

Hon. John Black Aird was great friend of Muskoka

May 10 1994

When it was learned at the beginning of the week that the Honorable John Black Aird, former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, had passed away in hospital on Saturday, May 6, many felt that they had lost a friend. This was especially so in Muskoka, where Mr. Aird and his family had been Muskoka Lakes summer residents for all of his life. It was also true that Muskoka itself had lost a friend, one who was greatly attached to the Muskoka lakelands and sought the best interests of our District.

Mr. Aird, C.C., O. Ont., Q.C., LL.D., D.Litt. S., passed away peacefully and surrounded by his family at Sunnybrook Health Science Centre, Toronto. He had been 72 years of age the previous day.

He was the much loved husband of Lucille Jane (Housser) Aird and loving father of Lea and her husband Bill Menear, Jane and her husband Tom Blackmore, Hugh and his wife Virginia, Katie and her husband Dana Porter; loving grandfather and friend to Kate, Robyn, Ian, Heather; Tommy, Jennifer; Elizabeth, John, Ginny; Ayrlea and Charlie. He was the loving brother of Elizabeth Aird Kieser.

The funeral service takes place at 2:00 p.m. today, Wednesday, May 10, at St. James' Anglican Cathedral, Toronto.

Born in Toronto on May 5, 1923, Mr. Aird was the devoted son of the late Hugh R. and May (Black) Aird.

In 1944 he married Lucille Jane Housser, member of a family whose name is also known in the Muskoka summer colony. She is the daughter of the late Harry Housser and Lucille Graham (Fisher) Housser.

Mr. Aird was educated at Upper Canada college, received his B.A. degree at Trinity College and his law degree from Osgoode Hall. His wartime service with the Royal Canadian Navy (lieutenant 1942-45) resulted in a back injury which made regular physical exercise including walking a regime for him. Corollary to his war service was his honorary presidency of the Naval Officers' Association of Canada.

His business base in Toronto was the respected legal firm of Aird and Berlis, of which he was a senior partner. Reed Stenhouse Companies Limited, under his chairmanship grew to be one of the world's largest insurance brokerage firms. Algoma Central Railway, of which he was chairman, in fewer than 20 years was built into one of the largest and most modern of the Great Lakes shipping fleets, in addition to operating a regional railway. He held directorships in several corporations, such as Bank of Nova Scotia, AMAX Inc., Canada Tungsten Mining Corporation, Consolidated-Bathurst, Douglas Inc., Economic Investment Trust, Famous Players Limited, Molson Companies Limited, National Life Assurance Company, Rolland Inc.

Mr. Aird was appointed a Queen's Counsel in 1960. He received an honorary degree in 1974 from Wilfrid Laurier University and became its Chancellor in 1977 until 1985. Subsequently, from 1986 to 1991, Mr. Aird was Chancellor of the University of Toronto.

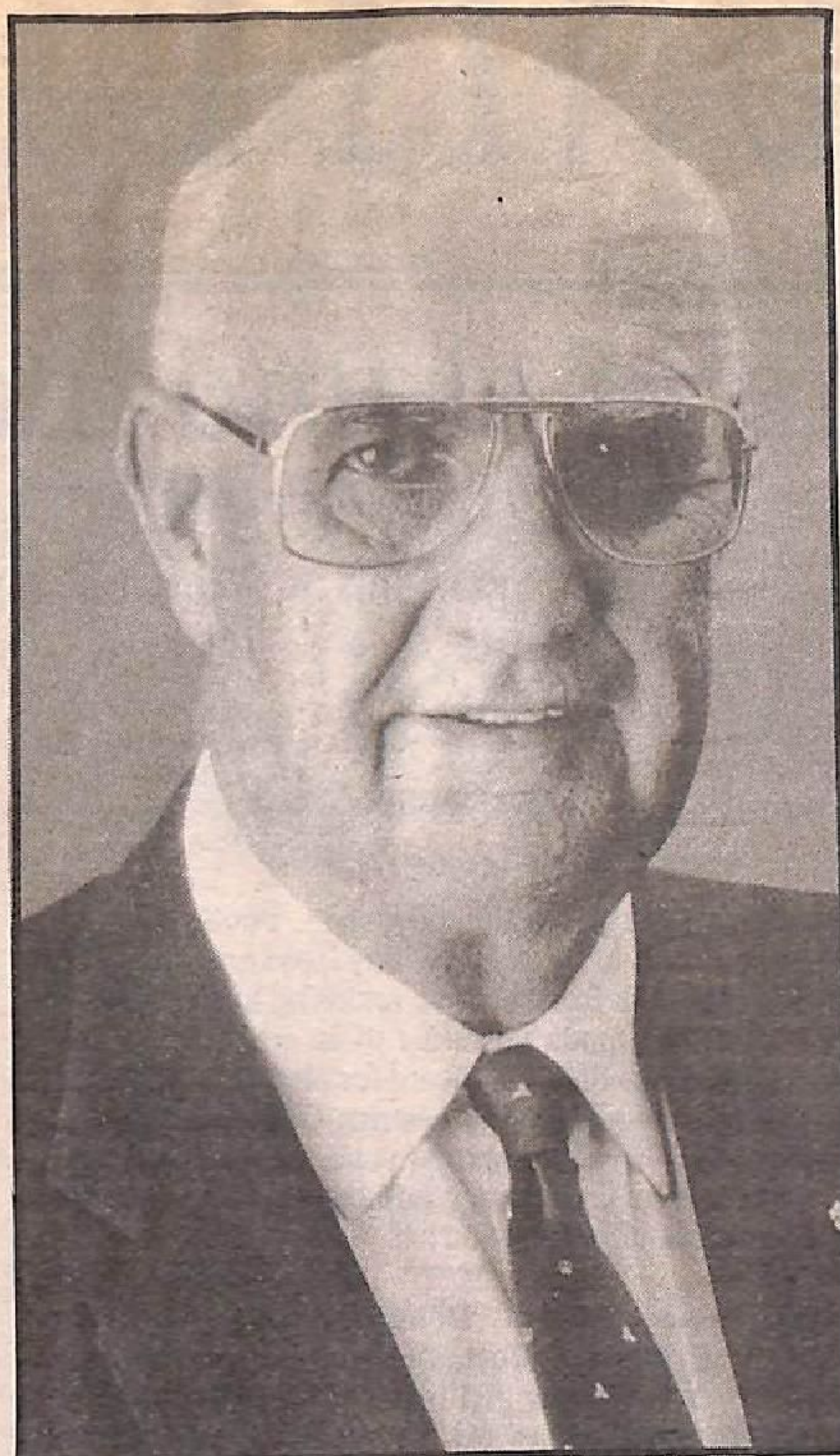
He had an honorary degree from the Royal Military College of Canada. In 1976 he was appointed an officer of the Order of Canada. In 1977 he was named "Great Lakes Man of the Year," for distinguished service to the shipping industry. He was a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem. Recently Mr. Aird was raised to the rank of Companion of the Order of Canada.

In 1964 Mr. Aird was appointed to the Senate of Canada, where he served for 10 years, resigning in November, 1974, to become chairman of the Institute for Research on Public Policy. At one time, he was treasurer for the Liberal party of Canada. In 1971 he was named chairman of the Canadian section of the Canada-United States Permanent Joint Board on Defence, and led that vital group until late in 1979.

In wartime service, in representing the Canadian government in various national missions, in business, and for personal enjoyment, Mr. Aird had travelled widely and was familiar with many parts of the world. It was said of him, however, that his heart had always been in Ontario, particularly at his Lake Rosseau cottage, the home of the closely-knit Aird family through the summers.

One of Mr. Aird's great interests in Muskoka was in collecting wooden power boats hand-crafted in former years by Muskoka boat builders. These he navigated himself, greatly enjoying exploring the channels of the Muskoka Lakes waterways. He also collected art and was a skilled photographer.

Mr. Aird's appointment in 1980 as the 23rd Lieutenant governor of Ontario was received in Muskoka with special pleasure. It was said of Mr. Aird as Lieutenant Governor



The Honorable John Black Aird

in working with disabled children. He learned sign language during his term and took groups of blind children from the CNIB location near Foot's Bay on cruises on the lakes.

The Aird summer home on Lake Rosseau was known as Temple Trees. There during his governorship, Mr. and Mrs. Aird had the honor of entertaining Her Royal Highness the Princess Margaret and her daughter for several days one summer.

The property was sold by the Airds and two years ago they made a cottage at Sherwood Inn their summer retreat. After retiring as Lieutenant Governor in 1985 the Aird's continued their keen interest in Muskoka. Mr. Aird was particularly supportive of South Muskoka Memorial Hospital, where one summer he had been briefly a patient. He agreed in 1991 to become patron of the South Muskoka Hospital Foundation.

Gilbert Scott yesterday said of Mr. Aird that his assistance to the Foundation had been of great help, knowing as he did possible sources of financial support by corporations and individuals. "His guidance and assistance were available to the Foundation as a most friendly act, always appreciated by those concerned," he said.

In one recent summer Mr. Aird contributed a special article to The Muskoka Sun expressing his appreciation of the lakes and his thought that those who loved Muskoka should always be able to enjoy the peacefulness of this beautiful part of Ontario.

Much more could be written about John Black Aird as a friend of Muskoka and of many people of Muskoka. Perhaps others would also like to express their thoughts about our departed citizen and friend. Suffice it to say that the name of John Aird will long be remembered in Muskoka, as in Ontario and Canada, for great services to the country and its people.