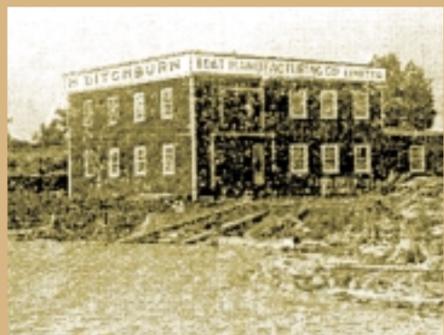


Chapter Two  
On the Muskoka Wharf



This was a most advantageous business location, since private cottages were springing up all over the lakes, and every cottage needed at least three boats. Canoes, sailing dinghies, and rowing skiffs were basic, but now motorboats were to make their initial appearance.



Gravenhurst's first boat-building plant was erected immediately adjacent to the Muskoka Wharf, right where the new railway line delivered passengers to the waiting steamships that now plied the three lakes. Trains proceeded the length of the wharf so that luggage could be transferred directly to the steamers. This was a most advantageous business location, since private cottages were springing up all over the lakes, and every cottage needed at least three boats. Canoes, sailing dinghies, and rowing skiffs were basic, but now motorboats were to make their initial appearance.

Private steam launches of various sizes, several of which are still in existence and owned by members of the Toronto chapter of the Antique and Classic Boat Society, had been

serving wealthy cottagers for some years. Personal steam yachts had existed in both Britain and United States for many years, and commercially two steamboat ocean crossings had been completed by 1838. In Canada their use had been mainly as commercial transports on rivers and lakes, yet by the late 1800s several private steam yachts were plying Muskoka waters, joining the working fleet of A. P. Cockburn.

In 1890, Senator William Sanford of Hamilton commissioned construction of the 68-foot *Naiad* by Polson Iron Works of Toronto. With her elegant, black-painted hull and her interior trim of bird's-eye maple, mahogany and teak, she provided ostentatious transportation for almost fifty years. Two later

steam yachts—the 1903 *Rambler*, at 73 feet (now diesel-powered), and the 1915 *Wanda III*, at 90 feet, still survive, as do the much smaller *Constance* and *Nipissing*. Steam-powered yachts were sophisticated, silent, and reliable, but they were also expensive, required much of their interior space for machinery and fuel, needed at least an hour to build up a head of steam, and worst of all, required a licensed engineer to operate them. The stage was set for the entry of the internal combustion engine, which, despite a poor beginning, was about to revolutionize the Ditchburn business.

In 1904, Herbert Ditchburn, second son of William, the Rosseau postmaster, bought into his Uncle Henry's business while he was still in his early twenties. Under his dynamic leadership, Ditchburn Boats grew by leaps and bounds, declaring a 17 percent profit in one year. Gains were plowed back into the business to finance

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No. 1. Painted Quality Basswood Board



No. 2. Varnished Quality Basswood Board



No. 3. Varnished Cedar Strip

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the expansion needed to meet demand. The H. Ditchburn Boat Manufacturing Co. Ltd. was incorporated in June 1907, with a board of directors consisting of Herbert Ditchburn as president and Alfred Ditchburn and Thomas Greavette as directors.

Tom Greavette was born in Worthing, Sussex, England, in 1881 and came to Canada as a twelve-year-old, following the death of his father. Starting as a labourer at the Ditchburn plant at the turn of the century, he was to become a key figure in the company and a lifelong friend. Alfred Ditchburn, Herb's older brother and first son of William, was confined to office work due to poor eyesight,

but he was a skilled administrator, active in the community, and also served four terms as mayor of Gravenhurst.

It would be difficult to overestimate the economic impact of the boat-building plant on the small town. Recruited locally and trained to be boat builders, the work force was increasing every year, while at the same time the lumber industry was falling into decline. Thousands of badly needed dollars were paid to young trainees, many of whom were able to establish their own building operations in later years. Herb's practical skills in engineering, wood-working, and metalwork were constantly needed in these early manufacturing days,

and even more so in the years to come, as technical advance and the rapid development of reliable gasoline engines produced major changes to pleasure boating.

The liveries at various resorts were operating to capacity, with hotel guests reserving their fishing boat as they made vacation arrangements. When a disastrous fire destroyed the Summit House in 1915, the rental fleet based there was sold to Herb and distributed to other livery stations. Herb's uncle John had now retired from boat building, and all production was now centred at the Ditchburn factory in Gravenhurst, a facility that had become the largest employer in the industry.




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