

## WHO WAS SIR JOHN JOHNSON

AND

## WHY CELEBRATE HIM?

Born at Mount Johnson in the Mohawk Valley of New York State on November 5, 1742, he was the only son of Irishman, Sir William Johnson, who became the richest landowner in the then Province of New York, and his wife Catherine Weisenberg, an indentured servant. In 1749, his family moved to a larger house on the bank of the Mohawk River where he grew up with his sisters Ann and Mary.

William Johnson held the position of Superintendent General of Indian Affairs for the British Government. He was well liked by the many Indian tribes and because of their mutual respect was able to maintain their allegiance to the British. During the Seven Years War, when the French and English were fighting for control of North America, at the age of 13, John accompanied his father and took part as a volunteer in the Battle of Lake George, where his detachment defeated the French troops. For this effort, his father received a baronetcy and his son was promised a knighthood when he became 21.

John received part of his education in England where he became a sophisticated young gentleman of the day. Returning home, in 1773, he married Polly Watts from a wealthy and influential New York family and over the years they had 11 children.

When Sir William died in 1774, his son inherited a vast fortune and moved into Johnson Hall, his beloved home on the Mohawk River. The following year, hostilities erupted in the British colonies but all the Johnson family remained loyal to the King.

Unable to remain neutral he was forced to escape with some of his tenants and friends to avoid capture by the rebel troops. The group travelled overland through the Adirondack

Mountains to the site of present day Cornwall, from where they proceeded by water downstream to Montreal. Here, Sir John formed the King's Royal Regiment of New York and acted as its commandant for the rest of the war. His troops made frequent raids on the Mohawk Valley to rescue other Loyalist members and to destroy the rebel provisions and they defeated the Americans in the bloody battle of Oriskany.

When the American Revolution ended and those who had fled realized that they would never again be allowed to return to their land, it was Sir John Johnson who was assigned the task of settling the approximately 10,000 Loyalists in their new homes.

Having suffered enormous losses of property during the war, Sir John bought the Seigneurie de Monnoir and the Seigneurie d'Argenteuil on the North River and also maintained several homes in Montreal and the Kingston area of Ontario. However, as he grew older he seemed to favour his smaller house on the Seigneurie de Monnoir at the foot of Mount Johnson on the Chambly plain. When he died in January of 1830, he was buried beside the remains of his wife, Lady Polly, and four of their children, in the family vault at Mount Johnson.

It is this crypt that was accidentally bulldozed 40 years ago by a man hired to level an area of rocks in the middle of an orchard on the south side of Mont St-Gregoire, as Mount Johnson is now called. Only recently did this man discover who Sir John Johnson was and immediately decided to make amends for his desecration of the burial site so many years ago. He has become an active member of a group called "La Societe de Restauration du Patrimoine Sir John Johnson" and with the support of the local Sir John Johnson Centennial Branch of the United Empire Loyalist Association are working to restore this the last resting place of the man who helped to preserve Canada from American domination.