Vocabulary

*Before reading, translate these words.*

Heroine

Contribution

Embellish / Embellishment

Myth / Mythic

Retold

Revolutionary

Landowner

Mohawk (people)

Acre

Founded

Log cabin

Hostilities

Wounded

Sacrifice

Overheard

Set out to

Petition (verb)

Stroke (medical)

Contribution

Acknowledge

Account (story)

biography

The story of Laura Secord is an interesting one. She is considered a war heroine now, but her contribution was not well known in her lifetime. However, over time, she has become an almost mythic person in Canadian history. Her story has been embellished as it has been retold.

Laura Secord was born on February 28th, 1775 in the Province of Massachusetts (Massachusetts, USA). Her father, Thomas Ingersoll, was an American revolutionary. He fought against the British during the American Revolutionary War. He was also a rich landowner, but the war decreased the value of his land. He had a lot of debts. The Mohawk leader, Joseph Brant, showed Thomas (and his four partners) some really good land in Upper Canada (now Ontario). They received 66,000 acres of land and founded the town, Oxford-on-the-Thames. The town still exists but it is now called Ingersoll, Ontario.

Laura Secord’s family moved to Queenston, Upper Canada and moved into their own log cabin in 1796. She married James Secord in June, 1797. They moved to St. Davids and lived above a shop. Together they had 5 children, one boy and four girls.

There were growing hostilities between the USA and Canada (owned by the British). The Americans tried to invade Canada during the War of 1812. James Secord fought in the war under General Isaac Brock. Brock famously died in the Battle of Queenston Heights. James was at that battle and helped carry Brock’s body away. James was also injured during the battle. He was wounded in the leg and shoulder. Laura rushed to help James. There is a story that Laura saw three American soldiers trying to beat him to death with their guns. She offered to sacrifice herself to save her husband. It seems that this might be an embellishment from later stories. When the Secords came home, they found that their house had been looted. Laura spent the next few years nursing her husband back to health.

On June 21st, 1813, Laura overheard some American plans for a surprise attack in Beaver Dams. Early the next morning, Laura set out to warn Lieutenant James FitzGibbon about the attack. According to the story, she walked 35 kilometers to deliver the news. The legend says the walk took 17 hours. FitzGibbon ordered a small British force and a larger Mohawk force to defend the attack. They successfully defeated the Americans. However, there was no mention of Laura Secord in the reports that followed the battle.

The store owned by the Secords was destroyed during the war, so the family was poor. Laura had two more daughters in 1815 and 1817. She became a grandmother in 1817 as well. James Secord died of a stroke in 1841.

The Secords petitioned to have her contribution acknowledged for years with little to no response. FitzGibbon acknowledged that Secord game him some information, but never mentioned if he used it. In 1827, he wrote that she walked 20 miles (35kms) to deliver the information. Secord’s own account of the walk changed during her lifetime as well.

In 1860, the Prince of Wales heard her story when he was travelling through Canada. He learned about her situation and awarded her 100 pounds (about $9,500 today). During her lifetime, this was the only acknowledgment of her contributions to the War of 1812. She died in 1868 at the age of 93.

Several investigations into the story say that it is just a myth. FitzGibbon likely found out about the attack through Mohawk scouts. Her story was likely embellished to attract wealthy upper-class women to Canada in the 1880s. The story has also been used to empower women and Canadians. We also know that Secord changed her story through her life. There were a lot of reasons to embellish the story.

*NOTE: There is a chocolate factory in Canada called Secords, but there is not relations.*

Questions

1. Where was Laura Secord born?
2. Her father fought in the American Revolutionary War. Which side was he on?
3. Where did her family live in Canada?
4. What caused the War of 1812?
5. What was the name of the Battle that James Secord was wounded in?
6. Who did he carry off the battlefield?
7. What even is Laura most famous for?
8. How far did she walk?
9. Who did she tell?
10. Why was the family poor?
11. How many children did Laura have?
12. Who gave her 100 pounds for her contribution to the War of 1812?
13. Do you think the story is true? What do you think is embellished?