

Merrymaking and Militia Musters Mohawks, Loyalists, and the (Re)Construction of Community and Identity in Upper Canada

James W. Paxton

Volume 102, numéro 2, fall 2010

Imagining New Worlds in the New World: Entertainment, Agency,
and Power in Upper Canada

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065583ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065583ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Paxton, J. W. (2010). Merrymaking and Militia Musters: Mohawks, Loyalists,
and the (Re)Construction of Community and Identity in Upper Canada. *Ontario
History*, 102(2), 218–238. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065583ar>

Résumé de l'article

La Révolution américaine divisa familles, amis, voisins, mais elle fut aussi à l'origine de la formation de nouvelles communautés. La guerre rassembla, par exemple, dans une communauté multiethnique les Mohawks et les Loyalistes qui avaient combattu ensemble à Fort Niagara. Ceux qui, après la Révolution, se résignèrent à l'exil et s'établirent dans le Haut-Canada, s'efforcèrent aussi de maintenir un sens de communauté en organisant des réunions privées ou semi-publiques, des fêtes, des assemblées, des rassemblements de miliciens, ou simplement en s'accueillant les uns chez les autres. Ces différentes formes de loisirs permirent de préserver des structures sociales familières dans un environnement étranger; mais elles présentèrent aussi un défi que releva le gouvernement colonial, celui-ci cherchant en effet à imposer un « ordre conservateur » dans la province.

MERRYMAKING AND MILITIA MUSTERS: MOHAWKS, LOYALISTS, AND THE (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY IN UPPER CANADA*



by James W. Paxton

On a cold February evening in 1792, as darkness enveloped the Mohawk Village, two figures walked briskly between houses and ducked into the log school house that doubled as a council house. There they were greeted by the “superbly dressed” Mohawk men and women who had already begun to gather. Also present were a few loyalist veterans who had served with Six Nations during the American Revolution and had travelled one hundred kilometres from Niagara to attend the party. The first man, Joseph Brant, introduced his companion, Patrick Campbell, to the mixed assemblage as they prepared for the evening’s entertainment. Campbell,

a Scottish soldier, was visiting the Grand River of Upper Canada as part of a tour of British North America to assess the region’s potential as a home for Highland émigrés. A guest in Brant’s home, the Scot was now to be treated to a Mohawk celebration. For nearly two hours Mohawk men performed war dances. When the warriors finished, Campbell joined men and women in a variety of Mohawk dances and Scottish reels.¹

After two more hours of dancing, Campbell, fatigued and tipsy from having drunk too much wine and rum, retired from the dance floor and struck up a conversation with Brant and a loyalist named Ralfe Clench.² Brant and Clench re-

*I would like to thank Michel Beaulieu, Jennifer Brown, Gerald Reid, Kate Muller, and the anonymous readers for their insightful comments.

¹ Patrick Campbell, *Travels in the Interior Inhabited Parts of North America in the Years 1791 and 1792*, ed., William F. Ganong (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1937), 171-72.

² For more on Ralfe Clench, see Bruce G. Wilson’s entry in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*

galed the rapt visitor with “many strange adventures” they had had during the war. One story that ended with adoption of captive women and children by Haudenosaunee families reminded Campbell “of the rape of the Sabine women by the first settlers of Rome.” Although the Scot obviously enjoyed the rough camaraderie of fellow soldiers—earlier in the evening he had boasted that he “had fought in many parts of Europe [and] killed many men”—he roundly condemned “such barbarity to women and children.” The Iroquoian mode of warfare that Brant and Clench practiced and condoned set them apart from their guest who clearly did not share their understanding of the event.³

To dismiss Brant and Clench’s tale as a “war story” misses a point that Campbell himself perceived. The Mohawk warriors, their adoptive kinsfolk, and loyalists who celebrated in the council house recognized a common past, one rooted in their shared experiences of exile and combat during the American Revolution. Their stories created a usable past that when retold in social settings and on celebratory occasions reaffirmed and strengthened bonds of community in the present.⁴ Yet, if these

Abstract

The American Revolution not only divided families, friends, and neighbours; it also gave rise to new communities. For Mohawks and loyalists who campaigned together out of Fort Niagara, the war forged them into a multi-ethnic military community. Survivors who resigned themselves to exile in scattered settlements across Upper Canada maintained their distinct community through regular rounds of private and semi-public celebrations – parties, reunions, militia musters – and commonplace acts of hospitality. These forms of entertainment preserved familiar social arrangements in an alien environment, but they also provoked a challenge from the colonial government which sought to impose a conservative order on the province.

Résumé: La Révolution américaine divisa familles, amis, voisins, mais elle fut aussi à l'origine de la formation de nouvelles communautés. La guerre rassembla, par exemple, dans une communauté multiethnique les Mohawks et les Loyalistes qui avaient combattu ensemble à Fort Niagara. Ceux qui, après la Révolution, se résignèrent à l'exil et s'établirent dans le Haut-Canada, s'efforcèrent aussi de maintenir un sens de communauté en organisant des réunions privées ou semi-publiques, des fêtes, des assemblées, des rassemblements de miliciens, ou simplement en s'accueillant les uns chez les autres. Ces différentes formes de loisirs permirent de préserver des structures sociales familiales dans un environnement étranger; mais elles présentèrent aussi un défi que releva le gouvernement colonial, celui-ci cherchant en effet à imposer un « ordre conservateur » dans la province.

men and women shared a past, what lay in their future was less certain.

The stories they told and the contexts in which they told them were responses to the end of the war and the chaotic conditions that prevailed in western Quebec (Upper Canada), a result of resettling thousands of disbanded soldiers, loyalist

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 6: 153-54.

³ Campbell, *Travels*, 168, 172. For the adoption of prisoners, see Daniel K. Richter, “War and Culture the Iroquois Experience,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 40 (October 1983), 530-31.

⁴ On the constitutive nature of memory, see David Thelen “Memory and American History,” *Journal*



Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea), 1776 by George Romney, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Transfer from the Canadian War Memorials, 1921 (no. 8005)

land (if they ever are just that) but self-conscious acts of community making. In the fluid environment of future Upper Canada, entertainment and storytelling established a sense of belonging and reinforced community boundaries and thus helped to restore order to a world violently wrenched from its moorings by war, defeat, and exile.

Communities, as anthropologist Anthony P. Cohen has theorized, are socially and symbolically constructed. Groups of interacting people, whether they live in the same locale or not, generate common symbols, stories about raids for example, that perform the dual function of uniting members while establishing boundaries between them and outsiders, those who do not share the same symbols.⁵ While scholars have demonstrated the significance of various forms of sociability and entertainment to the coming of the Revolution and the construction of identity in the new republic, no similar work has been undertaken for the “losers” in that war.⁶ Regular rounds of public and semi-public celebrations—dances, reunions,

refugees, and First People over a period of years. In some cases, wartime communities dissolved and individuals struggled to preserve old friendships while creating new homes in an alien land. The old comrades Brant and Clench for example settled a hundred kilometres apart and met only irregularly. In these circumstances, merrymaking and other forms of sociability were not simply welcome interruptions to the arduous process of clearing

of American History 75 (March 1989), 1119; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Usable Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 109.

⁵ Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, (Chichester, UK: Ellis Horwood, 1985), 12. My thinking about community has been influenced by John C. Walsh and Steven High, “Rethinking the Concept of Community,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 64 (November 1999), 255-73.

⁶ Richard J. Hooker, “The American Revolution Seen through a Wine Glass,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 11 (1954), 52-77; Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Streets: Festive Culture in*

militia musters, church attendance—and even commonplace acts of hospitality became a form of secular ceremony that for displaced people helped explain and give meaning to the present.⁷ Such self-conscious acts of community making defined these particular Mohawks and loyalists in opposition to their American enemies—people who could be taken captive or killed—and to the colony's other loyalists and First Peoples who had not shared in that past. Significantly, much of the cross-cultural sociability and merrymaking analyzed in this paper took place not in the public spaces analyzed in this issue by Michel Beaulieu and Julia Roberts but primarily within private and semi-private settings. The people who gathered knew one another and sought out each other's company precisely because they sought to reaffirm membership in a common community.

These acts of community making provoked a challenge from imperial and colonial officials who were themselves attempting to mould the heterogeneous population of Upper Canada into a conservative state whose residents were or-

ganically linked in vertical chains of dependencies.⁸ Viewing the development of a multiethnic community centred on Grand River as a serious political and military risk to the young province, officials blamed Joseph Brant for competing with the government for the loyalty of the loyalists. No sinister plot was afoot, however. People simply sought to restore a sense of normalcy in trying times. Nevertheless, officials sought to draw the lines of race sharply and meaningfully within the province and thereby reconfigure the composition of communities. While scholars have correctly interpreted the ensuing struggle as one centrally concerned with the independence of the Six Nations, it should also be viewed as a struggle over identity and community boundaries.⁹ Self-definition is, after all, a form of power.

The people who gathered at the Mohawk Village council house on a winter evening in 1792 were members of a broader community that traced its origins to British Fort Niagara and the relatively recent events of the American Revolution. During the war, Niagara at-

the Early American Republic (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Tavern Going and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

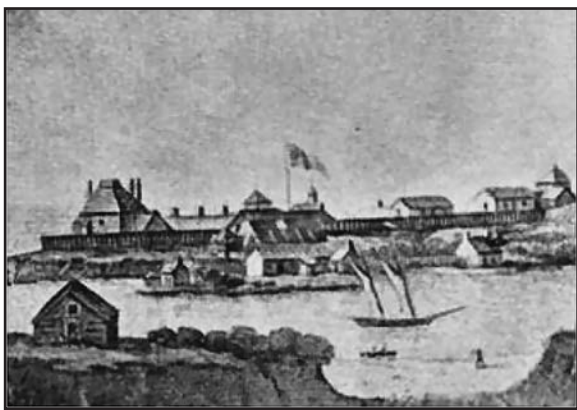
⁷ Joseph C. Hermanowicz and Harriet P. Morgan, "Ritualizing the Routine: Collective Identity Affirmation *Sociological Forum* 14 (June 1999), 197-214.

⁸ "Discussion of Petitions and Counter Petitions," in Adam Shortt and Arthur Doughty, eds., *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1759-1791* (Ottawa: J. de L. Taché, 1918), 2: 283-87; Simcoe to Dundas, 30 June 1791, in E.A. Cruikshank, ed., *Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe* 5 vols. (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1925-1931), 1:27 (hereafter *SP*); Simcoe to Portland, 22 Jan. 1795, *SP*, 3:265; Simcoe to Dorchester, 22 Dec. 1795, *SP*, 4:164.

⁹ Sidney L. Harring, *White Man's Law: Native People in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Jurisprudence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 35-61; Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 326-65.

tracted a diverse collection of loyalists and First People from across the northern colonies. Once loyalists and First People organized themselves into regiments and war parties, the fort served both as a refuge and as an important base of operations for attacks against the New York and Pennsylvania frontiers. However, Niagara was more than a British military post or a temporary shelter for displaced people. Rather, Niagara became, in Co-

munities, but it is misleading to conclude that these communities consisted solely of First People. While British regulars, loyalist soldiers, and Aborigines at Niagara did inhabit different physical and social spaces, interactions between warriors and members of the Indian Department and the loyalist corps Butler's Rangers were common and often intensely personal. Most Indian Department personnel and many Rangers hailed from the Mohawk Valley, where they had peaceably lived with Mohawks for half a century.¹¹ After fleeing their homes, Mohawk Valley residents turned the cross-cultural alliances that had been marshalled to maintain peace into effective instruments of war. They joined loyalist regiments, the Indian Department, or formed war parties to strike at exposed flanks of New York and Pennsylvania. Joseph Brant aggressively recruited warriors and loyalists for a multi-ethnic unit, whose members dubbed themselves Brant's Volunteers and preferred to serve under a Mohawk without pay rather than join one of the loyalist regiments.¹² War parties, Indian Department officers, and loyalist regiments cooperated closely to revenge themselves on their common enemy. The experience of combat and ultimately defeat severed



"A View of Fort Niagara" ca 1783, James Peachey Collection, LAC, Acc. No. 1989-217-2

lin G. Calloway's words, "an experience which Indians of different tribes shared lives, and out of which they created new communities at [Grand River]."¹⁰

The experience of fighting the war did forge disparate groups into new com-

¹⁰ The best account of the war remains Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972). For Fort Niagara's role, see Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 129-57 (quote on 157).

¹¹ Calloway, *Revolution in Indian Country*, 130; David L. Preston, *Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667-1783* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 61-115, 178-215; James W. Paxton, "Kinship, Community, and Covenant Chains: Mohawks and Palatines in New York and Upper Canada, 1712-1830," (Ph.D. diss. Queen's University, 2006), ch. 3.

¹² Taylor and Duffin to Daniel Claus, 26 Oct. 1778, Haldimand Papers, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), 21774, 9-10; Claus to Frederick Haldimand, 30 Nov. 1778, *ibid.*, 19-20.

connections to their old homes and welded these disparate elements into a multi-ethnic community in exile.

Peace, however, dispersed the military community at Niagara and forced members now separated by distance to devise other means of preserving a sense of belonging. As imperial officials turned their attention to resettling loyalists and First People, strategic imperatives overrode local concerns to preserve the cross-cultural alliances that developed during the war. As officials considered various locations for new settlements, both the Mohawks and Senecas insisted “that the Loyalists be settled somewhere near [them].¹³ Although their advice was not heeded, both the Mohawks and the member of Butler’s Rangers did effectively veto plans to move them from Niagara to the Bay of Quinte and Cataraqui (Kingston) region.¹⁴ By 1784, officials allowed the men of Butler’s Rangers and their families to remain in and around Niagara, where they had already begun clearing land and building homes, while many Mohawks, other members of the Six Nations, and allied groups would receive a tract of land extending six miles on either of the Grand River more than

one hundred kilometres to the west.

British policy ignored social realities by organizing new communities along lines of race, a practice that fell afoul of the people it was intended to benefit. Several loyalists abandoned their government land grants to move to Grand River. Their motives were complex. Some left Niagara “with the intention never to return” to protest the extension of the seigniorial system to their land grants. Some of these went to Grand River, doubtless lured by the availability of large tracts of land.¹⁵ Ties of kinship led other loyalists to settle at the Grand. At least two men, John Dochsteder and John Huff, had Haudenosaunee wives and wanted to be close to their families. Some Mohawk Valley families who had no marriage ties to the Mohawks were also considered kinfolk because of their longstanding relationships with the Mohawks and because they had served alongside warriors during the war. One such family, the Nelles’s, acquired over 4,000 acres at Grand River. In conferring land on these individuals, chiefs and headmen acknowledged the intimate connections that bound Mohawks to loyalists, who were described as “our brethren living on the same River.”¹⁶

¹³ Proceedings with the Six Nations, 24 July 1783, Haldimand Papers, 21779, 125; Johnson to Haldimand, 19 May 1783, Haldimand Papers, 21775, 112-13; Haldimand to Johnson, May 26, 1783, *ibid.*, 122.

¹⁴ A.L. Burt, *Old Province of Quebec* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), 2: 90; John Johnson to Haldimand, 11 March 1784, Haldimand Papers, 21775, 160; Substance of Brant’s Wishes Respecting Forming A Settlement on the Grand River, March, 1783, in Charles M. Johnston, ed., *Valley of the Six Nations: A Collection of Documents on the Indian Lands of the Grand River* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1964), 44-45; Haldimand to Johnson, 26 May 1783, Haldimand Papers, 21775, 122.

¹⁵ A.S. de Peyster to Haldimand, 28 June 1784 in E.A. Cruikshank, ed., “Records of Niagara, 1784-1787,” *Niagara Historical Society* 39 [1928], 37.

¹⁶ Memorial of Hendrick Nelles, 1784, in R. Janet Powell, ed., *Annals of the Forty, No. 6, Loyalist and*

For both parties, the principal aim was to reconstitute families and communities.

While the number of loyalists living at Grand River grew over the years and decades, with one settlement containing about thirty families, most loyalists with connections to the Six Nations took government land at Niagara or along the south shore of Lake Ontario.¹⁷ The resulting settlement pattern looked something like a dumbbell with population clusters at Niagara and Grand River connected by a thin line of settlement running parallel to the lake. The community that had come together at Fort Niagara was becoming disaggregated and dispersed by physical distance and the absorption of families with the time consuming task of farm making. The influx of newcomers, the so-called late loyalists who constituted about sixty percent of the population by 1812, into existing settlements promised to further erode older senses of community.¹⁸

For a community thus scattered, sociability and entertainment maintained vital human connections and gave a sense of belonging in a foreign land inhabited by strangers. At times, merrymaking could be quite self-conscious efforts at

delineating a community distinct from Upper Canada's other populations. Parties, balls, and reunions offered formal occasions at which individuals and families enacted membership in a larger social network. At other times, sociability was either informal or commonplace and served immediate needs. Visiting, hospitality, and church attendance provided a welcome respite to the tedium and isolation of frontier living. While such activities were less self-consciously part of a community building exercise, they did help sustain the individual and family connections that contributed to a sense of community across the Niagara peninsula and Grand River Valley.

When journeying from one part of the colony to another, Mohawks and loyalists alike often stayed in the homes of friends and kinfolk, thus preserving ties between people separated by distance. Upper Canadians were surprisingly mobile. Farmers often made short trips to gristmills, sawmills, and merchants and, with less frequency, they undertook longer trips either to sell surpluses at the closest town or the garrison or to conduct business in the capital at Niagara (later York). Depending on weather and road

Pioneer Families of West Lincoln, 1783-1833 (Grimsby: Grimsby Historical Society, 1983), 66; Translation of a deed from the Five Nations, 26 Feb. 1787, LAC, RG 10, vols. 1834-1835, 201-204; H.V. Nelles, "Robert Nelles," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 7: 651; Mary Nelles, "United Empire Loyalists along the Grand River in Haldimand County," in *Loyalist Families of the Grand River Branch, United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada* (Toronto: Pro Familia Publishing 1991), 57-59; Resolution of a Six Nations' Council at the Onondaga Village, 1 March 1809, in Johnston, *Valley of the Six Nations*, 111; Proceedings of a Six Nations' Council at Onondaga, 9 Nov. 1806, *ibid.*, 137.

¹⁷ Translation of a deed from the Five Nations, Feb. 26, 1787, LAC, RG 10, vols. 1834-1835, 201-4; Johnston, *Valley of the Six Nations*, map facing page lxxxvi.

¹⁸ Michael Smith, *A Geographical View of the Province of Upper Canada* (Philadelphia: J. Bioren, 1813), 61.

conditions, the journey from the Grand River to Niagara could take several days, and most people had the option of staying at inns and taverns or relying on friends and family members for food and accommodations. Given the small number and uneven quality of public houses in newly settled districts, many travellers opted to stop at private homes. When, for example, Ralfe Clench left the celebrations at the Mohawk Village for his home in Niagara, he stayed overnight with a former Indian Department officer named Young and his Mohawk wife.¹⁹ In one sense, the Youngs' home functioned much like the taverns analyzed by Julia Roberts. Both served as places where people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds mingled, found amusements, and obtained victuals and shelter. But in one important regard, private homes contrasted sharply with taverns in that the hosts knew their guests personally and freely engaged in cross-cultural sociability. Rather than catering to an indiscriminate assemblage, people who took in travellers reaffirmed and reproduced membership in a common community.²⁰

In most cases, hosts would have had difficulty refusing requests for food and

a bed. Hospitality was one manifestation of frontier mutuality, the reciprocal obligations for assistance in labour, goods, or services that generated dense networks of interdependencies. Mutual aid should not be confused with selfless altruism. As Catharine Anne Wilson has argued in regards to work bees, people living in new settlements believed that "individual prosperity and mutual reliance" were not mutually exclusive.²¹ Such a view accorded well with Iroquoian concepts of hospitality. Mohawks counted hospitality as one of the obligations of kinship. Clans functioned in part to provide assistance to kinfolk travelling abroad. Visitors to a village were immediately taken to homes of fellow clan members, where they would be welcomed as family and given food, a place to sleep, and entertainment. By Iroquoian reckoning, kinship was not restricted to blood relations and could be extended to anyone willing to assume similar reciprocal obligation and duties. In this sense, many loyalists were kin. Therefore, Mohawks who warmly welcomed visitors to their village expected to be received in kind when they went abroad.²² It was not unusual, then, to find Niagara loyalists staying with Mohawks

¹⁹ Campbell, *Travels*, 180. See also, L.H. Tasker, "The United Empire Loyalist Settlement at Long Point, Lake Erie," Ontario Historical Society *Papers and Records* 2 (1900), 43; Charles Aikins, ed., "Journal of a Journey: From Sandwich to York in the Summer of 1806," Ontario Historical Society *Papers and Records* 6 (1905), 16-19 and Journal from Niagara to Detroit 4 Feb. 1793 to 10 March 1793, *SP*, 1:288-93.

²⁰ Julia Roberts, "A Mixed Assemblage of Persons': Race and Tavern Space in Upper Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 83 (March 2002), 4.

²¹ Catherine Anne Wilson, "Reciprocal Work Bees and the Meaning of Neighbourhood," *Canadian Historical Review* (2001), 431-64 (quote on 463-64); John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 130-36.

²² William N. Fenton, "Northern Iroquoian Culture Patterns" in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 15, Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 306-307; Mary Druke Becker, "Linking Arms: The Structure of Iroquois Intertribal Diplomacy," in Daniel K. Rich-

when they travelled to the Grand River or beyond or for loyalists to open the doors to Mohawk visitors.

While travel and hospitality reinforced the dense webs of kinship and friendship between members of dispersed communities, the sources reveal the movements and whereabouts only of locally prominent and well-to-do individuals, precisely those who were most capable and likely of recording these sorts of activities. Without a doubt, hospitality reinforced bonds between elite members of the community, and tracing the perambulations of individuals and where they lodged provides a crude map not just of community but also power relations in early Upper Canada. The extent to which ordinary Mohawks and loyalists reproduced similar patterns of hospitality remains unclear. Certainly Mohawk men went far afield hunting or on diplomatic missions but they do not enter the record often enough to know where they stayed and with whom.

Some homes, either because of their location relative to popular destinations or because of the personal qualities of the owners, became busy social centres where people gathered, swapped news, and found accommodations. One such house at the head of the lake near present day Stoney Creek belonged to surveyor Augustus Jones. Although Jones had no connection to the Mohawk Valley or to the wartime community at Fort Niagara, he did become an integral member of the community through his surveying work, which brought



William Berczy, *Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant)*, c. 1807. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 5777)

him into frequent and close contact with the Haudenosaunee and Mississauga. From time to time, he employed First People on his surveying crews. Eventually he learned both the Anishinabe and Mohawk languages. For a time, Jones was married to two women simultaneously, Tuhbenahneequay, a Mississauga, and Sarah Tekarihogen, the daughter of a Mohawk chief.²³

Jones's work and complex family life

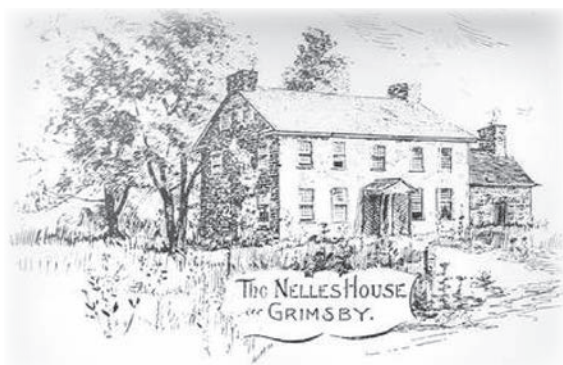
ter and James H. Merrell, eds., *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 33; Elisabeth Tooker, "Women in Iroquois Society," in Michael K. Foster, Jack Campisi, and Marianne Mithun, eds., *Extending the Rafters: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Iroquoian Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 111; Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 20-22.

²³ P.E. Jones to Lyman Draper, 12 Nov. 1882, Draper Manuscript Collection, Joseph Brant Papers, Series F, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 13F14 (hereafter Brant Papers); *Upper Canada Gazette*, 12 May 1798; Peter Jones, *History of the Ojebway Indians with Especial Reference to Their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A.W. Bennett, 1861), 210; Donald B. Smith, *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewa-quinaby) and the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 2-6; idem, "Augustus Jones," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 7: 450-51.

Nelles Home, Grimsby Museum 2008.147.1
 <museum@town.grimsby.on.ca>

made his home a gathering place for clients and his wives' numerous relatives. Joseph Brant visited frequently during trips through the region, and he eventually built a home at the head of the lake to be near Jones and Sarah Tekarihogen. During a brief stay with Augustus and Sarah in 1808, Methodist minister William Case noted that a number of Aboriginal visitors stopped at the Jones' household. At the end of his visit, he concluded that not only were Augustus and Sarah good Methodists but also that the reserved and respectful demeanour of their Aboriginal acquaintances set a "good example for all people."²⁴

Members of the extended Nelles family so frequently opened their doors and pantries to Mohawk guests that it impinged on both their lives and, in one case, the organization of household space. The Nelleses had long and intimate associations with various Mohawk families. They were particularly close to the Brants; the families visited and corresponded regularly. Because Robert Nelles's home at Forty Mile Creek stood about mid-way between the Grand River and Niagara, he and his children often



received travelling Mohawks. In Robert's absence, his son Henry and his wife entertained guests. One evening in the spring of 1818, the younger Nelles family entertained a number of Mohawks, among them the daughter of Joseph Brant and Margaret Clark, the wife of merchant Niagara merchant Thomas Clark and the daughter of Molly Brant.²⁵

At Grand River, another Nelles, Robert's younger brother William, obviously anticipated playing host to a large number of Haudenosaunee and loyalist guests when he designed and built his home in 1794. The front door opened onto a large open room that occupied the entire ground floor of the house. Fireplaces located at either end of the room provided heat and light.²⁶ The house might have been mistaken for an unfinished tavern

²⁴ Early encounters with Mohawks and Mississaugas laid the foundation for Case's later missions to First People beginning in the 1820s. G.S. French, "William Case," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 8: 133; Journal of William Case, 28 August 1808, AO, F-987 (quote).

²⁵ Joseph Brant to Robert Nelles, 4 March 1803, AO, Robert Nelles Papers, F-542; Catharine Brant to Abraham Nelles, 21 Nov. 1809, AO, Abraham Nelles Papers, F-543-G; Julia Nelles to Lyman Draper, 2 April 1879, Brant Papers, 13F27; Grimsby Museum (GM), People and Families, Henry Nelles, 305, Nelles to Robert Nelles, 7 March 1818; R. Janet Powell, ed. *Annals of the Forty: Loyalist and Pioneer Families of West Lincoln, 1783-1833* vol. 6 (np: Grimsby Historical Society, 1983), 73; Powell, ed. *Annals of the Forty, 1783-1818* vol. 1 (np: Grimsby Historical Society, 1955), 32.

²⁶ F. Eleanor Chapin and Mary V. Nelles, "William Nelles," *Loyalist Families of the Grand River*

and indeed Nelles seems to have intended the room to host large gatherings and parties. But Nelles's home was not a tavern. It was not public space open to anyone. Rather, Nelles controlled access and guests would be known to him and arrive with invitations. Moreover, the ground floor lacked private spaces, the parlours and sitting rooms, associated with most inns.²⁷ Nelles's home resembled not so much an English or American public house as a Haudenosaunee council house, where large groups could gather face-to-face and deliberate on important matters. And although the house might have witnessed some serious discussion, it more likely became the scene for boisterous parties such as the one when the Brant entertained Campbell in the Mohawk council house. Whether Mohawks and loyalists gathered in this purpose built structure to remind each other of the camaraderie they had enjoyed and the hardships they had endured cannot be known. Private homes were the primary venues for sociability and merrymaking because, apart from taverns, there were few places where rural Upper Canadians

could socialize.

With so little in the way of entertainment available, it is not surprising that church attendance assumed important social dimensions for those who lived close enough to attend. Christians at Grand River were fortunate not only to have the largest Anglican congregation but also the first Protestant church in the colony. St. Paul's, a clapboarded log structure topped with a steeple, was built at government expense in 1785 in the Mohawk Village.²⁸ The church helped to unify and define the community in two ways. First, the church attracted parishioners from among Mohawks and local loyalists. Church membership, therefore, roughly reflected the composition of the Grand River's multi-ethnic community. In 1796, Rev. Robert Addison baptized "18 Indians, 3 Negroes and 32 Whites."²⁹ Two years later, a visitor noted, "the Indian church is well attended both by Indians and white people, and the greatest order is preserved."³⁰ Participation in the Anglican Church, then, reinforced community boundaries.

Second, so many people attended

Branch, United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada (Toronto: Pro Familia Publishing, 1991), 415.

²⁷ Roberts, "Race and Tavern Space," 4 and idem, "Women, Men, and Taverns in Tavern-Keeper Ely Playter's Journal," *Social History/Histoire sociale* 36 (2003), 383-84.

²⁸ John Webster Grant, *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 29.

²⁹ Addison served the Grand River congregation until 1818. H.E. Turner, "Robert Addison," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 6: 3; A. H. Young, ed., "The Rev. Robert Addison: Extracts from the Reports and (Manuscript) Journals of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records* 19 (1922), 177; Charles Thomas and James C. Thomas, "Reminiscences of the First Settlers in the County of Brant," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records* 12 (1914), 60.

³⁰ Young, "Robert Addison," 175; Francis Hall, *Travels in Canada and the United States in 1816 and 1817* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1818); 136-137; Benjamin Mortimer, "From Pennsylvania to Upper Canada, with John Heckewelder," in James Doyle, ed., *Yankees in Canada* (Downsview: ECW Press, 1980), 30.

church, partly, because they craved a temporary escape from isolation and toil. While religion did serve important spiritual needs, the sociability that occurred before and after services provided a welcome form of entertainment for rural families engaged in back breaking labour. In churchyards, people met to exchange news, gossip, and make plans. While the sociability surrounding Sunday services helped knit together the local community, it also connected Grand River Mohawks and loyalists to kinfolk at Niagara. Because the Mohawk Village shared its minister, Rev. Robert Addison, with the congregation at Niagara, ministerial visits were limited to three or four times a year. Infrequent visits made Addison's arrival eventful, especially as he doubtless brought news from Niagara, carried messages, and reported on distant friends and family.³¹ The minister's updates were in themselves entertaining and they provided an important if virtual connection between people separated by space. For the people at Grand River, the church helped organize newly settled areas by drawing together families living dispersed across the landscape.³²

The intimacy and familiarity that Mohawks and loyalists took for granted in their everyday lives fascinated outsiders and, not surprisingly, reaction to inter-racial merrymaking was decidedly

mixed. On a 1793 visit to Niagara, Colonel Thomas Proctor of the United States army was pleasantly surprised to meet several women of Aboriginal descent, most likely the daughters of Joseph and Molly Brant, while attending a ball in honour of the King's birthday. Balls and other formal events were festive showcases for imperial officials and members of the colonial elite. The hosts of such events attempted not only to relieve the boredom and drudgery of life in the rude, young colony but also to impose social conventions more appropriate to London. At balls elegantly dressed men and women danced, ate, and conversed all the while negotiating rank and status within the community.³³ That Aboriginal women moved with "ease and affection" among the well-bred wives and daughters of colonial and imperial officials suggested a degree of social integration and equality that shocked and delighted Proctor.³⁴

Fifteen years later, in 1808, William Case, who had spoken so highly of the restraint shown by Augustus Jones, Sarah Tekarihogena, and their guests, criticized the riotousness pastimes Mohawks and loyalists joined in together at Grand River. Hard drinking and swearing were too much in evidence for the abstemious minister, although he could not fault them for their hospitality. Strangers received "great kindness and attention" from local

³¹ Johnston, *Valley of the Six Nations*, 236, 238; Young, "Robert Addison," 174.

³² See Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830," *American Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1969), 23-43.

³³ Journal of a Treaty, 4 June 1793, *SP*, 2: 25.

³⁴ See Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), 161-168 and her article in this volume.

residents, who readily welcomed visitors into their homes and community. Drink invariably accompanied and facilitated hospitality and socializing. The potent mixture of alcohol and boastfulness triggered fights, prompting Case to condemn Grand River as a “wicked settlement of Whites and Indians.”³⁵

The varied reactions of two outsiders to inter-racial sociability obscure an important commonality: in both cases entertainment helped define group boundaries. The different tone each account strikes partly reflects both the classed nature of the entertainments and the class biases of the observers. Case had witnessed the unvarnished, and to his mind ungodly, lives of ordinary Mohawks and loyalists living in frontier conditions. For him, the intermingling of races was fraught with potential danger and mutual degeneration that only Methodism’s redemptive embrace could forestall. Doubtlessly the extent of drinking, cursing, and wrestling were exaggerated, but behaviours that to an outsider looked like evidence of discord were to former soldiers and warriors a form of social bonding. Drinking was an integral part of late eighteenth-century sociability, and sharing drinks and coarse conversation cultivated a sense of goodwill and belonging even if at times it led to disputes and fights. Rough but generally friendly competition reinforced the boundaries of community precisely because it preserved social connections between Mohawks and loyalists and alienated uniniti-

ated visitors. The boisterousness of Grand River sociability contrasted sharply with the rigid formality of the ball, which, except for the presence of Aboriginal women, was comparable to those held in England or the United States. Yet, these two quite different forms of entertainment served similar purposes. Drawing together prominent members of the Fort Niagara community, loyalist officers and Indian Department employees, with other prominent Upper Canadians, the elite forms of entertainment confirmed membership in a particular community and within a broader class. The presence of Aboriginal women at an exclusive social event pointed to the continuing military and political significance of Native peoples to early Upper Canada.

As their presence at the King’s birthday ball indicates, Mohawks and loyalists did use occasions of colonial or imperial significance to reinforce local attachments. One such event was an annual militia muster and reunion held at the beginning of May at the Mohawk Village for warriors and loyalist soldiers and their families. Combining the two events was appropriate because musters were never purely military events. They were a source of amusement and entertainment. One of the few days in the calendar when most men in the community congregated for a common purpose, militia days were also lively social occasions accompanied by gossip, storytelling, drinking, and wrestling.

At Grand River, militia musters

³⁵ Journal of William Case, 28 July 1808, 29 Oct. 1808, AO, F-987.



Mohawk Village on the Grand River [ca. 1793]. Watercolour. Simcoe Family papers, LAC F 47-11-1-0-109.

drew together the entire community, men women, and children. Each May first, veterans, warriors and their families gathered at the Mohawk Village to reaffirm old friendships and commemorate their shared past. Rather than sombre events that dwelt on defeat and dispossession, these reunions were festive occasions that enjoined young and old, men and women, Mohawks and loyalists in celebration. John Smoke Johnson, who was a boy at the time, fondly remembered how “Brant used to call a meeting at Mohawk Village of his old warriors - & of the Royalists along the Niagara ... & have a great time of merriment, dancing, drinking, running & horse racing.”³⁶

A correspondent to the *Upper Canada Gazette* reported, “the day was spent with greatest conviviality, and finished with several Indian dances at the council house.”³⁷ Conversations doubtlessly centred on friends, family, and conditions in the new colony, but such occasions also encouraged people to reflect on their lives before the war.

While the assembled crowd drank, danced, and gamed, prominent guests and personal friends retired to Brant’s house where they dined sumptuously and consumed imported wine. The party likely differed little from what Patrick Campbell had experienced seven years earlier. According to custom, guests drank a slate

³⁶ Notes of Conversation with Chief John S. Johnson, 11 Oct. 1877, Brant Papers, 13F27. Brant continued the tradition of holding reunions after he moved from Grand River to the Head of the Lake.

³⁷ *Upper Canada Gazette*, 12 May 1798.

of toasts to mark the occasion. Toasting was an important ritualized activity that fostered unity among the participants. Because anyone who disagreed with the sentiments expressed was expected not raise their glass, toastmasters made their speeches inclusive and inoffensive. Following a prescribed pattern, toasting began with healths to individuals, starting with the king and working down the hierarchy, and then proceeding to sentiments that commemorated specific events, attitudes, or opinions.³⁸ At the Mohawk Village, Brant led the toasting. After drinking to the king's health, Brant toasted the colonels of the different militia regiments and "those loyalists who were fellow sufferers with the 6 nations, during the late American war." Brant's words would have offended no one, but they did underscore the meaning of the reunion and the muster: unity and shared suffering during war had inextricably bound these people together while remembrance and reciprocity renewed those bonds.³⁹ Brant and those in attendance had transformed an occasion meant to reinforce identification with imperial interests into one that served local purposes.

In contrast to the more age and gender inclusive festivities, only men participated

in the militia muster. Militia service was inextricably bound to masculine notions of community, as all able-bodied men from the same neighbourhood belonged to same company. Fathers and sons, brothers and uncles served side-by-side with neighbours and friends. Local notables who successfully obtained commissions led the community in war and peace. The militia company was literally a community in arms.⁴⁰ This was especially true at Grand River where many of the men had served with each other during the revolution. Militia days, then, reinforced social bonds and hierarchies among people scattered across an agrarian landscape.

If performing military service strengthened neighbourhood ties and local identities, it also had a countervailing tendency of reminding participants of their membership in and obligations to the larger imagined community of the empire. Officers and men, many of them veterans, could not be unmindful of the fact that obligatory militia service trained them for war and should hostilities with the United States reignite, as many expected, they would be called upon to lay down their lives to protect their homes and empire. Given the inadequate training militiamen received, however, the most im-

³⁸ On toasting, see Richard J. Hooker, "The American Revolution Seen through a Wine Glass," *William and Mary Quarterly* 11 (1954), 52-77; Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); 99; Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 29-31.

³⁹ *Upper Canada Gazette*, 12 May 1798.

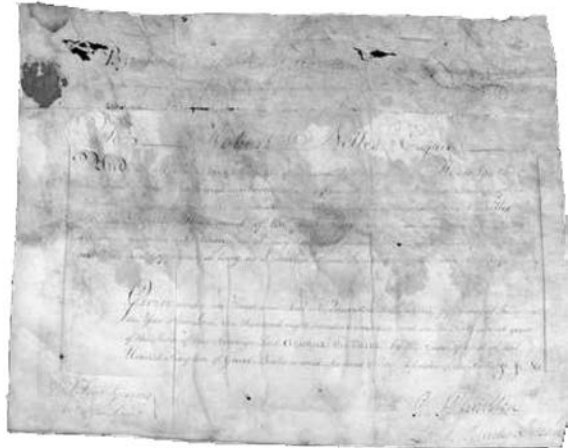
⁴⁰ James W. Paxton, "The Lincoln Militia's War of 1812," in Craig Leslie Mantle, ed., *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience, 1812-1919* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2007), 92-93; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1982), 104-110.

portant purpose of militia musters seems to have been to impress on citizen soldiers their place within the empire and their duty to the Crown. The king was the head of the armed forces and officers held their commissions in his name.⁴¹ Commissions bore the monarch's seal and intoned the bearer to instil order and discipline among the rank and file. By design, local militia companies replicated the hierarchies that structured the metropole.

In most cases no conflict existed between local desires and imperial designs, but the presence of both Mohawk warriors and militiamen at Grand River proved worrisome for authorities, especially at times when of heightened tension between the administration and the Haudenosaunee.⁴²

In 1795, for example, a murder involving Brant's son brought the Six Nations into conflict with the Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe. In the spring, Isaac Brant shot and killed a man near his home at Grand River. The victim, a saddle and harness maker named Lowell, had deserted from the United States army and had come to the Grand to ply his trade.⁴³ Lowell had quickly developed local ties. His saddle and harness business, one of the

few shops in the area, provided a valuable service to the young settlement. Although Lowell's status within the community cannot be known with certainty, one can imagine the former soldier partaking in the rough amusements that bonded war-



Military Commission of Robert Nelles, 25 June 1802, Grimbsby Museum, 84.36.4 <museum@town.grimbsby.on.ca>

riors and veterans. Moreover, the Haudenosaunee proposal to resolve the matter by “covering the grave” of the victim with presents suggests that Lowell was looked upon as kin. The custom of covering the grave extended the social practices that had bound people together in life into death.⁴⁴

Official correspondence reveals that

⁴¹ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 103-105.

⁴² Simcoe to Dorchester, 22 Dec. 1795, *SP*, 4:164; Powell to Russell, 3 Jan. 1797, in E.A. Cruikshank, ed., *Correspondence of the Honourable Peter Russell* 3 vols. (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1932-1936), 1:123 (hereafter *RP*).

⁴³ The reporting of the murder and subsequent controversy may found in Russell to Simcoe, 5 April 1795, *SP*, 3: 342; Butler to Chew, 8 April 1795, *SP*, 3: 343; Chew to Chew, 11 April 1795, *SP*, 3: 344; Simcoe to Dorchester, 5 May 1795, *SP*, 5: 140; Simcoe to Dorchester, 9 July 1795, *SP*, 4: 38; Simcoe to Dorchester, 22 Dec. 1795, *SP*, 4: 164. See also, Isabel Thompson Kelsay, *Joseph Brant, 1743-1807: Man of Two Worlds* (Syracuse: University of Syracuse Press, 1986), 529.

⁴⁴ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 76.



John Graves Simcoe, Metropolitan Toronto Library Board, T 30592

the Lieutenant Governor and other officials did not share the Haudenosaunee definition of community. Repeatedly and consistently they referred to Lowell as a “White man.” Lowell’s skin colour marked him as being both an outsider to Grand River and beyond the Six Nation’s jurisdiction. Such a view ran square against the social practices of Grand River. Simcoe, therefore, refused to abide by Haudenosaunee custom of covering the grave, a practice he found repugnant under any circumstance, and requested permission from his superiors to have the militia arrest Isaac Brant and bring him before the court. Simcoe’s racialized understanding of identity offered a quite different conception of community that left little room for the possibility that

Lowell, like many loyalist kinfolk, was neither an outsider nor white.

Ordering out the militia almost certainly would have steered the government on a collision course with the community because the militia, like the community, was integrated. While there is no extant account of the 1795 muster, doubtless it resembled the description one that appeared in the pages of the *Upper Canada Gazette* three years later. After 400 Six Nations’ warriors “performed the various evolutions in a manner which met the plaudits of a surrounding multitude,” Captain Docksteder and Lieutenant Nelles put the Grand River militia company “composed of white men” through “their manuel exercise &c with such order as to give credit to themselves.”⁴⁵ While the *Gazette’s* coverage indicated that the muster day at the Grand River preserved a great deal of the cross-cultural co-operation that had characterized military operations during the Revolution, warriors and militia had paraded separately, each under their own leaders. A second account of the same muster, this one by the Moravian missionary Benjamin Mortimer, gives a different version of events. Arriving at Grand River shortly after the muster, Mortimer learned that Mohawks and loyalists had served together under Joseph Brant’s “banners.” Then to underscore where power resided at Grand River, he added “all the settlers are in a kind of vassalage to him [Brant].”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Upper Canada Gazette*, 12 May 1798.

⁴⁶ Mortimer, “From Pennsylvania to Upper Canada,” 30.

If correct, Mortimer's account suggests that the militia and warriors operated like Brant's Volunteers, as a fully integrated unit. Many men who paraded that day had served with or under Brant during the war and continued to view the Mohawk as a leader.

With tensions over Lowell's murder running high, reports on events from Grand River would have given administrators cause for concern. Officials may well have wondered who had authority there? People who had in the same evening toasted the health of King George and their commitments to each other might have to decide between the two. At the moment of crisis, would Captain Docksteder and Lieutenant Nelles, men who held royal commissions but owed their land and livelihoods to the Six Nations, support the king and his representative in Upper Canada or the people with whom they had served in war and continued to associate afterwards? Joseph Brant thought he knew and bragged "it would be seen who had [the] most Interest with the Militia, and that the Governor would not be able to make them Act against him."⁴⁷ The crisis was resolved later in the year without resort to the militia when Isaac Brant was

himself mortally wounded killed in a drunken fight with his own father.⁴⁸

For some members of the colonial administration, the parties, reunions, and militia musters that helped maintain the Mohawk-loyalist community proved worrisome. It was not the entertainments themselves so much as what they represented. Joseph Brant seemed intent on building a multiethnic community because he wished to establish himself and the Six Nations as a rival source of power to the colonial government. This reading of events both exaggerates Brant's role and fails to take into consideration the desires of individuals and families to piece together their lives after the war. And while not all officials worried all the time about the goings on at Grand River, for a government trying to construct a stable, conservative state amid war and rumours of war with France and the United States, the signs were ominous.⁴⁹ Officials understood that when Brant presided over parties and militia musters with loyalists and members of the colonial elite in attendance, he was simultaneously drawing together a multiethnic community and affirming his leadership within that community. The ability to hold celebrations and entertain visitors marked men

⁴⁷ William Dummer Powell to Peter Russell, 3 Jan. 1797, *RP*, 1: 123.

⁴⁸ Chew to Chew, 23 Nov. 1795, *SP*, 4: 145; Simcoe to Dorchester, 22 Dec. 1795, *SP*, 4: 164; McKee to Chew, 29 Jan. 1796, *SP*, 4: 186.

⁴⁹ S. F. Wise, "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition," in Edith G. Firth, ed. *Profiles of a Province: Studies in the History of Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1967), 20-33; Gad Horowitz, "Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation," in Janet Ajzenstat and Peter J. Smith, *Canada's Origins: Liberal, Tory, or Republican?* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1997), 21-44; David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988); Alan Taylor, "The Late Loyalists: Northern Reflections of the Early American Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (2007), 1-34.

like Brant and Nelles as especially capable and generous, the requisite qualities of leadership. British officials also recognized how rituals and ceremonies, such as toasting and treating, buttressed authority and power.⁵⁰ Understandably, observers ignorant of the non-coercive nature of Haudenosaunee power concluded that “Brant had assumed an air of Sovereignty” over the loyalists.⁵¹

Even with Isaac Brant safely interred, the effects of the Lowell murder continued to ripple through the colony. Simcoe and his successors viewed former and current military officers and Indian Department officials who either lived at Grand River or participated in the social life of the Six Nations as suspect. In February 1795, he denounced Indian officers whose “Ignorance of all but the separate Nations, upon an interest with whom, their own consequence is grafted, their immoral Habits, and the Indolence and depravity which in them, seems to be derived from the Persons with whom they are so conversant, disabled them, from *unnecessary* confidence.”⁵² The Brant crisis, therefore, seemed to highlight the danger of permitting the Six Nations to dispose of their lands to non-Aboriginals. Because the administration’s authority lay primarily in its monopoly over the distribution of land, Simcoe identified

Six Nations’ lands grants and leases as the source of Brant’s power over loyalists. These “clandestine, illegal and most dangerous” transactions, he believed detached loyalists from the government and, thus, threatened the security of the colony.⁵³ Simcoe, therefore, determined to drive wedges between members of the community to divide and physically separate them along lines of race. Invoking the Royal Proclamation of 1763’s prohibition on private purchases of First People’s land, the Lieutenant Governor and his successors would attempt to prevent further alienation of Six Nations’ lands.

Brant, seeking to avoid any restrictions that impinged upon Haudenosaunee autonomy, seized the opportunity presented by Simcoe’s departure from the province in the summer of 1796 to announce the sale to speculators of several large blocks of land, amounting to approximately half of the entire Grand River tract. Money raised by the sales would be invested to create an annuity for the Six Nations. When Peter Russell, Simcoe’s successor, denied the legality of the sales, Mohawks allied with local Mississaugas, who were themselves incensed at the murder of one of their chiefs by a British soldier, to threaten the colony with a local First Nations confederacy. The Mohawks did not want war, although they did nothing to

⁵⁰ See, for example, Bruce Curtis, “The ‘Most Splendid Pageant Ever Seen’: Grandeur, the Domestic, and Condescension in Lord Durham’s Political Theatre,” *Canadian Historical Review* 89 (2008), 55-88; David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*.

⁵¹ Powell to Russell, 3Jan. 1797, *RP*, 1:123; Mortimer, “From Pennsylvania to Upper Canada,” 29.

⁵² Simcoe to Portland, 17 Feb. 1795, *SP*, 3: 302.

⁵³ Simcoe to Dorchester, 22 December 1795, *SP*, 4:164; Paxton, “Kinship, Community, and Covenant Chains,” 422-43.

dispel these fears among administrators. Rather, Brant hoped by presenting a united front First People could force concessions from the administration.⁵⁴

The ensuing land controversy that played out most intensely through 1797 and 1798 has been well documented by Charles Johnston and other scholars and does not require extended treatment here, but historians have paid scant attention to the social dimensions of the crisis.⁵⁵ More than a struggle over land, the dispute involved issues about who could erect and maintain community boundaries and definitions of belonging. By denying the legality of the loyalists' land grants and leases, the government sought to stop the migration of loyalists to Grand River and to persuade the loyalists already there to leave. In effect, they tried to break up and segregate an established community along racial lines. In this context, the merrymaking and militia musters that the *Gazette* reported on in 1798 takes on greater significance. The loyalists and Mohawks who gathered

at Grand River to reaffirm the bonds of community also publically challenged the government's attempt to redefine that community.

Nevertheless, government sanctions were partially successful. By the early 1800s, prohibitions on sales and leases did make Grand River loyalists nervous about the security of their land tenure and prompted some to abandon their farms.⁵⁶ Others incurred the wrath of the Six Nations by appealing directly to the government for a secure deed or simply by selling their lands to outsiders. Squatters appeared on the Grand River and Mohawks accused other Mohawks of illegally renting or selling land to strangers or for personal gain.⁵⁷ As land became the dominant issue, divisions within the community grew wider and more evident. Increasingly, Mohawks and loyalists confronted outside pressures that made it difficult to meet on terms of easy sociability. The community that had been forged in war had trouble meeting the challenges of peace.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 28-29; Alan Taylor, *Divided Ground*, 343-44.

⁵⁵ See, Johnston, *Valley of the Six Nations*; idem, "The Six Nations in the Grand River Valley, 1784-1847," in Edward S. Rogers and Donald B. Smith, eds., *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1994); Robert J. Surtees, "Land Cessions, 1763-1830," in *ibid.*; idem, "The Iroquois in Canada," in Francis Jennings, William N. Fenton, Mary A. Druke and David R. Miller, eds., *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy: An Interdisciplinary Guide to the Treaties of the Six Nations and Their League* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985); John S. Hagopian, "Joseph Brant vs. Peter Russell: A Re-examination of the Six Nations' Land Transactions in the Grand River Valley," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 30 (November 1997), 300-33; Reginald Good, "Crown Directed Colonization of Six Nations and Métis Land Reserves in Canada," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 1994); Taylor, *Divided Ground*.

⁵⁶ Patrick C. T. White, ed., *Lord Selkirk's Diary, 1803-1804: A Journal of His Travels in British North America and the Northeastern United States* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1958), 304.

⁵⁷ Claus to Cameron, 26 April 1811, LAC, RG 10, vol. 27, 16240-42; Johnston, *Valley of the Six Nations*, 110-12.

People give meaning to their world partly by establishing and maintaining the boundaries of their communities. In the disorienting transition from peace to war and back to peace, the Mohawks struggled to preserve a sense of order and continuity by reconstructing in Upper Canada the multiethnic communities that had existed in the Mohawk Valley and at Niagara. Land grants and leases brought elements of the community together, but proximity was no guarantee that a sense of belonging would develop. Communities are social constructs, and hospitality, merrymaking, and other forms of sociability played a vital role in establishing the boundaries of this particular community.

While colonial officials did success-

fully circumscribe the ability of Mohawks and loyalists to construct and maintain kinship alliances, it would be wrong to conclude that they had become powerless to shape their communities. If, by 1800, it had become more difficult to create cross-cultural alliances, Mohawks and loyalists did continue to engage with each other and the world beyond their borders. At the level of individual and family little had changed. Brants and Nelleses, for example, continued to attend church, socialize, and host parties. Brant continued to hold reunions for loyalist soldiers and Mohawks. Entertainment provided a means for Mohawks and loyalists to create meaningful commonalities that cut across the distinctions of race.
