

# The Mohawk chief, the lost portrait, and the Bath & West

## by Katy Jordan

In 1804, the Society gained a rather unusual member. On page 66 of the 1805 volume of the *Rules, orders and premiums of the Bath and West of England Society*, we find listed among the Honorary and Correspondent Members: "Teyoninhokarawen, *alias* Capt. Norton, North-America."

The history of Teyoninhokarawen is somewhat confused, as different sources give different accounts. He was the son of Cherokee from North Carolina who had been adopted by a Scottish soldier, renamed John Norton, and taken to Scotland, where he became a printer and married a Scottish woman. So his son, the half-Cherokee John Norton, was brought up in Scotland and joined the 65th foot in 1784. Two years later his father also enlisted, and they were both posted to Canada. The younger John Norton left the army in 1788, and by 1793 he was a fur trader in the Detroit area.

He also acted as interpreter for the Mohawk in the Grand River area, and in 1799 was adopted as nephew by Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant and made a chief of the Six Nations, being given the Mohawk name Teyoninhokerawen.

He travelled to England in 1804 on business related to the confirmation of a land grant in the Grand River valley near Brantford, Ontario. It is at this time that he became one of the two hon. members to be elected to the Royal Bath and West Society that year. Hudson (1976, p.49) tells us "One was Sir Humphrey Davy, and the other, more surprisingly, was Teyoninhok Arawen, otherwise known as Captain Norton, 'a Chief of the Mohawk Nation'. He was present at the Annual Meeting, and 'having been introduced to the sittings of the Anniversary by R. Barclay, Esq, rose and made a most appropriate address on the occasion'." He also met members of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and this contact led to his translating the Gospel of John into the Mohawk language. This became the first foreign-language publication of the new Bible Society.

During the war of 1812 he fought on the side of the English, who promoted him to Captain of the Confederate Indians for his part in the victory at the Battle of Queenston Heights. He was later promoted to Major, but grew disenchanted with the war when it set Canadian Iroquois against their fellow-Iroquois from the United States. He retired, married a young native American woman and lived quietly on his army pension on the Grand River reservation until he was accused of killing his stepson in 1824. He left the reservation around 1826 and was last heard of travelling south with a Cherokee cousin. He is believed to have died in 1831. His journal, which includes an account of the war of 1812, forms an unique and valuable account of the war from the native american perspective.

Teyoninhokarawen is the subject of one of the Bath and West's lost treasures. The Society's minute-books record for the General Meeting of 12 Feb.1805, item 4:-

"Robert Barclay esq. of the Borough of Southwark having at this meeting thro' the medium of the Committee of Superintendance presented this Society with a very valuable painting by Williams, being a portrait finely framed of Teyoninhokarawen otherwise Capt. Norton the Mohawk Chief now in England the same was received with a lively sense of gratitude both for the liberality of the donor and as a memento of an interesting foreigner lately elected an honorary member of this Society. Directions were accordingly given that this valuable

specimen of the fine arts be affixed in the Society's Chief Room - and on motion made by J.Billingsley esq. and seconded by G.Gordon Gray esq. the grateful thanks of the Society were unanimously to Mr Barclay, for so liberal & elegant a token of respect, and the Chairman was requested to transmit a copy of this minute in a suitable letter to that Gentleman, signed on behalf of the Society."

The portrait was last heard of in 1862, for the inventory made of the Society's possessions at that time records, "Oil painting. Portrait of Teyoninhokarawen a War Chief of the Mohawk Nation." Some time subsequently it quietly disappeared, and there is no indication in any of the Society's records as to what became of it.

But a recent enquiry about the portrait, from Barbara Luck of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Virginia, has led to the discovery of its whereabouts now. Fascinated by the idea of a Mohawk member of the Bath & West, the Hon. Librarian was inspired to find out more about his life. In the course of research she read Carl Benn's article on John Norton in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (2004-6) where he notes that a likeness of Norton dating from c. 1804, and painted by Solomon Williams, is in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. The subject, artist and date were exactly right. Could this be our lost portrait? (See below.) It seemed, at the very least, a strong possibility. The Librarian made enquiries and received this response from Dr. Laura Brandon of the Canadian War Museum: *We have no doubt that it is the same work. We purchased it in 1995 from a dealer in London who, in correspondence with the National Gallery of Canada (to whom the painting was initially offered), had concluded it was the portrait commissioned by the society in 1804-5.*

So a mystery of many years is solved, at least in part. Who knows how the portrait left the Society's possession? It may be that further enquiries will reveal something of its history between 1862 and 1995. But whatever its past history, we now know that the portrait hangs in the new Canadian War Museum building in Ottawa, for all to see and enjoy. It seems very fitting that the Bath and West's portrait of the Mohawk chief, like the man himself, should have made the long journey back to the land of his ancestors.

## References

Carl Benn, 2004-6. Norton, John (1770-1831?). *In: Oxford dictionary of national biography* [online]. Oxford University Press. Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68142> [Accessed 25 Jan 2006]

Hudson, Kenneth, 1976. *The Bath & West: a bicentenary history*. Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, p.49.

