

We Share Our Matters (Teionkwakhashion tsi niionkwariho:ten): Two Centuries of Writing and Resistance at Six Nations of Grand River by Rick Monture

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to have been the only absolute necessity.

6. For tobacco, tea, and sugar, there was little change in consumption patterns in the course of fifty years.

7. Alcohol was commonly purchased; although there was some decline over the years, many customers continued to purchase it; there is no evidence for seasonal alcohol purchase patterns; many alcohol customers also bought tea.

The epigraph for the first chapter is a quotation from Catharine Parr Trail's *Backwoods of Canada*: "We begin to get reconciled to our Robinson Crusoe sort of life..." For McCalla, it is this notion, that each early settler family in Upper Canada was, "isolated, surrounded by the unknown, deprived of the

usual supports of civilization, and fending for itself," (8) that this work seeks to contradict. Even from the earliest years, settler families were part of an interconnected world-wide economic enterprise.

In his penultimate paragraph, McCalla warns: "As the main chronological focus of Canadian historical research shifts even farther forward in time, the settlement era can easily recede in historians' field of vision, becoming an abstract, timeless world 'before' (for example, before markets or industrial capitalism or modernity). This book offers a different perspective" (152).

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We Share Our Matters (Teionkwakhashion tsi niionkwariho:ten)

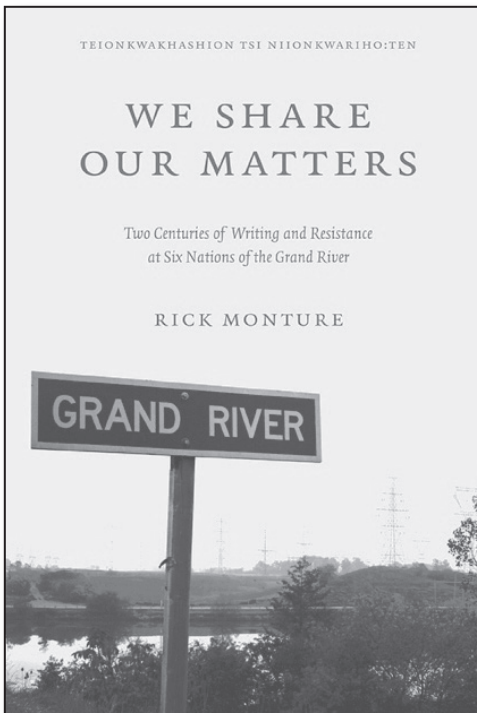
Two Centuries of Writing and Resistance at Six Nations of Grand River

By Rick Monture

Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015. 228 pp. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-88755-767-5. \$20.00 eBook or digital download. ISBN not provided. (www.uofmpress.ca)

At the community book launch in the Spring of 2015, the theatre of the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford was standing room only, while hundreds of people from Six Nations feted Monture with rounds of applause and a standing ovation. Clearly, they appreciate Monture's efforts to publish what he calls an intellectual history of the Six Nations of Grand River. While numerous scholars from outside Six Nations have researched and written about the community's history, myself included, very few from within it have done so and published for a wider audience. Monture's book is especially important for this reason. He is sharing not only his extensive research and analysis, but also his knowledge of his community's history from an insider perspective, for the community itself and the wider public.

We share our matters is based on Monture's dissertation in English, and as such, focuses especially on the literary history of the community, although it includes analysis of numerous other sorts of documents and publications. The book is made up of six body chapters which proceed chronologically and thematically throughout the history of the Six Nations at Grand River, beginning with their arrival at Grand River after the American Revolution, and ending with films made by Haudenosaunee artist Shelly Niro in 2012. Monture's focus is on "how our leaders, intellectuals, writers and artists have consistently reiterated—in English—our ancient philosophies in the context of the political and social environment of their day to build upon the central belief structures of traditional thought in profound and creative ways" (218). He



uses the writings of such well known Six Nations people as Joseph Brant, Seth Newhouse, Pauline Johnson, Levi General, and Jake Thomas, as well as many others, as examples of Haudenosaunee people “asserting their resolve to maintain their traditional ways” (14). Monture has gathered some of the most important writing on Six Nations sovereignty and history from some of the most important minds over the last two and a half centuries in one place to build an argument that while the community has changed in many ways with the impact of Euro-American culture, “our understanding of ourselves as a Confederacy of nations with a distinct history and purpose has remained essentially the same since pre-contact times” (223).

One frustration I have is that there are numerous other people who acted to maintain their traditional ways, but because they did not write with as much frequency as those selected for this study, they were not

included. For example, Monture spends several pages discussing the important activist work of Levi General (Deskahch), and especially his trip to Europe in the early 1920s, but does not mention either that Emily General, Levi’s niece, and a teacher on the reserve, led another delegation to London in 1930 to argue for Six Nations sovereignty, or her work in establishing the Six Nations Reserve Forest Theatre in 1949. While Monture does include the work of Pauline Johnson, as well as a small section on Bernice Loft Winslow, and an examination of Shelley Niro’s films in the last chapter, the book relies too heavily on the written words of men. Monture might have included letters written by Emily General, newspaper articles which interviewed her before her death in 1991, and interviews done with her during her life. Her activist work does not qualify as “literary history” but it certainly is an example of important efforts to resist colonialism at Grand River. Letters to the editor of the Brantford Expositor written by Evelyn H.C. Johnson, sister to Pauline, throughout the early twentieth century, would also have added to Monture’s argument, as Evelyn was an ardent supporter of the hereditary council and a critic of the Mohawk Institute, the local residential school.

Monture has said that he wanted the book to be one that Six Nations people can have at home, and that is accessible and understandable for the general community. Monture’s was the first book launch I have ever attended in which the book sold out. Its inclusion in the Native History Series at the University of Manitoba Press means that scholars from across Canada interested in Native history and culture will find it an important book on the Six Nations, very likely the most important book published on the topic in decades.

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