

Jack Sharp – London’s First Dog

by John Mombourquette

On March 2, 1793, Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe visited the forks of the Thames River. His mission: to lay out the site of what he believed would be the new capital of Upper Canada, the present city of London, Ontario. Simcoe's small party spent less than 48 hours exploiting the forks before walking back to the then colonial capital at Niagara-on-the-Lake. Unfortunately for London, other matters kept Simcoe occupied before he finally left Upper Canada in 1796. York (now Toronto) became Upper Canada's new capital city and the London site remained undeveloped until 1826.

One of the members of Simcoe's party was a large Newfoundland dog named Jack Sharp or simply Jack. The dog appeared to be a personal favourite of Simcoe's, and he was bought for the Simcoe children from a farmer in Niagara. When Simcoe left Niagara for an inspection tour of Fort Detroit in February, 1793, it seemed natural to Simcoe to take Jack with him. (London was visited on the return journey)

By all accounts Jack was good with Simcoe's children, but not much of a hand at wilderness travel. The Indians who accompanied Simcoe were probably less amused at Jack's tendency to scare away game. Jack's most serious misadventure was at the London site when Simcoe and his party prepared for dinner. The only game that could be found was a large porcupine - which Jack promptly bit, needles and all. Jack spent his only night in London having the needles removed from his mouth, one by one.

Jack's fate is unknown after the Simcoe's left Upper Canada. However, a journal entry from Simcoe's canoe trip to Lake Simcoe in 1794 does tell one more story about Jack. Once again, Jack went with Simcoe, only this time he came close to capsizing the Lieutenant-Governor's canoe on more than one occasion. At one point during the trip, however, supplies ran low and someone noted that Newfoundland dogs were quite edible. Fortunately for Jack, the party reached York in time. Jack had a tasty dinner instead of becoming one!

The London and Middlesex Historical Society