

Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada by Donald Smith

Christopher J. Wright

Volume 106, numéro 1, spring 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050730ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050730ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Wright, C. J. (2014). Compte rendu de [*Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada* by Donald Smith]. *Ontario History*, 106(1), 140–141. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050730ar>

Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada

By Donald Smith

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. 496 pages. \$85 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-80209-162-8 \$37.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-80209-427-8 (www.utppublishing.com)

Donald B. Smith's *Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada* examines the Ojibwe Methodist Church, and eight stories of Anishinaabeg conversion to Christianity. Each chapter focuses on a high profile Anishinaabe person, or family, from the Great Lakes region, who converted to Methodism: Kahkewaquonaby (Peter Jones); Nawahjezhegwabe (Joseph Sawyer); Nahnebahnwequay (Catharine Sutton); Pahtahsega (Peter Jacobs); Maungwudaus (George Henry); Kahgegagahbowh (George Copway); Shawundais (John Sunday); and, Shahwahngeezhik (John Sunday) and his sons. The result is a disciplined historical work that has significance beyond the story of the Church and Methodist conversion. Smith's stated goal was to "make Mississauga history more comprehensive to non-Aboriginals" (pg. xxiv), which he has more than accomplished with *Mississauga Portraits*.

The book delves into different and complex approaches Great Lakes Anishinaabeg had to Methodism, as well as the varied levels of adaptation. The reader can see how the Anishinaabeg had not only to negotiate new identities within their own communities, but also within the mutable national identity of nineteenth-century Canada. Readers are introduced to multifaceted individuals, who held fast to many core Anishinaabeg values. Smith identifies sharing as a core value of the Anishinaabeg (pg. 178), and each of the people profiled in *Mississauga Portraits* exemplifies this value in his/her own way. Most often, the most valuable commodity shared was knowledge.

Each of the Anishinaabe Methodists profiled travelled extensively, in order to

share their knowledge and ways of knowing. They appear in each other's chapters as their paths crossed, whether it was in Great Lakes Anishinaabeg communities, larger Canadian and U.S. cities, or overseas in European metropolises. Smith has skillfully combined 40 years of his personal research with new data, which has become available more recently with the explosion of online periodicals and electronic resources. As a result, Smith successfully illustrates the impact of key Anishinaabeg Methodists, and the major influence they carried in Canadian, Anishinaabeg, and even international circles.

Smith's declared target audience is non-Indigenous. With this in mind, there are a couple of instances where additional clarification or interpretation of facts would have been beneficial for readers who are completely new to this area of history. For instance, on the first page of the preface, Smith writes: "The Mississauga believed that their 1820 treaty with the British had guaranteed them self-government as well as the protection of their remaining lands on the Credit River. It had not." This is immediately followed by a discussion of a painting of Joseph Sawyer. With regards to the treaty, were the Mississauga tricked? Were there guarantees that were not honoured? Were the Mississauga naive? People who are not familiar with Mississauga history could interpret "It had not" in a number of ways.

That being said, Smith does an excellent job at creating social and cultural backdrops for the actions of the Anishinaabeg Methodists by offering a great deal of context. For example, in chapter three, Smith explains

how Anishinaabe belief systems are taught to children, and then more specifically talks about Nahnebahnwequay's childhood. Nahnebahnwequay adopted the name Catharine Sutton upon receiving a Christian education, but she always remained "Nahnee" to those who knew her (pg. 70). The importance of the land is central to Anishinaabe belief systems, and Sutton fought tirelessly for Anishinaabe land rights throughout her life. She was buried in her adoptive Anishinaabeg community of Saugeen. Her passion made such an impact that it continues to be referenced in contemporary cases concerning hunting and fishing rights in the Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula. Readers are given a more complete picture of who these individuals were, and what motivated them, because of the context offered by Smith.

Smith goes beyond examining the discrete actions of the people profiled in each chapter, and shows how each person's actions embodied a broader belief system, rooted in Anishinaabe core values. Each chapter can stand on its own as important glimpse into

an individual life, but together the chapters illustrate the difficulties of maintaining ties to one's roots, while navigating a new world. In chapter one, Smith illustrates how Peter Jones tried to help his people adjust to the new dominant British Canadian society (pg. 26); however, there are echoes of efforts similar to Jones's, in each chapter. *Mississauga Portraits* reframes notions of Anishinaabeg Methodist assimilation, as stories of adjustment and adaptation.

The Methodist Church was heavily influenced by Social Darwinism in the twentieth century, becoming a prejudiced and unwelcoming path for potential Anishinaabeg converts (pg. 281). Smith concludes that Anishinaabeg Methodism was not a success, but the same cannot be said for this book. *Mississauga Portraits* is an important contribution to scholarship, and should be considered essential reading.

Christopher J. Wright
PhD candidate, King's College London
Department of History



The Champlain Society

Discover, Conserve, Preserve Canadian Heritage

Join Us!

For more than a century, The Champlain Society has made accessible Canada's rich documentary heritage—*something you care about*. Did you know it relies exclusively on membership revenue and fundraising efforts to support these activities?

The Society has issued more than a hundred of the most important documents in Canadian history, adding a modern sense of discovery, originality, and interpretation to each one. All the books are peer reviewed and reflect the highest level of scholarship. As the new century progresses, The Champlain Society continues to publish groundbreaking works and maintains an Internet presence that allows free public access to Canada's historic documents.

Prove your commitment to the preservation of Canadian documentary heritage by joining The Champlain Society.

Membership Includes

- Beautiful limited-edition volume of key documents of Canadian history;
- Invitations to the Society's annual historical lecture;
- Early warnings on what's new in documentary heritage;
- Discounts on past publications (when available) and;
- The membership pin.

Invest in something you care about

The Champlain Society
10 Morrow Avenue, Suite 202
Toronto, Ontario M6R 2J1
Tel 416 538-1650 Fax 416 489-1713
www.champlainsociety.ca
Email: info@champlainsociety.ca