

The Historical Society of St. Catharines  
P.O. Box 25017, 221 Glendale Avenue, Pen Centre,  
St. Catharines, Ontario L2T 4C4

*Celebrating 85 years: 1927-2012*

Our mission and goal: to increase the knowledge and appreciation of the history of St. Catharines and area. The society was founded in 1927.  
Our Society is affiliated with the Ontario Historical Society.

Our website is: <http://stcatharineshistory.wordpress.com>

## March 2012 Newsletter

### UPCOMING PROGRAMMES AND EVENTS

Our monthly meetings for all members and guests are held at the St. Catharines Museum, Lock 3. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. The museum is also open at that time so that members and guests may view current exhibits. The Society meeting starts at 7:30 sharp. Reminder: as our members are inside the Burgoyne Room and unable to monitor those entering the Museum, the Museum's door will be locked at approximately 7:45 p.m. If you are late, please ring the doorbell to the right of the main doors.

#### **Thursday, April 26, 2012**

7:30 p.m. Our Annual General Meeting: presentation of annual reports and elections. The elections this year will be for up to 6 directors only, as the executive positions do not expire until 2013. If any member is interesting in standing for a directorship, please notify any executive member. The minutes of last year's annual meeting were sent to all members in the August 2011 letter.  
Lecturer to be announced: either Alun Hughes or John Burtiak, or possibly both.

#### **Thursday, May 24, 2012 – note locations and times**

6:30 p.m. at the Oille Fountain, corner of James and King Streets: Our annual Potting Ceremony will take place, thence to the St. Catharines Centennial Library, Mills Room, where a small celebration will precede the 7:30 lecture, "Oille and Water: the rest of the story: Dr. Lucius Oille, his life, career and legacy", to be presented by Dennis Gannon, John Burtiak and Bill Stevens.

#### **Thursday, June 28, 2012 – note times**

6:30 p.m. at the St. Catharines Museum. Our annual celebration of William Hamilton's birthday will this year be held at the National Historic Plaque outside the museum's **canal-side** entrance, followed by a serving of birthday cake in the Burgoyne Room. The evening's speaker, at 7:30, will be John McKenty, author of a recent book: *Canada Cycle & Motor: the CCM Story*. John will tell us about the Welland Vale Manufacturing Company, which merged with five bicycle operations to form CCM in 1899. Bill Stevens suggests: if you have a CCM bike, why not ride it or bring it to the meeting!

*The Society gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture*

## SOCIETY NEWS

### Memberships:

Our membership year is from September 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>.

Annual membership dues are: Individuals \$10.00 and Family \$15.00

Paid-up members will receive a membership card.

Note: families receive one newsletter per household.

### In Memoriam:

On November 30, 2011 we were all saddened by the passing of our friend and board member **Paul Lewis**. Paul was a teacher, librarian and archivist at Ridley College for 40 years. He was the author of several books, and as recently as September 2011 published *The History and Homes of Yates Street, St. Catharines*. He was also the editor of HSSC's recent (May 2011) monograph, *Duelling Columns*. Paul was married to Janet Lewis and was the father of two children and grandfather of three. He was only 71.

On January 13, 2012, HSSC member **Al Page** passed away unexpectedly at the age of 93. Al was a retired Lt. Col. and former commanding officer of the Tenth Battery.

We will miss both of these fine Society members.

### New Members:

We welcome Shanna and Molly McCoy, and Jill and Ian Brindle.

### November 24, 2011 General Meeting Report

Fifty-nine members and guests were welcomed to our annual Show and Tell meeting. Several members presented items for our enjoyment (you can see some photos on our website):

- Anthony Percival: photographs of a "Butchers' Parade" in St. Catharines, 1907-1910, from the Museum's collection.
- Ross Tucker: a brick from the recently-demolished McIntyre Building.
- Susie Hastings: two dolls which she had made by hand and dressed in WW2 uniforms.
- Barbara MacDonald: two cow bells made by the Hauser Company.
- David Outram: photographs of the Welland Canal, NS&T, and old aerial views of the city.
- John Bacher: his new book: *Two Billion Trees and Counting*, about Edmund Zavitz.
- Gail Benjafield: artefacts concerning Guelph Veterinary College and John McCrae, and proof that she had successfully campaigned for an alteration to a local bus route in the 1970s.
- John Stevens: several old shoe horns and button hooks advertising local businesses.
- Barbara Butler: "then and now" photographs of her house on Russell Avenue.
- James Black: a book *Tales my Father Told Me* and a cup used as a soap dispenser made from a WW2 shell.
- Bill Steinman: the original letter from City Hall to St. Barnabas Church permitting them to move the church to a new location in 1891.
- Bill Stevens: a book published in 1939 from the "Leonard Library" (perhaps in the Leonard Hotel?) where it cost 3 cents to borrow an item.
- Brenda Zadoroznij: an old copy of Mrs. Beeton's *Cookery Book*.
- John Sheehan: albums of photographs related to his family and Western Hill.

- Elizabeth Finnie: a portrait and article regarding her ancestor Capt. Joseph Barss who was a privateer in the War of 1812.
- John Burtiniak: the programme of the 1932 Ontario Historical Society's annual meeting held at St. Georges Church, St. Catharines.

### January 26, 2012 General Meeting Report

Fifty-eight members and guests were welcomed to our long awaited first meeting of the 2012 season. President Elizabeth Finnie spoke of the passing of two good friends of HSSC (please see **In Memoriam**). She then introduced Ross Tucker, who has been appointed a director of our board until at least the annual meeting in April.

Kathleen Powell, curator of the Museum, demonstrated a two-man saw from the collection in relation to tonight's main presentation. Bill Stevens then introduced our speaker, HSSC member David Hemmings, who has done much research on local historical families. David's presentation featured the story of John McFarland, the subject of his latest book *The House of McFarland: a master shipwright's legacy*. Ross Tucker thanked the speaker.

### February 23, 2012 General Meeting Report

For this celebration of Black History Month, fifty-five members and guests attended. Kathleen Powell of the Museum showed original rules and regulations from the Lincoln Industrial Home. Brian Narhi then presented our main address. Brian's introduction appears below:

**"Crime and Punishment: One Bad Apple Doesn't Spoil the whole bunch. The Niagara Justice System and the Black Community":**

The presentation focused on the Mills and Talbot families of St. Catharines, who were descended from fugitive slaves who came to Upper Canada/Canada West during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. My research interest in these families was piqued about three years ago, when I was fortunate enough to acquire an archive of some of their private family papers. The collection encompasses about three boxes of material, which had been cleared out of the family residence at 33 North Street, and abandoned in a dumpster. This material was salvaged through the quick thinking of an intrepid dumpster diver, and subsequently sold to me by Hannelore Headley. The archive includes a family Bible, photographs, autograph albums, several scrap books, and a large collection of postcards and personal letters. The date range for this material is from ca. 1860 to the 1960s.

Two of the branches of this family, those of Lorenzo and Frances Talbot and James and Caroline Parker, may have originated in Kentucky or Tennessee. The Talbots settled in Francistown (now part of Exeter) in Huron County sometime before 1851, where they remained until the 1860s or 70s. They later appear to have moved to Brantford, before finally settling in Hamilton in the 1870s. The Parkers settled in or near Rondeau in Kent County, before they settled in Hamilton in the 1870s. Their family home was at 293 Wellington Street North.

The other branch of this family, which has deep roots in St. Catharines, is that of Willis and Hannah (Taylor) Stark or Starks. Willis was born in Virginia around 1815, and arrived in Toronto in early April 1840. His wife Hannah was born in the District of Columbia around 1818. We are less certain about the time when she arrived in Upper Canada. They were married at St. James (Anglican) Church in December 1840. Starks lived in Toronto until about 1851, although the records suggest that the family may have been in New York State in the spring of 1842. The family returned to Toronto, and they lived on Dundas Street near Chestnut in 1846. At that time, Willis was described as a "carpenter" in the Toronto City Directory. Tragically their eldest child, Willis Francis Stark, died in March 1849 in his ninth year, and was buried in the Potter's Field Cemetery...**to be continued...**

## **Did you Know ... that the Queen's Plate was once held in St. Catharines?**

(submitted by Bill Stevens)

The famous Queen's Plate, a stakes race for thoroughbred horses, is the oldest uninterrupted stakes race on the continent. It received royal assent by Queen Victoria in 1859. It was first run at Toronto's Carleton Race Track on June 27, 1860. The event moved around Ontario before it settled permanently, with the Queen's approval, in Toronto in 1883.

In 1867 the St. Catharines Turf Club was selected to host the event on a leased oval track on the farm of Colonel Thomas Adams. The race was originally scheduled to run on May 24, Queen Victoria's birthday, but track conditions due to rain and a lack of entries, caused a postponement. The new date was set for June 18, just days prior to Confederation. The St. Catharines Turf Club was criticized for the lengthy postponement by the horsemen as they had spent considerably to arrive to race on May 24<sup>th</sup>. However the delay did not impact the attendance as over three thousand people filled the grounds under ideal weather conditions. However, the original fourteen entries for the eighth running of the Queen's Plate had diminished down to nine by the race date.

The nine horses entered were all Canadian owned, bred in Upper Canada, and had never won a match, purse or sweepstake in accordance with the then entry rules. Two heats and a final were held. The winner of the Plate was "Wild Rose", a six-year old chestnut mare, owned by brothers James White of Bronte and the Honourable John White of Milton. The jockey was Alex McLaughlin. White Rose had won the first heat in a record time and was only half a second slower in winning the second heat. The second heat created a degree of excitement when White Rose's trainer (or groom), a Mr. Fagan, ran onto the track to encourage the jockey and the horse on. According to the news report in *The Evening Journal*, Fagan was struck in the shoulder by another horse and he was spun around and knocked over.

Though the trophy was indeed a plate in its early days, it has since been replaced by a gold cup. Plate winners earn a gift of 50 guineas from the monarch. But the little purple bag of coins contains not guineas but sovereigns. Minting of guineas was discontinued by George III, whose forebear, George I, instituted the royal gift of 50 guineas for thoroughbred race winners, a tradition that remains today.

Sources: web sites: <http://www.woodbineentertainment.com>; [www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com); [www.canadianhorseracinghalloffame.com](http://www.canadianhorseracinghalloffame.com); books: *The Plate, A Royal Tradition*; *An Unbroken Line* (Note: both books are available at the St. Catharines Public Library).

## **NEWSLETTER NOTES**

The Historical Society of St. Catharines Newsletter is published up to 4 times per year. The purpose is to inform the membership of issues pertaining to the Society and items of historical interest. Comments and queries should be directed to the Society's postal address. Opinions and comments expressed in the Newsletter are of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society. Subscription to the Newsletter is by paid membership only.

## Yesterday and Today: Church Street in the 1860s



The photo above is one of my favourites, but it has only rarely been published. It deserves to be much better known than it is. It shows the stretch of Church Street between Carlisle and Clark streets sometime in the 1860s.

The central element is St. George's Church with its tall spire. Beyond it is the Grantham Academy with its small cupola. Beyond that stands the original First Presbyterian Church.

The street is completely unpaved, just a relatively smooth stretch of mud, with no discernible curbs – the land just slopes away along its sides. In the middle of the street, near St. George's, is a horse-drawn wagon.

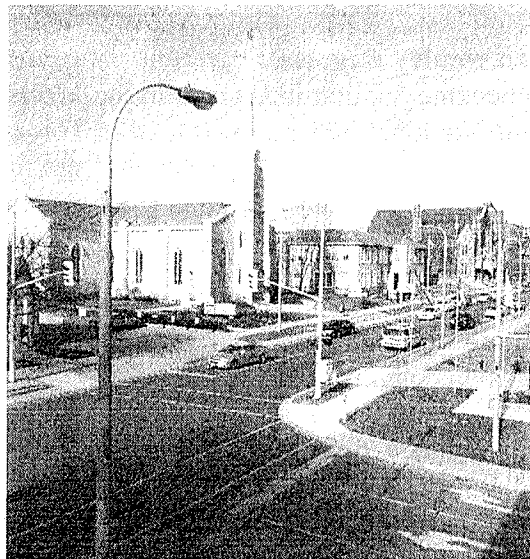
Best of all, in the lower right hand corner there's a Holstein cow standing there, surveying the scene. The fence of

one property is to her left, that of another to her right – but there's nothing in front of her to keep her from wandering as she pleases.

In the recent photograph below St. George's still dominates the scene, but with a tower and steeple a little less ornate than the earlier one. What had been the Grantham Academy was enlarged in the 1870s but also at some point lost its cupola. It was later re-named the St. Catharines Collegiate, then the W. J. Robertson School. Today it's the headquarters for the Folk Arts Multicultural Centre.

The original First Presbyterian Church building disappeared in 1879. Its replacement, long home to First Presbyterian and later First United, has in recent years become the Royal House Redeemed Christian Church of God.

One clear improvement is the street – it's fully paved – no more mud. But I do kind of miss the wandering cow.



**By Dennis Gannon**

## **SOME PROVINCIAL PLAQUES IN ST. CATHARINES**

Continued from the December 2011 Newsletter, by Bill Stevens

### **William Hamilton Merritt 1793-1862**

A prominent early settler in the St. Catharines area, Merritt was largely responsible for the construction of the first Welland Canal. During his long tenure in the legislative assembly, he continued to promote various transportation projects. Location: In Memorial Park, St. Paul Street West, St. Catharines

### **The First Welland Canal 1824-1833**

The first Welland Canal was constructed under the charge of William Hamilton Merritt. It was a narrow channel with 40 small, wooden locks running from Port Dalhousie to Port Colborne. When completed it allowed vessels to pass directly between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie.

Location: Near the site of former Lock #6, in Centennial Gardens Park - via Gale Crescent or Oakdale Avenue, St. Catharines

### **Brock University**

Chartered by a provincial act in March 1964, Brock University began classes later that year in St. Paul Street United Church. In 1967, the year of the institution's first convocation, the DeCew campus was opened.

Location: Beneath the podium at the end of Thistle Corridor, Brock University, Glenridge Avenue, St. Catharines

### **Ridley College**

A renowned boarding school, Ridley College was established in 1889 by Anglican churchmen determined to provide boys with sound academic, athletic and religious instruction. The college has expanded steadily over the years, and since 1973 has been co-educational.

Location: At the front gates of the college, Ridley Road and Henrietta Street, St. Catharines

### **The Royal Canadian Henley Regatta**

Competitive rowing became popular in Canada in the 1860s, and in 1880 the first Royal Canadian Henley Regatta for international oarsmen was held in Toronto. In 1903, a section of the old Welland Canal at Port Dalhousie was chosen as the permanent site for this popular sporting competition.

Location: At the entrance to the Henley Regatta Course Grandstand, Main Street, St. Catharines

### **Louis Shickluna 1808-1880**

Reputedly a ship's carpenter in his native Malta, Shickluna worked in several North American shipyards before coming to St. Catharines in 1838. The extensive shipbuilding operations he developed there contributed significantly to navigation on the Great Lakes as well as to the economic prosperity of the town.

Location: Opposite the radio station, Yates Street near St. Paul Street West, St. Catharines

Do you have any suggestion of a place, structure, person or event in St. Catharines that could be researched and proposed for a Provincial Heritage Plaque?



## Who Was Eugenie Hibbard?

Article by Elizabeth Finnie with assistance from Susan Armbrust Suk, who first told me the story.

St. Catharines has had good reason to be proud of its Mack Training School for Nurses. Canada's first school for nurses was founded in 1874 by Dr. Theophilus Mack, following the principles established by Florence Nightingale in the Crimea.

One of its earliest graduates was Mary Eugenie Hibbard. Born near Montreal in 1856, half Canadian and half American in parentage, she graduated from Mack in 1886. Upon her graduation she was named "Lady Superintendent" of the school. She stayed until 1888. A letter of recommendation from Dr. F. G. Greenwood states "in losing her this Institution (the St. Catharines General and Marine Hospital) suffers a great loss. She was beloved by all with whom she came in contact....Our loss we find is irreparable however it is someone's gain."

That "someone" was Grace Hospital in Detroit, where in 1889 Eugenie Hibbard opened the Newberry Training School for Nurses, one of the earliest formal nursing programs in the U.S. She stayed on for about nine years before becoming Superintendent of the Homeopathic Hospital in Trenton, N.J.

In 1898 the U.S. became involved in the War for Cuban Independence. Eugenie attempted to volunteer but at that time, only male nurses were accepted. An outbreak of typhoid finally prompted the Surgeon General to call for female nurses. Eugenie volunteered to work for free during her two weeks' vacation, and in August 1898 was sent to Camp Cuba Libre in Jacksonville, Florida, where she was put in charge of 70 nurses. By October 1898, however, she herself had typhoid. Upon her recovery in March 1899 she became chief nurse at the U. S. General Hospital in Savannah, Georgia, thence to Washington, D.C., New York, and Manchester, New Hampshire.

In December 1899 Eugenie Hibbard changed course and sailed for Britain on the U.S. Hospital Ship "Maine". This time the Boer War was calling. On December 4, 1899 she was one of five nurses and five doctors to meet with Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle. On December 23, 1899 the "Maine" set out for South Africa, with Eugenie Hibbard as Superintending Sister and Lady Randolph Churchill (Jennie, mother of Winston) as Chair of the American Hospital Ship Fund. In November of 1899 Jennie

Churchill had learned that young Winston had been captured by the Boers, but the day before the ship's departure she was relieved to learn that he had escaped. In early February 1900 Jennie Churchill's other son Jack was brought aboard the ship with the first group of soldier-patients, and treated for a leg wound. Shortly after the Relief of Ladysmith in March of 1900 the "Maine" returned to England with 165 patients on board. The very earliest articles in the American Journal of Nursing (1900 and 1901) are accounts by Eugenie Hibbard of her experiences aboard the "Maine".

On her return to England in May 1900 a Mr. Henry Bonham Carter arranged for Eugenie to meet with Florence Nightingale, who was 80 years old by this time. According to later memoirs, "I went (upstairs) and was received by Miss Nightingale in a large room. She was lying on a sofa facing the door, dressed in a white gown with the usual white kerchief on her head. She received me most graciously, and spoke with intense interest of our work in South Africa."

By September 1900 Eugenie was sailing for Cuba to become Superintendent of the Training School of Nurses at Santa Isabel Hospital in Matanzas, Cuba. Following the Spanish American War, conditions in Cuban hospitals were terrible. Eugenie herself soon came down with yellow fever, but through her high standards of organization Cuban nurses were first licensed in 1902, a year before those in the U.S

In 1904 Eugenie Hibbard was appointed Chief Nurse at Ancon Hospital, Panama, sailing with Col. William Gorgas, Chief U.S. Sanitary Officer for the construction of the Panama Canal. The voyage itself was bad enough but the scene when they arrived "beggared description" according to reports. Lush tropical vegetation competed with filth to boggle the senses. By all accounts Eugenie was fearless, helping to tackle the dreaded yellow fever that had defied medical minds for decades. A large part of the problem was that hospital staff, mainly untrained French nuns, were loath to change their ways. As always Eugenie insisted on high standards. Cleanliness and mosquito nets made a huge impact on the numbers of cases of the disease. She remained in Panama for three years, until her work was done.

The last twenty years of Eugenie Hibbard's long career were spent in Cuba where she was first appointed "Inspectress General" of the Island of Cuba in 1908, being responsible for virtually everything related to nursing. From 1909 to 1919 she was Head of the Department of Nursing, Tuberculosis Section, in Havana, and lastly she was named Chief of the Bureau of Nurses for Cuba.

In June of 1927 Eugenie Hibbard at age seventy-one retired from nursing on a pension from the Cuban government. She seems to have lived out her days in Jamaica and died on June 7, 1946 in Malverne, Jamaica.

So, what can we make of Eugenie Hibbard? We can only read between the lines of her diaries, letters and articles, and one Ph.D. thesis. (Phyllis Foster Healy, Univ. of Texas). She never officially returned to work in Canada after her stint at Mack. She moved from position to position frequently. Was she ambitious, an adventurer, or a true heroine? We know only of a brother, Omri Hibbard, a lawyer in New York City. Apparently Eugenie never married. Her writing is colourful, in keeping with the Victorian times, dealing more with her surroundings than with her actual nursing experiences. She received many commendations and awards: a silver medal from Queen Victoria for her service on the "Maine"; a letter of commendation from Lady Randolph Churchill; a gold medal from the President Theodore Roosevelt for service in the Panama Canal Zone; and a plaque in her honour was unveiled at the Gorgas Hospital in Panama in 1951 five years after her death.

Handwritten letters from Eugenie Hibbard in 1938 to Miss Wright of the Mack School indicate some dismay that she had not heard from the school in the fifty years since she left St. Catharines. (Not surprisingly, she was hard to track down.) She was, however, pleased to be named honorary President of the Mack Alumnae Association. In 1948, two years after her death, the school received a watercolour of the "Maine" painted and bequeathed to the school by Eugenie Hibbard.



## LAURA SECORD AND THE PRINCE OF WALES

In March of 1861 Laura Secord received a “generous present” of £100 from Albert, Prince of Wales, eldest son of Queen Victoria. Albert had learned about Laura’s epic walk when on a tour of North America the previous year, and his gift is generally interpreted as royal recognition of the heroic role Laura played five decades earlier during the War of 1812. Her obituary in the *Niagara Mail* of October 21, 1868 is typical, describing the Prince’s gesture as a “token of his respect for her patriotism and intrepidity.” But was it really this, or was the Prince motivated by something else altogether?

### Laura’s Story

The story of Laura Secord is well known. In late June 1813, at her home in Queenston, she heard of an American plan to attack the DeCew House in Thorold, then in use as a British base with Lieutenant James FitzGibbon in command. FitzGibbon had to be warned. Laura’s husband James was the obvious person to do so, but he had been invalidated at the Battle of Queenston Heights the previous year. Laura had no choice but to go herself, and after a long and arduous full day’s trek, reached the DeCew House at dusk and conveyed the warning to FitzGibbon. Two days later the advancing American troops were ambushed by loyal native warriors in the beechwoods in the northeastern part of Thorold Township, and after a three-hour battle — the Battle of Beaverdams — surrendered.

Though Laura Secord’s walk is familiar today, it was many years before it came to full public notice in the 19th century. Immediately after the War of 1812 it was known only to those directly involved, such as FitzGibbon, and to family and friends. That began to change in 1820, after James Secord submitted a petition to the Lieutenant Governor for a license to operate a quarry on the military reserve at Queenston. In support of his request he included a brief mention of Laura’s walk and enclosed a testimonial written for Laura by FitzGibbon himself.

This was followed over the next two decades by several petitions from James, Laura and their son Charles, for positions, land and pensions. Laura herself sought the job of caretaker of the Brock Monument at Queenston Heights in 1831, the license to run the Queenston ferry in 1839 and a pension after her husband’s death in 1841. Many of the petitions referred to Laura’s exploit, and some were accompanied by other supporting statements written by FitzGibbon in 1827 and 1837. Though James’ 1820 petition was successful, many others (including Laura’s) were not, and significantly none of them elicited any sort of official recognition or even acknowledgement of the role she had played in the War of 1812.

### The Prince’s Visit

But this was soon to be rectified when Prince Albert arrived in 1860. He was just 18 when he left Britain in July for a three-month tour of the Canadian colonies and the United States. The itinerary was crammed with official events and travel, but in September the Prince took a weekend break at Niagara Falls, allowing him to relax and play tourist. When the formal tour resumed on the Tuesday, his first stop was at the Brock Monument on Queenston Heights for a ceremony honouring veterans of the War of 1812. He then proceeded down the Escarpment to unveil an obelisk marking the spot where Isaac Brock was mortally wounded, before embarking by boat down the Niagara River.



*Laura and Albert*

At the Queenston Heights ceremony he was presented with an address of welcome signed by 1193 veterans, all male apart from one female — Laura Secord. About six weeks earlier she had turned up at the office of the Clerk of the Peace in Niagara and demanded that her name be added to the list. An August 8 report in the *Niagara Mail* headed “A Canadian Heroine” says it all: “The Clerk demurred to taking so novel a signature, although the lady insisted upon her right, having done her country more signal service during the war than half the soldiers and militiamen engaged in it. We do not give the venerable lady’s name, as she may not like the notoriety....” Her identity would have been no secret, however, if only because the report goes on to describe her walk, and concludes, “We say that the brave loyal old lady ought not only be allowed to sign the address, but she deserves a special introduction to the Prince of Wales as a worthy example of the fire of 1812, when both men and women in Upper Canada vied alike to defend their country against the invading enemy.”

This newspaper article may have prompted Laura Secord to take a significant further step, and prepare a written memorial to the Prince stating what she had done in 1813 and asking him to take her case to his mother, Queen Victoria. In this she says: “In the war of 1812 being strongly attached to the

British cause I took every opportunity to watch its progress, and living on the Frontier during the whole of the war I had frequent opportunities of knowing the moves of the American forces. I thus was enabled to obtain important information which I deemed proper to communicate to the British Commander ... Lieut. FitzGibbon of the 49th Regt." While there is a touch of exaggeration in what she says, she can perhaps be excused given the lack of official recognition of her achievement.

The memorial continues: "I am now a very old woman — a widow many years. ... I request that your Royal Highness will be pleased to convey to your Royal Parent Her Majesty the Queen the name of one who in the hour of trial and danger ... stood ever ready and willing to defend this Country against every invasion come what might."

The *Niagara Mail* on April 3, 1861 reported that the memorial was delivered to the Governor General, who at first seems to have ignored it. Only through the intercession of one Sir William Fenwick Williams was it presented to the Prince. Laura subsequently met the Prince in person (this is confirmed in her obituary), probably on the Sunday during his stay at the Falls. He was due to attend church in Drummondville, but at the last minute it was switched to Chippawa where Laura was living at the time, and to the very church, Holy Trinity, that she attended. One can't help wondering how the meeting of the elderly Laura and the teenage Albert went, but there are no eye-witness accounts.



*Sir William Fenwick Williams of Kars*

Lieutenant General Sir William Fenwick Williams of Kars, to give him his full title, clearly played a key role in Laura's later life. He was a hero of the Crimean War (for which he was awarded a baronetcy, hence the "Sir" and the "Kars"), and at the time of the Prince's visit was Commander-in-Chief of British forces in North America. According to the *Illustrated London News* for October 13, 1860, the Prince stopped for lunch at his home on Dorval Island in the St. Lawrence, and the two then sailed in a large bark canoe downriver to Lachine. Sir William was born in Nova Scotia, but his paternity is uncertain. He was either the legitimate son of Thomas Williams, Commissary General at the Halifax garrison, or the bastard son of Edward, Duke of Kent, Queen Victoria's father. Interestingly, he made no effort during the Prince's visit to deny the possibility that he was the Queen's half brother.

## The Question of Motive

While in North America, the Prince was known to hand out monetary gifts on an *ad hoc* basis — for example, he gave £100 to Blondin, whom he watched crossing the Niagara Gorge on a tightrope. But he didn't give anything to Laura when they met, and her £100 obviously came from the Queen via the Prince. What then was the Queen's motive? Was it recognition of Laura's role in "saving the country," or was it something else?

Queen Victoria is known to have felt great sympathy towards people in distress, but less known was her habit of sending money to women in far-flung parts of the Empire who were enduring financial hardship. This makes an announcement in the *Quebec Morning Chronicle* of March 20, 1861 quite telling. It reads: "The Prince of Wales does not forget Canada. We have pleasure in stating that he has just sent Mrs. Hatt, daughter of Col. de Salaberry, and Mrs. Laura Secord, £100 stg., each, as a mark of sympathy for these ladies in their straitened circumstances." This suggests that the gift was more an act of charity than anything else, especially as Charlotte Hatt is not known to have done anything significant herself.

So, the question remains, was the Queen's gift to Laura Secord an act of charity towards a lady living in poverty, or was it long-overdue recognition of the heroic role she had played in the War of 1812? Or was it perhaps both? The *Morning Chronicle* makes it clear that it was indeed charity, but it is only reasonable to conclude that there was more to it than that. Presumably Victoria did not send out money indiscriminately; something had to justify the gift.

In Charlotte Hatt's case it was a combination of family ties and family heroism. The Queen's father, the Duke of Kent, became acquainted with the de Salaberrys when posted to Quebec as commander of the 7th Regiment of Foot in 1791, and remained a family friend for the rest of his life. And Charlotte's own father, Colonel Charles de Salaberry, was the hero of the Battle of Châteauguay in 1813.

In Laura Secord's case, of course, it was her own heroism that distinguished her — she didn't have to depend on anyone else — and Victoria must have been impressed by her memorial to the Prince. By 1861 Laura was well into her eighties and had been waiting almost 50 years for recognition. When it eventually came it couldn't have come from a more appropriate pair — Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales.

**Credits:** layout (Loris Gasparotto); editing (John Burtiniak, Ffion Hughes)

**Note:** For full details of the Prince's visit to Niagara in 1860 see my earlier article of September 2009, "The Prince of Wales at Niagara."

**Principal Sources:** (in addition to those cited in the text and in the article listed in the note above): DCB & DNB entries for Sir William Fenwick Williams; Saunders, "When Nova Scotia Helped to Save the Empire," *Newfoundland Quarterly*, 1961; Preston, "General Sir William Fenwick Williams...", *Dalhousie Review*, 1976-77.

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