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Schooner Days CCCLXIX (369)
By C.H.J. Snider

CUP YACHT? FISHERMAN? LAKE SCHOONER?

THESE schooners which have been dragging out a fortnight's racing at Boston and Gloucester, the *Bluenose* and the *Gertrude Thebaud*, are vastly different from the fleet of a thousand sail which once gladdened the five Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes schooners varied in size from thirty-foot wood carriers like the *Zebra* (once *Merrimac*) crowded with five cords, to five masted "barques" like the *David Dows* with a carrying capacity close on to 2,000 tons of dead weight. The "average" schooner was the "old canaller," built to get through the locks of the Welland Canal from the Upper Lakes, and down to the sea, either by running the rapids of the St Lawrence or squeezing through canals. Even smaller vessels than these went to salt water and across the ocean from the lakes to Europe, Africa and the Indi [a eur] freshwater craft were no sissies but bigger ones had to stay at home, because they could not get through the bottle necks of inland navigation made by nature and maintained by Montreal.

APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS	LAKE FISHERMAN	CUP YACHT	SCHOONER
Overall length	140 ft.	135 ft.	140 ft.
Waterline length	112 ft.	87 ft.	130 ft.
Beam.	26 ft.	21 ft. 6 in.	26 ft.
Draught	15 ft.	15 ft.	11 ft.
Displacement on above draught	285 tons	164 tons	800 tons
Sail area.	10,000 st	7,550 st.	15,000 st.
Maximum speed possible.	14 knots	13 knots	13 knots
Average speed.	7 knots	8 knot	6 knots

The "old canaller," named and dimensioned by the locks of the Welland Canal, was around 140 feet long, 26 feet beam, and 12 feet depth of hold; and she sailed well on 9 feet draught, because she had a centreboard. They all had centreboards. They could load to 11 feet or even deeper, and still sail well on the lakes; but 9 feet was the limit for the St. Lawrence canals, and it left them good freeboard for salt water.

The dimensions quoted are round figures and approximate. No two vessels ever came out alike, owing to the free and easy methods of the wooden shipyards on the lake. The beam was usually under 26 feet, to avoid jamming in the canal gates, and the hold was often shallower than twelve. Vessels intended for the lumber trade were shoaler and wider than those meant for grain and coal. Lumber was a good deck load, and the more of it carried there the cheaper the handling charge, so the lumber hookers were made beamy.

These fishing schooners are about the same length as the “old canaller,” but the resemblance ends there. *Bluenose* is 141 feet long on top, *Thebaud* some 134 ft. 6 in. Parenthetically could you get a better name than *Bluenose* for a Nova Scotian fisherman, or a poorer than *Thebaud* for a Gloucesterman?

The name *Thebaud* is an honored one, of Huguenot ancestry, enriched with centuries of New England tradition but still the American tongue boggles at pronouncing it, and it comes out as Tebo, Taybo, Theebaud, or anything you like in speech. In despatches it is rendered sometimes Thebaud and sometimes “the band.” So, with the greatest respect for that charming lady, Mrs Thebaud, for whom the vessel was named, and for Mr. Thebaud, the good sport who put up most of the money that had her built, we must voice the wish that a handier hailing name had been pinned on the schooner when she was launched.

The *Bluenose* is almost 27 feet beam, three feet wider than the *Thebaud*, and she is twelve feet deep in the hold, like the “old canaller.” But she is so much sharper, both in the ends and in the bottom, that she could not carry half the “old canaller’s” load, which ran as high as 25,000 bushels of grain or 750 tons of coal. Yet *Bluenose* draws 15 feet of water, for she has no centreboard, and a deep keel, and carries 100 tons of ballast. The “old canaller” had no ballast at all, and was practically flat bottomed.

The fisherman was built to get to the banks fast, be handy as a ratchet-wrench in dodging around on the banks, setting trawls and picking up dories, and get home quickly with a perishable catch. She was never intended as a big carrier; her load of fish was a perishable commodity that had to be hurried to market or the curers or fish-makers in comparatively small quantities. Freighting the finished product was another matter.

Bluenose herself and many another fisherman used to make trips to the West Indies and the Mediterranean with smoked and salted fish, in the winters, when banks fishing was over. But this was just to find occupation for her, she was not expected to earn her living as a freighter. Coasters costing only half as much to build served just as well for the fish carrying trade.

Bluenose was built in 1920, in a high-price era.. She was soundly constructed of native Nova Scotian woods, mostly soft. There is a lot of birch and spruce and pine and tamarac or hackmatack in her, and very little of the fine white oak which was characteristic of the “old canaller.”

Nova Scotian softwood is good in salt water, but it has not the strength of white oak, nor its life. After ten years a fisherman was expected to become a coaster, which could be nursed, and after twenty years she was lucky to be alive at all. Many of our “old canallers” lived thirty years and were then still in good shape. Some of them lasted sixty. They cost \$1 to \$1.25 a bushel or \$30 to \$35 a ton, builders’ price, that is, a 25,000-bushel or 750-ton capacity schooner might cost \$25,000, new and complete.

But that would be an outside figure, allowing generous profits for the builder. Muir Brothers built such schooners for themselves in their own shipyard at Port Dalhousie for around

\$16,000.

There is no shipyard on the lakes today capable of building one of the “old canallers.” They could not get the men nor the white oak, nor the buyer. There is no demand for their product if they could, but to reproduce an “old canaller” now would cost at least \$50,000 to \$75,000.

Bluenose cost \$35,000 complete seventeen years ago. About \$20,000 today. She was designed by one of the great naval architects of our time, Roué, of Halifax, yacht designer of international reputation. She was his first commercial venture, not one dollar of her cost could be charged up to the influence of yacht design, she was built on a standard fisherman construction, of standard materials, by standard workmen.

The *Thebaud* cost \$80,000 eight years ago, and it is difficult to believe that part of this cost was not due to the influence of racing design. She is a smaller vessel than *Bluenose*, but cost more to build because strength was secured, as it is in yachts, by using costlier methods of fastening and stronger, costlier materials.

She was a sporting venture, by New England yachtsmen in combination with Gloucester fishing interests, just as *Bluenose* was a sporting venture by Lunenburg fishing interests in combination with Nova Scotian and Ontario yachtsmen. It is not generally known that Aemilius Jarvis, Herrick Duggan and Sir Joseph Flavelle all had shares in the *Bluenose*, but she was built for fishing, in fisherman fashion, and costs were kept down to the possibilities of the salt banking industry. Cod fishing cannot pay reasonable dividends on an investment of \$80,000 in one schooner. *Bluenose* has not been making much money fishing, but she has paid her way. Her profits in her lifetime have come from racing prize money and the high prices that prevailed in her first two years.

In speed these fishermen are faster than the “old canallers.” It is doubtful if either *Bluenose* or *Thebaud* can prove a better speed than fourteen knots over a measured course. Race records do not show it.

They are much handier than the “old canallers,” which were long, slab-sided and flat-bottomed. Undoubtedly both *Bluenose* and *Thebaud* would sail rings around them on short courses, especially working to windward. The fishermen point higher and foot faster and get to their maximum speed quicker, when an “old canaller” would be pushing half the lake ahead of her at nine miles an hour the *Bluenose* would be slicing through it at ten. But when the “old canaller” began to drag the other half of the lake after her at fourteen knots, or sixteen statute miles per hour, neither the *Bluenose* nor the *Thebaud* nor a cup yacht would be doing any better. It was rarely that the lake vessels reached that speed, though they often claimed it.

The “old canallers” did make some wonderful passages; Kingston to Toronto, by the *Dauntless*, 160 miles in thirteen hours. Chicago to Collingwood, by the *Malta*, 500 miles in fifty hours. These are good averages, but fall short of the tallest fisherman’s claim, Boston to Halifax, 438 miles, in twenty-nine hours. The comparisons are endless and prove little, for the two types

have never raced together on even terms or on any other terms. "Average speed" is almost impossible to determine, but the fisherman is probably fifteen per cent faster than the old laker in moderate weather.

We have heard a good deal of comparison between the fishermen and the America Cup yacht. A good deal of it is wind and the rest hot air. It is true that fishermen consider just a breeze one that keeps cup yachts at their mooring. Thirty or forty years ago the cup yachts were frail baskets that could only be taken out of the cellophane in fine weather, but that was before *Bluenose* or *Thebaud* were hatched. Now cup yachts rate A-1 Lloyd's for seventeen years without renewals, which is higher than the best fishermen, and they cross the Atlantic either in tow or under sail in the worst of weather.

The homeward passage of *Endeavour*, entirely on her own resources after losing her consort in a gale, compares very favorably with either of the Atlantic passages *Bluenose* has made. Each vessel encountered very severe weather and took it nobly. *Bluenose* had to put back for extensive repairs; she was the older vessel of the two.

In maximum speed the America's Cup yacht cannot catch either the fisherman or the "old canaller," from the physical reason that they are too short; maximum speed under sail varies with the length, other factors being equal.

Except when running before the wind the cup yachts spread much less sail than the fishermen, and in general the fishermen have less muslin than the "old canallers" boasted. The latter prided themselves in "flying kites" – raffees, batwings, square-sails – square topsails too, sometimes they always had four jibs on their long horns, and often a fifth, with a flock of flying staysails between the masts. An "old canaller" might carry fourteen "standing sails," as they were called, with extras in the form of watersails and such. The fisherman sets only eight sails at most, and the cup yacht has only four set at any one time; usually three, but the cup yacht makes such good use of them that she can work to windward at the rate of ten miles made good per hour; the "old canaller" did well to make good four, and the fishermen rarely achieve better than seven.

With the wind on the beam or on the quarter the fishermen can run away from the cup yachts if it blows hard enough, for they have the great waterline length to do it; with the wind over the stern the cup yachts have the advantage, for they spread in their spinnakers fifty per cent more sail than the fishermen have in their whole rig. The eight pieces of the fishermen's outfit have an area of 10,000 square feet; they have no spinnakers at all; the spinnaker of the cup yacht *Yankee*, one of the largest, had an area of 17,000 square feet. That big kite was handled by a crew of twenty-two men all told – including the navigator. The fishermen go to the banks, under short rig, with a crew of twenty-two men. They race with thirty. When it comes to sail handling you must give the yacht sailor credit and you should, for most of them are or were fishermen!

Fantastic financing is the main reason why fishing schooner races are unlike anything else in the world.

Who pays whom and why?

Who pays the sailmakers and riggers who have worked on *Bluenose* and *Gertrud*. Who pays the hired hands who sail in them during the races? Who looks after shipyard bills and machine shop bills and chandlery and grocery bills?

At the start of things the word was noised abroad that the Port of Boston would subscribe \$50,000 toward promoting a deciding race.

Half of the \$50,000 was to be lavished on *Gertrude Thebaud's* refitting and reconditioning. \$10,000 was to be devoted to making *Bluenose* slick and sassy. \$5,000 was to be earmarked as prize money – \$3,000 for the winner and \$2,000 for the second-best queen.. Nothing was said about the \$10,000 residue of the fund, but it was generally understood that there would be no trouble about disposing of it for incidentals and sundries.

The fund resolved itself into an affair of public spirited citizens going out soliciting subscriptions, and the response to their solicitations was truly wonderful. One man generously donated a yacht for which he had no further use, and without mention of charge for his suggestion he advised the racing committee to stage a gigantic raffle of two thousand tickets at four bits a throw as a certain and quick means of disposing of the craft.

A group of artists secured permission to use a vacant store free of charge and put on an exhibition of their paintings which they also proposed to raffle off for the benefit of the fishing schooner race fund.

Various banks, chambers of commerce, better business bureaus, service clubs and utilities corporations actually sweetened the pot with hard cash, and a host of merchants, mechanics, tourist agencies and others said that the committee could rest assured that they would do more than their respective shares.

The Canadian Department of Fisheries took \$2,500 out of general funds and paid it over to the owners of *Bluenose* to get her ready for the prospective race. Capt. Walters says, “there is now to my credit a sum of \$3,000 donated by the Nova Scotian Government.” If this is in addition to the \$2,500 from the Dominion he is lucky, very lucky indeed, but he does not speak that way; some other Canadian Government department assigned the Canadian Ice Patrol boat *Arras* to escort duty for the Lunenburg.

In the meantime Captains Angus and Ben went into the business of refitting in a big way. *Gertrude Thebaud* blossomed out in new running gear and a complete new suit of sails. Naturally she had to be hauled out and scraped and painted and caulked here and there and titivated elsewhere.

Bluenose needed new gear and got some. She needed a new bowsprit and a new fore topmast, the first more than the last. She got a new horn at Boston and had a couple of bands put around her fore topmast. She was hauled out a couple of times, to keep even with *Gertrude* who developed a fond and deep affection for the ways at Rocky Neck,

Gertrude Thebaud's brand new suit of muslin cost \$3,500.

The prize money will not cover this bill alone. The committee say they have paid Capt. Pine \$5,700 and Capt. Walters \$4,000. Capt. Walters appears to be unable to find the cup or the prize money or the suit of clothes on which he paid a \$10 deposit. "I figure the racing committee owes me \$9,000," says he – who pays whom and why?

PASSING HAILS

ANOTHER BID FOR THE "MYSTERY BARQUE"

Dear Schooner Days, – I am greatly interested in the old black mystery Barquentine, the picture of which was taken at Parry Sound supposedly some 60 years ago. I may say it is indeed some old picture and may I inform the readers of Schooner Days it was taken in the middle sixties when Parry Sound had just nicely started as a lumber shipper.

I have considerable knowledge of the very early days of the Sound, real old pioneer stuff, when the outside world was known as "Down to the Severn," my father, the late Capt. Burritt, having first gone in to the Sound from Collingwood in May, 1858, with a cargo of oats for the Messrs. William Gibson, who had a small mill, established in 1856.

I may say the first winter my mother spent in the Sound was in the company of one other white woman, the late Mrs William Bowers, and one white man, who was left to look after the firewood, supplies, etc., while the rest of the small company of men were down in the bush trying to locate a road to the Muskoka River.

In the fall of 1863 the Messrs James and William Gibson sold out to the Messrs James and William Beatty, of Thorold, who, after operating several seasons, sold the larger portion of their holdings to the Rathbuns, of Deseronto. They in turn were succeeded by Dodge Bros., Anson, Dodge and W. Dodge, of New York, who, having opened up their operations at Byng Inlet in 1868, transported their Parry Sound holdings in 1872 to the Parry Sound Lumber Company.

The picture of the old Barquentine was taken during the Messrs Beatty's regime in the middle sixties, thus removing from the scene the *Mary Higgie*, which was not built until 1873. So as the curtain goes down on the identity of the old craft and you start a-guessin' anew, you might guess who that chap is on the lumber piles wearing the white shirt. I have given these details to back up my explanation of the picture.

My father was one of the pioneer sailormen on the Georgian Bay from 1855 on, particularly on the east and north shores, and for many years did a great deal of piloting, and as I look at the old Barquentine I say unto myself, I'll bet my dad piloted her into the Sound.
Yours sincerely,

ALF BURRITT.

Toronto.

The double topsails and other details of the rig of the vessel in question favor the Mary Higgle identification as correct, but if any old-timer can assist Burritt with a better suggestion, he is welcome to the space.

Compiler, schooner days.

(Caption) BLUE NOSE, champion fisherman, going to the line in one of the recent races.

(Caption) America's Cup challenger Endeavour sporting a perforated spinnaker of greater area than the total sail plan of Bluenose.

(Caption) Schooner Souis of Satherines, typical "old candler" of the 1870's.