

BRANT – HILL FAMILY SAGA: MOHAWK AND WYANDOT

By

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It would not be overstating the matter to assert that the leading family among the Mohawk Nation at Canajoharie (Indian Castle, NY) was those with the surname Brant; while their counterparts at Tiononderoge (Ft. Hunter, NY) were members of the family who adopted Hill as their surname. This is reflected in the land holdings and the personal effects owned by each individual with the surname Brant or Hill based on claims for losses at the time of the American Revolution. These families were in a category beyond any others, reflecting their high degree of acculturation including the predilection to marry members of the local Euro – American elite.

What follows is an overview of the story of the Brants and the Hills from the 1600s to the early 1800s.

Brant –

The name Brant was originally a baptismal name, copied from the local Dutch of Schenectady and Albany. The first Mohawk to bear this soon to be illustrious name was one of the “Four Indian Kings” who visited London in the year 1710, met with Queen Anne, and who were feted by British aristocracy and were the subject of a number of paintings and who were in general the subject of considerable curiosity among the English public. What little is known of the life of this Brant is noted in Sievertsen (1996). He appears to have largely “faded from view” upon his return to New York, possibly dying soon thereafter.

Among the relatively few with the baptismal name Brant was an infant born in February 1697, and baptized 4 April 1697 at the Albany Reformed Dutch Church, son of **Marie Senehanawith** (“Who Boils Maize”). He would later have the name **Brant Canagaradunckwa**. The father’s name is not mentioned, which was common at this time. Either he had not been baptized (probably the most common reason), had died before the birth, or the father was “out of the picture”. The minister recorded that Marie was baptized in Canada, and was probably born at Caughnawaga, Quebec among the Catholic Mohawks who had moved there particularly after about 1670. Marie appears to have been a member of the Bear Clan. She or her unnamed husband may have been white captives.

Brant’s future wife, **Catharine Tagganakwari** was born about 1703, and baptized 4 August 1703, daughter of **Asa Onasiadikha** (“Pasture Burner”). Asa was born about 1664 and baptized 25 December 1697 at the Albany Reformed Dutch Church. He was a sachem at Canajoharie in September 1713. Both he and his wife **Maria** were traders, traveling to Canada to represent the Albany trader Everett Wendell, their names been recorded in a frequent basis in his account books. Via the latter documents it can be seen

that Maria died in July 1707, and that her mother, **Margaret Koasootha** was alive in February 1705. Based on the Clan affiliation of Catharine's son Nicholas, she was of the Beaver Clan and probably the descendant of Huron / Wyandot captives, perhaps admixed with the French, adopted into the Mohawks (who did not have a Beaver Clan). Her progeny were affiliated with the Bear Clan, one of three among the Mohawks. She died between 29 December 1735, and 11 October 1738 by which time her husband had remarried.

Brant and Catharine were married about 1720 and had a large family, only some of whom appear in the church registers of the area. Their son Thomas, baptized 12 February 1721 at the Albany Reformed Dutch Church was a village chief (a title bestowed by merit not inheritance) at Tiononderoge where he remained until his death in February 1761.

Most of Brant's children had reached adulthood prior to their appearing in any document other than an entry in a church book. It was not until 1746, after the arrival of Sir William Johnson (who would marry one of Brant's daughters, and later his step – daughter), that it is possible to get a sense of how the Brant family fit into the local Mohawk and Euro – American societies. By that time Brant was in his late 40s, and had remarried, his first wife Catharine having died before 1738. While only three (?) of the children of Brant and Catharine were recorded in the extant church registers, other record sources indicate that they had at least twice this number of children. Brant's marriage to his second wife Christina was documented in the baptismal and marriage register of Reverend Henry Barclay, () 1738. The latter minister left Ft. Hunter in 1746 and his departure caused considerable anger among the Mohawks of Ft. Hunter. On 9 December 1746 a "Petition of some Mohawk Warriors" about the matter included the name of Teghanagereghkough, the Indian name of Brant (spelling not being in any way consistent over the series of documents bearing his name).

On 7 March 1747 Johnson made an entry in his account books that he gave over 2 pounds currency, *1 Black stroud 30s stockgs: & Shirt to Clean Brants House after the Decease of his Son before he could keep Council in his House* (JP, Vol. 9, p.17). This entry tells us that one of his sons had died recently, and that of all the Mohawks, it was the house of Brant that was used as a Council House for important village meetings or meetings with foreign dignitaries. Evidently Brant was among the "upper crust" of the Mohawks, at least at Tiononderoge where he was then residing. More information about the home of Brant is available three years later when Daniel Claus (soon to marry one of the Euro – American daughters of Sir William Johnson) wrote in his diary and entry of 31 August 1750, *We had to take up quarters at one of the Indian chiefs, by the name of Brant, in German, Brand, and we really could not find fault with it; for he lived in a well built, 2 story house, provided with furniture like that of a middle class family; there was nothing wanting in our food or drink or in our beds. In the morning we had a good breakfast* (Kelsay, 1986, p.239). Thus already the Brant family was aspiring to a middle class lifestyle, mimicking the home style and furnishings of the more affluent Euro – American citizens of the Mohawk Valley. They appear to have been somewhat unique at the time but for one exception – the Hill family, as we will see later.

During the 1750s it is evident that Brant and his family came to the forefront of Mohawk society, appearing to hold the respect of both Mohawk and Euro – American alike. In 1751 Conrad Weiser, the interpreter for Pennsylvania, wrote in his diary the following: *I visited Brand a Chief of the mohocks and told him that I brought one of my Sons in order to put him in the Mohocks Country to learn the language and if they (that is Brand and his wife She being present) would receive him I was inclined to leave him with them. Both Brand and his wife appeared to be very glad, and Embraced my Son Samy with tears in their Eyes, and Said they would receive him as their own Child, if I would leave him with them, they having but one Child and Just then brought him to Albany to put him into an English School to learn English. Brand's wives family is the family in which I was Adopted as a Son, in the year 1714.* The child noted above was Young Brant, baptized to Brant and Christina on () at Ft. Hunter, and later, when the Mohawks had moved to the Grand River, Ontario he was raised up as Canadagai, Turtle Clan sachem ().

As a reflection of the tensions and factionalism within the Mohawk villages, Brant's wife Christina was killed in a not uncommon drunken orgy. (more details)

Brant was evidently of a very entrepreneurial nature. The ginseng trade emerged almost overnight and fortunes were made in selling this root (often in a human – shaped form) to the Orient where demand was high. Both Brant and Margaret, the widow of Peter and later Lucas (and mother of the pre-eminent Mohawks of their day, Joseph Brant and Molly Brant Johnson).

Brant's ties to Sir William Johnson were sealed by marriages to both the daughter of Brant (producing sons Williams Johnson Jr. Tagawirunte and Brant Johnson Kaghyakon), and later to Brant's step-daughter Mary (Molly) Brant, Joseph's sister. Undoubtedly this relationship cemented by strong family connections benefited both men in terms of power and prestige – and economically. The links to Conrad Weiser who held considerable power in Pennsylvania must also have given Brant an edge in many dealings with whites.

On 23 August 1752 Daniel Claus wrote to Conrad Weiser as follows, *On the 10th last past of this month we all arrived here safe and Brand brought Us over in his Wagon from Sceneckdady as we had written asking him to do He was glad to see Samuel again Samy gave him the 10 Pounds in your letter Brant wished me to write the enclosed P:St to you* The said letter was written in Mohawk and mentions individual Mohawks and also the Catawba of the Carolinas with whom the Six Nations were at perpetual war. Brant signed the latter, Hanakaradon – showing that the ending of his name (kwah) was apparently “optional”.

There are reports of “scandal” involving Brant (who married too soon after his wife's death) and Margaret (who may have committed adultery) – see Kelsay (1986). The two married and soon Brant, although comfortably ensconced at Ft. Hunter, moved to Margaret's home village of Canajohary in the year 1753. Brant likely turned over his possessions to his eldest son Thomas who became a village chief there at this time.

It is very evident that Brant was living in relative opulence and splendor. His fine home at Indian Castle ultimately became the residence of his step-son Joseph (who took his step-father's baptismal name as a surname). The large Dutch – style barn is still standing, and extensive archaeological work has been completed at the house site by Guldenzopf and Snow (various publications). The home is close to the present New York Interstate 90, situated between here and the Indian Castle Church (built in 1769 and still standing). A cluster of homes was situated here near the banks of the Nowadaga Creek; and a second cluster was situated about two miles downstream around Ft. Hendrick opposite East Canada Creek.

On 9 July 1754 Brant and other Six Nations signed a deed to the “Proprietaries” of Pennsylvania. Here most make their mark but Brant signed, “Blant’d” and was listed among those in attendance at the Conference at Albany at this time. He was noted as “Canagaradooughqua, Brantd” among the Bear Clan of Canajoharie.

Brant was among a “select” group of Mohawks accompanying William Johnson 8 January 1755 at Philadelphia with “Conagaratuchhqua Brandt” and “Canadyora Brandt’s Son Nicholas” in attendance. His correctly spelled name is **Nicholas Brant Canadiorha**. He was likely born at Tiononderoge, situated near Ft. Hunter, the Lower Castle of the Mohawks. About 1746 he married **Margaret Hill**, born about 1728, likely also at Tiononderoge, the daughter of Aaron Hill and Margaret Crine (see historical record of the Hill family below). As with his father Brant, a few of the children of Nicholas are recorded in the baptismal registers, in this case of Albany, Ft. Hunter, and Schoharie, but until the year 1755 Nicholas (Nicus) Brant is not found in official records – then, as with his father, the number of records becomes fairly extensive quickly. On 5 July 1755 Johnson’s “Account of Indian Expenses” includes the following: *To Nickus Brants son to finish his House before he could go* (JP, Vol. 4, p.579). This entry indicates the likelihood that in this year Nicholas moved from Ft. Hunter to Canajoharie, and that he was in the process of building his home when tapped on the shoulder by Johnson to go on some scout, diplomatic errand, or war party. A document dated 10 November 1755 reported on the activities, *of Indian scouts, Hendrick and Nicklas, after observations near Ticonderoga* (JP, Vol. , p.285). It is not entirely clear that this is Niclas son of Brant since there were a number of Mohawks with the baptismal name Nicholas. From this point it makes sense to include details of both the father Brant, and son Nicholas intertwined rather than trying to keep the biographical details separate.

An interesting statement is given in the “Account of Indian Expenses” for 20 April 1756 which reads, *To Nickus Brants son for a Cow for his Family being a Brave Fellow* (JP, Vol. 2, p.610).

On 1 January 1757 Thomas Butler and Jelles Fonda reported to Johnson that, *We came to the upper Castle of the Mohawks went To the House of An Indian known by the Name of Brant Who Understanding We Were Going to the Six Nations told Some of our Company That if we Went Shou’d Certainly be killed Or taken; That the upper Nations were not True in the English Intrist* (JP, Vol. 2, p.668).

The names of Nicholas and Paulus (the son of “King” Hendrick) are seen frequently together, suggesting a strong friendship. For example on 12 June 1757, *Nickus and Paulus Sachems at Canajoharee, with several other head men, arrived and desired to say a few words with Sir William, who told them he was ready to hear them; when Nickus spoke as follows:-*

Brother Warraghiyagey. Doubtless you are desirous to know what is the occasion of our present visit to you. We are to acquaint you that it is the request of those of the Six Nations who are now come down, who desired we would attend this meeting and hear what they have to say to you (DRCHNY, Vol. 7, p.255).

In Johnson’s “Journal of Indian Affairs” for 4 November 1757 (obviously a busy year for Nicholas) reported, *Canadiorha, alias Nickus Brant’s son, who was in quest after De Couagne as far as Oneida, came here [Ft. Johnson], and said he inquired what news was stirring among the Oneidas* (JP, Vol. 13, p.100-1). Nicholas has a lot of information to relay about the Six Nations and the Western Nations and the French.

Brant reappears in 1758 in a letter from George Croghan dated 12 March 1758. Croghan reported that, *this Afternoon Came hear old Brant and powless and brought with them Arant Brants son in law and Isace of Conjouary with a young Dutch lad to go on the scout they say they will go Near Swegachey I Cant halp Noticeing to you that ye. Conhouarys shoes a great Dale of zeal for ye. English Intrest* (JP, Vol. 2, p.780). It should be noted that not only were there a number of those with the name Nicholas, there were also two Brants at Canajoharie, and both at times known as “Old Brant”. It is only by examining the context of each document that the individuals can be teased out. Where they cannot, the information will be left out of the present work.

Johnsons Accounts of February 1759 contain entries relating to father and son within the span of a few days. On the 8th we see, *To old Brant of Conahahare & anoyr. Family*. On the 13th the entry reads, *To Nickus Brant’s Son for provs. For his Sick family* (JP, Vol. 3, p.158).

In the “Journal of Sir William Johnson’s Proceedings with the Indians”, on 4 April 1759, *Arrived the same Evening at Brandt’s house at Conojohary, where Sr. Will, fixed his Quarters* (DRCHNY, Vol. 7, p.378). It is clear from the list of those who visited Sir William at this location that the home must have been very commodious, and able to accommodate council meetings – for example, *Three Sachems of each of the Nations waited on Sir William at his Quarters* (along with sundry interpreters and officials, Ibid, p.391). By this time Brant would have been in his early 60s, somewhat elderly by the standards of the day. Johnson realized that he was putting a great deal of strain on the resources of Brant, so in his Account for April he included, *To Brant an Indn. Whose house we took up, Waggon horses fire wood, Dressg, Victualls &ca* (JP, Vol. 3, p.164).

There are a number of indications that in the 1700s, many Mohawks were not member of one of the three regular clans for that Nation, Turtle, Wolf and Bear. The Mohawk had incorporated many refugees and captives over the years to the point where almost all

Mohawk were in part of entirely of another ancestry. In 1760 Lyman Draper, and Francis Halsey noted, *the name Nicolas Brant, who was described as “of the Beaver”* (Halsey, 1901, p.158). Hence it appears that Brant’s first wife was of the Beaver Clan, the mother being the sole determinant of the child’s clan affiliation. There is evidence to link Nicholas to the Huron (Wyandot), and possibly also the Onondaga (the latter via his father).

Nicholas appears to have been taking an increasingly prominent role among the Canajoharie Mohawks, perhaps stepping in as his father became more aged. He was apparently the primary signator (14 November 1760) attesting that their fathers had signed a deed of land to Teddy Maginis (JP, Vol 3, p.282). Just before signing this document he had accompanied Sir William Johnson to take Montreal from the French and is listed among the Ft. Hunter Bear Clan (as is his full brother Thomas). Apparently he affiliated with his father’s clan since there was not official Beaver Clan (JP, Vol. 13, p.173)

In Johnson’s Journal of 4 March 1761 at Castle Cumberland, “Old Brant, als Araghiadecka” (hence not Brant Canagaraduckwa) spoke about the need of the Canajoharies for a school house, but that the block house at Ft. Herkimer was being used as a stable, *so that we have been obliged to look out for another, and Nickas, here present offers the use of his house, for that purpose, provided he be allowed something reasonable for it* (JP, Vol. , p.228). Since his friend Paulus was the sometime schoolmaster, this made eminently good sense. Later that year, on 10 August 1761 at Oswego, *Nickus, of Canajoharie, an Indian, arrived here, and acquainted me that several of his castle died of a malignant fever, since my passing that castle, and that all Brant’s family were ill of the same disorder, except the old woman. He also told me that he had heard, by the way, from several Indians, that I was to be destroyed or murdered on my way to Detroit, and that the Indians were certainly determined to rise and fall on the English, as several thousand of the Ottawas and other nations had agreed to join the Five Nations in this scheme or plot* (JP, Vol. 13, p.238). Also, on the 14th, *Nickus, the Mohawk, with his party encamped here last night. He told me he expected White Hame, his uncle, would be up with us in a day or two* (p.240). Other evidence indicates that White Hans, Johannes Crine, was actually the uncle of Nicholas’ wife.

Sir William Johnson still chose to lodge at the home of Brant at this time, for example, 29 December 1761, “Lodged at Brant’s” at Canajoharie (JP, Vol. , p.274). However, Brant’s days appear to have been numbered. Canagaraduncka was among 5 Canajoharies, *being Oldest, and Principal Sachems of Conajharie* assembled to call attention to their grievances, particularly the threat of being disposed of their lands (JP, Vol. 10, p.571). The last reference to Brant is on 10 March 1763 when he was noted as a “Chief Sachem of Canajohary” in a meeting to address the Canajohary Patent. Of the six who are named, in addition to Canagaraduncka, his son Canadiorha and the latter’s good friend Saghsanowano Anahario (Paulus) were enumerated. Brant even made an impassioned plea as follows, *Brother, It is very hard we must be thus treated, there would have been mischief done long ago, had we not restrained our Warriors – We beg you will suppose it your own case you had been wronged by us, as we have been by Klock – As there are so*

many Justices now present, we hope they will consider what has passed, and that the whole proceedings may be Confirmed by them and faithfully transmitted to the Governor, and not as last fall to occasn disputes (JP, Vol. 4, p.60).

It seems that there was a great deal of jockeying by individual Mohawks to profit from the sale of lands – often to the detriment of the whole Nation. Even Nicholas had dealings that were questionable. On 26 June 1763 he and two others acknowledged the receipt of 200 Spanish Dollars from Sarah Magin (although she was a great friend of the Mohawks).

On 8 July 1763 Paulus Peteson and Nicholaes Brandt wrote a letter to Johnson alerting him to the factionism within the community to the point where George Klock was alleged to have paid one han Juery, an Oneida, *would kill old Brands wife And him Selves old Bran[d]* (JP, Vol. 4, pp. 165-6). This is the last occasion when the name of Brant is mentioned in any context. It is likely that he passed away about this time, probably before his 70th birthday. His role in the history of North America has not been acknowledged – but one could easily surmise that without his presence, Mohawk and thus Euro – American history might have been very different. The strong attachment he and his family (including that of his step-son during the American Revolution) surely altered the course of history in unknown ways.

During the 1760s Nicholas appears to have turned much of his attention to diplomatic missions. For example, on 21 May 1765 John Campbell wrote to Johnson from Detroit that, *Two days ago Nicolas a Mohawk, a Wyandot of Sanduskey, and two Canada Indians came in to me in Company with four Chiefs of the Hurons of this place* reporting information relating to the activities of the French, of Pontiac's supporters and other matters of interest.

In Johnson's Journal for 24 December 1765, he noted that, *Six Conojhares arrived here who acquainted Sir Wm. That they were sent by their Nation, or Village on business – Namely Paulus, Hendrick's Son, Nickus, alias Kanadyora* and others (JP, Vol. 11, p.984) expressing grievances over a variety of matters.

On 6 March 1766, Nicklass and Paulus wrote Johnson a lengthy letter (JP, Vol 5, pp. 56-8) about the many damages George Klock had done, and also another white neighbor, Peter Shuyler who took an axe to the son of one of them (the document is very damaged so it is difficult to follow the thread of matter).

Nicholas was soon on his way to undertake another diplomatic mission. On 8 June 1766 Johnson's secretary stated that, *On this day the Mohocks all assembled here in order to shew Sir William the Belts they intended to send to the Huron Nation by one of their Chiefs going that way, namely, Nickus alias Kanadyora. – they sent four Belts, all declaring their Desire of a strict Alliance with that nation expressing their Satisfaction at the Restoration of Peace, and recommending it to them to use all means for the preservation of it in their Country, as they were determined to do the same in theirs. – Sir William gave Nickus a Pass, some Cash &c, and parted* – (JP, Vol. 12, p.122).

At the Treaty of Ft. Stanwix of 1768 it would appear that most of the Mohawks (238 people) and principal people of other Nations were in attendance. As was typical before any business could be conducted, a condolence ceremony needed to be performed to pave the way for negotiations. On 6 November, *At the Ceremony of Condolence Sir William gave 6 New Black Belts to Cover the Graves of the Six following Chiefs viz – One for Kanadiorah, a Mohawk* (JP, Vol. 12, p.629). Hence some time recently before this date Nicholas had died. Whether he died during the proceedings at Ft. Stanwix is not clear – but is likely. If so he would probably be buried in a cemetery near the fort – but the specific location is unknown.

Due to the paucity of records pertaining to females at this time, it is unknown whether the wife of Nicholas, Margaret Hill, outlived her husband, was already deceased. If the former is correct, then perhaps she is the Margaret “young” Kayadontyi seen in the deed of sale of the Mohawks formerly of Fort Hunter, in 1789. The name is one found in the Astawenserontha family.

Hill –

The earliest origins of the Hill family blend mysteriously into the mists of time before the mid 1600s. There is no evidence that they are anything except Mohawk – although mixture with Wyandot is highly likely. It is more likely that the Huron – Wyandot entered the Hill genome via a later marriage of the focus of this saga, Aaron Hill Oseraghete to Margaret Crine (Green) but more on this later.

Aurie (Aria) Kanaghowende (probably born circa 1660 in Ossernenon on the south side of the Mohawk River) was baptized 5 October 1700 at the Schenectady Reformed Dutch Church along with his mother **Maria**, and wife **Catharine** and her mother **Sarah**. The mothers would have been born perhaps 1635. Their not having been baptized in Canada suggests that they may have been “true” Mohawks (as opposed to captive Hurons). This appears to have been a three generation baptismal marathon in that Cornelius, the son of Arie and Catharine, was also recorded in the baptismal register in this family grouping.

Folklore of the Mohawk Valley records that Aurie’s Creek and Auriesville NY were named after an Indian who resided in a home on the flats near the hill of the Ossernenon Mohawk Castle. The specific location can be pinpointed based on the naming of the farm and owner of Aurie’s home in a county atlas of 1853. In speaking of Aurie’s Creek, Simms, in his “History of Schoharie County” stated, *Aurie is the Dutch of Aaron, and the creek was so called after an old Indian warrior named Aaron, who lived many years in a hut which stood on the flats, now owned by J.C. Yost, on the east side of the creek.* Basically he resided at the other end of the Mohawk Flats, west of Ft. Hunter (the village of Tiononderoge). Interviews by Lyman Draper circa 1879 with the descendants of the Mohawks who fought in the American Revolution succeeded in obtaining an explanation of why the surname Hill (presently the most common surname on the Six Nations Reserve) was adopted (e.g., instead of the patronymic naming practiced by other Mohawk families). Two separate informants stated that the name arose due to the

geographic circumstance of their having resided on a hillside at the time of the Revolution. It is not clear whether the surname emerged in relation to the hill as Osserenon or further east, which is an extension of this hill, closer to Ft. Hunter where the Hills appear to have resided in 1777.

Aurie appears to have been an individual of some influence, although there is no evidence that he was a hereditary sachem. He does appear in the account books of Everett Wendell of Albany. In one entry Wendell heads the page, *Cornelis's wife Debit Aria's son*.

It appears that at least until 1717 Aurie was an active war captain, leading parties deep into the south to attack their ancient enemies the Catawbas (Flatheads) of the Carolinas. The editor of the Wendell Account Book includes the following entry for 28 May 1717 where Alida Schuyler Livingston of Livingston Manor wrote in a letter, *Arie de Wilt had just passed by with twelve or thirteen other American Indians, and that they carried three scalps and an Indian who they had captured in the Carolinas*. Furthermore, *A delegation from Virginia, that was sent to Albany to discuss with Iroquois leaders a series of recent violent clashes, found in June of that year that 'Aria, a Mohog that was Capt. Of that company that was lately in Virginia' denied any hand in the raids in that colony* (Waterman, p.242, #232). There is a sketch (used as a cover to the Wendell Account Book) that exactly matches the description in the first section above. It is presently located in a French archive.

In the continuing acrimony over the title to the lands of the Mohawk Flats (where the Mohawks resided), claimed by the Corporation of the City of Albany, the deed considered bogus by the Mohawks was produced by officials in Governor Crosby's administration, probably about 1733, it was *burnt by Aria one of our Sachems in the Govrs presence*. Aurie was still alive 28 December 1735, but drops off the radar at that point.

Aurie's son **Cornelius "of the Hill" Thannewanega** ("His Two Adjoining Swamps") was born about 1684, probably on the North Bank of the Mohawk River (e.g., perhaps Caughnawaga). On 4 October 1704 he married **Karagkwine** – in the bulk of the records her first name is **Catharine**, but also Mary and Mary Magdaline. There does not seem to be any sensible explanation for these inconsistencies. Catharine was alive 13 December 1729, but likely died soon thereafter since Cornelius. By 21 December 1733 Cornelius was married to an Anna, and continued having children. He had 4 recorded children (likely in fact double this number) via each wife. He was also a frequent witness to the baptism of children in the Dutch Reformed and Anglican churches. The many references to a Mohawk sachem Cornelius in sundry record sources of 1700 to 1714 all appear to be Cornelius Tirogaren a Turtle Clan sachem – not Cornelius, son of Aurie.

It seems that in his later years, Cornelius resided near Ft. Hunter and devoted himself to encouraging his people to be faithful to the church, and the children to attend school. On 17 November 1742, Reverend Henry Barclay wrote to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts that he had opened schools at both Mohawk Castles, and that

he had, appointed two school-masters, each receiving 10 pounds per annum, *one Cornelius a Sachem at the Lower and one Daniel att the Upper Town. The former is very faithful and Diligent and vastly Successful* (SPG Letters 1701-1786, Vol.10, No.112). He also noted that the Mohawks observe two hunting seasons when all participate, and so too the schoolmasters for two months at a time. On 4 November 1743 Barclay wrote that the Indian schools were a great success due to, for example, Cornelius instructing several young men in the faith, and *reads prayers in my Absence, and ----- much Beloved by his Countrymen* (Ibid, Vol.11, #115). Cornelius disappears from the records at this time, and it is supposed that he died, or went into retirement before Barclay left Fort Hunter in early 1746 (he was last a witness to a baptism 17 June 1744).

The second son of Cornelius and Catharine was **Aaron Oseraghete** (“He Carries a Knife”) “**of the Hill**”, baptized 3 March 1708 at the Albany Reformed Dutch Church. Aaron was of the Turtle Clan, indicating the clan affiliation of his mother. Later documents show that Aaron was well schooled in that he could compose letters in Mohawk and was able to speak English, Dutch and many Indian languages. He was to become the progenitor of a long and illustrious list of descendants. Aaron married **Margaret Konwatyennih Crine (Green)**, daughter of **Crine Anequendahonji** (“Dark Belly”) and **Anna Hazeankahha**, baptized with three brothers and sisters 21 January 1712 at the Schenectady Reformed Dutch Church. Margaret was a clan mother of the Astawenserontha Bear Clan / Tribe, and the sister of Johannes Crine Anequendahonji who was well know to Europeans and locals as White Hans (“a whitish Indian”). Hans was one of the few Mohawks who supported the Rebel (Patriot) cause, and returned to his home 330 yards from the Anglican parsonage at Ft. Hunter after the American Revolution. The family appears to have been extensively admixed with Europeans based on physical descriptions and the fact that during the War of 1812 one of Catharine Brant’s first cousins was named John “Blue Eyed” Green.

Aaron and Margaret married about 1727 and had at least three children before the arrival of Rev. Henry Barclay as minister to the Mohawks of Ft. Hunter in 1735. Their names were Mary, **Margaret** and Cornelius. Five of their children were baptized by Rev. Barclay before his departure in 1746 – Aaron Jr., Catharine, John, Peter, and David. Aaron Jr., John, and David would become officers in the Indian Department during the American Revolution. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this family was the most prominent, wealthy and acculturated to European ways, by far, of any of the Ft. Hunter Mohawks.

It appears that Aaron followed in his father’s footsteps on the warpath. On 8 April 1735, the Mohawk sachem Hendrick appeared before the Commissioners of Indian Affairs and reported to them that, *aron one of the Indians of yt Castle (Mohawks)* had been taken prisoner by the Flatheads (Catawbas) while there with *a number of Indians fighting*. Hendrick stated that the Catawbas treated Aaron *very barbariously Especially when he was first brought in*. In other words he was subjected to the “standard” torture ritual at the stake. Hendrick continued, *however a great Catawba Sachem interceded and demanded Aarons release. This being secured they then dressed his wounds. He asked*

Aaron to take a message back to the Six Nations that he wished to conclude a peace with them.

Over the next 10 years Aaron rose to a very high degree of power in his community. Aaron was also not at all averse to using his status to secure the best deal for himself or his people. The year 1745 seems to have put Aaron into the spotlight, much of the activity being of interest to the Commissioners of Indian Affairs. In March, *Hendrick and Aaron two Sachims of the Mohawks* explained to the Commissioners that the “unease” has passed, and that they are no longer considering the offer of the Oneidas to join them and reside at the “great flats” or Oriskany. Aaron made another appearance on 17 April with the Commissioners saying, *you and Some of your Relations are Very uneasy and turbulent* and wished to know the reason. Aaron refused to elaborate but stated that he, *declined and refused to act any longer as Sachem An Honour had been conferred upon me by the universall Consent to my nation to be held during good behaviour*, and further that the councils had always been held at his house. However after a series of rumors about a pending English attack on them (actually the residents of Albany), in which Aaron seems to have played a part, the councils were held in the houses of other Mohawks. Clearly Aaron felt slighted as he was not even consulted on any of these matters, and was not sure why this was the case. Therefore he gave the other sachems, *the belts of wampum belonging to that nation thereby resigning my office*. The Commissioners believed that this was not in the interests of “peace and harmony” and insisted that he resume his office, indicating that they would inform the other sachems of their decision. Aaron agreed, and then gave the Commissioners information about a war party sent to the Catawbas.

The concern felt by the Commissioners was due to the stated intent of some Mohawks, including Aaron, to move to Canada the next spring. Ten days later word arrived that the sachems had accepted the recommendation and that Aaron was reinstated as, *Ye Chief of ye Mohawks Sachims*. It seems apparent that Aaron was a “village chief”, and elected official, as opposed to a hereditary sachem.

The evidence does seem to point toward Aaron being one of the chief perpetrators of the rumors which had caused turmoil throughout the Mohawk Valley. The problem did not go away. Such rumors appear to have been almost constant, particularly as by this date the Mohawks were surrounded by settlements of Europeans, and there was a faction in Albany that claimed title to the very lands on which the Mohawks resided.

On 24 July of that year Conrad Weiser visited the Mohawk settlements and inquired as to the names of the chiefs at Tiononderoge (Ft. Hunter). *I was told that Aaron was ye Chief, & Brant, & Thomas; But the two latter being Jealous of Albany people, no matter of Notice was to be given, to what they said*. Thomas was Aaron’s eldest son. This seems to be a reversal of the situation only a few months earlier and now Aaron was seen to be part of the pro Albany faction – that would not last. On the 27th to the 29th of July there was a council and “Aaron Asaragehty” was the speaker and delivered the address. Basically he said that credible information came to their attention in the last fall to the effect that the people of both Albany and Schenectady were poised to attack the

Mohawks at the first snow in order to get the Mohawk lands. He relayed that there are many in the community who feel that the Mohawks were cheated out of their lands. The matter was of sufficient consequence that on 8 October “Aaron Asaragehty” appeared again before the Commissioners and the Six Nations – the subject being once again the above rumors. Aaron said that he heard Andries van Patten tell another sachem, Johannes, about the pending attack – it being noted that, *Arent understood Dutch*.

In 1746 the saga continued. Aaron was again before the Commissioners explaining that he with other Six Nations had been to Canada and had an audience with the French Governor at Montreal. While there a Caughnawaga Mohawk told him that after he (Aaron) left, there was to be a French expedition against Albany. Aaron was very much on the minds of people everywhere in the northeast it would appear. The New York establishment took particular note. Colden wrote in his book that Aaron, *a noted Mohawk Sachem* had been to Canada (basically recapitulating the above). However there is evidence reported that Aaron was negotiating with a Frenchman, one John Colan, explaining that he and many other Six Nations were in fact friends of the French. Governor Clinton of New York caught on and said directly that, *the reason why I send so positively for Aarion is because he has deceiv'd me, I hate Treachery*. Apparently Aaron agreed to stay put but escaped to, *deceive my Bretheren and friends the Mohawks, by deluding them with false Alarms, that a French Army of great force was coming against them*.

It seems clear that Aaron was playing off one side against the other in order to gain advantage. What appears to have turned the tables to the point that Aaron became firmly in the camp of the English was the arrival of Sir William Johnson in the Valley and his assuming a role in Indian Affairs. As with many Mohawks, Aaron appears to have seen Johnson as a worthy ally and it was not so much trusting the British, but his personal relationship with Johnson, that brought the Hills and Brants solidly into the English fold. None the less, Aaron still continued to be something of a problem for Johnson as he was frequently the source or rumors that served to agitate everyone. He was not at this time a trusted ally – more someone where trust was fragile, and at times had to be bought. Aaron and Brant appear to have been cut from very different cloth.

On 22 June 1747 Johnson provisioned, *Saushagehtey & party of 12 men a fortnight at my house and on their journey to Canada*. Presumably this individual was Aaron.

The same old problems were still present at the time though, and in October 1749 Johnson had to go to the Mohawk Castles to ease their fears about rumors that an attack by the French was immanent. Apparently Johnson has considerable success until, *Aaron the Indian* arrived from Albany reporting that an army, consisting of many Indians, was coming from Crown Point. Aaron appears to have been backsliding here and was still a thorn in Johnson's side in 1755 when he made an entry in his account books of March that he gave presents, *to Aron whom I stopt from going to Canada*, and in June to, *Aron the Mohawk on promises to go wth us*. It seems that Johnson needed to keep Aaron under a watchful eye.

Not only was Aaron taking favors from Johnson, but also from J Lydius who, according to the interpreter Arent Stevens in a letter of 26 July 1755, sent a string of wampum to the Mohawks with Captain Van Schaick, Blicher, and “Aaron the Indian” and Martinus Lydius. This also became a problem since Lydius was acting against the interests of New York and Johnson in purchasing land and pedaling influence. Related to this issue, one Matthew Ferrall was sent to the Mohawk Castle at Ft. Hunter to attempt to counteract the influence of Lydius and his faction there. During his stay there he was invited to a war dance, *when Arren made me sit down and put hot Ashes upon my head*. It seems that Aaron was attempting to taunt Ferrall.

On 28 July 1756 William Johnson called a council and Aaron, *of the Turtle Tribe* spoke for the Mohawks. He did not deny that some Mohawks had agreed to go with Lydius and other “Albany people” on a scalping expedition to Canada – after Lydius had plyed them with liquor. However Aaron maintained that some were so drunk they did not remember what they had agreed to and decided to await the arrival of Johnson from Onondaga country. Presumably Aaron was among those with alleged alcohol induced black outs.

For the next three years Aaron appears in the account books kept by Johnson with entries such as the following: *To Aaron a Mohawk in lieu of a Gun; to buy fodder for his horses; to buy provisions for the Sick; to buy provs for his large Sick family; in lieu of Cloathing; for sundry Services*. On 24 December 1758 Johnson referred to “Aron of the Hill” for sundry expenses.

It was also during this time frame that Aaron’s name became associated with that of Daniel (Captain Daniel Oghnawera). More on this later.

It appears that during the mid 1750s Aaron adopted the role of ambassador and messenger on behalf of Sir William Johnson. This suggests that by that time there was a trust that had developed between the two since Johnson sent Aaron on some very “delicate” missions where only a most trusted associate could be relied upon. It appears that Aaron’s previous actions as a “spy” were to stand him in good stead for the tasks that were to follow.

The final showdown with France was approaching. During the Niagara campaign of 1759, on the 17th of September Johnson reported, *Thomas, Aaron and his family left yesterday, and took one of the prisoners, taken from the vessel with them*. On 14 May 1760 Johnson wrote George Croghan noting that Aaron had been given a pass only for personal business that would take him to Pittsburg (one wonders what sort of business that might be). Croghan noted that he sent Aaron to Detroit to obtain intelligence about the French and their Indian connections. It does not appear that Aaron was among the large contingent of Mohawks who accompanied Johnson to Montreal to ultimately end the French menace. It appears that Aaron may have been assigned to the strategic region of Detroit to operate in that theater. For example, on 15 September 1761 Johnson, while at Detroit, noted that, *I had the three Huron interpreters here at my lodging, and Aaron, also St. Martin, when I thanked them kindly for their conduct in the affair of the war-belt offered by the Six Nations deputies this summer*.

On 3 October 1761 while at Detroit a group of Mohawks told Johnson that they planned to hunt during the upcoming winter at Cherage Creek and return early in the spring, while Aaron indicated that he may head to Sandusky (a Huron – Wyandot settlement). On 24 September 1762 Johnson wrote to Croghan had recently arrived at Johnson Hall from Detroit, bringing a message from the Hurons, and indicating his intention to return in the spring.

Apparently Aaron was to prove his worth during the Pontiac uprising. In August of 1763 “Daniel Oughnovra” and “Aron, or Aregheghta” wrote Johnson that Major Wilkins at Niagara was angry because they would not allow him to open correspondence addressed to the Captain at Detroit – they heading to that fort. Wilkins’ views appear to have influenced DeCougne who wrote that, *most people give an indifferent Acct of Aron*. On 7 October 1763 Rogers wrote Johnson that after a council meeting, Aaron brought news as to where the various Indian nations were poised to strike.

On 1 December 1763, while at Fort Pitt, Aaron (if it was his writing) penned a letter in perfect English to Johnson saying that he had been, *sent express by Maj. Gladwin from De Troite to this Place, on arriving at Sandusky meeting with about 300 Shany and Delaware Indians*. He mentioned that he had discovered that the Seneca Indians were the cause of the troubles, and that the Shawnee, Delaware and Wyandots had asked him to arrange a meeting with Johnson. Aaron reported that he, *had the misfortune to be rob’d of 4000 of Wampum, A Tamihok and all the Powder and Ball I had by the Delawar’s, Shanees & the Five Nations. Sir, Remain with great Respect, Your Obedient Humble Servant. Aaron*. Other correspondence from various individuals indicate the role as messenger and ambassador that Aaron was playing on behalf of Johnson at this time. In January he was at Ft. Pitt. On 11 May 1764 from Detroit Gladwin wrote to Johnson commending two Mohawks, but adding, *I wish I could say as much for Aaron – the Hurons tell me he is doing all the Mischief he can by poisoning the Minds of the Indians*. From this point it seems that Aaron began spending more time at home.

Aaron was involved in the 20 September 1764 meeting at Johnson Hall about the contentious Kaydarosseras Grant. Over the next few years the decision was made to re-survey the grant, with the recommendation that Aaron should be in attendance.

On 20 September 1767 Alexander McKee wrote to Croghan that three days earlier Aaron and Mons Maisonville arrive at Fort Pitt from Detroit. This may have been Aaron’s last harrah in the diplomacy department. No further entries place him in the western territories. There is an entry in the 1768 account book of Jelles Fonda of Caughnawaga for one Ariegheghtee; and circa 1771 an Areguetus appears in the ledger relating to Aaron’s son in law Sadequoit, second husband of his daughter Mary.

Further references to Aaron are likely pertaining to Aaron Oseragheté’s son Aaron Kanonraron – such as the Aaron in attendance at the meeting with the Albany Committee 21 December 1773 (there being later references that Aaron Kanonraron attended councils with Sir William Johnson. It would appear that Aaron died between 30 August 1772

(Fonda Account Books) and 14 January 1784 (Claims for Losses as of 1777). His wife Margaret appears in the same account books for 3 October 1772.

The two families of Brant and Hill were linked in a number of different ways through marriage. However for the present study, the marriage of Margaret, daughter of Aaron and Margaret Hill to Nicholas Brant, son of Brant Canagaradunckwa and Catharine resulted in the birth of **Catharine Brant – Hill**, born 1747, and married to Lt. **John Young** (Johannes Jung) of the Six Nations Indian Department.

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