

CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARIES OF THE
WAR OF 1812.

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XIII. — The Battle of Beaver Dams.

June 24. — Before daylight on the morning of the twenty-fourth of June, 1813, five or six hundred of the invaders, with two field guns, were quietly advancing through the woods from Queenston to attack a British outpost, when they were fired upon by Indians. They kept on for some distance, returning as well as they could the fire of their unseen foes, whose terrifying yells were as effective as their bullets; then a British officer summoned them to surrender, and they obeyed. This is, in brief, the story of the Battle of Beaver Dams. But it leaves much to be explained, and there are two persons connected with the story who should be particularly mentioned.

The first is Laura Secord, whose name is known to every reader of Canadian history. She had already proved herself a heroine. While the United States troops were in possession of Queenston Heights, after the death of Macdonnell and before the final engagement, she learned that her husband had been wounded in the battle. She found him lying on the battlefield, just in time to save him from two of the enemy who would have killed him with their bayonets. Throwing herself upon his body, she protected him until one of the United States officers came up. The officer promptly sent the two men across the river under arrest, and had Secord taken to his home in the village of Queenston. This occurred on the thirteenth of October, 1812. On the twenty-third of June, 1813, Secord was still confined to his house, not fully recovered from his wounds. Two officers who happened to be billeted there were overheard discussing plans for the capture of the nearest British outpost, thirteen miles distant. The husband could not go to warn the British; so Mrs. Secord set out, accompanied by her niece, to carry the message to her brother's house, some two miles away. When they got there, they found the place deserted; and without hesitation, they determined to go on and deliver the message to Lieutenant FitzGibbon, who was in command of the threatened outpost. To avoid the enemy, they chose a long, circuitous route of nearly twenty miles. The story of deceiving the sentries is not true. They succeeded in passing the sentries without being seen. The niece kept up with Mrs. Secord for a time,

but had to be left behind when she could go no farther; and darkness came on before the long journey was ended. Still the brave woman kept on. At last she came upon an encampment of armed men. They were Indians, and with them she found safety and protection. They took her to the house of a friend, where she received good care; and they sent forward the message which she had brought at the risk of her life. Then they prepared for the bewildering attack in the woods by which the battle was won.

Lieutenant James FitzGibbon, to whom her warning was sent, was at the head of a small independent company of skirmishers that had done good service along the Niagara frontier. We are told that he and his men were all Irishmen, speaking the Irish vernacular. When he and his followers arrived at Beaver Dams, he found the invaders willing to surrender to save themselves from the dreaded Indians, by whom they were surrounded, and of whose numbers they were wholly ignorant. He took advantage of the situation, pretending to have the authority of Major de Haren, of the 104th, to receive their surrender; and he delayed over the arrangement of terms, anxiously waiting for someone with real authority to come to his relief. It so happened that Major de Haren himself came up in time to sign the articles of surrender.

This "unaccountable occurrence," as it was called, was a crushing blow to the invaders. The officer in command of the expedition was freed from blame for his loss of half a thousand men; but his superior officer, General Dearborn, who had left him unsupported, and who had already sent in his resignation, was allowed to retire.

To the memory of Laura Secord, a monument, on which her two heroic deeds are recorded, was erected by the Canadian Government last summer on the battlefield of Queenston Heights. The site of the battle of Beaver Dams, at or near where now the railway from Niagara to Hamilton runs under the Welland Canal, might very well be marked by some memorial of James FitzGibbon; who, by his courage and self-possession, sealed and completed the victory of the Indians; and who modestly disclaimed the praise which was due to him, and ascribed to the Indians all the credit.

Traffic is growing faster on our Great Lakes than anywhere else in the world; and there is being constructed there, on the United States side of the Sault Ste. Marie, a lock which will be bigger than the great locks of the Panama Canal.