

The Seat of Government was at Newark, Upper Canada, (Niagara), and there the first Ontario Parliament held its sessions, five in number, within the four years of its full term. In 1797 and subsequent years Parliament met in York (Toronto), which had then become the capital of the Province.

The Record of the business transacted by the early Parliaments of Ontario is justly placed among the most important Archives of the Province. The Proceedings of Parliament are the Minute Book of the people, and it has been a matter of regret that those of Upper Canada have not hitherto been generally available to the growing class of students of our provincial history.

The Journals of those early sessions of the Legislature were regularly kept and there is evidence that they were ordered to be printed. That the printed copies had disappeared at an early date is also evident from the fact that no copies were known to be in existence in 1855 when the manuscript copies in London, England, were copied by Mr. Mayer for the Canadian Government. But there is a break in the set in London, the Journals for the Legislative Assembly for the years, 1794, 1795, 1796, and 1797, and also for the years 1809, 1813, and 1815 being amissing.

Various explanations have been offered to account for the disappearance of the missing volumes. It has been thought that copies were not sent from Canada to London in the usual course for these years; or that if they were sent the vessels carrying them may have been captured by French men-of-war. It is unlikely that so careful an officer as Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe would have neglected his duty in this respect; but if he had, or if the vessels had been captured by the enemy, in either case a request would have been made by the Imperial Minister for copies. There can be little doubt that all the Journals found their way to London and were inadvertently mislaid. The search for them under present-day facilities may yet bring them to light. Experience proves that though the chase for a public document may be a long one it ought rarely or never to be a hopeless one. Only a short time ago a valuable fragment of the Journals of the Legislative Assembly for 1794 was found among old papers in the Parliament Buildings by the Archivist, and while this note is being written part of the original eight-page Statutes of Upper Canada for 1792 has been found and deposited in the Archives. The originals of the missing Journals and the printed copies of them possessed by the Government were most likely destroyed when the Parliament Buildings at Toronto were burned by the United States forces in 1813. The copies possessed by officials and public men, of which there would, probably, be a considerable number, if, indeed, they were printed, as seems likely, have disappeared in the natural process of time, a fact which well illustrates the evanescent character of records—even the most important—unless proper methods are provided for their preservation after they have passed out of current official use.

The Journals here given were copied from the manuscript copies in the Parliamentary Library, Ottawa, and are designed as a first instalment of these papers. They cover the years 1792, 1793, partly 1794, 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803, and 1804—embracing the three first Parliaments of Upper Canada.

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