

Leaving Mohawk Valley: Stories from the Draper Manuscripts

Lyman C. Draper (1815-1891) was a librarian & historian in Wisconsin. He spent much of his life collecting material for a series of biographies. While researching for a planned biography of Joseph Brant, he contacted several members of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte. They provided him with information he recorded about the history of the community as it had been passed down to them.



Mr. Draper died before he could write the biographies but his notes were preserved. This wonderful resource lets us hear 19th century voices of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte.

Several of those who helped Draper described how the Mohawks left Mohawk Valley. The stories do not always match exactly but the overall feeling is that when the Fort Hunter Mohawks had to leave Mohawk Valley they suffered greatly, particularly the children.

Mrs. Lydia (Loft) Martin, aged 77 years

Lydia was a daughter of Catherine Hill from Captain Isaac Hill & Lydia John (sister of Captain John Deserontyon). Her mother was very young at the time of leaving Mohawk Valley. Her testimony is dated 28th September 1879.

From Mrs. Lydia Martin:

"When the war broke out, the Mohawks resolved to take the King's side; & all the nation started, save a few families (Mrs. Martin thinks only three remaining) for La Chine, where they would be safe. As Brant was most the object of Americans, he was placed in front, & all trudged along; Mrs. Martin's mother was then but three years old, & of the party, & used to relate, she remembered ... they would stop at some of the houses by the way, & get buttermilk."

"The only food they took with them was parched corn meal, called in the Mohawk, o-no-quits-sa-rah; of which each carried as much as he could. They were pursued by the Americans, & six Mohawk women, lagging behind with their heavy loads, were overtaken & made prisoners, & were put in prison & kept a long time, suffering much during their incarceration. Mrs. Martin knew one of these women at Bay of Quinte. The Mohawks suffered greatly during this long journey through a wilderness country to La Chine." [Draper Mss. 13F34 Reel #17]

"The few Mohawk families that were left on the Mohawk, Mrs. Martin says were compelled to join the others, & , she thinks, before the close of the war... One of these lagging families was named Claus." [Draper Mss. 13F35 Reel #17]

George Rokwaho Loft, aged about 64 years

George was a son of Henry & Jemima Loft. Henry's father was David Loft who was not Mohawk but his sons Henry and John settled with the Mohawks. His testimony is dated 30th September 1879.

From George Rokwaho Loft:

"Informant's grandfather was a St. Francis Indian. Ka-ron-ya-gi-gowe, or The Big Clear Sky. He was the pilot sent to conduct the Mohawks from the Mohawk valley to Lachine – of which can give no particulars. He served till the end of the war. When the British troops left Canada, an officer, David Loft, who was on very friendly terms with Big Clear Sky, exchanged names with him, & had a great feast on the occasion – hence the origin of the Loft name among the Mohawks. He had two sons, John & Henry, the latter was informant's father." [Draper Mss. 13F48 Reel #17]

"On some occasion, it [would] seem [about] 1775 ... Washington spoke beautifully saying, "Stay with me, you did not cause the war, it was the result of differences between me & the British – you stay, & share with me, if I prosper, you shall prosper- be one with us". But the Mohawks said among themselves, "we have pledged faith with our British Father, & we must keep it: We will go over the Lake to Canada & so left the Mohawk Country... They brought their old Church bell with them – on evidence of their devotion to their religious teachings, for it must have cost them much toil & labor; & it is now in the church near Mill Point." [Draper Mss. 13F48-9 Reel #17]

Mrs. Margaret (Green) Moses, aged 79 years

Margaret was a daughter of John Green. He had served in the American Revolution and War of 1812. Her testimony is dated 6th October 1879.

From Mrs. Margaret Moses:

"Her father John Green died in 1845, aged 110 years (not so old L.C.D.). He was a chief – went in 1814 for defence of Kingston. Capt. John then dead. He first went upon the war path at fourteen; was much under Sir Wm. Johnson." [Draper Mss. 13F65 Reel #17]

"When the Mohawks retired from the Mohawk Valley, they went via Caughnawaga, to Canada: The braves in the rear guarding the women & children. John Green among them, were pursued a considerable distance. Don't remember any fighting. Six Mohawk women & one child were taken by the Americans - one, afterwards Mrs. Seth Powless,

who lived to be aged. The party suffered greatly for want of provisions." [Draper Mss. 13F66 Reel #17]

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"Removal 1776 – when the war became troublesome, two Mohawk women & a child were taken from their houses at night. The next morning, as there were no men at home, four young women or girls went on a distant hill to make such discoveries as they could, whether a body of Americans were coming; & when they returned, the other women & children of the settlement had all gone, & these four girls were captured. The warriors joined the women for their protection in their [?] to Lachine." [Draper Mss. 13F79 Reel #17]

Chief Thomas Green aged about 77 years

Thomas Green was the brother of Margaret (above) and son of John Green. He was one of the last Life Chiefs as recognized by Indian Affairs. His testimony is dated 6th October 1879.

From Chief Thomas Green:

"The Americans wanted the Mohawks to remain at their homes, & take no part in the war; but so firmly attached were they to the King, that they would not listen to this advice. They started to retire in a body to Canada; Capt. John was in the rear, to protect the women & children: they were overtaken and attacked on the way, & those in front fell back to aid the rear guard, & Capt. John was wounded. Thinks there were some white commanders with the Indians, but do not know their names." [Draper Mss. 13F67 Reel #17]

"Capt. John was wounded in the thigh. Thinks the fight was on land & not while crossing a river. John Green was along. If pursued over any river, Mr. Green thinks it must have been the Mohawk (Upper Mohawk, I think – L.C.D.)"

"The retreating Indians became nearly starved – children would cry of hunger – camped out; & the Indian hunters went out in every direction to hunt, killing only a few birds, & made them into gruel, so as to go as far as possible, but afforded the hungry scarcely a spoonful a piece, with small bits of the scanty meat. They were then nearly two days travel to Lachine, & without food. The journey was tardy, as the children who could had to walk in their enfeebled condition - & the smaller ones had to be carried." [Draper Mss. 13F68 Reel #17]

Mrs. Elizabeth (Loft) Powless aged about 76 years

Elizabeth was a daughter of Catherine Hill from Captain Isaac Hill & Lydia John (sister of Captain John Deserontyon). She was a sister to Mrs. Lydia (Loft) Martin (above) and was married to Seth Powles who was one of the last Life Chiefs. Her testimony is dated 6th October 1879.

From Mrs. Elizabeth (Loft) Powless:

"Removal from Mohawk Valley to Lachine [about] 1776. There were a few men to guide the women & children. American Indians followed & over took them, & killed some – once on an island, & killed three of their number: One Margaret Pin (who married Seth Powless) when young, was captured & kept prisoner awhile; & finally got to the Seneca Chief, Kianquacta, & stayed some time – she was fifteen when she found her surviving kindred, two younger brothers. Those who fled from the Mohawk Valley, had only parched corn, & suffered every hardship." [Draper Mss. 13F75 Reel #17]

Mrs. Ann (Brant) Pin [Penn] aged about 79 years

Ann was the daughter of Peter Brant who belonged to the Delaware Nation. Her father and his brother, Brant Brant, fought as allies to the British in the American Revolution. Delawares were with the Fort Hunter Mohawks at Lachine. Their families came down to the Bay of Quinte in 1784. Her testimony is dated 7th October 1879.

From Mrs. Ann Pin:

"Peter Brant was wounded twice in the same fight – the first time he fell, & his brother, Brant Brant, carried him away, & was wounded again while being carried, both times in the same leg – so that he had a stiff knee ever after. This was early in the war – perhaps on a scout, he was taken to Fort Niagara & remained in the hospital a good while. Capt. John was wounded at the same time." [Draper Mss. 13F76 Reel #17]

"This was in the retreat from Mohawk Valley to Canada. No recollection of hearing of women out spying, & some captured; nor of an Indian wounded while crossing a stream."

"Peter Brant's wound frequently broke out as long as he lived – he drew a pension of a York shilling a day. He died about 1815, about 60 years of age. He had 8 children – Mrs. Pin the youngest."

"Brant Brant was older than Peter Brant – only these two brothers; their parents & others of the family had died before the war. Brant Brant died about 1804, left a family, all of whom are dead. Don't know the names, nor origin of the parents; of Brant Brant & Peter Brant thinks there was no relationship between them & Capt. Joseph Brant – but really knows nothing – never heard of anything." [Draper Mss. 13F77 Reel #17]

Mrs. Ellen (Hill) Maracle aged 79 years

Ellen was the daughter of William Isaac Hill & Nancy Crawford. William Isaac Hill was a son of Captain Isaac Hill. Ellen was the widow of Cornelius Maracle.

From Mrs. Ellen Maracle:

The retreat from the Mohawk to Lachine, 3 were killed by pursuing Americans. The Indians ambuscaded in the woods, & had a fight when the Americans came up, who were not numerous, & were beaten back. Capt. Isaac Hill's brother was among the killed. No recollection of women having been captured. This retreat was in the fall of the year, as the Mohawks had large hogs in their pens fattening – these & their cattle they left behind – hiding in the ground such valuables as they could not carry. These losses were made good by the British Government. [Draper Mss. 13F87 Reel #17]

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Capt. Isaac Hill had at least two brothers beside the one killed on removal from Mohawk Valley...[Draper Mss. 13F88 Reel #17]

Mrs. Catherine (Brant) Hill aged about 64 years

Catherine was the daughter of Joseph Brant Jr & Margaret John. She was a grandchild of both Captain John Deserontyon and Joseph Brant. She married John W. Hill who was a grandson of Captain Isaac Hill. Her testimony is dated the 6th, 7th, & 8th October 1879.

From Mrs. Catherine Hill:

Canada Migration: It was probably in the fall of 1776, the Mohawks left the Mohawk river – Indians would carry the small children on their shoulders, & large packs. They sat down on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence – saw a large boat approaching them, well manned with oarsmen, & many oars: the Mohawk women fearing it was a party of Americans, began to cry; but at length they espied red colors, & other British indications, & dried up their tears; it proved to be Sir John Johnson, & all rejoiced, as they all knew him - & he piloted them to a suitable place (Lachine) & supplied their almost famishing necessities. [Draper Mss. 13F96-7Reel #17]

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When the Mohawks left their Mohawk River settlements, they buried many of their things – among them the ancient silver church service presented by Queen Ann in 1712 – a tankard with this date I saw at Rev. Abram Nelles near Brantford & a similar one, without date,, in care of Mrs. Catharine Hill, of Bay of Quinte. Afterwards they returned, & found the silver ware, & other things (probably when on expeditions in 1778 & 1780) [Draper Mss. 13F97 Reel #17]

Excerpts taken from The Draper Manuscript Collection, Series F - Joseph Brandt Papers. Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, custodians of the collection.