

Chief Two Moon Collection

COLLECTION, M-64

DATE

1926 – 2013

1926 – 1932

CONTRIBUTOR

Mattatuck Museum

ADMINISTRATIVE/BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY ELEMENT

The myth of Chief Two Moon is known better than facts about his life and business. 1920 and 1930 census records show that Chief Two Moon Meridas was living in Waterbury, Connecticut with his wife Helen [Nugent] Meridas. He listed himself as being an "herbalist", that his race was "Indian" meaning Native American, and that he was born in 1888 in North Dakota.

Chief Two Moon used this mythology of being a Native American healer in order to produce and sell bitter oil tonics to cure various ailments through his business Chief Two Moon Herb Company. He wore a stereotypical indigenous head-dress and clothing. At first, Meridas sold his product himself in empty parking lots, but with word of mouth his business expanded to a mail-in-service and wares in several local pharmacies. Meridas purchased a bus that was driven by one of his assistants – and remedies were sold from there as well. While the general bitter tonic was his first and best seller, he quickly expanded his offerings to include teas for women, household liniments, cough remedies, ointments, and stomach washes. An order form lists all the various types of tonics offered: one each for rheumatism, stomach, asthma, female tonic relief, liver, kidney, and a builder relief. Advertisements for his products often included an image of Two Moon with a headdress and a teepee. Advertisements also utilized a story about his life – "A Remarkable Personality: Chief Two Moon Meridas is the full blooded Indian son of a long line of genuine American Indian Chiefs. He attended Carlisle University...He is internationally famous for natural gifts as a 'Medicine Man'..." (taken from an advertisement on the cover of an account book for farmers).

What can be found in addition to the myth, is that on August 27, 1914 Elico C Meridas married Helen Nugent in Brooklyn NY. August 28, 1914 a Manhattan marriage license was listed for Helen Nugent and Chico C Meridas. No other birth records or immigration records can be found for him – though it is likely that he arrived or was born under another name. It has never been confirmed that he was of indigenous birth. Sometime after marriage, the pair moved to Waterbury. In 1932, Two Moon was indicted on charges of practicing medicine without a license. Oral histories conducted by Dorothy Cantor reveal personality traits and that the popularity of his brand was possibly from the flu epidemic of 1918, among other salacious details.

SCOPE & CONTENT

This collection was compiled by the Mattatuck Museum over a series of years. It is arranged in one series: General Files. The collection includes Chief Two Moon Herb Company administrative forms, product sleeves, newspaper clippings, and advertisements from circa 1920-circa 1932. Advertisements range in type from small booklets, to broadsides, to a cardboard stand that would have been displayed in a pharmacy. There are several black and white photographs depicting Chief Two Moon's personal life, as well as his professional career. Lastly, a beaded arm band and necklace that Meridas owned were donated to the archive. They are housed in a separate box.

Dorothy Cantor, the former Director of Education for the Mattatuck Museum, conducted extensive research which is also included in the collection. She spoke to local individuals who lived near him, knew him, or were mentioned by others. She also located more newspaper clippings, and pieced together a timeline of Meridas' life.

RELATED PEOPLE/INSTITUTIONS

Mattatuck Historical Society (created by)

Chief Two Moon Meridas (created by)