

## **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.