

## The Face of Crazy Horse

by Gary Tillery, SFSPE

Though he is a legend for his exploits during the Indian Wars, the Lakota warrior Crazy Horse has remained a faceless name since his death in September 1877. He never posed for a photograph, painting, or sketch.

When Korczak Ziolkowski began his gargantuan sculpture of Crazy Horse in South Dakota in 1948, he created the face of his scale model from a photo of someone said to resemble him and a composite of features from three of his family descendants.<sup>1</sup> The artist acknowledged the deficiency by declaring, "Crazy Horse is being carved not so much as a lineal likeness but more as a memorial to the spirit of Crazy Horse."<sup>2</sup> Ziolkowski died in 1982, still at work on his masterpiece, without ever learning that an itinerant artist had sketched a likeness of Crazy Horse in the 1930s, guided by a family member who had lived with him for years.



**Sketch of Crazy Horse,  
based on the description from his sister, Iron Cedar.**

Crazy Horse was not given that name at birth. He was called Among the Trees.<sup>3</sup> Only after he showed great bravery as a teenager in a clash with a band of Shoshoni did his father, Crazy Horse, pass on to him his own name and begin to call himself Waglula, or "Worm."<sup>4</sup> When Among the Trees was about four years old, his father was leading a hunt for buffalo when he happened upon a Lakota encampment under attack by a band of about 60 Crow. The elder Crazy Horse plunged his own group of warriors into the fight and drove the Crow away. Out of gratitude, the chief of that Lakota band gave him his three daughters as wives. They joined Among the Trees and his mother, Rattling Blanket Woman, in Crazy Horse's family. Two decades later, the youngest of those three sisters, Red Leggings, would give Waglula a daughter named Iron Cedar.

The little girl grew up in the daily company of her half-brother, who now bore the name Crazy Horse and was one of the most admired men in the Lakota Nation. It was Iron Cedar who, in her late 60s, described her brother to that itinerant artist. Brought to tears by the resemblance in the sketch, she said, "That's him."<sup>5</sup>

Married to Amos Clown, Iron Cedar was also known as Julia Clown.<sup>6</sup> When she died a few years after approving the sketch, it was passed down through her descendants, the Clown family. They finally revealed their connection with Crazy Horse in 2001, after more than a century of cautious anonymity. (In 1918, a half-brother of Crazy Horse was murdered by four masked men after he made his relationship known.)<sup>7</sup> In 2016, after spending more than a decade documenting their lineage

legally, the Clown family made public the sketch as part of their disclosure of their family history.

I have over 30 years of experience as a figurative sculptor. As I studied the sketch, it occurred to me that I had the skills to transform it into a 3D bust. The painstaking process involves repeatedly comparing the clay being worked on with the sketch, using photos taken from precisely the same angle, employing computer software to overlay a



**Clay sculpture of Crazy Horse, front view, by Gary Tillery  
(Photo used with permission from Gary Tillery)**



**Clay sculpture of Crazy Horse, side view, by Gary Tillery  
(Photo used with permission from Gary Tillery)**

grid of vertical and horizontal lines to determine which features are in position and look correct and which still need to be modified. Creating the frontal view is a special challenge, requiring experience in figurative art as well as the study of photos of individuals who were said to resemble Crazy Horse. I also researched verbal descriptions of him by contemporaries to make the work as true-to-life as possible.

Further complicating the process of capturing his likeness is the fact that Crazy Horse had scars on his left cheek which are not easily discernible from the point of view used in the sketch. At the age of about 27, he was shot in the face by a jealous husband. The bullet is said to have struck him beside his left nostril, passed through the upper jaw below his eye socket, and exited behind his left ear. His recovery took many months, and he was sensitive about his appearance forever



after, often disguising the scars beneath a painted lightning bolt a vision had advised him to wear into battle.<sup>8</sup> In the sketch, a rough spot is visible where the bullet was said to have struck him, and scars appear to branch out from it across the left cheek and even onto the upper lip and chin. It seems reasonable that, with or without the expressed wish of Iron Cedar, the sketch artist chose to portray Crazy Horse from an angle that would de-emphasize the scarring.

To capture the work in permanent form, the finished clay must be covered by a rubber mold, then a mold of hardened plaster to support the flexible rubber. Then the work can be reproduced using the lost-wax process, preferably cast in bronze.

Throughout the sculpting, I kept in mind the cultural and spiritual importance of Crazy Horse to the Lakota Nation. He embodied the traits his people most admired—death-defying bravery in battle, quiet confidence in everyday life, and selfless generosity. He never kept battlefield spoils

for himself, preferring to pass them out to others. When he went out to hunt, he invariably came back with food that he shared with anyone who was hungry. When he joined the leaders gathered around the fire in decision-making councils, he rarely voiced his own opinions. He listened. He was also fiercely independent. When all the other leaders—even Sitting Bull and Red Cloud—gave up the struggle with the encroaching white civilization and agreed to live on reservations, he remained aloof. When Ziolkowski was persuaded by Henry Standing Bear to sculpt a monument to a Lakota hero to rival the faces on Mount Rushmore, no one was considered more deserving than Crazy Horse.

My goal in creating this work was not to sculpt a romanticized figure from the Old West for commercial reasons. I simply felt a responsibility to bring a legend to life. Success for me will be to see the work displayed in a public museum; and, ultimately, I hope to be able to donate a copy to the Lakota Nation.

## NOTES.....

1. The Edward Clown Family and William B. Matson, *Crazy Horse: The Lakota Warrior's Life & Legacy* (Kaysville, UT: Gibbs Smith 2016), 169–170.

2. “Crazy Horse Monument,” TribalDirectory.com, <https://tribaldirectory.com/information/crazy-horse-monument.html>.

3. Clown Family and Matson, 35.

4. Ibid., 52–53.

5. Tashunke Witko Tiwahe/Crazy Horse Family/ECF, Facebook (July 25, 2016), <https://www.facebook.com/TashunkeWitkoTiwaheCrazyHorseFamilyEFC/photos/in-the-early-1930s-a-sketch-artist-met-crazy-horses-youngest-sister-iron-cedar-u/1250805851607901/>.

6. Clown Family and Matson, 152.

7. Ibid., 160.

8. “Defending the Homeland Prior to the 1868 Treaty,” *The Authorized Biography of Crazy Horse and His Family: Part Two*, directed by Bill Matson (Reel Contact, 2007), DVD. 