

**An Exploration of the Relationship
Between
The United Empire Loyalists
And
Freemasonry in Upper Canada, now Ontario**

By

R.W. Bro. Robert Collins McBride UE, B.Sc., M.Ed.

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Foreword

At the outbreak of the American Revolution there were over one hundred Lodges and 5,000 Freemasons in the Thirteen Colonies. The names read like a veritable who's who of both the Loyalists and the Patriots. John Walden Meyer, Sir William Johnson, Sir John Johnson, John Butler, Joseph Brant and even King George III and George Washington were all Masons. How did these fraternal Brethren who were sworn to the tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth manage during eight years of civil war that pitted neighbour against neighbour and brother against brother? Learn how the United Empire Loyalists upheld their Masonic values while maintaining their patriotic duty to their King at this presentation by Robert Collins McBride UE.

R.W. Bro. (Bob) Robert Collins McBride UE, B.Sc., M.Ed.
Maple Grove Farms, R.R. # 1, Indian River, Ontario. K0L 2B0
Phone: 705-295-4556. E-mail: ddgm2007@nexicom.net

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Talk to Templum Fidelis Lodge No. 746, "*An Exploration of the Relationship Between
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Saturday, 20 March 2010.

Bob McBride is a retired elementary public school teacher, former Gifted Education Consultant, public school principal and teacher-librarian; a Past President of the Otonabee Township Historical Society; a Past President and current Director of the Kawartha Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada (UELAC), Editor of *The Loyalist Gazette*, the national semi-annual magazine of the UELAC, Acting Senior Vice-President of the UELAC; Past District Deputy Grand Master for Peterborough District, Assistant Editor of *The Ontario Mason Magazine* and Editor of the quarterly *Reflections: The Newsletter of the Committee on Masonic Education*, both being publications of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario. As well, he is a Director of the Masonic Foundation of Ontario.

He and his wife, Grietje (Purdy) McBride UE, live on a century farm near Indian River.

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The following is a talk that R.W. Bro. McBride presented to Templum Fidelis Lodge A.F. & A.M. No. 746 G.R.C., in Bath, Ontario, on Saturday, 20 March 2010.

Generals Wolfe, Montcalm and George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, John Graves Simcoe, William Jarvis, John Butler, Joseph Brant and James FitzGibbon – what did these famous pioneers from widely different backgrounds have in common? They were all leaders of their era and were all Freemasons, the largest and oldest worldwide fraternity that emphasizes personal study and self-improvement as well as social betterment.

The American Revolution was the first American civil war. *“Everywhere, notably in New York, New Jersey and the Carolinas, neighbour was turned against neighbour, father against son, and brother against brother – except within the ranks of the Craft.”*¹ The United Empire Loyalists consisted of those colonists of the Thirteen Colonies who remained faithful to King George III during the American Revolution. The conflict was rooted in Britain’s attempt to assert her economic control over the American colonies and recoup the costs of waging an expensive but successful campaign against the French during the Seven Years’ War.

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“After the British occupation of New York City, the Tory [Loyalist] members of St. John’s Lodge No. 2 combined to meet with brother Masons in the British army at the Green Bay Tree Inn. One evening, while the Lodge was in session, the ceiling gave way and Brother Joseph Burnham, a rebel [Patriot] member of the Lodge, crashed down in the midst of the astonished assembly of members and visiting British officers. [A Loyalist] Brother Hopkins, the Tyler and proprietor of the inn, explained that he had been concealing [a Patriot] Brother Burnham in the attic until the opportunity arose to send him across to the New Jersey shore. The [Loyalist] Brethren proceeded to take up a collection and presented Brother Burnham with a generous contribution towards his new life outside the [New York] colony. Never a word was said outside the Lodge and Brother Burnham escaped shortly afterwards. The war raged for eight years, during which the fortunes of both sides advanced and wavered. The ferocity of the conflict, particularly among native colonials, was unparalleled. Among themselves, at least, Masons were an exception.”ⁱⁱ

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For some Loyalists, exile began as early as 1775 when the Patriots (Rebels) created “*Committees of Safety*” throughout the Thirteen Colonies and began to harass British sympathizers that they labelled as Tories. Many Loyalists formed various regiments that included The King’s Royal Regiment of New York, The New Jersey Volunteers, The Pennsylvania and Maryland Loyalists, Butler’s Rangers, (Roger’s) Kings Rangers and (Jessup’s) Loyal Rangers, to name only a few of the Loyalist regiments that campaigned actively during the war.

On 7 June 1779, the Governor of Quebec, Sir Frederick Haldimand, directed Lieutenant-Colonel Mason Bolton, Commandant at Niagara, to begin settlement on the west bank of the Niagara River. These settlers were chosen from the older members of Butler’s Rangers who had previous farming experience. The first census of the Niagara settlement, prepared by John Butler and dated 25 August 1782, lists sixteen farmers, four of them labelled Rangers.

Two of these Butler’s Rangers, Adam Young UE and McGregory Van Every UE, were my fourth great grandfathers.

Adam Young UE was also a member of Lt.-Col. John Butler’s Lodge at Fort Niagara in 1780, according to family tradition.

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Adam's son, Sergeant Daniel Young UE, my third great-grand uncle, was a founding member of Barton Lodge No. 10 in 1796 and their first Treasurer.

Those who were Freemasons in their original villages in the Thirteen Colonies brought the Craft with them to their new surroundings. For example in the Province of New York, Union Lodge No. 1, in Albany, received a Warrant in 1759, the first W. Master being Richard Cartwright (1720 – 1795), an innkeeper and Deputy Postmaster of Albany who later came to Canada as a Loyalist,ⁱⁱⁱ settled in Cataraqui (now Kingston) by 1785,^{iv} and became a Charter Member of the Ancient St. John's Lodge A.F. & A.M., No. 3, G.R.C. of Kingston, the Lodge receiving its Warrant on 20 November 1795.^v Sir John A. Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, was also a member of St. John's Lodge No. 3.^{vi}

The first Masonic Lodge in the Kingston area was St. James' Lodge No. 14 P.R.Q. (No. 518 E.R.), Warranted in 1781 by the Honourable John Collins, the Deputy Surveyor General, at the petition of eight Masons including the Loyalists, Major James Rogers, Captain John W. Meyers,^{vii} Lieutenant William Buell, Lieutenant Solomon Johns and William Marsh. The first W. Master was Major James Rogers, the Senior Warden being Captain John W. Meyers^{viii} and the Junior Warden being Lieutenant William Buell. The first meetings of this Lodge were held in the barracks at Kingston.^{ix}

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The basic Masonic tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth have given rise to some interesting examples of chivalry in the midst of battle.

Stephen Burrett, later a Master of Rideau Lodge No. 25, Carleton County, Upper Canada, fought on the Loyalist side at the Battle of Bennington, Vermont, and later served in the Queen's Rangers. After the battle, he and his brother, William, found a wounded rebel [Patriot] Mason on the field, whom they nursed and saved. Sometime later, they were apprehended and imprisoned at Bennington. Their guard, as fortune would have it, turned out to be none other than the [Masonic] Brother whose life they had safeguarded. Shortly afterwards, guided and assisted by the [Masonic] Brother, they made their escape.”^x

In 1779, St. John's Lodge of Friendship, a civilian Lodge, was formed at Fort Niagara.^{xi} *“The new Lodge was probably the result of Brethren, mostly Loyalist refugees, seeking security in the shadow of the Fort, and meeting initially ‘by immemorial right’. Undoubtedly, the incipient Lodge had the sanction of the Masters and Wardens of Lodge No. 156 in the King's or 8th Regiment of Foot.”^{xii}*

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Lieutenant-Colonel John Butler was W. Master of a Masonic Lodge at Fort Niagara in 1780, W. Master of Lodge No. 19, P.R.Q., Niagara, in 1787 and of Lodge No. 2, P.R.U.C. in 1795, becoming Grand Senior Warden of the first Provincial Grand Lodge of Upper Canada in 1795. ^{xiii}

At the beginning of the Revolution, Joseph Thayendanega Brant, a Mohawk, became the principal war chief of the confederacy of the Six Nations and received a Captain's commission in the British army in charge of the Indian forces loyal to the Crown. Immediately following this commission, Brant first visited England where he received his Masonic degrees and had the distinction of having his Masonic apron given to him by King George III, a fellow-Mason. ^{xiv} Returning home, Brant convinced the natives to side with the Loyalists in the Revolution and led them in many battles in the northern Thirteen Colonies.

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More than once Brant demonstrated his Masonic principles when dealing with the Patriots or Rebels. After the surrender of the American forces at the Battle of the Cedars on the St. Lawrence River in May 1776, ^{xv} Brant exerted himself to prevent the massacre of the prisoners. In particular, Captain John McKinstry, a member of Hudson Lodge No. 13 of New York, ^{xvi} had been captured and was about to be burned at the stake. McKinstry, remembering that Brant was a Freemason, gave him the Masonic sign of appeal that secured his release and subsequent good treatment. *“When Captain McKinstry was taken prisoner by the British, and marked as a victim by the Indians to be put to death by fire, Brant, recognizing him as a member of the brotherhood, exerted himself for his rescue, and, in connection with some humane English officers, subscribed to purchase an ox which they gave to the Indians for their carousal instead of the gallant prisoner.”* ^{xvii} An American account of this incident states, in part: *“Already had he been fastened to the fatal tree and the preparations for the human sacrifice were rapidly progressing when, in the strong agony of his despair, and scarcely conscious of a hope, the captive made the great mystic appeal of a Mason in the hour of danger. It was seen, understood, and felt by the Chieftain Brandt [sic], who was present on the occasion. Brandt [Brant] at once interposed in his behalf, and succeeded, by the influence of his position, in rescuing his American [Masonic] Brother from his impending fate.*

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Having freed him from his bonds, he conducted and guarded him in safety to Quebec, where he placed him in the hands of the English, by whom he was permitted to return to America on his parole. Colonel McKinstry lived several years after to repeat, with great emotion, the history of this singular occurrence.”

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McKinstry and Brant thereafter remained friends for life.

Hudson Lodge No. 7, F. & A.M., in Hudson, Columbia County, New York, held its first meeting in the home of John McKinstry, one of its Charter Members, on 18 December 1786. ^{xix} In 1805, he and Brant together visited this Masonic Lodge in Hudson, New York, where Brant was well received and on whose wall his portrait now hangs. ^{xx}

On another occasion, a Patriot soldier, Jonathan Maynard, was captured by the Indians who prepared to put him to death. *“Brant happened to pass that way when Maynard was partially stripped for the torture and discovered Masonic symbols tattooed upon his arms. He at once interposed and saved the prisoner’s life.”* ^{xxi}

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In 1779, Brant again attempted to save the life of a fellow-Mason, Lieutenant Boyd, who had been captured by the Loyalist forces. Boyd presented a Masonic sign of a distressed Brother to Brant who immediately, and in the strongest language, assured him that his life should be spared. However, when Boyd and his fellow-prisoner, Private Parker, were questioned by Lieutenant-Colonel John Butler in Brant's absence, both refused to divulge any information about the Patriot troops commanded by General Sullivan, also a Freemason. "*Butler demanded of the captive [Lieutenant Boyd] information which his fidelity to his commander would not allow him to give.*" ^{xxii} In keeping with his military duty, Butler delivered Boyd and Parker to the Indians who put both of them to death by decapitation ^{xxiii} on 13 September 1779. ^{xxiv}

Thus, both Brant and Butler had fulfilled their Masonic responsibilities of attempting to safeguard their fellow-Mason, Lieutenant Boyd, but both Butler and Boyd also fulfilled their military duty when Boyd refused to reveal information about the Patriot troops to Butler, resulting in Butler having him executed.

Such is the code of conduct of all Freemasons: to come to the assistance of fellow-Masons but also to strictly maintain the laws and principles of their respective governments.

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Joseph Brant was once almost deceived by a Patriot who tried to capitalize on Brant being a Mason. *“It seemed to be generally known that he was a Freemason; and one well-to-do Provincial who had been taken captive sought to trade upon the circumstance. Conducted into the Chief’s presence, he gave the sign of the order. It transpired, afterwards, that he did not belong to the Craft; still, Brant – passing by his colossal effrontery – though greatly incensed, resolved to protect him.”*^{xxv}

Following the end of the Revolution, the Six Nations Indians were awarded a tract of 675,000 acres, located three miles back on either side of the Grand River. Brant, as their leader, led 1,843 Mohawk and other Indian Loyalists there in 1784 to settle and establish the Grand River Reservation. He granted 999-year leases to a number of white families, all friends of Joseph Brant: the Dochstaders, the Nelles, the Huffs, and the Youngs.^{xxvi} Thus it was that the families of Adam Young UE, my fourth great grandfather, his three sons, Lieutenant John Young UE, Sergeant Daniel Young UE, and Private Henry Young UE, along with Captain Henry William Nelles UE, became the first white families to settle in Haldimand County, the Young Tract and the Nelles Tract each being approximately nine square miles in size, extending three miles back from the banks of the Grand River. Both Captain Henry William Nelles UE and Adam Young UE were also the first Freemasons to settle in Haldimand County.

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Joseph Brant became affiliated with Lodge No. 11 at the Mohawk village on the Grand River, of which he was the first W. Master, and later affiliated with Barton Lodge No. 10 (now No. 6), that meets in Hamilton, being present at their first meeting on 31 January 1796. ^{xxvii} In later years, the town of Brantford was named for him.

It is interesting to read, in the Minutes of the 12 December 1800 meeting of Barton Lodge, the notation of a letter received from the Grand Secretary, “*informing this Lodge of Communication received from the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, announcing the Death of the R.W. G. [Right Worshipful Grand] Master Washington, and requesting this Lodge go in mourning at their public and private meetings [for] Six months, including their first meeting.*” ^{xxviii} It should be noted that communication in those days was such that it took a year for the death of George Washington, who had died on 14 December 1799 in Virginia, to become known at Barton Lodge in Hamilton. It is also recorded in these Barton Lodge Minutes that “*We now know Washington, as the whole world knows him, as a noble man, a pure patriot ... our early Brethren knew him as a republican while they were monarchists; as a successful rebel against their sovereign; as one whose triumph had made many of their neighbours, and some of themselves, exiles; but they also knew him as a Mason, and they forgot all else in that, and honored him as an honored member of the craft.*” ^{xxix}

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Members of the English Field Lodge No. 237, upon their retreat, were forced to leave behind their Constitution and all their Masonic jewels. General George Washington returned all the Masonic property under escort of an officer and a guard of honour. ^{xxx} When the guard of honour entered the British camp, it was welcomed with full military honours. The English regiment took parade formation and presented arms to the deputation from the enemy camp. Washington had also issued an order that all property of English Masons found among the spoils of war should be returned. ^{xxxi}

In 1777 – 1778, a similar occurrence took place as the Forty-sixth Regiment was stationed at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During this period, *“its famous bullock chest, with brass mountings, containing the Lodge Warrant, Working Tools, regalia, etc., fell into the hands of the American troops; but it was shortly thereafter returned to the regiment by Brother General George Washington, under a flag of truce and a guard of honour.”* ^{xxxii}

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After the Battle of Stony Point, in July 1779, the American troops took some papers and archives belonging to the British army and found among them the records of the English Field Lodge, “*Unity No. 18*”,^{xxxiii} whose members were in the Seventeenth Regiment, stationed in Pennsylvania. “*The Warrant eventually fell into the hands of a Connecticut officer, General Samuel H. Parsons, also a Mason, who graciously returned it to the regiment with a fraternal message: ‘however our political sentiments may impel us in the public dispute, we are still Brethren, and (our professional duty apart) ought to promote the happiness and advance the weal of each other.’ This incident, occurring amid hostilities between the United States and Great Britain, was remarkable evidence of the pervasiveness of the Masonic spirit in the eighteenth century. Although Masons served their respective countries, they remained loyal to the higher values of universal brotherhood and bore no personal ill will toward each other.*”^{xxxiv}

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Another interesting event with a Masonic connection involves the story of Laura Secord. During the War of 1812, five hundred and seventy American troops, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles G. Boerstler, of Maryland, planned to capture the supply depot at Captain John DeCou's Georgian-style stone house at Thorold, where Lieutenant James FitzGibbon had set up his headquarters. Captain John DeCou, my third great grandfather, served in the Lincoln Militia but had been captured a few days earlier and sent to Philadelphia for execution.

Laura Secord, whose husband, James, was a Mason, learned about the American plan and walked twenty miles by a circuitous route to reach DeCou House and warn FitzGibbon of the impending attack. ^{xxxv} FitzGibbon rallied his men and captured the American Infantry, a field piece and fifty dragoons at what has become known as the Battle of Beaverdams. Upon learning that the American Lieutenant-Colonel and one of his aides were fellow-Masons, FitzGibbon treated the men with more than the usual courtesy of war. ^{xxxvi}

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As well, during the War of 1812, a Loyalist Freemason, Captain John Clement, member of St. John's Lodge No. 19 in Niagara, observed an Indian about to scalp an American just wounded by a tomahawk. Seeing the British officer approaching, the American gave a Masonic sign of distress. Captain Clement threw the Indian back and ordered him away. He then secured medical aid for the American and had him conveyed to a farmhouse where he rested and recovered. The American prisoner was then released and returned to New York State. Some months later, Captain Clement was taken prisoner and jailed in New York. His jailer was the very man he had rescued. The fellow-Mason advised Bro. Clement that the jail door would be unlatched at dawn and a horse and cart would be made ready to take him back across the border. xxxvii

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Why would Masonry prosper in Upper Canada? Certainly the outbreak of the American Revolution disrupted business and the Masonic community and caused many Lodges to suspend meetings for at least part of the war. The answer lies in what Masonry has to offer to the Brethren. In Masonry, benevolence and charity has always been encouraged above all other virtues. ^{xxxviii} Through Masonic affiliation, the Brethren gain an instant relationship with men of like-minded thought and character. Freemasonry emphasizes a “*respect for tradition and encourages men to create a better world through reason, harmony and right conduct.*” ^{xxxix} During the Revolutionary times and thereafter, men have appreciated the Fraternity as an agent of moral instruction and a stable response to the anxieties of upheaval by providing a sense of social order and encouraging high moral values.

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Masonry inculcates and promotes peace. It strives to settle quarrels and promote good will. Each Lodge closes with harmony and the lessons learned in Lodge, if taken to heart by the Brethren, have a ripple effect in the community in which they live. Good men and good works spread harmony among the Brethren. Time after time in the past, as in the present, Masons have been the best supporters of good government and order in society. The Loyalists, having in many cases suffered everything but death, found comfort and support in the Masonic fraternity and fellowship among other men seeking good. The principles held dear to the Loyalists were found equally in the moral teachings of Masonry. The relationship between Freemasonry and United Empire Loyalists were both close and mutually supportive.

In the two centuries since the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists, the myths and realities of their heritage have intertwined to have a powerful influence on how we, as Canadians, see ourselves. Certainly their arrival created the two provinces of Ontario and New Brunswick but it also gave them special characteristics which can still be seen today, perhaps the most striking being the motto on the Ontario coat of arms: *“Ut incept sic permanet fidelis”*, that is to say, *“As she began, so she remains, Loyal.”* Those Loyalists and their descendants who are Freemasons can also say that we believe in Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

R.W. Bro. (Bob) Robert Collins McBride UE, B.Sc., M.Ed.
 Maple Grove Farms, R.R. # 1, Indian River, Ontario. K0L 2B0
 Phone: 705-295-4556. E-mail: ddgm2007@nexicom.net

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Endnotes:

- ⁱ The Education Committee of Friendship Lodge No. 729, Pickering Ontario, “*The Contribution of American Masonry to the Development of the Craft in Ontario*”, *The Newsletter of the Committee on Masonic Education*, Volume 4, Number 4, April 1985, p. 2.
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- ⁱⁱⁱ Wallace McLeod, Chairman, The Special Committee on the History, Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario, *Whence Come We? Freemasonry in Ontario, 1764 – 1980*, Grand Lodge, Hamilton, 1980, p. 9.
- ^{iv} Colin Keates Duquemin, editor, *A Lodge of Friendship: The History of Niagara Lodge No. 2, A.F. & A.M., G.R.C., Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada, 1792 – 1992*, published by Niagara Lodge No. 2, A.F. & A.M., G.R.C., 153 King Street, P.O. Box 1666, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. L0S 1J0. December 1991, p. 209.
- ^v Augustus T. Freed, 33°, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario, “*Early History of Freemasonry in Upper Canada*”, *A Concise History of Freemasonry in Canada*, compiled and published by Osborne Sheppard, Box 165, Hamilton, Ontario, 1924, p. 54.
- ^{vi} Augustus T. Freed, 33°, 1924, p. 55.
- ^{vii} “*John Walden Meyers. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. ... John Walden Meyers (January 22, 1745 – November 22, 1821) was an Upper Canada businessman and United Empire Loyalist. He was born Johannes Waltermeyer in Albany County, New York in 1745, descended from German immigrants. In 1777, he joined the army of Major-General John Burgoyne and served as a recruiter for the Loyalist forces, also collecting information for the British and carrying dispatches. In 1781, he led an unsuccessful raid on the house of Philip Schuyler. Later that year, Meyers became a Captain in Edward Jessup’s Rangers.*” Internet web site, URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Walden_Meyers.
- ^{viii} “*There has always been some controversy about the MEYERS name. We use ‘Capt. John W. MEYERS UE’, and avoid the Walden as his middle name that has also been spelled Walthimier.*” W. Bro. Peter W. Johnson UE, United Empire Loyalists’ Association of Canada [UELAC] President (2006 – 2008), 751 Will Johnson Road., RR #1, Frankford Ontario. K0K 2C0. Phone: 613-398-6871. E-mail: johnsonue@sympatico.ca. Personal e-mail to R.W. Bro. Robert Collins McBride UE, Monday, 12 March 2007, 9:06 a.m.
- ^{ix} R.W. Bro. O.G. Alyea, “*Early Free Masonry in the Bay of Quinte, Upper St. Lawrence Districts, 1792 – 1822*”, Read at the seventh meeting at Kingston, Ontario, 10 October 1952, *The Papers of The Canadian Masonic Research Association, 1949 – 1976, Volume 1: Papers 0 to 38*, Canadian Masonic Research Association, Published by The Heritage Lodge A.F. & A.M. No. 730 G.R.C., 1986, Volume I, p. 171.
- ^x The Education Committee of Friendship Lodge No. 729, Pickering Ontario, “*The Contribution of American Masonry to the Development of the Craft in Ontario*”, *The Newsletter of the Committee on Masonic Education*, Volume 4, Number 4, April 1985, pp 3 – 4.
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R.W. Bro. (Bob) Robert Collins McBride UE, B.Sc., M.Ed.
 Maple Grove Farms, R.R. # 1, Indian River, Ontario. K0L 2B0
 Phone: 705-295-4556. E-mail: ddgm2007@nexicom.net

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- ^{xv} Rev. Charles Rockwell, "Chapter 6: Suffering and Escapes Of Prisoners - Ravages Of Tories And Indians", The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around: Their Scenery, Legends, and History, Taintor Brothers and Company, 229 Broadway, New York, 1869, as found on the Internet, URL: <http://www.catskillarchive.com/rockwell/6.htm>.
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R. W. Bro. (Bob) Robert Collins McBride UE, B.Sc., M.Ed.
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