

CHARLES W. JEFFERYS, O.S.A., R.C.A., LL.D.

(1869 - 1951)

Biographical Notes

C. W. Jefferys, master draftsman, landscape painter, water colorist, and author, was Canada's greatest artist-historian.

He was born in Rochester, Kent, England, in 1869. His father was a builder and the family emigrated in 1877 to Philadelphia. The Jefferys later moved to Hamilton and then to Toronto by the time young Charles was 11 years of age.

Charles Jefferys attended public school in Toronto's Cabbagetown where he showed an aptitude for history and art, although he had little interest in most other subjects. His formal schooling was brief, however, and he was soon apprenticed to a lithographer. Tiring of this work he went to New York and joined the staff of the Herald. That was in the Nineties and times were hard, but Jefferys abetted his income by illustrating the poems of Isabella Valancy Crawford, Charles G.D. Roberts and Bliss Carman, for calendars back home.

Jefferys' wife died in 1900 and he returned to Toronto. Eight years later in Winnipeg he remarried and settled in Toronto to illustrate magazines and newspapers and to engage in pictorial publicity. He occasionally wrote historical articles, and it was in the field of history that his greatest interest lay. He travelled extensively in Canada examining every minute detail of the country's past. This provided material for the drawings which later made him famous. And in most of the history books used in Canada for almost half a century the illustrations bear the inimitable talents of C.W. Jefferys. A collection of his drawings appeared in three volumes published by the Ryerson Press in 1942, 1945 and 1950.

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Jefferys drew over 100 sketches to illustrate a projected volume on Haliburton's "Sam Slick", but the project was never completed by the American publishers. This was a pity because the artist had put some of his greatest work into this series.

In 1938 Jefferys guided the reconstruction of the French habitation at Port Royal in behalf of the Federal Government of Canada. He did the murals for the Royal Ontario Museum. Various commemorative medals and postage stamps were made from his designs.

The artist's canvases have been bought on this continent and abroad and they hang in many Canadian galleries and private collections. Jefferys put the whole pageant of Canadian life on paper, in word and drawing. He was from 1912 to 1929 an instructor in architecture at the University of Toronto, and he also taught at the Ontario College of Art. He was councillor at the Royal Academy of Arts, a president of the Ontario Society of Artists, a president of the Ontario Historical Society, a founder of the Canadian Authors' Association, and a president of the Canadian Society of Graphic Arts.

In 1931 Queens University conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws on Jefferys.

In October, 1951, Dr. Jefferys died. He was 82.

Shortly before the artist's death Imperial Oil formed a permanent collection of some 1,000 Jefferys historical drawings. The idea was to regard the collection as a public trust to be safeguarded and made generally available to the people of Canada. The original plan has been carried through.

The more recent acquisition of the "Sam Slick" drawings is an extension of Imperial Oil's hope to preserve the work of C.W. Jefferys for the use and education of Canadians generally.