

Port Cockburn

(Continued from front)

A wealthy lawyer, he left New York State and settled a short time in Brampton before he got the Muskoka fever and wanted to do something completely different with his life.

In 1872 he decided to open a hotel. Not any hotel, mind you, but one posh enough for State governors (the hotel catered mainly to guests from the United States). People were expected to show up at mealtime in evening dress. Ladies wore shoulder bouquets.

Port Cockburn today is nothing more than a strip of sand and a hump of rock with a few cottages dotted about (one of them is called Summit House and it sits where the old hotel used to). There is no evidence of the hubbub wreaked on this quiet shore when steamboats met stage coaches bound for Parry Sound in the late 1800s.

Brendan's father, Donel, was on his way back from a sailing trip on Georgian Bay on that very stage one summer when he met up with the Frasers and became friends with their son, Alexander (or Alec, as Brendan calls him).

Later he leased land

of Port Cockburn. It's called Kinkora, after the ancestral home of Brian Brou, the founder of the O'Brien clan, and the one who is said to have driven the Vikings out of Ireland.

Brendan kept the name for his own cottage, on Burnt Island, just a hop, skip and a jump away from Port Cockburn. The original one is still clearly visible on the hill above the sandy beach at Port Cockburn.

He remembers the immense lobby and a stuffed loon in a display case.

Mrs. O'Brien's insistence that the family cow come to Muskoka was a bit like taking coals to Newcastle: the Frasers ran a huge dairy business. The barn, in fact, was situated behind Kinkora. "I can remember going to sleep to the tinkle of cow bells," Brendan says.

He remembers, as well, standing in the Summit House lobby when he was five years old in 1914. "It seemed immense to me," he says. It was the stuffed loon in a big glass case that captured most of his attention, however. The

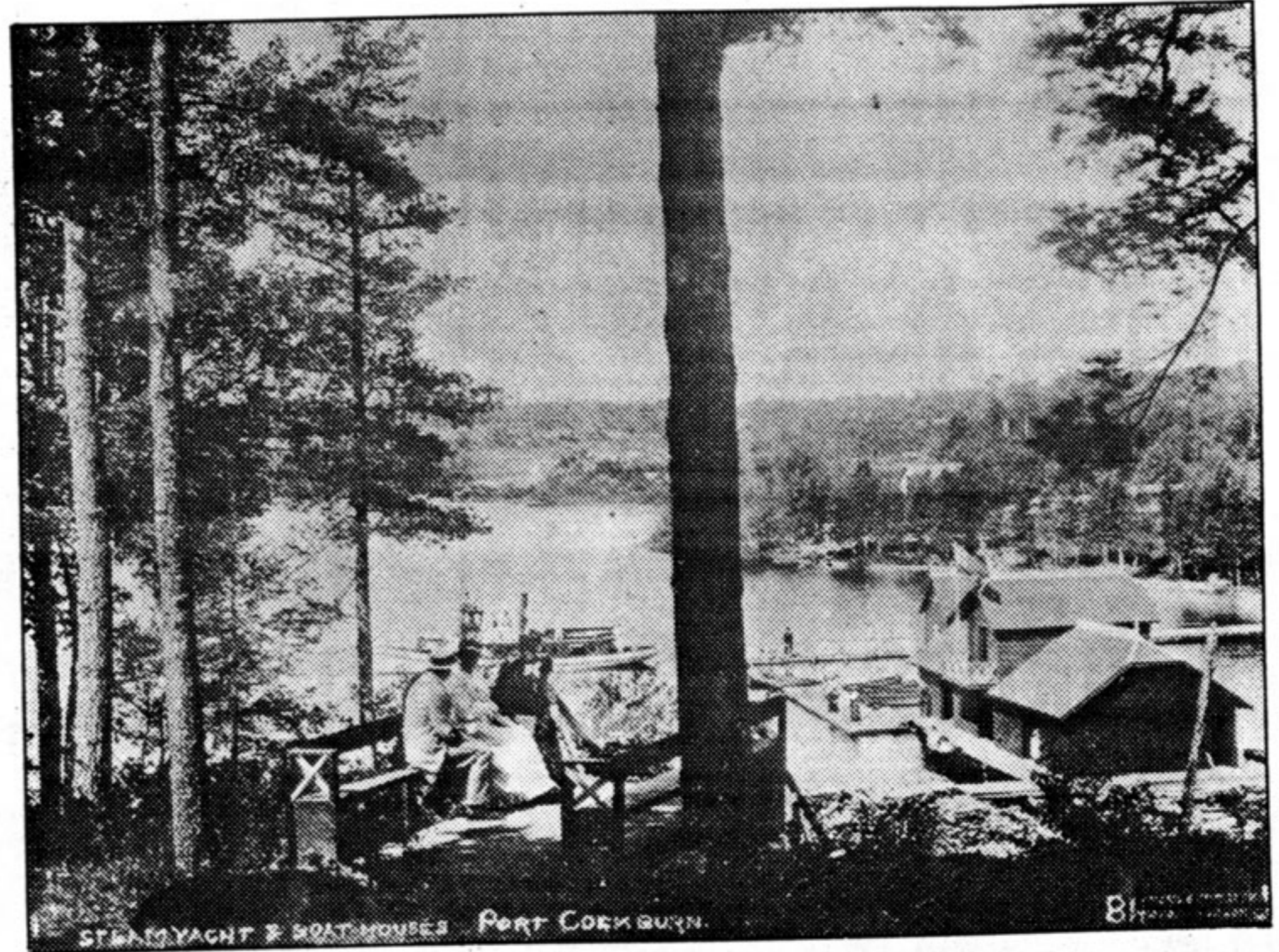
steam launch, the Onaganoh. "That, for some reason, made an impression on me," Brendan says.

The following year the building burned. It was late October. Alec Fraser woke up to the sound of gunfire at 3 a.m. The kitchen was so fiery, the ranges themselves had turned bright red.

The flames had reached the gunroom where ammunition was stored. They say the coals of the ruins kept burning for days afterwards.

When the O'Briens returned the next summer they found nothing but the chimneys standing in the midst of rubble, "and thousands and thousands of nails," Brendan says. "It had a very dedicated group of guests," he adds. So dedicated, they continued to come to the property years afterwards. One group refurbished the bowling alley and stayed there. Another fitted the golf course pagoda with canvas walls and a third group, the Parkers, converted the nearby church to a cottage.

When Summit House burned the O'Briens lost their water line, their telephone link to the hotel (a comfort to Brendan's mother when his



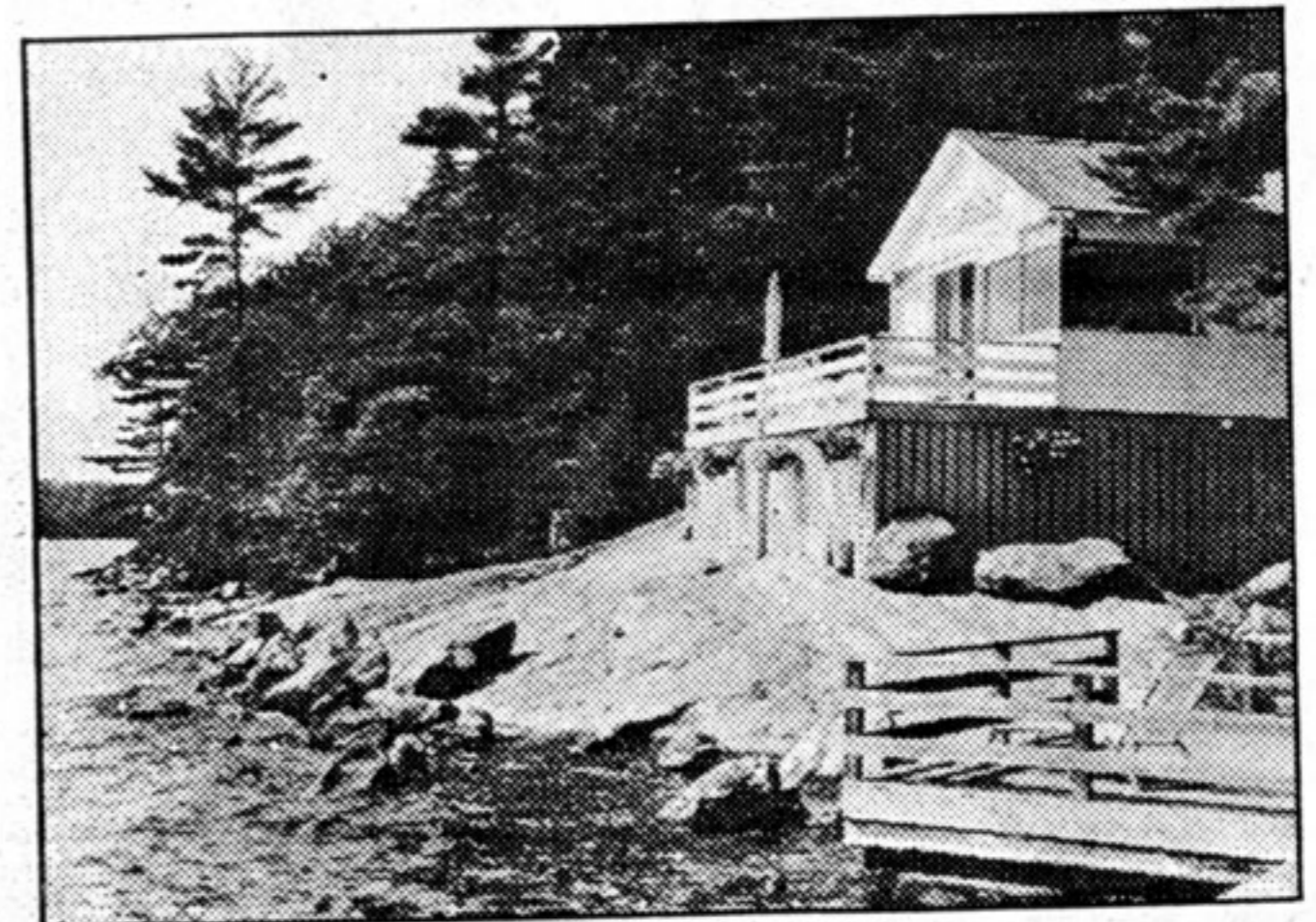
PORT COCKBURN. Taken from Summit House, this photograph of Port Cockburn shows the Ditchburn boat rental livery and the Fraser's steamboat Onaganoh coming into the wharf. Behind the wharf is a beautiful sandy beach, which is still there today.

Jersey's milk cool.

In time it was clear the O'Briens would have to give up the house.

Today Brendan and his wife Beverley have a new Kinkora, on an island he saw every day from his Port Cockburn vantage point. He's collecting information to write the history of Port Cockburn and the people who came so far to build so much.

The grass is the only commodity that's still in good supply, it seems. And very green. Pity



KINKORA TODAY. When Brendan O'Brien built his cottage on Burnt Island, he named his Kinkora after the family's original