



Oronhyatekha, baptized Peter Martin, was a Mohawk, born and raised at Six Nations. Among many accomplishments, awards, and citations, Oronhyatekha was one of the first of Native ancestry to receive a medical degree. He was also a Justice of the Peace, Consulting Physician at Tyendinaga (appointed by Sir John A. MacDonald), an Ambassador, Chief Ranger of the Independent Order of Foresters, and Chairman of the Grand Indian Council of Ontario and Quebec. But what was perhaps most remarkable about the man was not that he achieved success in the Victorian world, but that he did so with his Mohawk heritage intact. This slide show follows the remarkable life of Oronhyatekha, demonstrating how he successfully negotiated through two worlds, balancing Victorian Values to maintain his Mohawk Ideals.

❁Begin Slide Show❁





## Upbringing



Born at Six Nations on August 10th, 1841, Oronhyatekha was baptized Peter Martin. From the time of his early childhood, he preferred his Mohawk name, which means Burning Sky. "There are thousands of Peter Martins," he declared, "but there is only one Oronhyatekha." Oronhyatekha's character owed much to the influence of his grandfather, George Martin. As a Confederacy chief, George Martin was obliged to uphold the three principles most central to his position: Peace, Power and Righteousness, and raised Oronhyatekha to exemplify those high ideas in his life.

*Confederacy Chiefs, 1871. Albumen print photograph.*  
Collection of the Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford,  
Ontario.





## Early Education



Although firmly grounded in the language, traditions and ideals of the Mohawk people, Oronhyatekha entered into the missionary-run school system on the reserve. He first attended the new day school at Martin's Corners, and later, the Mohawk Institute.

*S. S. Number One School House, Martin's Corner, Six Nations.* Photograph. Woodland Cultural Centre Collection, Brantford, Ontario





# Mohawk Institute



The Mohawk Institute was established in 1831 and was managed as a residential school by the New England Company, the agent of the Church of England in Canada. Agents of the New England Company believed that removing Indian children to residential schools—away from the influence of their families and communities—was the most effective means to educate them. The Reverends Nelles and Elliot (of the New England Company) supervised the Mohawk Institute and the Mohawk Chapel and were very influential in the operations of the Six Nations community.

*The Mohawk Institute.* Photograph. Woodland Cultural Centre Collection, Brantford, Ontario





## Cobbler



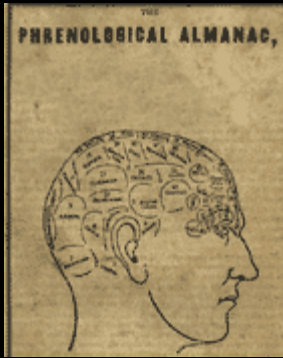
At the Mohawk Institute, Oronhyatekha learned to read and write, and received training as a cobbler. When he left the Institute, he began working on a piecework basis for a local shoemaker. However, the owner failed to pay him after three months, provoking Oronhyatekha to quit the job and the trade.

*Cobbler Tools: Last and Stand, Iron 980.016.052-054. Glanmore National Historic Site and Museum, Belleville, Ontario*





# Phrenology



As chance would have it, an American phrenologist was traveling through the community. Phrenology was the then popular “science” of reading the bumps and indentations on human heads for signs of intellect and personality. The phrenologist visited Oronhyatekha at his home, pronounced him “educable,” and proposed that he should continue his studies in the United States. Oronhyatekha convinced both his family and the Rev. Nelles to let him go, even though he would receive no financial support during his time away from home.

*The Phrenological Almanac.* Fowler and Wells Families Papers, #97. [Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections](#), Cornell University Library. Ithaca, New York





# American Education



Oronhyatekha did accompany the phrenologist to the United States, and entered the Wesleyan Academy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, at the age of 14. In 1857, he went on to enroll at Kenyon College in Ohio, again with the assistance of the Rev. Nelles, completing a four-year program of study in three years. The studies Oronhyatekha undertook at both the Wesleyan Academy and Kenyon College prepared him to become a missionary and a teacher, professions Oronhyatekha believed would enable him to be of the “most service to my people.” After Oronhyatekha graduated from Kenyon, he returned to the Six Nations reserve and took a teaching position with the New England Company.

*Old Kenyon, Kenyon College, 1948. Wood engraving, from Gordon K. Chalmers, *The College in the Forest 1824*, (New York: Newcomen Society, 1948), p. 21. Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.*





## Political Reform



The Six Nations Confederacy Council appointed Mohawk Chief George Henry Martin Johnson to the position of Interpreter in 1859. His selection was a controversial one and sparked the beginning of a reform movement spearheaded by a group of “young, educated upper Mohawks” at Six Nations who questioned the authority of the Confederacy Council and introduced the notion of an elected government.

*Chief George H.M Johnson, Confederacy Council Six Nations Chief*, ca. 1855. Daguerreotype. 2000x3.2.1, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Ontario. [1904 Catalogue of the Oronhyatekha Historical Rooms and Library. Item No. 355.](#) Used with permission of the Royal Ontario Museum. ©ROM.







## The Royal Visit



In September of 1860, at the age of 19, Oronhyatekha got the opportunity that changed his life forever. The first official Royal Visit of the Court of Queen Victoria to Canada was underway, and the Six Nations Confederacy Council presented a welcoming address to the Crown's representative, the Prince of Wales (who later became King Edward VII). The Confederacy called for submissions and Oronhyatekha's—prepared in both Mohawk and English—was chosen in favor of those produced by the New England Company's agents. Oronhyatekha was invited to present the welcoming address to the visiting Prince and his entourage when they arrived in Brantford, Ontario. The event was pivotal in re-establishing the direct link between Six Nations and the English Crown, which had been broken by the death of Captain John Brant, Joseph Brant's son, in 1834.

*Young Oronhyatekha giving a speech to Prince of Wales, 1860. Drawing. Courtesy of Ethel Brant Monture, Famous Canadian Indians series*





## The Prince of Wales



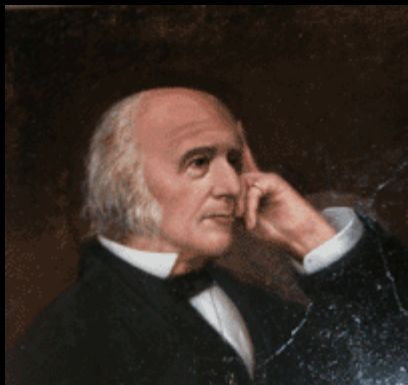
*Beaded Outfit of Oronhyatekha, 1860. A.1572.26-1;-5 (10 pieces)*  
Collection of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, California

Oronhyatekha was subsequently invited to present the welcoming address to the visiting Prince and his entourage when they arrived in Brantford, Ontario. The event was pivotal in re-establishing the direct link between Six Nations and the English Crown, which had been broken by the death of Captain John Brant, Joseph Brant's son, in 1834. According to E. B. Montour's biography, Oronhyatekha's sisters created the remarkable suit he wore to greet the Prince of Wales. Attired in his handmade ensemble, he presented to the Prince a most impressive figure at 6' 3" tall. During his presentation, Oronhyatekha reminded the royal visitor of the chain of friendship that had existed between the Six Nations and the Crown for over 200 years. For the Martin family, his presentation to the Prince fulfilled a belief that they were themselves royalty and that it was their rightful place to be with members of the Royal family. Throughout his life, this event was emphasized as a seminal moment for Oronhyatekha.





## Sir Henry Wentworth Acland



Oronhyatekha made the greatest impression upon the Court's appointed physician, the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford University, Sir Wentworth Acland. Following the presentation at Brantford, Sir Henry Acland, himself an aspiring sketch artist, invited Oronhyatekha to pose for him. During their discourse on the sketch, Sir Henry suggested or implied that Oronhyatekha might someday consider coming to Oxford to study. Apparently, Oronhyatekha took this discussion to be an invitation, an invitation that he accepted in the spring of 1862.

*Sir Henry Wentworth Acland*, oil painting, James Powless Collection, Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario





## Oxford University



Oronhyatekha left for England to accept Sir Henry Acland's invitation to attend Oxford University. When he arrived on Sir Henry Acland's doorstep penniless, Sir Henry assisted in arranging for Oronhyatekha's enrollment, and petitioned the New England Company office in London to assist his young charge. Fortunately, Sir Henry's petition was accepted.

*Oronhyatekha in Oxford, England.* Albumen print photograph, ca. 1862. Collection of the Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario.





## Ellen Hill



When Oronhyatekha returned from Oxford in 1862, he came to Tyendinaga on the Bay of Quinte, where he had family. Soon after he began teaching at Tyendinaga, he met Ellen Hill. She was a member of a prominent family and was a direct descendent of both Joseph Brant and John Deserontyou. They were married in 1864, the same year Oronhyatekha entered medical school at the University of Toronto.

*Ellen Hill*. Photograph, ca. 1880. Private Collection, Tyendinaga, Ontario





## Medical Degrees



Oronhyatekha graduated with a degree in medicine from the University of Toronto in 1866, and completed his preliminary training at Oxford University, England. He was granted a license to practice “Physic Surgery and Mid-wifery” from the newly formed College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario in 1867, and established his practice in Napanee, Ontario.

*Oronhyatekha, M.D., University Of Toronto Graduation, 1866. Photograph. Private Collection. Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario*





## Oronhyatekha, M.D.



As a practicing physician, Oronhyatekha met with both skepticism and unrealistic expectations. Many believed that as an Indian he was incompetent, while others hoped that he possessed mystical powers and remedies. His dislike of both opinions was a major factor in his eventual decision to give up medical practice.

*Medicine Bag of Chief Shingwauk. Cloth, Beads.*  
Oronhyatekha Collection, Royal Ontario Museum, 911.3.75.  
[1904 Catalogue of the Oronhyatekha Historical Rooms and Library, Item No. 143.](#) Used with permission of the Royal Ontario Museum. ©ROM. Photo Credit: Brian Boyle





## Medical Practice



Oronhyatekha gained prominence as a medical doctor, establishing practices in Nepanee, Frankfort, Stratford, and London, Ontario. He was consulting physician to the Oneida near London and was appointed Consulting Physician to Tyendinaga by Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald. He practiced medicine both on the reserve and in Ontario's Victorian society for more than a decade. Before long, however, Oronhyatekha became more interested in the many fraternal societies to which he belonged, and abandoned his medical practice.

*Oronhyatekha, M. D., ca. 1890. Photograph. Collection of the Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario*







## Riflery



Oronhyatekha joined the Queen's Own Rifles of the University of Toronto and was said to have participated in the defense of Canada against the Fenian Raids. His excellent shooting skills earned him a place on the first Canadian Team to participate in the Wimbledon Shoots, England, where he won nine medals for marksmanship.

*Ensign Cooks Cup, Private Oronhyatekha, June 6th, 1865,  
Sterling Silver Shooting Trophy. Collection of Ms. Edith  
Green, Tyendinaga, Ontario*





## Fraternal Societies



Fraternal societies were very popular throughout Canada and the world during the Victorian era. Oronhyatekha was an active participant in many organizations such as the Masonic Lodge, the Good Templars and the Orange Order. He was able to adapt many of the procedures and rituals he learned in other fraternal organizations, implementing them in the structure of the Independent Order of Foresters.

*Oronhyatekha. Photograph from the *History of the Independent Order of Foresters* by Oronhyatekha, M.D. S.C.R., 1895. Collection of the Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario*





# Independent Order of Foresters



When Oronhyatekha joined the Independent Order of Foresters in 1878, the insurance organization was promoting itself under the banner of “Liberty, Benevolence, and Concord.” It was a struggling group, fraught with factionalism and facing crippling debts. Oronhyatekha rose through the ranks quickly to the position of Supreme Chief Ranger. During his tenure, the order grew and prospered, gaining international success. Oronhyatekha succeeded in broadening membership, and introduced an amendment to the Independent Order of Foresters Constitution to admit women as full members.

Independent Order of Foresters Plate. Keith A. Jamieson Collection, Six Nations.





# Independent Order of Foresters Building



By the late nineteenth century, the IOF had grown considerably under Oronhyatekha's stewardship, and new accommodations were required. Oronhyatekha oversaw the site selection, planning, designing and construction of the company's new headquarters. The result was the IOF Temple on the corner of Richmond and Bay Streets, a block south of the new Toronto City Hall, a prime piece of real estate. When completed in 1898, the twelve story, red brick and sandstone Temple was the tallest office building in the British Empire. Oronhyatekha proclaimed the building to be "absolutely fireproof" and personally assured the inclusion of many fire fighting innovations, such as the installation of "fire hydrants on the roof to help city firemen fight possible flames in neighbouring buildings of lesser stature and inferior construction."

*Independent Order of Foresters Building, ca. 1899. Postcard.*  
Collection of the Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford,  
Ontario





## Archway Crown



When the Duke and Dutchess of York (the future King George V and Queen Mary) toured Toronto in 1905, he went to City Hall under the IOF's arch, which Oronhyatkeha had constructed for this particular one-day visit. The archway and crown had flashing lights and remained in place for one month. As a result of this brilliant piece of marketing, IOF membership climbed dramatically.

*Archway Crown, 1905.* Photograph. Independent Order of Foresters Archives, Toronto, Ontario





# Transforming the Insurance Industry



Oronhyatekha brought his Mohawk ideals to bear on the institutions of the Victorian era. He helped transform the insurance industry by extending insurance benefits to the average working man at an affordable rate. In addition to admitting women as full members, he extended benefits to the children of deceased members of the IOF. His leadership had a significant impact on the insurance industry as he transformed the Independent Order of Foresters into a world leader.

*Oronhyatekha in Rickshaw, with children at the Orphanage, ca, 1900. Postcard. Collection of the Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario*





## Mohawk Ideals and Victorian Values



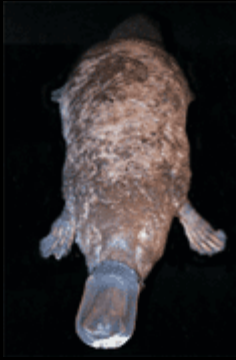
The Independent Order of Foresters became the vehicle through which Oronhyatekha was able to amalgamate the ideas of his Mohawk upbringing, which included Peace, Power, and Righteousness with the Victorian era values of God, Duty and Immortality to influence an organization that would promote Liberty, Benevolence and Concord. He was able to mold this exclusive fraternal organization into an organization that promoted inclusivity, tolerance and humanitarianism.

Oronhyatekha, Supreme Chief Ranger, Independent Order of Foresters, 1890. Photograph. Private Collection. Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario





## The Oronhyatekha Historical Rooms and Library



Oronhyatekha adopted a lifestyle befitting a successful, Oxford-trained physician, and his leisure activities often revolved around his collecting habits. During his travels as Supreme Chief Ranger, Oronhyatekha collected an enormous variety of curios, artifacts and natural specimens into a “cabinet of curiosities.” As a proper Victorian gentleman of means, he maintained his museum in the Temple Building, Toronto. There, the Oronhyatekha Historical Rooms and Library were opened to the public in September of 1902. Of the over 800 pieces in his collection, many objects symbolized First Nations sovereignty and international relationships.

*Platypus, or “Duck-Bill,”* Oronhyatekha Collection, Royal Ontario Museum. 91.10.1.35. [1904 Catalogue of the Oronhyatekha Historical Rooms and Library. Item No. 763.](#)







# The Martin Family



Oronhyatekha maintained an interest in his own people and began collecting objects that reflected both his personal and professional life. All the while, he wrote and published articles that promoted the Mohawk people as a part of contemporary Victorian society. This turn-of-the-century collage demonstrates the Martin Family's diversity and their perception that they had a special relationship with royalty. Queen Victoria has been included in the lower right hand corner of the collage.

*Martin Family Collage, ca. 1900. Tom Hill Collection, Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario.*





## Elegant Living



Oronhyatekha was frequently criticized for his flamboyant lifestyle. His financial and social success encouraged him to build homes that announced his international fame. The Pines, depicted in this painting by the late Les Claus, was Oronhyatekha's home on the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. The Pines was also his retreat, where he permitted only Mohawk to be spoken. The interiors were lavishly decorated in the Victorian style. Oronhyatekha also kept a menagerie of live exotic animals at the Pines.

Les Claus, *At the Pines*, ca. 1940. Oil Painting. Ella Claus Estate, Tyendinaga, Ontario





# The Orphanage



In 1903, Oronhyatekha built a large and extravagant orphanage on Forester's Island in the Bay of Quinte, near Belleville, Ontario. The Independent Order of Foresters did not, however, have the financial resources to assure its endurance. Following his death, the Independent Order of Foresters closed the Orphanage in 1908 because of a reported debt of \$232,000.

*Foresters Orphans' Home, Tyendinaga, Ontario, ca. 1905.*  
Postcard. Collection of the Woodland Cultural Centre,  
Brantford, Ontario.





## Last Years



During the winter of 1906 to 1907, Oronhyatekha's health deteriorated due to heart disease and the debilitating effects of diabetes. Oronhyatekha's attending physician suggested that he take an extended vacation. In late February, the ailing Oronhyatekha left for a sanatorium in Savannah, Georgia, stopping en route in Washington, D. C., where he was the guest of President Theodore Roosevelt. On March 3, 1907, Oronhyatekha passed away quietly in Savannah. The next day all three Toronto papers carried front page obituaries.

*Oronhyatekha in his last years, ca. 1906. Oil painting.*  
Whitlow Collection, Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford,  
Ontario





## The Funeral Procession



Oronhyatekha's funeral was a spectacular event. His body arrived at Union Station in Toronto two days after his death. A public procession that included the city's Mayor and other dignitaries accompanied him to Massey Hall, where his body lay in state. Oronhyatekha was one of the few people in Canada who was not a head of state to be accorded a state funeral in Toronto. Over 10,000 people came to pay their respects. Oronhyatekha was later interred with his family at Christ Church Chapel Royal, Tyendinaga, where there is a plaque honouring his life. He is also honoured in the Canadian Indian Hall of Fame Collection in the [Woodland Cultural Centre](#). In July 2002, [Oronhyatekha was designated a Figure of National Historic Significance](#) by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

*Oronhyatekha Funeral Procession, The Canadian Courier, 16 March 1907, p. 11.*





## Oronhyatekha, M. D., Victorian Mohawk



Oronhyatekha lived to show the world that culture, identity, and race were not commodities that could be sold, traded, or even taken away. Nor were these attributes an impediment or barrier to expressing compassion for the young, aged, sick and less fortunate. Oronhyatekha had pride and a sense of place from his acute sense of history and he promoted himself, his family and his Mohawk people as equals on the world stage.

Walter Seymour Allward, *Oronhyatekha, M. D., Supreme Chief Ranger*, 1899. Bronze Statue. Collection of the Independent Order of Foresters, Toronto, Ontario. [1904 Catalogue of the Oronhyatekha Historical Rooms and Library, Item No. 3](#)

