

## Joseph Brant and Me

A recollection from the 2010 Mohawk Valley Tour

By Mark Jodoin

One moment captured the essence for me of the recent UELAC bus tour of the Mohawk Valley in New York State.

On Tuesday, September 28th, the tour bus pulled up alongside the Indian Castle Church, a simple white clapboard structure that looks a little lonesome sitting at the base of the hill about one hundred meters from the road that drapes the southern bank of the Mohawk River. Our bus had been commodious, its driver competent and friendly, and the tour well organized as the “Sir John Johnson Manor House Tour of the Mohawk Valley”. Each of our three day-trips had struck a near-perfect balance between activity and rest, food and fun, audio commentary and quiet travel.

The Indian Castle Church stop came near the end of another full and interesting day. I had taken notice of how many of the fifty or so of us had been moved by personal connections to the landmarks we had visited in the days previous. My favourite had been the smiling



faces of three female descendants of Sir William Johnson who had stood proudly at the base of the statue commemorating their forebear on our approach to Johnson Hall the morning before.

But it occurred to me that as an associate member of UELAC, I might be denied such a moment as my connection to the loyalist cause is based on appreciation and admiration rather than ancestral ties. Yet as I stood in the doorway of the Mohawk church just such a moment occurred.

Rain showers, often heavy at times, had been dampening the back roads of the valley for two days. Somehow our tour had dodged the downpours but on that day, at that moment, one caught up to us. I had

been listening to some first-rate heritage interpreters inside the church and as is often my curse, I drifted away as their words lit the embers of my imagination. Cold burnt embers had come into my view, in fact, as I looked up to the church ceiling. Its rafters dating from 1769 had somehow held fast amidst the burning of a deliberately set fire that almost destroyed the church forty years ago.

I had read in our tour guidebook, carefully researched and written by Edward and Elizabeth Kipp and George and Janet Anderson, that the church had been built on land donated by Joseph Brant. Wanting to see his barn that stands intact across the long field in front of the church, I walked to the doorway and stepped into a curtain of rain so thick that visibility was only a few hundred feet.



Lyse and Ed

As I waited out the storm, my mind drifted even further to the month previous when my girlfriend and companion on the bus tour, Lyse Larose, and I had visited the Mohawk Chapel in Brantford. In August in Galt, Ontario, I had made a presentation to the UELAC's Grand River Branch and thanks to directions from Fred Hayward and a map from David Kanowakeron Hill Morrison, a Brant descendent, Lyse and I drove south afterward to see the chapel and Brant's monument in Victoria Square in Brantford. Both sites spoke silently of the results of war, displaced peoples, cruelty and hardships, and both moved us deeply.

In the intervening weeks I made a research trip to visit St. George's Cathedral in Kingston where displayed is Reverend John Stuart's copy of Brant's translation of the Gospel of St. Mark that

with permission I was allowed to carefully hold. Somewhere between Brantford, Kingston and the Mohawk Valley I had developed a connection with the man that went beyond mere interest in colonial history. The connection had begun two years ago when I researched Brant for a chapter in my book of stories, *Shadow Soldiers of the American Revolution: Loyalist Tales from New York to Canada*, and deepened when I visited his stone tomb, sat on the wooden pews of his churches, and saw his words on paper printed more than two and a quarter centuries earlier.

Standing in the gloom that Tuesday afternoon watching the rain from the doorway of his place of worship, an inner peace arose as I made a silent private, prayer to Joseph Brant.

Before long the shower moved on and the skies cleared and I was able to look directly at his barn across the way. I was taken aback with what I saw: starting at the corner of its

weathered brown logs was a radiant, polychromatic rainbow that arched high into the sky and touched down, it seemed, miles away. Giving my head a shake, I walked forward with much disbelief.



The closer I got to the barn the stronger the sun shone. Heavy thoughts of arsonists and long ago wars gave way to lighter feelings of resilience and hope. The man spoke to me across centuries in the azure of the sky, the verdant grass of his field, and the pristine whiteness of his little Mohawk Church. The colours of his rainbow were more than present in the landscape that surrounded me.

As I turned away from his barn for one last look at the Church, a second, parallel rainbow emerged from below the first. With the thought that Joseph Brant's older sister Mary had decided to join the fun, I gave my head another shake and heeded Ed Kipp's call to head back to the bus knowing that for me, the trip had now become perfect.