

INSIDE AURORA: A Rough Road Ahead (2)

By Scott Johnston

It was early summer in 1796. Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe was coming out of his office in the Town of York, after a full day of attending to the many varied demands of the recently created province of Upper Canada.

He was exhausted. There were just so many details that required his attention.

"Sir?", came a voice. He turned to find one of his men standing smartly behind him.

"Yes, Ashby. What is it?"

"Well, sir," Ashby said, then shifted nervously. "It's? um?"

"Come on. Out with it, man." Simcoe stated. "It's been a long day, and I wish to get home."

"It's Machell's Corners, sir," Ashby said, in a rush. "There are problems with Yonge Street in that area."

"Wait a moment," Simcoe said, eyeing the young man closely. "You reported to me only a few months ago that the locals there were complaining about the state of that recently-completed north-south road. There were hills, swamps, and holes that were slowing down traffic. They wanted it smoothed out. Didn't you send a crew up there as I told you, to deal with all the issues?"

"Yes, sir, they did a very thorough job," Ashby stated, a drop of sweat starting to trickle down from his hairline. "But the people up there?"

"Yes?"

"Now they're complaining traffic is moving too quickly. They want some sort of calming devices installed."

"Traffic calming devices!" Simcoe stammered, feeling his blood pressure go up a notch. The past few years had taken a toll on his health, and the seemingly endless issues associated with this little hamlet thirty miles away at the corner of Yonge and Wellington had not helped any.

"Yes, apparently with all the recent improvements the road is quite straight and level. People were delighted at first, but the carts and horses using that stretch are moving quite quickly, making it dangerous for pedestrians along that stretch of road."

"But that road's been built to speed troops north in the event of an American invasion. It's supposed to be in good condition."

"I guess it's in too good a condition, sir," Ashby stated. "They'd like us to install some sort of ?? he consulted a piece of paper he was carrying, ?? speed humps."

"Speed humps? What the devil are those?"

"They're a kind of a small hill put in the middle of a street to reduce the pace of traffic."

"But they just made us get rid of all the hills in that road to speed it up!" Simcoe exploded.

"I guess they want them back, sir," Ashby winced. "They're quite insistent about it."

Simcoe breathed heavily for a moment, then sighed. There were just too many other important considerations in the fledgling province to spend more time worrying about this.

"All right. Dispatch more men to put in some of these 'speed humps'."

"Yes, sir. Right away," said the young man thankfully, with a salute.

"And Ashby," said Simcoe, pointing a finger at his junior officer, "having insisted on a smooth road, then deciding it should have bumps in it, the settlers in that area had better not change their minds again about this and want them taken out."

"Oh, no, sir. I can't imagine anyone would ever do to that."

For anywhere else, Simcoe would have believed him. But when it came to this frustrating community of Machell's Corners, the Lieutenant Governor wasn't as sure.

Feel free to e-mail Scott at: machellscorners@gmail.com