

## ORONHYATEKHA, PETER MARTIN, MD

Inducted 2007

Dr. Oronhyatekha, also known as Peter Martin was born August 10, 1841 on the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford and died March 3, 1907. He had an illustrious loyalist connection through his Mohawk roots. He was married on August 28, 1863 to Ellen Hill, who was a great-granddaughter of Joseph Brant. He was a son of Peter Martin Sr. of Six Nations Reserve and Lydia Loft of Bay of Quinte Mohawks. His grandfather was George Martin, born December 23, 1767 near Canajoharie, NY and died February 8, 1853 in Salt Springs near Brantford. George served in the American Revolution and settled as a Loyal Mohawk with Joseph Brant and others on the Six Nations Reserve. George was married to Catherine Rollston, who was of Dutch ancestry. George and Catherine also had a daughter Helen who married John "Smoke" Johnson. George Martin served as a confidential interpreter to William Claus, who was the deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1799 to 1826, and as a native interpreter to Joseph Brant Clench during the War of 1812. Lydia Loft was a granddaughter of Lydia, sister to Capt. John Deserontyou, who married Isaac Hill.

Oronhyatekha, or Peter Martin, was educated in the Mohawk language and traditions. His native name meant Burning Sky. He later attended the Mohawk Institute in Brantford, where he learned to read and write in English and was trained to be a cobbler. He then taught in day schools at the Six Nations Reserve. He later attended Kenyon College in Ohio.

In 1860 he was chosen to represent the Six Nations Confederacy Council and deliver a welcoming address to the visiting Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII, done in full native attire. He so impressed the Prince that he invited him to attend Oxford University. He also became a life-long friend to Sir Henry Acland, physician to the Prince. In 1862 he became the first Aboriginal to study in Oxford. This was a short-lived experience as he soon returned to Canada, settling in Tyendinaga, where he married and built his home known as "The Pines". He decided to pursue a medical career and became the first Aboriginal person to be accredited as a medical doctor in Canada, graduating from University of Toronto in 1866. He established his first practice in Frankford, then Napanee, and later London, Ontario. All the while he maintained contact with the Tyendinaga area. He was elected as the first secretary of the Hastings County Medical Association in 1870. Sir John A. Macdonald recommended his appointment as consulting physician to the Mohawks in Tyendinaga in 1873.



During the 1870s he began to show interests in other fields as well as his medical work. In 1871 he won nine medals for marksmanship representing Canada at the Wimbledon Shoots, England. He also joined the Orange Lodge, Masonic Lodge, and the Good Templars. In 1872 he became Chairman of the Grand Indian Council of Ontario and Quebec. He made frequent trips to England and became a fixture in the Court of Queen Victoria.

In 1879 he joined the Independent Order of Foresters in London, Ontario which was a struggling organization with 369 members and a debt of \$4000 at that time. In 1881 he became Supreme Chief Ranger of the Independent Order of Foresters, and held that position until his death in 1907. He built the IOF into a successful international and financially healthy organization which focused on the needs of people in crisis. The premise he pioneered was to make insurance available to the average working man. By 1907 the IOF boasted over 250,000 members worldwide, and \$11-million in assets. Over this 26-year time period the organization distributed over \$20-million in benefits and insurance money to over 100,000 families.

He established a stately home in Tyendinaga, as well as a castle and an Orphanage on Forester's Island in the Bay of Quinte. The island today is still owned by the IOF. He died in Savannah Georgia on March 3, 1907 following a visit to President Theodore Roosevelt. On his death, he was given a full state funeral at Massey Hall in Toronto, attended by over 10,000. He was buried in Tyendinaga.

To honour his efforts, a plaque in his memory was unveiled in 1957 by the Province of Ontario. The National Sites and Monuments Board of Canada unveiled a marker to commemorate his historical significance on Aug.21, 2005 at Christ Church, Her Majesty's Chapel Royal of the Mohawks, in Tyendinaga.

