

# JOHN SKYNNER

John Skynner was born in England in 1762. His family had a strong connection with the Royal Navy with both his father and grandfather serving as high ranking officers. John would follow in this tradition with a distinguished naval career.

Little is known of Skynner outside of his naval accomplishments. From "O'Byrne's Naval Biographical Dictionary, 1849" we have a clear record of his rise through the Royal Navy. The dictionary states that Skynner joined the Navy in 1795 as an Able Bodied Seaman. He quickly moved through the ranks serving as a Midshipman and Master's Mate in the Mediterranean.

During the time he served in the Mediterranean, he was present for the evacuation of Corsica (1796) and saw action near Cape St. Vincent (1797). He continued to serve on the "Ville De Paris" and "Isis" and then became the Acting Lieutenant on the "Nemesis". He became a full Lieutenant on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1802 for the "Amazon". While in command of the "Amazon", he brought the Duke of Kent to England from Gibraltar and then returned to the Mediterranean. His daughter recalls him telling stories of the Duke walking with him on deck during this voyage. The Duke of Kent was the father of Queen Victoria. Skynner also held command of the gun-brig "Hirondelle" from June 19, 1804 until December 14, 1807.



Lieutenant John Skynner was presented with a piece of "plate" (silver cup) given "by the Merchants and others residing in the Island of Malta as a token of respect for his very meritorious conduct and unremitting attention to the numerous convoys under his charge while in the Mediterranean". He was listed as a retired Commander on April 10, 1838.

Details of his personal life are few. He married a woman named Joanna who was 22 years younger than himself. They had six children, four boys and two girls. The oldest child, John, was born in 1816 when John was 54 years old. It can be assumed that John must have started his family sometime after 1807 when details of his active Navy career end. Perhaps he returned to England and felt he was secure enough to support a wife and family. After his retirement in 1838 at the age of 76, he emigrated to Upper Canada. His reasons for emigrating so late in life are not clear although it was not uncommon for retired officers to resettle in the colonies where there were lots of opportunities and readily available land. Perhaps he had his children's future security in mind when embarking on this endeavour.

The family lived at The Anchorage which originally was located at the foot of the present Southdown Road on the shores of Lake Ontario. This property originally belonged to the Jarvis family who had used it for shipping goods to and from York (Toronto) and Niagara. His family seems to have been fairly prosperous and any concern for his family's welfare was unfounded. The family seems to have been well connected and community minded. Two of his children, Henry and Caroline, both married members of the Jarvis family. Caroline's husband, Frederick William Jarvis would become the Sheriff of York County. His eldest daughter, Joanna, married Dr. Beaumont Dixie after which Dixie Road is named.

Commander John Skynner died July 12, 1846 at the age of 84. He is buried at St. Peter's Cemetery along with his wife Joanna. His home, The Anchorage, is now part of the Bradley Museum and serves as office space, artifact storage, a tea room, gift shop and exhibit space. The Bradley Museum collection has a few of his belongings including the above mentioned "plate", his signal book, a few letters and four engravings.