

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

has heard her mother say.

Contributing equally to the success of *Laura* are the watercolour and pencil illustrations. Karen Reczuch plays masterfully with bold but gentle blocks of colour in the range of home-made, New World dyes — the blues and greens of the sky and grass balancing the browns and reds of Laura's hair and dress, the earth, the cow and calf; the whites of Laura's cap, dress trim and apron balancing the darks of shadows and the night sky. The effect is a visual lyricism that enhances the text, drawing out the rich emotional resonances.

In *Storm at Batoche*, Trottier tells another fictional story about an historical personage: the rebel Métis leader, Louis Riel (1844-1885). In this story, James, who looks about six in the illustrations, falls from the wagon of his Scottish immigrant parents as they are making their way through a night-time winter storm to the hamlet of Batoche in what would eventually become the province of Saskatchewan. After walking "afraid and nearly frozen" for a long time, James is rescued by "a man on a horse" who wraps him "inside his buffalo robe" and takes him to a "small house."

The man introduces himself simply as "Louis." Louis and James spend three days together, sharing stories, making and breaking bread, and waiting out the storm. Their only dispute is that Louis calls the bread "*galette*," while James calls it "bannock." When the weather clears, Louis conveys James to within walking distance of Batoche, and the boy is reunited with his parents. That spring, when James and his parents receive news of a "dangerous man, an enemy of the country" who has been put in jail, James does not think that the man could be *his* Louis, because "The Louis he knew was a good man." He does think that "Bannock or *galette*, between two friends there is no difference."

The story makes the history slightly bloodless and cerebral, perhaps, but is otherwise admirable. Then one turns to Trottier's historical note and the history seems suspiciously whitewashed and paternalistic. If one compares Trottier's notes with the relevant pages of, say, *The Illustrated History of Canada* (ed. Craig Brown, Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1987), one concludes that Trottier romanticizes Riel and the Métis dangerously. For example, Trottier depicts Riel as simply "an educated man" who "wrote letters and petitions" and led the Métis when they "rose up in resistance." Trottier does not mention that Riel and his followers resorted to violence, using what *The Illustrated History* terms "armed blackmail" in Manitoba in 1869-70 and Saskatchewan in 1885.

The revisionist historical note aside, *Storm at Batoche* is a useful tool for discussing racial tensions in general or the Riel Rebellion in particular. The fictional story is enhanced by John Mantha's handsome, dynamic, bright illustrations. The pictures are at their best in action shots such as James's fall from the wagon and his wild horseback ride with Louis, but the growing friendship between man and boy is also portrayed skilfully, and the Batoche street scene is historically informative and visually fun. My only complaints are that, according to *The Illustrated History of Canada*, Riel was "never a horseman," and that, in the final illustration, Riel's head hides the Métis flag.

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Because It Was There — and Not There: Labrador Adventures and Correlatives for Modern Living

The Lure of the Labrador Wild. Dillon Wallace. Breakwater, 1983. Reprint of 1905 ed. published by F. Revell, New York. 267 pp. paper. ISBN 0-919948-38-3. *The Labrador Fiasco.* Margaret Atwood. O.W. Toad, Bloomsbury Quid, 1996. 41 pp. paper. ISBN 0-7475-2889-6. Sold as a two-book set.

Following a trend of scientific and travel expeditions reflecting an interest in Labrador which had begun in the first half of the nineteenth century, in 1903 Leonidas Hubbard, a 29-year-old magazine editor from New York, determined to retrace a 1838-39 journey of a Hudson's Bay agent, John McLean, through the wilds of Labrador. Hubbard recruited two confederates for the daunting trek, Dillon Wallace, a lawyer by profession and the author of the book under review, and George Elson, "a half breed Cree Indian from down on James Bay." Hubbard's ostensible objective was to travel to the eastern and northern part of the Labrador peninsula to Fort Chimo, Ungava, and to study the habits of the Indians, who were reported to be "the most primitive on the North American continent" (7).

Wallace's account, however, reveals that additional motives inspired this idealistic adventurer. Caught up in the romantic notion of travelling to regions where no white man had preceded him, Hubbard was lured to the vast and barren regions of Labrador precisely for his own reputation. That McLean's incomplete record of his trip indicated to Hubbard that his experience was less of exciting venture into the virgin wilderness than a harrowing struggle against hardship and starvation only served to sharpen the ambitions of Hubbard, who in the spirit of Scott, Amundsen and the early Mount Everest climbers such as the tragic George Mallory, resolved to pursue his improbable quest against all odds. For Hubbard, Labrador was the unexplored crucible where his "manliness" would be put to the test.

And so it was that Hubbard, Wallace and Elson reached Labrador by steamer in early July of 1903, where, as Wallace would later reflect, "we were destined to encounter a series of misadventures that should call for the exercise of all our fortitude and manhood" (17). The preparations for the trip precipitated the misadventures to no small degree. Although Hubbard was meticulous in considering preparatory details, the trio set out with insufficient provisions and necessities,