

## Comptes rendu de livres

### DIANE CHISHOLM

#### Review of

Jamieson, Keith and Michelle A. Hamilton. 2016. *Dr. Oronhyatekha – Security, Justice, and Equality*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

368 pp. Paperback. B/w photographs throughout. ISBN (pb.) 978-1-45970-663-7; (E-pub) 978-1-45970-665-1. \$ 26.99.

This biography of Peter Martin, also known as Burning Sky and “Dr. Oronhyatekha” of the Six Nations of Grand River looks at some important issues in Indigenous life and raises important questions about Indigenous life. Born in 1841, he would rise to eminence not only in the field of medicine but in sports (he was an accomplished marksman), business, fraternal organizations like the Templars and Foresters, and in Aboriginal political bodies like the Grand General Indian Council of Ontario. And this all took place during the Victorian era, a time when native peoples had greater obstacles to advancement and achievement than the poorest members of white mainstream society.

The authors’ backgrounds constitute a useful mix of skills and knowledge; Keith Jamieson is himself a Mohawk ethno-historian of the Six Nations of Grand River and Michelle A. Hamilton is a specialist in 19th-century Canadian and Indigenous history and director of public history at the University of Western Ontario. They have resurrected the figure of Dr. Oronhyatekha, which loomed large during his own lifetime but has since fallen into relative obscurity. At the time of his death in 1907 Dr. Oronhyatekha’s obituary was not only featured in North American newspapers but in such prestigious publications as the *British Medical Journal*, *The Lancet*, *American Anthropologist*, and the *National Fraternal Congress* journal. Dr. Oronhyatekha’s name also appeared in biographies of prominent individuals of the time like Edward J. Dunn’s *Builders of*

*Fraternalism* (1924) and was even featured as late as 1971 in an article in *Tawow* magazine. Though Oronhyatekha currently has a significant entry in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* on-line, his is no longer a widely known name. Jamieson and Hamilton make a persuasive case that it should be.

According to the authors the title of the volume itself, *Dr. Oronhyatekha – Security, Justice, Equality*, refers to the tenets of the Mohawk whose world view incorporates these principles. But Jamieson and Hamilton stand the title on its head and cite the *insecurity, injustice, and inequality* Oronhyatekha experienced as an Indigenous person during that period, ever subject to societal limitations and strictures because of his background. The authors discuss the difficulty of locating accurate information on Oronhyatekha’s life and comment on the paucity of his own writing, usually in the form of personal correspondence. Their research on their subject however, is extensive and includes archival sources at Library and Archives Canada, Archives of Ontario, the Diocese of Huron Archives at Huron University College, and the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, as well as government documents, newspapers and periodicals, and books, articles, and theses, with a limited number of oral and email interviews.

Oronhyatekha’s story is a compelling one and Jamieson and Hamilton present it in an engaging fashion. From his adoption of the

name “Oronhyatekha,” which he felt indicated his singularity far better than his baptismal name of Peter Martin (and foreshadows the showmanship that was an Oronhyatekha trademark) the authors follow his remarkable career set against the backdrop of racism, attempted assimilation, and restrictive societal controls of the Victorian world. As a point of interest, they also provide historical background on the Haudenosaunee, and something of the flavour of opportunities—or their lack—for Indigenous peoples of that era. We get a clear picture of the effort that went into being a distinguished member of Victorian society but an even stronger impression of the greater effort needed to rise to that same position if one were Indigenous, not wealthy, not a member of “the club.”

Of critical importance was Oronhyatekha’s life-altering meeting with the Prince of Wales during an 1860 royal tour and the attendant opportunities it afforded him as a young man. It was at this encounter that he met Sir Henry Wentworth Acland, who would become a mentor and major influence in his life and after whom he named his eldest son, Acland. It was on Sir Henry’s suggestion that Oronhyatekha attended Oxford. (After completion of his medical degree he advertised himself as an Oxford-trained doctor though he was actually enrolled for only a brief period, eventually graduating from the Toronto School of Medicine.) Jamieson and Hamilton include a telling paragraph from an article in the *London Review and Weekly Journal of Politics, Literature, Art, and Society* that portrays Oronhyatekha as having a “loftier intellect” than his fellow Haudenosaunee that precluded him from any desire “to rob the beaver of its skin, and the buffalo of its tongue.” With this sort of inclusion the authors manage to convey the condescendingly superior and racist milieu in which Oronhyatekha as an Indigenous person found himself.

A strength of this book is the way it chronicles Oronhyatekha’s accomplishments set against a social scene rife with both prejudice and paternalism. Jamieson and Hamilton recount how a former mentor, Reverend Abraham Nelles, made allegations against Oronhyatekha’s honesty (misappropriation of Confederacy Council funds, a charge of which he was acquitted) and moral probity (making an unsubstantiated claim

Oronhyatekha had fathered a child out of wedlock while at Kenyon College) in a letter to Acland; charges which were to follow Oronhyatekha for years and resulted in withdrawal of funds to support him at Oxford. That Nelles was censorious of any decisions Oronhyatekha made without his guidance or input was later confirmed by a professor at University College, Toronto, who said anyone exhibiting an independent spirit was deemed “troublesome and rebellious” by Reverend Nelles. The influence on our lives of other people—for good or ill—is a theme of *Dr. Oronhyatekha*; Nelles, a former mentor undermines Oronhyatekha whereas Acland remains a lifelong ally and stands in as a father surrogate.

It was during his years as a medical student that Oronhyatekha showed himself to be a self-described “joiner,” going on to membership in the University Rifles, the Independent Order of Good Templars, King Solomon’s Lodge, Knights of the Maccabees, the Old Boys’ Association of London, The United Order of Workmen, The Loyal Orange Association, and The Independent Order of Foresters. Ever mindful of his origins and the need for public service Oronhyatekha also gave presentations on the Mohawk language, the Haudenosaunee people, and the Confederacy. This was to set the pattern of his civic duty and his membership in organizations, particularly fraternal and benevolent, for the rest of his life, including his participation in Aboriginal political bodies like the Grand General Indian Council of Ontario. It was through such memberships and Oronhyatekha’s own idiosyncratic personality that friendships with eminent political figures like Sir John A. Macdonald and President Theodore Roosevelt ensued as well.

Against a catalogue of accomplishment and personal achievement, however, Jamieson and Hamilton have as a counterpoint Oronhyatekha’s continuous and lifelong struggles with criticism of his personal life and career from both non-native and Aboriginal society, finances (he was bankrupt at one point), dissension within the fraternal organizations he led, and the deaths of three of his children. The authors refer to the MacTavish Royal Commission on life insurance in 1906 and Oronhyatekha’s testimonial before it, which was a precursor of his increasingly weakening health.

We also see Dr. Oronhyatekha's vanity: he secured for himself and his family the underpinnings of that to which he felt entitled. A colleague visiting his home referred to it as the "most beautifully furnished home" he had seen on the continent. Oronhyatekha built "The Wigwam" which indeed was a stately mansion on a privately owned island and later a "cottage" that eventually had thirty rooms and was called "The Castle" because of its grandeur. He and his wife assembled a vast collection of bibelots and Victoriana in their homes and even a life-sized statue of himself. His properties also featured live reindeer, exotic birds, and a monkey. Such examples of ostentatious display were de rigueur for the period but Oronhyatekha's social conscience was also evident as much of his property was later donated to fraternal organizations.

Dr. Oronhyatekha was a product of his time but had to overcome the prejudices of his time. It is a testament to the man that he was able to surmount disadvantages and give service to this country. His story is worth telling and Jamieson and Hamilton do a credible and even-handed job, depicting Oronhyatekha as someone who merged two worlds to make a life of his own choosing and creation. If it is their intention to mark a time in history and the indomitable power of the individual they have been truly successful. Dr. Oronhyatekha remains a figure of national interest whose narrative should regain a foothold in our collective national consciousness.

## TIMOTHY RAWLINGS

Review of

Laudun, John. 2016. *The Amazing Crawfish Boat*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

240 pp. 35 illustrations, maps and figure. ISBN (hb.) 9781496804204. \$ 30.00.

In *The Amazing Crawfish Boat*, John Laudun shows a deep affection for the people of Louisiana and a prairie landscape once limited to land-based agriculture that has been transformed over the past century to include rice farming and now aquaculture—that of growing crawfish. This book is focused on one aspect of that transition—the historical development over the past forty years of the amphibious crawfish boat and the loose community of people, including farmers, fabricators, machinists, repair men, and welders, who, knowingly or unwittingly, have played a role in its birth and evolution. In doing so, Laudun's stated goals are to capture the too often forgotten ordinary people doing ordinary work who have played critical roles in the development of landscape, communities, economies, and culture. This story is also one focused on a community responding to unfolding social and economic changes within the American agricultural industry. The creative developments documented here are ones borne of necessity—the invention of practical solutions to immediate problems—but according to Laudun

are also strongly reflective of local traditions and culture. Too small to be of interest to large manufacturers, the slow and incremental changes in boat form, engines, hydraulics, wheel placements, etc., are based on subtle tinkering and adjustments over the years, with knowledge trickling down from person to person through word of mouth, requests for repairs and modifications at local machine shops, and through watching friends, neighbours, and even competitors at work in their fields. It is not a story of cooperation and collaboration, not at all, but one of forward progression over time based on individual and collective experiences and practical needs. Boat hulls scattered in farmers' fields are testament to the historical truths documented here. The story itself is probably reflective of many other small industries that move forward through local innovation and without the help of dedicated engineers, scientists, or Big Industry. But, as with the case of *The Amazing Crawfish Boat*, many of these stories have remained untold.