

In defense of Joseph Brant and the Mohawks

By Jim Windle

KANATA VILLAGE, SIX NATIONS - Revisionism isn't the exclusive domain of non-Native governments and lop-sided google-historians. It can also be held that even amongst Six Nations traditionalists there is a lot of revisionism believed by some to be true accounts of "the way we were" so to speak.

Looking back over more than 300 years of history from our place in 2015, it is next to impossible to determine exactly what the contemporary understanding of any historical event or agreement was to those who participated in it. That is why reading old documents recorded by those directly involved are so very important.

The Mohawk Workers submitted to the Two Row Times the minutes of a meeting of the Confederacy Council of the Grand River with the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, dated 1805.

This document explains quite clearly what the accepted understanding within the Confederacy Chiefs of the day was regarding the Haldimand Deed as well as the Mohawk Nation's place within the Grand River Tract.

It also defends Joseph Brant himself who was being accused by some of seeking personal gain by his work on behalf of the Six Nations.

All have opinions on these matters, but we thought it would be most valuable to publish this

original document verbatim to see what the people of the day thought. These minutes were recorded only 20 years after arrival on the Haldimand Tract and two years before the death of Brant.

The Two Row Times welcomes the submission of other historical documents for printing in our newspaper so we can bring the words of the past to light in the current day.

Grand River May 4th 1805

At our usual Annual Meeting at our Council House.

Brothers: (Henry Tekarohogen principal Chief and first Sachem of the Mohawk Nation speaks)

In consequence of some late extraordinary transactions at a pretended Council at Buffalo Creek and afterwards at Niagara, we think it necessary to inform the public of their sentiments in regard to these affairs. In order to do this it will be necessary to mention some things that have happened many years ago.

Brothers: At the commencement of the trouble between Great Britain and the late Colonies the Mohawks and some other(s) mindful of the engagement of their ancestors took a decided and active part in favour of his Majesty and at the hazard of their lives brought Johnson and the Indian

Department through a hostile country from the Mohawk River to Lower Canada.

Brothers: In the year 1775, Sir Guy Carlton one of His Majesty's Generals and then Commander in Chief of that Province of Quebec promised the Indians in general that any loss they might sustain by the war which had now commenced should be fully and amply compensated; ...confiding in his Excellency's promise, the Mohawk exerted themselves to the utmost of their abilities, they were also instrumental in confirming others of the Six Nations in their attachment to the King and their conduct during the war is still fresh in our memory.

Brothers: The promise of Sir Guy Carlton was confirmed by his successor General Haldimand and at the peace a Deed was executed by him for lands we now possess on the Grand River, this grant was at first intended for those Indians who had lost their lands on the Mohawk and Susquehanna Rivers, and at their request extended to such others of the Six Nations as wished to settle there, ...at this time we were invited to remain within the American territories but such was our attachment to the King our Father, that we preferred retiring to an uncultivated wilderness in Upper Canada with our Brother Soldiers and fellow sufferers the Loyalists.

Brothers: At the time we obtained our grant

from his Excellency General Haldimand, we represented to him the advantage it would be to us to have a few white families settled among us in order to show our people the benefits of agriculture and the advantage of having good roads to which his Excellency readily assented and there are now a sufficient number settled for these purposes.

Brothers: After several years residence on the Grand River we considered it to be for the interest of the people that part of our lands should be sold and the proceeds put to interest, we accordingly with consent and approbation of the Chiefs sold part of the said lands and received some of the interest which was applied to sundry public uses for the benefit of our

people.

Brothers: The purchases (purchasers) inability to make the payments as stipulated caused some of the Lower Mohawks and old women to murmur and some young men not capable of distinguishing right from wrong, or of judging of the nature of disappointments, began also to be

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Portrait of Joseph Brant, Thayendanegea, by Ezra Ames, 1806 one year before his untimely death.

buried in oblivion. Nothing however was sufficient to satisfy the malcontents, like the Jacobins of France they panted for nothing less than a total change in the whole order of things, an abolition of all the customs and institutions of their ancestors and to accomplish this, it was necessary in some way or other to sacrifice our much esteemed Brother and Principal Chief Captain Brant and the other Chiefs who adhered to him and his Council. Defeated however in this malicious scheme in a Council of the nations who are the only competent Judges of their Chiefs who know and acknowledge his great merit and usefulness to the Nation who had often witnessed and admired his valor in the field and his wisdom in the council, they repaired to Buffalo Creek within the limits of the United States and held a Council with the Senecas and others. What was transacted at that strange self created Council it is impossible for us to say, but as the leaders do not tell us of anything we conclude they found their powers

too weak and inadequate to the task they had undertaken, and yet discouraged, they repaired with all speed to the King's Council Fire at Niagara to regulate our affairs and make Chiefs for our Nations. Articles of impeachment were there drawn up without citing us to appear at their tribunal, and without even the form and ceremony of a treat, we were deposed and five new Chiefs with the title of Warrior Chiefs appointed in our stead. Permit us to ask what right the Senecas have to intermeddle in our affairs, let us ask these august legislators from whence they deserve the Right of putting down and raising up Chiefs at their pleasure. Is it from our customs or the customs of our ancestors. Can any Chief or Sachem be made except by the Chief and Sachems of his Nation and at their Council fire and is not merit the only ladder by which they attain to that honor and distinction and can these Warrior Chiefs claim any for themselves?

Brothers: We earnestly hope that the Superintendent of Indian

Affairs will discourage and frown upon these unjust and unwarrantable proceedings, we hope he will endeavor to promote a spirit of peace and harmony amongst His Majesty's Indian allies and that he will not calmly look on, and suffer those who have often shed their blood, and who will always be ready to do it for the service of the King, to become the sport of a few designing men.

We hope the eyes of our people may be opened and that they may see the evil consequences of discord and disunion and to distinguish their real from pretended friends; such proceedings as we have now stated appear like the act of a mob, who imagine that numbers authorize them to trample upon honor and Justice; if any of our proceedings are wrong or that we have acted against the interest of the King our Father we earnestly request that we may be informed of it, that if in our power it may be rectified.

Brothers: As the proceedings in the late Council at Niagara appear to be leveled chiefly against Captain Brant, permit me

in a few words to state some of his services. By his going to England he was highly instrumental in obtaining for us the lands and also a remuneration for our losses during the war which was paid us in money and goods at Black Rock; how often has he been to Quebec to the Westward and to the United States upon our Service, and have we ever contributed one shilling to bear his expenses, and shall we after he is grown old in the public service be led away by designing men; No, we cannot be so ungrateful, we hope the time is not far distant when the eyes of our Brethren may be open and that we may yet live in that unity that has always been recommended by our Ancestors and by our Brethren the British. We therefore Brothers confirm the Rank that Captain Brant has heretofore held amongst us and to which we will adhere as long as we live.

Present at this meeting the Principal Chiefs of the Mohawks, the Onondagas, the Cayugas, and the Oghwagwas (sic) or Oneidas and all the Delawares.

dissatisfied; some malicious person fanned the flames of discontent and actually impressed on the minds of some of our weaker Brethren a belief that, we, in conjunction with Captain Brant our principal Chief and Warrior had embezzled their money.

Brothers: Conscious that in all our transactions we had adhered to the strictest Rules of Justice, we for a long

time disregarded these unfounded aspersions, when we found however that our very silence was construed into guilt and the evil spread wider and wider, we convened a Council of all the Sachems at the Mohawk village in June 1804, at which the Commandant of Fort George and the Deputy Superintendent General assisted. At this Council all the Acts of our Chiefs were approved and to be