

A Mohawk Memoir from the War of 1812: John Norton - Teyoninhokarawen introduced, annotated, and edited by Carl Benn

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Protestantism was passé as a cultural force. Immigrants from all over the world redefined Canada, especially in the big cities, where diversity and inclusion were the new watchwords. This shift triggered a backlash by upstart white supremacist organizations such as Aryan Nations, the Aryan Resistance Movement, and the Brotherhood. The Klan was relegated to the sidelines, a minor player in the new constellation of hate groups. As in former times, the American influence was powerful. David Duke established the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in New Orleans in 1975 and visited Toronto to spread his message with some success.

The final chapter of the book turns to the twenty-first century and the age of the internet. The worldwide web has proved a boon for white supremacist groups, enabling the easy flow of propaganda and providing direct access to potential supporters

in the privacy of their own homes. In this environment the Klan has been overshadowed by its competitors, who are not interested in cross burnings and white hoods. Bartley observes that “by the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century there was no formal organization extant with name of Ku Klux Klan of Canada” (276). He goes on to say that the influence of the Klan is not entirely extinguished. Its “brand” continues to have symbolic power, and it is still the universally recognized shorthand for white supremacy and hate. Bartley makes his arguments convincingly in a reliable, comprehensive narrative of the Klan in Canada. His book is a testament to the power of shining light in dark corners.

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A Mohawk Memoir from the War of 1812

John Norton - Teyoninhokarawen

Introduced, annotated, and edited by Carl Benn

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. 392pp. Paperback \$39.95 ISBN: 9781487523268
(www.utorontopress.com)

Historians are not prone to letting historical documents “speak for themselves” as one of the central elements of historical methodology is to contextualize, analyse, and explain the historical significance or place of a document within a larger narrative. Rarely do historical studies provide the reader with more than a few sentences or paragraphs of the words written by those who may have witnessed some of the most significant events in history. In “*A Mohawk Memoir from the War of 1812*,” Carl Benn shows that presenting the words of historical actors, in this case

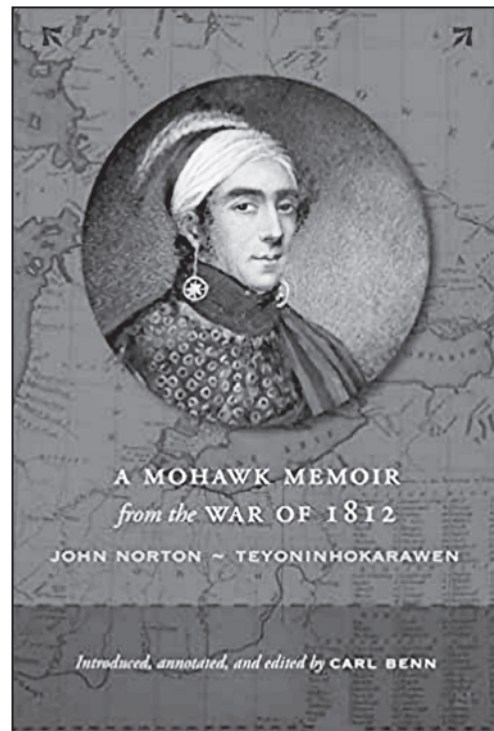
John Norton-Teyoninhokarawen, as they chose to write them adds significant value to our understanding of shared history. Norton, himself, is a fascinating individual who deserves greater attention.

For those familiar with the events of the War of 1812, John Norton’s name is easily recognisable. A prominent Indigenous military leader during the War’s battles on the Niagara Frontier, his early life in Scotland, his wide-ranging travels and his role in Settler-Haudenosaunee relations have been overshadowed by other Haudenosaunee leaders, or undermined

by colonial officials. Born of a Cherokee father and a Scottish mother in 1770, Norton came to North America as teenager in the wake of American War of Independence as a drummer in the 65th Regiment of Foot at Fort Niagara, from which he deserted in 1787. Norton then spent several years in Western New York and in Upper Canada as teacher in various First Nation communities, including Tyendinaga and the Grand River, and as a fur trader in the Ohio Valley (30). A remarkable polyglot, Norton spoke several languages, was fluent in both spoken and written Mohawk and in 1797, joined the Indian Department as an interpreter in Niagara. Through his strong relationship with Joseph Brant (the prominent leader in the Six Nations who later adopted him into his extended family as a “nephew”), Norton rose to occupy positions of influence amongst the Mohawk of the Six Nations, even acting as Brant’s delegate for a trip to the United Kingdom in 1804 (51) and was given a new name, Teyoninhokarawen, in 1799 (35).

Although not accepted by everyone in Six Nations and openly undermined by the Indian Department, by the outbreak of the War of 1812, Teyoninhokarawen was an important diplomat and war chief who was called upon to rally Haudenosaunee warriors to the British cause (71).

After the signing of the Treaty of Ghent brought an end to the War, Norton made one last return trip to the United Kingdom. While there, he left a manuscript of his life with the Duke of Northumberland who had been a long-time supporter and friend of Joseph Brant. The document remained at the estate until it was brought back to light in 1970 when the Champlain Society published *The Journal of John Norton, 1816*, edited by Carl Klinck and James J. Talman. Here, Benn draws our attention to the parts of the manuscript focusing



on the lead up and the events of the War of 1812, a topic on which he has written extensively.¹ For Benn, Norton’s memoir of the War is “one of the most extensive, absorbing, and historically useful autobiographies from the War of 1812 by any of its participants, regardless of ethnicity or status” (4). To help the reader place John Norton in his historical context, Benn provides a biographical essay discussing not only on his life and role during the War of 1812, but also the broader geopolitics of settler-colonial relations. As the text in question is the part of the memoir limited to the period of the War of 1812, an epilogue closes the loop with the introductory essay describing Norton’s continued role amongst the Six Nations and his rupture with the Haudenosaunee in 1823. While Benn’s essays are valuable in understanding who John Norton–Teyoninhokarawen was, it is the memoir itself that is at the

heart of this book.

With its proliferation of National Historic Sites across southern Ontario, the War of 1812 plays a central role in the narrative of Ontario. While nearly all historical accounts of the events make at least a passing reference to Indigenous contributions, Norton's memoir is one of a handful of Indigenous perspectives of the conflict. As a key player in several decisive battles of the conflict, such as Queenston Heights in 1812, and Lundy's Lane in 1814, Norton provides insight into the battles themselves but also the ongoing tension between British military commanders, Indigenous warriors, and the Indian Department who pushed to control First Nation leaders such as Norton (228-29). For students of the War of 1812, John Norton-Teyoninhokarawen's words bring a more complete account of the conflict as it shows not only how the battles were planned and fought, but also the profound impact and disruption of the war on Indigenous communities.

While allowing the text to "speak for itself" with only minor editorial changes, the significance of Norton's words is made possible by the rich and extensive explanations and contextualisation Benn provides through annotation and footnotes. With Norton's memoir being 200 years removed for any reader, Benn's annotations provide a depth of additional information that allows the reader to better understand not

only the context of the events being described by Norton, but also to expand on the significance of an event or the longer-term ramifications. Each of the eight sections of the memoir are introduced with a summary of the relevant contextual information to help the reader understand Norton's words without needing to turn to other sources for help. Benn's use of footnotes provides a wealth of information providing descriptions of battles or locations mentioned in the memoir, or explains the complexities of the geopolitics within the Six Nations and Norton's shifting authority and influence throughout the war.

In *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, Carl Benn has added a new source to the deep historiography of the War of 1812. Not only showing that a better understanding of the event of the war can be gleaned by returning to contemporary sources, but his thoughtful annotations have also brought additional nuance to the complexity of Settler-Indigenous relations. Most importantly, however, by placing John Norton-Teyoninhokarawen's words as the focus of his study, Benn has amplified a long-silenced Indigenous voice.

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1 For example, *Native Memoirs from the War of 1812: Black Hawk and William Apess*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014; *The War of 1812*, Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002; and *The Iroquois in the War of 1812*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.