



## LAURA INGERSOLL SECORD

*"When Laura Secord left her home,  
With holy message fraught,  
And lone FitzGibbon's distant post  
With hasty footsteps sought."*

*-- A Ballad of 1812*

Although Laura Secord is one of Canada's favourite heroines, her story is neither simple nor straightforward. Many of the details of Laura Secord's life are a mystery, and even today, there is considerable debate regarding the particulars of her courageous journey.

Born September 13, 1775 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Laura Ingersoll was the first child of Colonel Thomas Ingersoll and Elizabeth Dewey. Her family moved to Canada in 1795, and settled in Oxford County, founding the town which was later named Ingersoll in their honour. At the age of 22, Laura married James Secord, a merchant who lived in St. David's. They later moved to Queenston where they lived with their five children in a modest clapboard house which was purchased for restoration by The Laura Secord Candy Shops in 1969.

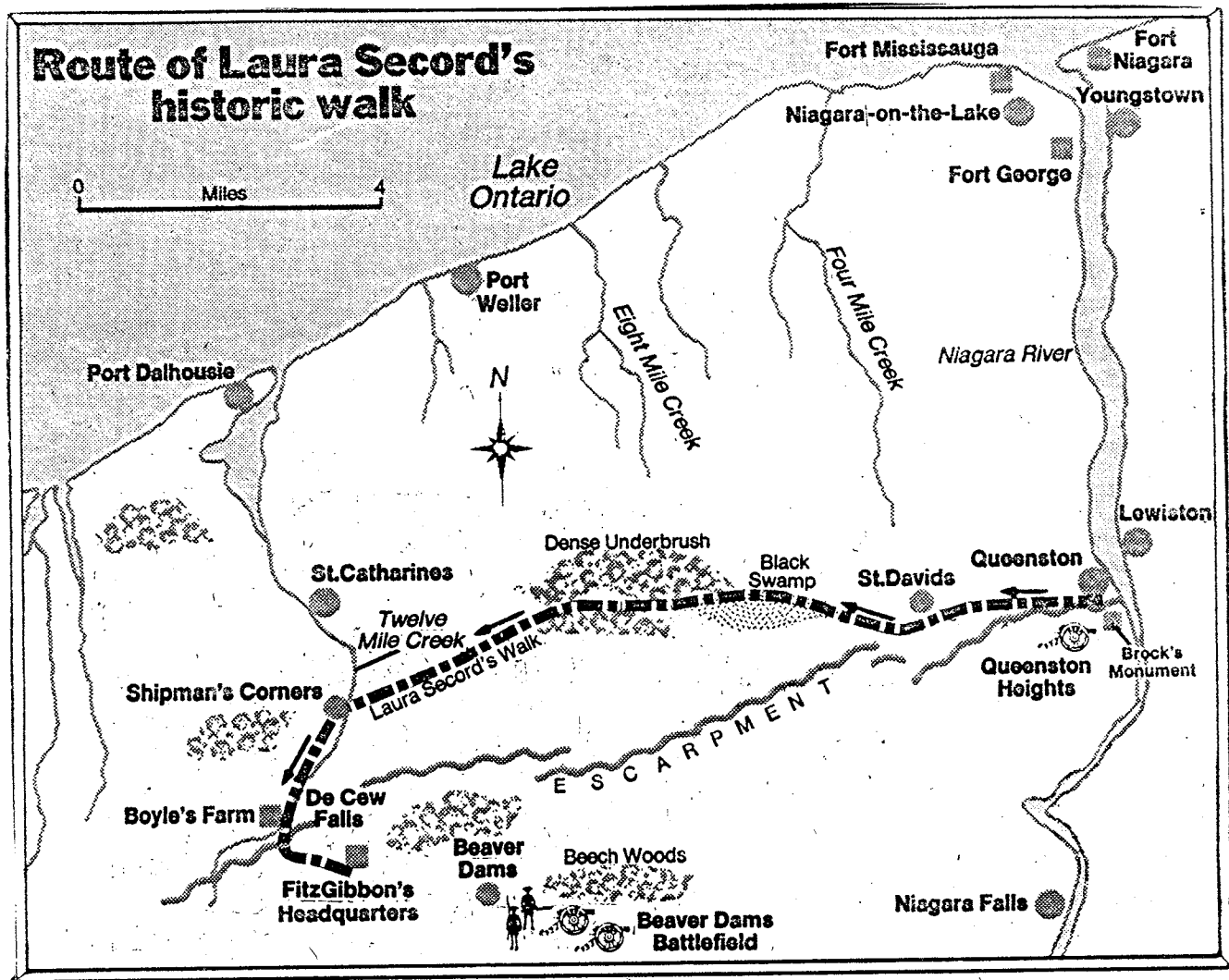
During the War of 1812, the Secords were forced to oblige American soldiers who demanded food and accommodation. Although we do not know for certain, it is entirely possible that on the evening of June 21, 1813, Laura Secord overheard American soldiers planning a surprise attack. The target was the home of John De Cew, a supply depot for arms and ammunition which was guarded by a scant 50 soldiers under the command of Lieutenant James FitzGibbon. Although Laura and her husband realized the importance of informing Lt. FitzGibbon of the planned attack, James had been injured in the recent battle at Queenston Heights and thus, could not warn FitzGibbon. Therefore, Laura set out before daybreak on June 22, wearing only a cotton dress, bonnet and house slippers, and began her now famous 20 mile trek. Her original intention was to walk to St. David's and send her half-brother Charles with the message. However, finding him seriously ill with a fever, Laura was forced to convey the information to Lt. FitzGibbon herself.

Afraid of being intercepted by American soldiers, Laura kept off of the main roads. She crossed dangerous terrain -- swamps, forests, creeks and fields -- in the sweltering heat, losing both of her slippers in the process. She arrived at De Cew's house well after nightfall, fatigued and bedraggled, but able to deliver her message to an amazed Lt. FitzGibbon. Taking advantage of Laura's information, Lt. FitzGibbon, along with 50 soldiers and Indian reinforcements, ambushed American soldiers near Beaver Dams on the morning of June 24, and tricked 462 American soldiers into surrendering. The victory at Beaver Dams was an important turning point for the British and helped them to regain control of the Niagara frontier. One can only speculate what would have happened to the soldiers at De Cew's House had Laura Secord been unable to deliver her timely message.

Lieutenant FitzGibbon was celebrated for his role in the British victory at Beaver Dams, but no mention of Laura Secord was made in FitzGibbon's report of the battle. After the war, the Secords also did not ever publicly mention Laura's courageous journey,

possibly for fear of reprisals from Americans. The family moved to Chippawa sometime in the 1820's, after James, permanently disabled by his war injuries, received an appointment as Customs Officer. James Secord died in 1841, at which point his pension from the government ceased. Laura operated a small private school in her house, but this did not generate much income. In the face of hardship, Laura petitioned the government for a commission to support her family, but was repeatedly refused. In 1860, her name was on a petition presented to the Prince of Wales on a visit to Niagara Falls. The Prince accepted her story and awarded her the sum of 100 pounds.

Laura Secord died on October 17, 1868, at the age of 93. She was interred beside her husband in the Drummond Hill cemetery. An eight foot high monument, a square granite pedestal topped by a bronze bust of Laura Secord, was unveiled in the cemetery on June 22, 1901, in the presence of 2000 people. Laura Secord is truly one of the great heroines of Canadian history. To many, she is a symbol of bravery, courage, and perseverance, and the Laura Secord monument stands as a testament to her character.



**Historic walk:** Laura Secord's June 1813 walk from Queenston to FitzGibbon's headquarters, including stopping off places. She made the heroic journey through woods and swamps almost entirely on her own.