

"Brother — We have heard and considered your case; we sympathize with you. We are bereaved of a beloved son. But that son raised his parricidal hand against the kindest of fathers. His death was occasioned by his own crime. With one voice we acquit you of all blame. We tender you our hearty condolence, and may the Great Spirit above bestow upon you consolation and comfort under your affliction."

This was the declaration of the Indian council which tried Joseph Brant, at his insistence, for the accidental killing of his son, Isaac. It was one of the most tragic incidents in Brant's outstanding career

yesterdays

and was the result of a lifelong resentment that Isaac felt toward his father.

Isaac Brant was born in 1767, the son of Brant's first wife, Peggie (Neggen Aoghyatonghser), and was named after his maternal grandfather. Even as a young boy Isaac had always been a problem for Joseph. The death of his mother when he was only four years old may have been a major contributing factor to his unruly behavior as a child. He disliked Joseph's second wife, and hated his father's third wife, Catharine. He balked at going to school, was jealous of his step-siblings, and resented his father's continual absence from home during the Revolutionary War

Drinking problem

As a young boy living near Fort Niagara he was very aware of the soldiers at the fort. This fired his desire to become a warrior, and at age 13 he was fighting in the war. He later became a member of Butler's Rangers. His contact with the military also taught him a lifelong habit that was to ultimately lead to his death — drinking spirits.

As Isaac's reputation as an intemperate brawler increased, his father attempted to exercise some direct control over Isaac by appointing him as his personal secretary. The ploy did not work. Isaac would not be controlled, and on one occasion when acting for his father on Indian business, was referred to as an "Emissary of the Devil".

Isaac's behavior continued to worsen. He was particularly sullen in his attitude toward whites. On one occasion he apparently assaulted a young white man who was minding his own business and

Brant's bad son was born to die

merely riding along the highway. The young man was maimed, and his horse was killed. Joseph was forced to pay heavy damages for the assault. Then in 1795, in the area that was to become Brantford, Isaac killed a harness-maker named Lowell in cold blood. The authorities, possibly fearing to rouse Joseph Brant's ire, (although Brant reportedly wanted some action taken against his son), did nothing.

In November of that same year, Isaac attacked his father with a knife. The incident took place at Burlington Heights where the Six Nations had gathered to receive their annual bounty from the government.

Accounts differ as to exactly what happened between father and son. It is agreed that Isaac was drunk, was threatening to kill his father (something he had done publicly many times), and that he was the aggressor. In the struggle, Isaac received a scalp wound from his father's knife. It was not a dangerous wound, but Isaac refused to leave a dressing on the wound, and a few days later died from a blood infection.

While some see the incident as an almost inevitable result of Isaac's drinking and life-long resentment of his father, others maintain that Isaac was an agent for a group of Indians from the Grand River area who were dissatisfied with Brant's leadership and wanted him assassinated. They point to Isaac's continual friction with his father, and the fact that he had friends among the malcontents. They also note that as he lay dying, Isaac asked to see his father. Under his pillow was a loaded pistol.

Joseph Brant was distraught. He attempted to resign his commission as a captain in the British army, but the Governor refused to accept it, claiming that Brant was innocent. It was then that Brant insisted that he be tried by an Indian council. They, too, found him innocent.

The affair has a rather tragic footnote. Some time later, Isaac's own son was killed by a white man in a drunken brawl in Brantford.