

Emily Pauline Johnson was born at Chiefswood, on the Grand River just south of Brantford, in 1861. Her mother, Emily Susanna Howells, belonged to an influential family of English missionaries. Her father, George Henry Martin Johnson, was a Mohawk chief.

Pauline was the youngest of four children. She spent her childhood in an atmosphere of privilege and culture. Symbolically, the house her father had two main entrances, one facing the river, the favoured route of the Indians, the other facing the white man's road.

Some of Pauline's earliest recollections were of important visitors who called at her home. In June, 1892, in the *Waterford Star*, she recalled one incident, the visit of Arthur, Duke of Connaught, to Chiefswood. Pauline's father escorted Queen Victoria's third son on a tour of the Royal Chapel of the Mohawks, then participated in a ceremony in which Prince Arthur was made an honorary chief.

More than twenty years later, Pauline wrote: "I see again those grand old Iroquois chiefs in their savage dress, their copper-colored faces dashed with red and black paint..."

"But my childish eyes watched only two people in that vast gathering, the pale young prince and the dark, military-looking chief that rode beside him. How proud I was of that rider! How well I knew...that beautiful buckskin costume, those brilliant, silver medals and ornaments, that dainty, though deadly, scalping knife, and well-worn tomahawk..."

"I leaned far out the window and peered down into the savage-visaged throng."

"Will he look up?" I cried to my mother, but she was too eagerly watching that pair to reply, and a clear, proud light crept into her blue English eyes when she saw 'our' chief dismount, toss off the scarlet blanket, spread it on the green as a carpet, conduct the younger prince to a place of honor upon it, take from his own shoulders a magnificent sash of Indian workmanship in beads, moose hair and porcupine quills, and laying it across young royalty's shoulder tie it in a loose knot beneath his arm."

Other celebrities, including Alexander Graham Bell and Governor-General and Lady Dufferin, also visited the Johnson home.

The genteel lifestyle came to an end after Chief Johnson's death in 1884. Unable to maintain the family home, even with the help of two grown sons, Emily Johnson moved her daughters to smaller quarters in Brantford.

There, while her sister Evelyn went to work as a secretary, Pauline pursued her literary ambitions.

Then, as now, a literary career is hardly the easiest way to make money. Eventually, Pauline followed the example of many other poets of the day. She took to platform, travelling about the province, and eventually across Canada and to Britain, giving dramatic readings of her poetry and prose.

Although I have yet to find any record of Pauline's appearances in Haldimand-Norfolk, she probably appeared at recitals here on more than one occasion. Between October 1892 and May 1893 she gave 125 performances in Ontario towns. Since Simcoe, Waterford, and Hagersville were close to home, it's likely she appeared before audiences in these communities.

The fame her performances brought enabled her to publish her first collection of poems, *The White Wampum*, in 1895. Publication didn't bring financial comfort, though. Besides, Pauline was never very good with money. "Do you know what I'd do if I had only two dollars in the world and knew it would be my last?" she once said. "I'd spend half on my body and half on my soul. With one I'd buy a whacking good steak and with the other a dozen cut carnations. Then I'd die happy."

For 20 years, she criss-crossed Canada, enduring long, dusty rides in carriages and trains, make-shift accommodations (she once changed in a grain bin) and gradual disillusionment. Finally, though, she was able to retire.

The time she planned to spend in writing was tragically brief. Shortly after she retired to Vancouver, she discovered she had breast cancer. When friends

learned she couldn't support herself, they arranged for a special sale of her book, *Tales of Vancouver*.

When Pauline Johnson died shortly before her 52nd birthday, all Vancouver went into mourning. Her remains were buried near Siwash Rock, in Stanley Park, and, contrary to her wishes a monument was later erected there.