

He Tells Another Side of History on the Mountain

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Sculptor Korczak, the figure he envisions and the mountain he is carving.

SCULPTOR CARVING 563-FOOT LIKENESS OF CRAZY HORSE

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By CHARLES HILLINGER
Times Staff Writer

CRAZY HORSE, S.D.—The tall, heavyset sculptor with flowing gray beard stood outside his mountain tomb puffing on a cigar and musing aloud.

"I got my sarcophagus completed in case I die. But I hope I won't have to use it until I finish carving the mountain."

Korczak Ziolkowski (*Core-chock Jewel-kuff-ski*), 71, has spent the last 32 years—and \$4 million, by his estimate—blasting a likeness of the Sioux Indian Crazy Horse astride a stallion on Thunderhead Mountain in the

Black Hills. If he completes it, it will be the largest sculpture ever created.

Korczak—he is known only by his first name—calculates he has blasted 6.5 million tons of granite from the red mountain and has 1.75 million tons to go to finish the 563-foot-high carving.

"I'm down to the nubbin," insists Korczak. "If I had 10 men and all the money it would take I could have it done by 1990. And, what the hell, if I don't finish it, my sons will."

His carving on the mountain would be 10 times taller than the heads of the four Presidents on Mt. Rushmore 17 miles northeast of here. Already 15

times as much stone has been blasted from Korczak's mountain.

The head of Crazy Horse will be 87½ feet high. His arm—pointing to the east, "where the invaders came from"—will be 263 feet long, long enough for 4,000 persons to stand on.

Korczak was a successful New England sculptor with 120 busts and statues to his credit, including a 13½-foot statue of Noah Webster in Webster's hometown, West Hartford, Conn., and a bust of Paderewski that won first prize for sculpture at the New York World's Fair in 1939.

That was the year a Sioux chief named Henry Standing Bear wrote to

Korczak asking him to come to South Dakota and carve a memorial to the American Indian.

"We Sioux chiefs want you to carve a mountain for us so that the white men will know that the red men had great heroes too," wrote Henry Standing Bear.

Korczak agreed and decided to use as his subject Crazy Horse, the famous Sioux warrior who led his people in the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana in which the forces of Gen. George Custer were defeated and killed. Crazy Horse surrendered at Ft. Robinson, Neb., the next year and was killed by a cavalryman guard while in custody.

Why Crazy Horse for the statue?
"In the minds of Indians the life and death of Crazy Horse parallels their tragic history," Korczak said. "Crazy Horse was one of many great and patriotic heroes, but his tenacity of purpose, his modest life, his unflinching courage, his tragic death set him apart and above the others."

Since its inception the project has grown. "My original plan was a carving on the mountain 100 feet high that would take 10 years to complete," Korczak said. "It is now six times bigger than my original plan."

"Sure, it's slow going. But that doesn't discourage me. The mountain is my life, my passion. . . ."

"I'm not doing this as a tourist gimmick. It has immense meaning to Indians. Don't treat it as a hot dog stand. I'm doing this for the Indians to give them something to be proud of. I am a man of my word. I made a commitment. I cannot let the Indians down."

"I'm a stubborn old bastard. This is all I want to do with my life. Mt. Rushmore tells part of the story of America. Crazy Horse tells another side."

Korczak's wife, Ruth, and 10 children.
Please Turn to Page 3, Col. 1



SCULPTOR AT WORK—Korczak and two of his sons chip away at slope on Thunderhead Mountain.
Times photos by Rick Meyer

INDIAN SCULPTURE

Continued from First Page

dren, the youngest 17, the oldest 31, support him wholeheartedly.

On the mountain, working beside his father with a jackhammer, Joel, 20, confides:

"My brothers and I will finish the mountain if he dies. But he isn't going to die before it's done. If it will take until his 90th birthday, knowing my father, he will be up here then blasting the eastern face off this mountain . . ."

Korczak receives no money from the government. He is supported by visitors who pay \$4 a carload to look through binoculars to see him blasting away at the mountain. Last year admissions to his 360-acre site, plus contributions, brought the sculptor \$294,130, all of which he says he poured back into Crazy Horse.

The \$4 also includes a tour of Korczak's rambling 62-room home and studio he built during the years and a visit to a museum with Indian artifacts. Tourists can send a postcard from the U.S. Post Office here: Crazy Horse, S.D., 57730.

The sculptor has done an enormous amount of work on the mountain, but the carving is still largely in a visionary stage. A scale model 1/34th the size of the carving is on a platform at the base of the mountain to help visitors envision the final form.

Korczak has fallen several times on the mountain and has broken his spine and several bones. He has had two heart attacks, and he has arthritis. But the man is as tough as the granite he carves and is on the mountain, weather permitting, nearly every day from dawn to dusk.

Because of a running feud with the town of Custer, 5 miles to the north, Korczak has not set foot there in 10 years.

"People in Custer claim I'm a pony, that I'm ripping off everybody that comes here and pays \$4 a carload to watch me and my sons work on the mountain," Korczak says.

"What are you going to do with a town like that? That's why I stay clear of Custer. To hell with those people."

Townpeople in Custer, population 1,700, admit there was some animosity in the past.

"Korczak got mad at something townspeople did or did not do years ago," says Martha Schilling, executive secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. "But the majority here feel he is sincere. If there is anything Korczak is not, he is not a fraud."

"Korczak and I have never gotten along, but there is no denying the man is a genius," says realtor Bill Sager. "That mountain attracts a lot of people to this town. It has meant a lot to the economy of Custer."

"I think Korczak should forget the past and come to terms with the town. He is welcome here."

Recently Korczak climbed into his pine coffin inside the tomb he blasted out of the side of the mountain.

Three of his sons were present, and he gave them precise instructions on how he wanted his burial services conducted. "I want to die right," Korczak told them.

On the 2½-ton steel door to the sarcophagus the sculptor inscribed his epitaph in steel letters:

KORCZAK
STORYTELLER IN STONE
MAY HIS REMAINS BE LEFT UN-
KNOWN

Korczak roared in raucous laughter and then explained:

"I purposely made the epitaph ambiguous. After I die I want people to wonder if the s.o.b. is in here, or isn't he, and wonder what the hell the inscription means. It'll keep them guessing."

On the inside of the steel door is a large knocker. "I put the knocker on the door in case I ever want to get out."