

Dr. Oronhyatekha: Security, Justice, and Equality by Keith Jamieson and Michelle A. Hamilton

Cecilia Morgan

Volume 109, numéro 2, fall 2017

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1041289ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041289ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Morgan, C. (2017). Compte rendu de [*Dr. Oronhyatekha: Security, Justice, and Equality* by Keith Jamieson and Michelle A. Hamilton]. *Ontario History*, 109(2), 267–269. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041289ar>

the discontent between what Gordon references as “myth history,” that is what the public expects to see at these museums, and the actuality of what life was like in the past. For these sites to thrive, and in some cases merely survive, they must often choose to depict a past that is the one visitors expect to see, even if it is sanitized and simplified for their benefit. If visitors knew that to have an authentic experience of the past they would have to deal with dirt, foul smells and unsanitary conditions that are very different from today, very few would choose to visit living history museums. Imagine visiting a pioneer village where you had to use boot scrubbers before entering a building to remove the dirt and fecal matter you collected from crossing the field, and you get the picture.

Gordon’s use of case studies, while useful to illustrate the connections between the rise of tourism and the living history museum, are to some extent a distraction from his argument. After wading through each case study, it took some time for Gordon’s argument to once again come to the forefront. Although the case studies are important as illustrations, perhaps they would have better served the argument if they were less convoluted and more focused.

In his conclusion, Gordon writes about the shift in the museum field itself to better understand that current cultural

expectations greatly influence the way that the past is interpreted. There are no right or wrong ways to interpret a site and each one is valid in its own way. Within history, perspectives can change and often necessitate a shift in the way past events are interpreted. Why then, have living history museums been slow to move from the more simple interpretation of the site to a more complicated, multi-voice interpretation of the site? According to Gordon, a lot of it has to do with the museums’ past and the difficulty of being both experts of the past and entertainment for today.

Museums, in particular living history museums, continue to adapt and broaden their mandates in order to simply continue their existence during changing economies. They have had to embrace, to some extent, the amusement park model to better connect with current visitors. If done well, the focus on amusement can bring in new visitors who then see the education value in the site. If the amusement, such as a farmer’s market or art installation, enhance the mandate of the site and bring in new visitors, it will allow these sites the opportunity to begin shifting the narrative they are presenting to one that includes multiple perspectives and voices.

Jennifer Weymark,
Oshawa Museum

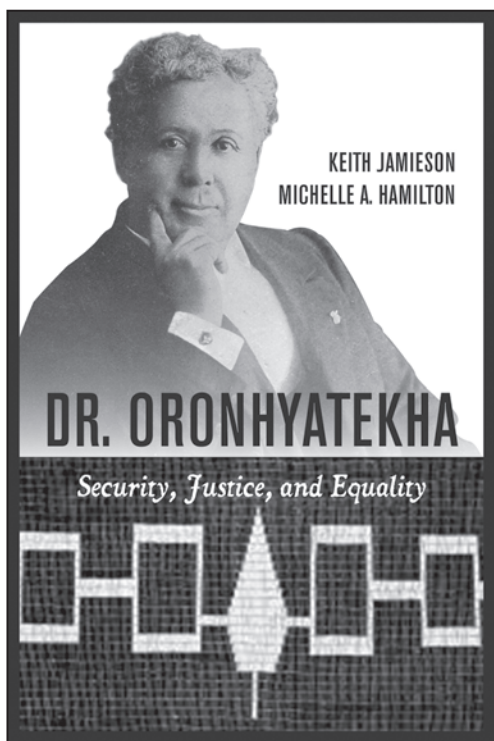
***Dr. Oronhyatekha:
Security, Justice, and Equality***

by Keith Jamieson and Michelle A. Hamilton

Toronto: Dundurn, 2016. 368 pages. \$26.99 paperback. ISBN 978-1-45970-663-7 <dundurn.com>

In the midst of today’s discussions about the abuses of Indigenous children in residential schooling, broken treaty prom-

ises, and missing and murdered Indigenous women, Keith Jamieson and Michelle A. Hamilton’s biography of Dr. Oronhyat-



ekha (1841-1907) reminds us that Indigenous-settler relations in Ontario were more complicated than present-day narratives might admit. Over the course of his lifetime, Oronhyatekha confounded racially-grounded assumptions about Indigenous people's abilities to move across boundaries and borders.

Born to parents from prominent Mohawk families at Desoronto and Six Nations, Peter Martin and Lydia Loft, Oronhyatekha grew up at the Grand River reserve. The Martins had been influential in establishing the Mohawk community there and had maintained ties to the Crown through relationships with leading officials in the Indian Department. However, as Jamieson and Hamilton point out, such alliances did not protect Oronhyatekha's family from the incursions of settler society, ones sanctioned by the colonial state and that were

witnessed by him throughout his childhood. Despite these losses, though, he grew up with Mohawk as his first language and learned about his community's values of respect for land and, as their title suggests, justice, security, and equality, ones that he espoused throughout his long, distinguished, and multifaceted career. Oronhyatekha also was given a Western education by the Anglican church's missionary enterprise, the New England Company. As Jamieson and Hamilton point out, such training was seen by the Mohawk as being important and useful.

Jamieson and Hamilton go on to trace Oronhyatekha's many achievements, starting with his education at Wesleyan Academy in Massachusetts, his representation of the Six Nations to the Prince of Wales during the latter's 1860 tour of British North America, his brief, albeit significant, time as a student at Oxford University, and his medical training at the University of Toronto. (They admit he was not the first Indigenous doctor in Canada; Peter Edmund Jones, a member of the Mississauga of the New Credit, graduated from Queen's University's medical school some months earlier). While practicing medicine in and around the Mohawk community of Tyendinaga and in southern Ontario occupied much of his time in the 1860s and '70s, Oronhyatekha also became involved in Indigenous politics. As the chair of the Grand General Indian Council of Ontario in the 1870s, a period of increased attempts by the new Dominion to assert legislative control over Indigenous people, Oronhyatekha was confronted with questions of land ownership, Indian status, and enfranchisement. Not only were these questions significant for his Indigenous communities, they also affected Oronhyatekha himself, since his right to membership in either Tyendinaga or the Grand River came un-

der fire from both communities. As well, Oronhyatekha believed that enfranchisement, particularly John A. Macdonald's 1885 Franchise Bill, was a crucial step to providing First Nations (most notably the Mohawk) with equality: in his words, "the removal of all distinctions between him and the other citizens of this Dominion" (159). Yet not all First Nations communities agreed with his position and he must have been disappointed when that legislation was repealed in 1898 by the new Liberal government.

Oronhyatekha's medical and political careers are significant in their own right, not least because of the ever-increasing encroachment by the Dominion government on Indigenous peoples' mobility. Yet in the 1880s he also became involved in the Orange Order and, even more significantly, in the Masonic Order, the International Order of Good Templars (a temperance organization), and most importantly, the Independent Order of Foresters (IOF), a insurance organization originally from England. The first non-white member of the IOF, Oronhyatekha rose to the rank of Supreme Chief Ranger, consolidating and expanding the organization: by 1890, it could be found in all provinces and territories, thirteen states in the United States, and in Hawaii. Moreover, during these years Oronhyatekha travelled extensively; he continued to make trips to Britain but also visited Egypt, Australia, and India, building an extensive collection of artefacts. Oronhyatekha also left his mark on the southern Ontario landscape, building large, elaborate homes at Tyendinaga and a new set of quarters, The Temple, for the IOF in Toronto at the intersection of Bay and Queen Streets, which also housed his collection of artefacts. After his death the material was donated to the Royal Ontario

Museum, where it was broken up until curator Trudy Nicks and Tom Hill, Museum Director of the Woodland Cultural Centre on Six Nations, created a 2001 exhibit that highlighted the significance and complexity of Oronhyatekha's life and legacy.

Dr. Oronhyatekah will appeal to both scholarly and popular audiences who are interested in Indigenous history, nineteenth-century Ontario, and the histories of education, medicine, and voluntary organizations. Very well-researched and clearly-written, the book is a tribute to the skill and care of the authors, who have provided us with a well-contextualized and nicely-illustrated narrative of his complex life and the many challenges he faced (and surmounted). While some historians and museum studies scholars have been aware of Oronhyatekha through his museum collection, this biography provides a well-rounded and very rich portrait of this intriguing individual. It is, though, a little harder to get a sense of him as a person, no doubt because he left so little of his own writings. While Jamieson and Hamilton are scrupulous in providing ample evidence for their arguments, they refrain from much speculation about his interior life. Moreover, while certainly Oronhyatekha was an accomplished and distinctive person, he was not alone. While they may not have achieved Oronhyatekha's high level of visibility, over the course of the nineteenth century others—Peter Jones, George Copway, Catherine Sutton, John Brant-Sero—also challenged the borders and boundaries put in place by colonial governments and settler society. These stories can be placed alongside Oronhyatekha's to give us a fuller picture of our shared past.

Cecilia Morgan
University of Toronto