further reference to them at this time is not necessary, as they are made a part of the history of the towns in which they were respectively situated.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR WILLIAM JOHNSON, BARONET.

A CONDENSED HISTORY OF THE LIFE OF THE FOUNDER OF JOHNSTOWN.

HAVING made frequent reference to that remarkable man known first as William Johnson, land agent; then as Colonel Johnson; later as General Johnson, and finally as Sir William, we now propose a brief review of the leading events of his life, though we shall hardly expect to do justice to the most eminent character in the civil and military record of the province of New York, being limited to a mere outline of his illustrious career.

William Johnson, the son of Christopher and Anne (Warren) Johnson, was born in county Down, Ireland, in the year 1715. His uncle, Sir Peter Warren, had married an American woman, and became possessed of an extensive tract of land in the Mohawk valley. It contained 14,000 acres (originally granted in 1735 to Charles Williams) and located between the Mohawk and Schoharie rivers, in what is now the town of Florida. In 1738 William Johnson came hither to serve as superintendent of this estate, whose development was of great importance to its proprietor, since the purchase was a speculation from which he had great hope of financial profit. With this view young Johnson, under the direction of his uncle, cleared part of the land, putting it under cultivation, and also surveyed the entire tract, dividing it in a manner that would attract settlers of limited means. An important feature in this work was the erection of a mill. He also established himself in trade, a store being necessary to public convenience, and thus extended every inducement that could assist the new settlement. Later on, in view of the hostility between the British and French, and as well be-
tween the Iroquois Indians and their savage enemies in Canada, he erected a fortress which was called "Fort Johnson," on whose site Fort Hunter was afterward built. This was his home for several years, and from this point all his business operations were extended; but while doing full justice to his patron he omitted no opportunity to advance his personal interests, and early won that reputation for fair dealing which was always so prominent a feature in his character.

Such a life could not but render the young land agent familiar with the Indians. He adapted himself to their habits and language, and gained their confidence and enduring friendship. His intercourse with the Mohawks rendered him popular with the entire Six Nations, who thenceforth regarded him as their friend and protector. As a result he had no difficulty in acquiring Indian titles to such land as he desired, and he was also serviceable to his friends in procuring similar favors. To such a degree was this acquisition extended that at the time of his death he was the owner of various tracts in the country of the Mohawks, and also in other western nations of the confederacy, to the enormous extent of more than 173,000 acres.

The young land agent, like most adventurers, was unmarried, but he soon employed a housekeeper, a comely German girl, named Catherine Wisenberg, whom he afterwards married. She became the mother of three children, one son (John) and two daughters, one of whom became the wife of his nephew, Col. Guy Johnson, and the other the wife of Colonel Daniel Claus. After the death of his wife (the precise date of which is unknown) Johnson, who had then become colonel, took as housekeeper Molly Brant, sister of Joseph Brant, the famous Mohawk chief. She bore him eight children, each of whom was abundantly provided for in the baronet's will; but as his entire estate was afterwards confiscated and sold, none of his heirs ever possessed their inheritance.

It was not until George Clinton became governor of the province of New York that this "Mr. Johnson" became at all prominent in public

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1 This marriage ceremony was performed by Mr. Barkley, the Episcopal minister residing at Fort Hunter, where he officiated in the stone church built by direction of Queen Anne for the Mohawk Indians. (Yates)

2 This George Clinton is not to be confounded with our patriotic governor of the same name.
affairs. He had been previously occupied with the details of business, but with Governor Clinton he appears to have formed an intimate friendship. About this time (1742) he moved from the Warren tract to the north side of the Mohawk river, locating at a place named by him "Mount Johnson," where he erected a substantial stone mansion, now owned and occupied by Ethan Akin. In 1745 Johnson was appointed one of the justices of the peace of Albany county, an appointment which was the recognition of services among the Indians, holding the latter firm in their allegiance, and thus counteracting their preference of the French standard, a natural result of the Jesuit influence.

So highly appreciated, indeed, were these services that in 1746 he was appointed superintendent of Indian affairs in the entire province, a duty which extended through a vast territory. He was, however, so well known to all the Iroquois that he had their confidence and was really the object of their admiration, a natural result of his uniform honesty as well as decision of character. Such indeed was his popularity that the Mohawks adopted him into their nation, making him a chief with the title of Warre-haha. Four years later (1750) opposition was created against Colonel Johnson. He was falsely accused of using his influence for selfish ends, and while this charge was never sustained it so embarrassed him that he resigned the superintendency of Indian affairs; nor would he again accept the office when subsequently requested to resume its duties, until he yielded to Braddock's solicitation.

The title of "Colonel Johnson" first appeared in 1746 in correspondence which he held with Governor Clinton, and soon afterwards he was ordered to organize the militia for frontier defence. In obedience to this commission he formed the Germans and other settlers into militia companies; and thus the former land agent, now known as "Colonel Johnson," having this force under his command, together with his Indian allies, established a formidable barrier against the so dreaded French invasions.

In 1750 Colonel Johnson received a still higher honor, being appointed a member of the governor's council, a body whose decisions controlled the highest public interests. His opinions in its deliberations

¹ Johnson's Indian name is differently given in a preceding chapter.
had a peculiar value because of his familiarity with Indian affairs, and here he proved eminently useful. As an acknowledgment of his services, and also as a compensation for advances and expenditures made for the public benefit among the Indians, Colonel Johnson was voted by the council a belt of land two miles in width surrounding Onondaga lake, and including, of course, the site of Syracuse, whose salt springs had even then attracted attention.

We now reach that interval of almost peaceful nature which preceded the last struggle between the French and the British, and Colonel Johnson improved this opportunity to advance the welfare of his estates, which were rapidly increasing in extent as well as in value; but he also found time to elevate the condition of those around him, and especially to promote the civilization and education of his Indian dependencies. He became a patron of the mission schools and placed Joseph Brant, then one of the most promising Mohawk youths, at the Indian school in Lebanon. His prominence in public affairs, however, continued, for he, like all other of prophetic ken, foresaw the approaching crisis.

Jealousy is the inevitable penalty of public service, and the commissioners of Indian affairs were envious of his influence among the Iroquois. The Indians, too, became discontented and inclined to rebel against the power that restrained them; they called loudly for the reinstatement of their old superintendent, and on this point King Hendrick and his brother, Abraham, were clamorous. In obedience to this request, Johnson submitted a report to the governor on the government of the Six Nations, with suggestions for observance. He also placed the militia of the province in condition for active service.

In 1755 the final conflict for supremacy in America was begun between England and France, and immediately we find Colonel Johnson foremost in every military expedition. How signally he distinguished himself when disaster came to the British arms in every other quarter, is brilliantly recorded on the page of history. On the earnest invitation of General Braddock, he attended the military conference at Alexandria, where he received command both of the provincial militia and the warriors of the Six Nations in the expedition against Crown Point, his rank being major-general. Braddock also induced Johnson to serve
as superintendent of Indian affairs, giving him sole power and commis-
sioning him to treat with the confederate nations in order to unite them
in support of British interests. This investment of authority was fol-
lowed by a grand council at Mount Johnson, and the long sought alli-
ance was accomplished; but when General Johnson marched for Lake
George the jealousy of Governor Shirley prompted him to use every
means to discredit Johnson, and even to attempt to win from him the
friendship of the Mohawks in order to rally them under his own standard.

Having previously described the expedition against Crown Point, it
is sufficient here to state that it was only through the timely arrival
and persistent efforts of General Johnson that victory was secured.
Early in the battle which decided the fate of war, he was wounded 1 and
was obliged to retire from the field, but while succeeded by General
Lyman, he still in part directed the action, and yet, notwithstanding its
grand success, he incurred censure for neglecting to attack the French
fort at Crown Point, which some thought might have been captured
easily, as the enemy was too severely beaten to make a successful de-
fense. Instead of doing this Johnson erected Fort William Henry at
the head of Lake George, but whatever may have been the truth of the
above mentioned censure, it is evident that the public was in approval
of Johnson’s conduct, and congratulations were freely bestowed both
by the province and the crown. The former tendered him an ovation
and public reception in New York city, while the latter made him a
baronet, and he was thenceforth known as “Sir William.”

Parliament also voted him thanks for his victory, and a more sub-
stantial reward was added in the handsome gift of five thousand pounds.
These gratuities were followed by a commission as “Colonial Agent,
and sole Superintendent of all the affairs of the Six Nations and other
Northern Indians”

The last mentioned appointment was the source of much gratification
to all the Indians and especially to the Mohawks. About this time,
1756, the Pennsylvania Indians became hostile to the colonists, and the
superintendent was called upon to prevent violence. Several confer-
ences were held, and though serious trouble was threatened, it was
averted by this timely intervention.

1 General Johnson was wounded in the hip, from which he was ever afterward a constant suf-
ferer, and no doubt the injuries received in this campaign did much to shorten his life.
Sir William now suffered much from his wound, and this increased the burden of public affairs, but when he was called upon to support Webb at German Flats he responded promptly and witnessed the distress of that cowardly officer on learning of the fall of Oswego. The next year he joined the army under Abercombie, having in his own command the organized militia of the Mohawk valley, and also his faithful Indian allies, but the inefficiency of the commander-in-chief prevented his engaging the enemy—a service which he had earnestly requested. Disaster at this time attended public affairs, and in addition to those which befell the army in the Champlain valley, came the destruction of Palatine village, occurring at a time when Sir William was confined to his bed by sickness. As soon, however, as returning health permitted he reorganized his militia for active service and marched to the scene of conflict.

An army was sent against Fort Niagara in 1759, under the command of Prideaux, but as he was slain at an early time in the siege, Sir William succeeded him, and having defeated the attempt to relieve the beleagured garrison, he eventually secured a signal victory. This campaign being ended he returned to Fort Johnson, and it may be added that the victories which marked this year really brought the French dominion in Canada to a close, though three years elapsed before the terms of peace were specified by treaty. This pacific interval enabled Sir William to attend to his personal affairs, which had suffered much for want of care. As has been mentioned, he had acquired large landed estates, having purchased from the original patentees many desirable tracts, among which was included what afterward became the township of Johnstown. Impressed with its eligibility he founded a settlement on this spot, though a year or more elapsed before marked progress was made in colonization. This work was also retarded by the campaign of 1760, when he with his Mohawk warriors were summoned to the aid of General Amherst in his movement against the now weakened French positions in the Champlain valley. Serious Indian troubles also occurred the next year in the northwest, and his presence as superintendent was required to pacify the savages and secure an amicable settlement of difficulties. This duty required a journey to far distant Detroit, which Sir William, notwithstanding his infirmities, undertook and ac-
accomplished, being accompanied by his son John and his nephew Guy Johnson. On the return journey the baronet was again prostrated by illness and was obliged to remain several days at Niagara before he could resume his homeward route.

Peace being now proclaimed, and the Indian troubles practically settled, Sir William once more devoted himself to his personal interests. In 1762 he induced one hundred families to settle in his new village of Johnstown, and as an additional bounty, he gave the Lutherans and Presbyterians each fifty acres of land as a glebe for pastoral support. Previously to this he had erected a summer residence on the northwestern border of the great vlaie, in the present town of Broadalbin, to which he gave the dignified name of Castle Cumberland. He also built a lodge on the south bank of the Sacandaga, in what is now the town of Northampton, where he was accustomed to resort during the fishing season, and the spot even to the present retains its early name, the “Fish House.” Agriculture and stock raising also shared his attention, and to improve the breed of domestic animals he brought blooded sheep and horses into his settlement.

Public affairs, however, soon again required his attention, this being occasioned by a disaffection among the Indians in Pennsylvania, and grievances inflicted on the Mohawks who justly complained that their lands had been withheld or invaded by the settlers. Such complaints were familiar to Sir William, who again brought the troubles to a satisfactory close, and the Indians again learned that they had no wiser and firmer friend than the baronet. The treaty at Easton was made and confirmed, and Sir William returned to Mount Johnson, where soon afterward (1762) his daughter Nancy was married to Col. Daniel Claus. The remainder of the year was occupied by the baronet in preparing his timber and other material to be used in the construction of Johnson Hall, an elegant baronial mansion, completed in 1763, and thenceforth his dwelling until the close of his life. This building still stands within the limits of the village of Johnstown. It may, however, be added incidentally that the settlers brought to this spot were chiefly Germans, while nearly four miles north he settled a colony of Scotch Highlanders, who were also his dependents and faithful followers. They occupied the region until the Revolutionary war, and then by reason of their
tions to repel invasions and punish outrages, or in negotiating peace treaties. In 1764 he held a grand council at Niagara, whose most important result was the Senecas ceding to the British government a tract four miles wide on each side of the Niagara river, and extending from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. They additionally granted to the baronet all the islands in the same river, which he, in turn, ceded to the crown. At the same time Sir William was greatly disturbed by events other than those relating to Indian affairs. The patentees who had purchased lands of the crown on the promise to satisfy the Indian titles had been guilty of many unjust dealings, and had succeeded in trapping the un-tutored natives into land conveyances without adequate compensation. The owners sought to occupy and settle under their patents, and their fraud thus became known to the Mohawks, who, finding themselves thus defrauded, became deeply indignant. A similar animosity spread throughout the Six Nations, and renewed disaster was threatened.

The chief cause of this wide spread discontent was created by the granting of the patent of Kayaderosseras, an act permitted by the crown and sanctioned by the provincial government. Its proprietors represented to the Indians that the land sought to be obtained by them would include in extent only enough to make a small farm, and they released their title for nominal consideration; in fact the patent included the great amount of about 700,000 acres, and the fraud was not discovered until the deed of cession had been made. Parts of Montgomery and Fulton counties were included by the patent, as will be seen by reference to the previous chapter. Through the efforts of Sir William the Mohawks were restored to a part of their lands, and so far as possible he rectified the great wrong which they had suffered; but in this attempt he was opposed by powerful political influences exerted by the proprietors, and no small amount of both time and effort was required to accomplish the much desired result.

The adverse influences which constantly beset the baronet in the province operated in other modes of injury. He had earnestly espoused the cause of the Indians, being indeed their official protector, therefore reports of his impending removal were circulated. The unscrupulous proprietors justly considered him an obstacle in the way of their nefarious designs. That hoped for removal, however, was never accom-
SIR WILLIAM JOHNSON.

plished; on the contrary Sir William's influence increased, and he was soon gratified by the news that his son John, who was then in England, had been knighted by the king. This was conclusive proof of the royal confidence in the baronet's ability and integrity. During the same year (1766) Sir William built a grist-mill for the benefit of his tenants, gave personal attention to the erection of an Episcopal Church at Schenectady, fitted up at his own expense a Masonic lodge room at Johnson Hall, and built commodious stone dwellings for his sons-in-law, Guy Johnson and Daniel Claus, to each of which he added the gift of a square mile of land. The mansion and estate of Guy Johnson is now included in the suburbs of Amsterdam, and has long been known as "Guy Park"; that of Colonel Claus was located about midway from Mount Johnson to the Park. Sir John Johnson first lived at the Hall with his father, but having married Miss Mary Watts, of New York city, on June 29, 1773, they began housekeeping at Mount Johnson.

The restoration of peace again enabled the baronet to give attention to his much neglected business affairs. He devoted himself to the development of the estate at the Hall, and also to the improvement of his tenantry, while the educational and spiritual welfare of his Mohawk dependents had a full share in his efforts. Many indeed of these once savage warriors had become thrifty and successful farmers, and Sir William gave them every possible encouragement. He also built a church at Canajoharie for their use and supplied their school with a teacher. It was at this time of usefulness that the king, in recognition of his eminent service, granted to him the immense tract called the "Royal Grant," lying between East and West Canada creeks. Its extent was 69,000 acres, and it included the site of Little Falls and part of the village of Herkimer.

In 1771 Johnstown had become a thriving and prosperous business centre, and all through the Mohawk valley settlements were increasing with marked improvement in agriculture. Johnstown soon required new streets, for during the year 1770 eighty families had come there to live. Lumber for building was supplied from the baronet's mill, and other necessaries were furnished through his bounty. In March, 1771, he built St. John's Church, commonly called the "Stone Church," and in the same month advertised in the New York papers for a teacher for the free school which he had established.
Notwithstanding, however, the apparent peace and prosperity that prevailed on every hand, the baronet was seriously troubled both in body and mind. He was afflicted by a serious malady and every remedy failed to restore health. In addition to personal ailment was that dark cloud which he saw gathering in the political horizon. He well knew its cause, and evidently forecast the inevitable result. The mother country had burdened the colonies with oppressive measures which taxed both their means and patience beyond endurance. Long years of experience in public life had made Sir William conversant with the needs as well as the capacity of the country, and also with the temperament of the people. He beheld the public grievances, yet was powerless to remove the burden. A servant of the crown, as well as its beneficiary, he was a sad and silent observer of all that occurred, and his unerring judgment told him at once that a rupture with Great Britain was inevitable. He did not, however, live to participate in the conflict that followed these premonitory signs and which ended in national independence and the creation of the Republic of the United States.

Previous to this important event, Sir William became an active factor in the organization of two new counties, being in this movement the counselor of Governor Tryon, then chief executive of the province. The plan and petition for dividing Albany county was first suggested in 1769, but the bill for that purpose was opposed and defeated. In 1772 another petition was sent to the legislature by Sir William, and after a brief delay he was gratified to learn that the bill had become a law. This subject will be more fully discussed in one of the later chapters of this work, and yet a brief allusion to it at the present time is appropriate.

The original county of Albany was created in 1683, and was confirmed in 1691, but its jurisdiction then included the entire province of New York, together with that disputed territory then called the “New Hampshire Grants,” but now part of Vermont. The bill which was passed in 1772 divided Albany county and created three counties—Albany, Tryon and Charlotte. Tryon included all that part of the province west of the Delaware river and a line extending thence north through what is now Schoharie county, and along the east line of Mont-
gomery, Fulton and Hamilton counties, and continuing in a straight line to Canada. Charlotte county included the New Hampshire grants north of the north lines of the towns of Arlington and Sunderland in Vermont, and a continuation of that line west to the Tryon county line. The remainder of New York, with part of Vermont, constituted Albany county.

Sir William lived to see this organization completed. In fact he was not only one of its originators but designed its temporary offices, nominated those who were elected by the people and controlled its affairs during his lifetime. Johnstown was designated the county seat. The court-house and jail were built the same year, the first term of court being held in September. The baronet also, at the suggestion of the governor, divided the new county into provincial districts, or townships they would now be called.

During 1772, Governor Tryon, accompanied by his wife, visited Sir William's palatial home, the ostensible object being to hold a council with the Mohawks, but in reality it was to learn what might be the most desirable lands in that region, for the worthy governor had a desire to speculate. During his stay, however, he reviewed the various regiments of troops under Sir William's command—three in number, one being composed of residents of Johnstown and its vicinity. In recognition of Sir William's services in organizing so effective a body of militia, Governor Tryon soon honored him with a commission as major-general of the northern department, a position he held during the remainder of his life.

From this time until 1774 we have a quiet interval, but in the last mentioned year Indian troubles again demanded the attention of the superintendent, arising from a revolt in Pennsylvania, which seriously threatened the peace of the Six Nations. Johnson, although unfit for duty by reason of illness, consented to hold a council at the hall. Six hundred of the confederates were present, and the baronet addressed the chiefs and sachems for two hours, all the time being exposed to the burning heat of a July sun. The exertion required by such an effort produced a fit, from which he died the next day, July 11, 1774. "His funeral," says a reliable authority, "was the most solemn demonstration the colonies up to that time had ever witnessed. The clergyman
in attendance was the Rev. Mr. Stewart, missionary at Fort Hunter, and the funeral procession numbered over 2,000, including colonial dignitaries and Indians, who were bereaved of a lifelong friend. He was buried in a vault erected beneath the floor of St. John's church for the family, but he was the only one of the number who ever occupied it."

Sir William, six months before his death, prepared a will disposing of his property and estate, by which he made abundant provisions for the children born to him by Catherine Wisenberg and Molly Brant, and also to other beneficiaries, but his principal devisee was his son, Sir John, who inherited the estate at Johnstown with other vast tracts of land, and to whom also descended the influence and power exercised by the baronet over the Six Nations. One especial injunction in Sir William's will clearly indicates the true character of the testator; it really revealed his heart: "I do earnestly recommend to my son to show leniency to such of the tenants as are poor, and an upright conduct with all mankind, which will on reflection afford more satisfaction to a noble and generous mind than the greatest opulence." But the will of the baronet, although elaborately prepared, and legally signed and witnessed, was never executed.

Had Sir William lived it is confidently believed he would have espoused the cause of the colonies against the mother country, in which event one of the most magnificent estates in the country would have been confirmed to him, but his successors, and particularly his son Sir John, allied themselves to the British, and as a result the estate was confiscated and sold for the public benefit.

While Sir John Johnson succeeded to the baronial estate of his father, and also, as far as possible, to his influence among the Indians, the office of superintendent of Indian affairs was committed to Colonel Guy Johnson, assisted by Colonel Daniel Claus, the latter having been deputy superintendent to Sir William in Canada.