

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.

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