

# Laura Secord Beats Paul Revere Hands Down

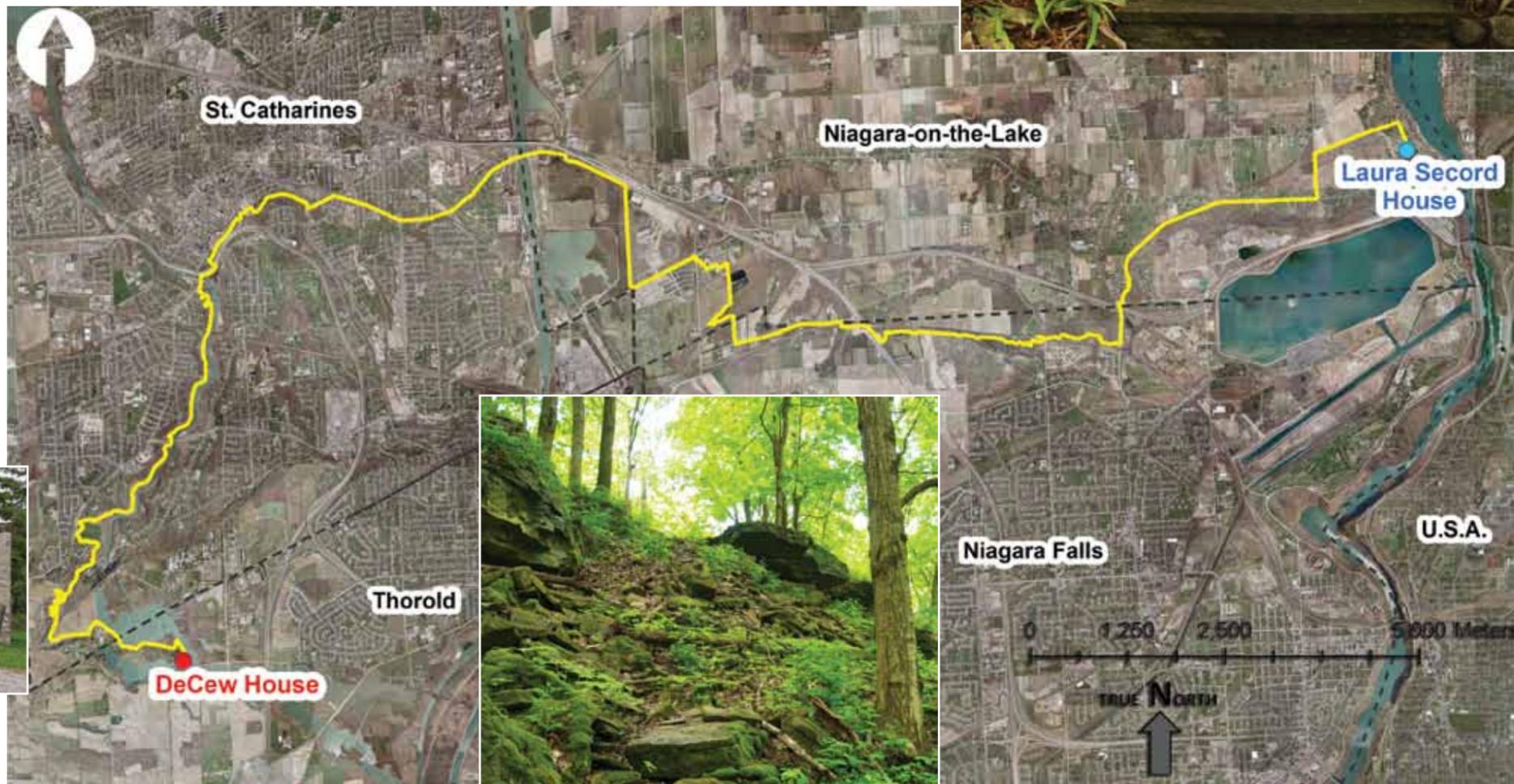


Written and photographed by Chris Mills except where noted.

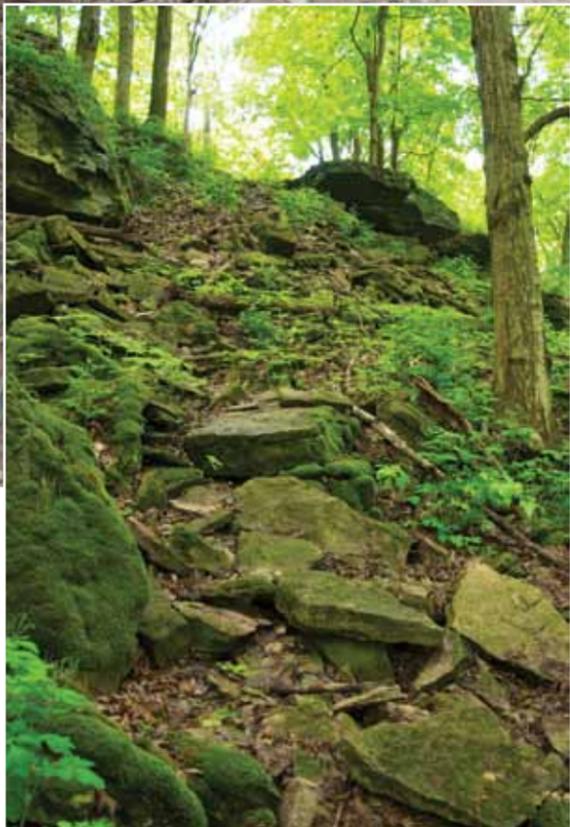


● Laura Secord Homestead in Queenston where Secord lived between 1803 and 1835 with her husband and seven children.

Just over 200 years ago, a 37-year-old wife and mother of five began a gruelling 20-mile walk through mosquito-, wolf- and snake-infested territory across the Niagara Escarpment. She did it with full knowledge that the invading army she intended to foil, patrolled those roads and pathways she avoided, with full intent to execute her on the spot should they learn she were a spy. Paul Revere has nothing on Canada's Laura Secord.



● The ruin monument DeCew House, also known as DeCew House, in Thorold. This was Secord's destination on her historic hike across the Niagara Escarpment in 1813. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.



Walking over the Niagara Escarpment isn't for wimps. Wearing cloth slippers and a long gown, Secord would have had a difficult time scrambling up and down the Escarpment and could easily have lost a shoe, leaving her barefoot, as legend has it. ▶

Secord successfully reached her destination at Decew's House to warn the British officer that more than 500 American soldiers were behind her with plans to surprise and capture them with cannon and mounted dragoons.

It's a harrowing story that today is mixed with myth and legend, replete with stories, novels, dramatized re-enactments, scripts and memorials. Yet 200 years ago, few were privy to, let alone celebrated, her role in what certainly contributed to the salvation of Canada.

Hailing from Massachusetts, Laura Ingersoll at 19 years old moved to Queenston on the Niagara River with her family in 1795. Laura later met shop owner James Secord through one of her father's Freemason meetings. They married, and over the next 20 years parented seven children.

Besides raising a family in a war zone in volatile political times, Laura demonstrated her staunchness in 1812 when her husband suffered musket balls in his shoulder and knee at the battle of Queenston Heights. Left among the dead and dying,

▲ Map showing Laura Secord Legacy Trail (33.4 km), starting in the east at Laura Secord's homestead (●) and wending indirectly to DeCew House in the west (●). The map was created by Lori Steglinski and Leah Bercovitch of Niagara College, who marked the trail (■) on an aerial photograph from Niagara Region. Map courtesy of Friends of Laura Secord.





▲ Some of the 1,000-plus people who took part in commemorative hikes on the Laura Secord Legacy Walk, June 22. The Trail includes parts of the TransCanada and Bruce Trails.

Laura Secord Beats Paul Revere Hands Down

he lay until Laura climbed the Escarpment and arranged for someone to carry him to their ransacked and ruined home.

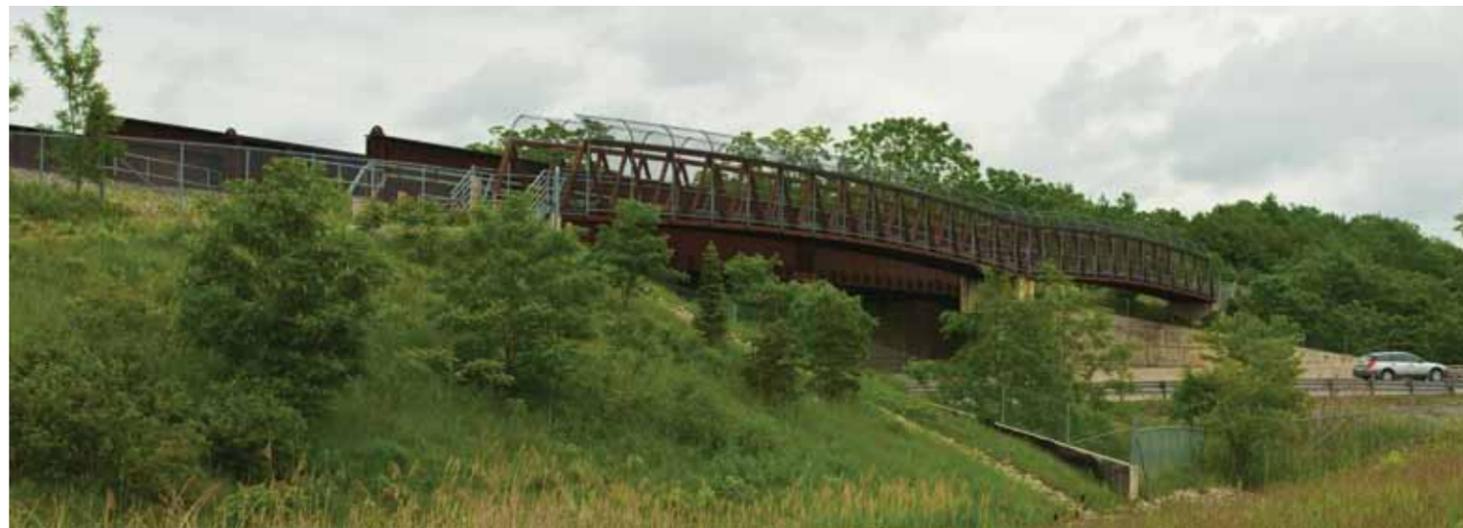
She saved him a second time by nursing his wounds instead of allowing the army surgeons to amputate his limbs and likely die by bleeding to death or by infection, both common outcomes at the time. He lived

another 29 years.

Nine months later, the Americans were in occupation of Fort George in Niagara, now Niagara-on-the-Lake, then the capital of Upper Canada. The British had been pushed back to Grimsby on Lake Ontario. However, Lieutenant James Fitzgibbon held an outpost at DeCew's house south of today's St. Catharines from where he, a native force of 400, and his band of 50 hand-picked



▲ In Secord's time the Black Swamp was located where Niagara College, above, is now. To avoid the roads, Secord managed to follow Native trails through the swamp.



▲ The Laura Secord Legacy Trail leads over QEW on this special footbridge.



▲ Holy Trinity Church, Chippawa, south of Niagara Falls, was founded in 1820 and had the current brick building constructed in 1841. Secord attended this church, and now her original gravestone is mounted inside the church after a monument to her was put in Drummond Hill Cemetery in 1901.

men relentlessly harassed and tweaked the noses of American patrols.

**The Trek**

On June 21, 1813, the Secords overheard American officers, who had commandeered the Secord household for dinner, discussing the attack and capture of Fitzgibbon and his men.

Laura left the following morning before sunrise.

In order to disguise her intent, she dressed for a typical morning in a homestead, with flat-soled ballet-style slippers and a light dress over a petticoat. She explained to the sentry that she needed to milk the cow, then, leading it to the hedge, left it there to shield her furtive departure.

She trekked up and over the Escarpment to her sister-

Continued on page 34



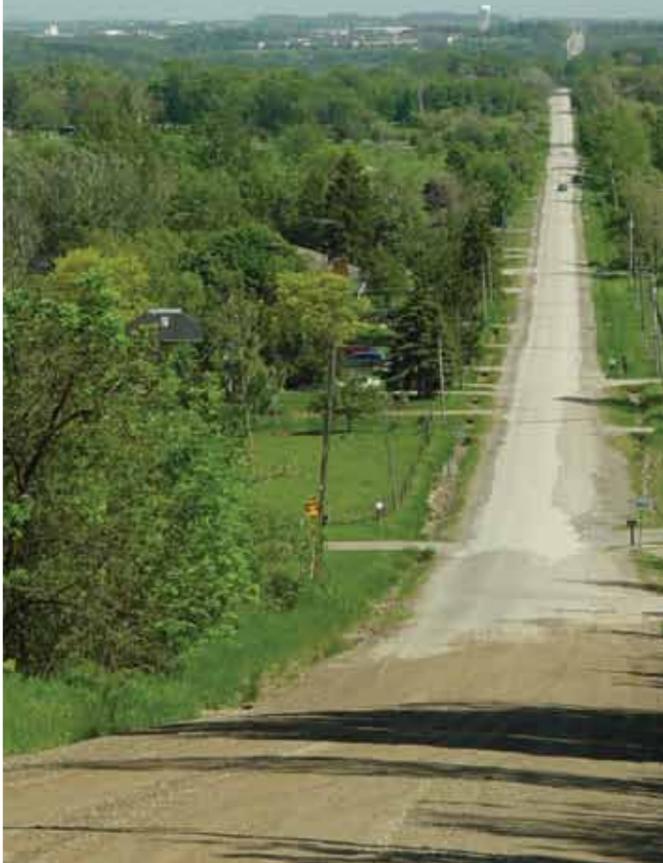
**J.M. Davis and Associates Limited**  
Environmental Engineering  
Since 1994

**Environmental Engineering Services we provide:**

- ◆ Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments
- ◆ Remediation Plans
- ◆ Clean-up monitoring of contaminated areas
- ◆ Record of Site Condition

**J.M. (Mike) Davis, P. Eng., QP<sub>RSC</sub>**  
905 877 9665  
Cell 905 866 7888  
mike@jmdavis.ca  
www.jmdavis.ca

We are bank approved.



Laura Secord Beats  
Paul Revere Hands Down  
Continued from page 19

in-law's grist mill, where she met her niece who would join her for passage through the Black Swamp, which is now the Glendale Campus of Niagara College, over the river that's now the Welland Canal, and through sweltering thick forest to Twelve Mile Creek, from where she continued alone.

Laura pushed south, climbed over the Escarpment once again where at twilight she stumbled into the camp of Fitzgibbon's native force. They leapt to their feet and started whooping at the sight of her. Fortunately, they escorted her to DeCew's house where she next had to convince Fitzgibbon she wasn't an American spy.

**The Victory**

In the early morning of June 24, the Mohawk and Kahnawake natives prepared a series of ambushes for

the approaching column of Americans within the woods around Beaverdams in Thorold. They attacked, harried and whooped until the invaders were utterly terrified of being scalped alive. Finally, British Lieutenant Fitzgibbon approached them with a white flag and persuaded the Americans to surrender 462 officers and soldiers. This action precipitated the eventual withdrawal from Niagara of the American forces.

So why did Laura and her family continue in relative obscurity and financial hardship for the next 48 years, given that both her husband's store and their homestead had been ransacked during the war?

Local historian and author David Hemmings explains, "The problem was that she was a woman, who don't fight in wars. She was a civilian, who don't fight in wars. And she was a spy, whom countries don't talk about ... ever."

Hemmings has written seven books of local history as

well as lectured to historical societies.

It wasn't until 1860 that Laura Secord heard of a document to be signed by all surviving Niagara soldiers of the 1812 War and to be presented to the Prince of Wales upon his visit to the new Brock Monument that year.

"She marched right up there, demanded to be allowed to sign it, and wouldn't leave until they did," says Lauren Kemp, 22, a Laura Secord Homestead guide and English/history education student at Brock University. "When the Prince saw her name, he quietly arranged to meet her. When he returned to England, he sent her 100 pounds gold, about \$5,000 Canadian today, for her services to the Crown."

**The Legacy**

Today the Canadian government recognizes as bonafide heroines of Canada only Laura Secord and 14-year-old Madeleine De Vercheres, who in 1692 defended her fort against repeated Iroquois attacks.

The Friends of Laura Secord, founded in 2010, now presides over her memory with a Legacy Trail. In a turn of historical significance, the president is Caroline McCormick, Laura Secord's great-great-great-granddaughter.

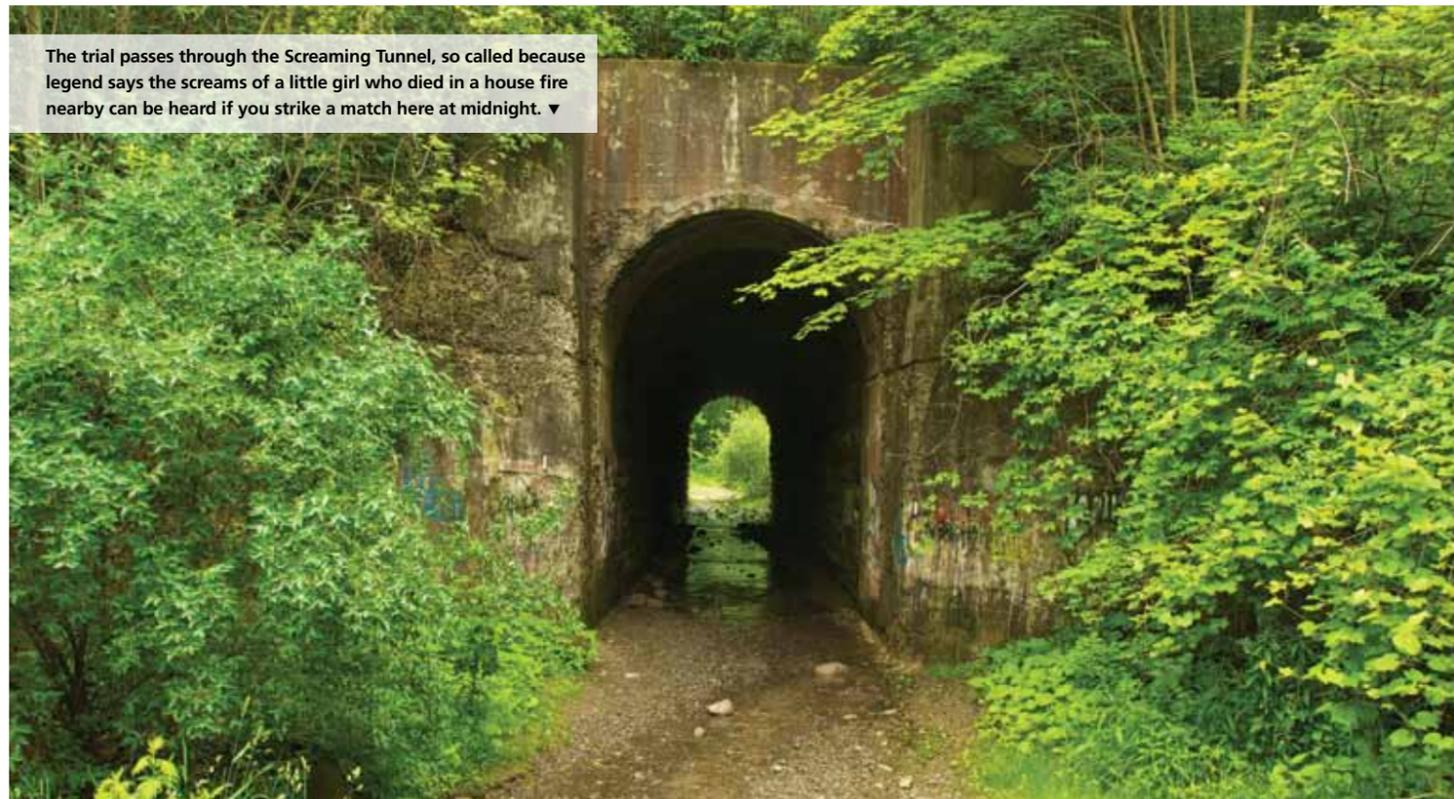
"The remembrance is her continuing story of courage, determination and perseverance," says McCormick. "We hope we made her proud of our initiatives."

Unquestionably, says Hemmings. "They've really done an extraordinary job recreating the trail Laura could have taken," says Hemmings, the Friends's official historian. "By laying maps from 1813 over today's maps of the region, they've managed to create a path that is probably within a couple 100 metres of where Laura actually walked."

Commemorative medallions, postage stamps, numerous namesake schools

Continued on page 36

The trail passes through the Screaming Tunnel, so called because legend says the screams of a little girl who died in a house fire nearby can be heard if you strike a match here at midnight. ▼



**TREE PLANTING SERVICES CAN SAVE YOU MONEY.**



Planting trees on your property can do more than fight climate change. You can receive funding assistance.

If you have at least 2.5 acres of productive land, find out if you qualify by contacting:

Trees Ontario  
416.646.1193

Or by visiting:  
www.treesontario.ca/  
programs/index.php/  
fifty\_million

Trees Ontario is working with its tree planting partners across the province to deliver the Ontario government's 50 Million Tree Program.



Paid for, in part, by the Government of Ontario

**39th Ball's Falls Thanksgiving Festival 2013**

OPEN OCTOBER 11TH TO 14TH  
10:00 AM - 5:00 PM DAILY

- ADMISSION \$6 PER PERSON
- Seniors (65+) \$4 on Friday only
- Children under 14 FREE (when accompanied by an adult)
- Purchase a pass for \$14 & enjoy access all weekend long!

- Over 130 Juried Artisans and Exhibitors
- Caterers in the Glen Elgin Rooms
- Live Music and Family Entertainment
- Children's Crafts and Activities
- Museum Tours and Heritage Demonstrations

- FREE Parking
- Courtesy Shuttle and Parcel Check
- ATM and Fast Food Service
- NO PETS Please!



Follow us on Twitter @BallsFallsCA

Like us on Facebook



For more information call 905.562.5235 or visit www.ballsfalls.ca



www.edwardjones.com

You can be ready to retire or not. Ready is better.

**Archie Braga**  
Financial Advisor  
(519) 853-4694  
315 Queen St. E., Unit #2  
Acton, ON L7J 1R1

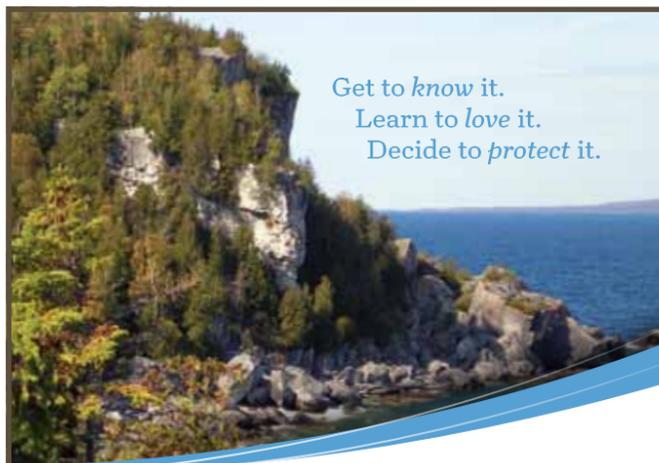
**Colin Brookes**  
Financial Advisor  
(905) 873-7630  
211 Guelph St., Unit 4  
Georgetown, ON L7G 5B5

**Ken Fast**  
Financial Advisor  
(519) 938-9295  
77 Broadway, Unit #1  
Orangeville, ON L9W 1K1

**George Paolucci**  
Financial Advisor  
(519) 833-9069  
132 Main Street, Unit 4  
Erin, ON NOB 1T0

**Edward Jones**  
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

Member - Canadian Investor Protection Fund

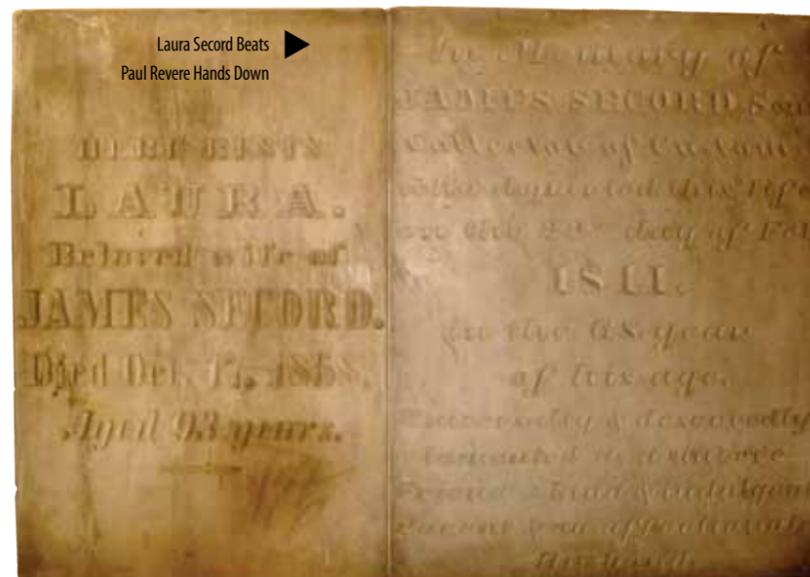


Get to know it.  
Learn to love it.  
Decide to protect it.

COALITION ON THE  
NIAGARA ESCARPMENT



Make a contribution at  
[niagaraescarpment.org](http://niagaraescarpment.org)



Laura Secord Beats  
Paul Revere Hands Down

▲ These gravestones for Laura and James Secord were moved to Holy Trinity Church, Chippawa. This was the town where Laura lived out her final years. The inscription for her reads "Here rests Laura. Beloved wife of James Secord. Died Oct. 17, 1868. Aged 93 years."

Canada-wide in her honour, a statue in Ottawa and a monument in Niagara Falls are all testimony to a woman whose bravery 200 years ago deserves remembering by Canadians. Paul Revere, you've met your match. **NEV**

Chris Mills is a Niagara-based writer and photographer who can be reached at [chrismills.ca](http://chrismills.ca). His "Who Was Sir Isaac Brock?" was published in Escarpment Views, Autumn 2012.

Another War of 1812 feature is "DeCou's House of Heroes" by Adam Shoalts, Winter 2011.



▲ Commemorative monument over Laura and James Secord's graves at Drummond Hill Cemetery in Niagara Falls. Raised by the Ontario Historical Society in 1901, it is adjacent to the Lundy's Lane Battle memorial.

## The Laura Secord Experience

### Laura Secord Legacy Trail

Created for the 200th anniversary commemorations. The 32-km trail now starts at Secord Homestead, Queenston, climbs the Niagara Escarpment, passes over QEW on a special footbridge, goes through the Screaming Tunnel, to Niagara College, through south part of St. Catharines, crosses Twelve Mile Creek on a bridge specially built for the Trail, where Secord may have crossed on a fallen log, climbs the Escarpment again, ends at DeCew's House near Beaverdams reservoir. Can be completed in about eight hours now instead of the 16 hours it took Secord. More than 1,000 people participated in the June 22 Commemorative Walk, including Prime Minister Harper's wife Laureen Harper and TV personality Valerie Pringle.

### Laura Secord Homestead, Queenston

The Laura Secord Chocolate Company bought and renovated the Homestead in 1971. It is now in the hands of Niagara Parks. There is also a gift centre with books on Laura Secord, Laura Secord chocolates and ice



### Holy Trinity Church, Chippawa

Attended by the Secords until the end of their lives; location of two original gravestones from their gravesite.

cream. Open to Thanksgiving, 10-5 Wed. to Sun. Open again for a Christmas weekend.

### Drummond Hill Cemetery, Niagara Falls

Burial place of Laura and James Secord. A memorial is beside the Battle of Lundy's Lane memorial.

### Greetings from H.R.H. Charles, Prince of Wales

View his video at [friendsoflaurasecord.ca](http://friendsoflaurasecord.ca). His great-great-grandfather met Secord 153 years ago.

◀ Lauren Kemp, student at Brock University, inside the Laura Secord Homestead. All artifacts are between 150 and 200 years old.

**Cruise a Canadian Heritage River!**

- Lunch Cruises with entertainment
- Sunset Dinner Cruises
- Sunday Brunch *Great Day Trip!*
- Gift & Bake Shop
- Reservations required

Located between Caledonia and Brantford, Ontario  
Call for your free brochure! 905-765-4107 or 800-847-3321  
**grandrivercruises.ca**

**HERITAGE WINEMAKING BEGINS IN OUR FAMILY'S ORGANIC VINEYARDS.**

**REIMER VINEYARDS**  
WINERY: 1289 LINE 3 ROAD  
NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ON  
(905) 468-9417  
[WWW.REIMERVINEYARDS.COM](http://WWW.REIMERVINEYARDS.COM)

*Experience Hospitality...*  
in the heart of  
Niagara's Wine Region

- 118 guest rooms including 11 deluxe King Jacuzzi Suites
- The Garden Sleep System™ by VSS Sleep Systems – adjustable to each guests individual needs
- Ample FREE parking and 24 hour complimentary business center
- Free Wi-Fi throughout the property
- Heated indoor pool with whirlpool, steam room and state of the art fitness center
- Full service Great North American Grill™ restaurant open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Convenient 24 hour Pavilion Pantry
- 3,750 square feet of flexible meeting space, suitable for events up to 220 people and deluxe weddings from 50 to 200 persons with outdoor ceremony
- Conveniently located off the QEW just minutes away from world-class Wineries, Golf Courses, Restaurants, Shopping and many world class Attractions.

**Hilton Garden Inn**  
Niagara-on-the-Lake

500 York Rd., Niagara-on-the-Lake ON L0S 1J0  
P: 905.984.4200 Toll Free: 866.777.9877  
W: [niagaraontheLake.hgi.com](http://niagaraontheLake.hgi.com)