

DR. ROSA MINOKA-HILL

Dr. Rosa Minoka-Hill, a Mohawk, was the first American Indian woman physician in North America. Throughout her life, she maintained that going to school and being educated are sometimes two different things. The foundation, dedicated to her memory and the example she set for all American Indians, will emphasize projects designed to facilitate self-determination among the various tribes of the United States.

When her parents died in 1881, five-year-old Rosa Minoka was taken from her home on the Mohawk reservation in upstate New York to the Philadelphia residence of Dr. J. Allen, a Quaker physician who had worked among the Mohawks. Dr. Allen and his sister raised Rosa and educated her at the Graham Institute in Philadelphia, a Quaker school for girls. Rosa benefited from the Quakers' non-racist attitudes toward Indians and from their egalitarian feeling about men and women. The Allens encouraged Rosa's interest in science and urged her to become a physician rather than a nurse.

At age 17, Rosa traveled to Quebec and Montreal where she converted to Catholicism and entered a convent. After leaving the convent and deciding to become a doctor, she entered Women's Medical College in Philadelphia in 1894. She was the second American Indian to study there. Licensed in 1900, she opened an office in Philadelphia with another woman and built up a thriving practice during her first five years as a physician. During this time she also met a young Oneida from Wisconsin named Charles Hill. When Hill asked Rosa to leave her practice and come with him to Wisconsin, she accepted. Hill did not want his wife to practice medicine professionally in Oneida, but she knew that she would always be a physician.

The transition from Philadelphia to Oneida was slow and difficult for Rosa Hill. She was a foreigner among the rural Oneida because of her city ways and her knowledge of medicine. Medical care for the Oneidas was seriously deficient. There was one doctor for 20,000 Indians in the area and an old government hospital the Oneidas called "The House of Death." Rosa Hill took time to learn about traditional Indian cures and within a year she had gained the trust of the community as she was called upon to tend sick babies, care for wounds, and treat illnesses.

In 1915, Charles Hill died from a sudden attack of appendicitis and Rosa was left with six young children. The farm's mortgage was foreclosed, but fortunately Rosa had a small trust fund from Dr. Allen's estate and that income, plus the goods which patients occasionally brought in payment for Hill's medical services, kept the family alive.

World War I took the Oneidas' one "official" doctor, leaving Rosa Hill as the only trained physician in the community. She did not have a license to practice in Wisconsin so she could not charge patients or obtain drugs by herself. Nevertheless, with the cooperation of doctors in Green Bay, she managed to attend to the medical needs of both whites and Indians in the Oneida area.

Hill's trust fund collapsed with the stock market crash of 1929 and her financial condition became more serious. Not having a medical license was more and more of a burden. The Hill children convinced their mother to take the exam for a Wisconsin medical license--35 years after her graduation from medical college. Hill had to borrow the money to pay the exam fee and had only four months to study before going to Madison for the two-day ordeal in the fall of 1934. She was one of the five, out of nine candidates, who were licensed that year. She returned to Oneida as Dr. Rosa Minoka-Hill, M.D.

Medical services improved in the '30s because Dr. Minoka-Hill obtained needed drugs more easily, and by 1939, she had the assistance of a public health nurse three days a week and a government doctor once a week. The government also provided the Oneida with certain food supplies which helped ease the community-wide malnutrition that Hill was constantly battling.

A heart attack in 1946 forced the 69-year-old Hill to slow down, so she stopped making house calls. Her "kitchen clinic" was busy with patients up to the time of her death in 1952. Fortunately, the last years of her life had brought Dr. Hill many awards and honors from both medical and Indian groups. In 1947, she was named the outstanding American Indian of the year by the Indian Council Organization, and in 1949, the American Medical Society honored her on the 50th anniversary of her graduation from Women's Medical College. She was the first woman to be made an honorary member of the Wisconsin Medical Association and was honored by the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture for her service to rural people. Dr. Hill's greatest honor probably came to her in 1947 when she was made a member of the Oneida tribe. Chief Julius Danforth proclaimed at the ceremony:

"She has labored long among us. We feel humble that all we can do in return is to adopt her into the tribe. It is little at this late date."

The Dr. Rosa Minoka-Hill Foundation will be a reestablishment of the legacy of Dr. Hill and provide opportunity for many young Indian people. The Dr. Rosa Minoka-Hill Foundation, based upon her past, is an investment in the future.

THE NEED

Educational achievement can provide opportunity for many young Indian people. A Southern Ute medicine man, Eddie Box, referred to Indian students as the "20th Century Warriors" -- in that the "battle for Indian survival during the next decade will be won (or lost) in the classroom.

The Dr. Rosa Minoka-Hill Fund was established in 1981 to assist American Indian people in securing an education which will generate increased individual and tribal self-reliance. Patterned upon the University of Colorado's pioneering "Science and Self-Determination" projects, there is a need to establish innovative program models which will effect "grassroots" institutional change in American education for Native American students. The brief duration of the institutes conducted at the University of Colorado/Boulder over the past three years give substantial indication that a definite case for a comprehensive program does exist.

The establishment of the Hill Foundation secondary academy represents the first attempt to convert the institute experience into a full high school program based upon the University of Colorado's highly successful model. The secondary academy will provide intensive, advanced developmental instruction to over 150 selected American Indian students from across the nation. The school will emphasize science and mathematic skills development while retaining an integrated curriculum format which reinforces linkages between academic content and traditional Indian cultural values.

THE PROGRAM

The priority objective is to emphasize projects designed to facilitate self-determination among the various tribes of the United States. In order to meet this objective, the Minoka-Hill Foundation has the following goals:

1. to establish a private, independent secondary academy that will focus on mathematics and science. This school will be a model for many other tribal and alternative schools throughout the nation;
2. to improve Indian education by providing assistance to tribes, Indian organizations and educational agencies for a broad range of reforms, innovations and improvements which will provide equal educational opportunity;
3. to create programs involving new paths to career and professional training and new combinations of academic experiential learning that have been traditionally underrepresented;
4. to design and introduce cost-effective methods of instruction and operation; and,
5. to introduce institutional change designed to expand individual opportunities for Indian students who are entering and re-entering institutions and pursuing programs of study tailored to their individual needs.

The theme of all the objectives includes cost-effectiveness, far-reaching impact and institutionalization. Research and dissemination will also be vital to the Fund's success and will be coordinated by the Fund.