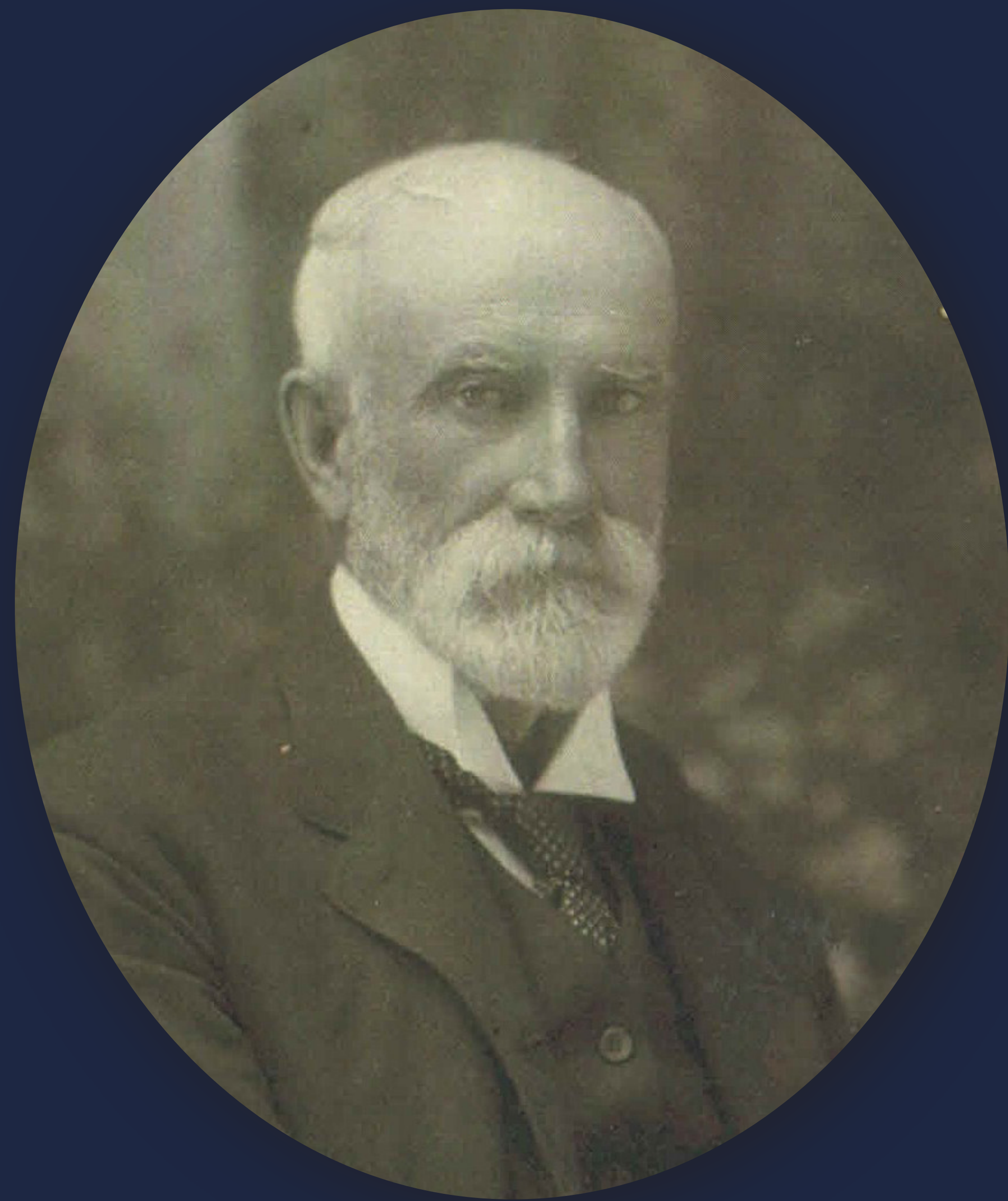


# COCKBURN SQUARE



**Alexander Peter Cockburn**  
1837-1905

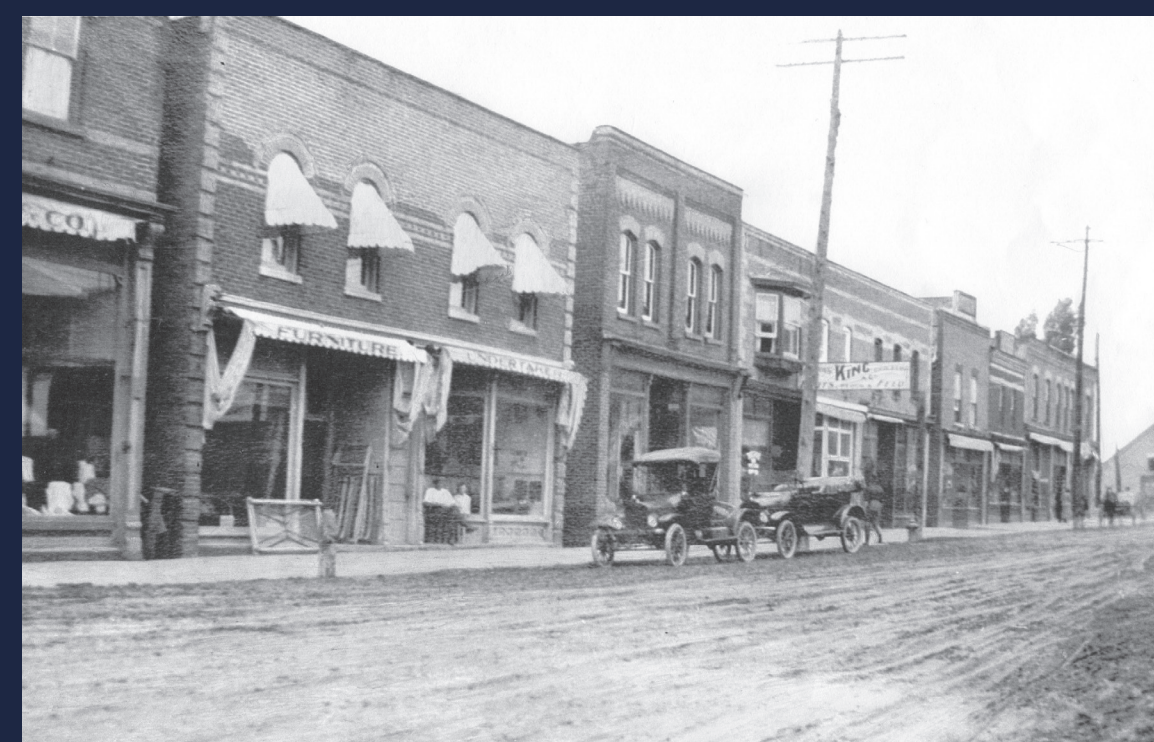
This square is named in honour of A.P. Cockburn: businessman, politician, author and tireless champion of Gravenhurst and the entire Muskoka region. Cockburn served as Muskoka's first MPP and MP and actively supported settlement, agriculture, railways, lumbering and the tourist trade. In 1866 he launched the steamer *Wenonah* here on Muskoka Bay. His fleet expanded to eight ships by 1903 and gave rise to the Muskoka Lakes Navigation & Hotel Company, which served the lakes for 92 years. Still sailing today, the RMS *Segwun* and her newer sister ship the *Wenonah II* continue Cockburn's steamship legacy.



A.P. Cockburn's first steamboat was the *Wenonah*, an all-purpose sidewheeler which carried freight, passengers and mail, and towed logs on the Muskoka Lakes for twenty years. Connecting with stagecoaches from Washago, she turned Gravenhurst into a major shipping centre.



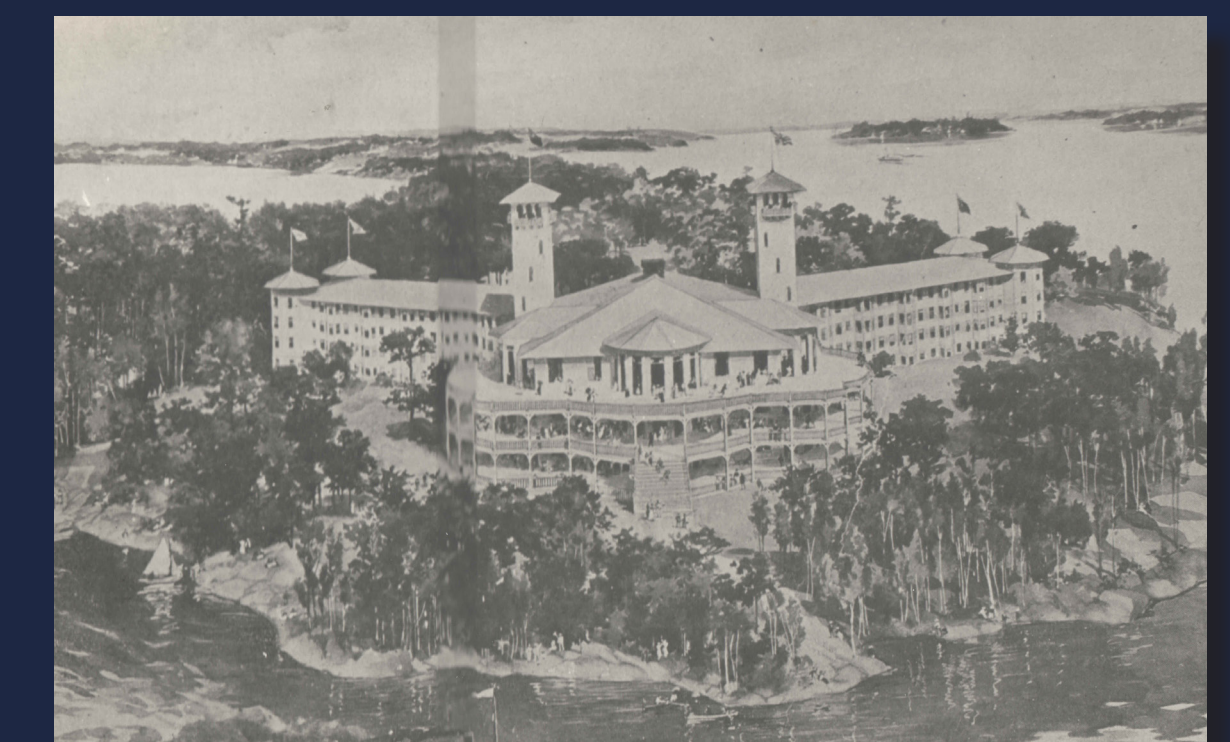
Cockburn strove vigorously to bring a railway to Gravenhurst. His efforts met with success in 1875 when the Northern Railway (later part of the Canadian National system) reached Gravenhurst and the Muskoka Wharf. This led to a boom in lumbering and tourism.



Gravenhurst grew as one of Muskoka's earliest settlements, drawing people north to experience the rugged beauty of the area. Cockburn, an active promoter of settlement, opened the first store in Gravenhurst in 1866. Gravenhurst's Main Street, the original Muskoka Colonization Road, was not paved in these early days of the automobile revolution.



After the railway arrived in 1875, Gravenhurst became one of the busiest lumber towns in Canada. Called "Sawdust City", by 1887 it had a total of seventeen saw and shingle mills, employing hundreds of men and exporting millions of board feet of lumber each year.



Cockburn capitalized on Muskoka's potential as a tourist and sporting paradise before wilderness vacations became fashionable. His fleet of steamers supported the development of hotels including some of the first luxury resorts in Canada. In 1902 his company built the Royal Muskoka Hotel on Lake Rosseau (pictured above).



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# THE STEAMBOAT ERA

Scores of steam vessels have plied the Muskoka Lakes since 1866 starting with A.P. Cockburn's *Wenonah*. Other vessels included tugs, yachts, supply boats and twelve splendid passenger ships. Of these, only the RMS *Segwun* and a few small steamers survive.



Port Carling is the hub between Lakes Muskoka, Rosseau and Joseph and was a hive of activity for steamboats. Pictured here (L to R) are the steamers *Cherokee*, *Ahmic* & *Sagamo* at Port Carling locks in 1946.



The "Gateway to Muskoka": The original wharf (located on the west side of the bay at Wharf Road) connected steam trains and steamships with passengers and freight. Here the *Medora* and RMS *Segwun* are being loaded at the Muskoka Wharf in 1925.



Many of the steamers have given their names to streets in Gravenhurst: *Segwun*, *Islander*, *Oriole*, *Cherokee*.



Muskoka's steamship heritage predated Confederation. The first boat sailed in 1866. The RMS *Segwun* still sails today.



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