

"Dr. O" exhibit opens at Woodland to packed house

By Marie-Lauren Gregoire

BRANTFORD – The Woodland Cultural Centre opened the exhibition of a renowned Mohawk physician from Six Nations at a ceremony last Sunday to a packed house at the centre. "Mohawk Ideals, Victoria Values: Oronhyatekha, M.D." opened with a celebration on Sunday, July 29 and will run until December 29, 2001.

"Mohawk Ideals, Victorian Values" speaks to the life of one man who faced tremendous odds in many areas," said Keith Jamieson, curator of Woodland Cultural Centre Museum. "He comes from the Six Nations Territory when the Six Nations were definitely a nation unto their own."

Jamieson spent four years researching Dr. Oronhyatekha and gathering artifacts for the exhibit. He also learned a great deal about "Dr. O".

"I think the fundamental philosophy is a principle of reciprocity and it is a very simple philosophy, it just simply was respect for others, respect for things," said Jamieson.

Dr. Oronhyatekha's passion for collected pieces of culture from North America and his travels overseas is shown in the exhibit. The Woodland Cultural Centre collaborated with the Royal Ontario Museum and the International Order of Foresters to put this project together. Woodland Cultural Centre also involved Heritage Canada, the Ontario Arts Council and the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation in bringing the idea of an exhibit of Dr. Oronhyatekha to fruition.

"Today is a beginning and it is also ends a lengthy process that began eight years ago," said Tom Hill, director of Woodland Cultural Centre Museum. "The man became an inspiration, the event became an exhibition. [Dr. Oronhyatekha was] a man born a Mohawk who had to face incredible racial prejudice and rose to fame in the International Order of Foresters, an incredible story, one that has to be told," said Hill.

The exhibit of Dr. Oronhyatekha's personal artifacts and his collection of Indian artifacts cost \$250,000 to put together. Woodland Cultural Centre obtained artifacts from the LA County Museum, Casa Loma, Brant County Museum and many other museums that house Dr. Oronhyatekha's artifacts as part of their permanent collection.

"From the time we started eight years ago, it would be \$250,000 that covers the insurance for all these things," said Hill. One of the cases on loan from another museum cost \$4,000 to insure.

"We got funding from Heritage Canada, Indian Affairs, and private donations and then we fundraised," said Hill. The Woodland Cultural Centre is still fundraising to produce a catalogue of the Dr. Oronhyatekha exhibit that Hill hopes will be available in the fall.

The opening ceremony was an opportunity for those involved in the project to share their congratulations and gratitude to Woodland Cultural Centre for creating this exhibit. Representatives from the Royal Ontario Museum, the International Order of Foresters, the City of Brantford and Six Nations Council were in attendance among the hundreds gathered for the opening.

"A special thank you to Keith Jamieson, who has worked for four years on this exhibition. His invaluable research has brought to life the incredible Dr. Oronhyatekha and his life and times," said Hill.

The "Mohawk Ideal, Victoria Values: Oronhyatekha, M.D." exhibit travels to the Royal Ontario Museum after a long engagement at the Woodland Cultural Centre.

"Keith Jamieson really

brings something alive that was hidden in many departments of many museums," said William Thorsell, President and CEO of the Royal Ontario Museum. "The story of "Dr. O" is one of great inspiration because the man overcame many assumed obstacles at the time."

Dr. Oronhyatekha was a prominent figure in the International Order of Foresters. He helped the organization grow from its humble beginnings to an international organization.

Dr. Oronhyatekha taught the IOF the value of giving back. He pioneered the IOF and has left a lasting mark on the organization. Dr. Oronhyatekha, Supreme Chief of the IOF, influenced the militaristic style of dress in the 1940's, helped erect one of the first monumental buildings on Toronto's Bay Street, and established an orphanage on Forrester's Island.

"I think we owe a great deal to Tom Hill, Keith Jamieson for putting on this exhibition," said Chief Wellington Staats. "It's always a pleasure to come before people and show what Six Nations people can do, what Indian people all over can accomplish."

Councillor Paul Urbanowicz, City of Brantford, thanked Woodland Cultural Centre for presenting the exhibit and spoke about tourism in Brantford, Brant County and Six Nations.

"We have a very unique opportunity where we can offer tourists not just a day trip but three or four days, maybe a week, to take part in and look at the culture and exhibitions that we have to offer," said Urbanowicz. "I have yet to see a community that has a history and culture that we have to offer."

Dr. Oronhyatekha was born August 10, 1841 in Six Nations and died in Savannah, Georgia on March 3, 1907. He began his public life early as the Confederacy chose him to give a welcoming address to the Prince of Wales on his first visit to Six Nations in 1860 when he was sixteen.

In 1866, Dr. Oronhyatekha was the first person of native ancestry to graduate from medicine at the University of Toronto. He was a consummate Victorian and collected artifacts and specimens on his travels to different countries and cultures. He collected over 800 objects that belonged to First Nations leaders, warriors and diplomats.

"Dr. O faced many obstacles, government policies and institutions as it was believed that native people faced extinction and so it was thought that all Indians assimilate into the emerging culture of Canada," said Larry Sault, Grand Chief of Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians. "Dr. O was a Mohawk first and he achieved great prominence as a leader and socialite in Victorian society."

The exhibit is a walk through time to Dr. Oronhyatekha's Victorian era and further back through First Nations' histories. Many of the specimens of Dr. Oronhyatekha's collection are artifacts of Captain Joseph Brant and Chief John Tecumseh.

The exhibit honours the life and time and contributions of a man who achieved success against great odds.

"In anything we do I think we need to honour the men and women in our community who have done so much," said



A statue of Dr. Oronhyatekha greets patrons of the exhibit.

Sault. "I know that our people have come a long way in the last century and in the last 25 years to honour our people. Let's honour them as they are alive and while they have that breath, let us not wait until they are gone," said Sault.

Chief Daniel LaForme, Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, presented the Mississaugas' headdress to Amos Key, executive director of Woodland Cultural Centre.

"This headdress itself has travelled many miles to represent all native people across Canada," said LaForme. "We went to represent all Aboriginal people in Canada for the Olympics."

The Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation were involved in Toronto's unsuccessful but valiant bid for the 2008 Olympics as Toronto is the Mississaugas' traditional territory.

Chief LaForme presented the headdress that New Credit had made for the Olympic Bid presentations. LaForme said the headdress was made to represent as many First Nations as possible through the beadwork, the eagle feathers and the animal hair that compose the headdress.

"When you get the gift of eagle feathers it is akin to the Order of Canada," said Key. He accepted the gift in full regalia to show honour. "It is very important to our people. It is a symbol of Haudenosaunee and Anishnabe people, it is a great honour."

The opening ceremony was followed by a guided tour of the exhibit by Jamieson. Guests and patrons were invited to a very Victorian "High Tea" outside the museum with classical music playing in the background.

The exhibit showcases the traditional clothing of Dr. Oronhyatekha as well as military jackets. Dr. Oronhyatekha's replica of Queen Victoria's throne is on loan from Casa Loma. The exhibit features an exquisite collection of the history of Dr. Oronhyatekha, a fusion of Mohawk and Victorian life.

"Mohawk Ideals, Victorian Values: Oronhyatekha, M.D." is on at the Woodland Cultural Centre from July 29 to December 29. The museum is open Monday to Friday 9am to 7pm and Saturdays and Sundays at 11am to 6:30pm.