

FIRST PARLIAMENT OF UPPER CANADA

Some Notes as to its First Meeting Place and About Pioneer Buildings of the Town of Niagara, U.C.

By JANET CARNOCHAN.

To ascertain exactly the position of various houses and points of interest in early times in different countries has been a fruitful subject of discussion, has given interest to the researches of the antiquarian and the historian as well as to the careless traveller. Much ink has been wasted in written documents, as well as much time spent in wordy discussions—sometimes good-natured, sometimes acrimonious. So has it been in the past; so, no doubt, will it still be in the future, and we can only gather up from all possible sources fragments from documents, from maps, from old drawings, from books of travel, from oral tradition, from old inhabitants, sifting as we may the evidence found, noting the apparent contradictions, the points of agreement or disagreement in documents or statements from different sources.

The place where the first Parliament of Upper Canada, held in Newark 1792-1796 met, has long been a disputed point, but the old building called Navy Hall, now in the Fort George enclosure, has been generally acknowledged as having had that honor. The position of the Free Mason's Hall has also been a subject of dispute. That of the first Butler's Barracks, that of the Government House, all afford room for dispute.

In an article by Duncan Campbell Scott, F.R.S.C., read before the Royal Society, 1913, the conclusions arrived at by not only myself but others have been disputed.

The aim of the present paper will be to sum up all that has been found from maps in the possession of the Niagara Historical Society of 1784, 1799, 1816, 1817, 1819, 1831,

1835, 1851; from the drawings of Mrs. Simcoe and from her diary, from the statements of Governor Simcoe, Alured Clark, Peter Russell, papers in the Archives, statements of persons who remembered these old buildings or could quote the words of those who had seen them in early years. One difficulty staring us in the face is the fact that the town was burned almost completely 10th December, 1813, that it had sustained fierce bombardments 13th Oct., 1812, and 27th May, 1813, and during the American occupation several houses were burned, notably that of St. Andrew's Church, Sept., 1813. That some houses were saved and parts of houses, we know.

And first, what is meant by the phrase, "first Parliament"? Do we mean where it met the first day or the first year, or during the five years that it met in Niagara, then called Newark, 1792-1796? It is only lately that it has been shown on definite information, that of Littlehales (military secretary), that the first day it met in Free Mason's Hall, a building on King street on the site of which (strange coincidence) the present Free Mason's Hall stands. And it is well to understand that evidence exists for many spots, Indian Council House, a tent, the Parliament Oak, Government House, Navy Hall, Butler's Barracks, all are mentioned, and some have even spoken of Fort Niagara, which was then still a British possession till 1796.

And first with regard to names, some misconceptions must be cleared away. The word Niagara in early years means Fort Niagara and not Niagara on the west side of the river, now called Niagara-on-the-Lake, but variously called West Niagara,