

The Historical Society of St. Catharines

P.O. Box 23104, 124 Welland Ave., St. Catharines, Ontario, L2R 7P6

Founded in 1927.

Our Mission and Goal is to increase the knowledge and appreciation of the history of St. Catharines and vicinity.

Our Society is affiliated with the Ontario Historical Society.

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

December 2009 Newsletter

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Upcoming Programs

Lecture Series is held at the St. Catharines Museum - Doors open at 7:00 p.m. and the Museum is open also at 7:00 p.m. so that members may view current exhibits. The Society meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. sharp.

Reminder to all members: 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. on meeting nights. Members are reminded to be on time but if they are late, ring the doorbell to the right of the main doors.

Thursday, January 28 – Society Secretary Elizabeth Finnie will present a lecture titled “Cholera Reaches Niagara 1832-1833”

Thursday, February 25 - Society member Alun Hughes will speak on “Charting the Great Swivel Link – Maps of the First Welland Canal.”

Thursday, March 25 - Society member Brian Leyden invites you to join him in a "fire-side style presentation" on the history of St. John's Anglican Church in Port Dalhousie, its congregation and some of the interesting connections between the church and the community.

Welland Canals Centre and St. Catharines Museum

Exhibit Continues through to January 3, 2010 - Canadian Science & Engineering Hall of Fame Exhibit. On loan from the Canada Science and Technology Museum, this exhibit showcases 48 Canadian scientists, engineers and innovators who helped shape Canada - and the world.

The Ontario Lacrosse Hall of Fame on October 17th inducted Wally Thorne of St. Catharines into the Veteran Player's Category and Bob Luey of St. Catharines into the Builders Category of the Hall of Fame.

If you're looking for something different, why not support your Museum by shopping at Merritt's Mercantile Gift Shop.

The Society gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Ministry of Culture

Membership Notes:

* **In Memoriam** - the Society was saddened by the passing of member Bruce Cordner on September 25, 2009 in St. Catharines. Bruce and his wife Lorraine have been Society members for several years. We extend our sincere sympathies to Lorraine and family. Bruce was very involved in his community of Port Dalhousie and he will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

* **New Members** - A Warm Welcome To Our New Members: Anthony Percival, Bruce Williamson, Jeff Neudorf, Marty Myers, and John Sheehan.

* **Best Wishes on Retirement** - While we all know that Arden Phair has retired, for the record.... the Historical Society wishes Arden all the best in his retirement! Arden's 30-year career at the Museum is one that he can be proud of. The citizens of our fair city have been blessed with his devotion to preserving our collective history.

* **The Society Donates to Garden Project** - The City's Green Committee has worked with the Church congregation to create a beautiful Meditation Garden on the north side yard of the British Methodist Episcopal Church on Geneva Street. Visitors to our City's only National Historic Site will be able to pause to reflect upon the areas rich history and read the two plaques that are located there. Our Historical Society has made a \$200 contribution towards a continuation of improvements to this project.

* **Remembrance Day** - On Wednesday, November 11, 2009 the Society placed a wreath at the Cenotaph during the Remembrance Day service. The wreath was laid by President John Burtiak. There were many Society members in attendance. It is right and fitting that those who made the supreme sacrifice be remembered. Lest We Forget!

* **September 10th Program Report** – A 70-minute “Walk-About” of Historic St. John’s Cemetery in Port Dalhousie was presented in conjunction with the St. John’s Cemetery Board. Bill Stevens led a group of 37 individuals around the Cemetery on a beautiful fall evening to visit over 40 gravesites.

* **September 24th Program/Meeting Highlights** - Our speaker for the evening was Dr. Wesley Turner, a former president of the Society and retired Brock University history professor. Wes, who was introduced by Bill Stevens, gave a most enjoyable and informative talk on Forts and Families in Upper Canada, and particularly the Niagara area. His talk was well illustrated with maps and pictures. Many members had questions for him afterwards. Wes was thanked by Mary Leighton. Attendance 49. Other items of interest from the Meeting are as follows:

-Anthony Percival, Museum staff member, gave an interesting talk about a prized artefact in the Museum collection, an 1848 Military General Service Medal and its local connection. He also reminded members that they are welcome to participate in the Museum’s upcoming War of 1812 exhibit.

-The St. Catharines Heritage Committee will hold a Victory Wartime Housing Commemoration in 2010 and is looking for an appropriate house of the period which will serve as a model of World War 11 housing.

-A tree has been planted at the Glenridge Quarry Park in honour of the late Thomas George Nicholson who was a member of our Society and a senior planner for the Niagara Region.

* **October 22nd Program/Meeting Highlights** - the program started with Anthony Percival, Museum staff member, giving a presentation about a porthole from the Northumberland, well known as a ship that transported visitors between Port Dalhousie and Toronto. The ship burned in 1949 and the cracked and damaged porthole was in the possession of the ship’s captain until it was donated to the Museum. The evening’s guest was Walter Lewis, librarian, and researcher of Great Lakes history and author of the book *River Palace*. David Sharron introduced our speaker. Walter presented a most informative talk with illustrations depicting the history of passenger ships on the Great Lakes. The talk was well received. Walter was thanked by John Calvert. Attendance 52.

War of 1812-14

The following is a transcription of an original document relating to the War of 1812:

Head Quarters Kingston 19th January 1815

Militia General Orders

A General Court Martial will assemble at Shipmans Tavern in Grantham on Tuesday the 28th February next at ten o'clock a.m. for the Trial of such prisoners as may be brought before it --

Colonel Beasley 2nd York Regt. Militia, President

Members:

Lieut. Col. Harren 3rd Regt. Lincoln

Major Hall 5th Regt Lincoln

Major Nellis 4th Regt. Lincoln

Capt. Street 3rd Regt. Lincoln

Capt. Cummings 3rd Regt. Lincoln

Capt. John Servos 1st Regt. Lincoln

Lieut. Geo. Adams 1st Regt. Lincoln

Major Simmons 2nd York Regt

Major Robertson 1st Lincn Regt

Major Secord 2nd Regt Linc

Capt. Robert Land 5th Regt Linc

Capt. John Smith 5th Regt Linc

Capt. Thos. Butler 4th Regt Linc

Lieut. Wm Chisholm 4th Regt Linc

Lieut Colonel Edwards Acting deputy Judge advocate, to whom a List of Members with the dates of their Commissions, and a List of Evidences will has be without delay. ~

By Command of His Honor, The President and Lieut General Commanding

Signed, C. Foster

adj. Genl. of Militia

Certified, (signed) J. Clark

a.a.G.M.

Source: Photocopy held in Special Collections, St. Catharines Public Library, possibly from Niagara Historical Records Collection held at the Niagara-On-The-Lake Public Library and copied by Alan Holden.

St. Catharines Bicentennial of the War of 1812 Committee

St. Catharines now has a committee in place to plan activities and projects to commemorate this important period in our history. If you would like to participate in this committee, e-mail Bill Stevens at bibmstev@computan.on.ca and he will e-mail you the latest minutes and meeting information.

McCombs Family Pioneer Cemetery Heritage Designation

On Sunday, October 11, 2009 the St. Catharines Heritage Committee held a ceremony to designate the McCombs Cemetery under the Ontario Heritage Act. This Cemetery is located on the former McCombs farm, on Part of Lot 16 Concession 9 in Grantham Township. The family originated in Old Bennington, Vermont, where John McCombs, son of Timothy and Sarah McCombs, was born in April 1792. During the War of 1812, brothers John and Samuel McCombs fought as privates in McEwen's Company of the 1st Regiment of Lincoln Militia. Family tradition relates that they saw action at Queenston Heights, Lundy's Lane, Chippawa, and at the burning of Buffalo. John was given a grant of 200 acres for service to the Crown. The men of the family continued to serve in the local militia, and were named in muster rolls during the 1820s and 1830s. There are no visible surviving tombstones within the fenced enclosure.

Newsletter Notes

The Historical Society of St. Catharines *Newsletter* is published up to 4 times per year by the Society. The purpose of the *Newsletter* 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 postal address. Opinions and comments expressed in the *Newsletter* are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society. Subscription by paid membership only. Edited by John Burtiak and produced by Bill Stevens.

Next Issue: March 2010 - Deadline for submissions for the next issue is **February 1, 2010.**

Port Dalhousie Named After Father of Great Environmentalist

By John Bacher, PhD

Few know that the community of Port Dalhousie is named after George Ramsay, the 9th Earl of Dalhousie and former Governor-in-Chief of Canada. He has been honoured by historians for his role in assisting Black refugees fleeing slavery, and also, while serving in Nova Scotia before his more significant posting to Lower Canada, for protecting the historic territories of the Micmac by holding their lands in trust before the development of reservations. He also founded the university in Halifax that bears his name.

Significant though the accomplishments are of the person for whom Port Dalhousie is named, the most important was to be the father of his third youngest and most remarkable son, the 10th Earl of Dalhousie, James Andrew Brown Ramsay. He served as Governor-General of India between 1848 and 1856. During this period he laid the basis for much of the subsequent development of India as a strong and democratic state, establishing for instance, its publicly owned railway system, still one of the largest employers in the world. But Dalhousie's most significant accomplishment was to adopt the conservationist Indian Forest Charter, which remains prominently in the Constitution of India.

Dalhousie's Indian Forest Charter has been appropriately recognized as a major turning point in human civilization. This is because it recognized the importance of government as a protector of the environment, through regulations fairly administered by scientifically trained experts. He had all government-owned lands in India become forest reservations, not only to protect future sources of lumber but for watershed protection, species diversity and to counter negative forms of human-induced climate change.

In making his major environmental protection initiative, Dalhousie was influenced by the eminent botanist and director of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, J. D. Hooker. He alerted Dalhousie to the tragic consequences, including drought-inducing climate change as well as species extinction that had taken place on the island of St. Helena over the past two centuries of European colonization.

Before Dalhousie's great Forest Charter the forests owned by the Government of India were regarded as wastelands, which any person was free to plunder. Under the Forest Charter they were now regarded "as the property of the Government and no general permission to cut timber therein will be granted to anyone." The Charter also meant scientific management of state forests, not only for commercial purposes, but to protect endangered species and water resources. One of the admirers of the early conservationist achievements of Indian Forestry was none other than the leader of India's independence movement, Gandhi, who termed one of its leading administrators, Dietrich Brandis, as "the Hero of Pegu," an area in Burma of ecologically diverse teak forests. Another famous figure in the Indian Forest Service was the founder of the Boy Scouts, Baden Powell, who was employed by the Indian Forest Service in Punjab.

The model of Indian Forestry was exported throughout the British Empire, including Canada. It was introduced to the United States by the great forester, Gifford Pinchot, through his remarkable creation, the U.S. Forest Service. It carries on remarkably in the conservationist spirit of the Indian Forest Service of the Victorian era, which inspired many of the famous nature stories of the British author, Rudyard Kipling.

(Apart from *Wikipedia* articles on the 9th and 10th Earls of Dalhousie the major source for this article is: Gregory Allen Barton, *Empire Forestry and the Origins of Environmentalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).)

Niagara's Early Environmentalists as Reforming Agents of Empire

By John Bacher, PhD

The spirit of the Imperial environmental reformers was quite important in motivating the early environmentalists of Niagara. The Boy Scouts movement in Canada was launched in St. Catharines by A. E. Coombs (A. E. Coombs was a past-president of our Historical Society, and the Girl Guides by

Mary Malcolmson. They sought to realize the same conservationist principles to which Baden Powell had come to adhere while employed with the Indian Forest Service.

Environmental problems in early Niagara from forest clearing were part of the reason that one of the first acquisitions by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority was the Balls Falls site in 1959. The grist mill there had been converted to steam power in the 1850s (the original waterwheels can still be seen in the grist mill's basement) because the Twenty Mile Creek went dry in the summer months as a result of the extensive deforestation of its watershed. The founders of the Conservation Authority in Niagara (which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year) and across the province wanted pioneer museums to teach the historical roots of ecological abuse. The drying-up of streams was so common in Niagara that it was water for his mills, rather than for navigation, that was William Hamilton Merritt's original concern. From this evolved the concept of a canal and the formation of the Welland Canal Company.

What is generally not well understood is the role that prophetic-like figures from Niagara have played in the environmental movement of Ontario and Canada. Their role is very important since nowhere else in all the British Empire was there as much resistance to governments adopting the regulatory ideals of Imperial forestry as in Ontario. In contrast to the difficult foot-dragging encountered in Ontario, these were imposed rather quickly in Western Canada by the Canadian Forest Service and in Quebec by its forest service which was spearheaded by remarkable conservationist priests in the Catholic Church at the Laval University.

W. D. Beadle, whose home and nursery-farm still forms the basis for St. Catharines' Lester B. Pearson Park, was one of the first Euro-Canadian environmentalists. In the 1870s and 1880s Beadle served as Secretary of the Ontario Fruit Growers Association, which was, in effect, the first environmental protection group in Canada. Beadle and a similarly visionary fruit grower from London, William Saunders (who founded the Canadian Department of Agriculture's network of experimental farms), had lived through the negative changes that deforestation caused fruit growing through increasing winter cold and wind damage.

Beadle urged government financed reforestation of wastelands of Ontario, such as the Oak Ridges Moraine, and the shores of Lake Erie in Norfolk County. He helped secure the creation of the post of Clerk of Forestry, whose reports, influenced by the ideals of Imperial Forestry, documented problems caused by deforestation, such as the death of streams and shifting sands that frequently buried crops. While educating the public about problems of environmental abuse Beadle unfortunately had little impact on actual government policies in his lifetime, apart from helping to persuade the government to establish Algonquin Provincial Park.

What Beadle sought was eventually realized through the work of the long time Chief Forester of Ontario and Deputy Minister of Forests, Edmund Zavitz. He was born in 1875 in Ridgeway, in Bertie Township and now the Town of Fort Erie. His home, located near the Fort Erie Museum, is still occupied and is designated as an individual property under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Zavitz learned about the problems of deforestation at an early age from his mother. She had seen these problems on her father's farm on the Oak Ridges Moraine, and her lessons were reinforced by his maternal grandfather, Edmund Prout, and an uncle, the University of Toronto Professor of French, John Squair. While attending primary school in Ridgeway, Edmund developed a love of bird-watching and nature study under the guidance of his teacher, Alva Killman.

After the unexpected death of Zavitz's father, when Edmund had completed grade school, he did not continue school but dropped out for five years. Later, after attending a business course in Buffalo, he became a store clerk. His mother and step-father persuaded him to go to high school. He took three years of study at the St. Catharines Collegiate Institute and completed his matriculation at Woodstock College. In his final year at McMaster University, then located in Toronto, he decided to become a forester, doing graduate work at Yale University and the University of Michigan.

Zavitz's success, after beginning to work for the Ontario government in 1905, has been well described as a forest fire in reverse because of the speed at which he encouraged reforestation in the

province. Streams flowing from the Oak Ridges Moraine which dried up in the summer months returned to life and again supported brook trout. Norfolk County, which became so heavily deforested that many farms were abandoned as wastelands because of the shifting sands, became one of the best forested areas of the fertile farmland of Southern Ontario. What is now Turkey Point Provincial Park was formerly a sand-blown wasteland. Another achievement of the Agreement Forest Program which Zavitz developed, the La Rose Forest near Ottawa, is the second largest human-created forest in the world. It covers 22,000 acres and supports a healthy population of 150 moose. In addition to reforesting Southern Ontario, Zavitz brought the management of Northern Ontario forests under the control of professional foresters. This finally reduced the threat to communities in the North from destructive forest fires that had burned down entire towns such as Cochrane, Cobalt and Haileybury. Zavitz successfully encouraged the re-organization of the Department of Lands and Forests to ensure that decisions impacting Crown lands were made by scientists, and developed legislation to encourage the formation of Conservation Authorities.

In 1953, when Mel Swart was first elected to Welland County Council and became Deputy Reeve of Thorold Township, none of the programs that Zavitz had developed, such as the Conservation Authorities, had been applied to Niagara. Mel, as he explained to me when I began his biography (now under review at McGill-Queen's University Press), that reading the 1950 Report of the Select Committee on Conservation, which was heavily shaped by Zavitz's ideals, "turned him into a conservation activist." Mel later met Zavitz at the St. Williams Forestry Station in 1956, on the eve of Zavitz's retirement, when Mel was developing the tree-cutting protection by-law for Welland County.

Mel Swart, along with a member of The Historical Society of St. Catharines, Francis Goldring, was critical in the formation of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. This finally brought the ideals of Imperial Forestry and Edmund Zavitz to Niagara, as the agency made use of provincial funds to quickly purchase and thus protect many threatened Carolinian forests through public ownership, beginning at Balls Falls. While Zavitz's great accomplishment was the protection of the Oak Ridges Moraine, Mel Swart had a similar major impact on reforesting the province through the protection of the Niagara Escarpment, largely through the protective impact of the 1985 Niagara Escarpment Plan. This he successfully negotiated with Dennis Timbrell during the last weeks of the short-lived cabinet of Ontario Premier Frank Miller. This climaxed years of effort in the Legislature and in the founding of the Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment and its Niagara member group, The Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society.

(Both Beadle's and Zavitz's accomplishments are described in the 1967 Centennial History of the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, by Paul Pross and Richard Lambert, titled *Renewing Nature's Wealth*. Much of the material regarding Mel Swart was obtained from personal interviews and his papers at the Archives of Ontario.)

NIAGARA STONE ROAD

By Thomas Kennedy

When visitors travel to Niagara-On-The-Lake (formerly Newark in the early days of Upper Canada) to attend the Shaw Festival or enjoy wine tasting at one of the many excellent wineries, the Niagara Stone Road is often the road taken. Many of these visitors have wondered why the rows of grapes and the concession roads do not sit at a 90-degree angle to the Road, but at about a 45-degree angle. Few realize that the Niagara Stone Road is out of sync with the surveyor's work who laid out lots and concession lines on a true North-South basis to Lake Ontario. But the road is the shortest distance between two points dictated by the terrain between Newark and Homer and Old Highway No.8 - the Queenston and Grimsby Road.

Niagara Township (originally designated as Township No. 1) was surveyed three times in different degrees from 1783 to 1787 by several surveyors, the last two being Augustus Jones and Philip Frey. The present East-West Line, often called the Garrison Line, was laid out to separate the land for potential military use to the North, and for settlement to the South. The land west of Newark (formerly called Lenox) on a map dated 1816-1817 was referred to as "The Black Swamp" because of the boggy

nature of the ground. The local name of this area to the Four Mile Creek, was "Marias Normand" or in English, the Norman Marsh. The land to the Ten Mile Creek was of this nature as beavers were constantly creating their dams on the Four Mile Creek. A trail had been blazed in the area to the Twelve Mile Creek (Shipman's Corners), but it was at the best of times a rutted dirt road, impassable in the spring of the year.

As early as 1793, Township No. 1 (Niagara Township) appointed pathmasters (later called road commissioners or overseers) under the Statute Labour Act of 1792 for the maintenance of roads. These initial appointees were: John Young, Adam Crysler, Gilbert Fields, Steven Secord and Cornelius Lambert. The Statute Labour for the Roads applied to all members of the male population.

An advertisement appeared in a Newark newspaper on January 30, 1799 inviting private subscription from the public to build the Black Swamp Road. A meeting was to be held at Hind's Hotel. Thomas Hind was a partner in a stagecoach line and had operated the King's Arms Hotel and Hind's Tavern in Newark. Apparently monies were raised as a later report stated that by March 15, 1799, a causeway of 387 rods in length was finished and that the remaining 240 rods could be done for only the sum of three hundred and sixty dollars, apparently a reasonable amount in those days. This causeway at 627 rods would be about 10,345 feet - nearly two miles long. The term causeway infers wet and poorly drained land for a road.

The War of 1812 added another historical note to the Black Swamp Road. When Laura Secord made her historic walk with her niece Elizabeth, her biographer notes she avoided the paths or roads patrolled by American soldiers, and took the boggy path, made worse by the rain the night before, to carry a warning to Lieut. FitzGibbons and his "Green'Uns" encamped at John DeCew's house. There were only four possible routes, the Lakeshore Road, the Iroquois Trail (Old Hwy. No. 8), Portage Road or, the boggy Black Swamp Road.

The Legislature of Upper Canada committed the sum of 150 pounds in 1829 "to be laid out on the road leading from the Town of Niagara through the Black Swamp, as far up as the Twenty Mile Creek (Jordan Harbour)." The Commissioners to oversee this work were Lewis Clement and Thomas Butler of Niagara and Joseph Smith of nearby Fifteen Mile Creek. On March 2, 1831 the sum of 75 pounds was voted by the Legislature for the Black Swamp Road from Niagara to the Ten Mile Creek, with Adam Boomer of Queenston and Thomas Darling of Grantham as overseers.

The introduction of a Bill in the Legislature by Charles Richardson on December 30, 1837 to macadamize the Swamp Road from the Town of Niagara to the Ten Mile Creek in the Township of Grantham was followed on January 19, 1838 by a petition of Thomas Butler and eighty-two others, that the Swamp Road be macadamized. A resolution was passed on January 24, 1838 to have the Legislature issue a debenture for 10,000 pounds for this purpose. As the macadamizing appeared to have Government support, Charles Donaldson and ninety-six others petitioned for the authority to "turn pike" (collect tolls) the road from the Town of Niagara to the Ten Mile Creek. Eventually there were toll gates at Homer (Ten Mile Creek) and at the end of the road in the Town of Niagara.

The Niagara and Ten Mile Creek Plank Road Company was reported by the *Niagara Chronicle* to be "planking the Swamp Road," in news reports on November 27, 1844, April 24, 1846 and October 29, 1847. Planking was the method of laying wooden planks on a level surface of a roadway, while curing rutting from wheels in muddy weather; the surface was not inherently smooth or permanent as wood rots in damp conditions.

A further petition to the Legislature by Charles Richardson on April 7, 1846 was for the incorporation of the Niagara and Ten Mile Creek Road Company with termination in the Town of Niagara and the authorization of a water course from the Welland Canal to Niagara. A request for incorporation was finally filed on June 25, 1851, capitalized at 3830 pounds. The initial Directors were Gilbert McMicken (Reeve of Niagara), George Boomer (Mayor of Niagara), John Simpson, William Ball and Richard Hiscott. In 1853 the second annual report on activity was issued showing a profit for the toll road. The Officers of the Company at that time were John Simpson, Secretary and Treasurer, Richard Hiscott, John C. Ball and William M. Ball.

The creation of the County system in 1856 ensured more permanent roads and a better level of repair. The local name of the road has varied from the Swamp Road, the Black Swamp Road, the Niagara and Ten Mile Creek Road, the Homer and Niagara Stone Road to its present name of Niagara Stone Road - Regional Road 55.

Sources: Early Canadiana Online: Archives of the Legislature of Upper Canada and Canada West; Early Life in Upper Canada (Guillet); Laura Secord (McKenzie); Histori.ca-online; Bicentennial Stories of Niagara-On-The-Lake (Field); Niagara Township Centennial History (Rennie); Historical Atlas of the Counties of Lincoln & Welland County (H.R. Page, 1876); Lincoln County 1856-1956 (County of Lincoln); Charter of Niagara and Ten Mile Creek Road Company (1851); Early Surveys of Township No. 1 (Hughes); Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol.59 (Burghardt); Pioneer Inns of Ontario, Vol.1 (Graham); The beginnings of settlement in the Niagara Peninsula, 1782-1792 (Gentilcore); Documentary History of the Campaigns upon the Niagara Frontier in the Year in 1812-1814; Niagara Historical Society/Cruikshank; Map "Travels in Canada and the United States in 1816-1817" (Lt. Hall)

Norval Johnson Collection

The St. Catharines Public Library is now the home of the Norval Johnson Heritage Centre Collection. This invaluable collection of over 1,400 volumes includes true stories about the 200-year history of Blacks in the building of the communities of Niagara. Historical materials, biographies, over 1300 books on early settlements in Canada, racism and civil rights movements in the United States, and contributions of Black Canadians form a significant part of this Collection. Another important resource is the Genealogical Collection, a research tool for the North American Black community whose ancestors settled in the Niagara Region. The Collection was officially opened on Sunday, October 25, 2009 and is housed in the reference area on the second floor of the Central Library. The addition of this wonderful collection to the already fabulous special collection materials will certainly make the Central Library a must stop for anyone of all ages undertaking research in Black History.

Mrs. Norval Freeman Johnson was born on November 27, 1900 and died on May 20, 1981. She spent many years serving in the Niagara Falls community. She spent many years teaching Sunday School, choir and music. She was an untiring worker and at times singlehandedly kept the BME Church located on Peer Street in Niagara Falls open and functioning.

Private Alexander WATSON

(two newspaper excerpts)

Thorold Post, June 5, 1885, p.3:

"The funeral of Private Watson at St. Catharines on Friday last was the largest by long odds that was ever held in that city. The civic council and thirty other organizations attended in bodies, and the streets were thronged by thousands all the way to the cemetery. The pageant was most imposing, the remains being borne to their final resting-place on a gun-carriage. Large numbers from Thorold and other places attended."

Thorold Post, September 17, 1886, p.2:

"The unveiling of the Watson monument was performed Tuesday afternoon (September 14) between three and four o'clock. The crowd was, we think, the largest ever gathered in our city, fences, trees and every spot that could hold a sightseer occupied. The ceremony was decidedly tame owing to the poor arrangement of the platform, which was only about a foot high, altogether too low to enable the crowd to see or hear what was going on, and not a single cheer was heard from beginning to end. Hundreds of people in the crowd not did catch a glance at Middleton (commander of the forces that suppressed the Riel rebellion). The ceremony consisted in the handing over of the deed of the monument by Dr. Goodman, for the monument committee, to Mayor King, who called on Gen. Middleton to unveil the monument. The monument is an imposing affair, consisting of three bases, a disc containing the inscription, the cap, the whole surmounted by a statue of a Canadian volunteer at 'stand at ease' position."

(The Watson Monument also has since had plaques added to recognize the sacrifice of four local soldiers during the Boer War. So, is this Monument worth preserving? - Certainly. Ed.)

LAURA SECORD'S KEY AND THE SCHOOLBOOK SCANDAL

It all began with the discovery of the key. On November 30, 1931 the *Niagara Falls Evening Review* reported that "A key weighing half a pound, which may be the one lost by Laura Secord on her heroic ... journey through the woods to warn the British soldiers at Beaverdams of an impending American attack in the War of 1812-14, has been unearthed by D'Arcy Cropp ... on the old Henry Woodruff farm south of the village of St. David's." Cropp, a Stamford fruit-grower, found the hand-forged, rust-encrusted key buried some ten inches in the ground while ploughing a field. "Historical records show that the Queenston woman lost a key on her walk," the *Review* added.

That this was not Laura Secord's key did not matter (it was much too big for a house key, and it made no sense for her to be carrying it — had she locked her family in the house before leaving?). Nor did it matter that the "historical records" were probably no more than local lore. The story was immediately picked up by the national newspapers, and almost overnight became the catalyst for a furious public debate about Laura Secord and whether or not her epic trek from Queenston to the DeCew House in Thorold was of any historical significance — in particular whether it had a bearing on the outcome of the Battle of Beaverdams on June 24, 1813. Though the debate was brief, lasting barely a month, its outcome spoke volumes about the influence Ontario Loyalism still exerted in the first half of the 20th century.



The key found by D'Arcy Cropp

Prelude to the Storm

Laura Secord's walk took place in 1813, but it was many years before it came to full public notice. For several decades after the War of 1812 it was known only to family, friends and neighbours, and perhaps a few military and government personnel. That began to change at mid-century after Laura's own narrative of her walk was published in a history of the War written by Gilbert Auchinleck; this was serialized in the *Anglo-American Magazine* in 1851, and published in book form two years later. In 1861 William Coffin provided further details, including the first mention of the cow, in his book *1812: The War, and its Moral: A Canadian Chronicle*. Then in 1869, in *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812*, Benson Lossing printed an 1861 letter from Laura containing additional information.

The person who did most to popularize the story of Laura Secord, however, and to elevate her to the status of Canadian icon, was English-born feminist Sarah Curzon. In 1887 she published *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812: A Drama, and Other Poems*, followed in 1891 by *The Story of Laura Secord, 1813*. It was here that the Laura Secord legend, which had her wading through a swamp, eluding wild animals, crossing a stream by a fallen tree, being ambushed by Indians and reaching the DeCew House exhausted, bedraggled and shoeless, really took shape. Some of these events were probably true, while others — like the swamp — were questionable. When Emma Currie followed suit with *The Story of Laura Secord* in 1900 Laura came to be celebrated as the epitome of pioneer womanly courage. Though not herself of Loyalist stock (unlike her husband), she became the quintessential Loyalist heroine, and in the early years of the 20th century her reputation was literally set in stone, with monuments erected in her honour in Queenston, at Lundy's Lane, and on Queenston Heights.

But in the 1920s some historians began to view her story with mounting scepticism. A major issue was the matter of timing. Curzon and Currie both stated that Laura walked on June 23, the day before the Battle of Beaverdams, starting at daybreak and reaching the DeCew House after dark. But the Americans did not receive marching orders until that same afternoon, which posed the problem that she would have left Queenston before the orders were issued. There was also the fact that James FitzGibbon, the officer-in-charge at the DeCew House, was told of the American advance by native scouts on the morning of the battle. There was even the possibility that the native warriors who ambushed and defeated the Americans — the Battle of Beaverdams was fought entirely by natives loyal to the Crown — were acting independently of the British command in the first place.

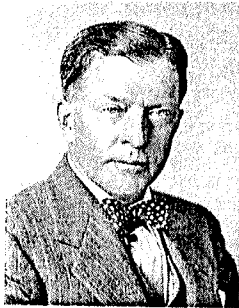
Historian William Wood concluded in 1920 that "the result would have been the same without her," for he was certain that FitzGibbon had been warned by native scouts before Laura Secord arrived. In 1927 Louis Babcock stated that "while she may have tried to give warning to the British forces it seems fairly clear that her good intentions were fruitless." Then in 1931, Milo Quaife firmly denied "the claim that the British learned of the impending American attack from Mrs. Laura Secord, whose supposed exploit ... has caused her to be lionized by the Canadian people," and added the withering index entry: "SECORD, Mrs. Laura, myth, 764."

Few people had read what these historians had written, and there was no public reaction. But that all changed when D'Arcy Cropp dug up the key.

The Great Debate

On December 1, just one day after news of the key broke in the *Niagara Falls Evening Review*, it was repeated in the Toronto papers. The *Globe* offered no comment, but the *Evening Telegram*, *Mail and Empire* and *Star* all raised questions, not just about the authenticity of the key, but also about the whole Laura Secord episode. For in seeking the opinion of professional historians they had unearthed a surprising (and to the Loyalist community, disturbing) fact that had previously gone unnoticed.

In an article headed "Laura Secord as Heroine is Fading Out of History. Skepticism Greeted Finding of Key Supposedly Lost by Her," the *Mail and Empire* announced that the latest editions of public and high school histories of Canada issued by the Ontario Department of Education in 1928 and 1930 omitted all mention of Laura Secord, this because the author considered her walk of no consequence. Mysterious "historians who declined to be quoted" placed the blame on William Stewart Wallace, Librarian of the University of Toronto, a respected academic and resolute Secord skeptic. As author of the new editions, he immediately became the focus of a huge public uproar. The key, which was later donated by D'Arcy Cropp to Lundy's Lane Historical Society, was promptly forgotten, and its present whereabouts are unknown.



William Stewart Wallace

There ensued a month of reports, interviews, columns, editorials and letters in both the Toronto and the local Niagara papers. Almost all were in support of Laura Secord, but Wallace also weighed in to defend his position. That position was a formidable one, for he had delved deeper than Wood, Babcock and Quaife and examined all the known documentary evidence, including statements made by Laura herself and FitzGibbon. His conclusion was that there were aspects of her story that simply did not add up. As he later wrote, "of her courage and patriotism there is no question," but "she played no part in determining the issue of the Battle of the Beaver Dam." And so she had no place in the school history books.

Most of the discussion took place in the *Mail and Empire*, possibly because Fred Williams, a columnist who wrote substantial historical articles on a daily basis, immediately began writing on the topic. Readers responded, and spoke with great indignation about the insult visited on their national heroine. They included Secord "kinsmen," among

them Henry Cartwright Secord, who penned long letters in Laura's defence, and even engaged Wallace himself in debate. He did not hesitate to speak his mind, on one occasion accusing his opponent of "erroneous conclusions and sarcastic insinuations quite unbecoming to the subject."



Headlines in the press

On December 10, the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada petitioned George S. Henry, the Premier and Minister of Education, for the reinstatement of Laura Secord in the history books. By the start of 1932, only a month after the issue came to public attention, the Loyalist backlash had become so fierce that Henry capitulated — at least in part. On January 8, 1932 he announced that Laura's story would be added to a future edition of the *Third Book*, one of several collections of readings used in schools, but lack of space would keep her out of the histories. Laura's honour was restored sufficiently for the issue to fade from the public consciousness. But still no one had refuted Wallace's arguments, and in March he published a 26-page booklet titled *The Story of Laura Secord: A Study in Historical Evidence*, spelling them out in detail.

That is how matters remained until 1934, when a document, long forgotten and unknown to Wallace, was rediscovered. This was an 1820 statement by FitzGibbon containing the crucial fact that Laura's walk took place on June 22, 1813, not the 23rd. Though this did not resolve every question about her trek (questions remain to this day), it did tilt the balance strongly in her favour, and led Fred Williams to produce a triumphant column headed "A Vindication of Laura Secord." This concluded, "The controversy has led to a deeper appreciation of Laura Secord's deed, a truer conception of her heroism, and a wiser understanding of her patriotism. Her place in history is secure." Henry Cartwright Secord was less charitable, gloatingly referring to Wallace as a "self-styled 'professional historian'" who made "glaring blunders" and was guilty of "a baseless slander of the nation's honored dead." Wallace's reaction is unknown.

Principal Sources (in addition to those cited in text): Babcock, *The War of 1812 on the Niagara Frontier*; Quaife, *The John Askin Papers*; Wallace, *A First Book of Canadian History*, and *A History of the Canadian People*; Wood, *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812*.

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