

Freemasonry in Upper Canada in the War of 1812

(Speech notes: DJG at Templum Fidelis, June 19, 2010)

Introduction:

June 18, marks a most important anniversary. On that day in 1812, the government of the United States declared war on Great Britain, and set out to conquer Upper Canada, as the Province of Ontario was then known. A great deal of interest is now developing in Canada and the United States as we approach the official bicentennial of the War of 1812. This interest is logical, since the War was a defining moment in the evolution of both countries. In fact, in some parts of Southern Ontario to this day, if one mentions “the War” it is automatically assumed to be the War of 1812, not the Second World War or Afghanistan.

Given the vast scope of the War, it would be impossible to cover the entire conflict in detail here today. Therefore, we will concentrate on one very significant but little known historical theme in the War of 1812.

Freemasonry was one of the most important institutions brought by soldiers and pioneers into Upper Canada. It provided a rallying point for local Canadians, played a crucial role in strategic planning, boosted morale, and even transcended national loyalties. In fact, as we will see, no study of the War of 1812 can be regarded as complete, without a consideration of the role of Freemasonry.

When we look at any historical event, we should keep in mind that history is the sum total of many personal stories. As part of our look into Freemasonry in the War of 1812, we will also meet a few of the people who fought in that War.

Spring 1812:

In the spring of 1812, the new colony of Upper Canada, was slowly developing in the midst of a vast wilderness of forests, lakes and rivers. Approximately 100,000 Upper Canadian civilian inhabitants were located in a string of settlements along the main water routes. Major concentrations occurred in the Cornwall to Kingston area, York now known as Toronto, the Niagara River, the Grand River flowing into Lake Erie, the north shore of Lake Erie, and the Detroit River.

Water transportation was both the key to the survival of Upper Canada, and the weak point in the defense of the colony. Several British frontier garrisons had been established along the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes corridor, to protect this strategic supply link with Britain. However, the total strength of regular troops in all of British North America amounted to less than 5,000 professional soldiers. These soldiers were expected to protect a border of more than 1,000 miles, stretching from Montreal to Lake Superior. To the south and east, the United States was a formidable and aggressive opponent of 7,000,000 people. In 1812, due to international politics, most people expected that a War between Great Britain and the United States was only a matter of time.

For our study, it is important to recall that most of the British Regiments of Infantry and Artillery garrisoned in Upper Canada usually held their own Masonic Lodges. Traveling Warrants issued by the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland, or Ireland, authorized the Regiment to hold Lodge meetings anywhere the Regiment served. Local pioneer civilian Masons often attended these Lodges until they were able to establish one of their own in the new settlements. Good examples occurred in the Kingston area, where military Lodges were meeting as early as 1781. In the Niagara area, the 8th Kings Regiment stationed at Fort Niagara supported the first Loyalist Masonic refugees coming into that area after the American revolution.

The original capital of Upper Canada was located in Newark, now known as Niagara on the Lake, situated at the mouth of the Niagara River on Lake Ontario. The first Masonic Lodge built in Upper Canada was erected at Newark in 1791, and was in fact one of the first structures erected in the new community. As such, it was also pressed into service as a school, agricultural society hall, and place of worship for divine services. This emphasis on constructing the Lodge showed the strong Masonic roots of many of the original settlers, such as Brother and Colonel John Butler of Butler's Rangers, a veteran of the American Revolution.

Noted Masonic historian John Ross Robertson wrote the following words on Niagara.

“One might almost call the Niagara District the cradle of Masonry in Upper Canada, for its soil is indeed sacred to the cause of the Craft.”

While Niagara Masons constructed the first Masonic Lodge building, Freemasonry played a significant role in the development most pioneer settlements throughout the Province. By 1795, a dozen Lodges were reported on the Provincial Register. This does not count military Lodges, or Lodges meeting under other warrants, or even those meeting informally by immemorial right.

The village of Bath on the shore of Lake Ontario, at that time known as Ernestown, was a typical pioneer settlement. Originally settled in 1783 by United Empire Loyalist refugees from the American Revolution, it was developing an economy based on farming, logging, trade and shipbuilding. Freemasonry was part of this frontier community. For example, in 1804, it is noted that the local Lodge was re-designated by the Provincial Grand Master as # 13.

The influence of Freemasonry in 1812 had an important political influence on the new colony of Upper Canada. Many people assume that the colony at this time was settled exclusively by people of English descent. In actual fact, the population was much more diverse. United Empire Loyalists and later immigrants represented diverse ethnic backgrounds and spoke many languages. In Upper Canada, one would hear English, French, Palatine German, Dutch, Irish and Scottish Gaelic, as well as many different Aboriginal languages. Masons were represented in all of these cultural groups. Membership in the Craft therefore exerted a unifying influence through shared experience that helped create a sense of community on the frontier.

Another institution that exerted a unifying influence in Upper Canada was the local Militia. In the 19th century, it was expected that every man of military age was subject to service in his local colonial Regiment of Militia. Every year on the King's birthday, the Militia was ordered to

parade at the nearest permanent British military outpost. These Militia musters were a chance to ensure that every Militiaman was registered on the Regimental rolls, held a musket in good working order, and could adequately perform basic military drill.

Thus by definition, every Mason of military age would have also been a member of the Militia. So the men who settled the colony, and built the pioneer Masonic Lodges, were also the same men who were called up as Militiamen to defend their new homes during the War.

Although the provincial capital moved to York or Toronto in 1796, Newark in 1812 retained many of its vestiges of the original capital. It continued to serve as the local military headquarters, with nearby Fort George being the principal garrison for the British Army, the local Militia, and the Provincial Marine.

One of the British Regular soldiers who was charged with protecting the Niagara frontier was James Fitz Gibbon. Born in Ireland, he spoke both Irish Gaelic and English. He enlisted in the 49th Regiment of Foot in 1797 at the age of 17, and served in the Napoleonic Wars in Europe as a Sergeant.

In 1802, the Regiment was posted to duty in Quebec, which gave Fitz Gibbon the opportunity to become a Mason in Merchant's Lodge # 40. Under the able military direction of his superior officer, Colonel Isaac Brock, Fitz Gibbon was promoted to Sergeant Major and eventually Lieutenant. The Regiment, along with Fitz Gibbon, was later posted to Upper Canada. By then Colonel Brock had become General Brock. (We have not yet been able to associate Brock with a specific Masonic Lodge. However, as an officer in the Regular Army, he would have been familiar with the concept of military Lodges.)

Another important military group stationed at Newark was the British Indian Department, whose headquarters was located adjacent to Fort George. This organization was charged with maintaining the alliance between the British Crown and the First Nations of North America, and formed a major part of the strategy for the defense of Upper Canada against the United States.

A strong alliance with the First Nations was a strategic priority for the British. The location of First Nations settlements in Upper Canada and in American Territories served as a sort of buffer state between British and American interests. In addition, the psychological value of Native warriors cannot be overestimated. After the American Revolution, the Americans demonized the role of Native warriors who had supported the British, and regularly accused them of all manner of atrocities in popular literature. By 1812, a whole generation of Americans had been raised on exaggerated myths of Native warriors as a vicious and dangerous foe, lurking in the wilderness, ready to pounce on any American invader who dared to venture into Upper Canada.

In their diplomatic work, the officers of the British Indian Department proved to be well skilled. Their success can be attributed to two reasons. First, they showed great respect to the warriors of the First Nations by learning their languages and customs. One of these traditions was the silver chain of friendship. Aboriginal tradition recalls that when European explorers first sailed to North America, the local Iroquois welcomed them as friends and allies. The warriors tied the explorers' ship to a tree so they would not lose their new friends. However, the rope began to rot,

so it was replaced with a silver chain. Unfortunately, silver will tarnish if it is not polished regularly. Therefore, to maintain the brilliance of the alliance, it was necessary to polish the silver chain of friendship, symbolically, by exchanging gifts across it.

The most important Aboriginal gift was wampum strings and belts, which held great value as records or reminders of significant events or agreements. For example, when General Brock was killed at Queenston Heights in 1812, the Iroquois presented a string of red wampum to honour his memory. In return, British officers would present weapons, tools and trade silver jewelry. It is important to note that much of the trade silver was ornamented with Masonic symbols. A painting of Chief Joseph Brant done in England in 1776 clearly shows him wearing silver broaches in the shape of the square and compasses, as well as a Masonic ball fob opened up in its form of a Christian cross.

Another important gift was the pipe tomahawk, which was both a weapon of war and a tool of diplomacy. Many pipe tomahawks were ornamented extensively with Masonic symbols. A nice example in a Detroit museum has a large silver square and compasses inlaid into the blade. The military significance of the pipe tomahawk is obvious. But at a formal meeting or council, the pipe tomahawk took on another significant role. It was tradition for the pipe to be smoked and passed around to all members at the start of any council. Tobacco was a sacred gift of the Creator and Mother Earth. When the smoke was inhaled, it was then blown to the sun to thank him for the gift of light, without which no life could exist. (The reference to light is a striking connection to Masonic ritual, which would not have been lost on any Masons taking part in the council.) Smoke could also be blown to the ground, to thank Mother Earth for her bounty. The pipe thus helped to set a proper tone for the deliberations and ultimate success of a council.

Many of the British officers of the Indian Department were indeed Masons, a tradition going back to the days of Sir William Johnson the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Crown Colony of New York, before the American Revolution. In fact, Sir William founded St. Patrick's Lodge at Johnson Hall, on the grounds of his estate in Johnstown, New York, north of Albany. John Butler, a senior officer in the Indian Department, was one of the officers of St. Patrick's Lodge. He would later lead Butler's Rangers in the American Revolution, and became one of the founders of modern Niagara on the Lake, and of Freemasonry in early Upper Canada.

While it is not surprising that the officers of the British Indian Department were Masons, most people are intrigued to learn that a high proportion of Aboriginal warriors and chiefs were also Masons. The Enlightenment movement of the 18th century that favoured Freemasonry taught that Aboriginal peoples were "Noble Savages" or children of the wilderness unspoiled by civilization. Since Freemasonry embraced all men, First Nations warriors were natural candidates. In return, Aboriginal culture, always open to new concepts, embraced Freemasonry. The Masonic Great Architect of the Universe was similar to the Aboriginal belief in the Creator who made the world, its animals and its people. Aboriginal culture was reinforced by rituals, signs and symbols. Any Aboriginal warrior would immediately recognize the importance and power of Masonic rituals, signs and symbols, and would thus be attracted to the Craft.

Freemasonry thus created a cultural bridge that enabled men from very different cultural backgrounds to meet on the level for shared personal experiences. On a larger scale, it provided a

foundation for the political alliance between the British Indian Department, and the chiefs and warriors of the First Nations. There was nothing to compare with this in the United States. In 1812, in contrast, relations between American settlers and the First Nations south of the Great Lakes was often a war of extermination.

The British Indian Department in 1812 was concerned with two main groups of First Nations.

The first group was the remnants of the Six Nations of Iroquois from New York State, who had fought with the British during the American Revolution. One of the principal war chiefs of the Iroquois at that time was Chief Joseph Brant of the Mohawk Nation. Chief Brant was also Brother Brant. He was made a Mason in 1776 during a trip to London England. During the American revolution, he had led his warriors on campaign for the Crown beside Brother and Colonel John Butler's Corp of Rangers.

After the Revolution, many Iroquois were forced to leave the new United States as political refugees. Some 2,000 Iroquois had followed Joseph Brant, to new homes on the Grand River near Brant's Ford, while another Iroquois settlement was founded at Deseronto, west of Kingston.

In Upper Canada, Brother Brant promoted Freemasonry in the new settlements. He was active in Lodge # 11 at the Mohawk Castle, near present day Brantford, and the Barton Lodge # 4 in Hamilton.

History took a significant turn in the early 1800's at Grand River with the arrival of a man called John Norton. His ancestry was actually half Scottish and half Cherokee. Before he came to the Grand River, Norton had been a British soldier, and then a fur trader in the Ohio and Michigan Territories. When he arrived at the Grand River to work as a Christian missionary, Brant recognized Norton's leadership skills, and encouraged his participation in Iroquois affairs. Brant eventually adopted Norton as a Mohawk with the Mohawk name Teyoninhokarawen. Like his adopted Father before him, Norton was also a Mason.

Brother Brant passed to the Grand Lodge Above in 1807. On his death bed, Brant passed his chieftainship to John Norton, his adopted son. Norton, as a principal chief of the Mohawk nation, would later become a key figure in the War of 1812.

The second important group of First Nations were the Shawnee and other related Nations, known at that time as the "Western Indians." These people lived in the Michigan and Ohio Indian Territories of the new United States, and were led by Chief Tecumseh and his brother the Prophet. Tecumseh and his brother attempted in the early 1800 era to organize a confederacy of all First Nations in the Territories to resist American settlement on Indian lands. In this work, they received British Indian Department support and encouragement from the British post at Fort Malden in Amherstburg, located on the Detroit River, south of modern day Windsor.

It is widely believed that Chief Tecumseh was a Mason, although exact details of his Masonic affiliation have been lost. However, we do know that when he travelled to Fort Malden to meet with Indian Department officials, he often visited Adoniram Lodge in Amherstburg. Captain

Fox, a member of Adoniram Lodge and an officer in the local Amherstburg Militia, told his son stories of the War of 1812. Captain Fox recalled that Tecumseh “frequently met with the Brethren and sat in old Adoniram Lodge, and that the old chief had a great deal of reverence for Masonic work.”

Tecumseh’s pipe tomahawk survives in excellent condition in the collection of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington. On one side an engraved inscription reads “Presented to Chief Tecumseh by Colonel Procter, 41st Regiment, 1812.” On the other side, are engraved 4 significant Masonic symbols, which you will no doubt recognize. They include, the dove - the messenger, the sun - the glory of the Lord, the moon - to rule the night, and the 7 stars that gleam in the Heavens. In fact many of the pipe tomahawks surviving in museum collections today bear these same 4 Masonic engravings.

1812 Campaign:

On June 18, 1812, President Madison of the United States signed the declaration of war against His Britannic Majesty George III and the British Empire. The regular forces of the British Army and Navy were placed on alert, while the local Upper Canadian Militia Regiments were mobilized for action. Officers of the Indian Department recruited and assembled warriors.

Given the small number of regular British soldiers in Upper Canada, the contribution of the Militia and Indian Department would prove to be essential. While most accounts talk about the Americans fighting the British, it is important to keep in mind that when one reads “the British” it actually means the regular British army, local forces of the Canadian Militia and the warriors of the Indian Department. As we have seen, a large proportion of all of these men were Masons.

It is not possible to cover all the military actions of the War in this paper, so we will consider only those with specific Masonic connections.

Detroit:

The first invasion of Upper Canada occurred on the Detroit, near modern day Windsor. The American General Hull believed that the conquest of this part of Upper Canada would be a “mere matter of marching.” Accordingly, Hull crossed the Detroit River on July 12 into Canada, fully expecting that the local population would either surrender or join with the American Army. He also planned to capture Fort Malden from the British.

At Adoniram Lodge in Amherstburg, a meeting was being held just as Hull’s forces were crossing over into Canada. Captain Fox, a member of the Lodge and an officer in the local Amherstburg Militia, was being Passed to the Second Degree, when the news of the invasion was delivered by a Brother to the Tyler. Captain Fox later recalled.

“The Master finished up in less than 5 minutes and the 20 Brethren in the room cleared out, the Lodge being called off.”

Captain Fox was then ordered as a Militia officer to carry dispatches describing the invasion to General Brock at Niagara. Consequently, the Masons in the local Canadian Militia from Adoniram Lodge were among the first to respond to the American invasion.

Back at Niagara, General Brock hastily assembled an armed expedition of Regulars, Militia and a few warriors with Brother and Chief John Norton to travel to the Detroit River. On his arrival, Brock met with Chief Tecumseh who had assembled a large force of several hundred of his own warriors for battle.

By this time American General Hull had retreated back across the Detroit River and was bottled up in Fort Detroit. Hull's plans to attack Fort Malden had come to nothing. Everyone at this point expected a bloody battle on the American side of the Detroit River.

On August 16, Brock ordered the artillery to fire into Fort Detroit, and then sent a message to Hull. Counting on the savage and violent reputation of the warriors, Brock pointed out that he could not control their actions once active fighting began. To Brock's great surprise, Hull immediately surrendered the Fort and the entire Michigan Territory. Several of Hull's senior officers were so disgusted they threatened to shoot him; he later faced a court martial for cowardice over the quick surrender.

Battle of Queenston Heights:

Brock did not have long to enjoy the victory, since he had to rush back to Niagara to plan his defense against an invasion on the Niagara Frontier. By October of 1812, it had become clear that the Americans were assembling a huge force to cross the Niagara River. If they could gain a foothold in the Niagara Peninsula, it would enable them to cut off supplies to the British posts on the Upper Lakes. and then go on to capture the southern part of Upper Canada.

On October 13, 1812, the American Army opened up artillery fire on Newark as the prelude to an invasion of Upper Canada at Queenston Heights. Norton and his warriors were camped at Newark and realized that a battle was imminent. Norton rushed to Fort George and met with General Brock who told him to move his warriors to Queenston as fast as possible. Brock also ordered all the Militia and Regular Army reserves from Fort George to march to Queenston at double time. The General then mounted his horse Alfred, and rode to meet the main American attack.

As the warriors jogged into Queenston a short time later they met members of the Canadian militia retreating from the battle, who informed them that Brock had been killed and that most resistance had ceased. In addition, they said that the Americans were crossing the Niagara River by the boat load. One of the older chiefs simply replied "the more game, the better the hunting."

The Iroquois arrived on the battlefield and began to skirmish with the American Army, then in position on Queenston Heights. The warriors, from under cover of the surrounding brush, shot at the Americans who returned heavy musket fire. Norton described the sound of the lead balls flying through the air as "a hive of bees enraged," and was slightly wounded. At the same time, the militia artillery threw down accurate fire on the boats crossing the Niagara River, further intimidating the Americans.

At this point, about half of the 4,000 Americans originally mustered for the battle had crossed over to Queenston. Suddenly, without warning, the Americans on the New York side recalled that they were local militia and were not obligated to leave the State. An American officer, Captain Lovett, later recalled that the arrival of the Iroquois had “petrified” the soldiers, and “scarcely a man would go.”

Within a short while, British reinforcements arrived from Fort George, and faced the Americans who remained on the Canadian side. The British fired a musket volley followed by a bayonet charge, with Norton’s warriors deployed on the flank. The Americans were quickly overwhelmed and forced to surrender. Upper Canada was again safe, but only for the moment.

1813 Campaign:

The year 1813 began with powerful, well organized attacks by an American invasion force that was determined to capture and subdue Upper Canada, once and for all.

Battle of York:

On April 27, the Americans captured York or Toronto. They destroyed Fort York, burned the Provincial legislative buildings, and also the naval dockyard. The British were forced back in disorder towards Kingston. Just before the British evacuated Fort York, they lit a long fuse to the powder magazine.

The most prominent Mason involved in this battle was the American General Zebulon Pike of Philadelphia Lodge no 3. General Pike at the head of his troops, was entering the west gate of the Fort just as the magazine blew up. Pike was mortally wounded by a huge stone that flew up from the walls of the magazine and crushed his chest. He was taken back to the flagship of the American fleet. His head was then cradled on a pillow improvised from the folded British flag that had shortly before flown over Fort York. Brother Pike expired a few moments later.

Battle of Fort George:

On May 25, the American navy arrived at the Niagara River. Their warships bombarded Fort George and the detached artillery batteries in a prelude to an all out invasion. May 27 witnessed a numerically superior force of Americans that landed on the beach and after a savage battle succeeded in capturing Fort George and the town of Newark.

Just before the Battle of Fort George began, the British soldiers were told that the American Army had been ordered to give no quarter to the British. A short while later that morning, Captain Arrowsmith of the American Army landed on the beach and formed up his men to attack the British line. As the British were pushed back, he saw a British officer with a broken leg desperately trying to crawl away from the American advance. The American line came up to the wounded man’s position. Fully expecting to be bayoneted, the wounded British officer gave a Masonic sign of distress. Arrowsmith recognized the sign, and related that “the hairs on my head stood up and held off my hat.” He then reassured the wounded officer that no harm would come to him, and ordered the American Army surgeon to care for the wounded officer “in the red coat.” Arrowsmith himself was later wounded in the head, and soon found himself in the field

hospital, right next to the British officer whom he had saved. Both men survived the War and became good friends.

The British were forced to evacuate Newark and Fort George. As soon as the Americans occupied the town, some of their soldiers began to loot the houses of the local inhabitants. One of these houses, located on Gate Street, adjacent to the battlefield, belonged to Brother Field. American soldiers plundering his house came upon a chest filled with the regalia and jewels of the local Lodge. An American officer recognized the contents of the chest, ordered the looters out of the house, and posted sentries on the door.

Battle of Stoney Creek:

The American Army continued the drive into Upper Canada and advanced all the way to Stoney Creek, near Hamilton. They halted to make camp and to plan their next attack on the British fortifications at Burlington Heights.

On the evening of June 5, the British scouted out the American positions. Lieutenant Fitz Gibbon disguised himself as a local farmer, and took a large basket of butter into the American camp to sell to the camp cook. Legend says that he successfully reconnoitered the American defensive positions and also received a hugely inflated price for the butter.

In the middle of the night, the British charged the sleeping American camp at the point of the bayonet. Many of the British, to alarm the Americans even further, yelled like Iroquois warriors. The Americans, far from home, and confused by the night attack, retreated in panic all the way back to Fort George.

Just before the Battle of Stoney Creek, Mrs Ephraim Land, wife of one of the Brethren of Barton Lodge in Hamilton, thought of her husband, away from home, serving with the local Militia. She recalled that he was holding the jewels and records of Barton Lodge for safe keeping during the War, and feared that they might be looted by the invaders. Consequently, she buried the jewels and records of the Lodge in her garden, marking the spot with a flower. Once the enemy had been routed, she dug up the Masonic items and secured them in another spot until the War was over.

Beaver Dams:

Most Canadians are aware that Laura Ingersoll Secord of Queenston was a Canadian heroine of the War. We were taught in school that she drove her cow ahead of her through the American positions, to deceive American sentries, so she could bring news of an American attack to the British. However, most Canadians would be surprised to learn of the Masonic connections to this true story. In fact one may accurately say that she was surrounded by Masons.

Laura Secord's father, Brother Ingersoll, was an active Mason in the Queenston area. One night, after a Lodge meeting, he brought home a young member of the Lodge named James Secord, and introduced him to his daughter. They were attracted to each other, married, and set up house in Queenston. During the Battle of Queenston Heights, Brother Secord of the Lincoln Militia, was seriously wounded and spent much time as an invalid under Laura's care.

At this point, Lieutenant Fitz Gibbon once again came into the story. After Stoney Creek, he had been given the command of a Ranger Corp called the Green Tigers, with orders to harass and attack the Americans occupying the Niagara Peninsula. In this important work, he learned much of his bush warfare techniques from Brother Norton's Iroquois, with whom he actively campaigned. His military headquarters was a stone house at the Beaver Dams, some 10 miles west of Queenston.

The Green Tigers and their Iroquois allies were so effective in disrupting the American occupation that the Americans became determined to destroy Fitz Gibbon. A plan was developed to launch a surprise American attack on the Ranger camp at the Beaver Dams, and Colonel Boerstler of the 14th US Infantry was put in command of the American Army.

While the planning for the attack was under way, American officers were billeted in part of the Secord homestead. Laura overheard their plans, and informed James, who recognized the grave danger to his Masonic Brother Fitz Gibbon. However, given his serious wounds, James was unable to make the trek to the Beaver Dams. It was determined by the couple that Laura would carry the news.

Consequently, Laura drove her cow to pasture through the American lines. She then abandoned the cow and travelled by foot through the bush towards the Beaver Dams. At roughly the same time, Boerstler's enemy force started out on their expedition. Laura did make it to the British position and gave her news to the Iroquois scouts that received her.

The American forces en route to capture Fitz Gibbon included some 700 infantry, cavalry, and artillery. The attacking force was discovered on the morning of June 24. They were surrounded in a surprise attack and beaten into a state of surrender by the Mohawks. Fitz Gibbon successfully negotiated the American surrender to his much smaller force.

At some point during the surrender negotiations Fitz Gibbon became aware that Colonel Boerstler and his second in command were also Masons, and offered them the extra safety assurance of Masonic protection as prisoners of war. He would also have been able to assure the Americans that the warriors included many Masons. This Masonic protection would help explain why the Americans would surrender to the smaller British force. When the news of the victory reached Merchant's Lodge in Quebec, the brethren drafted and sent Fitz Gibbon a formal resolution of congratulation dated August 12, 1813.

"The members of Lodge 40 feel that they are called upon to express their admiration of the judgment and bravery of Lieut. Fitz Gibbon, who they have the satisfaction of taking by the hand as a member of their society."

Death of Tecumseh:

1813 was also a hard year for the British on the Detroit frontier. The British naval forces on Lake Erie were totally defeated by the American Navy at the Battle of Put - in - Bay on September 10. This defeat meant that the British at Amherstburg were in danger of being outflanked by the Americans who now could sail anywhere on Lake Erie without interference. The British Army, over the strong objections of Tecumseh, decided to evacuate and destroy Fort Malden. Although

unhappy over the decision, Tecumseh's warriors acted as a rear guard defense in case the American Army decided to follow and attack.

In fact the Americans did pursue the British, caught up with them on October 5, and attacked them at Moraviantown, near Chatham. Tecumseh was killed in action as the main British force retreated and escaped. However, the warriors were able to recover Brother Tecumseh's body and carried it off into the bush, for burial in a secret grave. The location of his final resting place remains unknown to this day.

End of 1813 Campaign:

Back in the Kingston area, the local communities were spared the ravages of an outright invasion due to the strong presence of the British Army and the Royal Navy. However, wartime conditions still created hard times for Freemasonry. One of the best historical records of Freemasonry in this era was created by the surviving minute books kept by the Secretary of Lodge No. 6. One passage is most interesting.

“Recorded for the information of succeeding Lodges, that owing to the unpleasant situation of public affairs and various inconveniences occasioned by the War, Lodge no 6 ancient York Masons have been unavoidably prevented from meeting in regular form during the months of May, June, July, August, September, October, and November of this present year. Dated December 2, 1813.”

Kingston was spared the direct ravages of War, but Newark was not as lucky. The American Army decided to evacuate Newark and Fort George just before Christmas 1813. As they departed, they set fire to the town and the Fort, to deny the British forces winter quarters. Almost every structure that had survived the War so far went up in flames, including the Lodge building. Outraged, the British crossed the Niagara River, captured the American Fort Niagara, and laid waste to everything along the American side of the Niagara River.

1814 Campaign:

In the spring of 1814, the most professionally trained American Army of the War crossed the Niagara River and captured the British outpost of Fort Erie.

Battle of Chippewa:

The Americans then advanced along the Canadian side of the Niagara River and encountered the full force of the British at Chippewa, close to Niagara falls, on July 5, 1814. As both sides were determined to succeed and were well trained in military skills, the fighting was intense. The warriors of the Indian Department suffered more casualties in this action than in any other during the War. The American Army was halted, but only briefly.

At one point in the fighting that day, a warrior was about to slay an American who made a Masonic sign of distress. Captain John Clement, a member of the military Lodge of the 8th Kings Regiment, recognized the sign and spared the American. The American prisoner was then placed in a local house to recover from his wounds until he could be returned to his home in Buffalo, New York.

Some time later, Captain Clement was himself captured and sent as a prisoner to Buffalo. Imagine the surprise when the jailer turned out to be the American soldier that Captain Clement had rescued at Chippewa. In true Masonic tradition, the Captain was turned loose, a horse was provided for his escape, and his safe passage was arranged across the Niagara River, back to British territory.

Battle of Lundy's Lane:

After Chippewa, the American Army advanced north again and met the British forces at Lundy's Lane, near Niagara Falls, on July 25. The British were determined to stop them in their tracks while the Americans were just as determined to push past them to regain Newark and Fort George. American and British infantry stood their ground and poured volley after volley into opposing ranks as close as 40 paces away, with field artillery support on both sides, for hours on end, until well after midnight. Both sides were exhausted and withdrew from the field.

Sergeant Commins of the 8th Kings recalled the scene the next day.

“The morning light ushered to our view a shocking spectacle, men and horses lying together, Americans and English, occasioned by our advance and retreat.” This was the bloodiest battle of the entire War, with some 700 soldiers on both sides killed in action.

One aspect of the Battle of Lundy's Lane relevant to our study is a local legend, that was told to me by a Niagara Mason over 40 years ago. This legend states that on the eve of the Battle, the Masons in the British line invited their Masonic counterparts in the American Army to attend a Lodge meeting that was to be held in the field, in a British officer's marquee tent. The Lodge meeting was apparently held, and of course the next day several Masons on both sides perished in the Battle. No historical documentation supports this legend, but it does reflect the established customs of the time.

For those who may think this legend is just pure fiction, an interesting accidental archaeological find occurred at Lundy's lane several years after the Battle. A local resident found the Masonic jewel of a Lodge Treasurer, right on the battlefield. This jewel was designed in a distinctly American pattern. While the discovery does not prove that the legendary British - American Lodge meeting ever took place, it does still reinforce the concept of traveling military warrants in both armies.

Attack on Washington:

In August 1814, the British carried the attack to the United States. In retaliation for the Americans having burned York and Niagara, the British launched an assault on Washington. The Royal Navy carried the invasion force that temporarily drove the American Army out of Washington. The President's mansion was severely damaged by looting and fire. It was later white-washed to cover the scars left by the flames. It is known as the “White House” to this day.

During the British attack, an American Mason, Francis Scott Keyes, wrote the words to the Star Spangled Banner. He was inspired by watching the British warships bombarding the American shore fortifications with the latest naval artillery. The lyrics of the Star Spangled Banner descriptively record “through the rockets' red glare and the bombs burst in air, etc.”

Incident at Waterford:

Back in Detroit, we note General Duncan McArthur, one of the American officers who was so cowardly surrendered by General Hull in 1812. He was paroled by the British in 1812, but was soon back in uniform, determined to avenge the American defeat at Detroit. In the summer of 1814, an American Army of some 750 men under his direct command, conducted a raid into what is now Southern Ontario. They were determined to destroy local gristmills, bridges, and any other facilities that could support the British and Canadians.

By November, the Americans had advanced as far as Waterford, a prosperous village in Norfolk County on Nanticoke Creek, that based much of its economy on Brother Morris Sovereign's fine water powered grist mill. When the news reached Waterford that the Americans were close by, Brother Sovereign, assisted by Brother William Schuyler and his other men, began to hide bags of flour, to keep them out of the hands of the enemy.

General McArthur's forces entered the village, quickly set fire to Sovereign's mill and then moved on. They paused for a rest break just outside of the village, but were puzzled to see that there was no smoke coming from the mill. An American officer with six soldiers went back into Waterford to see why the mill was not burning. They caught Brothers Sovereign and Schuyler with buckets in hand, extinguishing the fire with water from the mill pond.

The American officer was so outraged that he ordered his men to hang Brothers Sovereign and Schuyler, from a huge oak tree near the mill. Ropes were quickly produced, and a noose was placed around the neck of each man. When General McArthur rode in to see for himself what was happening, Brother Sovereign, in desperation, made a Masonic sign of distress. Brother General McArthur recognized the sign. The General called out to his very surprised officer, "let them down boys, I'll spare their lives." The men were released, but their mill was destroyed.

Epilogue:

The War of 1812 concluded on Christmas eve 1814, with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, but it would take some time for Upper Canada to recover. Many of the farms, mills and settlements in Southern Ontario and in the Niagara Peninsula had been reduced to charred ruins. On the Grand River, as many as 50% of all Iroquois warriors of military age had perished in the War. In the Kingston area, commerce, ship building and settlement had been severely disrupted.

Freemasonry had of course suffered greatly during hostilities. One obvious source of sorrow was that more times than we will ever know, a Masonic Brother on one side had fought against and sometimes killed another Masonic Brother.

The Craft as a whole was in disorder. For example, St. John's Lodge of Friendship No. 2 in Niagara - St. David's met on December 16, 1815. This was the first time they had been able to assemble since February 1813, because the Lodge building had been requisitioned as military headquarters for the local Canadian Militia and British Army. The December, 1815 minutes read as follows.

"No election of officers, no St. John's Day, owing to the War, dull times for the Craft."

Fortunately, the pioneer spirit was undefeated in Upper Canada. It is not a coincidence that the Phoenix is a symbol that is venerated by Masons. As you will recall, the Phoenix is a mythical bird that is destroyed by fire, but rises again from its own ashes. Just like the Phoenix, that which was consumed by fire in Upper Canada would also rise again from the ashes of the War.

Bitterness would of course remain on both sides of the border for some time to come. However, Masonic fraternal visits between Canadian and American Lodges in subsequent years helped to heal the emotional wounds left in the minds of individual Masons by the War.

A very good example of rebuilding and the Phoenix was the first Lodge building in Upper Canada, located in Newark. It was destroyed during the War, along with the rest of the town. However, a substantial stone building was erected on the original location in 1817, using some of the rubble from the old town. It was used for a time as a barracks for the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment, while the local Lodge met elsewhere. In 1860, the Lodge moved into the 1817 reconstruction. Now known as Niagara No. 2, in Niagara on the Lake, the Lodge has met there continuously to this day.

It is also interesting to see what happened to some of the individual veterans of the War in later years.

Brother and General Duncan McArthur, of the American Army, who spared the life of Brother Sovreen but not his mill, survived the War. He entered into politics in the State of Ohio, negotiated several peace treaties with the remnants of Tecumseh's Confederacy, and eventually became the Governor of Ohio. Brother Sovreen, thanks to the General, also survived and was able to rebuild his mill after the War.

Brother and Chief John Norton took part in almost every major battle of the War. He was promoted to the rank of Major in the British Indian Department, and was personally presented with a sword and pair of pistols by the British Commander in Chief, General Prevost, late in 1814. After the War concluded, he was given a life time pension by a grateful colonial government.

A Masonic honour was also bestowed upon him. Merchant's Lodge no 40 in Quebec presented him with a silver medal, engraved as follows.

“To Brother Norton, Captn. and Leader of the Five Nations, from Lodge no 40 at Quebec, as a token of Rembrnc, 1814.”

Norton returned home to his much younger wife and his farm on the Grand River. Unfortunately this story did not have a happy ending. Brother Norton had a falling out with a close friend, over the honour of his wife. He challenged the former friend to a duel with pistols and tomahawks, and killed his opponent. Despondent over the tragedy, he decided to leave the Grand River. It is believed that he died somewhere on the Santa Fe Trail, on the way to Oklahoma, trying to find his long lost Cherokee relatives. The location of his grave is unknown.

Brother and Lieutenant James Fitz Gibbon was promoted to the rank of Captain during the War, and remained in Canada as an officer in the Militia. During the 1820's he was involved in maintaining order on the frontier among Irish labourers involved in building the Rideau Canal. In one memorable occasion in 1824 near the town of Perth, the Irish labourers were on strike and threatened violence. The local magistrate called out the Militia to restore order. Fitz Gibbon walked alone into the construction camp, addressed the men in their native Irish Gaelic, and restored order without any bloodshed. As a proponent of the Masonic brotherhood of man, he was an advocate for the rights of all Irish in Canada; he worked diligently to advance harmony between Roman Catholic Irish immigrants and Protestant Irish immigrants.

During the Rebellion of 1837, he actively supported the Crown, with the military rank of Colonel of Militia. In that role he led detachments of the Upper Canada Militia against the rebel forces who gathered under William Lyon Mackenzie.

At the same time he was also very active in Masonic affairs. In 1822, the Provincial Grand Lodge Assembly at Kingston installed him as Deputy Provincial Grand Master for all of Upper Canada. In this role, he helped to establish many new Lodges in the Province, and worked to advance the concept of an efficient and united Provincial Grand Lodge.

By 1848, he had again advanced his Masonic career when he became a Companion of the York Rite in Toronto at Ionic Chapter. Although records are not clear from this period, it is believed that he may have been a Charter Member of this particular Chapter. Fitz Gibbon eventually returned to England as an elderly military pensioner, and died at the age of 83.

Conclusion:

As we look back on the War of 1812, now almost 200 years ago, as Masons we can reflect with some pride on how members of the Craft actively took part in the defense of Canada against invasion. Even the ladies of our Canadian Brethren, as we have seen, played an active role.

We can also recall that more than once, in the midst of conflict, individual Masons on both sides put aside the intense emotions of the moment and recalled their obligation to support a Brother in distress. The War of 1812, just like all wars before or since, brought out the worst in some people, but it also brought out the best in others.

On another broader note, we must never forget that Canada and the United States fought against each other in this most destructive war. However, our countries now enjoy the longest undefended border in the world. Perhaps the rest of this troubled world would do well to study the finer points of Canadian and American military and Masonic history; the world would see that Canada and the United States have learned the lesson that one does not need to resort to warfare to settle disputes.

V. W. Bro. Daniel J Glenney
Grand Archivist
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