

Explosion at Dawson Creek, seemingly a very personal book, Maggie and her Great Aunt Kate discover that theirs is a shared past and, as a consequence, their present has been transformed. If Maggie is to have further adventures slipping into Canada's past, Hammond will have to come up with another means than Maggie's discontent with her present to serve as the motive force, and if that means more emphasis on the fantasy element, so much the better for both the fiction and the reader.

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Laura Walks Again

Laura Secord's Brave Walk. Connie Brummel Crook. Illus. June Lawrason. Second Story, 2000. Unpag. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-896764-34-7.

Advertised as "the only picture book for young readers which tells the legendary tale of Laura Secord's heroism during the War of 1812," *Laura Secord's Brave Walk* tells the familiar story efficiently and dramatically. Each page is a self-contained scene that frames an essential plot complication. Each scene is constructed with believable action and dialogue. The main character elicits empathy.

Here is how the text begins: "'Laura,' James Secord said, 'I must help fight to save our country. General Brock needs more soldiers; I will be one of them.'" The immediacy of this opening is maintained throughout the story. Interest never flags as Laura hides her children when a battle takes place in her back yard, rushes to her wounded husband behind the enemy lines, overhears American soldiers planning a surprise attack, and walks alone nineteen miles through American-held territory to warn the British. My only criticism is that the opening would have been more dramatic had Laura been *shown* to be sad: the locket gesture is too cool.

Specific details add authenticity and texture without ever becoming cumbersome. A quick exchange of dialogue conveys why Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, the British defender of the last portion of the Niagara Peninsula not in the hands of the Americans, was known as "Green Sliver." Laura's sufferings are made easily understandable to a child through such details as her bare feet becoming "scratched," her skirt "hanging in wet and muddy tatters," and her face "sunburned" and "mosquito-bitten."

Mostly I laud the fine, full-colour illustrations, lush with authentic, historical details. The pictures exhibit the same virtues as the text. Lawrason has depicted Laura as relatively young and pretty, as well as highly domesticated and feminine, despite the heroine's awesome courage and physical stamina. Presumably such an image will make Laura appeal even to those who hold conservative views of women's roles.

I do, however, quibble with some minor details in virtually every illustra-

tion. For example, in all the pictures Laura is shown as having black hair when the text says her hair is brown. In the second picture, the text's "dugout cold cellar" is shown as a basement kitchen with mortared stone and brick walls and a huge fireplace. In the third, although the text says "the fighting has stopped," the fighting is shown as continuing. In the fourth, James does not look sick and his cane is not clear. In the ninth, the swamp looks vaguely Southern and the rattlesnake looks more like a Florida diamond back than an Ontario massasauga. In the twelfth, Laura's face is pallid, not sunburned and mosquito bitten.

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Fiction on the Edges of History

Laura: a Childhood Tale of Laura Secord. Maxine Trottier. Illus. Karen Reczuk. North Winds, 2000. 30 pp. \$19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-439-98724-5. *Storm at Batoche.* Maxine Trottier. Illus. John Mantha. Stoddart Kids, 2000. \$19.95 cloth. Unpag. ISBN 0-7737-3248-9.

In *Laura*, Trottier successfully employs a fictional story and an historical note to convey what could well be the essence of Laura Secord's extraordinary achievement: she walked those miles for love. In *Storm at Batoche*, Trottier uses the same method somewhat less successfully to capture the essence of the Riel Rebellion: it was the old versus the new and intolerance of cultural differences. Paradoxically, the problem in *Storm at Batoche* lies not so much with the story as with the note: the history is less credible than the fiction.

According to the author's note that follows *Laura*, Laura Secord, the famous Canadian heroine of the War of 1812, was born in Massachusetts in 1775. Her father, Thomas Ingersoll, was an officer in the Colonial Militia during the American Revolution. The Ingersolls did not move to Upper Canada until 1795. Laura married James Secord two years later. Trottier's *Laura* is a fictional story about an incident that might have happened in Laura's US childhood. The story depicts Laura's background, character, and values. Taken with its author's note, *Laura* also provides a forum for discussing how an immigrant can be loyal to her adopted country.

Trottier's simple but poetic prose — "One afternoon long ago, the sun hung over a farm," the story begins — tells a strong, moving, elemental story of loss and recovery. The story is a credible explication of Laura's eventual heroism and a memorable portrait of colonial life (south of the border as well as north). When Laura loses her special friend, Peg, an old cow, she goes alone to seek her through the scary forest. She finds the cow dead, but her grief is alleviated by the discovery of a living calf that she leads back to the safety of the farm. "You must hold tightly to the things you love," she explains to her father, echoing words she