



Huron
AT WESTERN

Re: Proposed Demolition of 172 Central Avenue

9 July 2018

Dear members of the Planning and Environment Committee,

Because I cannot attend your meeting next Monday, I am writing to express both professional and personal concerns about the proposed demolition of 172 Central Avenue, the nineteenth-century home of Mohawk physician Dr. Oronhyateka (Peter Martin), a person of national historical significance. As a historian of Canada's early history, specifically nineteenth-century Indigenous intellectuals, I am concerned that this demolition will further erode the physical traces of this culture. As a citizen of London, I worry about the loss of much of this city's early heritage. Though traces of the city's early downtown development remain, much of this built heritage no longer exists. If we are to reinvigorate our city's core, the protection of its built heritage must be a central priority.

The site at 172 Central Avenue is historically significant for three reasons. First, it marks a site of important local history. It was from here that Dr. Oronhyateka conducted work with the Grand General Indian Council of Ontario, a political body that sought to influence government policies related to Indigenous peoples at a time when First Peoples had little power. It was also from here that Oronhyateka began his work with the Independent Order of Foresters, a fraternal organization that achieved global influence much because of his efforts. Michelle Hamilton and Keith Jamieson well document this in their recent book *Dr. Oronhyateka: Security, Justice and Equality*.

From a broader perspective, over the past five-to-ten years historians have demonstrated that Indigenous professionals like Oronhyateka are important for understanding the nineteenth-century history of the Great Lakes region. Though many people point to Oronhyateka's schooling as unique, this emerging literature points to the broader context in which it occurred. Recently, I published a synthesis of recent historical work on this subject in *History Compass* (<https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12445>). I encourage you to consult this essay before making your decision. 172 Central provides important insight into the intellectual cultures I describe here.

Finally, as Canadians reflect on the truths uncovered through our Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we have been called to change our behaviour as it relates to Indigenous histories and cultures. Several of the TRC's Calls-to-Action call for you to weigh seriously this decision (i.e. 43, 57, 77, and 79ii) and – I would suggest – in favour of the arguments put forth by local First Nations, especially Six Nations of the Grand River.

Thank you for taking this letter into consideration as you deliberate the fate of this building.

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