



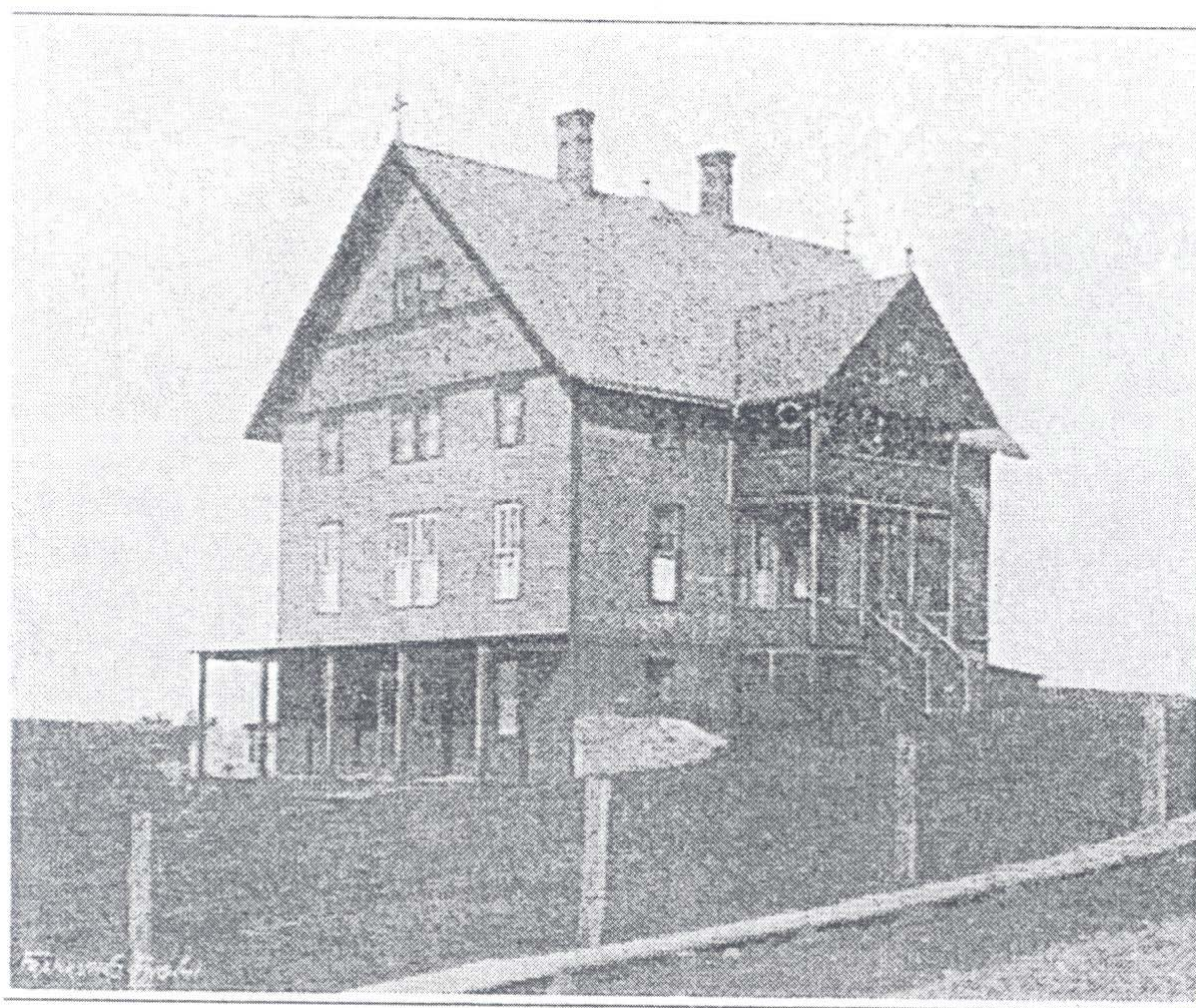
Oneida Cultural Heritage Department

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Oneida Healers: Hospitals, Doctors, and Nurses



Where it all began for the Oneida people in Wisconsin; A brief history of Oneida's medical History.

ONEIDA HEALERS

JACOB "JAKE" SMITH

The following is an excerpt from the research done by a descendant of the Smith family, James R. Hillman.

Jacob Smith was born April 15, 1875 in Oneida, Wisconsin, to Moses and Susannah Webster Smith. He was reared in the small community of Split Rock, Wisconsin, just outside the town of Tigerton, in Shawano County, Wisconsin. There he learned Oneida spoken in the home and also began learning about Indian herbal medicine, which was to become his livelihood. About 1894 he married Mary Denny. In his adult life Jake was a medicine man who traveled far and wide in the Wisconsin and upper Michigan areas seeking herbs and plants for his trade. He had a statewide reputation amongst the Indian people for his medicines which were used to cure arthritis, headaches, sunburn pain, poison ivy, and other minor irritations.

He spent much time in the woods locating the plants used in his medicines.

From all accounts, he lived very well. He always wore a businessman's suit and tie, drove nice cars, and seemed to have money. He also developed a second source of income as a picking crew supervisor and was replied upon by area farmers who called upon him when cherry or apple picking season was at hand.

Jake spent the last three years of his life in the Shawano County Nursing Home and died on January 30, 1962. He is buried in the Mormon Cemetery outside of Gresham in Shawano County.

WPA Stories

Nelson Cornelius to Dennison Hill

"There were just certain ones of the medicine men that were able to cure what we called nervous disease. It seems as though those few medicine men had supernatural power at the time that they are under the influence of their medicine."

"Of course there are only four or five of them left that used to perform medical treatment in that form. These men that perform the treatment were called the masked medicine men."

"I do not hear of them performing their medical treatments anymore in such ways. It might be on account of them not having a leader, as their leader has died. His name was Peter Jacobs. It also seems that there is not anyone with that disease."

PETER J. POWLESS

Peter J. Powless was born in Oneida, Wisconsin in 1865 to John C. and Mary Powless. He married Clara Cornelius the daughter of Elijah and Elizabeth Jourdan Cornelius.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Mary Powless-Jourdan. Her father to whom she refers in the interview is Whitney Powless, son of Simon and Sarah Powless. Simon was Peter J's half-brother. Mary was responding to a question about her older sister, who had moved away to Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

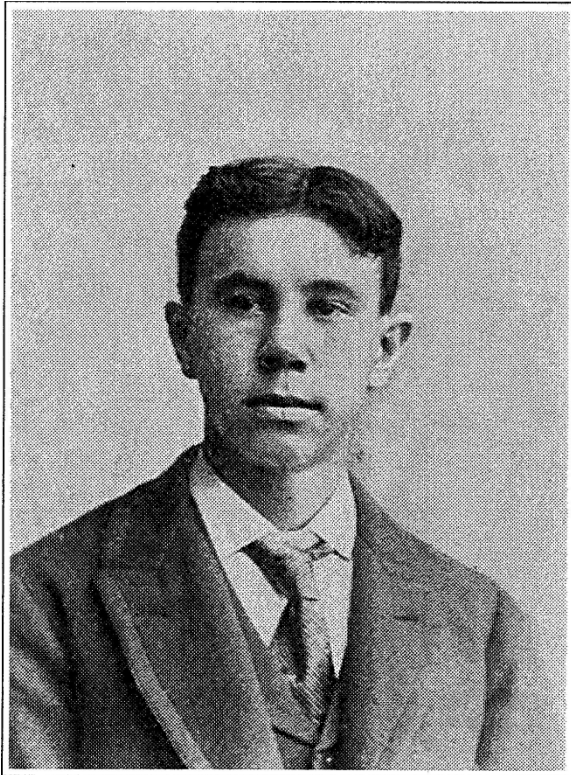
"...I saw a lot of her (my sister) when Uncle Pete came out to get me for six weeks to take care of the house for his wife (Clara) who was bedridden. She wasn't really bedridden, she had an infection in her ankle that wouldn't heal and she couldn't walk. They took her to doctors and the doctors couldn't heal it so Uncle Pete made his own medicine and treated her himself. It finally healed and he cured her. In the meantime, she couldn't step on her foot. She couldn't run the house so they came and got me to stay with her. I did the cooking and everything. I liked it there. Pete was my dad's uncle."

"Uncle Pete was a medicine man. He was well known for his Indian medicines. He used to make his own medicines. I used to help Aunt Ida (Peter J's sister) mix medicines, herbs and barks and stuff and bottle it. He used to make good money on that."

"I often wondered what happened to their recipes. He used to have a big thick book full of recipes for the different medicines and for the different ailments."

"They went through lawsuit after lawsuit because of his medicines. Doctors tried to discredit him, but he always won his case so he just kept right on. He had a lot of witnesses saying that his medicines cured when the doctors couldn't help them. Everybody called

him Peter J. Everybody knew who he was even if you just said Peter J. That was Peter J. Powless...."



Eugene Ford Smith, M.D.

EUGENE FORD SMITH, M.D.

Eugene Ford Smith, son of Joseph M. and Eliza "Dolly" Cornelius Smith was born September 30, 1877. He attended a government day school on the Oneida Reservation and a public school in Appleton for 3-1/2 years before entering Hampton Institute at Hampton, Virginia. Comments of his teachers and superiors were not complimentary to him and they lacked confidence in him. They said in part..."failed to graduate and not reliable."

Mr. Smith, however, expressed a desire, early on to attend medical school. He entered Lawrence University at Appleton, Wisconsin for two years where he excelled at football as a star end. He then graduated from the Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons at Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1906 and practiced for a short time at Oneida before establishing a life-long practice in Milwaukee. He died there on March 31, 1931.

On a recent research trip to the State Historical Society Archives in Madison, Wisconsin it was discovered that Dr. Eugene Smith often served as the witness for child birthing done by midwives. Some of the midwives named were, Samantha Ninham, Esther Denny, Sophia Webster, and Elizabeth Allen. A thorough search would probably show up many more names. Midwifery was a common practice during that time.

SUSAN SMITH

Susan Marie Smith, daughter of Joseph M. Smith and a sister of Dr. Eugene F. Smith was born June 30, 1892. She attended Hampton Institute in Virginia from 1909-1912. She went on to study nurses training at the Wisconsin Training School for Nurses in Milwaukee with post graduate work in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She married about 2 months after her mother passed away to Nicholas J. Lauer. She was described as a "young woman of quiet dignity and strength of character." She died about a year later, November 2, 1918 of pneumonia following a bout of Spanish Influenza. She is buried in the Methodist Cemetery, Oneida, Wisconsin.

ONEIDA HOSPITAL

The Oneida Hospital, situated on a hill on the corner of what is now Count Trunks E and U, just north of the Holy Apostles Episcopal Church, was opened for patients for the first time on January 1, 1898.

In 1890, Reverend Solomon Burleson, an Episcopal missionary, came to the reservation replacing the former Rev. Edward A. Goodnough. Rev Burleson was responsible for persuading the Federal government to establish a boarding school, build a bridge over Duck Creek and establish the Oneida Hospital.

Upon its completion, the hospital was in a constant flux about its financial needs. There were always obstacles to overcome, the greatest of which was lack of funds for supplies and equipment.

Within the first few years after being built, the hospital was opened under the charge of two Sisters of the Holy Nativity. For nearly a year, they provided minimal care, but without a resident physician, they provided only simple remedies.

Later Rev. Burleson was succeeded by the Rev. F. W. Merrill of the Holy Apostle's Church, who recognized immediately upon his arrival the great need for care for the sick. Rev. Merrill improved the situation by upgrading the quality of the medical personnel. Funding was still a source of concern for the fledgling hospital.



Lavinia Cornelius graduated from the New Haven School for Trained Nurses in Connecticut.

LAVINIA CORNELIUS

Answers to prayers came in the name of Lavinia Cornelius. Lavinia was born on December 5, 1871 (although her obituary states her date of birth as January 22, 1872) to Sampson and Margaret Cornelius. She attended Hampton Institute in Virginia for five years and then went on to graduate from the New Haven School for Trained Nurses in Connecticut. She returned to Oneida to do field matron's work, but very quickly became the administrator (jack-of-all-trades, she said) of the new hospital built by the missionary, Rev. Mr. Burleson until September 1, 1899 when she received an appointment at the Government Boarding School.

She went on to serve at the Riggs Institute, Flandreau, SD, Ft. Mohave, the Indian Hospital at Hayward, WI, the Government

Hospital at Winnebago, NB, field nurse on the Keshena Reservation, and the school hospital at Carlisle, PA. Later on in her career, she did extensive private nursing.

Lavinia died at a local nursing home in Hobart, Wisconsin in December of 1965. She was the last surviving member of the Sampson Cornelius family.



Nancy Cornelius Skenandore, among the earliest trained nurses to practice in the state.

NANCY CORNELIUS

Prayers were answered a second time in the name of Nancy Cornelius.

Nancy Cornelius was born on the Oneida Reservation in Wisconsin on June 13, 1861 to Elijah and Elizabeth Jordan Cornelius. She was a graduate of Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania and the Hartford Training School for Nurses in Connecticut. After graduation, she did private nursing in patients' homes in Connecticut.

She entered the Oneida Hospital on September 5, 1899 and continued nursing and sometimes served as administrator of the hospital, often without the services of a resident physician,

making her contribution to the community health care particularly significant.

Nancy Cornelius Skenandore was among the earliest trained nurses to practice in the state. She graduated from a school of nursing only two years after Wisconsin's first school of nursing was established in 1888.

Nancy remained at the hospital until after her marriage to Daniel Skenandore in 1904.

Interesting Note: According to the early census records there was a Dr. Lewis Denny. He first appeared on the 1887 Homeless List and then as Allotee #172 on the 1890 Allotment Records. He no longer appeared on the 1891 census. The Allotment Records indicated that at the time he was over 100 years old, however, as of the date of this writing there is no definitive data indicating to which family he belongs or how he came by the title "Doctor."

ZILPHA RINEHART WILSON, M.D.

On January 12, 1901, the Oneida Hospital employed the services of Dr. Zilpha Wilson. Dr. Wilson was a young woman who was employed as the physician at the Oneida Boarding School. She also assumed duties at the Oneida Hospital without additional pay.

Within a year, Dr. Wilson made over four hundred thirty home visits and also vaccinated seven hundred persons. Her service was from 1901 to 1904.

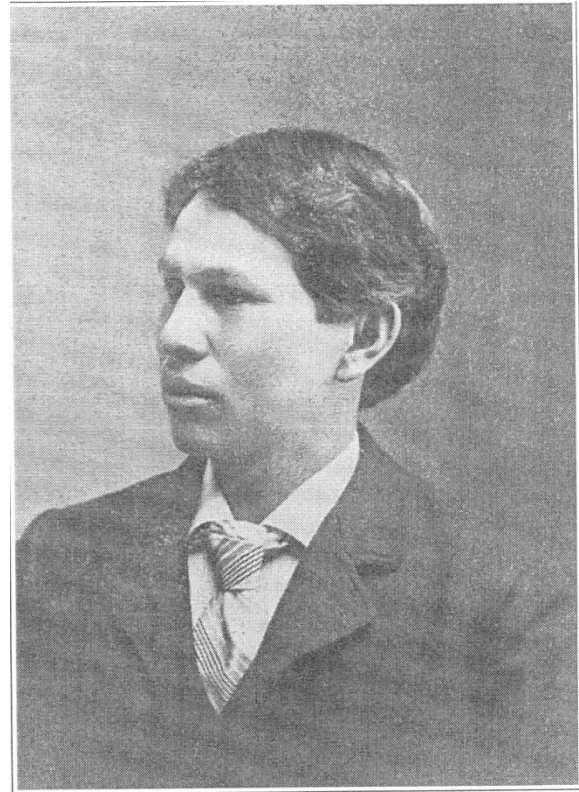
She graduated from Northwestern Medical School in Evanston, Illinois in 1900 and then spent some time practicing medicine in Pennsburg, West Virginia with her brother.

When she left Wisconsin, she went to New York City for a year's graduate study. In 1905 she married Rev. Charles J. Bopelli. Although she was not Oneida, she holds a place in Oneida's medical history for the way she endeared herself to the residents of the reservation by her unfaltering attention to her professional business and her impartial treatment of all her patients during her short stay here.

On one of her last days here, she was escorted in a procession led by the 18 piece Oneida Band and followed by about 600 Oneida's from the mission house to the government school for a tribute to her service to the community.

The Rev. Cornelius Hill was the master of ceremonies and speeches were made by Fr. Merrill, Dr. Josiah Powless and a number of other community members. Gifts were given and refreshments were served as the event came to a close.

She died September 2, 1908 and was buried in the Hobart Indian Cemetery near the village of Oneida, Wisconsin.



Dr. Josiah A. Powless

JOSIAH A. POWLESS, M. D.

Dr. Josiah Powless was born August 1, 1871, the son of Peter A. and Rebecca J. Doxtator Powless. He married Electa Skenandoah on March 1, 1897.

Josiah A. Powless, after attending Carlisle Industrial Institute for six years, graduated from the Milwaukee Medical College in his twenty-eighth year and took charge of the Oneida Hospital.

Dr. Josiah was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for aiding a comrade in World War I. He crossed an area subjected to intense machine gun and constant artillery fire, reached his colleague, who was

Capt. James M. McKibben, dressed his wounds and had him carried to safety. Lt. Powless was seriously wounded while performing this service. He died shortly after at the age of 46, just five days before the Armistice which was signed November 11, 1918.

He was a member of the 308th Infantry, Medical Detachment, 77th Division, and earned this award for his extraordinary heroism in action near Chevieres, France, on October 14, 1918. He was also in the Lost Battalion in the Argonne Forest.

Previous to his enlistment in the Army, he was the physician in charge of the Oneida Mission Hospital until 1916. He was stationed at Ft. Riley, Kansas, before being sent overseas. The Oneida Hospital finally succumbed to the financial pressures in the 1940's and closed down. The building was converted into an apartment building. According to Robert E. Ritzenthaler in The Oneida Indians of Wisconsin, in 1950 there were thirty people living in the twelve rooms.

Interesting Note: Rueben Alonzo Doxtator was born in May of 1884 to Truman and Emma Welch Doxtator. He married Minnie Skenandore, daughter of Cornelius and Lydia Skenandore. Reuben was a well-known herbalist. He lived in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, and was known to be seen riding his bicycle around the Sturgeon Bay area and even into Oneida selling his herbal remedies. He and several of his siblings were also known in the community as accomplished musicians.

AFTER THE HOSPITAL



Dr. Rosa Minoka-Hill

DR. ROSA MINOKA-HILL

Dr. Hill was a Mohawk woman born on the St. Regis Reservation in the state of New York on August 30, 1876. She was adopted as a child by a Quaker doctor. She graduated from the Philadelphia Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1899.

On June 1, 1905 she married Abram Charles Hill, an Oneida, and she settled on the Oneida Reservation and ministered to the Oneidas and to neighboring families nearly half a century. Although she was considered to be an outstanding physician, she never made a great deal of money in her practice because she considered the love and devotion to her patients and their need of her payment enough.

She raised their six children on the Oneida Reservation and served the Oneida community until 1946.

She passed the Wisconsin licensing examination during the depression and began to

advise Oneidas after Dr. Josiah Powless died in France. At the national convention of the American Medical association held in Atlantic City, N. J. in 1948, she was honored for her work among the Oneidas. The Wisconsin Medical society made her an honorary life member of their organization, the first woman to receive this honor.

She was a well-respected member of the Oneida community and in 1947 she was adopted into the Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin in recognition of years of selfless service. Also in 1947 she was the first woman to be made a life member of the Wisconsin Medical Society. She died in 1952 in St Agnes Hospital in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where she had been a patient for many months.

When she was adopted by the Oneidas she was given the name, "She Who Serves." The Citation she was given by the University of Wisconsin reads: "Inspiring homemaker and mother, untiring builder of health, unselfish servant of the public and deserving bearer of the tribal title, "She Who Serves."

Military Rites for World War I Nurse

The Oneida VFW post conducted military rites at the Episcopal cemetery for Mrs. Cora E. Sinnard, 58, army nurse who served with the AEF in World War I. Mrs. Sinnard, a former resident of Oneida, died at a veteran's hospital in South Carolina following a lingering illness.

The military rites followed funeral services at the Holy Apostles Episcopal Church. The Rev. William Christian, pastor, was in charge. The deceased was a graduate of Carlisle Indian School and of the Episcopal school of Nursing at Philadelphia. She served 18 months in France with an Episcopal hospital unit and was the only American Indian woman to serve overseas as a nurse in that conflict. Following the war she was ward supervisor in several veterans' hospitals, including Wood in Milwaukee.

Survivors include a son, James, Milwaukee; two brothers, Mose and Guy Elm, Oneida and five sisters, Mrs. Ida E. Blackhawk, Oneida, Mrs. Ruth Coleman, Mrs. Phoebe Webster and Mrs. Clara Webster, all of Milwaukee and Mrs. Mary A. Haus, Konawa,

OK. Cora was born February 18, 1891 and died June 9, 1919.

OTHERS WHO HAVE SERVED

The following is a partial list of others who have served the Oneida communities medical needs. If you have more information on Oneida people in the medical professions, please contact the Oneida Cultural Heritage Department at (920) 496-5395. When we update this brochure, we will include all additional information.

NURSES (in no particular order)

Dorothy Metoxen, nurse
Michelle Hill, RN working Shawano
Lea Warrington Rice, RN
Priscilla Manders, LPN
Ella Summers Sauer
Winona Skenandore, RN, WWII
Dorothy Metoxen Danforth, RN
Noel Summers Cleven, RN
Eileen Hill, RN, Cree tribe but served here in Oneida
Debby Skenandore Danforth RN
Ramona John, RN, Mt. Sinai
Ramona T. Skenandore
Lavinia Elm, nurse
Mary Ann Doxtator, nurse

MIDWIVES (in no particular order)

Toni House
Alice Skenandore
Bev Scow
Gail Ellis Danforth
Veronica Harris
Mary Metoxen

TODAY

Oneida people still continue to utilize herbal and spiritual ways of healing. They still gather the medicine plants and drink the herbal teas. They still honor Mother Earth.

INFORMATION SOURCES

- "The Oneida People" author Cara E. Richards
- "The Oneida Indians of Wisconsin" author Robert E. Ritzenthaler
- "The Oneidas" author J. K. Bloomfield
- Green Bay Press Gazette news articles
- "Sagole ... A Greeting from the Oneidas" revised by Loretta V. Metoxen, Oneida Tribal Historian