



# Queenston Heights

## Heritage Minute Learning Tool



### Introduction

This learning tool complements **The Historica-Dominion Institute's** Queenston Heights Heritage Minute by exploring the role of the **Six Nations** community on the Grand River in the War of 1812.

In May 1812, Major General Isaac Brock, the commander of British forces in Upper Canada, visited the Six Nations chiefs at "Brant's Ford" (near present-day Brantford, Ontario) to enlist their help. Brock knew that their support would be crucial to protect the vast Upper Canadian frontier if the United States declared war, which they did in June 1812.



From the Queenston Heights Heritage Minute, a warrior makes a war cry during battle.



In this scene, John Norton and the warriors learn of Isaac Brock's death.

John Norton, as portrayed by actor Billy Merasty.

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# Six Nations History

The Six Nations (Iroquois or *Haudenosaunee*) are a confederacy of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, and Tuscaroras, all of whom speak similar Iroquoian languages and share cultural and political traditions. Other people also lived with them, such as the Delawares, Nanticokes, and Tutelos. The peoples of the Six Nations were allied with Great Britain through the economic and political **Covenant Chain** alliances first made in the 17th century. Such alliances were often marked by the exchange of **wampum belts**.

The American Revolution (1775-1783) divided the Six Nations after centuries of peace. Many fought alongside their ally, Great Britain, against the Thirteen Colonies, which had declared themselves independent in 1776. At the end of the conflict, many Iroquois left their traditional lands in what is now New York and northern Pennsylvania and settled along the Grand River. In addition, some Six Nations people settled at Tyendinaga on the shores of Lake Ontario, while others lived elsewhere in the Great Lakes region, such as along the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers. Others, however, remained within the boundaries of the new United States rather than move to Canada. **For more information on wampum belts, Aboriginal warriors in the War of 1812, and accompanying activities, visit [Historica-Dominion.ca/1812](http://Historica-Dominion.ca/1812).**

◊ Pledge of the Crown Wampum, 1815.  
Photo by Rick Hill. Used with permission.

## Exercise

Examine the Haldimand Proclamation of 1784 and research how the Six Nations reserve has changed. What were the reasons for this change?

Begin your research here: [www.sixnations.ca/LandsResources/HaldProc.htm](http://www.sixnations.ca/LandsResources/HaldProc.htm)

**DID YOU KNOW?** In 1784, King George III of Great Britain authorized Sir Frederick Haldimand, governor of Québec, to give a large piece of land along the Grand River in modern-day Ontario to the Iroquois. The Haldimand Tract recognized the sacrifices and losses the Six Nations had suffered during the American Revolution.

## Who was John Brant?

*Ah'You'Wa'Eghs* (John Brant) was born at Brant's Ford in 1794 to the famous Mohawk leader *Thayendanegea* (Joseph Brant) and his wife *Adonwentishon* (Catharine). His father fought as a British ally during the American Revolution but died five years before the War of 1812. In 1813, John Brant became a lieutenant in the **Indian Department** and led warriors into battle several times. He later became a Mohawk Chief and, in 1830, the first Aboriginal person elected to the Assembly in Upper Canada.

◊ **John Brant (Ah'You'Wa'Eghs)**  
Painting by Charles Bird King, 1838. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada.



## Who was John Norton?

John Norton was born in Scotland in 1770 to a Scottish mother and a Cherokee father. He came to British North America (now Canada) in 1786 and became a trader, educator, and translator. He learned Mohawk and other Aboriginal languages. In the 1790s, he was adopted as a nephew by Joseph Brant and was given the Seneca name *Teyoninhokarawen* and made a Pine Tree Chief. With his adoptive cousin, John Brant, he fought in most engagements on the Niagara Peninsula during the War of 1812. He was a significant military leader and diplomat who worked to improve relations between the British Crown and Six Nations.

For more on John Brant and John Norton, visit [thecanadianencyclopedia.com](http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com).

◊ **John Norton (Teyoninhokarawen)**  
Painting by Mather Brown, 1805. Courtesy Yale Center for British Art.



# The Battle of Queenston Heights

13 October 1812 was a fateful day for the Six Nations of the Grand River. British forces, including about 160 Six Nations warriors, were assembled at Fort George at the mouth of the Niagara River in anticipation of an American invasion, which came upriver near the small Upper Canadian village of Queenston. Norton and Brant, along with several other leaders and warriors, hurried to the scene, only to learn that General Brock had been killed and that the Americans had taken the Heights overlooking the village.

## Outnumbered

As they approached the battlefield, the warriors heard from retreating soldiers that there were thousands of Americans. In response, about half the warriors left the group, returning to Fort George to protect their families (who had accompanied them from their homes on the Grand River). The Queenston Heights Heritage Minute shows Norton making a speech to inspire the 80 remaining warriors. The same speech is recorded in his journal.

### Flintlock Pistols

These flintlock pistols were given by Captain John Brant of the Six Nations to British general John Francis Craddock, First Baron Howden, during the War of 1812. Courtesy of Joseph Brant Museum.



### Plan of the Niagara Region

This map from 1810 shows the American Fort, Old Niagara, jutting out into the mouth of the Niagara River at Lake Ontario with the British Fort George on the opposite bank. A. Gray, 1810. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada.

## Warriors in Battle

Rather than advance up the northern edge of the Heights, where Brock had been killed and where American soldiers were waiting, Norton and Brant led their men to the west, scaled the Heights under cover, and approached from the side, taking the Americans by surprise.

Using the cover of gun smoke to move quickly through the woods, the 80 sharp-shooting warriors launched hit-and-run attacks, pinning down over a thousand Americans until British reinforcements, including **Richard Pierpoint and the Coloured Corps**, arrived for a final assault against the invaders, forcing the Americans to surrender.

To watch the **Richard Pierpoint Heritage Minute** visit [Historica-Dominion.ca/1812](http://Historica-Dominion.ca/1812)

***"This man is of the coolest and most undaunted courage and has led the Indians with the greatest gallantry and much effect on many occasions against the enemy."*** – Lieutenant-Governor Sir Gordon Drummond in tribute of John Norton, 1815.

## Activity

Imagine you are a warrior with Norton and Brant. Write a journal entry about your decision to fight at Queenston to repel the American invasion or to return to Fort George to protect your family.

# Definitions

## Six Nations Peoples

A confederacy of Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora nations united by a similar language and culture. They call themselves the Iroquois or *Haudenosaunee*, meaning People of the Longhouse.

## Six Nations community

A current First Nations reserve near Brantford, Ontario.

## Covenant Chain

An agreement that provided for peaceful relations, fair trade, and mutual defence between the Crown and the Iroquois.

## Indian Department

A British (later Canadian) government agency in British North America which started in 1755; it employed both British and First Nations officers.

## Wampum belts

Memory devices with woven designs made of tiny tubular shell beads that record agreements.

For a list of primary and secondary resources, visit: [Historica-Dominion.ca/1812](http://Historica-Dominion.ca/1812)





# Perspectives

In order to truly understand history, many points of view have to be taken into account. John Norton and Lieutenant-Colonel William Claus, Deputy Superintendent General of the Indian Department, were political enemies before the war. Although their superiors ordered them to keep the peace during the War of 1812, there was still much tension between the two men. Keep their relationship in mind as you read their descriptions of what happened at Queenston Heights.

***“The whole Line opened a fire on us, but without any effect at that time, a declivity in the ground favouring us. The Warriors returned the Fire of the Enemy with coolness & Spirit, and altho’ their fire certainly made the greatest noise, from the Number of Musquets, yet I believe ours did the most Execution.”***

– John Norton

***“I despatched every Indian I could collect and a number of militia. Captain Norton had proceeded before I saw him. ... The events of that day are well known to you, and the death of a man, Major General Brock, that will ever be lamented. On this occasion we lost two Cayuga Chiefs, one Onondaga warrior and two Oneidas killed besides several wounded.”***

– William Claus

## Activity

Review what both Norton and Claus wrote about Six Nations warriors during the Battle of Queenston Heights. How does each man represent the role of the warriors in the battle? How are the accounts different, and why?

**DID YOU KNOW?** The actors in the Queenston Heights Heritage Minute had their face paint done by a makeup artist, but during the war, warriors applied their own paint to reflect their feelings and cultural identity before going into battle. What kind of face paint would you apply?

## Media Literacy

Media literacy is the ability to analyze messages communicated through mass media like television, radio, and the Internet. Given the tremendous power and influence of the media today, it is more important than ever to view it critically.

Watch the Queenston Heights Heritage Minute and then consider the questions below.

1. What does the Queenston Heights Heritage Minute tell you about the warriors’ relationship with nature? Why is this important to the story?
2. Identify your favourite section of the Minute. Explain why this scene had the strongest impact on you.
3. How does the music enhance the mood of the Queenston Heights Heritage Minute?
4. How are First Nations people presented in the media today?
5. How accurately do newspapers present contemporary First Nations issues?

## Making of the Minute

To watch the Queenston Heights Heritage Minute and to view behind-the-scenes extras on the making of the Minute, visit [Historica-Dominion.ca/1812](http://Historica-Dominion.ca/1812).



Top, John Norton delivers his speech on screen. Bottom, cast and crew prepare to film the speech from the warriors’ perspective.

