

Jimmy Jock – Minto Cemetery's First Resident

Written by Teyana Neufeld

Jimmy Jock was one of the earliest settlers in the Minto area and had a greater-than-average adventure in reaching southwest Manitoba

Unlike most settlers, who began in the east – maybe Ontario, or even further east to Europe – Jimmy Jock came from the west. In 1879 he was living on the west coast, near the town of Granville: a settlement which would be renamed Vancouver in several years. He clearly wasn't set on staying there, because he made plans to travel with a group of settlers who were moving overland to the prairies. However, he was delayed by two days and the group left without him. He thought it would be no matter, and he would catch up to them easily. How very wrong he was! He never heard from that group of settlers again.

Perhaps he left Granville full of good spirit and positivity that morning. He had the company of his horse, after all and a rifle. He must have soon realized that his friends were nowhere in sight and that he was on his own. If he was daunted, it was not enough to cause him to turn around. He crossed the Rocky Mountains, living off the land and shooting game for food as he went. How magnificent the views are, coming down from the Rockies onto the open plains! He must have marveled at the land stretching to the horizon in front of him. Perhaps his eyes were so busy watching the distance he did not pay attention to his immediate surroundings and the group of Indigenous residents who stole upon him and soon relieved him of his horse.

He crossed two provinces on foot – a distance that today takes

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some 14 hours to drive in a vehicle. There is no record left regarding how long the journey took him, only that he was dogged in his determination.

As he continued on his eastward journey, he made a set of rules that he strictly adhered to. One was that when he came to a river or stream that required fording, he would accomplish the task in the evening so that he would be ready and fresh the next day to carry on. In fact, he travelled much of the distance under cover of nightfall. It seems he was intimidated by his earlier encounter with Indigenous Peoples and was keen to avoid further notice.

Jimmy Jock walked until he reached Winnipeg. It's reported that he was involved in the Red River Resistance and was in jail alongside Louis Riel. However, this story does not agree with the date he's reported to have left the west coast (1879): the Red River Resistance occurred in 1869, a decade earlier.

Either way, he made his way to southwest Manitoba in 1886 and built a small shack on the edge of a ravine on the north bank of the Souris River. And here he stayed. He made his living by trapping and offering his labour. Lisk Campbell became a fast friend of Jimmy's when he became his neighbour in 1890.

Jimmy Jock remained a determined man, and in some ways matter of fact. After freezing his feet quite badly one winter, Jimmy had to face the fact that one of his toes was just not healing. He could see the early signs of gangrene settling in, and knew he had to



▲ *James (Jimmy) Jock's headstone—his was the first to be erected in Minto Cemetery.*

take care of it before things got out of hand. So he cut it off. By himself. With an axe on a chopping block. Though unpleasant to imagine, and I'm sure to carry out, this act likely saved his life.

He had an equally matter of fact method of cleaning his dishes. He claimed that he used nine waters to get the job done. "Nine Waters," you say? It was the name of his dog.

Jimmy Jock died in 1901 at the age of 74 and was buried in the then-empty Minto Cemetery, making him the first resident. He left his land to his friend Lisk Campbell. Even today the ravine he settled bears his name, celebrating a man of uncommon character and stamina.

Source:

Campbell, Dick. "Jimmy Jock." *Minto People of Pride*. Minto and District Historical Society. Leech Printing. Brandon, MB. 1998. Pp 219.

Photo: Magdalene Andres