

# The Mohawk – Wyandot Ancestry of the Wife of Lt. John Young,

## Catharine Brant-Hill Kayakhon

### An Overview

By

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Here follows a short summary of the present author's interpretation of the evidence in relation to the identity of Catharine, first wife of Lt. John Young (1742-1812) of the Six Nations Indian Department during the Revolutionary War, and mother to all four of his children.

### Mohawk Ancestry

The single most important genealogical source here is the diary (published in 1793) of one Patrick Campbell, a Scottish traveler who visited Lt. John Young on 14 February 1792. Here Campbell states that Young *was married to a squaw, sister to one of the chiefs of the Mohawke nation who succeeded Captain David*. Furthermore Campbell stated that David's son Aaron Hill did not inherit his father's role, since the *son does not succeed to the honours and titles of the family, but they go in the female line to his aunt's son*. In this case there were two "honours and titles" to be assigned to David's maternal nephew including the designation of Captain (earned by his uncle David), and the Bear Clan Confederacy sachem title Astawenserontha (inherited by his uncle David).

Thus it can be said with authority that in 1792 Young was married to a Bear Clan Mohawk woman, but the task then becomes to find further evidence of Catharine's heritage, including her parent's names and family ties.

The need to explore records and sources relating to Mohawk (Six Nations - Haudenosaunee – Iroquoian) ancestors poses certain challenges. In 1899/00 Gerin made a very poignant statement; *It is not always an easy matter to trace the genealogy of an Iroquois* (p.89). After the present author's quest of 35 years researching this subject, he can attest to the veracity of Gerin's words. Over 100 years later the task, despite the digital revolution, is still daunting.

The key to accomplishing the goal here is to determine who held the "honours and titles" of Captain David Hill in 1792. This is somewhat problematic due to the scarcity of records for the period between 1790 (the year David Hill died) and 1800. In the course of the subsequent research, various hypotheses were explored. The following conclusions were arrived at based on a balance of probabilities relating to the factual record:

Lt. John Young's wife was **Catharine Kayakhon, the adopted daughter of Margaret Hill and Nichus Brant Canadiorha; and biological daughter of Mary Kateriunigh Hill and an unknown European male, available evidence pointing to Sir William Johnson.** It is suspected that Catharine's biological father may have been European. Margaret and key members of her wider family belonged to the Lower Mohawk (Ft. Hunter) Bear Clan Astawenserontha family, but many resided at the Upper Mohawk Village (Canajoharie). In Mohawk, **Kayakhon** means, "*She breaks / cuts all of them*" (Philip Henhawk, personal communication, 7 March 2011). Catharine was born in **1747**, and baptized 3 June 1747 at the Schenectady Reformed Dutch Church. Catharine was an Upper Mohawk (Canajoharie) of Lower Mohawk ancestry. While it may be cogently argued that there is only soft evidence linking Catharine to Sir William Johnson, there is evidence – and none whatsoever in relation to any other white man. Hence the attribution must remain **tentative** for the present, and would be immeasurably enhanced by a descendant of for example Sir William Johnson's son Sir John Johnson matching one or more members of the Young family who descend from Lt. John Young and Catharine in autosomal genetic testing.

The evidence emerging from the Campbell Diary shows that Catharine was a half sister of the Mohawk chief Seth Hill Kanenkaregowagh who succeeded to the title Confederacy title Astawenserontha (Bear Clan Mother Mary Hill Kateriunigh).

### **Wyandot Ancestry**

Based largely on evidence stemming from the **obituary of Catharine's grandson Warner H. Nelles**, it appears that Catharine was also of Wyandot descent or affiliation. It is recorded that her adopted father Nicholas Brant was a member of the Beaver Clan / Tribe (one of the very few Mohawks of record to hold to this affiliation which likely came to the Mohawks via Huron - Wyandot captives). However he was a member of the Bear Clan / Tribe, Astawenserontha family, and first cousin to Mary Hill.

All indications are that sometime around the time of the War of 1812, a sachemship belonging to the Upper Mohawks was created for the Huron – Wyandot faction at Six Nations, apparently due to political turmoil and extreme factionalism at this time. The first to hold this principal sachem title belonging to the Mohawk Bear Clan (Astawenserontha family) was Francis Cotter Tahatonne. In 1817 Cotter left the Six Nations Reserve with his entire family in order to join the Wyandots of Anderdon Township. It appears that since his was not a League sachem name, Cotter retained Tahatonne as his personal name. He moved to Anderdon Township Ontario, then Sandusky Ohio and ultimately Kansas. His children and grandchildren eventually moved to Oklahoma.

In the above year (1817), Catharine's grandson via her daughter Elizabeth, Warner H. Nelles, stepped into Cotter's shoes and was made a chief in the "room" of the latter, likely using a Bear Clan name bestowed upon him for the occasion. The obituary of Nelles indicates that in 1817 (at age 17) he was appointed chief of the "Beaver Tribe" and in a formal ceremony of installation, using strings of wampum to represent his "horns of

office”, Nelles was invested as a chief, his name being **Tahanata**. This is a Mohawk name meaning, “*Towards his village*” (Philip Henhawk, personal communication, 7 March 2011).

To view the complete and detailed (55 page) study, [click here](#), then on the button at the lower right.

### **Genetic Test Evidence**

The results of the genomic testing (22 pairs of autosomes) of the descendants of Catharine has been very informative, and using the newest testing procedures, supports the genealogical evidence. Clearly she was highly admixed. It is well documented that her Hill ancestors were very admixed, but having a European father would be consistent with the evidence. Perhaps ultimately this work could, for example, pinpoint the region in Northeast Asia where some of Catharine’s Mohawk ancestors originated many thousands of years ago. However for the perspective of the present work, it will tend to support one or more hypotheses that can be linked to the paper trail. To view the manuscript on this subject, and this hypothesis [click here](#).

### **Selection of Hill Family Records and Sources**

The Hills can be traced to the mid 1600s, admirable for genealogists working in Europe let alone on the frontier of the New World. The following items may be of interest to researchers and family members. No matter which hypothesis as to the ancestry of Catharine is accepted, the Hill family is included. The links below pertain primarily to the hypothesis noted at the top of this manuscript:

- 1) Genealogy: The individual files will not upload to this page. Please click on link on the links at bottom right of author’s website at [www.davidkfaux.org](http://www.davidkfaux.org).
- 2) Family Story: As above.
- 3) Baptismal record of Catharine – [click here](#)
- 4) Lower Mohawk Deed of 1789 signed by many in the family of Catharine [click here](#)
- 5) Upper Mohawk Deed of 1789 signed by Kayakhon Katerin and her sundry relatives from that community – [click here](#)
- 6) Seth Newhouse list of women’s and warrior’s names associated with the Bear Clan Astawenserontha family (“loaned” prior to 1880 to the Dehennakarineh family) – [click here](#)
- 7) Patrick Campbell Diary entry of 1792 pertaining to John Young’s wife – [click here](#)
- 8) George Martin’s 1815 list of the “Principle Chiefs” of the Mohawks including Astawenserontha and the associated Tahatonne titles – [click here](#). Catharine’s grandson W.H. Nelles succeeded Francis Cotter to the latter in 1817.
- 9) Painting of Catharine’s uncle Captain David Hill Karonghyontye with Indian Department officer Col. Guy Johnson in 1776 – [click here](#). It should be noted that

one might assume that Lt. John Young of the Indian Department may have sported a uniform similar to that of Johnson.

- 10) Close up of the face of Captain David Hill from the above painting by Benjamin West in 1776 – [click here](#). Hill's mixed European and Mohawk ancestry as noted by Campbell (see above), appears to be reflected in this depiction of his face.
- 11) Photo of presentation pistol given to Captain David Hill by the Duke of Northumberland [click here](#).
- 12) Photo of the brass plate with Bear Clan etching from above pistol [click here](#).
- 13) Painting by Lewis Foy and sketch by Robert Pilkington of 1793 Indian Conference at Buffalo Creek with Flying Sky (Karonhyontye) as orator [click here](#).
- 14) Photo of powder horn of Seth Kanenkaregowa (later Captain Seth Hill Astawenserontha) [click here](#).
- 15) Sketch of engraving on above powder horn [click here](#).

As ever, my thanks to Thomas M. Nelson for his sage advice, guidance, constructive criticism, and for digging up some materials that, despite diligent searching, had not come to my attention.

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Version: 20 January 2012; Revised 22 December 2014.  
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