New Scholarship Presents Timely Exploration of the History of the “Pioneer” Identity as Monuments are Removed Nationwide

Portland, OR – June 17, 2020 – As protesters remove monuments across the nation that represent a legacy of racism and oppression, the Oregon Historical Society’s scholarly journal, the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, publishes a relevant article in the just-released Summer 2020 issue on the complicated pioneer narrative by Marc James Carpenter, *Pioneer Problems: “Wanton Murder,” Indian War Veterans, and Oregon’s Violent History*. A digital copy of this article as well as interviews with authors are available by request.

In this research article, Carpenter examines turn-of-the-twentieth-century debates over the definition of the word *pioneer* in history and public memory. Leaders of the Indian War Veterans of the North Pacific Coast (IWV-NPC) and of the Oregon Historical Society, Carpenter writes, worked to shape the public’s acceptance or rejection of the “martial roots of the term *pioneer*” in relation to Euro-Americans’ violence against Native people. As Carpenter suggests, “a true history of the Pacific Northwest must reckon with the legions of Euro-American pioneers who, during the 1840s, the 1850s, and beyond, pursued pogroms and inflicted acts of workaday racial violence in pursuit of a white ethno-state.”

That reckoning should include an examination of memorialization in public spaces. According to Carpenter, Alexander Phimister Proctor’s *Pioneer* sculpture at the University of Oregon, which protesters recently removed from its base, is “unusual in its explicit celebration of pioneer violence.” The sculpture depicts a Euro-American man in purposeful stride, with a gun slung over his shoulder and a whip in his hand.

The statue clearly reinforced white-supremacist beliefs for at least one prominent Oregonian when it was erected, as past Oregon Historical Society President Frederick V. Holman spoke to “the instincts and traditions of the Anglo-Saxon race . . . to move westward . . . [to] a wild land to be made useful and become part of the civilized world.”
Holman’s speech was published in the September 1919 issue of the Oregon Historical Quarterly and can be accessed for free online.

This is not the first time the Quarterly has delved into the complexities of public memory, history, and debates over veneration of historical figures. In the Summer 2019 essay, “What’s in a name?” The University of Oregon, De-Naming Controversies, and the Ethics of Public Memory, authors Matthew Dennis and Samuel Reis-Dennis explore the significance of honorific building naming on college campuses. According to Dennis and Reis-Dennis, “questions about honorific naming opportunities . . . are not just academic — they are edifying.”

In September 2016, University of Oregon President Michael H. Schill decided to recommend that the university’s board of trustees de-name a building named for Frederic S. Dunn, a former classics professor and leader in the local KKK, but not Deady Hall. The authors commented on “the tortured nature of the president’s justification” at that time and argued that “the renewal of an icon is itself a history-making act, which says something not only about more distant, historical worlds, but also about us.” Their essay is valuable in considering debates over monument removal but also is particularly timely, as Schill has recently announced a reversal in his original recommendation to de-name Deady Hall, in response to a request from UO trustee Andrew Colas. Deady’s portrait has also just been removed from the Mark O. Hatfield U.S. Courthouse. The University of Oregon’s board of trustees will consider renaming Deady Hall at a meeting on June 24.

“What’s in a name?” is available to read for free on the OHS website at ohs.org/readohq, along with over 80 other peer reviewed articles spanning from 1963 through 2019. Published continuously since 1900, OHQ brings well-researched, well-written history about Oregon and the Pacific Northwest to both scholars and general readers. OHQ is one of the largest state historical society journals in the United States and is a recognized and respected source for the history of the Pacific Northwest region.

The Summer 2020 issue and many back issues of the Oregon Historical Quarterly are available for purchase through the Oregon Historical Society’s Museum Store for $10, and a subscription to OHQ is a benefit of Oregon Historical Society membership. Copies of the Winter 2019 special issue on “White Supremacy & Resistance,” available for $15, can also be ordered by emailing the museum store at museumstore@ohs.org.

About the Oregon Historical Society

For more than a century, the Oregon Historical Society has served as the state’s collective memory, preserving a vast collection of artifacts, photographs, maps, manuscript materials, books, films, and oral histories. Our research library, museum, digital platforms & website (www.ohs.org), educational programming, and historical journal make Oregon’s history open and accessible to all. We exist because
history is powerful, and because a history as deep and rich as Oregon’s cannot be contained within a single story or point of view.