

CHIEF TWO MOON MERIDAS

"Two policemen were required to handle the traffic near his headquarters on Sunday mornings. Hundreds insisted that be cured them where medical science had failed."

— New York Times, November 3, 1933

Born Chico Colan Meridan (changed to Meridas) on August 29, 1888, of uncertain beginnings and heritage, this long-time, enigmatic resident of Waterbury was commonly known as Chief Two Moon.

The Chief, with his wife, Helen Gertrude (nee Nugent) of Philadelphia, first arrived in Waterbury in 1914. He began to make local history by selling his herbal medicines on the street, in parking lots and from his rooming house. When none of his patients died in the 1918 flu epidemic, his fame spread rapidly. Many of his patients thought he had supernatural powers.

In 1921, he purchased a house at 33 Wales Street where he lived for the rest of his life. He established an extensive and prosperous herb business at 1898 East Main Street. Later (circa 1925-26), he built a large, colorful laboratory at 1864 (now 1870) East Main Street which still has the Indian Heads and the two moons engraved on the outside wall.

His "Bitter Oil-the Wonder Tonic," that was used by patients from all over the country and Europe, contained mineral oil, tincture of aloes and compound tincture of gentian. This product was sold at all leading drug stores and by mail order. To peddle his herbal medicines he had several buses for salesmen, a fleet of cars and an airplane.

On August 6, 1930, he was made an "honorary" chief by the Oglala Lakota tribal council at a celebration attended by some 8,000 Indians. In September of 1930, he went to Europe and had an audience with Pope Pius XI. He was hailed by the medical community there as a "Miracle Man." Chief Two Moon was given a public reception on the steps of New York City Hall and in Atlantic City, where he had a business at 1623 Boardwalk Place, officials gave him the keys to the city.

For most of his adult life Chief Two Moon tried to prove he was an American Indian. His critics called him a charlatan and accused him of masquerading a black racial heritage. He was convicted in New York for practicing medicine without a license and brought to court in Connecticut for performing naturopathy without a license.

In October 1932, the now wealthy Chief brought 26 Sioux chiefs from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota to his 300-acre estate in Beacon Valley. They were to speak at his trial, promoting his legitimacy as an Indian.

His philanthropy was well known by his neighbors, especially during Christmas. He was often praised as a hard-working, compassionate folk doctor, and for the healing properties of his remedies.

When he died on November 3, 1933, he had become established as a man to be remembered in the history of patent medicine in America.

