



# The Two Lives of Joseph Brant

by Dorothy Heiderstadt

To the Mohawks he was Thayendanegea, one of their best warriors, trained in the old Indian ways of fighting. To the white men he was Joseph Brant, who dressed like an Englishman, spoke perfect English, and

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fought for the redcoats during the Revolution.

Joseph's double role was not surprising. He had grown up knowing two ways of life.

As a boy, he lived in the home of Sir William Johnson, to whom his sister was married. Sir William was an English administrator, in charge of Indian affairs in the Mohawk Valley in upper New York. He was a friendly, good-natured man who was liked and trusted by his Indian neighbors. He had learned their language, and often invited their chiefs to visit him. When he, in turn, visited the Indians, he wore buckskin clothes and moccasins like theirs.

Joseph was a bright boy, and Sir William took a special interest in him. He saw to it that the boy dressed and spoke like an Englishman and received a good education. But this was not enough for the restless Joseph, whose father had been a powerful Mohawk chieftain. An Indian's business was to become a warrior, and that was what Joseph was determined to be. So he returned to his own people to learn how to wage war in Indian fashion.

In the days before the Revolution there was much fighting between the many Indian tribes. At the age of thirteen Joseph took part in his first battle. He did well for himself, winning a reputation for bravery and taking his first scalp. By the time the Revolution broke out, the tall, handsome brave had become a leader among the Indians.

Even before the outbreak of war, the colonists were urging the Indians to fight on their side. The British were also seeking the help of the tribes. For Joseph the choice was

easy; his friend Sir William was loyal to the king, so Joseph too would support the British cause.

Joseph was made an officer in the British army and was sent to England to arrange for supplies. He enjoyed his visit to London, and certainly London enjoyed him. Everyone made much of this Indian who spoke English so well and was going to raise a company to fight for the king.

On this visit Joseph usually dressed like an English gentleman, in knee breeches and powdered wig. But he had not neglected to bring along some Indian clothes, too. He was quite splendid in his fine white buckskin, silver armbands, belt of colored beads, and headdress. He even wore a tomahawk hanging at his belt. Several artists painted portraits of him in this beautiful, dramatic costume.

Joseph, encouraged by the public admiration, played his role to the hilt. Often he would add some war paint, give a few war whoops, and wave his tomahawk to complete the picture. On one occasion the war paint almost led to trouble. It happened at a masked ball in one of the fine houses of London. One of the guests, a Turk, could not be convinced that Joseph's painted face was indeed his own. Curiosity finally got the better of him: he crept up to the Indian and suddenly tweaked his nose. The whoop the startled warrior gave that time was a real one. He was raising his tomahawk in earnest, ready to strike his fellow guest, when his host broke in to explain the mistake.

London was a marvelous place, but Joseph did not lose sight of why he was there.

The coming war was much on his mind. In a jeweler's shop he bought a gold ring and had his name engraved on it. He did this, he explained, so that if he were killed in battle, those who found him would know who he was.

After Joseph got the supplies he needed, he returned to America, ready to take part in the great war. During the years that followed he led about fifteen hundred Indians on raids against settlers. His name became hated and feared throughout New York, especially in the Mohawk Valley. Among the battles he led was the terrible one at Cherry Valley in 1778. There is no doubt that his activities were of great

aid to the British. But he was fighting for a lost cause.

After the British were defeated, Joseph was not welcome in the United States. He went to live in Canada, where he had been given a tract of land by the English king. There his life took a new turn. Until his death in 1807 he worked hard to keep the peace between Indians and whites on both sides of the border. Joseph the warrior became Joseph the man of goodwill. Surely this peace-loving warrior, this gentlemanly Indian, was one of the most contradictory figures ever to strut across the pages of history.

## CHECK YOUR READING

1. **Sybil Ludington was**
  - A the youngest of twelve children
  - B the oldest of twelve children
  - C an only child
  
2. **Sybil's favorite task was**
  - A cleaning house
  - B helping care for her father's horses
  - C baking bread
  
3. **Colonel Ludington had to rouse his men because**
  - A the British had made a surprise attack
  - B General Washington was coming to see them
  - C the British had surrendered
  
4. **Contacting his men was a problem for Colonel Ludington because they had all**
  - A been captured by the British
  - B gone off to Canada
  - C gone back to their farms
  
5. **Sybil offered to alert the men because she**
  - A wanted to ride the yearling
  - B knew no one else could go
  - C wanted to take a night ride
  
6. **Sybil had to ride**
  - A thirty miles
  - B ten miles
  - C fifteen miles
  
7. **When Sybil reached a small settlement, she**
  - A stopped to rest
  - B told one man to spread the news
  - C had supper
  
8. **Sybil started to feel tired when she**
  - A thought she wouldn't make it
  - B knew she was halfway home
  - C realized a storm was coming
  
9. **Sybil's spirits rose when**
  - A she saw Meads Corners
  - B the rain gradually stopped
  - C the yearling began to run faster
  
10. **When Sybil returned home, the soldiers**
  - A hadn't gotten there yet
  - B had already left
  - C were ready to march