

CHIEF JOSEPH BRANT – EXTRACT

He was a Mohawk military and political leader, based in present-day New York and, later, Brantford, in what is today Ontario, who was closely associated with Great Britain during and after the American Revolution. Perhaps the best-known Native American of his generation, he met many of the most significant American and British people of the age, including both United States President George Washington and King George III of Great Britain.

While not born into a hereditary leadership role within the Iroquois Confederacy, Brant rose to prominence due to his education, abilities, and connections to British officials. His sister, Molly Brant, was the wife of Sir William Johnson, the influential British Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Province of New York. During the American Revolutionary War, Brant led Mohawk and colonial Loyalists known as Brant's Volunteers against the rebels in a bitter partisan war on the New York frontier.

Brant was born in the Ohio Country in March 1743, somewhere along the Cuyahoga River during the hunting season when the Mohawk travelled to the area from Kanienkeh ("the Land of the Flint"), the Mohawk name for their homeland in what is present-day Upstate New York. He was named Thayendanagea, which in the Mohawk language means "He places two bets together", which came from the custom of tying the wagered items to each other when two parties placed a bet. As the Mohawk were a matrilineal culture, he was born into his mother's Wolf Clan. The Haudenosaunee League, of which the Mohawks were one of the Six Nations, was divided into clans headed by clan mothers. Anglican Church records at Fort Hunter, New York, noted that his parents were Christians, and their names were Peter and Margaret Tehonwaghkwangearahkwa.

The Mohawk, in common with the other nations of the Haudenosaunee League, had a very gendered understanding of social roles with power divided by the male royaner (chiefs or sachems) and the clan mothers (who always nominated the male leaders). Decisions were reached by consensus between the clan mothers and the chiefs. Mohawk women did all the farming, growing the "Three Sisters" of beans, corn, and squash, while men went hunting and engaged in diplomacy and wars. In the society in which Brant grew up, there was an expectation that he would be a warrior as a man.

Brant's mother Margaret was a successful businesswoman who collected and sold ginseng, which was greatly valued in Europe for its medical qualities, selling the plant to New York merchants who shipped it to London. Through her involvement in the ginseng trade, Margaret first met William Johnson, a merchant, fur trader, and land speculator from Ireland, who was much respected by the Mohawk for his honesty, being given the name Warraghiagey ("He Who Does Much Business") and who lived in a mansion known as Fort Johnson by the banks of the Mohawk river.

In 1754, the British with the Virginia militia led by George Washington in the French and Indian War in the Ohio river valley were defeated by the French, and in 1755 a British expedition into the Ohio river valley led by General Edward Braddock was annihilated by the French.

Starting at about age 15 during the French and Indian War (part of the Seven Years' War), Brant took part with Mohawk and other Iroquois allies in a number of British actions against the French in Canada: James Abercrombie's 1758 expedition via Lake George that ended in utter defeat at Fort Carillon; Johnson's 1759 Battle of Fort Niagara; and Jeffery Amherst's 1760 expedition to Montreal via the St. Lawrence River. He was one of 182 Native American warriors awarded a silver medal from the British for his service.

On November 11, 1775, Guy Johnson took Brant with him to London to solicit more support from the government. They hoped to persuade the Crown to address past Mohawk land grievances in exchange for their participation as allies in the impending war. Brant met George III during his trip to London, but his most important talks were with the colonial secretary, George Germain. Brant complained that the Iroquois had fought for the British in the Seven Years' War, taking heavy losses, yet the British were allowing white settlers like Klock to defraud them of their land.

In London, Brant was treated as a celebrity and was interviewed for publication by James Boswell. He was received by King George III at St. James's Palace. While in public, he dressed in traditional Mohawk attire. He was accepted into freemasonry and received his ritual apron personally from King George.

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