

Landscape

Words by Gloria Hildebrandt

LANDSCAPE OF NATIONS:

The Six Nations
and Native Allies

Commemorative Memorial

at Queenston Heights is a long-overdue monument to the contribution of Indigenous people in the War of 1812. Unlike a mere statue, this is a large outdoor permanent installation that invites you to explore and move through it, providing plenty of educational opportunities for those who want to learn.

of Peace

Photos by Mike Davis



▲ The Memory Circle is the dramatic centre of the installation with the names of the Six Nations and Native Allies carved into bronze medallions on the surrounding stone “sun rays”.



◀ Bronze sculptures of John Norton, left, and John Brant, by artist Raymond Skye mark the entrance to the memorial landscape.

▼ The longhouse structure with the pattern of the Two Row Wampum Belt running in the path.



You come upon the memorial powerfully, without any introduction. Suddenly, among the trees, you see two sculpted figures in Native clothing, feathers standing up from their headdresses. Their plinths identify the one on the left as John Norton and the one on the right as John Brant. Both were Six Nations war captains at the Battle of Queenston Heights during the War of 1812.

Well known and commemorated is Sir Isaac Brock, the British Major-General who died while leading the Canadian opposition to invading Americans at Queenston



▲ Beside the path, a time marker for the beginning of the War of 1812. Sweetgrass grows densely in the centre of the Memory Circle.



▲ The Tree of Peace, an Eastern White Pine, is planted on top of a tomahawk and marks the exit of the memorial landscape.

Heights in October 1812. The Autumn 2012 issue of this magazine when it was called *E Escarpment Views* contains a detailed feature by Chris Mills, entitled "Who Was Sir Isaac Brock?" This article is available at

www.NEVViews.ca under Magazine - Back Issues.

Much less known is the role of the many Natives who fought with the British and Canadians. While some people have talked about recognizing their involvement

since the War of 1812 itself, it was not until 2016 that the memorial was built. It was worth the wait, because the entire landscape makes up the commemoration, a contemporary and holistic approach to public art.

Sacred Space

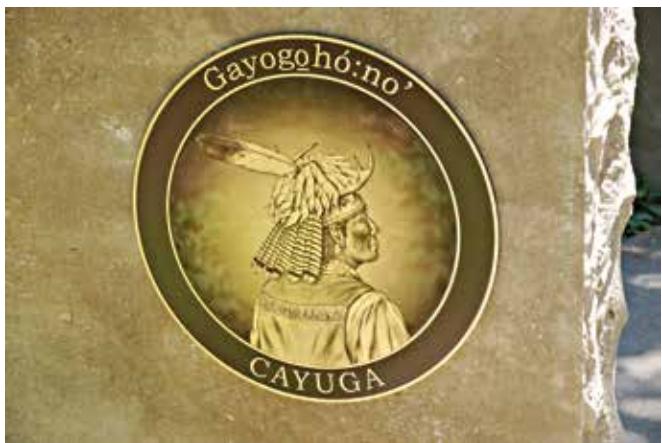
There are actually 11 distinct elements to the memorial, each one rich with meaning. There's a paper brochure and even an on-site bronze plaque explaining each element, but it's more than the sum of its parts.

There's a feeling when experiencing it that's similar to that of being in a large cathedral, house of worship or religious site. You don't need to know what everything means, to sense its importance. It feels like it has deep significance for many people. It's a processional space, a landscape to take a journey in both mind and body. It's a gathering place that you can imagine coming alive with ceremonies for large groups of people.

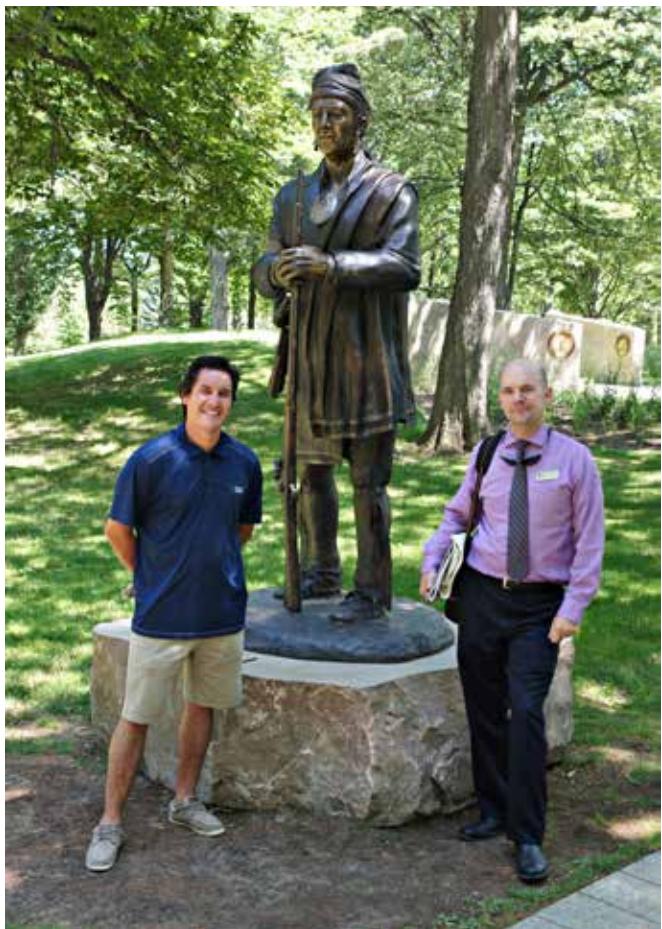
As you enter the memorial, passing the statues of Norton and Brant, you walk through a representation of a traditional longhouse. Merely a series of arched metal rods, it nevertheless conveys the idea of shelter. Six Nations people called themselves what translates as people of the longhouse.

The stone path underfoot has a pattern of two gray lines running parallel within a light-coloured field. The pattern and colours are similar to the very old and treasured Two Row Wampum Belt which signifies the first treaty between the Six Nations and Europeans. Astonishing to non-Natives, beaded wampum belts can be read aloud, and can take hours to do so.

The largest and most dramatic element of the landscape is the Memory Circle with a patch of sweetgrass growing in the centre, with eight short Escarpment limestone walls placed like rays from the sun fanning out around the edge. Each wall or ray has a medallion on it, two for the many different Native allies and six for the Six Nations: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca,



▲ One of the eight bronze medallions on the stone rays of the central installation, this one for the Cayuga of Six Nations.



▲ Flanking the sculpture of John Norton are left, Travis Hill, manager of Old Fort Erie and Niagara Parks Commission Indigenous consultant, and Jim Hill, no relation, superintendent of heritage for The Niagara Parks Commission.

Tuscarora, each in the Indigenous language of the nation it represents.

Jim Hill, superintendent of heritage for The Niagara Parks Commission, was showing visitors the memorial when a park staff member passed by and told of something that had recently happened

on National Aboriginal Day, renamed National Indigenous Peoples Day, which is the last Saturday in June. He had noticed two women leaving the memorial with sweetgrass in their hands. He told them they can't pick the grass, but the women explained that they were Indigenous people



▲ Six Nations war captain in 1812, John Brant. SCULPTURE BY RAYMOND SKYE.

and have the right to take it.

"Then they thanked me for stopping them," said the staff member, clearly impressed.

The memorial passes earthworks and a berm rich in history and terminates with an Eastern White Pine, called the Tree of Peace, that marks the place where a tomahawk has been buried. While full of references to

Indigenous life, having a memorial at all is unusual.

"Indigenous people don't create monuments, they tell stories to their children," explains Jim.

Friendship

Travis Hill, no relation to Jim, and manager of Old Fort Erie and Niagara Parks Commission Indigenous



▲ A plaque on a rock shows a map of the memorial plus interpretive details for each element.

consultant, elaborates about the war memorial: "We can't forget the past, we can learn from it. The friendship between the Crown and the Native allies needs to be polished every so often, which means meaningful discussions be made between both parties to flourish the relationship. This memorial stands as reminder of that relationship."

The memorial can be more about that relationship than commemorating war."

Jim puts it this way: "The memorial was originally intended to tell the story of the War of 1812 but it has taken on more meaning for visitors as a place of peace and reconciliation."

The Landscape of Nations project was co-chaired by



▲ John Norton was also a Six Nations war captain. BY RAYMOND SKYE.

Tim Johnson of Six Nations of the Grand River and Richard Merritt of Niagara-on-the-Lake. It was designed by landscape architect Tom Ridout and Six Nations bronze artist Raymond Skye. Walker Industries is credited with site preservation. It is located on land of the Mississaugas of the Credit, later occupied by Six Nations.

Other than The Gathering on National Indigenous Peoples Day, the best time to experience the memorial is any time at all.

“Come and take it in,” says Jim. “Every season has a different feel.” **NEV**

Gloria Hildebrandt and Mike Davis are co-founders and co-publishers of this magazine.