

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

TWO LOYALIST WOMEN

LINKED TO GASPESIA

Recalling incidents from the
lives of Laura Ingersoll Secord
and Sarah Bothum Sherwood.

KEN ANNETT

TWO LOYALIST WOMEN

PREFACE The two women recalled by this issue of GASPE OF YESTERDAY not only had links to Gaspesia but were archetypes of many of the women of Loyalist background that did settle in the District of Gaspé two centuries ago. Laura Ingersoll Secord the wife of a wounded officer of the Lincoln Militia, Lieut. James Secord, was linked by marriage to Mary Secord Beebe Pearson, her husband's aunt, and pioneer Loyalist settler at New Carlisle. Sarah Bothum Sherwood was the wife of Captain Justus Sherwood, distinguished officer of the Loyal Rangers. With her husband she came to Gaspé in the summer of 1783 and was a guest of the O'Hara family while her husband explored the coasts of Gaspesia for sites to settle Loyalists.

LAURA Few Canadian women are better known, by name at
INGERSOLL least, than Laura Secord, even if many who note her
SECORD name on candy shops across the land may not know of the historical context. Again, there are probably few students in the history classes of Gaspesian schools who link the Laura Secord, heroine of Beaver Dams, with Mary Secord Beebe, Loyalist and matriarch of the prominent Beebe family of Gaspesia.

Recently, in the Library of Confederation Center, Charlottetown, P.E.I., GASPE OF YESTERDAY^I found a rare, old book on the life and times of James FitzGibbon, the British Army officer who was warned by Laura Secord of impending attack by the invading Americans. Here is a contemporary account of that historic incident:

The duty of striking a preparatory blow, this surprise and capture of FitzGibbon, was entrusted to Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler and a force of upwards of five hundred men.

The natural confidence of success which the comparative strength of the two forces gave the Americans was eventually the cause of their defeat. At the Beaver Dam, some of the junior officers with Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler were overheard discussing his plans, and a woman undertook the difficult task of attempting to reach and warn FitzGibbon.

The story of Laura Secord, her loyalty, bravery, and perseverance under great difficulties, has been told more than once, yet I must repeat it once again. James Secord, formerly an officer in the Lincoln militia, had been wounded at Queenston Heights. Too crippled for further service, he had settled on a grant of land in the Niagara district, in that part of the peninsula at the time in the hands of the Americans. A couple of their officers coming into Secord's house to demand food, had stayed long enough, and talked loud enough, to allow his young wife to learn the danger threatening FitzGibbon and his handful of brave men. Her husband was incapable by reason of his lameness, but she could be fleet of foot and strong in purpose. From the moment she obtained her husband's consent to go, until she reached FitzGibbon, her courage never failed.

Putting everything in order, even setting the breakfast table ready, that the appearance of her presence might deceive any chance visitor to the house, and learning the particulars of the best route to follow, so as to avoid the enemy's pickets as much as possible, she set out at the earliest peep of dawn. Clad only in a short flannel skirt and cotton jacket, without shoes or stockings, her milking stool in one hand, her pail in the other, she drove one of the cows close to the American lines. While ostensibly making every effort to stay the animal's progress, she at the same time gave it a sly prod to keep it moving. Accosted by the picket, who questioned her anxiety to milk the cow so early, and chaffed her for her apparent inability to overtake it, laughing at her fruitless efforts to bring the creature to a stand, Laura merely grumbled at it for being "contrary." The scantiness of the woman's clothing, and her well-simulated wrath at the animal's antics, quite deceived the man, who let her pass without further protest.

The moment she was out of his sight, Laura Secord drove the cow on more quickly, following the course of a small ravine which concealed her from both sight and hearing. A mile away, she hid the pail and stool under the bushes, first milking the cow sufficiently to prevent her returning too soon to the clearing. She then set out on her long tramp through the woods.

The 23rd of June, the morning was hot and close, and through the lower lands the flies were plentiful. The underbrush in the forest was tangled and dense, making the tree-clad slopes more difficult to climb

The fear of encountering outlying pickets, or wandering bands of marauding Americans, who would stay or question her, led her to avoid even the slightly marked tracks, and took her a long way round. Her first stopping place was the mill on the little stream not far from St. David's. Her friends there, a widow and a lad, endeavored to dissuade her from attempting to reach FitzGibbon, and added much to the terrors of the way by exaggerated descriptions of the fierceness and cruelties of the Indians, who then infested the woods. But Laura had set out with a definite object, and she meant to accomplish it at all risks. She knew the enemy was to march the next day, and she must reach De Cou's, where FitzGibbon was, before them. The last half of her journey was even more trying than the first. She knew nothing of the way; there were so many paths and "blazed" tracks through the woods, that she several times took a wrong one. When almost despairing of reaching her destination, she came to an opening in the forest and at the same time encountered a party of the dreaded Indians.

One, who appeared to be their chief, sprang to his feet and accosted her. Terrified, she was at first unable to speak, but reassured by the obedience of the others to a sign from their chief, she soon recovered sufficiently to try and explain by signs that she wished to be taken to FitzGibbon. Reiterating the name and pointing to the knife in the chief's belt, she at last made him understand that many "Big

Knives"* were coming. With an expressive "Ugh" of satisfaction and intelligence, the Indian turned, and led the way through the beaver meadows to De Cou's.

"Thus," wrote FitzGibbon, "did a young, delicate woman brave the terrors of the forest in a time of such desultory warfare that the dangers were increased tenfold, to do her duty to her country, and by timely warning save much bloodshed and disaster." †

* Michigans, "Big Knives," the Indian name for Americans.

† The following paper was signed by FitzGibbon :



LAURA SECORD.

"I do hereby certify that Mrs. Secord, wife of James Secord, of Chippewa, Esq., did, in the month of June, 1813, walk from her house, near the village of St. David's, to De Cou's house in Thorold by a circuitous route of about twenty miles, partly through the woods, to acquaint me that the enemy intended to attempt, by surprise, to capture a detachment of the 49th Regiment, then under my command, she having obtained such knowledge from good authority, as the event proved. Mrs. Secord was a person of slight and delicate frame, and made the effort in weather excessively warm, and I dreaded at the time that she must suffer in health in consequence of fatigue and anxiety, she having been exposed to danger from the enemy, through whose lines of communication she had to pass. The attempt was made on my detachment by the enemy; and his detachment, consisting of upwards of 500 men and a field-piece and 50 dragoons, were captured in consequence.

"I write this certificate in a moment of much hurry and from memory, and it is therefore thus brief.

"(Signed) JAMES FITZGIBBON,
"Formerly Lieutenant 49th Regiment."

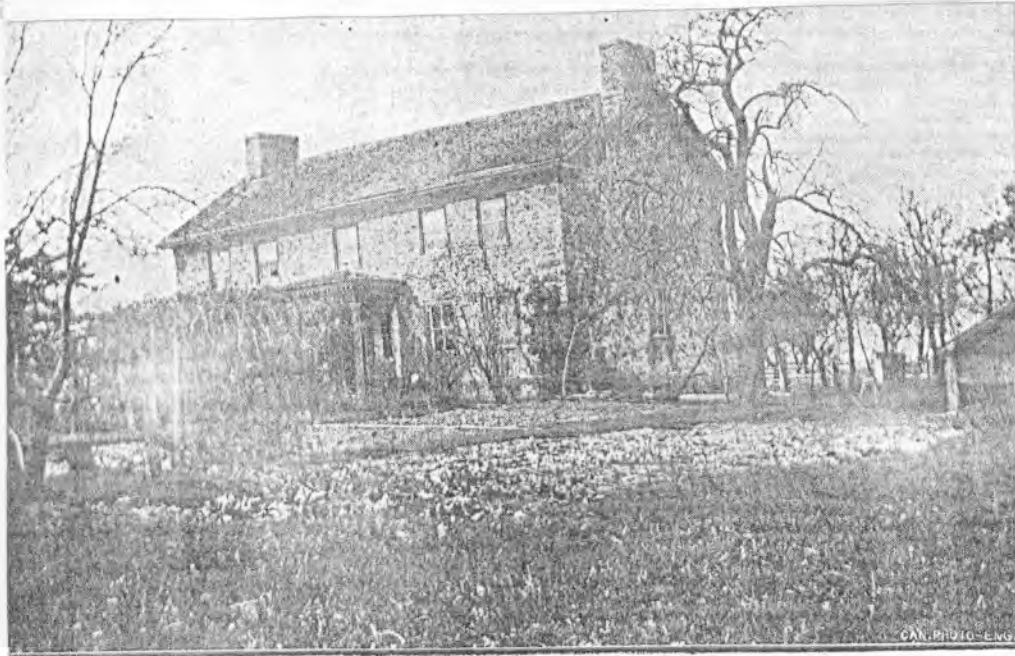


Yours sincerely
James FitzGibbon

Incalculable is the value of a firm purpose, and a determination not to be defeated in one's pursuits. If there be one thing more than another calculated to enoble the human soul it is the high faith in its own power.

When this living principle exists, a coarser impulse is generated which never calculates on difficulties. - And even when repulsed and defeated, it turns all things to its own advantage, and makes a virtue of necessity, so that its very failures redound to its present glory and ultimate success.

To the above I add - Cultivate this firmness incessantly until it becomes habitual.
T. F. S.



DE COU'S HOUSE, NEAR BEAVER DAM.

SARAH Sarah, one of five children of Elizah and Dorothy
BOTHUM Bothum, was born in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1754.
SHERWOOD When she was thirteen years of age the family moved
to the northern frontier in search of cheap land and
settled in Shaftsbury Township in the New Hampshire Grants - later
to be the State of Vermont. In her twentieth year she met and
married the young surveyor, Justus Sherwood, a member of Ethan
Allen's Green Mountain Boys and with a growing reputation as a
leader of men. The young couple set up housekeeping on a pioneer
farm at New Haven in the very year that the American Revolution
began.

Justus Sherwood resolved to remain loyal to the British
Crown. He was arrested by angry rebels, his home plundered, his wife
and children terrified and eventually sentenced to life imprisonment
in the notorious Simsbury Mines of Connecticut. He escaped, made his
way to Canada and became an officer of the Queen's Loyal Rangers.
After incredible trials and tribulations his wife, Sarah, and their
children also escaped to Canada and found refuge with the British
garrison at St.Jean on the Richelieu.

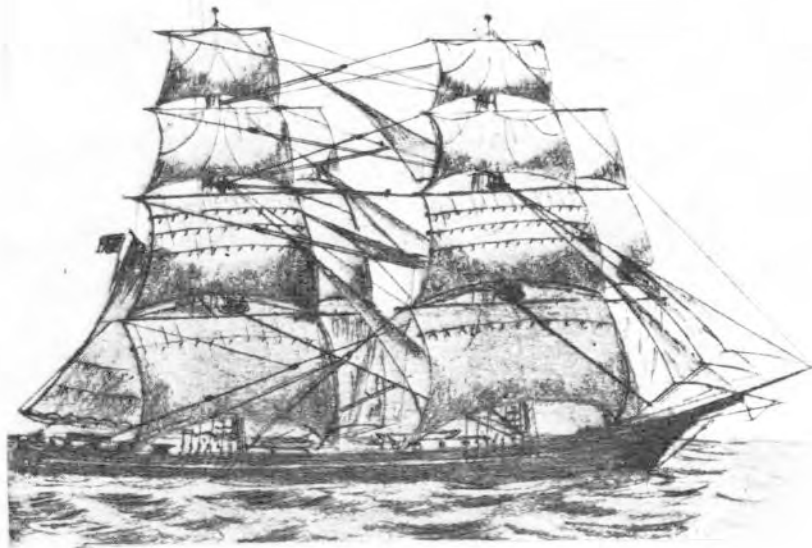
VOYAGE When the Peace of 1783 ended the bitter Revolutionary
TO War the Justus Sherwoods were invited to Quebec City
GASPÉ by the Governor, Frederick Haldimand. Haldimand put
the Government Brigatine, ST.PETER, at the disposal of
Captain Sherwood and his Loyalist associates for an exploratory trip
to Gaspesia in quest of sites for possible Loyalist settlement.
Sarah and the children accompanied her husband when they sailed from
Quebec on May 29th. Arriving in Gaspé Basin on June 7th they were
warmly welcomed by members of the O'Hara family. The following extract
recalls their Gaspé experience:

"...While Captain O'Hara acted as Justus' guide, Sarah and
the children had a glorious holiday and they must rank as
the first tourists who visited that magnificent region. The
children swam in the sea, fished with the young O'Haras and
feasted on lobsters which they caught by the tails among the
shallows. But again, too soon, this idyllic interlude ended.
On July 14th Justus and his party returned to Gaspé Bay. On
the 20th the Sherwoods sailed for Quebec, taking Captain and
Mrs.O'Hara's eldest son and daughter who were to stay with

"friends in the city. The voyage back to Quebec was tedious, as the brigantine battled both the prevailing winds and the currents of the lower St.Lawrence. Whereas the outward voyage had taken only ten days the return lasted twenty-four and they did not reach Quebec until August 12th....."

While the subsequent, interesting career of Sarah Sherwood is beyond the scope of this GASPE OF YESTERDAY article it may be of interest to note that she was widowed by the loss of her husband in 1798, that her last years were spent in Montreal near family members and that she died there in 1818 in her sixty-fourth year.

Having experienced great trials and losses as a Loyalist she is nonetheless remembered as one among many of her time who not only survived but who, with her distinguished husband, founded a family which made significant contributions to the life of Canada for generations.



BRIG

A VESSEL WITH TWO MASTS SQUARE RIGGED LIKE A SHIP'S FORE-AND MAIN-MASTS BUT CARRYING ALSO ON HER MAIN-MAST A LOWER FORE-AND-AFT SAIL WITH A GAFF AND BOOM.

RUNNING BEFORE A STRONG, STEADY WIND, A BRIG WAS A FAST CRAFT.

THE BRIG, "ST.PETER", ON WHICH CAPTAIN JUSTUS SHERWOOD TRAVELLED TO GASPÉ AND BAY CHALEURS IN 1783, WAS ONE OF THE VESSELS EMPLOYED IN THE FOLLOWING YEAR TO CONVEY THE LOYALIST FAMILIES TO BAY CHALEURS.