



# On Common Ground: The Ongoing Story of the Commons in Niagara-on-the-Lake

*Richard D. Merritt*

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This tract of land in Niagara-on-the-Lake has witnessed an amazing cavalcade of Canadian history.

For 250 years a large tract of oak savannah at the mouth of the Niagara River designated as a Military Reserve has witnessed a rich military and political history: the site of the first parliament of Upper Canada; a battleground during the War of 1812; and annual summer militia camps and the training camp for tens of thousands of men and women during the First and Second World Wars. In the midst of the Reserve stood the symbolic Indian Council House where thousands of Native allies received their annual presents and participated in treaty negotiations.

From its inception, this territory was regarded by the local citizenry as common lands, their "Commons." Although portions of the perimeter have been severed for various purposes, including the Shaw Festival Theatre, today this historic place includes three National Historic Sites, playing fields, walking trails, and remnants of first-growth forest in Paradise Grove.

*On Common Ground* chronicles the extraordinary lives and events that have made this place very special indeed.

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