

Emerging from the Shadows Recognizing John Norton

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Article abstract

John Norton (Teyoninhokaren) lived a multi-faceted life as diplomat, political leader, war chief, and author. Famous in his day and seen as “extraordinary” by contemporaries, he remained in the shadows of Tecumseh and Joseph Brant because of a lack of information and the negative portrayals of him by his adversaries. With the discovery of his personal correspondence and Journal, his character has been re-evaluated and his significance as a leader of the Six Nations, an important war chief in the War of 1812, and an author and historian, recognized. As well, his connections with Canada’s first internationally acclaimed author, Major John Richardson has been acknowledged and Norton recognized as a model for the character “Wacousta.” Little focus has been made of his “Wacousta” connection and an updated “overview” of his career has not appeared. Given his new status and what we now know of him, he is deserving of greater recognition and a fuller and up-to-date portrayal.

Emerging from the Shadows

Recognizing John Norton

By Alan James Finlayson

In his day, he was well known. Featured in the British and American press, military reports and contemporary books about North America, he was referred to as “the famous chief Norton,” and “the celebrated Indian partisan.”¹ Author of “the first major book by a resident of Upper Canada,”² his *Journal* of 1816’s account of his one-thousand-mile trip to Cherokee country has been deemed “panoramic,” its history of the Iroquois people “should merit distinction in the literature of the



North American Indian” and its memoir of the War of 1812 “perhaps the best memoir produced by a veteran of the war.”³ He served as a diplomat for the Haudenosaunee of the Grand River and Major General Isaac Brock, became friends with notable British reformers such as William Wilberforce and his “Clapham Sect,” and was mentioned in the correspondence of Secretary for War and the Colonies Viscount Castlereagh and celebrated author Sir Walter Scott. Seen by contemporaries as

¹ Brig-Gen. Boyd to the Secretary of War, 17 Aug. 1813, in Carl Benn, *The Iroquois in the War of 1812*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 140; *The London Times*, 1 October 1823 (from the *Albany Daily Advertiser*); *The Missouri Gazette*, 16 June 1816.

² C.F. Klinck, “New Light on John Norton” Royal Society of Canada *Transactions* 4, 1966, 169.

³ C.F. Klinck, ed., “Biographical Introduction” *The Journal of Major John Norton* (Toronto: Cham-

Abstract

John Norton (Teyoninhokaren) lived a multi-faceted life as diplomat, political leader, war chief, and author. Famous in his day and seen as “extraordinary” by contemporaries, he remained in the shadows of Tecumseh and Joseph Brant because of a lack of information and the negative portrayals of him by his adversaries. With the discovery of his personal correspondence and Journal, his character has been re-evaluated and his significance as a leader of the Six Nations, an important war chief in the War of 1812, and an author and historian, recognized. As well, his connections with Canada’s first internationally acclaimed author, Major John Richardson has been acknowledged and Norton recognized as a model for the character “Wacousta.” Little focus has been made of his “Wacousta” connection and an updated “overview” of his career has not appeared. Given his new status and what we now know of him, he is deserving of greater recognition and a fuller and up-to-date portrayal.

Résumé: *John Norton (Teyoninhokaren) mena une vie à multiples facettes; il fut diplomate, responsable politique, chef de guerre et écrivain. Quoiqu’il fût célèbre à son époque et considéré “extraordinaire” par ses contemporains, il resta toutefois dans l’ombre de Tecumseh et de Joseph Brant à cause du manque d’information à son sujet et d’une représentation négative par ses adversaires. Grâce à la découverte de sa correspondance personnelle et de son journal, on reconnaît aujourd’hui son importance en tant que chef de Six Nations, en tant que chef de guerre durant la Guerre de 1812 et en tant qu’écrivain et historien. De plus, on confirme ses contacts avec John Richardson, le premier auteur canadien de renommée mondiale, et on admet que Norton ait servi de modèle au personnage de “Wacousta”. Ce lien avec Wacousta fût peu exploré et un « aperçu » actualisé n’a pas encore été mis en place. Compte tenu de son nouveau statut et de tout ce qu’on sait présentement de lui, il mérite certainement une reconnaissance plus grande et une mise à jour de son image.*

“extraordinary,” he was the inspiration for the fictional warrior “Wacousta” in what has been called “the seminal Canadian novel”⁴ which was widely read internationally and went through seven editions before 1860. Officially, he was “Captain Norton”—Captain of the Confederate Indians—a title awarded him for his hero-

ics at Queenston Heights where his attack led to what historian Robert Malcomson has termed “the turning of the tide” and victory.⁵ Having fought almost continuously throughout the Niagara region, historian Donald Hickey has stated that he played “a more significant role in defending Canada than Tecumseh.”⁶ Despite be-

plain Society, 1970), xxii; Klinck “New Light”, 177; Benn, *Iroquois*, 7.

⁴ Douglas Cronk, ed., *Wacousta* (1832) (Montreal: Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts, 1999), “Preface”, xiii.

⁵ Robert Malcomson, *A Very Brilliant Affair: The Battle of Queenston Heights*. (Toronto; Robin Brass Studio, 2003), 169.

⁶ Donald Hickey quoted in Peter Shawn Taylor, “Canada’s Forgotten War Hero” *The National Post*, 28 December 2011.

ing seen by a recent historian as “a fascinating figure” “an expert eyewitness from two cultures—native and white” and “one of the most important Iroquois leaders in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,”⁷ he has remained unknown to most Canadians and as Hickey remarked in 2011, “you’d be hard pressed to find anyone who’s heard of him today.”⁸ Now, Norton is finally being recognized.

Born in Scotland in 1770 to a Scottish mother and a Cherokee father, he came to British North America with the army in the 1780s but soon resigned, briefly taught school for the Reverend Stuart near Kingston, then went to work for the Detroit trader, John Askin. While in the west, he came to the notice of Six Nations’ Iroquois leader Joseph Brant who became his mentor. In the words of a Brant biographer, “Joseph had finally found an educated friend whom he could trust.”⁹ In 1796 Brant arranged for Norton to become an interpreter for the Indian Department at Fort George. He volunteered to help the Grand River Natives

as well, but finding it difficult to fill both roles and feeling locked in a conflict of interests, he resigned from the Indian Department and went to live at the Grand River, “cutting his hair, painting his face, wearing the habit and assuming all the appearance, habits and manners of the Indians,” and becoming “as perfect an Indian as ran in the woods.”¹⁰ Taking the Indian name Dow-wis-dow-wis (The Snipe), he was adopted as Brant’s “nephew” and served as his deputy on diplomatic missions.¹¹ He initially declined the offer of being made a chief, “until it was represented to me that the good of the community required I should become a Chief to be enabled to act in a public capacity.”¹² He was then elevated to the status of a “Pine Tree” Chief—“an honorary title that is earned” as opposed to inherited, and “reserved for those who prove themselves worthy” and was given a new Mohawk name, Teyoninhokarawen.¹³

Although accepted by Native groups and Indian experts, colonial officials for political reasons refused to acknowledge

⁷ Carl Benn, “Missed Opportunities” *Ethnohistory* 59:2 (Spring 2012), 283 and 261.

⁸ Hickey, “Forgotten”.

⁹ Isabel Thompson Kelsay, *Joseph Brant: Man of Two Worlds* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1984), 516.

¹⁰ Gore to Castlereagh, 4 September 1809, J. McE. Murray, “John Norton,” *Ontario History* 37 (1945), 10; *Missouri Gazette*.

¹¹ For example, he went to Buffalo Creek in 1798, to Albany 1799 and to England in 1804. See Klinck “Biographical Introduction”, xxxvii.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See Rick Monture, “Introduction” to *We Share Our Matters: Two Centuries of Writing and Resistance at Six Nations of the Grand River*, (Kindle Edition) (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014). He uses this same term to describe Brant’s status. Norton is sometimes referred to as a “war chief,” but Susan Hill says that the phrase is not an exact translation and she also refers to Norton as a “Pine Tree” Chief—“a man who is recognized for exceptional leadership and commitment to his people and selected... to serve the Grand Council.” See Susan Hill, *The Clay we are Made of*, (Kindle Edition) (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017), Chapter 4 footnote 64.

his Native ancestry or his status as a chief. Frustrated by the intrigues of colonial officials who worked against Indian interests,¹⁴ and learning that Britain's war against Napoleon had resumed, he "immediately determined to go and serve or at least offer my service."¹⁵ Seeing an opportunity to place Grand River concerns directly before the British cabinet, Brant decided to utilize Norton's diplomatic skill and seek redress by going over the heads of the Upper Canadian officials who he claimed had "long ceased from paying attention to our complaints."¹⁶ Arriving in May 1804, Norton's offer of military service was refused but he took action to try and win for the Six Nations the right to lease and sell land like other British subjects. He impressed British officials including Secretary for War and the Colonies Earl Camden who wrote to Upper Canada's Lieutenant-Governor Hunter asking for more information. While waiting for a resolution of the Six Nations' land ownership issue, Norton

was hired to translate the Gospel of St. John into Mohawk, spoke to audiences at Bath and Cambridge, had his portrait painted by Mary Ann Knight, Solomon Williams, and Mather Brown, and became "the reigning rage of the town."¹⁷ Lord Headley who attended his speech at Cambridge, composed a sixty-page account of the event, while C.W. Janson, author of an 1807 book about America, discussed the visit to Bath and was favourably impressed by the "good temper and great mental quickness" of "this interesting Indian."¹⁸ Norton was also mentioned in a *Monthly Repository of Theology and Literature* account in 1809, which praised his "superior mind" and assumed he had been educated at "one of the American universities."¹⁹

His efforts to alter Six Nations' land ownership rights, however, were unsuccessful. Fearing Norton's influence, Hunter, in response to Camden's request, directed William Claus, the Deputy-Superintendent of Indian Affairs, to sabo-

¹⁴ Several colonial officials worked to undermine Brant and keep the various Indian groups "as separate and disunited as possible," Portland to Hunter 4 Oct. 1799 quoted in Alan Taylor *The Divided Ground* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 348. The major point of contention was land ownership rights. Since the 1790s, Brant and government officials had been at loggerheads over the right of the Six Nations people to lease or sell sections of "their" land to settlers and thus raise a source of income to help provide financial support. In 1803 a Confederacy Council declared that "Our Tract is now surrounded by white people so that our hunting is done away. Many in our Nation [are] perfect Strangers to farming, and should we be deprived of making the most of our landed property, many must Starve." C.M. Johnston ed., *Valley of the Six Nations*, (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1964), 75, 104.

¹⁵ Norton, "Onondaga Speech" quoted in Klinck "Biographical Introduction" xli.

¹⁶ See Brant's Petition to the Colonial Assembly, 14 February 1806, in E. A. Cruikshank, ed., "In the Days of Commodore Grant and Lt. Gov. Gore 1805-1811" *Records of Niagara* #42, 1931.

¹⁷ Thomas Campbell, 25 April 1805 in Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

¹⁸ Lord Headley, "An Account of the Description, Given by Mr. Norton Concerning his Country Customs and Manners," 12 March 1805; New York State Library Mss. 13350-1; C.W. Janson, *The Stranger in America*, (London: James Cundee, 1807), 278.

¹⁹ *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*, 4 September 1809, 495-97.

tage the mission. Claus, “a man of modest abilities” who was “fortunate to be born into a family of prominence, wealth and influence,”²⁰ looked down on Norton’s humble origins and “[v]irtually from the day his appointment was confirmed as Deputy Superintendent-General... denigrated Norton’s character and impugned his motives.”²¹ He was jealous of Norton and feared for his job and loss of power if Norton’s suggestions for reform should occur. Norton held a negative opinion of the Indian Department and its officials and was not alone in this view. As early as the 1790s Captain Hector McLean at Amherstburg had noted how the agents tended to “promote their own interested views” and Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe had termed the department “radically defective.”²² Meeting Lord Selkirk on his way to England, Norton had discussed the idea of moving his people further west out of the reach of the Indian Department which he saw as a “pernicious influ-

ence” and an expensive “source of vice and corruption.”²³ He believed money could be put to far better use helping Native people become more self sufficient and adapt to Upper Canadian life through the provision of a model farm with a missionary and seminary to educate Indian youth and the use of a proper mortgage system.²⁴ Claus provided a negative character sketch of Norton, held a fraudulent Indian council designed to discredit both Brant and Norton and sent misleading documents to England that called into question Norton’s status. The documents arrived in July of 1805, and Norton was informed that he had not been properly “authorized” and immediately shut out of government circles.²⁵ He sailed home that August. Referred to by Brant as “our implacable enemy,” Claus’ actions so enraged Six Nations’ leaders that they told him that “you have forfeited our esteem and confidence” and that they wanted “some other person to superintend our affairs.”²⁶

²⁰ Robert S. Allen, “William Claus,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. 8, 2000.

²¹ C.M. Johnston, “William Claus and John Norton: A Struggle for Power in old Ontario” *Ontario History*, 57 (1965), 103. Claus reported in 1813 that he felt “insulted” by the actions of Norton—“this subordinate officer”—who was receiving preferential treatment from military authorities. He minimized Norton’s contributions, complained of his “machinations” and “villainy” and that “the Government was deceived in the high opinion they had of that man,” and warned «if they do not find him out by and by to be a traitor I am mistaken indeed.” He even attacked Norton’s new wife as “the daughter of a deserter and a common woman.” (4 December 1813 “Military Report” in *Campaigns of 1812-14*, E.A. Cruikshank ed., Niagara Historical Society No.9, 1902). A good deal of the early information about Norton unfortunately, came from reports by Claus and Gore and, as Benn warns, it “must be regarded with deep suspicion.” Benn, *Missed Opportunities*, 276.

²² McLean to Green, 14 Sept 1797; quoted in Tim Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 71; Simcoe to Dorchester 22 December 1795, quoted in James Talman ed., “Historical Introduction” to *The Journal of Major John Norton*, cvi.

²³ See Talman, “Historical Introduction,” cxiii and Klinck “Biographical Introduction” lxxv and lv.

²⁴ See for example his letters of 12 Aug. 1806 and 10 Aug. 1808 in Klinck, “Biographical Introduction” liv-lv. and 1 Sept. 1808 in Johnston, *Valley*, 278-79.

²⁵ Klinck, “Biographical Introduction” cix.

²⁶ *Ibid.* lvii and cix-cx. Claus had little regard for the Six Nations based on his “Remarks and Observa-

Norton's efforts, however, were praised. The Grand River Council affirmed that they approved "in every respect of the representations of our affairs by Teyoninhokarawen in England" and the Duke of Northumberland wrote to Brant that Norton was in no way at fault and that "[n]o person could possibly execute the mission on which he was sent, with more ability than he did." Similarly, Sir Edward Nepean observed that he could not think of "a more honest and able negotiator among the Indian nations, or a man more deserving the confidence and protection of Government."²⁷

Hunter had died in August of 1805, but things did not improve upon Norton's return that fall. In August of 1806, a new Lieutenant-Governor, Francis Gore, arrived, a man who "could be imperious" and was concerned with status who had little use for "savages" or Native rights. His rule has been described in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* as "simple despotism."²⁸ He supported Claus who

labelled Norton "a White man under the Mask of being a Mohawk Chief,"²⁹ the implication being that he was a fraud who was attempting to deceive and could not be trusted. Norton, who hated political wrangling, wrote at this time of his frustration and his willingness "to retire from Councils if it would do any good" but agreed to "persevere in compliance with the wish of the Chiefs."³⁰ With Brant's death in November 1807, strong leadership was needed more than ever, and in May of 1808 Norton was asked to advise their Councils. He wrote to the Colonial Office advocating for reform³¹ and his English contacts pressured the British Government to make reforms. By April of 1809 Secretary of State Castlereagh was writing to Canada's Governor-in-chief Craig that persons "of a most respectable description" were suggesting changes to how Indians held land and that "Mr. Norton might be usefully employed in carrying into effect whatever measures are proposed for improving the Situa-

tions upon Indn. Politics as to their Political Maxims in Time of War between White People" (C.M. Johnston "Joseph Brant the Grand River Lands and the Northwest Crisis" *Ontario History* 55 (1963), 279-80) and was accused of embezzling Indian funds. His actions have been viewed negatively by many historians, most recently by Willig, *Restoring*, 259. Benn termed Claus' behaviour "consistently reprehensible." Benn, *Iroquois*, 39.

²⁷ Brant's Speech of 28 July 1806, *The John Norton Letter Book*, Ayer Collection Ms. 654, Newberry Library; Northumberland to Brant, 5 May 1806, in W.L. Stone, *Life of Brant* Vol 2. (New York: A.V. Blake), 426; Benn, *Missed Opportunities*, 273.

²⁸ David B. Read, *The Lieutenant-Governors of Upper Canada and Ontario* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1900), 67; S. Mealing, "Francis Gore" *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, VIII, 2000; Gore to Castlereagh 4 September 1809 in Talman, "Historical Introduction," civ-cv. Gore was recalled to England and had to pay damages in a libel suit but worked to block Norton's pension, calling him an "imposter". (See Douglas Brymner, *Report of Canadian Archives 1896* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson 1897), xi-xii and Benn, *Iroquois*, 185.

²⁹ Claus Speech of 23 Sept. 1806 quoted in Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, 360.

³⁰ Ayer Collection, Norton to Owen 20 October 1806; Norton to Owen 28 January 1807; Onondaga Speech of 12 February 1807.

³¹ See his letter of Aug. 10, 1808 in Cruikshank, "Days."

tion of the Indians.”³² This, of course, was the last thing Gore and Claus wanted. Despite being instructed by Craig to obtain the best information possible, Gore simply turned to Claus who had already written to him that “John Norton is such a character that any thing he does will not surprise me” and that he should ignore “the falsity of that fellow’s assertions.”³³ Gore supplied his superiors with not only Claus’ negative appraisal, but added a “lengthy, violent, and virulent attack” of his own which, according to historian James Talman, “clearly distorted the purpose of Norton, and Brant before him.”³⁴ Norton’s hopes for reform had been once again aborted.

Norton was away during this period of correspondence. On 27 April 1809, he had embarked on “A Voyage, of a thousand miles, down the Ohio” to connect with his Cherokee relatives and “to cover the grave of his father with wampum.”³⁵

He was gone for just over a year, and upon his return wrote to friends that he intended to write a journal of his travels as well as a history of the Iroquois peoples, something that Brant had contemplated. The result, was a document of almost one thousand pages, which has been

called not only “the first major book by a resident of Upper Canada” but “one of the most extensive and important texts produced by an aboriginal person in the colonial era.”³⁶ When the Six Nations’ Hereditary Council of Chiefs lamented in 1900 their lack of “a written history chronicled by themselves, of their ancient customs, rites and ceremonies, and of the formation of the Iroquois League,”³⁷ they did not know of Norton’s work, for his 1816 manuscript had been “lost” and remained unpublished until found in the Duke of Northumberland’s library in 1966 and subsequently published in 1970. Writing from the perspective of a Native person, Norton provides what Hill terms “insider authenticity” thirty-five years before Lewis Henry Morgan’s *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee*.³⁸ Norton was a skilled observer and based his accounts on the word of “eye-witnesses”³⁹ and his “account of the manners and customs, traditions and languages of the different Nations I am acquainted with,” comprised “their History, to the Present Time, as complete as could be collected from Oral Tradition, or the accredited Memoirs of the neighbouring Europeans”⁴⁰ is of major importance as an eth-

³² Castlereigh to Craig 8 April 1809; in Johnston, *Valley* 279-80.

³³ Claus to Gore, 2 April 1807, quoted in Johnston, “Struggle”, 103.

³⁴ Talman, “Historical Introduction,” ciii-civ.

³⁵ George Loskiel, *Moravian Mission Diary*, published 1838, 305 quoted in Benn, “Missed Opportunities,” 269.

³⁶ Klinck, “New Light,” 169; and Carl Benn, “Introduction” *The Journal of Major John Norton* (Second Edition), 2011, x.

³⁷ See Monture, “Preface.”

³⁸ Hill, “The Clay,” Chapter 1, footnote 10. Morgan’s study is credited as the first major study of an Indian tribe. See Monture, “Preface.” footnote 1.

³⁹ Klinck, “Biographical Introduction,” xiv, xl, and lxxiii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* xx, xviii.

nological document.

By late 1810 he had written over 200 pages and hoped to have it completed by the following spring. He had enjoyed being away from the feuding. In 1808 he had written that “continued disappointments... begin to sour my mind” and now that he was back he was once again thinking of retiring “to the South West... and had even fixed the day of [his] departure,”⁴¹ but rumours of war with the Americans and his sense of duty compelled him to stay and serve. In late 1811 Brock had arrived to replace Gore as Upper Canada’s leader. Gore had been recalled to Britain to face libel charges, and Brock asked Norton to meet with him, listened to his concerns, and selected him for diplomatic missions. While the majority of the Grand River Natives held back their support, it was Norton who encouraged them to take up arms with the British as “the most honourable course to be pursued.”⁴² He went west to take part in the Detroit campaign and was then asked by Brock to return to Niagara despite his desire to stay and serve in the west. His importance as a war chief now became apparent as he recruited an increasing number of Native troops and

he was singled out for praise for his role in the Battle at Queenston Heights.

Military leaders consistently praised his efforts. He was mentioned favourably in despatches at least ten times between October 1812 and March 1815. General Procter, in charge of the defense of the western section of the colony, “repeatedly sought his aid”⁴³ and when Norton asked Sheaffe for permission to go west to help Procter in April of 1813, Sheaffe informed Prevost that “I part with him, even for a short time, with great reluctance... He is the only leader of the Indians that I can repose confidence in.”⁴⁴ That same month, one of York’s leading citizens, W.W. Baldwin, described Norton’s conduct as “honourable, vigorous, active. He deserves the highest notice.”⁴⁵ On the Niagara frontier, Brigadier General Vincent made note of Norton’s “anxiety and zeal for the public service” which were “so constantly conspicuous.”⁴⁶ He was praised for his role at Stoney Creek, and the new commander, Major General De Rottenburg, reported that his “personal services are the most efficient of any in that Department, and he is the only one who personally leads Indians into action.”⁴⁷ He was given spe-

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, lix; John Norton, *The Journal of Major John Norton* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1970), 287.

⁴² Norton, *Journal*, 289 and 291.

⁴³ Sandy Antal, *A Wampum Denied* (Second Edition) (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 115.

⁴⁴ Sheaffe to Procter 20 Apr. 1813 in Robert Malcomson, *Capital in Flames* (Montreal: Robin Brass Studio, 2008), 159; and Murray, “John Norton,” 12.

⁴⁵ Baldwin to Wyatt 6 April 1813, in Murray, “John Norton,” 7.

⁴⁶ Vincent to Prevost 19 May 1813 in Talman, “Historical Introduction,” cxvii.

⁴⁷ De Rottenburg to Prevost, 22 July 1813, Talman, “Historical Introduction,” cxx. For Stoney Creek, see James E. Elliott, *Strange Fatality: The Battle of Stoney Creek, 1813* (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio 2009), 70 and Johnston, *Valley*, 267.

cial authority regarding the distribution of presents, and a *General Order* by Commander in Chief Prevost gave greater power to “Chiefs of Renown” who led on the field of battle. Prevost was well aware of “the intrigue by the Indian department” against Norton and was angry over its unwillingness to follow military directives. He wrote that he was “on guard against their endeavours” and did his best to free Norton from their control.⁴⁸ He wrote to Norton, consulted with him when at the front, and invited him to Quebec where he presented him with pistols and a sword from the King. Most importantly, he issued a direct order on 1 March 1814 stating that “no interference may be allowed, from the Officers of the Indian Department, between the Tribes and Captain Norton.”⁴⁹ The feuding, however, continued and De Rottenburg was unable to resolve it. His successor, Drummond, also became frustrated by the constant bickering and, with the war coming to an end, suggested that the problem might be solved by easing Norton out of service by offering him a pension and allowing him to retire.

Norton was delighted. He felt “liberated” and that summer took his young wife and son to Scotland where he placed them in school, visited old friends, and worked on his *Journal*. He petitioned for a

raise in his military status based on his war record and in January dined in London with former war colleagues Captain William Derenzy, Upper Canada’s Solicitor-General John Beverly Robinson, and his “good friend”, Sir Roger Sheaffe. He was brevetted a Major in the British Army, an event which was reported as an “Extraordinary Appointment” in the British press and in the American press with a good deal of anger: “Norton, the Indian chief, celebrated for his murders on our frontier during the late war, has the... commission of major from the British government.”⁵⁰ The Duke of Northumberland, who often gave Norton presents, and whose family in 1821 helped Norton pay his debts, congratulated him and also offered to help with the publication of his finished *Journal* which now included his memoirs of the war.⁵¹ He was painted once again, this time by the celebrated artist Thomas Phillips, painter of Byron, Scott, Blake, and Coleridge among other notables. After being honoured by his hometown, Norton sailed for home.

In the years following his return to Upper Canada, Norton, with the help of Aaron Hill, translated the remaining Gospels into Mohawk. He also farmed and worked on behalf of veteran warriors of 1812 whom he felt were deserving of government support. In 1823, he fought a

⁴⁸ Prevost to Sheaffe 27 March 1813, quoted in E.A. Cruikshank, “The Employment of Indians in the War of 1812”, *AHA Report*, 1896, 335.

⁴⁹ Talman, “Historical Introduction,” cxxi.

⁵⁰ “Extraordinary Appointment” 7 March 1816 *Military Gazette* in Ayer; *Niles Register*, 11 May 1816, quoted in *Benn, Iroquois*, 186.

⁵¹ Unfortunately, the Duke died that summer and the *Journal* was “lost” until its rediscovery in the family library in 1966.



Portrait of Major John Norton, Teyoninhokarawen, the Mohawk Chief.

duel in which his opponent was killed. He turned himself over to authorities for trial and weakened his own defense by refusing to tarnish the reputation of his young wife, an action the *Niagara Gleaner* described as “truly honourable.”⁵² Although he refused to see his wife again, he provided for her from his pension before heading west for Arkansas. He had expressed an interest in seeing the newly opened Santa Fe Trail and New Mexico and was said to have been in Laredo in 1825 but is then “lost” to history. It was later claimed that he died in October 1831.

Yet in a very real sense he did not “die”, for in that very year Canadian author John Richardson was in the process

of writing what was to become his most famous novel, *Wacousta*, using his memories of Norton for inspiration in the creation of the central character. Richardson considered himself a historian as well as a poet and novelist. He had already had published his *A Canadian Campaign*, a serialized historical account of the Operations of the Right Division of the army of Upper Canada as well as two novels set in Europe and two poems. He referred to himself in his “Prospectus” to *Tecumseh* (1828) as “Poet, the first of his native soil...but also...Historian” and stressed in its “Preface” that “a mere work of imagination it is not. Tecumseh, such as he is described, once existed; nor is there the slightest exaggeration in any of the high qualities and strong passions ascribed to him.”⁵³ Similarly, in his “Preface” to *The Canadian Brothers* (1840), he assured readers that it was “not to be confounded with mere works of fiction” and stressed in *Wau-nan-gee* (1852) that there was “but one strictly fictitious character” and “the whole of the text approaches... nearly to Historical fact.” In its “Forward”, written that March, shortly before his death, he wrote that he was inspired with “not the mere desire to make a book, but to establish on a high pedestal, and to circulate through the most attractive and popular medium, the merits of those whose deeds

⁵² *Niagara Gleaner*, 20 September 1823; in Benn, *Iroquois*, 246 footnote 43.

⁵³ Major John Richardson, 1 March 1828 “Prospectus” and 18 May 1828 “Preface” to “Tecumseh” (London: R. Glynn, 1828). See Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman eds., *Canadian Long Poems* <<http://www.canadianpoetry.ca/longpoems/Tecumseh/index.htm>. > (5 September 2017).

and sufferings have inspired him with the generous spirit of eulogistic comment.”⁵⁴

As a young boy, he had listened to first-hand accounts of Pontiac’s siege of Detroit, an event in which his grandparents had each played a part. Inspired by Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, he decided to write a novel about that event and venture on to “a ground hitherto untouched by the wand of the modern novelist.”⁵⁵ Despite his 1851 statement that his tale “is founded solely on the artifice of Pontiac to possess himself of these two last British forts” and that “[a]ll else is imaginary,”⁵⁶ his “imagination” may be seen to be a blending of his research and his own past recollection of associates.

Richardson continually chose to use his own experiences and incorporate people he knew as characters and models into his writing.⁵⁷ He and Norton had crossed paths on several occasions and shared many acquaintances. Norton had worked for his grandfather in the 1790s and was still featured in Askin’s correspondence as late as 1806. Richardson lived with his grandparents in 1801 and often visited them and it is likely that he heard mention of Norton. Living in Amherstburg he also would likely have

seen Norton when he came there to meet with Indian Department officials on behalf of the Grand River Natives. In August of 1812, both men were involved in the siege of Detroit and military operations in the Amherstburg area. In early 1816 both were in London and clearly Richardson knew Norton well enough to request his help in being returned to service. According to Richardson’s biographer, David Beasley, Richardson “paid a visit to Norton in London,” and wrote to him, providing a record of his service and stating:

“I only trust that your representation of my situation with the aid of this memorandum will have the effect of accomplishing something in my favour. I am certain you will do what you can for me, therefore will not despair.”⁵⁸

Norton did use his influence with the War Department and by the end of May Richardson was reinstated at full pay.

As a Canadian and an avid reader of contemporary journals and newspapers, Richardson would have been reminded of Norton in the 1820s by references to him in publications and the British press. He would have seen the notice announcing Norton’s “Extraordinary Appoint-

⁵⁴ Major John Richardson, *The Canadian Brothers* (1840), “Preface” 4, Donald Stephens ed., (Ottawa: Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts, Carleton University Press, 1992); “Preface” to *Wau-Nan-Gee* (New York: H. Long 1852), iii-iv.

⁵⁵ Cronk, *Wacousta*, 3.

⁵⁶ Major John Richardson, *Wacousta* “1851 Introduction” in John Moss ed., *Wacousta: A Critical Edition* (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press 1998), 437-38.

⁵⁷ For more information on his use of “models”, see A.C. Casselman ed., *Richardson’s War of 1812* (1902) “Introduction” (Toronto: Cole’s Publishing Company, 1974), xix, xx, xxx; and Alan James Finlayson, “Major John Richardson: A Study of an Artist, his historical models and his milieu” M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1977 (Also in University of Calgary Library).

⁵⁸ David Beasley, *The Canadian Don Quixote* (Erin: The Porcupine Press, 1977), 37.

ment” and may have read Howison’s *Sketches of Upper Canada*, published in 1821, in which Norton was described as “the white person who appears to have the most influence with the Indians.”⁵⁹ An 1822 article in the *Quarterly Review* entitled “Campaigns in the Canadas” featured a character sketch of Tecumseh and may have inspired Richardson to write his own poem the following year. The article was republished in *Tales of Chivalry and Romance* in 1826⁶⁰ and a variation appeared as an essay in early 1823 in *The Lucubrations of Sir Humphrey Ravelin*, a book sub-titled the “Prosings of a Veteran” which had “considerable circulation and ran into a second edition.” The essay entitled “Indian Warfare” singled out Norton for praise and referred to him as “extraordinary.” Written by Procter, Richardson’s former commander, it described Norton as “European” and one who was “highly respectable in conduct.”⁶¹ Richardson would have been interested in any writings by Procter—a man he intensely disliked and would harshly criticize in his later writings—or about Upper Canada and Indian Warfare. He also was likely to have seen, the October 1 article in *The London Times*

about “Colonel Norton, the famous Indian chief,” who had fought a duel in Upper Canada.⁶²

It would be surprising therefore for memories of Norton not to come to mind as Richardson contemplated writing about the siege of Detroit. Into the information he had obtained from his grandparents and accounts by Rogers, Navarre, Carver, and Henry, he inserted the story of a wronged individual and a tale of vengeance. “Reginald Morton,” a British officer who was “generous hearted and kind” is betrayed by his best friend and seeks his “just revenge.”⁶³ He follows his former friend to North America, joining first the French army of Montcalm and then the forces of Pontiac as a means of getting near to his enemy.

There are simply too many similarities between Norton and the character Morton (who becomes Wacousta) to ignore. Not only are the names Norton and Morton similar, but both are British soldiers who come to North America, turn “Native” and become war chiefs second in command to a greater chief—Pontiac and Brant. Norton would be in his forties when Richardson knew him during the war, and Wacousta is de-

⁵⁹ John Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada*, (London: Whittaker, 1821), 152.

⁶⁰ *The Quarterly Review* 27, 404-449. Some historians believe Richardson read this book, which included the poem “Tecumthe” by a Canadian and believe this helps explain Richardson’s emphasis on his *Tecumseh* having been written first, in 1823, and that he (Richardson) was Canada’s first author. See C.F. Klinck, “Some Anonymous Literature of the War of 1812” *Ontario History*, 491 (1957), 51; and Daymond and Monkman, “Introduction”.

⁶¹ See Klinck “Some Anonymous Literature of the War of 1812,” 49; and G. Procter, “The Lucubrations of Sir Humphrey Ravelin Esq.” (London: G.W.B. Whitaker, 1823), 328 and 330. There is a copy at the University of Western Ontario.

⁶² *The London Times*, 1 October 1823.

⁶³ Cronk, *Wacousta*, 462, 269.

scribed as “about forty-five.”⁶⁴ Both are large powerful men who could assume looks “atrociously savage,” wear feathered “turbans”⁶⁵ and are victims of betrayal in love affairs. Most significantly, Morton’s Indian name “Wacousta” points directly to Norton. The name we are told relates to a place, for Morton says “*of Wacousta as I am called.*”⁶⁶ It can hardly be coincidental that it was in an area known as “Waugusta” (or “Wagusta”) that Norton worked for Richardson’s grandfather.⁶⁷ The fact that the warrior Wacousta is described as a European—“the pale face”—rather than of mixed blood should not discount Norton as a model since Norton was also described as “the white person who appears to have the most influence with the Indians,” “European,” and “a Scotchman.”⁶⁸ Both Norton and Wacousta are described as having “dusky”

complexions.⁶⁹ Nor is there a discrepancy between Norton who was described as possessing a “sweetness of temper and a dignified calm” and the often violent, evil Wacousta, for Norton could assume “a most savage and terrific look” and was feared by the military as someone who “might prove a most dangerous Enemy.”⁷⁰ Morton we are told, before being betrayed, was “generous hearted and kind,” and “esteemed” by colleagues and as Wacousta is seen by Pontiac as a “friend,” as one whose “heart is big” and one whom he plans to make his successor.⁷¹ Norton is enlarged in size and strength to become the “gigantic warrior” Wacousta,⁷² but this depiction may be seen to be for artistic effect and, when criticized for deviating from reality in making the river St. Clair “too narrow” in the novel, Richardson defended himself by claiming

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 134

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 277. See also the Norton portraits by Knight, Williams, Brown and Phillips.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 269.

⁶⁷ G.L. Cranmer et al., *The History of the Upper Ohio Valley*, Vol. 2, (Madison Wis.: Brent & Fuller 1890), 40 uses the “Wagusta” spelling; M. Louise Stevenson, “Cresap and Logan,” *West Virginia Historical Magazine Quarterly* III, April 1903, 147 spells it “Waugusta.”

⁶⁸ Cronk, *Wacousta*, 232; Howison, *Sketches*, 152, Proctor, *Lucubrations*, 328; Thomas Vercheres for example, refers to him in 1813 as “a Scotchman, but living like an Indian” (quoted in M. Quaife ed., *War on the Detroit: The Chronicles of Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville* (Chicago: R.R. Donnelly, 1940), 157-58.

⁶⁹ Headley described Norton as having a “rather dark complexion, but by no means sallow nor so dark as many Englishmen who have lived in hot climates” while Wacousta is said to have “not the swarthy and copper-coloured flesh of the Indian but the pale though sun-burnt skin of one of a more temperate clime.” Cronk, *Wacousta*, 134.

⁷⁰ William Allen wrote of his “sweetness of temper” (14 Aug. 1805 in *The Life of William Allen*, Vol.1 London: Charles Gilpin, 1846), 78; Headley describes his transformation from “being mild” to “a most savage and terrific look.” Headley Mss.; De Rottenburg and Drummond both feared him. For example, see De Rottenburg to Prevost 15 August 1813 in Talman, “Historical Introduction,” cxxi; and Drummond to Prevost 11 March 1815 quoted in *Iroquois*, 185.

⁷¹ Cronk, *Wacousta*, 462, 448, 199.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 80, 133, 139, 152. Wacousta’s size is consistently stressed throughout the novel. Norton is described by Headley as “tall, about six feet high well made” and “muscular and well-proportioned.” See Klinck, “Biographical Introduction”, I.

“the license usually accorded to a writer of fiction” and reminded readers of his “privilege as a novelist in disposing our characters, in the manner most pleasing to the eye.”⁷³ When Battle of Lake Erie veteran Captain R.H. Barclay received a synopsis of *Wacousta* from Richardson in August of 1832, he immediately thought of Norton, replying to Richardson that he did not “remember any story like that to which you allude as the subject of your next book [the siege of Detroit] *except it be connected with the Scottish Indian Major who married a squaw and brought her to this country.*” Richardson himself identified the “Scottish Indian Major” as “Norton, alias Teyoninhokarawen, Chief of the Six Nations.”⁷⁴

For over a century, historians possessed only fragments of information about Norton usually derived from reports by his enemies in the Indian Department and government such as Claus and Gore. A reassessment of Norton’s character, however, began in the 1940s. A “diary” of Norton’s and a collection of his personal letters were found in his former home in 1942 and given to the Ontario Historical Society’s J. McE. Murray who found their contents “extremely out of harmony” with the previous depic-

tions of Norton, recognized the bias, and concluded that the earlier portrayal was the product of “jealous and malicious tongues.”⁷⁵ As more personal information came to light, historians tended to support this more positive view of Norton. Carl F. Klinck, who located and edited Norton’s unpublished *Journal*, came to see Norton as a “naïve” man possessing an “intellectual honesty,” a “benevolence,” and an “idealism,” a man who was “a good Indian.” He marveled at the “lack of egotism” in Norton’s writing and saw him as not only a valuable “dedicated ethnologist” who displayed a “social conscience far beyond the standards of his day” but a fine writer whose description of his travels was “an epic... constructed with no little art”⁷⁶ Historian and co-editor of the *Journal*, James Talman, also praised Norton’s skill as a reporter and historian and Carl Benn, like Klinck, has seen Norton as “a complex man who stood astride two cultures with sensitivity, kindness and intelligence.”⁷⁷

We now know that most contemporaries saw Norton as an honest, generous, brave and deeply religious man who possessed a strong sense of duty and was not interested in power or money. An acquaintance who knew him as a young

⁷³ Cronk, *Wacousta*, 587.

⁷⁴ Barclay to Richardson 24 August 1832, included as Appendix 12, in Major John Richardson, *Eight Years in Canada* (Montreal: H.H. Cunningham 1847), 231-32. Richardson also referred to Norton in his 1842 history of the War of 1812. See Casselman, “Richardson’s War,” 112.

⁷⁵ Murray, “John Norton,” 15.

⁷⁶ Klinck, “New Light,” 177; “Biographical Introduction,” xvi, xviii, xxiv, lvi; and “John Norton”, a 1977 address published in *Recovering Canada’s First Novelist*, Catherine Ross ed., (Erin: Porcupine’s Quill 1984), 18.

⁷⁷ Talman, “Historical Introduction,” cxv; Carl Benn (ed), *The Journal of John Norton* (Second edition 2011), “Preface,” ix.

man in the 1790s recalled that he had little interest in money, being happy to share with friends and remembered him as “a very intelligent, modest and unassuming young man” who “could discourse on any subject.”⁷⁸ Brant had selected him, an unimportant outsider, to be his protégé and trusted heir and the Six Nations agreed, trusting him as an important advisor after Brant’s death. A neighbour wrote of Norton’s “too generous heart” in providing for his wife and others recalled him as “a good natured man” with “a very good character” who was “intent on doing good among the Indians.”⁷⁹ The Reverend John Owen, Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, who hired Norton to translate the Gospels into Mohawk and remained his friend for the next twenty years, described him as “extraordinary” and wrote of his “strong sense of religion” and “ardent devotion to the interest of his Tribes.”⁸⁰ William Allen, who allowed

Norton to stay at his home in London, also used the word “extraordinary” to describe him and wrote that he “felt much at parting with him.” He too remained his friend over the decades.⁸¹ The family of Robert Barclay, with whom Norton also stayed in England, referred to him as “dear friend” and continued to correspond with him, as did Sir John Harvey, another 1812 colleague, and Sir Roger Sheaffe.⁸² Sir Walter Scott, who learned about Norton from his brother who had met him in 1814, was described in 1820 as Norton’s “Old and Staunch Friend” who was “constant in his Enquiries.” We do not know if Sir Walter and Norton ever met, but both were both painted in London by Phillips in this period. Norton also visited relatives in Scotland and Murray hypothesized that a Scott reference to Cherokees and Mohawks may have come from Norton.⁸³ In any case, the fact that so many highly respectable

⁷⁸ *Missouri Gazette*.

⁷⁹ Thompson to Norton 28 July 1823, “The John Norton Papers”, Archives of Ontario #88; Johnson to Draper in Benn, *Iroquois*, 100; Mary Hoggan 18 April 1904 in Klinck “Biographical Introduction” xciv, footnote 2.

⁸⁰ See his letter of 20 January 1806 (Ayer) and the Rev. John Owen, *The History of the Origin and First ten Years of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: 1816), 130 quoted in Klinck “Biographical Introduction,” xlix-l.

⁸¹ Letter of 14 August 1805, Allen, *Life* Vol.1, 78 .

⁸² Agatha Barclay to Norton 31 October 1808; Sheaffe to Norton 6 August 1820, Harvey to Norton 17 July 1823 in Klinck, “Biographical Introduction” liii, lxxxvi, xciv.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Robert Barclay to Norton 13 April 1820, and Thomas Scott’s letter to his brother of March 1814, xx; Beasley *Don Quixote* 37. Walter Scott was in London for ten weeks in 1815 and Francis Russell thinks that this is when the portrait was painted. See note on Walter Scott Image Collection site: https://images.is.ed.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/UoEwal~1~1~69301~101040?sort=work_source%2Cwork_creator_name%2Cwork_title%2Cwork_display_date&qvq=w4s:/who%2FPhillips%25252C%2BThomas;sort:work_source%2Cwork_creator_name%2Cwork_title%2Cwork_display_date;lc:UoEwal~1~1&mi=2&trs=4> (5 Sept. 2017); Murray hypothesized that Norton might have shared information with Scott which appeared in his *The Two Drovers: A Short Story* (1827) (Norton Papers, University of Western Ontario).

members of British and Canadian society thought well of Norton and maintained close and lasting friendships with him over the decades makes Claus' negative depiction of him highly suspect.

Just as Norton's character has undergone reassessment, so has his stature as an important Mohawk leader and author. Tecumseh has long been seen as a Canadian hero, one of the "big three" who helped defend Canada against the Americans⁸⁴ and referred to as "the most heroic character in Indian history."⁸⁵ He is viewed as a symbol, a martyr to the cause of the Indian peoples and has been commemorated by place names, statues, and numerous studies. Yet he was devoted to the Indian cause, not to Britain's, and he served for only a few months in actually fighting "for Britain." In contrast, Norton has received limited recognition despite his sense of loyalty to Britain. He offered his military service to Britain both in 1804 and in 1815, and while others held back, spoke out against the Six Nation community consensus in championing the British cause at the start of the war, an action of great importance for as Hickey has emphasized, "without his influence, the entire Grand

River Confederacy might have remained neutral and that could have turned the tide against the British on the Niagara front."⁸⁶ He served continuously from the Spring of 1812 until the Spring of 1815, with involvement at Detroit, Queenston, Fort George, Stoney Creek, Ball's Farm, Fort Niagara, Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, and Fort Erie as well as other more "minor" skirmishes. Although still lacking a complete biography, in recent decades he has been mentioned more frequently in historical accounts and the importance of his contributions are now being more fully acknowledged. In 2011 the Government of Canada awarded him the title of "person of national historic significance," a federal building has been named in his honour, and in October of 2016 a bronze statue of him was erected at Queenston as part of the "Landscape of Nations Memorial" to recognize his importance in that battle.⁸⁷

A final recognition of Norton's importance has been in his identification with the character Wacousta. In 1991, a McClelland and Stewart edition of the novel featured Norton's portrait on its cover thus highlighting the link between the author and his model.⁸⁸ Just

⁸⁴ See Peter Shawn Taylor, "Forgotten" and "How John Norton earned his name on a federal building" 7 March 2013 *Waterloo-Region Record*

⁸⁵ John Sugden, "Preface" *Tecumseh: A Life*. (New York: Henry Holt 1997), ix.

⁸⁶ Donald Hickey, *Don't Give Up the Ship* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2006) 185. See also Benn, *Iroquois*, 48.

⁸⁷ See the "Persons of national historic significance" site, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persons_of_National_Historic_Significance (5 September 2017); the "Landscape of Nations" site <<https://tworowtimes.com/news/regional/memorial-landscape-marks-first-nations-part-in-war-of-1812/>> (5 September 2017) and Taylor, "How John Norton....".

⁸⁸ See David Beasley "Tempestuous Major..." *New York Public Library Bulletin*, 74, #1, 3 and *The Canadian Don Quixote* (Erin: The Porcupine Press, 1977), 11, 60. Dennis Duffy also connects the two.

as Cooper had been inspired by “different individuals known to the writer in early life,” such as David Shipman and Daniel Boone in his creation of “Hawkeye,”⁸⁹ Richardson recalled the characters of his youth in his creations and Norton in particular deserves greater recognition as the inspiration for “Wacousta.” One of Canadian Literature’s most famous novels should be seen as a vindication

of Norton’s lasting impression and support for Susanna Moodie’s contention that “Fiction, however wild and fanciful is but the copy memory draws from truth... shadows left by the past... recalled again to life.”⁹⁰ Recognition of Norton’s important and multi-faceted career has been long in coming, but it seems to be arriving and it is good “to see Norton finally get his due.”⁹¹

See his *A World Under Sentence: John Richardson and the Interior*. (Toronto: ECW Press, 1996), 60.

⁸⁹ See Alan Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town* (New York: Vintage Books 1996), 53. 450-51 footnotes 56-58 and Walker, 39.

⁹⁰ Susanna Moodie, *Life in the Clearings* (Toronto: Macmillan 1959), 205.

⁹¹ Donald Hickey, quoted in Taylor, “How John Norton...”.