

Brant, Mary (Molly)

(c. 1736–April 16, 1796) Native American leader and British loyalist.

Mary (Molly) Brant, Native American, was a respected clan matron, translator, and diplomat. She helped the British Army communicate with the Native American Iroquois Nation. She and her brother Joseph were British Loyalists during the American Revolution. *See also* [Brant, Joseph](#) .

Early Life

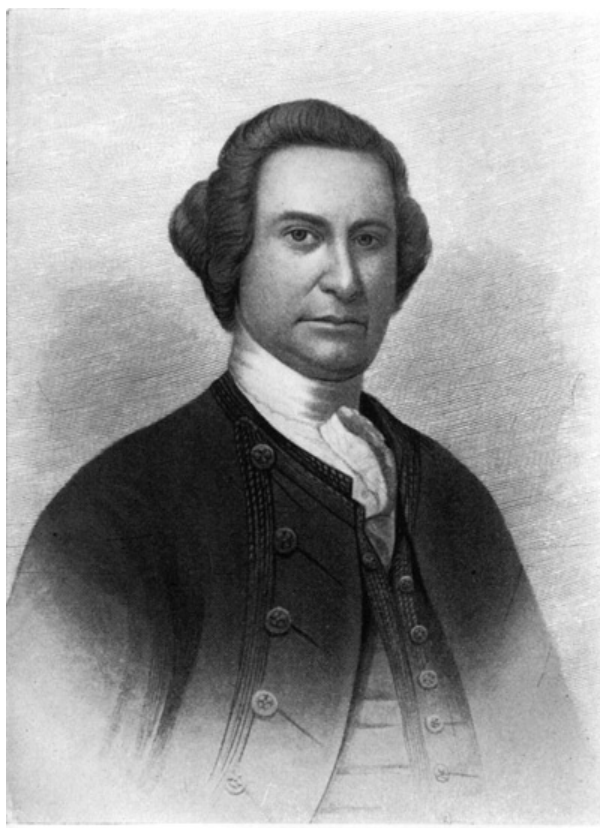
Molly spent her early years in a Mohawk village called Canajoharie in New York. Her parents Margaret and Cannassware were Christians. When her father died, her mother married the chief of the Mohawk Turtle Clan. The chief's name was Brant Kanagaradunkwa. Molly and her brother Joseph took his name to show that they were family now.

Molly probably went to a Christian mission school where she learned English. This would help her later in her work as a translator and diplomat. As a diplomat, she represented Native American tribes and their needs.

Her political experience began at 18 years old. She went with her stepfather to a meeting of tribe elders. They were discussing problems with buying and selling land. The American colonists had cheated the Native American tribes in the transaction.

General Sir William Johnson

Molly became the wife of General Sir William Johnson when she was 23. He was originally from Ireland. He fought for the British in the French and Indian War. He became a captain and then a knight.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Wm Johnson".

Wikimedia Commons public domain image

Sir William Johnson from a plate in
The Old New York Frontier by Francis
Whiting Halsey (1901)

After the war, Sir William Johnson made a home in New York. He learned the Mohawk language, so the tribe respected him. He became the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. He communicated between the British government and the Iroquois Nation. He helped them negotiate trades.

Sir William Johnson was 21 years older than Molly when they married. Molly's family connection as the daughter of a tribe chief helped Sir William Johnson in his work. The Native American tribes trusted him more as Superintendent.

As his wife, Molly was in charge of Johnson's large house called "Johnson Hall." She did the cooking and gardening, and she managed the servants and slaves. She also helped Sir William translate between the Native American people and the British.



Wikipedia/public domain image by Edward Lawson Henry (1841–1919)

A painting (1903) of William Johnson holding a Native American
conference with the chiefs of the Six Iroquois Nations at Johnson Hall in
1772.

Molly and Johnson had eight children together. She was a very popular and well-respected woman with both the Native American people and the British.

Sir William Johnson died in 1774 at the start of the American Revolution. Molly returned to her home in Canajoharie with her children. After her husband's death she was still an important connection between the British and the six tribes of the Iroquois Nation.

The American Revolutionary War

A short time after Molly returned to Canajoharie, the American Revolutionary War began. The American Patriots (the colonists) were fighting against Great Britain for the freedom to be their own country.

American people who supported the British were called "Loyalists." Loyalists wanted to stay loyal to the king of England. Molly Brant and most of the Native American tribes were Loyalists. She thought the Patriots would take over Native American land if they created an independent country.

Molly's brother Joseph was a very important connection between the Native American Iroquois tribes and the British. He even visited the king of England to ask for his support. When he was young, Joseph fought for the British army in the French and Indian War. He fought with Molly's husband. Joseph was the chief of the Mohawk tribe and the captain of the Mohawk Army for the British. *See also [Brant, Joseph](#) .*

Molly did not fight in the war, but she became a spy. She listened for information about the Patriots' plans and gave the information to the Loyalists. When she heard about plans for a Patriot attack, she told the Loyalist army. This helped them win the battle. She also protected British Loyalists by hiding them in her house or giving them supplies like ammunition for their guns.

The Patriots discovered that Molly was a spy when they lost the Battle of Oriskany. They realized that she told the Loyalists their plan. To retaliate, the Patriots attacked Molly's home in Canajoharie two separate times.

Molly took her children and ran away to the Iroquois capital in Canada. Many of the Iroquois people had to move there from New York during the war. Still, she encouraged her people to keep fighting.

The British lost the war to the Patriots in 1783. It seemed the British forgot about the Iroquois loyalty. The king of Great Britain gave away the Native

American land to the Patriots and colonists. All of the Iroquois had to move from their homeland to Canada.

Later Life

Molly Brant lived the rest of her life in Ontario, Canada. The British government gave her a large house next door to her brother Joseph. Her oldest child, Peter, died in the war but her other children all survived.

Even after the war, she was still an important voice for the Mohawk people.

Molly died in 1796 at the age of 60. She is remembered as an influential leader of her people.

Further Study

<http://www.josephbrant.com/joseph-brant-family/molly-brant/>

<https://historyswomen.com/early-america/molly-brant/>

<http://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2008/12/molly-brant.html>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Brant>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joseph-Brant>

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