

QUEENSTON
HEIGHTS

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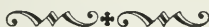
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Queenston Heights

Published by
The Niagara
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QUEENSTON HEIGHTS



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THE BATTLE
of
QUEENSTON HEIGHTS

WHEN, on the 18th of June, 1812, Mr. Madison, President of the United States, signed the declaration of war against Great Britain, Canada, to be the scene of action, was inadequately prepared for defence.

General Brock, Governor of Upper Canada and Commander-in-Chief of the Forces, had only 3,250 men, regulars and militia, to protect the thirteen hundred miles of the frontier of the whole province. Of these, he detailed twelve hundred for the defence of the thirty border miles along the Niagara River, where attack might be made at Fort George (Niagara-on-the-Lake), Queenston or Fort Erie. General Brock distributed his little handfuls of troops to the best advantage, trusting to the better training of the men, and the better military prowess of the leaders to offset the lack of numbers. At Chippawa he placed a small detachment of the 41st Regiment, under Captain Bullock, and the flank companies of the 2nd Lincoln Militia, under Captains Hamilton and Rowe; at Fort Erie a detachment of the 49th Regiment and some militia; Fort George, the General's headquarters, was garrisoned by part of the 49th Regiment and three hundred militia including some York Volunteers; Queenston's share in the distribution was part of the 49th, under Captains Dennis and Williams, and some militia, approximately three hundred in all.

About a mile below Queenston, at Vrooman's Point, the principal gun was mounted; other guns were placed at intervals between there and Fort George; also at a short distance below Fort Erie

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Brock's Monument

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and pointing at Black Rock. This was surely inadequate resistance to the expected onslaught.

General Van Rensselaer, in charge of the invaders, was at Fort Niagara, daily gathering strength for his task and, when the first week in October came, he felt himself ready. His plans were, as he expressed them, "To immediately concentrate the regular force in the neighbourhood of Niagara and the militia at Lewiston, make the best possible dispositions, and at the same time the regulars will pass Four Mile Creek to a point in the rear at Fort George and take it by storm; I will pass the river here (Lewiston) and carry the Heights of Queenston. Should we succeed we shall effect a great discomfiture of the enemy by breaking their line of communication, driving their shipping from the mouth of the river, leaving them no rallying point in this part of the country, appalling the minds of the Canadians, and opening a wide and safe communication for our supplies. We shall save our land, wipe away part of the score of our past disgrace, get excellent barracks and winter quarters, and at least be prepared for an early campaign another year".

Meanwhile the American people and press were urging him on to the seemingly easy conquest. The disgrace of Hull's surrender at Detroit rankled in their minds; it must be wiped out; the means were at hand to do it. Ready for action was Van Rensselaer with his 6,300 men, 3,650 of whom were regulars and 2,650 militia, placed at strategic points. At his headquarters at Lewiston he had 2,270 militia and 900 regulars; at Fort Niagara were 1,100 regulars, only 100 fewer than Brock's whole force distributed along the thirty miles. He

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decided to cross the river at Lewiston early in the morning of October 11th. The attempt was made but not carried out, and the adventure was postponed until the dark of the morning of October 13th.

At the appointed time all was ready and the thirteen boats provided for the purpose were busy carrying the men across the swift current of the Niagara River, less than a quarter of a mile wide at the place.

General Van Rensselaer, himself not a military man but a politician, had placed his cousin and aide-de-camp, Colonel Solomon Van Rensselaer, an accomplished soldier, in charge of the operations. He, with 300 regulars and 300 militia, was the first to take the boats. Immediately the British were aroused and the twenty-four-pounder at Vrooman's Point and the eighteen-pounder on the Heights went to the assault. Vigorous response came from the batteries at Lewiston in the effort to protect the troops being carried across the river and landing at the place which, afterwards, became the Canadian end of the Lewiston Suspension Bridge. Captain Dennis took sixty of the three hundred defenders of Queenston and, with a three pounder in charge, advanced towards the river. His little party opened well directed and continuous fire, killing and wounding several American officers and men and driving the rest behind a bank near the water's edge. Amongst the wounded were Colonel Van Rensselaer and three captains.

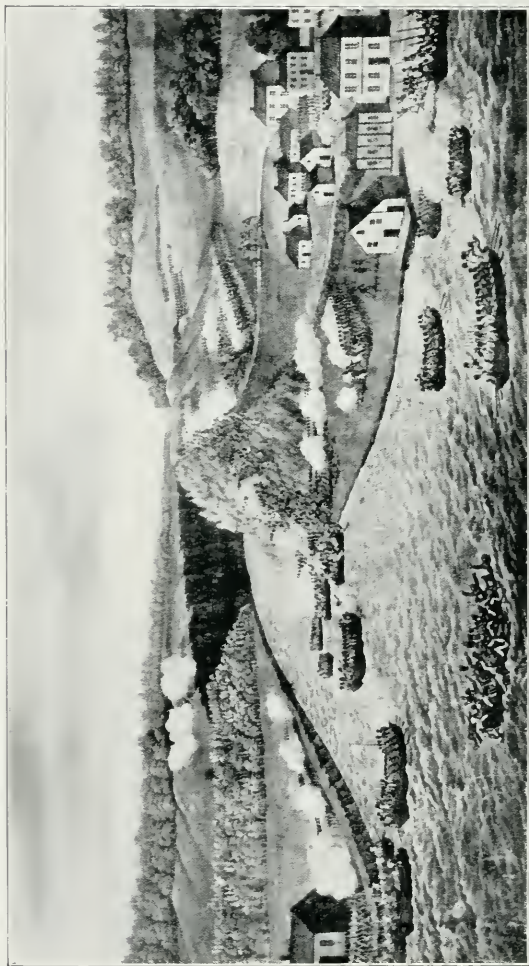
Captain Dennis was then reinforced by the remaining Grenadier Companies of the 49th. The Light Infantry, under Captain Williams occupied

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the Heights and joined in firing on the invaders, the shots reaching the relay of boats. One was totally destroyed, two were captured and the remainder went back home.

Brock, at Fort George, on the night of October 12th, was in conference with his staff till past twelve o'clock. After the others had gone he spent some time in thought and was preparing to retire. Suddenly, at about three o'clock in the morning, pitch dark, came the alarm, the sound of sustained firing. His servant, too, had heard and excitedly ran to his master. "My good Porter," said Brock, "have Alfred saddled at once while I complete dressing, and inform Major Glegg and Colonel Macdonnell that I am off up the river to Queenston." His charger ready, he mounted and galloped away, to draw up only for a moment, at the residence of Captain John Powell. Although scarcely daylight the household was astir, roused by the sound of the artillery. Miss Sophia Shaw, his betrothed, the daughter of General Shaw, and sister-in-law of Captain Powell, brought him coffee and he drank his last stirrup cup. Sad eyed farewells followed him as he rode away.

Presently came the sound of galloping hooves and Glegg and Macdonnell, his staff officers, rode up. Without stopping the three continued on their way, the Commander issuing orders to the outposts as they went. They arrived at Queenston about daybreak. Taking note of the situation, Brock saw the American reinforcements quickly landing. He ordered Captain Williams, with his regulars and militia, to go to the support of Captain Dennis at the foot of the hill. This move left



The Battle of Queenston Heights.

From a sketch attributed to Captain Dennis.

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the Heights undefended and Colonel Van Rensselaer saw the opportunity to capture them.

Captain Wool, of the American Army, had instructions to take his force along a concealed path, to a point behind the British battery and was advancing. Brock had noticed this manoeuvre, but, having been assured, by someone who had more intimate knowledge of the locality than he, that the Heights were inaccessible by this path, they were left unguarded. Soon the enemy emerged from the woods, appeared in view and were proceeding upward. Resistance was useless; immediate evacuation was necessary and Brock, with his two aides and twelve gunners, speedily retired to the foot of the hill. He then took command of Captain Williams' little force, and, cheering and encouraging the men, was leading the way up the hill again. Just then Colonel Macdonnell was nearing with the reinforcements for which he had been sent to Fort George. Quickly deciding on his course of action, Brock said to an aide: "If Williams and Macdonnell can but outflank the Americans at the summit and scale the mountain in the rear of the redan on the right, nothing can prevent our driving them out. Our place is here." "But, General," pleaded his devoted aide, "I pray you let me lead, or at least take proper precautions. If you are wounded, think what may befall us." The General's reply was characteristic: "I must remain at the head of these men; duty and desire compel me. Should I fall, there are others not less competent." So on he went in the forefront, conspicuous for his brilliant uniform and his height. He thundered his command to charge; the enemy fell back; reinforcements came to their assistance.

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A second charge volleyed. Up they hoisted the white flag, only to have it torn down and trampled under foot by their brave Captain Wool. The fight kept on with galling fire from both sides. Just then General Brock raised his sword arm, pointed to the hill and had just shouted: "Push on the brave York Volunteers", a brilliant target for the ball which struck him in the right breast, passing through his left side.

George Jarvis, a volunteer, has left the story of this fatal moment. He has written: "On arriving at the foot of the mountain, where the road diverges to St. David's, General Brock dismounted and, waving his sword, climbed over a high stone wall, followed by his troops. Placing himself at the head of the Light Company of the 49th, he led the way up the mountain, at double quick time, in the very teeth of a sharp fire from the enemy's rifle men, and ere long he was singled out by one of them, who coming forward, took deliberate aim and fired. Several of the men noticed the action and fired, but too late, and our gallant General fell on his left side within a few feet of where I stood. Running up to him I enquired, 'Are you hurt much, Sir?' He placed his hand on his breast, but made no reply and sank down. The 49th raised the cry 'Revenge the General', and regulars and militia, led by Colonel Macdonnell, pressed forward, anxious to avenge the death of their beloved leader, and literally drove a superior force up the mountain side to a considerable distance beyond the summit".

Fatally wounded, Brock's last words were a request that his death should be concealed from the men, and an almost unintelligible wish that a remembrance be sent to his sister.

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Cenotaph marking the place where Brock fell.

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Almost immediately before Brock was struck, Colonel Macdonnell had arrived with two flank companies of the York Militia. He took command and led them, with Captain Williams' detachment, up the Heights, against the enemy. Wool and his men were driven from the battery and forced to spike the gun. At this moment of success Macdonnell and Williams fell, wounded, Macdonnell fatally; Williams eventually recovered from the wounds in his head.

Without a leader, disorganized, it devolved upon Captain Dennis to assume command of the defenders. He retired his men to a position in front of the battery on Vrooman's Point. The Americans, established on the Heights, set about restoring the spiked gun to usefulness, and with it work havoc on Queenston. The odds seemed greatly in their favour. At this time there were only about two hundred available men on the side of the British, while the Americans had eight hundred fit and ready for action. General Van Rensselaer came over to the Canadian side of the river, expressed his great satisfaction at the turn of events and, thinking the fighting was over, left General Wadsworth in charge of the American troops.

But the genius of Brock was still operating. Before leaving Fort George for Queenston, in the early morning, he left instructions for General Sheaffe, who commanded at the Fort, to have his men ready and prepared for action at the first alarm. So soon as he heard of the attack Sheaffe was on his way with about three hundred regulars of the 49th, two companies of the Lincoln Militia and a few Indians. On the way he heard

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of the death of Brock, which made him all the more eager to save the situation. Reinforcements joined him; Chiefs Brant and Norton led their Indian braves; two hundred militia men came from Chippawa and together they proceeded along the St. David's road to a track, advised by the Indians as being a favourable way of reaching the Heights. Sheaffe had placed thirty men with two pieces of artillery in front of Queenston to prevent the Americans entering the village. Reaching the Heights, he drew up his troops in semi-circular formation and facing the enemy, who, with their backs to the river at the foot of the precipice, had all avenues for escape cut off.

The end was not far off. Sheaffe advanced upon the Americans with two guns, and ordered forward the Light Infantry Company of the 41st under Lieutenant McIntyre. With about fifty militia and thirty or forty Indians they attacked the enemy right. A volley; a bayonet charge, and they fell back; then a charge from the whole line; wild war whoops split the air; the Americans fled in disorder, down the sharp declivity, terrified. Many leaped into the river and were drowned; some got safely across. Then General Wadsworth sent Colonel Winfield Scott, later of Mexican fame, with a flag of truce and an offer to surrender the whole force. Approximately one thousand, including seventy-three officers, amongst whom was General Wadsworth, laid down their arms. These included the two boat loads captured in the morning.

Exact figures of their casualties are not available. The British lost during the whole day about eighty killed and wounded; these included the

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Indians. The only officers killed were General Brock and Colonel Macdonnell.

Thus, at about half past three o'clock in the afternoon of the day of his death, the General was avenged and the contest for Queenston Heights was ended. But not the war. Engagement followed engagement on land and water until December, 1814, when the Treaty of Ghent brought the peaceful conditions which have been kept for more than a century between the two peoples marching together along the three thousand miles of undefended frontier between the United States and Canada. By mutual forbearance, arbitration and in the spirit of comradeship, they have shown the nations the neighbourly way symbolized by the celebration at Lundy's Lane, July 25th, 1914, when troops from both sides of the border assembled, in full array, to do honour to the Centenary of Peace. At the very hour of rejoicing, Austria delivered the ultimatum to Serbia which was finally to bring the two nations shoulder to shoulder fighting the common foe.

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SIR ISAAC BROCK

FOR generations the Brocks had made their home at St. Peter's Port, Island of Guernsey, and there, Isaac, the eighth of the fourteen children of John Brock and his wife Elizabeth de Lisle, was born on the sixth day of October, 1769, the memorable birth year of Napoleon Bonaparte and Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington. Surely the stars ordained the rule of Mars.

Isaac Brock's boyhood revealed the qualities which made the man the ideal soldier and gentleman. He was the best boxer and swimmer of his school, courageous and daring. Gentleness and courtesy characterized the youth, and to his companions he became the favourite and hero. The fighting blood in his veins, inherited from both parents, drove his inclinations to the profession of his ancestors, and, at the age of sixteen, he purchased his entrance to the army as ensign. Serious application to study, devotion to duty and determination brought quick promotion until, at the age of twenty-eight, he became senior Lieutenant-Colonel of the 49th, Berkshire, Regiment, which, under his command, went from a very unsatisfactory condition to one of notable efficiency.

His first military expedition was in the campaign against Holland, when he gave distinguished service. Early in 1801, Brock was second in command of the land forces, in the attack by Lord Nelson on Copenhagen, and, leading the 49th, stormed the Treckroner batteries in conjunction with five hundred seamen under Captain Freemantle. After the termination of the Holland expedition the 49th was ordered to Canada. The first few years were spent in establishing and

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Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, K.B.

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After Queenston an armistice was arranged, to give opportunity for caring for the wounded and burying the dead. The time allotted, having been found insufficient, Sheaffe wrote to Van Rensselaer and suggested an extension, pointing out that part of the time would be "devoted to paying the last offices of humanity to the remains of my departed friend and General." To this letter Van Rensselaer replied: "I most cheerfully agree to extend the cessation of hostilities for a time amply sufficient to discharge the duties of humanity to the brave who are wounded or prisoners, and the just tribute of respect to the gallant dead. I shall order a salute, for the funeral of General Brock, to be fired at Lewiston and Fort Niagara." Sheaffe, in appreciation, wrote back, "I feel too strongly the generous tribute which you propose to pay to my departed friend and chief to be able to express the sense I entertain of it. Noble minded as he was, so would he have done himself."

During the funeral, from Fort Niagara and Lewiston, boomed the salute to the dead; a graceful tribute to a valiant foe.

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SIR ROGER HALE SHEAFFE

ON the 15th of July, 1763, Roger Hale Sheaffe was born in Boston, in the British Colony of Massachusetts; his father, William Sheaffe, was Deputy Collector of His Majesty's Customs at that port. Early deciding on military life his education was undertaken by Earl Percy, afterwards Duke of Northumberland, who purchased his protégé's entrance to the army as Ensign in the 5th Fusiliers. He soon attained the rank of Lieutenant and served some years with his regiment in Ireland, then back and forth between Canada and Europe, with promotions at intervals, until July, 1812, when he was again sent to Canada with the rank of Major-General, and achieved fame in his success at Queenston after the death of Brock. In acknowledgment of this service he was created a baronet. He also succeeded Brock as President of the Council of Upper Canada for a short time extending over only one session. During this tenure of civil office the chief act of the Legislature was to provide for the maintenance of persons disabled, and the widows and children of such persons as may be killed in His Majesty's Service.

But Sir Roger Sheaffe was essentially a military man and, as such, continued his service in Canada as Commander-of-the-Forces, until June, 1813, when he was succeeded by General de Rothenberg.

When he relinquished his civil duties he received, from the Executive Council, a complimentary address expressing appreciation of the candour, justice and impartiality which had marked his

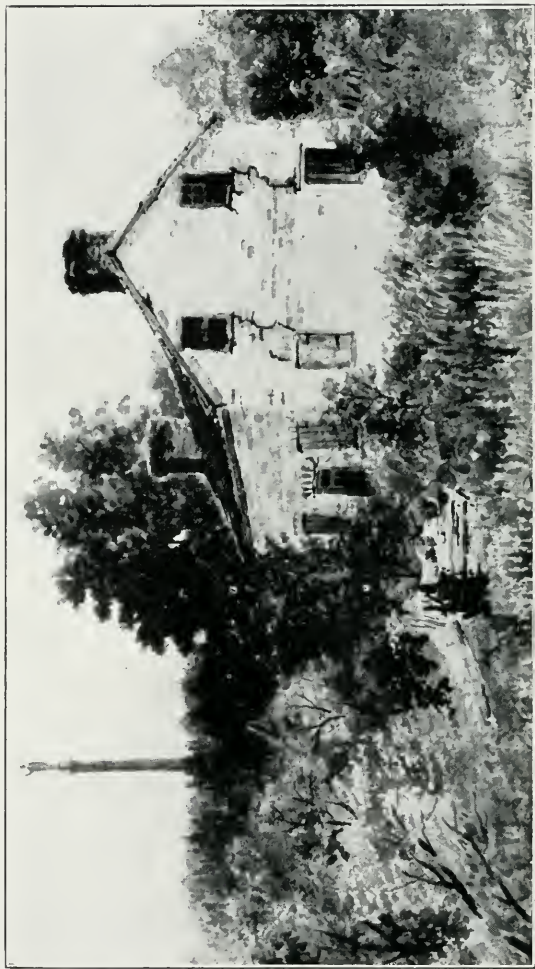
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administration, and the urbanity and confidence of his intercourse. The address also acknowledged the conviction that the salvation of the whole Province of Upper Canada was owing to his direction of the action on the memorable day of victory at Queenston Heights.

Sir Roger Sheaffe attained the venerable age of eighty-eight years and died in Edinburgh in 1851.

Amongst the memorials and markers throughout the Niagara district there is one beside the highway in the Village of St. David's. In simple words it tells its story :

"Sheaffe's path to Victory
October 13th, 1812."



Laura Secord's House at Queenston.
From a painting of the original by F. H. Wilkinson.

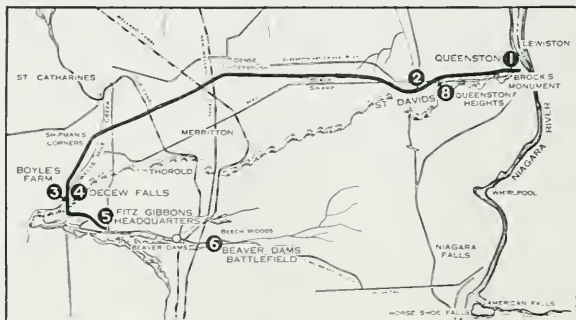
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LAURA SECORD

AFTER the Battle of Queenston Heights, the war continued with varying results to the British, until the end of the first six months of the campaign disclosed the American forces in possession of Niagara and Queenston. The British General, Vincent, then in command of the district, had evacuated Fort George, and had retired to Burlington Heights (Hamilton). Then in the dark of the early morning of the 6th of June, 1813, came the successful attack at Stoney Creek, when the Americans retreated in disorder. This vastly improved the situation for the British. Vincent had placed outposts at different points, one of them in charge of Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, at Beaver Dams, near Thorold, where a depot for ammunition and provisions was established in the house of Mr. DeCeu. Fitzgibbon had got together a company of fifty scouts and a band of about a hundred and sixty Indians. An expert in strategy, he succeeded by various means in convincing the enemy that his few men constituted a host. Dressing them in scarlet jackets lined with grey and using cowbells for signals, instead of bugles, they appeared at one moment in one colour and the next in another. The Indians had an uncanny way of announcing themselves, with terrifying yells, at unexpected times and places. Fitzgibbon and his men were pests, which the Americans decided must be eliminated and the capture of Beaver Dams, with the stores, would be of great advantage to them on their way to Burlington Heights and the ousting of Vincent. Colonel Boerstler was detailed for the duty.

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At Queenston few of the inhabitants remained. All the men of military age were taken prisoners of war, and the American officers were using the homes for billets, amongst them the Secord home where, on the night of the 23rd of June, Colonel Boerstler came on a visit to the officers quartered there. Openly he talked of the plans to surprise and dislodge Fitzgibbon, which, if carried out, would be disastrous to the British. "That post, once captured," said Boerstler, "Upper Canada is ours." Secord and his wife, Laura, heard the conversation and were struck with dismay. If warning could reach Fitzgibbon the situation might be saved; but who could give the warning? Secord, having been wounded at Queenston, was still suffering from the effects and was lame; he could not walk the distance to Beaver Dams. Laura made the startling proposal that she should go, and, in spite of protests and the seeming impossibilities of accomplishment, she determined to make the attempt.



Laura Ingersoll Secord's Heroic Walk from Queenston to De Cew Falls, 23rd June 1813.

From the John Ross Robertson Collection

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The next morning she arose, early as usual, and set about her accustomed domestic duties, dressed in the ordinary morning costume of the house mother of the period. Then she took the road, successfully passing two American pickets with the plausible explanation that she was looking for her cow. Outside the village another picket allowed her to pass when she told him, quite truly, she was going to St. David's to see her brother who was lying dangerously ill, at the home of a relative. On her arrival there, her friends tried to dissuade her from her purpose, but her resolution could not be shaken and she was soon on her way. But not along the blazed trail where enemy Indians might be lurking. Along miry roads she went, and through the Black Swamp; then into the woods, clogged with thick underbrush; rattlesnakes hid in its leafage. From the trees a wildcat might, at any moment, spring on defenceless shoulders. The howling of wolves came alarmingly near. Creeping on hands and knees, over fallen trees, across muddy streams swollen with the recent rains, climbing banks through tangled foliage, on she scrambled for interminable hours. Then up the mountain at last, she reached the British lines and came on an encampment of Indians. The Chief met her and, raising his tomahawk to strike, demanded to know what the white woman was doing there. With difficulty, by signs, she made him understand her mission. He sent her with a guide to Fitzgibbon to whom she told her story, and ragged and bruised, fell fainting at his feet.

When she recovered, she was sent to a near-by house where she was cared for, and was soon in bed fast asleep.

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The distance from Queenston to Beaver Dams is thirteen miles, but Laura Secord had covered twenty miles in her circuitous walk. The next morning she returned to Queenston, and was joyfully welcomed by her anxious husband and five children.

On the morning of the following day and according to his announced plans, Boerstler appeared, but, instead of surprising Fitzgibbon, was himself surprised by the scouts and Indians, and was compelled to surrender, with his five hundred and forty-two men and two field pieces.*

Fitzgibbon has left a written statement telling the story of Laura Secord's intrepid exploit, and has given her full credit, attributing his success to the result of her warning.

Later she and her family removed to Chip-pawa, where, in 1868, at the age of ninety-three, she died in the house now marked by a tablet, and lies buried in the graveyard at Lundy's Lane. A headstone, erected by the Ontario Historical Society, marks her resting place. On Queenston Heights, near that of the Immortal Brock, a monument to her memory has been erected by the Government of Canada.

Ever since the white men first came to Canada their women have played no insignificant part in the history of the country. The annals of the French régime reveal the spectacular exploits of Madeleine de Vécheres in contending against the primitive and savage conditions of the time, which all the early women settlers had to meet and faced with courage. Outstanding were those elect ladies of the church, whose lives, amidst

*Cruikshank.

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Laura Secord's Monument—Queenston Heights.

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rude hardships, were spent in establishing hospitals and in bringing health, physical and moral, to the new *Canadiens*. Their deeds are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The value to Canada of the high quality of the characters of the United Empire Loyalist women cannot be over-estimated, nor can that of the present day colonizers on the lonely prairies of the Great North West; heroines all.

Upper Canada (Ontario) thinks with pride and cherishes the memory of Laura Secord whose devotion to her country helped to keep the Union Jack afloat on this continent.

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THE MEMORIALS

IT was not long before measures were taken for the erection of a monument to perpetuate the memory of Sir Isaac Brock, and on October 14th, 1815, the Legislature of Upper Canada passed an act granting the "Necessary funds for constructing and erecting at Queenston, near where Brock fell, or such other spot as might be agreed upon by the Commissioners, a monument to his memory."

A lofty column was erected and, on October 13th, 1824, the anniversary of the Battle of Queenston Heights, the remains of General Brock and Colonel Macdonnell were removed from Fort George and, with solemn procession, in the presence of ten thousand persons, many from across the border, deposited in the vault beneath the monument, not then quite finished.

On Good Friday, April 17th, 1840, the monument was blown up with gunpowder and partially destroyed by a rebel, named Lett, who had fled from Canada to the United States because of his share in the rebellion of 1837. General indignation followed this act of vandalism, and it was at once decided to build another monument, the necessary funds to be raised by subscription. A prize offered for the best design was awarded to Mr. F. Young, Architect to the University of King's College. It was not long before the subscriptions, which poured in from comrades-in-arms, military organizations and private individuals, ensured the erection of the memorial, completed in 1854 and standing today a tribute to the memory of "The Hero of Upper Canada." On the pedestal is the inscription:—



Original Monument to the Memory of Sir Isaac Brock. Destroyed in 1840.

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UPPER CANADA HAS DEDICATED THIS
MONUMENT TO THE MEMORY OF
THE LATE
MAJOR-GENERAL SIR ISAAC BROCK, K.B.,
PROVISIONAL LIEUTENANT - GOVERNOR
AND COMMANDER OF THE FORCES IN
THIS PROVINCE, WHOSE REMAINS
ARE DEPOSITED IN THE VAULT
BENEATH. OPPOSING THE INVADING
ENEMY, HE FELL IN ACTION NEAR
THESE HEIGHTS, ON THE
13TH OCTOBER, 1812,
IN THE 43RD YEAR OF HIS AGE,
REVERED AND LAMENTED BY THE
PEOPLE WHOM HE GOVERNED
AND DEPLORED BY THE SOVEREIGN
TO WHOSE SERVICE HIS LIFE HAS
BEEN DEVOTED

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On the rise of the hill, near the lower road, a stone cenotaph marks the place where Brock fell. It is inscribed as follows:—

NEAR THIS SPOT
MAJOR-GENERAL
SIR ISAAC BROCK, K.C.B.,
PROVISIONAL LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR
OF UPPER CANADA, FELL ON
13th OCTOBER, 1812,
WHILE ADVANCING TO REPEL THE
INVADING ENEMY.

On the reverse side:—

THIS STONE
WAS PLACED BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
ALBERT EDWARD, PRINCE OF WALES,
ON 18th SEPTEMBER, 1860.

“In St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, England, there is a tabular monument to his memory. On it the body is represented as lying in the arms of a British soldier, whilst an Indian pays the tribute of respect his bravery and humanity elicited.”*

Nor has the brave Macdonnell been forgotten. In the vault beneath the monument on Queenston Heights his remains lie beside those of his beloved General; and in Osgoode Hall, Toronto, a tablet has been raised to his memory. The first Attorney-General of Upper Canada, his death, at the early age of twenty-seven years, deprived the Province of the services of one who gave promise of being in the forefront with those eminent men who so well and truly laid the foundation of the Province, now known as Ontario.

*Tupper.

Beriet W. Smith



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