

## Treasure Hunters Shed Light on Local History

*By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian*

While I like to dig up bits and pieces of our local history, a group of Perinton friends has taken a far more literal approach. They call themselves the ROC Diggers, and armed with metal detectors, these five history detectives enjoy unearthing artifacts from the past. Their treasures can help us to better understand our Fairport and Perinton history. Such is the case regarding the licensing of dogs. Members of the ROC Diggers, and others, have found several old dog license tags of late, which has prompted me to learn more about the history on this subject.



*The ROC Diggers with their metal detecting equipment: Dan Mantel, Steve Schalabba, Curtis Woods, Sara Schaeber, Doug Craven. Many owners have invited them to their property to search for artifacts of our past.*

Most town residents are aware that dog owners are required to license their pet. Many would be surprised to learn that the requirement to restrain and license dogs can be traced to a “dog tax” established in the village of Rochesterville on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1819. The fee for a dog license in 1819 was one dollar, no small fee. The daily fine imposed on citizens of Rochester for allowing a dog to be unrestrained was \$2.50, the equivalent of about fifty dollars today.

*Examples of dog tags unearthed in the area by Kevin Catalfamo, Doug Craven, and Tom Talmadge.*

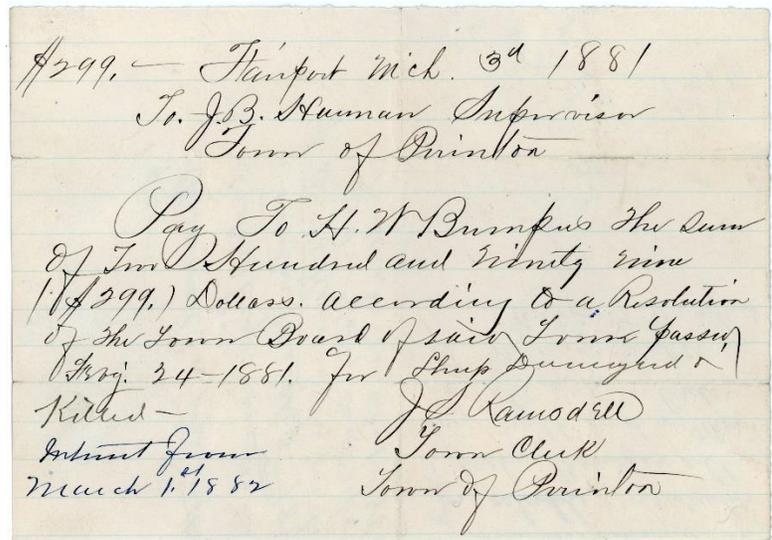


In Perinton, as in other agricultural communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sheep farmers suffered great losses due to injuries and deaths to their flock by dogs. Town records identify damages claimed by sheep

farmers, for their animals injured or killed by dogs as early as 1857. A report from Connecticut in 1877 illustrated the problem, with a claim of approximately 3,000 sheep killed by dogs in the state annually.

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century proponents for an annual dog tax were successful in legislating a new law within Monroe County, with the proceeds intended to reimburse sheep farmers for their losses. In Perinton, losses totaled \$918.00 in 1880, and were paid out to eight local farmers. One third went to William Bumpus, whose farm stood at the northeast corner of Ayrault and Moseley Roads.

*An 1881 document from the Town of Perinton historic archives, related to the reimbursement of \$299 to William Bumpus for the loss of sheep.*



\$299. - Perinton Mich. 3d 1881  
To J.B. Haman Supervisor  
Town of Perinton  
Pay To H.W. Bumpus the sum  
of Two Hundred and Ninety nine  
(\$299.) Dollars. according to a Resolution  
of the Town Board of said Town passed  
Nov. 24-1881. for Sheep damaged &  
Killed - J.S. Ramsdell  
Town Clerk  
Town of Perinton  
Perinton Mich. 1/18 82

Dog Tax laws evolved over the years. In 1904, Monroe County mandated that all dogs wear tags for identification, but it appears the law was widely ignored, both by dog owners and the municipalities charged with enforcement. In 1915, the failure to license a dog was elevated to a criminal offense, punishable by a fine of ten to fifty dollars, imprisonment, or both.



*An early 1880s photograph of the home and farm of William and Elizabeth Bumpus, whose farm was located near the corner of Ayrault and Moseley Road. William Bumpus was reimbursed for sheep lost to dogs on this farm in 1881.*

A rather shocking change to the law in 1917 allowed for the killing of unlicensed dogs by the local police or constable. According to reports at the time, the officer was permitted to enter any premises to find the animal, and was entitled to a three-dollar fee per dog killed, plus expenses.

In comparison, our current dog licensing practices are compassionate, both for dogs, and for their owners.