

M-64

Inventory to the Chief Two Moon Collection (1926-1932 and
1955-2013)

Processed and finding aid created by Stephanie Crawford, August 2020

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Mattatuck Museum

Title: The Chief Two Moon Collection

Dates: 1926-1932, 1955, 1969, 1983-1994, and 2013

Collection Number: M-64

Quantity: .33 cubic feet

Abstract: Chief Two Moon Meridas was an entrepreneur who lived in Waterbury from circa 1918 through his death in 1932. He utilized stereotypical imagery of indigenous peoples to sell “herbal tonics.”

Language: English and Italian

Repository: Max R. Traurig Library and Archive, Mattatuck Museum. Advance notice required.

Biographical History:

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 and Content Note:

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.

References and Related Collections:

The Mattatuck Museum also has a full bottle of bitter oil, an electric sign for his product, and a few desk instruments in the Museum Objects.

Name and Subject Tracings:

Waterbury, Connecticut

Indian healers [indigenous healers]

Swindlers and swindling

Administrative History:

Processing Note: A brief history from 1969 was removed from the M-5 Collection and included in this collection.

Preferred Citation: The Chief Two Moon Collection. M-64. Max R. Traurig Library and Archive, Mattatuck Museum.

Provenance: The Mattatuck Museum, specifically former museum director Dorothy Castor, conducted and collected research on Two Moon. Castor also conducted oral history interviews with people and the children of people who would have known him.

Restrictions: None

Container List: This section provides descriptions of the materials found within each series. Each series description is followed by a container list, which gives the titles of the folders and their locations in the numbered boxes that comprise this collection.

Series: General Files, 1926-1932, 1955, 1969, 1983-1994, and 2013

Arrangement: Research conducted by Dorothy Cantor is listed first, followed by an alphabetical listing of materials.

Box Folder

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | 1 | Research by Dorothy Cantor, 1969, 1983-1994 |
| | 2 | Research by Dorothy Cantor, 1983-1984 |
| | 3 | Administrative materials – blank, circa 1925 |
| | 4 | Advertisements and product labels, circa 1925 |
| | 5 | Advertisement booklet “Chief Two Moon Herbs for Health,” circa 1930 |
| | 6 | Advertisements, circa 1930 |
| | 7 | Certificate, 1930 |
| | 8 | Correspondence, 1926-1932 [original and photocopied] |
| | 14 | Newspaper Clippings, 1929-1932 and 1955 [also contains hand written notes detailing newspaper articles not photocopied] |
| | 9 | Newspaper Clippings, 1972-2013 |
| | 10 | [15] Photographs, circa 1920-circa 1932 [black and white, various sizes, including 3 photocopies] |
| | 11 | [11] Photographs of trip to Rome, 1931 [black and white, various sizes] |
| | 12 | Product containers, seals, and wrappers, circa 1930 |
| | 13 | Product containers, circa 1930 |

Box Item

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | 1 | Chief Two Moon Bitter Oil Laxative Container, circa 1930 |
| 2 | 1 | White leather pouch containing a blue, white, and orange beaded necklace – owned by Chief Two Moon Meridas |
| | 2 | Beaded arm band – owned by Chief Two Moon Meridas |