

THE HISTORY OF COBOURG HARBOUR

ALEXANDER CUTHBERT

Alexander Cuthbert started his working life as a shoemaker at Frenchman's Bay, just east of Toronto, but soon became a schooner captain, shipbuilder, professional sailor and yacht designer. He was not a scientific naval architect but was better than a rule of thumb designer and had a "good eye for the maudlin in a boat".

Not surprisingly, he was also an avid racer and raced many of the boats that he built.

It was after a move to Cobourg that Cuthbert designed and built his first yacht of importance, the *Dauntless*. He later designed, built and sailed the *Annie Cuthbert* which, in 1873, was considered to be the fastest yacht on the Great Lakes. Not completely satisfied, he then built the *Countess of Dufferin* on Cobourg's east pier, considering it to be an improvement on the *Annie Cuthbert*.

On behalf of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club the *Countess* was entered in the 1876 version of the prestigious America's Cup Challenge. On April 3 of that year, the Cleveland Herald included this note:

Cuthbert's new yacht, which he is now building at Coburg, is to be named "Countess of Dufferin" in honor of the Governor General's wife. We are sorry that he has given the yacht that name, for it necessitates the beating of a lady, a thing a Yankee seldom does.

While she sailed off with high hopes, the *Countess* was no match for the American schooner, *Madeleine*.



"The Madeleine's" Victory Over the "Countess of Dufferin", Third America's Cup Challenger, August 11, 1876
By Edwin Moran, 1876

In 1881, Captain Cuthbert made a second disheartening effort to capture the America's Cup with the *Atalanta* (also referenced as *Atlanta* in some sources) designed and built by him in Belleville. This challenge failed in part due to a distinct lack of Canadian support, poor crew and lack of adequate sails.

The designer, builder and skipper of two America's Cup Challengers and many other yachts, Captain Cuthbert still lives in lake lore for his famous *Cuthbert Gybe*. He was adept at stopping a vessel in her tracks. Running in before the wind without a word of warning to crew, he would roll the wheel hard up and swing the mainsail 'all standing' with a bang enough to twist the stern of the yacht, cheating the wind of a chance to fill the gybed mainsail.



From the book "American Yachts, Their Clubs and Races" by J. D. Jerrold Kelley
Painting by Frederick S. Cozzens, 1881