

Secord,
Laura
1820

The Story Of Laura Secord
Her Crowning Achievement, Which Gave
Her Name an Eternal Fame in Canadian History

The story of Laura Secord has been so often told in various forms that it is hardly necessary to do more than give the brief details of it here.

Laura, who was the eldest daughter of Major Thomas Ingersoll, a U. E. Loyalist, who afterwards founded the town of Ingersoll, Ontario, and his first wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Israel Dewey, Esquire, of Great Barrington, Mass., was born in Massachusetts, December 1775. In or about 1795, she accompanied her father and stepmother (her father's third wife) to Canada, which from that time became her home. She married, not long afterwards, James, youngest son of Lieutenant James Secord, and lived with him at St. David's and at Queenston, on the Niagara frontier. Her husband was also of Loyalist stock. He served during the war of 1812, and assisted in carrying the body of General Brock from the field of combat after he had fallen. At the third attack on Queenston, Secord was wounded, and it is on record that he would have been clubbed to death by the enemy as he lay helpless on the ground, if his wife, hearing of his mishap, had not gone to his assistance. Other brave and meritorious deeds rendered during the war have been attributed to her, but her crowning achievement, and that which has given her name an eternal fame in Canadian history, took place on June 23, 1813, as tersely recounted in the inscription on the public monument erected in her honor, at Lundy's Lane in 1911, "To perpetuate the name and fame of Laura Secord, who, on the 23rd June, 1813, walked alone nearly twenty miles by a circuitous, difficult and perilous route, through woods and swamps, over dirty roads, to warn a British outpost at DeCew's Falls, of intended attack, and thereby enabled Lieutenant Fitz Gibbon, on the 24th of June, 1813, with less than fifty men of His Majesty's 49th Regiment, about fifteen militiamen, and a similar force of Six Nation and other Indians, under Captain William Johnston Kerr, and Dominique Ducharme, to surprise and attack the enemy at Beechwood (or Beaver Dams) and after a short engagement, to capture Colonel Boerstler, of the U. S. Army and his entire force of 542 men, with two field-pieces, this monument, erected by the Ontario Historical Society from contributions of schools, societies. Her Majesty's 49th Regiment, other militia organizations and private individuals, was unveiled 22nd June, 1911." Mrs. Secord was the mother of one son and six daughters. Her husband died February 22nd, 1841 she died October 17th, 1868.

Secord, Laura
"Figs 20"

Ingersoll Daily Chronicle
Aug. 4, 1913.

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Laura Secord Centenary
Story of Brave Woman Whose Fame Will
Live In Canada

Monday, June 23, was the centenary of a deed of heroism that will always live in Canadian history, the accomplishment of which made possible a great Canadian victory which had its effects upon the issue of the war of 1812 - 14.

On June 23, 1813, Laura Secord, daughter of a United Empire Loyalist, and wife of a Canadian militiaman, who had been wounded at Queenston Heights, accidentally overheard a conversation between some American officers who had taken up their quarters in her home at Queenston, the purport of which led her to believe that the Americans were about to attack and defeat the small British force commanded by Lieut. Fitzgibbon, at De Cew's Falls.

Leaving the house, ostensibly for the purpose of milking her cow and driving the animal before her in a manner that gave the American soldiers the idea that she was unable to catch it, she managed to pass the American pickets unmolested. Once outside the American lines, she dashed into the woods and walked twenty miles by a circuitous, difficult and perilous route, through forests and swamps to Fitzgibbon's camp. As the result of her heroic deed, Fitzgibbon, on the following day, with less than 50 men of H. M. 4th Regiment, about 15 militiamen and a small force of Six Nation and other Indians under Capt. W. Johnson Kerr and Dominique Ducharme, surprised and attacked the enemy at Beaver Dams, and after a short engagement, captured Col. Boerstler of the U. S. army, his entire force of 542 men and two field pieces.

This was undoubtedly one of the most remarkable victories in our annals, and a victory, too, that helped to rid Upper Canada of the invaders and maintain this country as a British land.

At the time of her act of heroism Laura Secord was a woman of 38, the mother of five children. She was a fine, tall, strong woman and she lived to the old age of 93.

Other acts of bravery are attributed to her, including that of saving her husband's life, for after he lay wounded, it is on record that he would have been clubbed to death by the enemy had not his wife come to his assistance.

Also in the Ingersoll Chronicle and Canadian Dairyman
Aug. 7, 1913. Page 9.

THE STORY OF LAURA SECORDCANADIAN HEROINE WAS DAUGHTER OF
THOMAS INGERSOLL, FOUNDER OF THIS TOWN

(From the Canadian Courter)

Undoubtedly Laura Secord is the greatest of Canadian heroines. She performed one of the most heroic feats in the annals of history. This was sufficient to make her famous, but the romance which colors the history of herself and her husband adds much to the glamour which has always been associated with her and her name. Further, the deed which she was called upon to perform was the kind which appeals to Canadian men and women. A nineteen-mile tramp by moonlight through an untracked forest and over unbridged streams comprises a journey, the strain of which every Canadian can understand and appreciate.

Laura Ingersoll was the daughter of Thomas Ingersoll a United Empire Loyalist, who came from Massachusetts to Ontario about 1795. He was the founder of the town which goes by that name. His daughter Laura was about twenty years of age when the family came to Canada. Shortly afterwards she married James Secord of St. David's, who was afterwards a successful merchant in Queenston.

James Secord was a young man who had also shared in the sufferings of the U. E. Loyalists. His mother was one of a party of five women and thirty-one children, who arrived at Fort Niagara in 1776 destitute and starving.

In October, 1812, the American troops crossed the frontier but were defeated at Queenston Heights by General Brock. James Secord helped to carry the dying General from the battlefield. In the final assault he himself was wounded and in the dusk of the evening was found and rescued by his wife who had gone to search for him. In June of the following year the Americans had for the first time gained possession of the Niagara Peninsula. The British had outposts at Jordan, Beaver Dams and other points, and the Americans were advancing against them. While entertaining a number of American officers in their home at Queenston, the Secords heard of the enemies' plan to seize the post at Beaver Dams the next day. The husband, still suffering from his wounds, was unable to make the attempt necessary to warn the troops at this point. His plucky little wife therefore, started off in the middle of the night on her dreadful journey. It was thirteen miles by road but the road was unsafe because of the American sentries and outposts. She must needs tramp through the bush, wade the streams, or creep across fallen trees on hands and knees. She must needs also avoid the Indians who though working with the British, were not likely to respect a white woman whom they found wandering in such a fashion. However, the frail and delicate woman accomplished her nineteen-mile journey and tottered into camp in time to enable the garrison to prepare itself for the attack and to win a tremendous victory.

Such an example of womanly heroism ranks among the noblest teachings to any people.

Secord
Laura
T. Secord

85. Laura Ingersoll (Thomas, Jonathan, Thomas, Thomas, John), born Dec. 1775 at Great Barrington; died Oct. 17, 1868; married James Secord, born July 7, 1773; died Feb. 22, 1841, son of James and Madelaine (Badeau) Secord of New Rochelle, N. Y. Mrs. Secord with her son James, aged three years, was a refugee in Niagara, Canada, at the time of the Revolution and his marriage to Laura Ingersoll probably occurred soon after the removal of the Ingersolls to Oxford Co.

The story of Laura Secord is a most interesting one and is told in a book written by Mrs. Emma A. Currie of St. Catherine's, Ont. We take the liberty of quoting from the following statement of Lieut.-Col. James Fitz Gibbon.

"I do hereby certify that Mrs. Secord, wife of James Secord, of Chippewa, did in the month of June 1813, walk from her house, near the village of St. David's to De Cou's house in Thorold by a circuitous route of about twenty miles, partly through the woods to acquaint me that the enemy intended to attempt, by surprise, to capture a detachment of the 49th Regiment, then under my command, she having obtained such knowledge from good authority, as the event proved. Mrs. Secord was a person of slight and delicate frame and made the effort in weather excessively warm, and I dreaded at the time she must suffer in health in consequence of fatigue and anxiety, she having been

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exposed to danger from the enemy through whose lines of communication she had to pass. The attempt was made on my detachment by the enemy and his detachment, consisting of upwards of 500 men and a field piece and fifty dragoons, were captured in consequence. I write this certificate in a moment of much hurry and from memory, and it is therefore thus brief. (Sgd.) James Fitz Gibbon, Formerly Lieutenant 49th Regiment."

"It is a matter of interest to know how she got hold of the information that she so boldly carried to the Canadian army. At her house in Queenstown, some of the American officers were billeted, who talked freely of their plans, emphasizing the importance of securing the Beaver Dams as a base of operation, whereby a large force could be concentrated to advance on Burlington Heights. The Capture of Fitz Gibbon was to be the commencement of the enterprise. 'That position once captured,' said the American Colonel Borestler, 'Upper Canada is ours.' He spoke truly and military men of the present day acknowledge it was worth the venture.

"Laura Secord was a quiet, but eager listener. To carry the message of warning to Fitz Gibbon, she unhesitatingly 'took her fate in her hands and went forth with the inspiration that comes when duty calls.'"

"It is a strange fact that Mrs. Secord never received any recompense from the Canadian government. Her husband died in 1841 and twenty-seven years of widowhood followed—a long struggle with limited means and many bereavements, borne with uncomplaining patience. She was always grateful for help, but seldom asked for it. During the visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada in 1860 he, hearing of her meritorious action, sent her a check for £100 sterling. This was the first and only remuneration she ever received for her services, and is gladly mentioned as one of the kindly acts of our new and beloved King Edward."

"Mrs. Secord lived to the advanced age of ninety-three."

Many other incidents are told illustrating her courage and bravery and of the strong personality of her character.

Owing mainly to the efforts of Mrs. Currie, a monument was finally erected to her memory on Queenstown Heights, June 24, 1913, one hundred years after her famous exploit.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Secord are buried at Lundy's Lane.

Children:

- i Mary, m., Apr. 17, 1816, William Trumbull, Asst. Surgeon of 37th Regt., died in Ireland.
- ii Charlotte, unmarried.
- iii Harriet, m., Nov. 23, 1824, David William Smith, barrister at Queenstown.
- iv Hannah Cartwright, m. Hawley Williams; m. 2nd, Edward Carthew.
- v Laura, m. Dr. William Clark; m. 2nd, Capt. Poore.
- vi Charles Badeau, b. 1809; d. 1872; m. Miss Robins.
- vii Apollonia, d. aged 18.

Ingersoll

Laura

A Genealogy
of the
Ingersoll Family
in America
1629-1922

comp. by
Elizabeth Drake
Avery

Grafton Press
1926

4/1

Controversy Rages Over Cow But Agreement on Heroic Act

Sunday September 13, was the 178th Anniversary of the birth of Laura Secord, who has been voted by Canadian women as "the most outstanding woman in Canadian history".

For most of the past century a controversy has raged as to whether or not Laura Secord was accompanied by a cow on her perilous journey to the British Encampment to warn Fitzgibbon of an impending American attack.

While several historians have recorded in detail the activities of the cow, modern professors have scoffed and disclaimed that a cow had any part in the Laura Secord story.

According to an article by J. S. Hornibrook, in "Chambers Journal" of 1899, there is no question about the cow. Mr. Hornibrook wrote:

After attending to her household duties, she took a pail in her hand, and, as was her custom, went out to milk the cow. She was clad in a short jacket and flannel skirt, but had neither stockings or shoes. It was scarcely possible to imagine that a woman with bare feet would contemplate a long and difficult journey through a dangerous country; nevertheless, she was closely watched by two sentries. The cow however, appeared to be in an extremely restless mood that morning. No sooner had Laura settled down to milk than the creature kicked out viciously, knocked over the pail and bolted away. Again and again this was repeated, until one of the sentries, who had followed the pair closely, volunteered to capture the refractory animal. Mrs. Secord, however, declined his services; the cow would be sure to stand still presently. The secret of this little by-play was simple enough. No sooner was the cow's head turned in the right direction and Laura had started milking than she gave the animal a sly but vigorous pinch. Thus, without exciting suspicion, she at length gained the shelter of the forest. When she was concealed from view by the trees she drove the cow rapidly before her, until they were well into the wood. Then, flinging away her pail and stool the heroic woman started on her long and perilous journey. Imagine it; there were deep and thorny woods to traverse, rugged hills to climb, torrents to cross, and this for a fragile woman with bare feet! Nor did the danger end there; for ten miles from the farm the enemy's sentinels were posted, the country abounded with hostile Indians and rattlesnakes were not uncommon. To scare these venomous reptiles Mrs. Secord had armed herself with an ox-goad. With this weapon she beat the grass and undergrowth in front as she toiled along.

In the "History of Canada", by W. L. Grant, M.A., L.L.D., published in 1927, the cow angle is slightly different. Professor Grant wrote: "Leaving the house in the first flush of dawn, she started on her way. The story has often been told of her taking a pail on her arm, and passing the American sentry on the pretense of milking a cow in the field beyond, but it seems probable that the excuse she really made was her desire to visit her brother, who lay dangerously ill some miles away. Heedless of wolves and rattlesnakes, she travelled by a circuitous route through the woods, and more than once forded a swollen stream. For a time she seems to have lost her way, but after walking a distance of about nineteen miles, she at last reached

a branch of Twelve Mile Creek, and recognized her whereabouts. Finding the creek much swollen by rain and the bridge removed or swept away, she was compelled to cross by crawling on her hands and knees along the trunk of a fallen tree. Toiling up the steep bank beyond she stumbled into the midst of a group of sleeping Indians, who sprang to their feet with piercing yells. It was with great difficulty she made her object understood by their chief, who understood but a few words of English, and some delay ensued before she was entrusted to Fitzgibbon."

In another school history, published in Ontario by the McMillan Co. in 1917, the story about Laura Secord reads: "The enemy next to surprise Fitzgibbon at Beaver Dam. The news of their intention reached the ears of James Secord, a militia officer who had been wounded, and was then living at Queenston. As he himself, unable to warn Fitzgibbon, his wife Laura Secord, undertook the dangerous mission. Driving a cow before her, until she reached the woods, that the enemy might not suspect her real aim, this brave woman set out upon her lonely journey of twenty miles through the dense forest. Added to the difficulty of making a way where there were few paths, was the constant danger of meeting lurking Indians or Americans. At the close of a long day's tramp she delivered her message to the defenders of Beaver Dam. When the American force of nearly six hundred men approached, all was in readiness. Bewildered by the fierce attack of the Indians, and thinking he was surrounded by superior forces, the American Commander surrendered. This victory gave great encouragement to the British."

The British writer, Muriel Rowson Renaud, describing the courageous action of Laura Secord wrote:

"At the crack of dawn, this intrepid little woman crept out of the house and, with a stick in her hand, opened the barn and drove a sleepy cow out in to the yard. Then, driving the animal before her, she set out on her perilous journey. She had not gone far before she came to an American sentinel standing on duty. Without even a look at him, she struck the cow with her stick so that it broke into a trot. She hurried after it and passed the sentinel who took no notice of the farmer's wife driving her cow to pasture. Once safely out of his sight, Laura gave the cow a whack which sent it careering full speed straight towards the American camp. She raced after it, shouting wildly and waving her stick, which made the frightened animal gallop still faster, while the American soldiers roared with laughter at a poor woman trying desperately to catch her cow. Once clear of the camp, she threw away her stick, abandoned the animal to its fate, and started off towards the trail which she knew led to Beaver Dam."

Two or three monuments have been erected to honor the bravery of the heroine of the war of 1812, but today her memory is best kept alive by numerous well known little black and white candy shops whose products are distributed in boxes bearing Laura Secord's name and portrait.

No date

CHAPTER IV

A BRAVE DEED: LAURA SECORD

A BAND of Indian braves, decked out in war-paint, weird and frightful in the flickering moonlight, suddenly appeared through the trees. With fierce shouts they ran forward, brandishing their tomahawks.

"Woman!" they cried, "woman!"

Early the previous morning, before dawn had tinged the fleecy summer clouds in the eastern sky, Laura Secord had slipped away from the sleeping village of Queenston. Neither fires nor lights had been allowed in the homes since the Americans had occupied Queenston and Niagara; a picket had been thrown out to prevent anyone from passing through the lines with information concerning the movements of the troops. It was with a beating heart she had neared the picket line, and she could not but wonder, "Could he forbid her to pass?"

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Mrs. James Secord," she had replied. "My brother, Charles Ingersoll, lies at the point of death in St. David's and I am on my way thither."

This answer satisfied the soldier and he permitted her to proceed.

The night before, a party of American officers had been quartered at her home in Queenston. She

gathered from their remarks that an attack had been planned against Fitzgibbon at Beaver Dams. If it was successful the enemy would hold the strategic key to Upper Canada. She told her husband, who was ill in bed, suffering from wounds received in battle, what she had heard and expressed her intention of trying to warn Fitzgibbon.

"Somebody has to go," she replied, when he had pointed out the dangers of the journey. "You are not able and there is no one else. I must do the best I can."

(She was well aware of the difficulties which lay before her. Her way led through a district infested with wild animals and rattlesnakes, and what she dreaded even more, savages under the American command. She would have to avoid the main road and detour through swamps and woods, across ravines and streams, for she must run no chance of being captured by the enemy.)

At break of day she reached St. David's and, after a short stay with her brother, started out again, in spite of her relatives' remonstrances. She was determined to continue, no matter what befell.

Owing to recent rains the creeks were swollen and the fields heavy with mud. She could not follow the beaten track because hostile forces might be encountered. Many times she had to cross and recross the streams. Sometimes she waded the stream; once she crawled on hands and knees over a fallen tree which served as an improvised bridge.

She lost one shoe in the swamp, and her dress was torn by briars and brambles.

All day long she walked, up hill and down, through trackless swamp and dense woods, in the heat of a late June day. Wearied and footsore, she paused at intervals, to rest a moment, then on again she sped. An indomitable will and dauntless courage enabled her to persevere although almost exhausted from bodily fatigue.

"I must not give up," she said to herself, pressing her hand to her throbbing brow and staggering up from the log where she had sat down to ease her swollen feet, "Fitzgibbon and his men must not be taken unawares."

Night fell and the moon arose and still she struggled onward. At last she reached the neighborhood of Beaver Dams and there, to her dismay, had stumbled upon an encampment of Indians.

Though surrounded by yelling savages she did not lose her presence of mind. Putting on as bold a front as possible she endeavoured to explain to the chief, who knew only a few English words, that she must see Fitzgibbon immediately. At first the chief hesitated but by dint of signs Laura Secord made him understand she had an important message for the white commander and at last was conducted to him.

The Canadian forces were only a handful compared to the enemy but their leader was a brave, resourceful man. He stationed his few men and the

Indian allies in the woods and surprised the invaders; they surrendered, terrorized by the thought that they were outnumbered and at the mercy of war-whooping Indians.

Fitzgibbon never forgot Laura Secord's memorable walk. She treasured among her possessions in later life a letter he wrote which stated:—

"I do hereby certify that Mrs. Secord . . . did in the month of June, 1813, walk from her house near the village of St. David's, to DeCou's house in Thorold, by a circuitous route of about twenty miles, partly through the woods, to acquaint me that the enemy intended an attempt, by surprise, to capture a detachment of the 49th Regiment, then under my command, she having obtained such knowledge from good authority as the event proved. Mrs. Secord was a person of slight and delicate frame, and made the effort in weather excessively warm, and I dreaded at the time she must suffer in health in consequence of fatigue and anxiety, she having been exposed to danger from the enemy through whose lines of communication she had to pass. . . ."

Laura Ingersoll Secord's early childhood was spent in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where her father, Major Ingersoll, was engaged in business. The house in which she lived has been presented to the town and is now the Great Barrington Free Library and Reading Room. It is a frame building, a story and a half in height, low and broad, with dormer windows facing the street.

Here the little girl played happily about the four or five acres that surrounded her father's home and

Secord
Ingersoll

shop and extended to the banks of the Housatonic River. Born in December, 1775, she was only a child during the American Revolution. Its after effects, however, she was old enough to comprehend; for the war, as do all wars, had left a trail of hardship in its wake. Business declined; and Major Ingersoll, having heard that Governor Simcoe was offering tracts of land in Canada on generous terms to those settling there, determined to move thither.

When Chief Joseph Brant, of the Mohawk Indians, was visiting in New York he had become friends with Major Ingersoll and had promised to show him the best lands for settlement if he came to Canada to live. He did not forget his offer; after the Ingersolls arrived, but sent six of his ablest braves to point out the most suitable district which, according to his opinion, was around the Thames River, then called River La Tranche.

Major Ingersoll brought his family to Oswego and from there they sailed westward on Lake Ontario. It is said that when they were in the vicinity of Grimsby a severe storm broke upon them and they were obliged to put up a tent on shore and camp there until it abated. For several days the vessel had been becalmed and, during the days spent in waiting for a favourable wind, the supply of food had become almost exhausted. There was nothing for Mrs. Ingersoll and the children to eat, so the sailors started off to search for provisions. In the woods they found a camp of hunters who directed

them to a settler's house where they were able to procure milk and other necessities.

They left the sailing ship at Burlington Bay and proceeded the remainder of the trip by land. There were no roads built in that part of the country, nothing but an Indian trail leading from Ancaster to Detroit. Guided by Chief Brant's braves they reached their destination, a location that had been used for many years previously by the Indians as a summer camping-ground. Here Major Ingersoll settled, on the site of the present town of Ingersoll which bears his name.

At this time Laura Ingersoll was a handsome young woman, about twenty years of age, slight and fair, in height around five feet four inches. One day, later on, James Secord chanced to call upon Major Ingersoll to consult him on certain business matters. The gentlemanly bearing of the young man impressed Major Ingersoll and his wife and the latter remarked, after the stranger had departed, that it was unfortunate "there were so few opportunities to meet people of education and refinement," adding that she doubted if they would ever see the young man again.

But James Secord, during his short stay, had not been wholly engrossed in business. He had seen the lovely daughter of the household and had carried away a vision of kindly brown eyes and sweet, smiling mouth. It was impossible for him to stay away and so, before long, he returned. Thus began a

friendship which culminated in marriage. For a while the young couple lived at St. David's, then they moved to Queenston where they were when the war clouds of 1812 darkened the horizon.

Laura Secord was resourceful and courageous in danger. In the early part of the war she rescued her husband from the hands of three enemy soldiers who were about to club him to death, as he lay wounded on the hillside.

One night, some time afterwards, when she and her children were alone save for two young colored servants, Bob and Fan, a man knocked at the door. In reply to her query he said he was being pursued and wished to enter. As it happened, Mr. Secord had left a considerable sum of money in the house and the man must have known this for, when Mrs. Secord objected to admitting him at that hour, he became abusive and declared:

"I can come in and I will!"

Before he could carry out his evil intention, she spoke gruffly in an Irish brogue, saying in a loud, stern voice;

"If ye dare to do it, shure an' I'll set the dog on ye."

At the same time she motioned to Bob, the colored boy, to imitate the growling of a dog, an accomplishment in which he was an adept.

The man left but shortly came back again. Then, Laura Secord, not in the least intimidated, brought

out an old horse-pistol and threatened to shoot if he did not go away. This had the desired effect.

After the war, when the Secords were living in Chippewa, where Mr. Secord was a customs-house official, he was, one day, notified that smugglers were going to make an attempt to land at a certain spot. Mrs. Secord's granddaughter relates how, on hearing the news, Laura Secord at once said to her husband:

"There are only two of you and there will be great danger. I shall represent the third person."

She disguised herself by donning a pair of her husband's boots and wearing a man's cap and overcoat. Thus dressed she went with them to the boat and remained on guard while the cargo was seized.

Throughout her life she exemplified "strong religious principles, strong affections" and a strict adherence to the "sacred duty of doing good." Her motto was, "It is ever the darkest hour just before the daylight."

There was no recognition by the Canadian Government given Laura Secord at the time of her exploit but a monument, in her honor, was erected at Queenston in 1912, the centenary of the war.

When the Prince of Wales visited Canada in 1860, among the signatures attached to a petition, submitted for his approval, was that of Laura Secord. As hers was the only woman's name appearing he asked the reason for its inclusion and was told of the brave deed she had undertaken in order to save

her country. The Prince, at once interested, made further inquiries and when he returned to England expressed his appreciation of her heroism by sending her a hundred pounds.

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Secord
Laura
1860

SECORD, Laura Ingersoll

Laura Secord great frontier woman

Unblinking brown eyes stare from the oval frame. Her white-skinned features sparkling with youth have become familiar in the homes of Canadians.

Today the face of Laura Secord graces boxes of candy and chocolates. But while the elegant woman in the portrait looks very much like the spoiled debutante, it had seen the emotions of fear, anger and determination. Like her father, Thomas Ingersoll, Laura Secord came from a breed of pioneers whose strength and energy were responsible for settling in the Canadian wilderness.

Laura Secord is best known for her heroic efforts in preventing an American attack on Canadian outposts at Beaver Dam. But before establishing herself on Niagara soil, Laura made the arduous trek from the United States to this area. According to historian Emma Currie,



Laura Ingersoll Secord is one of the few Canadian heroines. Her trek across the Niagara wilderness saved Canadian forces from American attack during the War of 1812. This portrait shows her as an old woman. She lived to the age of 93.

Ingersoll Times
Sept. 7, 1983

Laura came to Canada with her father to the settlement of Oxford-on-the-Thames, to establish a foothold along the Thames River for the rest of the Ingersoll family still at their home in Great Barrington Massachusetts. After returning to get the family Laura's involvement in Oxford-on-the-Thames now ends. She remained in the settlement of Queenston, supporting her father with the funds she made at a tavern there.

Laura Ingersoll was 18-years-old in 1793. While Thomas attempted to get firm foothold on the 66,000 acres of fertile land given to him and a loyalist group of American settlers, she operated Ingersoll's tavern, a busy spot in the heart of the Niagara frontier. A frequent visitor to the tavern was James Secord, who owned a women's wear and household appliance shop no far down the street. His visits soon turned to romance, and in 1798, the couple was married.

Not long after feelings were aggravated between the British and the Americans. As an outlash against the Empire, the Americans decided to strike against them by attacking their interests in Canada. Queenston, just north of the border, saw the infiltration of American troops when the War of 1812 broke out.

Laura, now a young mother, followed the events from her home in Queenston. The Canadians felt safe for awhile, as the commanding hand of General Isaac Brock steered several victories. Soon James, her husband enlisted in the First Lincoln Militia of the Canadian forces.

Queenston became a centre of fighting during the war. In 1812, James fell to an American bullet and was forced to return home. The Americans regarded the small loyalist family consisting of a woman, seven small children and a crippled soldier as harmless, and consequently used their home to billet soldiers.

The move became a turning point in the war. As the Americans became accustomed to life in Queenston, they began to speak freely of the Secord home. One night, they invited Colonel Boerstler to dine, and assigned Laura to prepare the meal.

As Laura bustled about cleaning after their feast, her ears perked at their conversation. They planned to move against General James FitzGibbon in a surprise ambush at Beaver Dam, some 20 miles away. With James too weak to move. Laura left to warn the Canadians, wearing house slippers and a flowered dress for the occasion.

Laura's plan was originally to walk to a town nearby, St. Davids, and have her brother, Charles Ingersoll walk the remaining miles. But Charles was ill, so Laura went on, this time accompanied by her 20-year-old niece, a frail girl named Elizabeth.

Elizabeth didn't last long. In the midst of the outback, she lagged behind. Laura continued, staying off of the trails to avoid Indians. Even with this precaution, Laura was confronted with Indians, but after ordering them to take them to General FitzGibbon, she was able to relay her news.

General FitzGibbon acted fast by organizing the counter attack. Colonel Boerstler, the guest in the Secord home only a day before, was wounded and captured in battle.

It was only years later that recognition came to Laura Secord. At first, her trip was kept quiet to protect her family, but even years later her efforts seemed forgotten. However after she turned 85 years old, her valour was marked by Prince Albert Edward. After hearing of her exploits in a petition drawn up by General FitzGibbon, the prince sent her 100 pounds of gold from England. The words that brought her attention are as follows:

"I certify that Mrs. Secord did in the month of June 1813 come to the Beaver Dam and communicate to me information of an intended attack to be made by the enemy upon the detachment then under my command...Mrs. Secord arrived at my Station about sunset of an excessively warm day, after having walked about 12 miles which I at the time thought was an exertion which a person of her slender frame and delicate appearance was unequal to make. Signed, James FitzGibbon."

The story of Laura Secord has all the elements of a fictional suspense drama with intrigue and set backs at every corner. Her name lives on through a candy company while her spirit prevails from the romantic past of Canada.