



Sir John Johnson: Loyalest Baronet

Earle Thomas

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Sir John Johnson: Loyalist Baronet is the first full-length biography of a man who played a central role in the organization and development of Canada. The son of Sir William Johnson, he was born and bred in the Mohawk valley of New York and, after the onset of the American Revolution, became the most prominent Loyalist in the province of Canada. The commander of the King's Royal Regiment of New York, he played an important part in the forays on the rich agricultural lands of his native state, a region regarded as the breadbasket of the Thirteen Colonies. In 1782 he was appointed Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs in British North America; during his decades in this post, he remained the loyal friend of the Indians and the champion of their rights. In 1784 he supervised the movement of the Loyalists from the Montreal area to the upper St. Lawrence and Bay of Quinte regions and consequently may be considered as the founder of modern Ontario. He was recommended by Lord Dorchester for the position of first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, and there was widespread disappointment when some one else was chosen.

This is the story of a colonial who mixed easily with the elite of both America and England, his tumultuous affairs reflecting the tumultuous times he lived in. The tremendous property losses he suffered as a Loyalist were never matched by the land grants and money payments made by the British Government; yet he maintained the same extravagant standard of living he had been accustomed to before the Revolution. His mansions in Montreal, his seigneuries in old Quebec, his houses and mills in other parts of Canada, and his home in the London suburbs were costly to buy and expensive to maintain. He and Lady Johnson had fourteen children to provide for, to feed, clothe, educate, and purchase dowries, positions, and military commissions for. He had his former common law wife and their two children in Schenectady to provide for, as well as the families of no less than three deceased brothers-in-law to concern him. His life was one long struggle, in an age of nepotism, favouritism, and graft, to find the funds to finance his responsibilities. The product of an age of violence, the Seven Years' War, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the War of 1812, the Napoleonic Wars, he was not essentially a violent man. However, many of his male relatives, sons, nephews, brothers-in-law, cousins, were caught up in the turbulence of the age and paid with their lives. Sir John did not escape unscathed; he paid the price in a different currency.

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