

The Government nevertheless decided to open the Muskoka area for settlement and ordered the construction of the Muskoka Road. It was begun at Washago in 1858, and in 1860 had reached ~~in~~^{the} site of the present town of Gravenhurst, which a surveyor found to be devoid of even one settler in that year.

Early in 1861, two persons and one tavern were reported on the site. James McCabe and his wife were the proprietors of the log structure. McCabe also built a wharf on Muskoka Bay, which gave the locale its first name, "McCabe's Landing." By 1862 the settlement was big enough to require a post office. W.D. LeSueur, Secretary of the Post Office Department, decided to rename the place "Gravenhurst," inspired, it is believed, by a fictitious locality in a Washington Irving novel, "Bracebridge Hall."²

In 1866 a very significant event in the town's history took place. On Muskoka Lake, A.P. Cockburn launched the steamboat "Wenonah" (or "first-born daughter"). Plying between Gravenhurst and Alport, Bracebridge, Port Carling and "intermediate places," this sidewheeler (and subsequent ships of Cockburn's Muskoka Lakes Navigation Company) greatly reduced freight rates and the agonies of bone-jarring land journeys over the rocky roads of the Muskoka district for early settlers. Furthermore, Cockburn's fleet established

2 Not surprisingly, LeSueur also renamed the community 11 miles away formerly known as "North Falls."