

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."