

Pioneer Days

in London According to Sir John Carling

by John Mombourquette

On October 7, 1995 the Historic Sites committee of the London Public Library unveiled its latest plaque on Ann Street, near the Oxford Street bridge. The plaque commemorates the Carling Breweries plant that operated in that vicinity from 1875 to 1936. Thomas Carling founded the family operation in 1840, making a good living selling beer to thirsty British soldiers.

Thomas Carling's son John (1823 - 1911) is perhaps one of the most influential men in London's history. John Carling chose federal politics over the family business, eventually becoming a cabinet minister under three successive Conservative prime ministers. His long political service was rewarded with a knighthood and a Senate seat.

Sir John Carling was the first honorary president of the London and Middlesex Historical Society and addressed the Society during its second meeting in November 1901. Carling chose as his topic the early days of London settlement, reminiscing about stories that his father had told him. The full text of Carling's talk can be found in a 1967 Society publication, the *Centennial Review*. Two of Carling's stories, one about shoemaking in the 1830s and a court case from the mid-1820s are useful insights about daily life during pioneer times.

"We had no tailors or shoemakers or mechanics of any kind. The first mechanic that was known to this part of the country was a tailor by the name of Hessock. He lived in London East in later days. He was a good tailor. A man who could get a coat made by a tailor, or a pair of boots made by a shoemaker was looked upon as a dandy - which he was when compared to the men who would have their feet wound around with bark and deer skins. Until I was ten years old I never wore a shoe on my foot or a coat on my back or a cap on my head that was not made by my father or my mother."

"My father knew nothing about shoemaking - he was brought up on the farm in the old country - but necessity compelled him to turn his attention to making of shoes for the three or four young boys that were growing up. He would make his own lasts and then he would kill a young animal and take the skin down to the tannery which was down about Delaware or Kilworth. The tanner would keep half the hides for his pay. In this way my father used to make all our shoes. They were not such fine shoes as

you would get now-a-days but they answered the purpose in those rough and ready times..."

"London was called The Forks and went by that name for a long time, even after it became a village. A Magistrate was soon appointed and one of the first cases before him was that of a man who stole an axe. This was considered a serious offense because at that time an axe was a very useful thing and very hard to be got. A number of people were got together as a jury, and they passed a sentence upon him, that he was to be chained to a stump for twenty-four hours, which was done, so he remained all night chained to a stump for having stolen an axe.