

## JOHN NORTON MOHAWK CHIEF

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**Introduction:** The adopted Mohawk, Major John Norton (Teyoninhokovrawen), played a prominent role in the War of 1812, leading Iroquois warriors from Grand River into battle against American invaders at Queenston Heights, Stoney Creek, and Chippawa.

**Early Life:** Norton was born of a Cherokee father and a Scottish mother, in the early 1760s. His father was taken as a boy by British soldiers when his hometown was destroyed by the British. Norton's father eventually joined the British Army and moved to Scotland, where he married. John Norton was educated in Scotland. He served an apprenticeship as a printer, but ran away to join the army.

He came to Canada as a private soldier. The muster rolls of the 65th Foot record his enlistment at Mullingar (Republic of Ireland) early in 1784. He arrived in the province of Quebec with the regiment the following year and accompanied it to Fort Niagara (near Youngstown, N.Y.) in 1787. There he deserted. In 1788, he received his discharge.

For a time, Norton taught at Tyendinaga on the Bay of Quinte, west of Kingston, Ontario. However, he found "*teaching school too tedious, and confinement . . . more than he could bear,*" recalled one acquaintance, adding that "*he associated with the young Indians in all their diversions.*" Norton resigned in 1791.

He next went to the old northwest to become a fur trader from 1791 until 1795. After Anthony Wayne's defeat of the western First Nation tribes at the battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, Norton returned to Upper Canada and became an interpreter in the Indian Department at Niagara.

Joseph Brant [Thayendanegea] soon drew Norton into his own service as an interpreter, made him an emissary, and adopted him as a "nephew," deputy, and successor. Norton resigned from the Indian Department and began living at Onondaga on the Grand River. His appointment as Teyoninhokarawen, a rank recognizing him as a chieftain for diplomacy and his leadership in war, came in 1799.

In the early 1800s, Norton and Brant revived claims on behalf of the Six Nations for deeds to Grand River lands. After the American Revolution, the Six Nations had been invited to settle in what became Upper Canada on a vast tract of land. But the extent of the lands and the nature of the title had soon been called into question. Brant insisted that the grant allowed the First Nations to sell off portions of land to white settlers. Officials in Upper Canada maintained that the Royal Proclamation of 1763 denied the validity of such purchases by white people.

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Brant decided to go over the heads of Upper Canadian officials and to appeal to the Privy Council of Britain. He sent Norton to plead the case in London in February 1804. His trip, from 1804 to 1806, failed to achieve the desired results. Nevertheless, it was a personal triumph. At the request of the British and Foreign Bible Society, he translated the Gospel of John into Mohawk. In the Mohawk Chapel at Brantford Ontario, there is a memorial window which portrays the distribution of the Gospel in Mohawk in 1806.

**The War of 1812:** Throughout the campaign in 1812, Norton assembled and commanded fighting men of the Six Nations and other tribes, the parties varying in size with conditions and necessities along the Niagara frontier. His leadership in the great victory at Queenston Heights was the high point in his military career.

Major-General Roger Sheaffe mentioned in his dispatches *"the judicious position which Norton and the Indians with him had taken."* One week after the battle, on October 20, Sheaffe honoured Norton by appointing him *"to the Rank of Captain of the Confederate Indians"* – the same rank that Joseph Brant had held during the American Revolution.

In the campaigns of 1813 Norton was active again. He and a hundred First Nation tribesmen were at Fort George (Niagara-on-the-Lake) when the Americans attacked in late May, and they took part in the subsequent British withdrawal to Burlington Heights (Hamilton). After the American thrust was stopped at Stoney Creek on June 6, Norton and some warriors pursued the retreating enemy.

In 1814, Norton was at the head of some 200 Iroquois at the battle of Chippawa on 5 July. Although they did not play an important part in the action, they suffered their heaviest casualties of the war.

Norton himself remained on the frontier. He was at the head of a fighting force at the battle of Lundy's Lane in late July, and at the unsuccessful British assault on Fort Erie in mid-August. After the Treaty of Ghent in December, he retired from fighting and was granted a pension of £200 per annum. He kept on supporting the claims of First Nation war veterans for losses incurred in the campaigns.

**Later Life:** In 1813, while the war was on, he was married at Niagara by the Reverend Robert Addison to an attractive and talented girl named Karighwaycagh (Catherine). She was about 16. Norton must have been about 50 and had at least one son by a previous marriage to an Iroquois woman. In 1815 he and Catherine, along with John (Tehonakaraa), one of his sons, went to visit Britain.

Norton and his wife returned from Britain to Upper Canada in 1816. He had received a commission as a brevet major in the British army, but he was unofficially called Colonel Norton. He became the owner of a large farm overlooking the Grand River at Sims Locks, south of present-day Brantford.

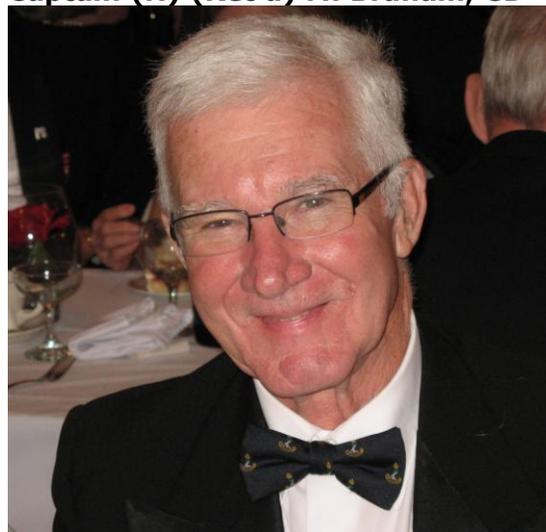
In 1823, Norton was found guilty of manslaughter after a duel involving his wife's suspected infidelity. After that, he essentially disappeared from the historical record. Unconfirmed reports indicate that Norton died in northern Mexico sometime in October 1831.

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