AN IROQUOIS WOMAN BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: MOLLY BRANT AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by Benjamin David Kern

This thesis examines the historical significance of Molly Brant, a Mohawk clan mother, in the late eighteenth century. Brant was famous for helping maintain the Covenant Chain alliance between the Six Nations and the British Empire in the Revolutionary War. Scholars, however, often misrepresent Brant as an important figure because she was an exceptional example of Iroquois women due to unique elements of her life such as her partnership with Sir William Johnson, the British Indian Superintendent. To better understand the actions of Molly Brant, her life needs to be placed within the imperial world of relationships in Iroquoia, the Six Nations homeland. The foundations of Iroquoian society were personal relationships among Iroquois peoples as well as intercultural interactions with British colonists dictated by Iroquois women. This thesis asserts that Molly Brant was an important historical figure because she exemplifies the power and significance of the various relationships in Iroquoia.
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INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1777-1778, Iroquoia, the homeland of Iroquois people in present-day New York, was a place of violence and internal divisions. The once united Mohawk, Oneida, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, and Tuscaroras of the Six Nations Confederation had divided between alliances with Great Britain or the United States, two sides in a great imperial civil war that had engulfed eastern North America. Following General John Burgoyne’s defeat at the battle of Saratoga in October 1777, Iroquois leaders held a council at Onondaga and debated the wisdom of continuing their alliance with the British headquartered in Canada. A Mohawk woman named Degonwadonti (1736? -1796), meaning “Several Against One,” argued against abandoning the British. Iroquois peoples and British officers knew Degonwadonti better by her English name Molly Brant.1 After finding people “in general very fickle & wavering in particular the head Man of the Senecas called Cayengwaraghton,” Molly Brant sought to convince the wavering Iroquois leaders to remain loyal to the British Empire. She reminded him in “a long conversation in Council…of the great friendship…between him and the late Sir William [Johnson],” the former British Indian Superintendent of North America. This emotional exchange caused Brant to break out into tears over the memory of Sir William, her husband and the father of her eight children. Molly Brant’s public actions at Onondaga in 1778 “had such an effect upon that Chief & the rest of the 5 Nation Sachems present that they promised her faithfully to keep up to the Engagements to her late friend; one word from her goes farther with them than a thousand from any white man.”2

1 An additional Mohawk name that was associated with Molly Brant was Konwatsi’tsiaienni or “Someone Lends Her a Flower,” which was also spelled Gonwatsijayenna in some accounts about her early life. In this thesis, I will refer to Brant by either her full name or last name as a manner of formality. The examination of her family lineage, however, requires referring to Brant as simply Molly as a method of differentiating her from her stepfather and younger brother Joseph Brant. Isabel Thompson Kelsay, Joseph Brant, 1743-1807: Man of Two Worlds (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 40; Earle Thomas, The Three Faces of Molly Brant (Kingston: Quarry Press, 1996), 17.

2 This story regarding Molly’s ability to sway Iroquois leaders exists in two different sources that are cited often by other scholars. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Claus kept a draft of the letter later sent to the Governor of Canada General Frederick Haldimand in his own personal records. The other is a copy of the original that was copied by Haldimand’s secretary R. Matthews. Although the separate letters describe the same event, there are subtle nuances between the narratives of the story that portray Brant’s influence in dissimilar manners. These letters will be treated as separate sources within the context of the chapters. Daniel Claus to Frederick Haldimand August 30, 1779, Daniel Claus Family Papers Volume 2 (National Public Archives of Canada MG 19, F1, Microfilm Reel C-1478), 131-133.
Although this story demonstrates why scholars are intrigued by Molly Brant’s life, it does not explain why Iroquois men listened to her or other factors that determined her decision to support an alliance with the British Empire. To understand the actions of Brant, we have to look at the social structures of Iroquoia in the Revolutionary Era, which spans the period from the conclusion of Pontiac’s War in 1765 to the Jeffersonian Republic during the early 1800s. The foundations of Iroquoian culture were personal relationships among Iroquois peoples as well as intercultural interactions with British colonists. Essential to the formation of these relationships were Iroquois women. Warriors who hoped to become a village or council chief depended on clan mothers, the eldest and wisest women of a specific family clan, for their nomination to the position, while European outsiders sought marriages with Iroquois women in order to be accepted into Iroquois society. The actions of Brant exemplify the power associated with imperial and gender relationships in Iroquoia in the eighteenth century. This thesis will investigate Molly Brant’s life in a broad historical context in order to provide a better understanding for why she is an important figure in Early American history.

Molly Brant is not well known in the field of Early American or Native American history. Scholars often misrepresent Brant as a unique component of the lives of her husband Sir William Johnson, the British Indian Superintendent, and her younger brother Joseph Brant, who was a famous Mohawk war chief. In The Divided Ground, Alan Taylor examines the life of Joseph Brant to illustrate that “the Iroquois resolved to defend their independence by preserving their strategic position beside, rather than within the colonial settlements.” Taylor asserts that Joseph was instrumental in the initial efforts to establish a boundary that separated and protected “Indian country” from the encroachment of European colonists following the Revolutionary War. Joseph Brant was an influential figure in maintaining the intercultural relationships between the Six Nations and the British Empire, but Taylor underestimates the actions of Molly Brant in the Revolutionary Era. Although Molly was not actively participating in the fighting, her efforts to support an alliance with the British demonstrate the personal desire to preserve her way of life and land prior to the outbreak of the war. From 1778 to 1783, Molly Brant lived in several British forts urging Iroquois warriors and chiefs not to abandon the British due to the hope she could return to the Mohawk region of eastern Iroquoia. She exemplified the

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relationships cultivated between the two cultures that were founded on mutual dependence and suspicion with the Six Nations remaining politically independent. Molly Brant’s achievements parallel Joseph’s post war activities and were as important to the Iroquois movement to continue the earlier system of relationships.

A few biographical works illustrate the lack of understanding regarding the importance of Molly Brant in the Revolutionary Era. The general argument of these works is Brant was an exceptional example of Iroquois women in Early American history, and therefore must be historically important because she represented a deviation from the notion that Iroquois women’s lives generally went unrecorded by white male observers. Molly Brant does represent a counter example to the declension theory that the roles of Native women dramatically decreased due to the increasing interactions with Europeans. This interpretation, however, needs to be framed correctly within the power structures of relationships of Iroquoia. By focusing solely on the exceptional aspects of Molly Brant’s life such as public interaction with Cayengwaraghton, scholars misinterpret the cultural methods and practices that enabled Molly to become influential Indian figure during the Revolutionary War. In “Molly Brant: From Clan Mother to Loyalist Chief,” James Taylor Carson argues that the unique elements of Brant’s life such as her family lineage and marriage to Sir William Johnson, allowed her to create new social and political roles that illustrate her influence in maintaining the alliance between the British and Iroquois tribes.4 A concern about Carson’s biography is the idea that Molly Brant obtained power comparable to a chief due to the distribution of goods. No other historian classifies Brant as a kind of Iroquois chief. Iroquois chiefs utilized a distribution system of goods to establish a following within the tribe or clan, but there are few examples of women becoming a sachem in the Six Nations. Brant distributed gifts to the various warriors of the Six Nations to keep them allied with the British, but her actions represent the influence women had in supporting war as the producers of food. In the end, the lack of biographical works incorporating Iroquois cultural concepts within the interpretations means that our understanding of her life is incomplete.

In order to reframe the life of Molly Brant within the relationships of Iroquoia in the Revolutionary Era, the objectives of this thesis are connected to the theoretical discussions of identity and agency. Identity is not an inherent trait of people but rather a negotiation of processes within and outside the community. According to Rogers Brubaker and Frederick

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Cooper, “[identity] is used by ‘lay’ actors in some (not all!) everyday settings to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from others.” The construction of Brant’s identity is a complex process because her life incorporates the recovery of Iroquois gender roles and elements of the historical tropes associated with the cultural brokers or mediators. For the majority of the Revolutionary Era, Molly Brant lived her life as a cultural broker between the Six Nations and the British Empire. This specific identity was fundamental in the formation of her cultural power. Cultural power or authority refers to the social influence of women that “[was] determined within specific economic, political, and ceremonial practices of individual nations” within the context of identity negotiation. Iroquois women’s authority came from the daily tasks within Iroquois villages such as the yearly cultivation of crops and the ongoing responsibility of incorporating outsiders into Iroquois culture. Over the course of her life, Brant was able to expand her cultural power utilizing Iroquois gender customs and relationships with British colonists.

Through the use of Iroquois gender roles and maintaining the imperial relationships with the British Empire, Molly Brant became the most powerful Mohawk woman in the Revolutionary Era. British officers such as Captain Alex Fraser, the commanding officer of Carleton Island, perceived her actions in the Revolutionary War as an example of loyalty to the empire. Fraser’s attitude, which was similar to those of other British Indian agents that survived in written documents, limits the agency of Brant. She may have chosen to remain allied with the British due to a sense of love for the empire, but her boundless energy could have also been a method of manipulating the garrison officers. Molly Brant grew up in an era where all she knew about life was a relationship with the British. If signing all correspondence in the war with her English name and exuding an unwavering loyalty for the British Empire ensured a continuation of her lifestyle, then Molly Brant performed those roles brilliantly. This thesis will place more emphasis on Brant’s agency in the Revolutionary Era. Garrison officers including Captain Fraser, were often frustrated with Molly Brant as she tried to hold onto her specific lifestyle that was being destroyed by the colonial American Revolution. Their frustrations demonstrated a misunderstanding about how relationships operated in Iroquoia. In the Revolutionary War, she utilized the traditional Iroquois customs such as gift giving to keep Indian warriors loyal to the

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British crown. Her distribution of goods from the stores in Fort Niagara and Carleton Island during the Revolutionary War was so prolific that General Frederick Haldimand, the governor of the Province of Quebec, had to mediate conflicts that developed between Brant and post commanders. By reframing Molly Brant’s life into the discussions of relationships and identity, this thesis contributes to the current scholarship on Native Americans in Early American History.

Over the last forty years, the historiography of early American history has shifted with the publication of works written from the perspectives of Native Americans. Historians such as Francis Jennings challenged the archaic frontier interpretation that stated the gradual conquest of America was inevitable. Native American alliances and interactions with early European settlers illustrate that America developed through negotiation. The scholarly debate over Native American perspectives in Early American history divides into the “middle ground” and borderlands interpretations. This thesis expands Alan Taylor’s borderlands perspective with the inclusion of women into how Iroquois women combatted the American western ambitions in New York.\textsuperscript{7} An important element of this interpretation is the fact that the majority of North America in the eighteenth century was Native land. Juliana Barr argues that “questions posed in terms of sexual frontiers and cultural borderlands should not distort a vision of the continent divided into recognized Indian domains constituted and ruled by jurisdictions of male and female authority.”\textsuperscript{8} Rebel invasions into Iroquoia resulted in Iroquois men and women utilizing their separate cultural roles as warriors and food producers to protect their land. Molly Brant represents an exceptional example of women actively participating not only in Revolutionary War politics but also protection of Iroquois lands.

For non-Native scholars, research and writing history from Native American perspectives creates a unique set of challenges. Historical interpretations need to be framed within the context of Native American cultures to avoid objectifying Native peoples. According to Vine Deloria, the objectification process results in “the massive volume of useless knowledge produced by [scholars] attempting to capture real Indians in a network of theories has contributed

\textsuperscript{7} A borderland differs from Richard White’s middle ground interpretation due to the lack of a territory mutually created between Native Americans and Europeans. The borderland in colonial New York is a dynamic, contested boundary that shifts periodically depending on which culture claims dominion in the area through violence and or diplomacy. Taylor, \textit{Divided Ground}, 11-12.

\textsuperscript{8} Juliana Barr, “Red Continent and the Cant of the Coastline” \textit{The William and Mary Quarterly} 69, (July 2012): 525.
substantially to the invisibility of Indian people today.” The incorporation of Iroquois language concepts and the oral histories within the narrative helps avoid objectifying both Molly Brant and Iroquois women. Throughout the separate chapters of this thesis, Native peoples are referred to by their tribal affiliation such as Iroquois, Six or Five Nations, Mohawk, and personal names whenever applicable. The decision to introduce Brant as Degonwadonti first prior to revealing her English name represents my effort to frame this thesis within Iroquois culture from the very beginning. Indian is also a term for describing Iroquois peoples and other Native American tribes because early American history “still resounds with words drafted ages ago by people with an agenda, words that have been (and still can be) weapons.” Terms such as the Indians need to be avoided because the words signify the continuation of colonialism and the process of othering Native peoples by non-Native scholars. By integrating Iroquois language concepts and names, the narrative of Molly Brant shifts away from the Eurocentric perspective and connects her cultural authority within Iroquois culture.

With the objective to reframe the narrative of Molly Brant’s life within Iroquois culture, the lack of written sources on both Iroquois women and Brant requires examining sources once considered nontraditional. The challenge is that the historical methodologies focused on examining contemporary documents reveal only particular aspects about the lives of Molly Brant. The concern over the limited information presented in colonial documents places a greater emphasis on the incorporation of Iroquois creation stories into this thesis. Jennifer Denetdale explains that Native peoples not only view history from a different perspective but also recall history differently than non-Natives. The fundamental components of this perspective are the Iroquoian oral histories and creation stories that form the foundation for both cultural power and specific social roles. Through examining histories such as Sky Woman and the creation of the world, scholars can understand why Iroquois society was matrilineal. The belief that Sky Woman fell from heavens and gave birth to her daughter Mother Earth illustrates that Iroquois peoples believed women were the creators of all life. This social concept is why family lineages were traced through Iroquois mothers and the reason women were the farmers,

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instead of the men. Incorporating oral histories into the examination of Molly Brant shifts the basis for her cultural authority from exceptional characteristics to matrilineal concepts practiced within Iroquois society.

The emphasis placed on integrating Iroquois language concepts and oral histories requires the use of approaches from several academic disciplines. Ethnohistory, “the use of historical and ethnological methods and materials to gain knowledge of the nature and cause of change in a culture [or cultures] defined [ethnologically],” provides the methodology for reevaluating colonial sources for Native voices.¹³ An essential component of ethnohistory is the study of language and how this cultural element aids in constructing the identity of Native peoples. The use of ethnohistorical concepts allows for effective integration of both the written sources and Iroquois language concepts within Brant’s narrative. Although the lack of written sources creates a complex situation for research, the issue represents an opportunity to reframe Molly Brant within Iroquois culture through ethnohistorical methodologies.

The legend of Molly Brant often overshadows the importance of her actions. She was an exceptional example of an Iroquois woman in the late eighteenth century, but there was much more to her life. Brant represents not only the entangled network of relationships in Iroquoia but also the power associated within the gender and imperial interactions. To understand the formation of her cultural power and these relationships, this thesis will first examine Iroquois culture and the beginning of the political relationship with the British Empire. Molly Brant relied on a combination of established Iroquoian and European cultural customs to expand her personal power in the Revolutionary Era. Brant then refined her roles within the relationship networks prior to the outbreak of war living with Sir William Johnson at Johnson Hall. The culmination of her cultural influence occurred during the Revolutionary War with the decision to move to Fort Niagara and Carleton Island. Although the imperial civil war brought a dramatic increase in Molly Brant’s cultural power, the American victory symbolized the end of the relationship structure that empowered her. The United States government rejected the system of mutual dependence and sought to claim complete dominion over both the Six Nations and

¹³ Ethnohistory developed as historians sought interpretations that combined the methods of archaeology, anthropology, and elements of cultural history. James Axtell, “The Ethnohistory of Native America” in Rethinking American Indian History, ed. Donald L. Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 12.
Iroquois. In the end, reexamining Molly Brant through the world of relationships in eastern North America affirms that she was and remains an important figure in Early American history.
CHAPTER 1: SKY WOMAN AND IROQUOIS CULTURE

Before the creation of land, the Earth was divided into the realms of the Sky and Water Worlds. The country above the sky “was inhabited by Superior Beings, over whom the Great Spirit presided; his daughter having become pregnant by an illicit connection, he pulled up a great tree by the roots, and threw her through the Cavity.” Sky Woman fell through the darkness of the void towards the waters that covered the world. Before hitting the waters, she was saved by various birds that “caught her softly on their downy wings” and gently placed her upon the back of the Great Turtle. The animals realizing that Sky Woman was unhappy living on the bare turtle shell sought volunteers to dive beneath the waters to bring back earth from the ocean bottom. Several creatures including the beaver attempted the perilous dive, but died prior to returning to the surface. The muskrat was the last animal to try and “a long time after he [went] under the water, he was seen floating dead…on examining his feet, it was found that he [filled] them with the earth at the bottom.” Sky Woman and the rest of the animals spread the trace amount of mud over Great Turtle’s shell eventually forming an island known as Turtle Island, which later became Iroquoia. This story is a version of the Iroquois creation myth known as the tale of Sky Woman

Iroquois conceived their history and the formation of their culture through a series of oral histories and creation stories. The story of Sky Woman is one of the most important myths in Iroquois mythos due to description of how their homeland was created. This myth additionally details the gradual processes of how Iroquois peoples, plants, and animals came to inhabit Turtle Island. There is no single version of this narrative due to the oral traditions of story-tellers retelling and passing the creation stories to the next generation of Iroquois. According to William Fenton, “the myth of Earth-grasper, or more commonly the Woman who fell from the Sky, exists in some twenty-five versions which all adhere to the same general plot and contain

14 This version of the Sky Woman origin myth comes from the writings of Major John Norton or Teyoninhokarawen, the adopted nephew of Joseph Brant. He recorded what he referred to as the tradition of the Nottowegui, or Five Nations and the creation story told by an Onondaga chief. The majority of the myth comes from the former, but details such as the animal interactions are from the Onondaga account. Norton complied these versions in a detailed account of his personal travels among Iroquois and Cherokee nations in the late eighteenth century. His relationships with the Six Nations and the Brant family have led me to rely on his versions of the narrative of Sky Woman. Additional versions of the creation narrative will be incorporated in this chapter to include further details on Iroquois culture. John Norton, Carl Frederick Klinck, and James John Talman, *The Journal of Major John Norton, 1816* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1970), xxxvii, 88, 94.
most of the essential [motifs].” Examining the various elements of the narrative reveals fundamental concepts in Iroquois culture and why women were powerful figures in the relationships of Iroquoia.

As with other Native American descendants of the Early Woodland cultures, the structure of Iroquois society was matrilineal. Family lines and heritage were traced through women. This social system was the basis for the influence of Iroquois women. Gender roles provided additional methods for women to both garner and exercise influence in society. The most important duty of Iroquois women was farming. As the major food providers, women had a say in the politics of both the individual villages and entire Iroquois nations. An influential diplomatic role for women was the position of clan mother, or the head of a particular family lineage. Clan mothers held formal power with the ability to nominate chiefs and remove reckless leaders who endangered the clan. The nature of many Iroquois women’s political roles, however, remains unclear due to a scarcity of information on women’s councils. What is certain is that women participated in some form in councils including the Grand Council of the League of Peace, which united all Iroquois nations. Understanding the elements of Iroquois culture exemplified by the narrative of Sky Woman reveals how Molly Brant was successful in the Revolutionary Era. In the end, Molly Brant was an Iroquois woman and we cannot understand her without understanding Iroquois peoples.

To understand the matrilineal elements of Iroquois culture requires retelling the birth of Sky Woman’s daughter and her sons. Soon after the creation of land, Sky Woman gave birth to her daughter known as the Lynx. The two women lived together on Turtle Island for several years until Lynx reached the age of maturity. Animals in manly forms “made proposals of marriage for the young woman: the mother always rejected their offers until a middle aged man of a dignified appearance…paid his address.” After spending one night with her, the man, who was the Great Turtle in human form, left the Lynx’s dwelling never to return again, but Sky Woman’s daughter was pregnant with his children. She ultimately gave birth to twins “the eldest named Teharonghyawago, the Holder of Heaven [or Sapling], [and] the youngest was called

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15 There were oral myths similar to the Sky Woman story in other Native American cultures that were descendants of the Early Woodland cultures. The parallels in the creation story accounts do not negate the Iroquois cultural elements integrated within the accounts. William Fenton, “This Island, the World on the Turtle’s Back,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 75, 298 (Oct.-Dec., 1962): 285.
Tawiskaron, or Flint.” Lynx sadly died during childbirth because Flint exited her body through her side, instead of following the path of his brother. Sky Woman chose to bifurcate her daughter as “the head [was] buried in the ground, and her body she threw up above, where it lodged, taking up its abode in the moon.” Under the guidance of their Grandmother, the Twins grew into adult males, but chose different spiritual paths for their lives. Sapling became the Good Twin because he created an Earth inhabited by many forest animals and plentiful in vegetation such as corn. By continuously destroying the works of his older brother, Flint represented the other moiety in the world, evil. Following a lengthy battle between the siblings, Teharonghyawago defeated his younger brother and “made the aboriginal natives of America out of earth,” which was the creation of Iroquois people.17

The birth of Lynx mirrors the Iroquois matrilineal practices because her heritage and family lineage extended solely to Sky Woman. The Five Nations’ account of Sky Woman mentions the father of Lynx in relation to conception only. There was little reason to consider her father’s lineage because he remained in the country above the sky without any direct link to the creation of Turtle Island or the Iroquois people. Barbara Mann demonstrates that the creation story conveys the idea “the Earth was created for a woman, Sky Woman, [and] the Earth was a woman, the Lynx.”18 This central belief reveals why the structure of Iroquois society was matrilineal instead of the patrilineal practices of contemporary Europeans. Without women, the creation of Iroquois peoples and the lands inhabited by the Six Nations was not possible in mythology. As the reproducers of society, Iroquois women ensured the continuation of their people and cultural beliefs for future years. The practice of retelling the myths to younger generations, therefore, reaffirmed the belief that each Iroquois nation and individual could trace their heritage to Sky Woman through women.

Iroquois emphasis on matrilineal concepts created a society structured around the distinctive kinship networks of clans. Through the kinship networks, women acquired cultural power because Iroquois traced connection to the clan through the mother’s family line. The formation of the clan kinship networks began with the Iroquois matrilineal lineages known as an

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17 The final resting place of Lynx’s body and Sapling’s creation of Native Americans are elements in the Onondaga version. Norton, Journal of Major John Norton, 95-97.
18 Mann, Iroquois Women, 214.
Both immediate and extended family members of the ohwachira in practice traced blood descent to a common mother. An Iroquois clan “composed of two or more maternal families who behave as if members of each generation are indeed siblings.” Children referred the older generations of women in each family as mother and later grandmother because they were all responsible for the care of the younger generations. This social practice demonstrated that Iroquois clans were structured around a kinship network that incorporated fictive elements to Sky Woman and strong familial ties between the maternal lineages. In Iroquois society, there were a variety of clans each named after a specific animal found in and around Iroquoia. The three most well-known clan names were the Bear, the Wolf, and the Turtle. These clans were not regulated to a specific village or area of Iroquoia. The villages of each Iroquois nation comprised of ohwachiras representing all the clans whose kinship networks spread throughout the entirety of Iroquoia. Elizabeth Tooker asserts that the extensiveness of Iroquois kinship networks made tracing the lineage of a clan to a single mother nearly impossible. However, this issue does not diminish the cultural power of Iroquois women. Through the formation of the individual clans, the ohwachiras associated with each kinship group evolved into representations of family and cultural heritage traced through Iroquois women.

The matrilineal social structure ensured the roles associated with motherhood were sources of cultural power for women. As reproducers, women were responsible for the extension of the clan kinship network and impressing the cultural beliefs onto the children of the younger Iroquois generations. Iroquois women influenced which individuals became members of their clan through their decisions on the marriage proposals. Judith Brown reveals the “marriages were arranged by the mothers of the prospective couple,” and the women had the cultural power to nullify the proposal. In the Sky Woman myth, the suitors of Lynx experience this practice as her mother turns away all the men, except the human form of the Great Turtle. Iroquois emphasis on choosing the correct marriage for their children stemmed from the concept that the

21 Richter, Ordeal of the Longhouse, 21.
clans were exogamous in formation. This practice combatted incest and “dictated that husbands and wives be members not just of different lineages but of different clans.” Iroquois women were able to exercise this power within their clan kinship network because of their roles as the reproducers and mothers. Throughout the years of childhood, a child’s direct mother and the older generations of women in a clan helped raise all the children. Boys were not only taught agricultural practices but also Iroquois cultural beliefs by women until they reached an age old enough to go out on the yearly hunts with their fathers and uncles. The child rearing system gave women a powerful voice on the decisions regarding marriage and other social issues which men had to follow because all people came from women and their mothers were the parents who taught them initially about life. In the end, the matrilineal lineages incorporated in the clan kinship networks and the influence associated with the role of the reproducer formed the basis of Iroquois women’s cultural power.

In addition to the matrilineal social structure, Iroquois divided society into two realms with men and women separately claiming dominion over one. The first known as “the clearing” consisted of the longhouses, village, and the fields surrounding the village, which was controlled by women. Men were responsible for matters pertaining to “the forest,” which was anything outside the jurisdiction of women. This system was a reflection of the concept of universal and social balance exhibited by the moiety of the Twins in the narrative of Sky Woman. Each realm assigned specific gender roles ensuring that both men and women held an equal amount of social power. There was no sense of competition between the two realms because the overall objective for both was the prosperity of the village and the entire nation. The most influential role for women in the clearing was the seasonal task of farming. Iroquois women were the farmers due to their link to Sky Woman. As Sky Woman fell into the hole underneath the Great Tree, she frantically grabbed at the roots and edges of the hole. She was unable to stop her fall, but “between her fingers there clung bits of things that were growing on the floor of the Sky-World and bits of the root tips of the Great Tree.” Sky Woman later planted the tips of the roots in the mud that was spread over the Turtle’s back, which formed the initial vegetation of Earth.

most important plants brought to Iroquoia by Sky Woman were the stables of Iroquois diet corn, beans, and squash collectively referred to as “The Three Sisters.” Iroquois women’s cultivation of the Three Sisters continued the legacy of Sky Woman, which was an additional source of cultural power.

As farmers, Iroquois women’s primary responsibility was overseeing the essential food production processes of planting and harvesting crops necessary to sustain life in the village. During these important seasons, all Iroquois women worked together moving from one field to the next with younger generations learning from their elders. European men viewed Iroquois farming techniques as barbaric and a form of slavery due to the reliance on the efforts of women. This trope, however, was inaccurate because planting and harvesting were seasonal events. The remainder of the year women spent maintaining the other components of the clearing. According to Mary Jemison, “labor was not severe; and that of one year was exactly similar, in almost every respect to that of the others, without that endless variety that is to be observed in the common labor of the white people.” The size and number of cornfields growing in Iroquoia actually demonstrated the success of Iroquois women. In his description of the village Tyoghnekanoght, Major John Norton stated it was “the most flourishing village of any of the Five Nations” because “their cornfields are extensive.” To ensure the cornfields produced high yields of crops, Iroquois women closely observed the overall state of the soil surrounding the village. When it was determined the soil was depleted of its nutrients, women called for the movement of the entire village and chose the next location for the village. The move allowed Iroquois men to participate in the agriculture processes because their role was to clear the forest in order to prepare the area for the new clearing. Iroquois men’s lack of participation illustrated that their economic contributions were secondary to the food production of women, but their

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28 According to Parker, the Three Sisters were called O-nes-tah or “sustainers of life.” Everett Parker, The Secret of No Face: An Irookwa Epic by Chief Everett Parker and Oledoska (Healdsburg, CA: Native American Publishing Co., 1972), 5, 19.
29 Kelsay, Joseph Brant, 31.
tasks were still valued due to the division of society.\textsuperscript{33} Through the various agricultural processes and tasks, Iroquois women exercised their cultural power in a political manner.

Iroquois women’s dominion over the clearing meant that the task of food distribution was the responsibility of females. Distribution of food and gift-giving were staples in Iroquois culture. These practices “embodied less a communal ethic than a sort of upside-down capitalism, in which the aim was, not to accumulate goods, but to be in a position to provide them to others.”\textsuperscript{34} Iroquois war chiefs utilized these principles to form a loyal following within the village in order better exert their authority on matters in the realm of the forest. Iroquois clan mothers, the female figureheads of the ohwachiras, were the women chosen to oversee food distribution. This task applied not only to individual villages but also entire Iroquois nations. In times of war, clan mothers provided “warriors with provisions when they go abroad.”\textsuperscript{35} There was, however, one stipulation with the process of food distribution. Clan mothers had the power to withhold the supplies required by warriors if they believed the reasoning behind the fighting was unwarranted. Iroquois warriors and war chiefs respected the wishes of the clan mothers or risked losing status within society due to a lack of goods to distribute. The role of food provider coupled with the matrilineal social structure enabled Iroquois women to have a formal role in politics.

Eighteenth-century British diplomats collectively referred to Iroquois as the Six Nations. Iroquois peoples, however, called themselves Handenosannee or “The People of the Completed Longhouse.”\textsuperscript{36} Both names referred to a ceremonial structure utilized by Iroquois leaders to keep the Six Nations peacefully united together. This system was known as the League of Peace. The League was first established in the fifteenth or sixteenth century by the famous sachems Hiawatha and Dekanawidah.\textsuperscript{37} Hiawatha conceptualized the League of Peace as a response to the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Gretchen Green, "Molly Brant, Catharine Brant, and their Daughters: A Study in Colonial Acculturation." \textit{Ontario History} 81, 3 (September 1989): 236.
\item Richter, \textit{Ordeal of the Longhouse}, 22.
\item Mann, \textit{Iroquois Women}, 17.
\item Hiawatha was Onondaga and Dekanawidah was Canienga, which was another name for Mohawk. Hiawatha’s ideas for a League of Peace initially failed in his own community and the first Iroquois settlements he initially enlisted to help him establish the League. Only with the aid of Dekanawidah was he successful in establishing the idea in the rest of the Five Nations prior to enlisting the support of Onondaga sachems. Horatio Hale, \textit{The Iroquois Book of Rites} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 25; Elizabeth Tooker, “The League of the Iroquois: Its History, Politics and Ritual” in \textit{Handbook}}
infighting between the Five Nations and ongoing threat of Native American enemies. He hoped to form an alliance based on a peace that eliminated violence between Iroquois nations in order to bind together against common enemies. There was an important difference between the League of Peace and the Iroquois Confederacy. The League’s purpose was “largely religious rather than political, its role was to preserve the Great Peace through ceremonial Words of Condolence and exchanges of ritual gifts.”

The central feature of Hiawatha and Dekanawidah’s League of Peace was the Grand Council. This influential council initially consisted of “fifty Sachems from the clans of major villages of the Five Nations…divided into two moieties—the elder composed of Mohawks, Ononodagas, and Senecas and the younger of Oniedas and Cayugas.” Hiawatha envisioned the efforts of the Grand Council as expansive in nature. The incorporation of other Native peoples into the League of Peace ensured the spread of peace, instead of continual violence. Following the establishment of the League, the Five Nations integrated many other eastern Native peoples into their culture, but Tuscaroras emerged as the most important nation. In 1713, Tuscarora peoples were displaced from their homes in North Carolina following the conclusion of the Tuscarora War. After the move north to Iroquoia, sachems from Tuscarora clans were included in the Grand Council, which formed the Six Nations of the Iroquois. Although Iroquois men were the figureheads of the League of Peace, clan mothers were essential figures in the ceremonial operations of the Grand Council.

League sachems were powerful leaders, but the appointment to the Grand Council was dependent on the authority of clan mothers. The titles of League sachems were traced through the matrilineal family lineages. In the situations when an individual sachem died or needed to be replaced on the Grand Council, clan mothers nominated a man from the clan to replace the previous title holder. This process illustrated a component of the formal political power Iroquois women exercised. Clan mothers also participated in the Grand Council ceremonies and voiced their opinions to the sachems, though, in an indirect manner. In order to maintain the


Richter, Ordeal of the Longhouse, 40.
Richter, Ordeal of the Longhouse, 39.
Richter, Ordeal of the Longhouse, 39.
social political balance of Iroquois culture, there were separate councils for men and women. An important characteristic of the balance of power was neither sex directly voiced their concerns in the other’s council. There is a lack of information on the inner operations of women’s councils because European men often overlooked the political roles of Iroquois women in their observations of Iroquois culture. An important component that Europeans recorded was the method used by Iroquois women to voice their complaints or opinions to the Grand Council. Clan mothers utilized male orators to ensure the Grand Council was aware of Iroquois women’s opinions on the matters being discussed. As with League sachems, these orators were chosen by clan mothers and only kept their position if their actions met the approval of the women they represented. The famous Seneca chief Red Jacket was the most well-known spokesmen for Iroquois women in the Revolutionary Era. Iroquois clan mothers’ success in helping maintain the League of Peace enabled the Six Nations to form a famous intercultural alliance known as the Covenant Chain.

Beginning in the late seventeenth century, the Five Nations emerged as the most powerful group of Native peoples in eastern North America. Iroquois sachems formed the Covenant Chain with Edmund Andros who was the English governor of New York. The earlier formation of the League of Peace established the Five Nations as a dominant group, and the Covenant Chain with the English further enhanced their status. This alliance was established through a series of signed treaties, but the interactions between the two cultures were defined by Iroquois customs. The foundations of the Covenant Chain were the ceremonial rituals of reciprocity and gift-giving from the League of Peace. In order to maintain and benefit from the alliance, English diplomats were required not only to learn but also respect Iroquois customs. The longevity of the alliance suggests that the English adapted to Iroquois customs rather well. Colonial diplomats could not afford to damage relations with the Six Nations due to the fear of losing a component of political power in North America. The famous alliance represented a power shift in colonial Native American diplomacy because the Covenant Chain took precedence

42 Kelsay, Joseph Brant, 32.
43 Davis, “Iroquois Women, European Women,” 94.
over the alliances the Five Nations made with other colonies, making New York central to policies regarding Iroquois peoples. This power shift was significant for Andros and later the British Empire because colonial officials utilized the alliance to claim British dominion over western territories including the Ohio Country. Iroquois peoples also benefitted immensely from the new alliance with Andros. The Five Nations gained access to desirable trade goods such as firearms and the promise that English, later the British, would protect Iroquois nations from their Native enemies.

No Iroquois nation benefitted more from the Covenant Chain than the guardians of the eastern door of the Iroquois Confederacy who called themselves Ganienkeh, or “the people of the flint.” This group of Iroquois people was better known by the name Mohawk. As the most eastern Iroquois nation, Mohawk sachems interacted with English traders and colonial officials more regularly than the rest of the Six Nations. The early interactions between the English colonists and Mohawks influenced the diplomatic system implemented by Sir William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Northern District. Johnson firmly believed “[Mohawks] swayed the Six Nations confederacy, which, in turn, dominated a chain of Indian relationships that reached north into Canada and west into the Ohio Valley…please the Mohawks and you could control the continent, so he argued.” To ensure the actions of the Six Nations coincided with British policies, Johnson formed relationships with influential sachems such as “King” Hendrick and distributed gifts to Mohawk leaders to keep them satisfied with the British Empire. This system established a privileged status for Mohawks in the Iroquois Confederacy until the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. In the end, the Covenant Chain became a cultural institution for all the Six Nations, but Mohawks benefitted slightly more from their relationship to Sir William Johnson.

Molly Brant’s actions in the Revolutionary Era distinguished her from other Mohawk women. The explanations for her success often overlook the significance that she was first and

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45 Richter, Ordeal of the Longhouse, 136.
46 The eastern door referred to the image of an Iroquois Longhouse symbolizing the structure of the Confederacy. Ganienkeh, or Kanyę?kehá•ka, villages were the most eastern settlements of the Five Nations, and therefore were the keepers of the eastern door of the Longhouse. Kelsay, Joseph Brant, 3; Richter, Ordeal of the Longhouse, 1; William Fenton and Elizabeth Tooker, “Mohawk” in Handbook of North American Indians Volume 15: Northeast, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 478.
47 Taylor, Divided Ground, 45.
foremost an Iroquois woman. Understanding how Brant was able to establish her influential relationships requires the examination of fundamental concepts of Iroquoian culture. An important component of this process is the incorporation and analysis of creations myths. Women’s connection to Sky Woman formed the basis of their cultural authority, but the roles associated with the realm of “the clearing” enabled women to exercise their influence in a variety of manners. Through the positions of clan mother and food provider, Iroquois women obtained formal political power in village councils and the Grand Council of the League of Peace. The responsibilities of clan mothers were essential not only to the operations of Grand Council but also the continuation of the ceremonial structure into the Revolutionary Era. Following the formation of the Covenant Chain with the English, the Iroquois Confederacy emerged as the most powerful groups of Native Americans in eastern North America. The interactions with European colonists altered aspects of Iroquoian culture, but women maintained their cultural power as colonial diplomats attempted to supplant their authority with European concepts. In the end, Molly Brant was born into a world of complex relationships and sought to use those cultural customs to her advantage.
CHAPTER 2: FAMILY TIES AND LIFE AT JOHNSON HALL

During the Revolutionary Era, Molly Brant lived her life within two cultural worlds and exerted substantial influence in both. Brant’s parents raised her within Iroquois culture but her personal relationship with Sir William Johnson placed her within the English colony of New York. With her relationship to the British Indian Superintendent, Molly Brant expanded her role from that of a Mohawk woman to one of the major cultural brokers in eastern North America. The concept of cultural brokerage implies a multitude of historical connotations because “brokerage is represented as a creative act that enhances identity or as a marginalization process that alienates the broker from his or her cultural roots.”

Representational practices of the latter process established the historical trope of a Native woman aiding a European man to achieve his purposes. This interpretation does not apply to the life and actions of Molly Brant. She utilized her role as a cultural broker to enhance her standing within the Mohawk Nation and among the Iroquois allies of the British Empire during the Revolutionary War. As a cultural broker, Molly Brant’s cultural power emerged as a blend of both Iroquoian and European social customs.

The formation of Molly Brant’s influence was a gradual process that began decades prior to the Revolutionary War. The initial foundation of her influence lay within Iroquois society. Her familiar relationships to Iroquois sachems and British officials, however, gave her a unique standing among Mohawk women. Brant’s Mohawk lineage remains contested. Scholars debate whether she was a descendent of the famous sachem “King” Hendrick. If true, her family lineage placed Brant in the upper echelon of Mohawk and English societies, and enabled her to garner her famed influence. Few dispute that Molly Brant was the stepdaughter of a Canajoharie sachem named Brant Canagaraduncka. However, her relationship to Brant further complicated her cultural power because of Iroquois matrilineal social practices.

The role of cultural broker also provided Molly Brant opportunities that were not available to other Iroquois women. Her experiences do not imply that role of a cultural broker was limited to an individual of Brant’s personal charisma. Iroquois women were responsible for adopting outsiders such as other Native peoples and European traders into their society.

The difference was that Molly Brant formed a partnership founded on Iroquois concepts of marriage with Sir William Johnson. Her relationship with Johnson enabled her to create new political and

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49 Richter, Ordeal of the Longhouse, 33.
economic roles that became the foundation of her cultural power. Common European roles such as a housekeeper and hostess were integrated within Iroquois traditions of goods distribution. Molly Brant, therefore, had unprecedented opportunities. Although Molly Brant’s early life remains uncertain, her Iroquois heritage and her daily roles at Johnson Hall were the foundations for her powerful relationships in the Revolutionary Era.

Because of Iroquois emphasis on matrilineal lineages, establishing Molly Brant’s family heritage provides insight into the basis of her cultural power. She was the daughter of Margaret and either Peter Tehonwaghkwangeraghkwa or a man named Cannassware from the Mohawk village called Canajoharie or the Upper Castle, which was in Herkimer County, New York. Isabel Kelsay asserts that Molly Brant’s parents were people of no particular political or social influence within the Mohawk nation.50 Iroquois society was not constructed on egalitarian beliefs. There was a social hierarchy associated with the individual clans in each Iroquois village, which meant social and political benefits for the families of the elite clan kinship networks. A result of this “aristocracy-ridden society [was] the women of non-noble families could attain nothing of position or power, and their offspring inherited their mother’s nothingness.”51

Kelsay’s interpretation of Brant’s humble family heritage conflicts with the concept that matrilineal lineages transferred cultural power to the next generation within Iroquois clan kinship networks and society. If Margaret was not a significant Mohawk or member of an influential clan, then Molly Brant’s cultural power never exceeded the influence of a common Iroquois woman. The matrilineal practices and structure of Iroquois society ensured that Brant exerted more influence than her European contemporaries, but nothing resembling the cultural power that permitted her actions during the Revolutionary War.

50 The distinction between which man is considered Molly Brant’s father depends on the date of her birth. Brant stated that she was born in 1736, but there are no records of her baptism in Henry Barclay’s Fort Hunter Register during that year. On April 13, 1735, there was a baptism for a girl named Mary who was the daughter of Cannassware and Margaret. If this Mary was the later famed Molly Brant, then she was the older half sister of Joseph. For this thesis, Peter will be referred to as Molly’s father. Although there is no certainty over who was the actual father of Molly, historians agree that her mother was named Margaret. Henry Barclay, Register of Baptisms, Marriages, Communicants, and Funerals begun by Henry Barclay at Fort Hunter, January 26, 1734-1735: Register Book, Fort Hunter, 1734 (Albany, NY: New York State Library, 1919) in Kelsay, Joseph Brant, 40.
51 Kelsay, Joseph Brant, 32.
Molly Brant’s humble origins within the Mohawk tribe meant that her later ability to sway the decisions of Six Nations leaders should not have been possible if Iroquois peoples strictly adhered to their cultural practices. Her unusual acquisition of influence among the Six Nations represented a contradiction of the importance of the matrilineal lineages and perhaps support for the proof that family heritages did not always dictate cultural power in daily interactions within Iroquoian society. Molly Brant’s dramatic social ascension during the Revolutionary Era resembles the opportunities available to Iroquois warriors who led war bands. Through battle exploits and establishing a fictive kinship network with his fellow warriors, a war chief could increase his personal standing in Iroquois society and the Six Nations. The fact that she was an Iroquois woman meant her rise in society could not be connected with valor in battle because women were not warriors. Examining the family heritage of her mother Margaret reveals the source of Molly Brant’s unusual cultural power.

Contemporary colonial figures who interacted with the Brant family provide other accounts regarding Molly Brant’s cultural heritage and power during the Revolutionary Era. Eleazar Wheelock who taught Joseph Brant at his Indian Mission school, stated that the Joseph was “of a Family of Distinction in [the Mohawk] Nation.” This description is the basis for the counterargument that Molly was a significant woman in Canajoharie due to the matrilineal lineages of her mother Margaret. In the end, Isabel Thompson’s argument that Molly Brant’s family lineage consisted of humble origins remains uncertain due to conflicting accounts from colonial contemporaries.

The writings of colonial figures such as Wheelock resulted in a reoccurring theory that Molly Brant’s heritage and her unusual cultural power was due to her being a direct descendent or even the granddaughter of the Mohawk leader “King” Hendrick. Hendrick gained fame among the Mohawk and English as one of the four sachems or “kings” who visited the English court of Queen Ann in 1710. Molly Brant’s possible ties to Hendrick demonstrate the

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52 Taylor, Divided Ground, 20.
54 Hendrick’s Mohawk name was Theyanoguin, but was presented to the English court as Tee Yee Neen Ho Ga Row, or the Emperor of the Six Nations, which was an exaggeration of his personal status as a younger Mohawk sachem. Eric Hinderaker, “The “Four Kings” and the Imaginative Construction of the First British Empire,” The William and Mary Quarterly 53, 3, (July 1996): 490.
formation of her cultural power through the Iroquois matrilineal customs. According to Jean Johnston, Margaret was the sister of “Nickus or Nicholas Brant [a Mohawk sachem from Canajoharie]…[who was] the son of the great Hendrick.”  As the both the offspring and sibling of two Iroquois sachems, Margaret’s family heritage provided her children with the exceptional cultural power commonly associated with both Molly and Joseph Brant. Molly’s potential influence among the Mohawk differed slightly from her grandfather’s power because matrilineal customs only transferred the influence associated with his wife’s clan, which remains obscured in the past. The lack of knowledge about her grandmother’s clan creates uncertainties about Molly Brant’s cultural power as a descendant of an Iroquois sachem. But the direct connection to Hendrick’s kinship network meant she probably was a significant woman in the Mohawk Nation. However, the relationship to Hendrick was only one possible connection to the four Iroquois sachems that traveled to England. Brant may have also been related to a Mohawk named Kryn from Canajoharie. These exceptional familial relationships, regardless of which man may have been the grandfather of Molly Brant, support the counter theory that she was indeed a significant figure among the Mohawks through her mother’s lineage. Although there are several theories regarding the cultural power associated with the family heritage of Molly Brant, there is little debate about how she became a known as a Brant.

Before the outbreak of the Seven Years War, Molly Brant’s family life experienced a transformation that altered the entire family’s standing among other Mohawks. Her parents decided to move away from the eastern territories of Iroquoia to live out west in the Ohio Country. A few years after settling near the Cuyahoga River, Molly’s father Peter passed away during an epidemic outbreak. Margaret returned to her home village of Canajoharie. Peter Tehonwaghkwangeraghkwa’s death represented a significant moment in Molly’s young life because Margaret needed the support of another husband to help provide for her two young children. The man who eventually became her next husband not only reveals the origins of cultural power later associated with Molly Brant but also the exceptional elements of her influence.

56 This name may refer to one of the other two Mohawks called John or Oh Nee Yearth Tow No Riow, which meant King of Canajoharie. Jean Johnston, “Molly Brant: Mohawk Matron,” *Ontario History* 56, 2, (June 1964): 107; Hinderaker, “The Four Indian Kings,” 490.
57 Kelsay, *Joseph Brant*, 43.
On September 9, 1753, Margaret married a man named Brant Canagaraduncka a Mohawk sachem from the Mohawk village near Fort Hunter. Following their marriage ceremony, Brant adopted both Molly and Joseph becoming their stepfather and giving them his last name. This event was the first time the personal cultural power of Molly Brant was directly linked to a Mohawk sachem. Although the family lineage of Margaret remains questionable due to the conflicting accounts, the adoption by her stepfather provided Molly a different form of influence among the Mohawks. Alan Taylor reveals that “Brant Canagaraduncka was the sachem of the Turtle clan whose women chose Canajoharie’s most prestigious chief: the Tekarihoga, [which means] Molly belonged to the maternal power brokers of Canajoharie.” By being adopted by her stepfather, she not only belonged to a significant clan kinship but also acquired the important role of deciding who was the next sachem.

The personal relationship to Brant was the foundation of Molly Brant’s unusual influence during the Revolutionary Era. This familial connection represents an exceptional formation of an Iroquois woman’s cultural power because the influence came from the father’s clan. But the relationship incorporates aspects of the matrilineal customs through Margaret’s marriage to Brant. In the end, the power associated with Molly Brant’s identity as a cultural broker consisted of the matrilineal practices reflected in the oral myths and her contested family heritage.

Through the relationship with her stepfather Brant Canagaraduncka, Molly Brant’s cultural power expanded beyond the borders of Iroquoia to colonial New York. Her social ascension provided Molly an opportunity to expand her cultural power in a manner unavailable to other Iroquois women: a partnership with the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs Sir William Johnson. Their union increased her cultural power due to Johnson’s political and trade interactions with the Six Nation sachems. A complex element of Sir William Johnson and Molly Brant’s union was whether they were actually married. Johnson referred to her as only as his housekeeper, never his wife. However, the nature of their relationship and his legacy to Molly Brant suggest a consensual union. What mattered most was the Six Nations considered their relationship a marriage, providing both with unparalleled power. Unlike other cultural brokers, Brant was not marginalized from the cultural influence of her Iroquois heritage. She maintained

58 Fort Hunter was also known as the Lower Mohawk Castle or Tiononderroge meaning “Junction of Two Waterways. This village was located thirty miles south along the Mohawk River from Canajoharie. Fenton and Tooker, “Mohawk,” 466; Kelsay, Joseph Brant, 53.
59 Taylor, Divided Ground, 48.
a direct link to the matrilineal lineages of Canajoharie by keeping the name Brant. Although the formality of Molly Brant’s marriage was uncertain, her partnership with Sir William Johnson established her role as a cultural broker and further enhanced her cultural power.

According to legend, Molly Brant and Sir William Johnson first met at a British militia drill demonstration near Canajoharie in the early 1750s. She was initially a spectator, but asked an officer for permission to join him on horseback as he galloped around the field. Although the officer doubted the young Mohawk girl could climb onto the steed, he said yes to her request. Brant “leaped upon the crupper with the agility of a gazelle…the horse sprang off at full speed and clinging to the officer, her blanket flying, and her dark tresses streaming in the wind, she flew around the parade ground swift as an arrow.”

Brant’s adventurous and carefree attitude caught the attention of Sir William Johnson; he became so infatuated with her that he invited young Molly Brant back to his house at Fort Johnson.

Although this romantic account of their first encounter may have occurred, Johnson had been well aware of Molly Brant for several years because of her stepfather. With Mohawks living in the eastern regions closest to the British colonies, Johnson relied on sound relationships with the sachems of Canajoharie to aid his interactions with the rest of the Six Nations. This emphasis on a strong affiliation with the Mohawks stemmed from his personal belief that Mohawks were the most important nation because their leaders held sway over the rest of the Six Nations. When William Johnson traveled throughout the Mohawk Nation, he commonly stayed in the homes of Brant Canagaraduncka and Nickus Brant; they were his greatest allies within the Mohawk nation. These diplomatic visits enabled Johnson to become acquainted with Molly Brant because she lived with her stepfather and mother. However, a potential partnership was

60 Stone does not mention the date of the militia demonstration, but he does note that Molly was sixteen years old. By using the dates associated with Molly’s birth, we can conclude that this romantic encounter occurred in the early 1750s. William L. Stone, The Life and Times of Sir William Johnson, Bart. Volume I (Albany: J. Munsell, 1865), 328.

61 Fort Johnson was not a reference to a British garrison. This was the common name for William Johnson’s mansion that he built along the Mohawk River near the town of Amsterdam, NY in the 1740s. He built a three-story house out of stone that included portholes and several small gun mounts in the design for defense against a possible attack by the French or their Indian allies. Papers Relating to the Oneida Country and Mohawk Valley, 1756, 1757, E. B. O’ Callaghan, The Documentary History of the State of New York: Volume 1 (Albany: Weeds, Parsons & Co, 1850), 342.
not possible because Sir William Johnson was already married to a European woman named Catherine Weisenberg.  

There is very little information on Catherine, Johnson’s first and only wife in the Revolutionary Era. The facts known about her not only form a parallel to his initial relationship with Molly Brant but also reveal why Sir William craved a partnership with Brant Canagaraduncka’s stepdaughter. Catherine was a German indentured servant who ran away from her master in New York City to live among the Palatines in the borderland areas of the colony. There appears to be no romanticized story about how she met Johnson, but they probably met near Fort Johnson during her travels west. Similar to Molly Brant, Catherine was about half the age of William Johnson when they initially developed their relationship and gave birth to their first child within a year of living together. Catherine had three children named Ann (who was commonly known as Nancy), John, and Mary (later known as Polly). Her children later became instrumental in the formation of the British Indian department in the Revolutionary Era. John Johnson became the Indian commissioner after a successful fighting career in the Revolutionary War, Nancy married an important Indian agent named Daniel Claus, and Polly married Sir William’s nephew Guy Johnson who succeeded his uncle as the Indian Superintendent of the Northern District. William Johnson recognized all of his offspring as his own, but there was a legal difference between Catherine’s three children and the “natural children” of Molly Brant. This social distinction correlates with the type of relationship each woman formed with Johnson.

In his will, William Johnson recognized Catherine as his English common law wife. He referred to her as his “beloved wife” and stated her last name was Johnson, instead of Weisenberg. The complexities of their marriage and contemporary law illustrate why William Johnson never stated Molly Brant was his legal wife. The concept of a legal marriage changed in

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63 Catherine’s master was Captain Richard Langdon. In a New York Weekly Journal advertisement about her disappearance, he describes Catherine as a seventeen year old, middle statured, slender, black eyed, with a brown complexion, and speaks good English. Langdon offered a twenty-schilling reward for anyone able to return her to New York City. Milton W. Hamilton, Sir William Johnson: Colonial American, 1715-1763 (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press National University Publications, 1976), 33.
England in the Revolutionary Era with the Marriage Acts of 1753. This act required “that every marriage be preceded by the calling of banns or by the parties obtaining a license,” the marriage ceremony “should take place in one of the Parish Churches or Chapels where such banns have been published,” and recording the marriage in the parish register.\footnote{Rebecca Probert, \textit{Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 222, 228-229.} Johnson decided to marry Catherine in 1759, which was nearly fifteen years after the birth of their third child Polly. This decision coincided with the deterioration of Catherine’s health; an illness left her bed ridden for the last months of her life.\footnote{Hamilton, \textit{Sir William Johnson: Colonial American}, 304} As her illness and health worsened, William Johnson had the local clergy perform an Anglican ceremony on her deathbed.

Johnson needed to marry Catherine in order to legitimize John Johnson as his heir to his estate in New York.\footnote{Milton Hamilton, “Sir William Johnson’s Wives,” \textit{New York History}, 38: 1 (January 1957), 24.} This ensured that British authorities later transmitted his titles to his son, which ensured his family’s legacy. Sir William and Catherine’s marriage failed to meet all the criteria of the Marriage Act. But the act of registering their marriage illustrated his desire to form a legal marriage. An English common law marriage to Molly Brant not only failed to ensure his Baronet title transferred to John Johnson but also risked damaging Johnson’s reputation as an Englishmen.

A possible alternative explanation is that William Johnson was protecting certain elements of Molly Brant’s cultural power. Molly maintained “her status in the matriarchal order of Iroquois [society]” because she “[kept] her matronymic of Brant.”\footnote{Jean Johnston, “Molly Brant: Mohawk Matron,” 119.} Taking Johnson’s name represented a full emersion in English culture with the loss of her powerful identity as an Iroquois woman and cultural broker. Although Catherine provided William Johnson with a male heir, her social status as an indentured servant was not advantageous for his diplomatic position.\footnote{William Johnson may have believed Catherine was beneath his social status because she was a runaway indentured servant. Green, "Molly Brant, Catharine Brant, and their Daughters,” 237.} She was of no particular importance nor did she have any relations to the Six Nations. Johnson needed a wife or partner who further legitimized his relationship among his Iroquois allies. Molly Brant was the perfect woman for his next partnership.

The relationship between Molly Brant and her future husband developed through her role as Sir William Johnson’s housekeeper. In the spring of 1759, Molly moved into Johnson’s home
to care for Catherine, who eventually died months later from her illness.\textsuperscript{71} Catherine’s death marked a transition in the relationship of Molly Brant and Sir William Johnson. Their personal relationship evolved into a highly public union that resembled a consensual partnership more than interactions between a mistress or housekeeper and her patriarch. This kind of union between a white male and a Native American woman was not uncommon in the areas around Iroquoia. In the Great Lakes region, “Indian communities successfully incorporated European traders as well as other strangers, and even enemies, through intermarriage.”\textsuperscript{72} Similar to Molly Brant, Native American women who married French traders remained in their own culture, but each partner mutually benefitted from their intercultural union. The European men gained access to furs or political connections off limits to outsiders and Native women became intermediaries in the exchange process of European goods.

Sir William Johnson’s decision to pursue a union with Molly correlated with a desire to increase his personal influence among the Six Nations’ sachems. He was an outsider, but “knew that women govern the politics of [Iroquois nations] and therefore always kept up a good understanding with the Brown ladies from Canajoharie.”\textsuperscript{73} A union with Molly integrated Johnson’s colonial power within the matrilineal lineages of her stepfather’s influential turtle clan due to Iroquois women’s control of adoption into the kinship networks. This gave him a more powerful voice in treaty councils. He was directly linked to the influence of Brant Canagaraduncka and Nickus Brant through family ties. Molly Brant’s desire for a more formal relationship with Sir William Johnson coincided with his colonial position. As the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, he had the important task of distributing gifts to Iroquois leaders. The alliance between the British Empire and the Six Nations required constant personal interactions centered on trade items desired by and tailored to Iroquois standards.\textsuperscript{74} Through a partnership with Johnson, Molly Brant obtained access to a substantial supply of trade goods that

\textsuperscript{71} When Molly Brant moved into Fort Johnson, she was twenty-three years old and William Johnson was forty-four years old. She gave birth to their first son Peter only months after Catherine’s death. Thomas, \textit{Three Faces of Molly Brant}, 31.

\textsuperscript{72} The unions between the French fur traders and Native American women later became known as metis marriages, which was the name of their mix-heritage descendants. Susan Sleeper-Smith, \textit{Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 4.

\textsuperscript{73} S.A. Harrison, ed., \textit{Memoirs of Lieutenant Colonel Tench Tilghman, Secretary and Aid to Washington Together with An Appendix Containing Revolutionary Journals and Letters, Hitherto Unpublished.} (New York: Albany, 1876), 82.

\textsuperscript{74} Richter, \textit{Ordeal of the Longhouse}, 84.
she could distribute to enhance her cultural power in Iroquois society. This distribution network of trade goods later became the foundation of her various relationships at Johnson Hall. Her relationship with Johnson also enhanced the influence associated with her heritage within the society of Canajoharie. Molly Brant was now the stepdaughter of a Mohawk sachem and the partner of Sir William Johnson; together they gave her an unequalled form of cultural power.

During the Revolutionary Era, Molly Brant’s relationship with Sir William Johnson was a significant component of her cultural power, although historians question whether the famous partnership constituted an actual marriage. Johnson could not refer to their relationship as a legal English marriage and referred to Brant only as his “Prudent and faithful housekeeper.” A common perception of their union, however, was that it resembled a consensual partnership. There are accounts that Molly Brant and Sir William were wed either in a Mohawk ceremony or “according to the rites of the Episcopal Church, but a few years before his death.” If there was an actual wedding ceremony at a church, the records have been lost. The lack of any written notes on a Mohawk ritual correlates with Iroquois rituals because there was no definitive ceremony. When an Iroquois man found a potential suitor, he “[sent] a present to her mother or parents, who on receiving it consult[ed] with his parents, his friends and each other, on the propriety and expediency of the proposed connection.” Once the woman’s family accepted the suitor’s gift, the man was allowed to move in with his new wife. With Sir William Johnson’s personal knowledge of Iroquois customs, he probably gave Brant Canagaraduncka and Margaret a gift as Molly became more significant in his life and politics. A difference in the ritual was that Molly Brant moved into her husband’s house, and the Mohawks also gave Johnson a gift consisting of “80,000 acres of land on the north shore of the Mohawk [River].” These events are unusual, but the exchange of gifts within a year of Brant moving in as the housekeeper demonstrates a form of an Iroquois marriage. The recognition of their partnership as a marriage in Iroquois society mattered most to Molly Brant and Sir William Johnson. They both benefitted not only from an increase in power but also a dramatic increase in property. Although William

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77 Seaver, and Vail. A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison, 171.
78 This massive land deal was given to Johnson on December 22, 1760, which was a little over a year after Molly moved into Fort Johnson as the housekeeper. Thomas, Three Faces of Molly Brant, 40.
Johnson and Molly Brant’s partnership was never considered an English common law marriage, the perception of the Six Nations enhanced Molly Brant’s power as a cultural broker.

To ensure Iroquois viewed their partnership as legitimate, Sir William and Molly cultivated a very public union. People not only knew of their liaison but also mentioned how loyal each was to the other. For nearly twenty years, Molly Brant faithfully lived alongside Sir William and had eight children with him prior to his death in 1774.\footnote{Brant Family Tree, \textit{Joseph Brant Family Papers Vol. 1} (National Public Archives of Canada MG 19, F6, Microfilm Reel C-6818).} Even after his death, she never remarried. Instead she adopted the image of Sir William Johnson’s widow to remain tied to his memory for the rest of her life. This coincided with the common practice of the British and American officers referring to Molly by the title “Indian Lady Johnson.”\footnote{Thomas Jones, \textit{History of New York During the Revolutionary War and of the Events in Other Colonies at that Period: with Notes, Contemporary Documents, Maps, and Portraits Volume II}, edited by Edward Floyd de Lancey (New York: New York Historical Society, 1879), 375.} The continued use of her title illustrated the public perception that the influential couple had some sort of some consensual union.

Sir William’s actions in the Revolutionary Era regarding Molly and other women further supported the existence of their union. When he was a younger man, [Johnson] lived loosely with Indian women, and had numerous illegitimate children within the Six Nations.” However, he grew tired of this lifestyle upon meeting Molly Brant. Johnson “took her to the Hall, and lived with her in all intimacy of the most conjugal affection, though he never married her.”\footnote{According to Johnson’s will, he had at least two other children that were half-Mohawk. Their names were Brant Johnson or Young Brant and William Johnson. The Will of Sir William Johnson, \textit{The Papers of Sir William Johnson Vol. 12}, 1064; Jones, \textit{History of New York During the Revolutionary War}, 374.} There was a sense of loyalty to Molly Brant not because of legal issues but because of diplomatic relations with the Six Nations. Johnson could not risk ruining his union Brant for fear of alienating himself from the Mohawk sachems in Canajoharie and losing his ability to sway the Six Nations. Without Molly Brant, Johnson lost essential components of his connections into Six Nation politics. His will supports the notion that he more than likely reframed from additional relations with other Iroquois women. Johnson divided his inheritance among thirteen children. His oldest half-Mohawk sons Brant and William were the only illegitimate offspring in the document. The rest of the children are related to either Catherine or Molly Brant without any
reference to another illegitimate child. William Johnson was well aware of the benefits of his partnership with Molly and the dangers of damaging Iroquoian perception of their union.

The will of Sir William Johnson provides further evidence of the consensual nature of the partnership Molly Brant formed with the British Indian Superintendent. Upon his death, Johnson left a sizeable inheritance of both land and money to all of his children, including the eight he had with Molly. The amount “her children received [was] a total inheritance of £ 32,000, equal to the estate Johnson left his sons-in-law.” Her children were considered on equal terms compared to the other relatives in the will who were of European descent. Molly Brant herself also received an inheritance that seems quite extravagant for a housekeeper during the eighteenth century. According to the will, Johnson “bequeath[ed] the [land] Lot No. one being part of the Royal Grant now called Kingsland…one Negro Wench named Jenny sister of Juba, [and] also the sum of two hundred pounds current money of [New] York.” The inclusion of land and a female servant illustrate the importance of Molly Brant to Johnson. She was already from an influential family so finding land to live on within the Mohawk Nation was not an issue nor was finding someone to help her perform her tasks around Canajoharie. Her inheritance reveals Sir William Johnson’s care for her. He wanted to ensure she lived a comfortable life following his death. Although Molly Brant and Sir William Johnson were not legally married in the Revolutionary Era, the nature of their union fostered the perception of a consensual partnership founded on Iroquois concepts that was mutually beneficial.

Molly Brant relied on a complex system of economic and political positions from both of the cultural worlds in which she lived to form relationships in the Revolutionary Era. These two categories cannot be entirely separated because the “loss of economic status undermined [Iroquois] women’s political and social standing.” Iroquois women depended on their roles as farmers and food producers to exert their influence in the political aspects of the Iroquois village. Examining the roles associated with Molly Brant, however, begins with her position as the housekeeper for Sir William Johnson. Her earlier life remains relatively obscure due to a lack of sources with the exception of her relationship to Brant Canagaraduncka and growing up in Canajoharie.

82 Huey and Pulis, Molly Brant: A Legacy of Her Own, 37.
The scarcity of information, however, does not mean that we know nothing about the roles and responsibilities taught to Molly Brant. Before her relationship with Sir William, Brant probably experienced a similar childhood to those of other Iroquois women: learning how to farm and performing daily tasks around the village. An unusual trait in the formation of Molly Brant’s authority was the absence of the most prominent task associated with Iroquois women, farming. Her position as Sir William Johnson’s housekeeper removed her from the cornfields, although she never abandoned all Iroquoian gender roles. The preparation of meals and the distribution of goods or food to warriors were two female duties that carried over into her later role. For Molly Brant, trade good distribution proved to be the most influential in not only increasing her personal authority but also in keeping the Mohawks allied with the British. By living with Sir William Johnson for fifteen years, Brant not only perfected the process of food distribution and gift-giving, she also integrated her domestic responsibilities with the networks of the Covenant Chain. This resulted in Brant forming her own networks of influence and she garnered the powerful title of a Mohawk clan mother. The move to Fort Johnson and later Johnson Hall proved essential to the formation and implementation of Molly Brant’s cultural power.

The title of housekeeper imposed by her life partner only revealed one realm of the roles performed by Molly Brant prior to the Revolutionary War. Brant’s influence stemmed not only from her daily tasks around Johnson Hall but also her personal transactions with colonial merchants and various Iroquois who sought council from the British Superintendent. An eighteenth-century housekeeper primarily ensured that all woman servants “did their duty that the house was well kept, the linen mended and replaced when necessary…[and] the beds aired.” The position enabled Molly Brant to garner influence similar to the authority Iroquois women possessed in the realm of the clearing, but in a different manner. Brant “did not do housework, though, that was the task of the indentured servants and black slaves who worked both on the estate and on the surrounding farm.” Her lack of physical labor as the housekeeper

85 Molly lived in two separate homes with Sir William Johnson. During the Seven Years War, she moved into Fort Johnson. In 1763, Sir William and Molly moved into his final manor Johnson Hall, which was located on the 50,000-acre tract called Kingborough above Fort Johnson. Hamilton, Sir William Johnson, 37, 302.


87 Green, “Molly Brant, Catharine Brant, and their Daughters,” 237.
did not imply a complete absence of her personal involvement in certain chores around Johnson Hall.

Molly Brant’s position as a cultural broker had a profound effect on how she performed the various roles of a colonial housekeeper. Sir William Johnson’s social status required him to entertain his friends and family with the most popular manner of the day, a formal dinner party. This tradition provided Brant additional economic roles as Iroquoian concepts regarding food preparation as a woman’s task carried over from Canajoharie to the Indian Superintendent’s home. During the fifteen years Molly Brant lived with the Sir William, the meals served to various guests reflected a combination of both European and Iroquois cuisine. Guests enjoyed local game “procured from the woods and rivers such as venison, bear, and fish of every kind with wild turkeys, partridges and grouse, and quails in abundance.” The drinks served with the lavish dinners were an assortment of Sir William Johnson’s liquors, which included “Madeira, ale, strong beer, cider, and punch.” Thank you letters from European guests who stayed at Johnson Hall demonstrated that Molly occasionally participated in cooking meals.

Following a personal journey through the regions of Iroquoia in 1765, Lord Adam Gordon thanked Sir William for “the pleasure to pass a few days with you, at Johnson Hall: a place I shall always think of & wish well to.” Lord Gordon added a small note for Molly Brant “P.S. My love to Molly & thanks for her good breakfast.” Unlike dinner, breakfast in Johnson Hall was not a representation of cultural mixing because European dishes and drink preferences were the prevalent options served to visitors. Guests “breakfasted in their respective rooms, and, at their option, had either tea, coffee, or chocolate, or if an old rugged veteran wanted a beefsteak, a mug of ale, a glass of brandy, or some grog, he called for it, and it was always at his service.” Brant’s involvement in the preparation of breakfast illustrated her ability to integrate the gender roles of both Iroquois and European cultures. This amalgamation of daily tasks and chores enabled her to garner additional influence in the Revolutionary Era. Her primary responsibility of overseeing the multitude of chores around Johnson Hall, however, was not a

88 Entertaining relatives and friends was a great feature in the life of the upper and middle classes. The dinner parties varied according to the means and hospitality of the hosts. Bayne-Powell, Housekeeping in the Eighteenth Century. 103.
91 Jones, History of New York During the Revolutionary War Vol. II, 373.
permanent feature in the formation of her personal authority. In the end, other roles associated with the position of housekeeper provided Molly Brant better opportunities to expand her influence.

As Johnson’s housekeeper, Molly Brant performed duties outside the private realm of the manner. She emerged as an important figure in the public image of Johnson Hall because of her roles as hostess and entertainer. William Johnson’s position as the Superintendent of Indian Affairs required him and Molly Brant to keep an open house policy for all who visited. When European or Iroquois visitors arrived at the manor, Brant was the person responsible for ensuring that the guests “were fed, housed and entertained” during their stay.92 The generosity displayed at Johnson Hall reflected Brant’s success as a hostess. An essential component of her success was the experience of obtaining various goods for her household through personal transactions. Molly Brant maintained running accounts with several merchants that lived in the areas around William Johnson’s estate. The types of material goods purchased by Brant varied from everyday items like tea to luxury commodities such as bolts of silk and a set of cream ware teacups.93 Her personal interactions with local merchants reflected the power associated with women in the Atlantic market networks. Women’s involvement in the exchange networks was essential due to their role as intermediaries, which provided participants “with fluid occupational identities, a firm investment in cash and commercial goods for power and meaning, and cross-class social and economic ties.”94 These characteristics combined with Molly Brant’s knowledge of Iroquois gift-giving customs became an initial basis for the distribution networks utilized by her to later exert influence in the Revolutionary Era. Through the roles of hostess, Molly Brant emerged as a more public figure and gained an understanding of how to obtain goods from merchants.

As housekeeper and hostess, Molly was already involved in the processes of welcoming Iroquois council members to the Johnson estate. Her participation in the relations between the Six Nations and the British Empire gradually increased to include the role of clan mother and the influential custom of gift giving. Through her contributions at councils, Molly Brant maintained

92 Danvers, “Gendered Encounters,” 199.
93 Robert Adams operated his store from Johnstown, which was the location of Fort Johnson. Molly bought two pounds of tea in October and one dozen cream-colored cups and saucers in April. Day Book of Robert Adams: entries October 6, 1772 and April 12, 1773 in The Papers of Sir William Johnson Vol. 13, 597, 608.
Iroquois women’s role in Six Nation politics and proved indispensable to Sir William Johnson. Her knowledge of Mohawk politics not only provided Johnson further insight into the diplomatic interactions of the Six Nation, she was also a useful ally. Molly Brant “often persuaded the obstinate chiefs into a compliance with the proposals for peace, or sale of lands.” Her ability to sway Iroquois leaders with her charisma and provide sound advice to any members of the Six Nations who visited Johnson’s home demonstrated her emergence as a clan mother. This position was usually reserved for the eldest woman in the clan, but the exceptional influence Molly Brant exercised at councils due to her roles allowed her to claim the position over her mother. As a Mohawk clan mother, Brant obtained formal power in the political realms of Iroquois culture, regardless of whether she was the descendant of King Hendrick. Molly Brant legitimized her status as a clan mother and expanded her authority with her involvement in the Covenant Chain gift-giving ceremonies.

The act of gift giving and distribution of goods between Iroquois nations and their allies reaffirmed their alliance, but this was an ongoing process. Participation in this custom was reserved for Iroquois men because the act was an element of the realm outside of the village. Throughout the year, representatives of the Six Nations traveled to Johnson Hall or designated council locations to obtain gifts and various goods from Sir William Johnson and his Indian agents. To ensure a constant supply of goods, Johnson built a personal storehouse near Fort Johnson in the 1740s. This store enabled the superintendent to establish his own personal distribution networks when the official supplies from England ran low. Molly Brant utilized Johnson’s store and Iroquois women’s role as food distributor to gain informal access to the Covenant Chain networks. Brant provided Iroquois visitors with food and small gifts of trade goods. These simple acts fortified her position as a clan mother because “the more generous she was, the greater her influence became and she was soon the most influential Mohawk woman in

95 John C. Ogden, *Tour Though Upper and Lower Canada* (Wilmington: Bonsal and Niles, 1800), 247.
Molly’s ability to exercise her influence as a clan mother and participate in the distribution networks, however, was limited by the personal views of William Johnson.

The position of Superintendent of Indian Affairs required Sir William Johnson to be tolerant of many elements of Iroquois culture. An aspect he appeared to struggle with was the formal role of women in councils. During a council in April 1762, he forbid Iroquois women to attend the seven-day event. He stated, “I really could not discover any necessity there was for the presence of women & children…[I] know it is their custom to come down on such occasion, I could heartily wish that no more persons could attend any meeting than were necessary for the discharge of the business on which they were summoned.”

Although Johnson emphasizes the lack of space around his estate, there were also ulterior motives to his decision to deny Iroquois women’s participation. His actions illustrated the desire to subvert the matrilineal elements of Iroquois cultures with English perceptions that politics was better left to men.

A system implemented by Johnson was establishing personal relationships with warriors and promoting their status in the Six Nations through goods or medals. This enabled him to create a distribution networks that directly united Johnson to Iroquois leaders without the outside pressures of women. His policies of limiting women’s involvement in councils also applied to Molly Brant. Her ability to exercise her power as a clan mother and distribute goods was determined by location because William Johnson prohibited her from traveling to councils. In 1759, Brant wanted to join the superintendent at a council at Oswego. Johnson instructed her not to leave Fort Johnson. Johnson was probably protecting Molly Brant because she was eight months pregnant with their first child Peter, but she is never associated with councils outside the confines of his estate.

Given the evidence, the benefits of Brant’s influence failed to outweigh his attempts to limit the power of Iroquois women. The relegation to councils held at Johnson’s estate, however, proved advantageous for Molly Brant in the Revolutionary Era.

The constant task of reaffirming the Covenant Chain and resolving issues raised by Iroquois leaders required a good deal of traveling on the part of Sir William Johnson. When Sir William was away on business in other regions of Iroquoia, Molly Brant was responsible for the

99 Green, "Molly Brant, Catharine Brant, and their Daughters,” 238-239.
operations of the Indian Affairs department at Johnson Hall until the return of the Superintendent. These opportunities enabled Brant to gain experience of the distribution networks outside the formalities of a council and further establish herself as an influential figure. Through the constant gift giving and trade networks, Molly Brant was “indebting [Iroquois] people to her” and the British Empire. The relationships formed by the personal interactions of the distribution networks illustrated why Brant was so successful in maintaining the alliance between the Six Nations and British Empire. Iroquois warriors received trade goods such as gunpowder and ammunition with the promise of more goods or gifts. In return, Iroquois peoples were expected to aid the British in their wars against the French or other enemies in North America. The Six Nations depended on their interactions with Sir William Johnson and other colonial traders for their access to European material goods that replaced the former hand made tools. From 1759 to 1774, Molly gradually established networks of influence similar to her partner Johnson. They proved vital during the Revolutionary War. In the end, Molly Brant’s loyalty and overall success at running the Indian department allowed Sir William to feel secure about matters at home while he was away on his travels.

For the British Empire, there was a negative aspect to Molly Brant’s developing roles at Johnson Hall. Her emergence as one of the most powerful Mohawk women was possible at the expense of her partner and government’s expenditures. Brant’s accounts with local merchants and the various goods given to Iroquois peoples were in her name, but she does not appear to have been responsible for paying the bills of her expenditures. She relied on William Johnson to fund her growing networks of influence because he remained in control of many financial aspects of his estate including purchasing the bulk goods desired by the Six Nations. British financial backing remained a characteristic of the methods utilized by Molly Brant to exercise her influence. She had the cultural status and social roles to claim a powerful position in Iroquois policies, but the lack of a constant supply of trade goods from merchants had the potential to damage her authority. This characteristic revealed that Molly Brant’s personal services were an expensive aid for the British Empire that became more evident for officers in the Revolutionary Era.

103 Green, "Molly Brant, Catharine Brant, and their Daughters,” 239.
105 Green, "Molly Brant, Catharine Brant, and their Daughters,” 239.
The formation of Molly Brant’s famed influence began decades prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. As a cultural broker, she combined Iroquois and European cultural customs together to create new opportunities for herself in the Revolutionary Era. The foundation of her influence remained in Iroquois culture due to the matrilineal social structure and her familiar connections to a Mohawk sachem. Her Iroquois status was enhanced with her partnership to Sir William Johnson. Her relationship with William Johnson allowed her to continue Iroquois women’s participation in councils and become involved in the distribution networks of the Covenant Chain. Although Johnson relegated her participation to councils held at Johnson Hall, Molly Brant became a powerful clan mother and gained valuable experience in how to obtain goods necessary for continuing the alliance between the British Empire and the Six Nations.
CHAPTER 3: MOLLY BRANT IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Molly Brant’s relationship to Sir William Johnson and her experiences at Johnson Hall distinguished her as a notable Mohawk woman in the Revolutionary Era. The outbreak of the American Revolution, however, transformed Brant into a figure of legend. Through her exploits in the war, Molly Brant became one of the most powerful figures in the alliance between the British Empire and the Six Nations. The legacy of her actions as a Mohawk woman continues to intrigue scholars, but there is an overlooked element of her life in the revolution. Focusing solely on Molly Brant’s achievements does not reveal how or why she was one of the figures instrumental in keeping Iroquois peoples allied with the British. The Revolutionary War, though destructive for all Iroquois nations, caused a progression in the formation of Molly Brant’s influence. Brant continued the roles she developed as Johnson’s housekeeper, but the fighting provided new opportunities for her to exercise her authority. She not only publically participated in councils but also established her distribution networks in several different locations in Iroquoia. British officers including the future governor of Quebec General Frederick Haldimand understood the benefits of Molly Brant’s methods and influence on Iroquois leaders. During the war, the British asked Brant twice to resolve the tensions between the Six Nations and army officers at a particular garrison in order to ensure the longevity of the intercultural alliance. Molly Brant exceeded the expectations of the British fort commanders each time, cementing her legacy success. Although the British Empire and their Iroquois allies lost the war, the period between 1774 and 1783 witnessed the full emergence of Molly Brant’s power.

The death of Sir William Johnson in 1774 marked a significant change in Molly Brant’s roles. In accordance with his will, John Johnson, a son from his marriage with Catherine Weisenberg, was named the heir to “all [his] Estate at and about Fort Johnson with all ye buildings.” Brant and her eight children had to leave the Hall. They moved back to live among her family in Canajoharie. This meant a loss in the majority of the tasks associated with her position as the housekeeper of Johnson Hall. There was, however, a benefit to the passing of William Johnson. Johnson’s death signified a transformation in Molly Brant’s identity. In addition to her cultural heritage, she utilized English marriage conceptions to become the widow

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of William Johnson.\textsuperscript{107} Molly now represented the legacy of the former superintendent and Iroquoian promises to honor the Covenant Chain alliance. This new identity later solidified her status as one of the most influential figures involved in the maintenance of the alliance between the Six Nations and British Empire. Although the return to her Mohawk village signified the end of many of her domestic roles as a housekeeper, she continued as a hostess for Iroquois peoples.

Molly Brant’s home remained open for anyone who wanted to visit her because she wanted to maintain her influence and the relationships established at Johnson Hall. To ensure that her personal authority never wavered, Brant borrowed a method utilized by the late superintendent. She set up a small store in Canajoharie with the inheritance left to her by Sir William to sell and distribute goods to Iroquois traveling through the area. This store, however, was not a source of substantial profit for Brant because of the open-house lifestyle she continued to live following her departure from the Hall.\textsuperscript{108} Nevertheless, profit was not the intended purpose of her store. As a powerful clan mother, Mohawks and other Iroquois warriors visited her for sound consultation on the growing tensions between the colonists and the British Empire. Molly Brant insisted that all Iroquois nations remain allied with the British as a method of honoring William Johnson. There was also a degree of uncertainty about whether the colonists would continue the distribution policies utilized by Johnson. The goods distributed by Molly Brant represented the promise that supporting the British Empire guaranteed a constant supply of trade items. This system exemplified how Brant reaffirmed her authority outside of Johnson Hall and why the Six Nations continued their Covenant Chain alliance. In the year prior to the Revolutionary War, Molly Brant’s home and store emerged as central meeting places for Iroquois who wished to remain allies with the British Empire.

The outbreak of the Revolutionary War in 1775 further solidified the importance of Molly Brant’s residence. As other Mohawk and British families moved to the safety of Canada, she chose to stay in Canajoharie to monitor the actions of Iroquois warriors.\textsuperscript{109} Brant’s decision to remain behind symbolized the full emergence of her authority in the Revolutionary Era. In addition to continuing her responsibilities as a hostess, she took a more prominent and public

\textsuperscript{108} Molly sold a variety of goods that included basic supplies desired by Iroquois such as liquor. Huey and Pulis, \textit{Molly Brant: A Legacy of Her Own}, 43; Thomas, \textit{Three Faces of Molly Brant}, 80; Green, “Molly Brant, Catherine, and their Daughters,” 239.
\textsuperscript{109} Kelsay, \textit{Joseph Brant}, 149.
role in Iroquois councils. This proved problematic for the colonists who would later declared political independence from the British in 1776. In the summer of 1775, diplomats from the second Continental Congress experienced the power of Molly Brant’s influence at a council at German Flatts, New York.\textsuperscript{110} The appointed commission called the conference to ensure that each Iroquois nation remained neutral in the growing conflict, which coincided with initial British policies towards the Six Nations. Lieutenant Colonel Tench Tilghman, the secretary, noted, “the Indians pay [Molly Brant] great respect and I am afraid her influence will give us some trouble, for we are informed that she is working strongly to prevent the meeting at Albany, being [entirely] in the interests of Guy Johnson.”\textsuperscript{111} Molly Brant and British officials feared that interactions with American diplomats had the potential to destroy the Covenant Chain or worse the League of Peace between the Six Nations. Utilizing her position as a clan mother, Brant advised Iroquois warriors to remain neutral in the fighting, but also loyal to the British cause in the war. The fighting between the British Empire and American colonists also legitimized her distribution networks. Operating the gift-giving ceremonies of the Covenant Chain was an expense the Continental Congress was not ready to pay in the early years of the Revolutionary War. Brant’s ability to maintain her networks illustrated the ongoing promise that alliance with the British meant a constant supply of goods. In the end, Molly Brant’s efforts helped ensure that the Six Nations remained relatively neutral for the first years of the fighting.

As one of the last eastern sites in Iroquoia loyal to the British, Molly Brant’s home emerged as a strategic location for warriors and soldiers launching raids throughout the borderlands. Brant adopted her roles to the volatile situation in an effort to further aid the British cause and protect Iroquoia. She took on the responsibilities of housing and resupplying warriors returning from raids throughout the Iroquoia and New York borderland.\textsuperscript{112} A more dangerous task undertaken by Molly Brant was reporting the movements of American militia in Tyron County to British army officers and her brother Joseph. As she had in her other roles, Brant

\textsuperscript{110} On July 13, 1775, Congress appointed three commissions to form treaties with the Six Nations and other tribes in the North, Creek or Cherokee Nations in the South, and intervening tribes in the west. The men assigned to the northern commission were Major General Philip Schuyler, Major Joseph Hawley, Turbutt Francis, Oliver Wolcott, and Volckert P. Douw. Harrison, \textit{Memoir of Lieutenant Col. Tench Tilghman}, 20.
\textsuperscript{111} Harrison, \textit{Memoir of Lieutenant Col. Tench Tilghman}, 87.
\textsuperscript{112} Molly Brant’s other responsibilities included sending arms and ammunition forward. Thomas, \textit{Three Faces of Molly Brant}, 86.
achieved success as a spy. During the siege of Fort Stanwix in 1777, she warned Joseph
“General Nicholas Herkimer was advancing with a rebel force of eight hundred Mohawk Valley
militia men to relieve the seven-hundred-man Fort Stanwix garrison.” 113 Molly’s information
allowed British rangers and Iroquois allies to set up an ambush several miles from the fort to
repel the rebel forces. The ensuing fight was the Battle of Oriskany, which received its name
from the nearby village. In the aftermath of the battle, British forces claimed victory because the
Americans were never able to relieve the fort. Although the battle was not a well known event in
the Revolutionary War, “Oriskany marked the beginning of the a civil war in the [Iroquois]
Confederacy.” 114 The Iroquois League of Peace could no longer keep all Iroquois nations united
in an alliance. At the battle, Mohawk and Seneca warriors fought along side the British rangers
against Oneidas who joined General Herkimer’s militia. Over the next two years, each Iroquois
nation chose to support a side in the fighting. The majority of Mohawks, Cayuagas,
Onondagas, and Senecas continued their alliance with the British, and Oniedas and Tuscaroras
became allies with the Americans. 115 The divisions among Iroquois nations threatened the safety
of Molly Brant.

In retaliation for her role in the Battle of Oriskany and supplying aid to enemy Iroquois
for three years, Oneidas sought revenge against Molly Brant and any loyalist forces in
Canajoharie. Following St. Leger’s decision to lift the siege on Fort Stanwix, British forces
withdrew from the area, moving west closer to British-controlled garrisons. This allowed
Oneidas warriors to attack and pillage Canajoharie. Brant’s home was raided and “she was
robbed of everything by the Rebels & their [Indian allies].” 116 This experience forced Brant to
flee with her family members westward to seek refuge among Iroquois nations remained allied

113 The Siege of Fort Stanwix was part of the British plan to isolate New England from the rest of the
colonies. Lieutenant Colonel Barry St. Leger was in command of the British forces responsible for
capturing the fort. The siege began in early summer 1777 and lasted until August 22. Blacksnake and
Benjamin Williams, Chainbreaker: The Revolutionary War Memoirs of Governor Blacksnake As Told to
Benjamin Williams, ed. Thomas Abler (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 86.
114 Barbara Graymont, The Iroquois in the American Revolution (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press,
1972), 142.
115 The fragmentation of the Iroquois League was a complex process due to the development of political
factions. Local Iroquois leaders voiced support for the British and American causes or remaining
completely neutral. This was particularly evident among Oneida and Onondaga communities. Calloway,
The American Revolution in Indian Country, 34.
116 The Indian allies mentioned in the quote refer to Oneida warriors. Claus to Haldimand August 30,
1779, Claus Papers Vol. 2, 132.
with the British. Although Molly Brant never returned to Canajoharie, her success at ensuring Iroquois warriors maintained their alliance with the Empire caught the attention of British officers in Canada.

Following her successful escape from Canajoharie, Molly Brant and her family settled down with some of her relatives in the Iroquois village of Cayuga near Lake Cayuga in the finger-lakes region of New York. Although she no longer had a store at her disposal to distribute goods, her passion for maintaining the imperial relationships and protecting the Six Nations’ way of life never wavered. During the few months Brant resided in Cayuga, the famous public interaction between her and the Seneca chief Cayengwaraghton occurred at Onondaga. This exchange demonstrated that Molly Brant’s authority transferred to each Iroquois or British community she joined in the Revolutionary Era. Brant’s recent actions at the Iroquois council impressed Major John Butler, who was in charge of the Indian department at Fort Niagara.117

Major Butler believed that Molly Brant was the solution to the tensions between the British soldiers and Iroquois living together at the fort. The intercultural conflict was the result of a lack of trade goods distribution by garrison officers coupled with the dramatic increase in the number Iroquois peoples inhabiting the areas around the imperial post.118 British officers also misunderstood the traditions of gift giving and good distribution among Iroquois nations. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Claus believed that “needless sums have been hitherto expended by Butler upon the Indians have rather injured the King’s interest by giving the Indians a precedent of asking and expecting presents without doing any service for them.”119 These issues needed to be resolved because Fort Niagara was an essential post for launching raids against American forces and a refuge for all Iroquois who remained loyal allies to the British. British soldiers feared that their Native American allies would abandon the fortification for rebel promises of goods, or worse turn on the men and attack the garrison.

Major Butler voiced his opinions about the importance of Molly Brant to the future of Fort Niagara to the high command of the British Army who agreed with the major. General

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117 Before the Revolutionary War, John Butler interacted with Molly Brant because he was an Indian agent and interpreter for Sir William Johnson. Kelsay, Joseph Brant, 149.
118 During the Revolutionary War, the population of Fort Niagara consisted of five or six separate communities that included peoples of various European and Native American heritage. Calloway, American Revolution in Indian Country, 130.
119 Claus to Sir John Johnson July 20, 1778, Daniel Claus and Family Papers Volume. 25 (National Public Archives of Canada, MG 19, F-1, Microfilm Reel C-1485), 21
Frederick Haldimand personally believed “she might be of use in encouraging the Indians to preserve their fidelity…[and] the care of this woman will regularly be attended with some expense to [the] government.”\textsuperscript{120} This personal endorsement from the British Governor of Quebec proved invaluable to Molly Brant. In late fall 1777, Butler “sent [Brant] repeated very pressing & encouraging messages to come and reside at Niagara, which at first she did not know how to comply with being so well treated by her friends [until] at length…[she] parted with them in friendship.”\textsuperscript{121} Brant’s decision to accept the invitation to move to Fort Niagara enabled her to resume the duties of hostess and good distributer she had performed at Johnson Hall.

Arriving at Fort Niagara, Molly Brant sought to implant the distribution methods used by the British garrison with her own networks. The official procedures adopted by fort commanders proved counteractive to promoting a beneficial alliance between British forces stationed in Canada and the remaining members of the Six Nations. British officials urged garrison commanders to avoid buying goods from local merchants as much as possible due to the inflated prices of their merchandise.\textsuperscript{122} Molly Brant, however, established a personal relationship with a local merchant company at Fort Niagara called Taylor & Duffin to supply her with goods. She informed the owners that her lifestyle “is pretty expensive [due] to her being obliged to keep in a manner [an] open house for all those Indians that have any weight in the [Six] Nation Confederacy.” The material and monetary demands of Brant’s role as a hostess were not a burden for the two merchants as they concluded their letter with “we have told her we will not see her in want.”\textsuperscript{123} Through the promised goods of Taylor & Duffin and the personal support of Governor Haldimand, Molly Brant now had the means to establish her distribution networks. She gave goods to Iroquois warriors and influential war chiefs with the promise that an alliance with the British Empire ensured a continual supply of future items. These relationships also allowed Molly Brant to continue her specific lifestyle that was being threatened by the American

\textsuperscript{120} Frederick Haldimand to Lord George Germain September 13, 1779, Frederick Haldimand Papers: Letters to the Ministry Volume 1 (National Public Archives of Canada MG 21, MSS 21714, Microfilm Reel A-662), 47.
\textsuperscript{121} Claus to Haldimand August 30, 1779, Haldimand Papers: Correspondence with Claus, 58.
\textsuperscript{122} There were two merchant firms located near Fort Niagara, which were owned by Edward Pollard and the joint company of Taylor & Duffin. Some army officers believed these competing merchants cheated the army blind in the Revolutionary War. Calloway, American Revolution in Indian Country, 134.
\textsuperscript{123} This letter also reveals that Taylor and Duffin paid Molly £25 Halifax currency, which were the specific directions of Governor Haldimand. Misters Taylor & Duffin to Col. Claus October 26, 1778, Haldimand Papers: Correspondence with Claus, 10.
forces. An American victory in the New York borderland had the potential to destroy everything Brant worked so hard to protect over the last years.

In addition to establishing her distribution networks, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Claus asked Molly Brant to monitor the strength of alliance between Iroquois peoples and the British at Fort Niagara. A central component of this responsibility was to communicate information “to her Brother & the chiefs of the Six Nations…and request to preserve faithful to their ancient friend and all the Great King of England.” This task initially proved difficult for Brant due to the state of the alliance and the overall moral of Iroquois people. She reported that the Six Nations were dissatisfied not only with the British distribution policies but also members of the Indian department at Fort Niagara. The ill feelings toward the Indian agents stemmed from the actions of Major John Butler and even Daniel Claus himself.

According to Molly Brant, “though Major Butler hath made great interest with [Iroquois peoples] since he came here that at this very instant more than half of them are in the interest of the Rebels and the other half she is afraid will soon go over to them also.” The problem with Butler was his personal policies towards gift giving. Several Iroquois leaders accused him of favoritism and giving trade goods to warriors suspected of receiving gifts from American agents as well. This created a sense of jealousy between sachems that Molly Brant had to overcome in her time at Fort Niagara. Her distribution networks and open house policy for Iroquois leaders could alleviate these issues, but Brant also suggested another possible solution. Daniel Claus was not visiting Fort Niagara on a regular basis in 1778. Brant chastised him for his absence and lack of attention given to Iroquois peoples living around the garrison. She stated “all will come to see you and that confidence in you would give your admonitions advice to them such weight that [the Six Nations] would act like one man in favor of government,” if Claus visited Niagara more often. With the personal support of General Haldimand, Molly Brant never hesitated to chastise members of the Indian department or report their faults to the British high command. This made her unpopular with many officers, but illustrated Molly’s power to maintain the alliance at all costs. The tensions and diplomatic issues at Fort Niagara proved to be a blessing for Molly Brant that enabled her to exercise all the facets of her influence.

124 Claus to Haldimand November 5, 1778, Haldimand Papers: Correspondence with Claus, 11.
125 Taylor and Duffin to Claus November 24, 1778, Claus Papers Vol. 25.
126 Taylor and Duffin to Claus October 26, 1778, Claus Papers Vol. 25, 42-44.
127 Ibid.
Over the next year, Molly Brant helped alleviate the tensions between the British soldiers and Iroquois peoples at Fort Niagara. She quickly established a reputation as one of the most successful and powerful figures in the intercultural alliance. For Iroquois peoples, Brant became “their only confide[ante] to whom they communicat[ed] everything [of] importance & desiring her advice much more than in her Brother Joseph whose zeal and activity are occasioned rather envy and jealousy.”\textsuperscript{128} This represented a culmination of the authority Molly Brant maintained for the remainder of the Revolutionary War. Her success in strengthening the alliance also gained the attention of British officers in the Indian Department. Daniel Claus believed “Mary Brant will out do fifty [John] Butlers in managing and keeping [Iroquois] firm…under the influence of the commanding officer at Niagara & a vast deal of money & [provisions] thereby saved to the Crown.”\textsuperscript{129} Brant’s influence exceeded British expectations because she ensured the survival of the alliance and decreased unnecessary expenditures on Iroquois demands.

Molly Brant’s services, however, were expensive for the British Army and Indian department. She only decreased the excessive amount of goods distributed to Iroquois peoples by interacting with warriors and chiefs that were influential among their respective clans. Her roles still required the distribution of a substantial amount of goods and presents relatively compared to the prewar financial figures. A contemporary account estimated that Brant “[was] an expense of three or four thousand a year to the British Government.”\textsuperscript{130} Molly Brant resided at Fort Niagara for nearly two years following her escape from Canajoharie. In that brief time period, “the supplies necessary to retain the active support of the Indians cost £500 per annum, New York currency, at the start of the war; by 1781 that amount had increased to £100,000.”\textsuperscript{131} Molly Brant’s efforts comprised only a segment of the dramatic increase, but the rise in expenses illustrated the growing costs of the intercultural alliance at Fort Niagara. Still, the importance of Iroquois warriors for the defense of the fort meant that the expensive nature of her services were well worth the additional expenditures. In the end, Molly Brant’s decision to move to Fort Niagara illustrated the reemergence of the unique roles developed at Johnson Hall that she used for the remainder of the Revolutionary War.

\textsuperscript{128} Claus to Haldimand August 30, 1779, \textit{Claus Papers Vol. 2},133.
\textsuperscript{129} Claus to Sir John Johnson July 20, 1778, \textit{Claus Papers Vol. 25}, 21.
\textsuperscript{131} Calloway, \textit{American Revolution in Indian Country}, 133.
Molly Brant resided at Fort Niagara until the spring of 1779. She left the garrison to visit and spend time with her children who lived in Montreal. Brant’s time away from the fort was abruptly cut short due to an American military operation against Iroquois settlements that was led by Major General John Sullivan. Sullivan’s Campaign was a direct reaction to Iroquois raids on Americans forces and settlements in the New York borderlands. During the previous summer, “the Board of War of the Continental Congress…reviewed the evidence of hostilities on the frontier and concluded that a major Indian war was in the offing.” The purpose of the proposed war was not to take territory from pro-British Iroquois but weaken the resolve of their alliance with the British. Sullivan’s Campaign symbolized the destruction of the imperial relationship structures created by the British Empire and Iroquois nations. By targeting the Six Nations, the American government demonstrated that a mutually dependent alliance was no longer necessary to claim dominion over eastern North America. Sullivan’s Campaign represents a significant turning point in Iroquois history because their status as the most powerful group of Native Americans was being taken away in the Revolutionary Era.

General George Washington initially offered the assignment to Major General Horatio Gates, but the task was forwarded to John Sullivan due to Gates’ refusal. Once the Continental Army raised the men and supplies, General Sullivan marched his army into Iroquoia destroying all crops and settlements associated with the Six Nations. The result was one of the most destructive moments in Iroquois history. From August to September 1779, Sullivan’s army destroyed an estimated 160,000 bushels of corn, several orchards, and forty Iroquois villages. In addition to the destructive nature of the campaign, Sullivan’s actions caused Iroquois peoples to flee their villages and homes to seek protection at British garrisons along the Canadian border such as Fort Niagara. The mass westward movement of Iroquois peoples caused a series of new concerns for Iroquois sachems and members of the British Indian Department.

In Montreal, Molly Brant voiced her concerns over the worsening state of the Six Nations to Daniel Claus. Claus wrote, “Miss Molly since hearing the movement of the Indians is very anxious to return among the Six Nations, and says that her staying away at this critical time, may

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132 This meeting took place well over a year prior to the campaigns on June 10, 1778. Sullivan’s Campaigns against the Six Nations were one of the most extensively planned campaigns launched by American forces in the Revolutionary War. Graymont, The Iroquois in the American Revolution, 167.

prove very injurious to her character hereafter, being at the head of the society of Six Nation Matrons.” This is the first time that Molly Brant or a member of the Indian department refers to her as the head of the matrons. There was a title position for an Iroquois woman called “the Jigonsaseh [that] acted in the political capacity of Head Clan Mother, chairing the Clan Mother’s Council of the League.” However, there is no definitive evidence that Molly Brant ever held the title. Claus’ references to her being the head clan mother probably served as another way to legitimize her authority to the British high command and other members of the Indian department. A possible alternative was Brant became the leader of Mohawk clan mothers living around Fort Niagara due to her powerful roles. Whether or not Molly Brant held the title of Jigonsaseh remains uncertain, but Guy Johnson, the Indian Superintendent, believed “[Molly] will be of great use to the King’s service at this time.”

Governor Frederick Haldimand agreed with Guy Johnson’s assertion about utilizing Molly Brant’s influence to once again mediate the situation developing at Fort Niagara. He instructed Johnson “that Molly is to act as she thinks best, whether remaining in [Quebec] or returning to the Seneca Country, and that you or Col. Claus will give her such presents as you may think necessary.” Brant took the instructions given to Guy Johnson and Daniel Claus a step further prior to her trip down river to Fort Niagara. Johnson revealed, “Molly used to go to the stores and take out everything she pleased and give to her particulars…besides which she made a visit here and helped herself.” Her actions demonstrated a personal belief that obtaining goods by any means was justified by Haldimand’s support of her networks. Brant’s attitude towards obtaining goods correlated with her efforts to protect her homelands in Iroquoia and the relationships that defined her life. Once Molly Brant resupplied herself with enough goods, she started her journey down the St. Lawrence River to Fort Niagara in fall 1779 with a

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134 Claus to Haldimand September 6, 1779, Haldimand Papers: Correspondence with Claus, 64.
135 Jigonsaseh was a position that passed through the Wolf clan of the Senecas. There is a similar Mohawk position, but the title did not represent the same political power with other clan mothers. Mann, Iroquoian Women, 134.
137 Haldimand to Guy Johnson September 9, 1779, Haldimand Papers: Correspondence with Guy Johnson, 29.
138 This letter implies that the actions of Molly Brant frustrated the commanding officer of Fort Niagara who disapproved of her methods of emptying the posts stores of goods without paying. Guy Johnson to Claus November 21, 1779, Claus Papers Vol. 25, 170-171.
group of Mohawk warriors to protect her. Brant, however, never completed the trip to her previous post. Her final destination was a new British garrison at Carleton Island near where the St. Lawrence River leaves Lake Ontario.\footnote{Carleton Island, previously known as Buck Island, was two miles long and one mile wide and lay in the main channel of the St. Lawrence between Wolf Island and the mainland of New York State. General Haldimand ordered a fort built on the island in the fall of 1778 as a forwarding post for the upper forts controlled by the British. Carleton Island was named after the previous British governor of Quebec, General Guy Carleton. Thomas, \textit{Three Faces of Molly Brant}, 112; Gundy, \textit{“Molly Brant—Loyalist,”} 103.}

Molly Brant’s arrival on Carleton Island was initially a temporary stop over for the rest of her travels to Fort Niagara. The late departure of her voyage from Montreal forced Brant to spend the remainder of 1779 and the winter months of 1780 at Carleton Island. Throughout the early months of her stay, she believed “when a vessel arrived, [she] could get a passage to Niagara,” but this never occurred.\footnote{The voyage from Montreal was not a pleasant experience for Molly or the Mohawk warriors traveling with her. She described the journey to Carleton Island as tedious and disagreeable. Mary Brant to Claus October 5, 1779, \textit{Claus Papers Vol. 2}, 135.} Molly Brant lived at the island fort from 1779 to the conclusion of the Revolutionary War in 1783. Although Brant eventually accepted her role at Carleton Island, the unexpected nature of her stay caused her to be unhappy with her situation. Her complaints reached the office of General Frederick Haldimand and he acted quickly to resolve the situation. In an effort to ensure Brant remained at the garrison, General Haldimand instructed the commanding officer Captain Alex Fraser to build a house “as will lodge her and family comfortably, [choosing] a favorable location within a five hundred yards of the Fort.”\footnote{In previous letters, Molly Brant voiced her displeasure over her living conditions at Carleton Island and requested her own residence that was separate from the fort barracks. She even traveled to Montreal in person to state her case about the state of her residence prior to the house being built. R. Matthews to Captain Alex Fraser July 17, 1780, \textit{Frederick Haldimand Papers: Letters to Officers Commanding at Carleton Island} (National Public Archives of Canada, MG 21, MSS 21788, Microfilm Reel A-689), 94.}

Over the next three years, Carleton Island became just as important to Molly Brant as her earlier residence at Fort Niagara.

Carleton Island, like Fort Niagara, was a refuge for hundreds of Iroquois families fleeing the destruction of the Sullivan Campaigns. The Indian department was overwhelmed with the numbers of Iroquois people needing food, shelter, and clothing for the winter months. Molly Brant utilized the goods intended for Fort Niagara to establish new distribution networks among Iroquois peoples living near Carleton Island. Captain Fraser was impressed by Molly’s methods and personality. He noted to Daniel Claus, “[she] has [shown] her usual zeal for you by her
constant endeavors to maintain the Indians in his majesty’s interest.” As she had at Fort Niagara, Brant initially had to overcome the jealousies that existed between Iroquois leaders. She mediated this issue relatively quickly by distributing goods to the war chiefs and other leaders who demonstrated true support to the alliance with the British. Her system ensured that there were enough goods for sachems to supply their warriors for the raids against the American militia. By establishing a proper distribution network, Brant legitimized her political authority among both the British officers and Iroquois peoples. This provided a more effective avenue for her to maintain the alliance as a clan mother and consultant to Iroquois peoples. After Molly Brant’s first winter at the garrison, her actions exceeded the expectations of General Haldimand and the agents of the Indian department. Captain Fraser reported,

the chiefs were careful to keep their people sober and satisfied, but this uncommon good behavior is in great measure to be ascribed to Miss Molly Brant’s influence over them, which is far superior to that off all their chiefs put together, and she has in the course of the winter done everything in her power to maintain them strongly in the king’s interest.

The British clearly benefitted twofold from Molly Brant’s influence at Carleton Island. Brant not only maintained the alliance but also decreased the expenditures of the Indian department. According to Captain Fraser, “[though] she is insatiable in her demands of her own family, yet I believe her residence here has been a considerable saving to [the] government, as she made the demands of other[s] both for presents and provisions.” Brant’s distribution networks supported war chiefs who were both pro-British and influential within the community, which in turn decreased the multitude of Iroquois demands for goods. Molly Brant also benefitted herself from the extended stay at Carleton Island. Sullivan’s Campaign represented an American rejection of the relationship structures, but Brant’s networks continued on Carleton Island. She helped maintained the world of relationships that the Six Nations depended on throughout the eighteenth century. The success of Molly Brant’s efforts also ensured her cultural power remained intact for the remainder of the war. Her three-year residence at the island post, however, was not without conflict.

142 Fraser to Claus February 23, 1780, Claus Papers Vol. 2, 179.
143 Fraser to Haldimand March 24, 1780, Frederick Haldimand Papers: Letters from the Officers Commanding at Carleton Island (National Public Archives of Canada, MG 21, MSS 21787, Microfilm Reel A-688), 116
144 Fraser to Haldimand March 24, 1780, Haldimand Papers: Letters from Carleton Island, 116.
Molly Brant’s personal relationships with the commanding officers of Carleton Island were turbulent. Tension gradually developed over her consistent demands for goods to distribute to Iroquois warriors. Captain Fraser voiced his concerns that “she will be unreasonable in her demands—her family however is numerous and not easily maintained on the decent footing on which she keeps them; and if she be not humored in all her demands for herself and her dependents…she may by the violence of her temper be led to create mischief.” This conflict stemmed from a misunderstanding of how Brant’s networks operated. The distribution of goods was a constant procedure that was required whenever important Iroquois warriors visited the garrison for aid in their fight against the rebels. Molly Brant’s insatiable demands “did not reflect any extravagance on her part but instead revealed the very real costs of building a network of support based on the redistribution of goods.” The British governor was well aware of Brant’s methods. Lieutenant Colonel Mason Bolton the commanding officer at Niagara had also voiced his displeasure over the amount of demands required to placate Molly Brant. In a letter to Fraser, Haldimand stated, “she has always been unreasonable in her demands for her own family and favorites, but if by gratifying them a greater expense is avoided it becomes that less an evil…it is necessary to keep her in temper.” The personal demands of Molly Brant kept the Six Nations allied with the British. Although Carleton Island was not the intended destination for Molly Brant in 1779, her residence on the island enabled her to continue the behavior that was the foundation of her influence.

Following the conclusion of the Revolutionary War in 1783, the British abandoned the garrison on Carleton Island but continued their support of Molly Brant and her family. General Haldimand relocated Molly to a nearby British post known as Fort Cataraqui where he ordered a new house built for her. The British also awarded Brant compensation for her personal actions in the Revolutionary War. Haldimand “thought fit to grant unto her a pension of one hundred thousand pounds sterling.”

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145 Fraser wrote this letter to General Haldimand because he was concerned about Molly Brant leaving Carleton Island permanently on her personal visit to Montreal. He was happy with her helpful conduct and also reveals that Brant was pleased with her personal treatment by the commanding officer. Fraser to Haldimand June 21, 1780, Haldimand Papers: Letters from Carleton Island, 150.
146 Carson, “Molly Brant: From Clan Mother to Loyalist Chief,” 55.
147 Haldimand to Fraser. April 16, 1780, Haldimand Papers: Letters to Carleton Island, 78.
148 This is the modern site of Kingston, Ontario and is across the river from Carleton Island. The British built Fort Cataraqui on the site of a former French post named Fort Frontenac. Johnston, “Molly Brant: Mohawk Matron,” 121; Fesiter and Pulis, Molly Brant: Her Domestic and Political Roles, 316.
pounds currency a year, which as far as it depends upon [him] shall be continued to her.”

This final pension was a continuation of a similar payment plan created by John Johnson and Daniel Claus earlier in the Revolutionary War. Claus suggested “if a yearly consideration [of £200] was fixed upon her by the General during ye troubles by the superintendent it would be the shortest and less expensive and most pleasing to her.”

The pension established by Haldimand allowed Molly Brant to continue living her specific lifestyle, but the money failed to cover her other war losses. Brant and other Upper Castle Mohawks lost their homelands in Iroquoia because they moved to Canada for British protection from American rebels. Both Molly and Joseph Brant claimed further compensation from the King’s government over the loss of their family lands and various land grants. After Joseph’s personal visit to London in 1786, the siblings were awarded “the [combined] sum of £1449, fourteen shillings, and eight pence as compensation for their war losses.” Molly Brant lived the remainder of her life in Kingston on the monetary compensation. Although she helped keep several Iroquois nations allied with the British, she never returned to her homelands in Iroquoia, which became part of upstate New York.

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149 General Haldimand instructed General John Johnson to pay Molly Brant her pension in quarterly payments. This pension began once Johnson took the positions of Superintendent and Inspector General of Indian Affairs. Frederick Haldimand to Joseph Brant May 27, 1783, Brant Family Correspondence, 1791-1885 Vol. 1 (National Public Archives of Canada, MG 19, F6), 2.

150 Claus to John Johnson June 26, 1780, Claus Papers Vol. 25, 191-192.

151 This payment was part of a war loss compensation for the Mohawk Nation. The British government granted Mohawks who remained allied with the British the sum of £15,000. Thomas, Three Faces of Molly Brant, 140-141.
CONCLUSION

The signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783 officially ended the fighting between the British Empire and the United States of America. The ensuing peace dramatically affected Molly Brant’s life. Without the constant task of reaffirming the alliance between the British and Iroquois nations, Brant lost a significant component of her cultural power. No longer the most powerful Mohawk woman in the New York borderland, she nearly disappeared from the historical record. The few writings that described Brant’s life in Kingston were from the accounts of travelers visiting the small town. John Ogden, an American tourist and writer, noted her presence and revealed that Brant’s legacy with the British enabled her to continue certain roles in post-war Canada. According to Ogden, “when Indian embassies arrived, [Molly Brant] was sent for, dined at Governor Simcoe’s, and was treated with respect by himself, his lady, and family.”\(^{152}\) Molly Brant remained an ambassador to the local British government for Iroquois peoples who lived near Kingston. This limited role was a far cry from the legendary actions associated with Brant at Fort Niagara and Carleton Island. Although she no longer exerted her influence through distribution networks, Molly Brant never lost her zeal for the relationship structures of the imperial world in eastern North America.

In 1785, the Land Commission of the United States sent a letter to Kingston offering Molly Brant and her family the opportunity to return to their family lands in New York.\(^ {153}\) After traveling to Schenectady, New York to hear the offer from US officials, Brant rejected the proposal and returned to Canada to live with her family. She lived the remainder of her life in Kingston except for the occasional trips to other Canadian cities for special events such as her daughter’s wedding. Brant died on April 16, 1796; she was approximately sixty years old.\(^ {154}\) In the end, Molly Brant spent over a decade of her life successfully keeping Iroquois nations allied with the British.

The legacy of Molly Brant is directly tied to the impact of the American Revolution on the Six Nations. Depending on a scholar’s perspective, her extraordinary actions are either perceived as traitorous or as a mixed blessing for Iroquois peoples. The greatest loss for the Six Nations was their homelands in Iroquoia. A provision in the Treaty of Paris included the

\(^{152}\) Ogden, *Tour Though Upper and Lower Canada*, 37.

\(^{153}\) Gundy, “Molly Brant—Loyalist,” 106; Thomas, *Three Faces of Molly Brant*, 141.

\(^{154}\) Feister and Pulis, “Molly Brant: Her Domestic and Political Roles,” 318.
establishment of boundaries between the United States and British North America. This agreement coincided with “transferring [Native American] lands to the ownership of the United States as far west as the Mississippi River.” British and US delegates accomplished this land transfer with relative ease due to the exclusion of Iroquois leaders from the peace talks in Europe. The complaints of the Six Nations regarding the British abandonment of their treaties commitments to protect their lands went relatively unnoticed as the Americans gradually claimed Iroquoia. Molly Brant’s efforts to maintain the alliance with the British ensured not only a loss of Iroquois lands but also their exclusion from the new nation.

There was a positive result of Molly’s decision to support the British cause in the Revolutionary Era, however. Following the war, Governor Frederick Haldimand, at the requests of Joseph Brant, gave Mohawks land for a reservation along the Grand River in Ontario. This land grant was part of a promise Haldimand made to Mohawks as a reward for their continued loyalty in the war. In response to the destruction of Mohawk villages, he stated, “as soon as the present troubles were at an end, the [villages] should be restore[d] at the expense of government to the state they were in before these broke out.” Molly Brant’s actions were crucial to the formation of a reservation for Iroquois and other Native peoples who fled to Canada. She established the image of Mohawks as essential to the British war effort and the most loyal of the other Iroquois nations. The establishment of the Grand River Grant, however, perpetuated the ongoing fragmentation of the Six Nations.

The divisions that developed between individual Iroquois communities and each Iroquois confederate over who to support in the war continued into the post war period. Many pro-British Iroquois chose to move to Canada in order to live under the protection of the British Empire. This migration north failed to unite the various Iroquois communities. Mohawks, in particular, were further divided between several reservations due to personal loyalties to popular war chiefs. Following the Revolutionary War, “Lower [Castle] Mohawks, who had gone to live near

157 The land given to Joseph Brant and his Native American followers was known as the Haldimand Grant. This grant, later known as the Grand River Reservation, was estimated to comprise of 570,000 to 675,000 acres. The reservation was six miles wide on either side of the Grand River and stretched from Lake Erie to the head of the river. Graymont, *Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 284,293.
158 The basis for Haldimand’s promise was an earlier decree made by his predecessor Sir Guy Carleton. Haldimand specifically mentions the following villages: Canajoharie, Tyondarago, and Aughwago (Oswego). Frederick Haldimand Promise to Mohawks April 1779, *Daniel Claus Papers Vol. 2*. 154
Montreal decided to settle on land given to them at the Bay of Quinté…Upper [Castle] Mohawks, who had gone to live at Niagara, decided to settle on land along the Grand River.”

The efforts of Molly and Joseph Brant influenced the development of this internal division. Mohawks from Canajoharie probably felt confident in their decisions to follow the Brant siblings due to their wartime successes and continued close relationship with British officials. In the nineteenth century, the Six Nations reestablished the Grand Council to reunite Iroquois peoples, but the leaders had to gradually overcome the years of internal divisions. Although the legacy of Molly Brant contains the negative connotations of the separation of the Six Nations and the loss of Iroquoia, she firmly believed that decision to support the British was the best option for Iroquois peoples.

In the Revolutionary Era, Molly Brant emerged as the most powerful Mohawk woman. Her impressive accomplishments set her apart from other Iroquois women, but focusing solely on the nature of her actions distorts Molly’s historical importance. Examining the foundation of Molly’s cultural power and the development of the influential relationships enables a better understanding of why she was so successful in keeping Iroquois warriors allied with the British. Molly Brant was first and foremost an Iroquois woman. The basis of her authority was the matrilineal structure of clan lineages and the gender roles associated with “the clearing” realm that were illustrated in the Sky Woman myth. As the keeper of both the ohwachira and “The Three Sisters,” Iroquois women exercised formal political power. Clan mothers were the most powerful representation of women’s influence with the authority to nominate or remove chiefs and withhold food from warriors if their reasoning for fighting was unsound. The position of clan mothers enabled Iroquois women to exert their influence in the League of Peace that united the Six Nations in a ceremonial peace. Molly Brant utilized Iroquois cultural concepts and gender roles to exert her power, but with slight alternations due to her exceptional life in the Revolutionary Era.

The family heritage of Molly Brant, to a certain degree, was a mystery. Contemporaries claimed that she was the descendant of the famous Mohawk sachem King Hendrick, but this remains uncertain. What was certain was Brant Canagaraduncka of Canajoharie adopted Molly as his stepdaughter, which placed her in the upper echelon of Mohawk society. Her familial connection to influential Mohawk leaders attracted the British Indian Superintendent William

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Johnson who asked Molly Brant to become his housekeeper and later partner. The move to Johnson’s estate transformed Brant into a cultural mediator and enabled her to create new roles that were a blend of European and Iroquoian concepts. At Johnson Hall, Molly Brant gradually became involved in the trade good distribution networks of the Covenant Chain due to her role as hostess. Through the establishment of her own networks of influence, Molly Brant obtained the position of clan mother, which she held for the remainder of her life. The outbreak of the American Revolution represented the full emergence of Brant’s cultural power. On two separate occasions, Governor Frederick Haldimand asked Brant to mediate the growing conflicts between British soldiers and Iroquois peoples at British garrisons. Through her distribution networks and her status as a Mohawk clan mother, Molly Brant succeeded in keeping the Six Nations allied with the British Empire for better or worse.

Molly Brant is often overlooked in Early American history because she was on the losing side of the Revolutionary War. Her actions, however, demonstrated that she was a significant figure in the Revolutionary Era. Brant exemplifies the importance and power associated with the various relationships of Iroquoia. Reframing her life in the imperial world of relationships brings new meaning to her life. She was an exceptional example of the lives of Iroquois women, but the unique elements such as her marriage to Sir William Johnson help illustrate the powerful nature of her relationships. Brant aided the continuation of the Six Nations’ position as powerful political group that colonists needed to have an alliance with to assert power in eastern North America. In the end, Molly Brant was much more than a famous Native American woman.
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