

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