

By Kate Sheely, summer intern

A Monumental Task

FORMER HCW STUDENT CONTINUES HER HUSBAND'S WORK

At the top of a mountain in the Black Hills of South Dakota, a massive face has emerged from the rock. It is the face of Crazy Horse, war leader of the Oglala Lakota. The Crazy Horse Memorial, officially begun on June 3, 1948, to honor Native American heritage, stands to become the world's largest mountain sculpture. Currently overseeing this grand endeavor is Ruth Ross Ziolkowski.

In the mid-1940s, Ziolkowski (then known as Ruth Ross) was a student at Hartford College for Women (HCW). She recalls taking English from HCW Dean Laura Johnson and babysitting for the two children of Frederick C. Copeland, professor of biology. Other memories of her student days include participating in a community music group.

"We played in the Noah Webster Fife and Drum Corps at ceremonies for all the draftees being sent overseas for World War II," says Ziolkowski.

After helping the sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski create the statue of Noah Webster for the town of West Hartford, Conn., Ruth and several friends decided to follow him to South Dakota. Korczak had recently been commissioned by Lakota elder Henry Standing Bear to begin the Crazy Horse Memorial.

Just shy of her 21st birthday, Ruth arrived at the Rapid City, S.D., railroad station in 1947. "We didn't really have a plan. We had not been to the West and thought it would be an adventure," she recalls. She remained in South Dakota, marrying Ziolkowski in 1950. The couple had 10 children, and six of the children currently assist her at the memorial. When Korczak died in 1982, Ruth took over the project.

As president and CEO of the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation, Ziolkowski has helped turn the memorial into a valuable community asset. With its extensive museum collections and educational outreach programs, this privately funded nonprofit has brought invaluable educational opportunities to the youth of South Dakota.

Over the years the Ziolkowskis have refused to accept federal funding for the mountain project because "[Korczak] was appalled by the way the U.S. government had treated the Native Americans," Ruth explains.

The Indian University of North America, established by the foundation in 2010, hosts a summer university program that encourages high school graduates who are members of American Indian tribes to earn college credits, transferable to any regionally accredited college or university.

In addition, the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation Scholarship Fund has awarded more than \$1.5 million to American Indian students attending tribal or state colleges, universities, nursing schools, or vocational-technical schools in South Dakota. "We receive many, many testimonials from native youth who have been



Above: In the foreground, a 1/34 scale model of the Crazy Horse Memorial with the mountain sculpture in the background. Korczak began the carving using only a sledge hammer, a single-jack drill bit, and a box of dynamite on June 3, 1948. At his death in 1982, he had blasted away 7.4 million tons of granite at the site near Custer, S.D. Left: Ruth Ziolkowski applauds a performance at the memorial. She has received numerous awards and honorary degrees for her humanitarian efforts. Bottom: Seven-year-old Wakiyon Cook from Rapid City, S. D., performs as part of the summer lecture series program at Crazy Horse Memorial.

helped by the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation Scholarship Fund," says Ziolkowski.

Meanwhile, work continues on the sculpture. Crazy Horse's face was completed in 1998, 50 years after Korczak set off the first blast. Today, the blocking out of the sculpture's 22-story-high horse's head has passed the halfway mark.

"Crazy Horse Memorial will be 641 feet long, 563 feet high, and carved in the round. By comparison, the Washington Monument is 555 feet high and the Statue of Liberty is 305 feet tall," says Ziolkowski. "The four Mount Rushmore presidential busts would fit in the space of Crazy Horse's head and hair," she adds.

Ziolkowski, who has returned to Connecticut only once since 1947, cherishes her life in South Dakota.

"It was an exciting opportunity—Korczak called it as close to pioneering as you could get in the 1940s and stay in this country—and you just looked forward to every day. It's been that way ever since, and the next thing you know, it's 64 years later. It's a great way of life, it really is," she says. ■

