

a well-aimed stab that generally hits the mark.

Those of a more academic leaning will undoubtedly appreciate the multiple detailed lists the author provides, including information on the various ships and voyages that Bullen served in throughout his career. Kennerley's detailed tracing of Bullen's movements back and forth across the world's oceans, makes it easy to see exactly why and how he came to be so genuinely sympathetic to the trials and tribulations of the common sailor. Moreover, in the absence of a biography of Bullen, Kennerley has opened up new avenues for research into the life and times of the man himself, particularly surrounding his youth that the author himself was unable to answer, nor which were the core concern of this biography. While only time will tell the true fruitfulness of such an inquiry, it would not at all be surprising for a future reader of this book to be inspired to seek to answer the lingering questions about the circumstances that forced a young Frank Bullen to sea, and what held him there until he found himself inextricably bound to it in one fashion or another for the rest of his life.

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John G. Langley, Q.C. *Canadian Confederate Cruiser: The Story of the Steamer Queen Victoria*. Halifax, N.S.: Nimbus Publishing Limited, www.nimbus.ca, 2018. 191 pp., illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. CDN \$17.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-77108-660-8.

The life, death, and lasting legacy of SS *Queen Victoria* is a tale well worth the telling, and John Langley, of Baddeck, Nova Scotia, tells it well. He shines a bright light on this hitherto little known, and sadly, unsung aspect of Canadian history.

The SS *Queen Victoria* and its twin sister ship, SS *Napoleon III*, were commissioned by Francois Baby, a Quebec City ship owner, and built by Robert Napier and Sons at Govan on the River Clyde. The two astutely named vessels joined the Baby fleet in 1856. Of advanced design and powered by both steam and sail, the two assumed such routine but essential duties as supplying lighthouses, delivering mail, tending navigational buoys, and providing tugging service. It was *Victoria*, however, that was plucked, Cinderella-like, from this mundane existence and given a task that placed her at the heart of the political processes resulting in Confederation.

The life of the SS *Queen Victoria* was not entirely humdrum, however, and Langley describes in considerable detail its occasional role in carrying such dignitaries as two successive governors general and their entourages and, in 1860, the young Prince of Wales, later to be King Edward VII, during his

visit to Canada. As the author notes, the ship had made a progress in four short years from utilitarian tug to royal yacht. This, albeit temporary, elevation in status, is not the reason why *Victoria* should be better known.

In 1864, the political leaders of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island decided to meet in Charlottetown late that summer to discuss with little enthusiasm the oft-recurring subject of a possible Maritime union. (Newfoundland had been invited, but cited lack of advance notice in declining.) They were joined by eleven senior representatives of the province of Canada East and Canada West, MacDonald, Cartier, Brown et al., who, although uninvited, were determined to raise the issue of possible Confederation with their Maritime counterparts. These Canadians set sail from Quebec City for Charlottetown on 29 August. The ship that was chosen to carry them there was the SS *Queen Victoria*.

John Langley does an excellent job of setting the stage for what eventually came to be called the Charlottetown Conference, referencing the social and political currents at play in the colonies there represented. With similar detail, he documents the discussions that unfolded, the many accompanying social events, and the role of *Victoria* therein.

The Canadian delegation arrived unheralded on 1 September as *Queen Victoria* anchored in Charlottetown harbour. After an underwhelming start – the Canadians were greeted by the P.E.I. provincial secretary who rowed out to greet them in a flat-bottomed boat reputedly laden with molasses and flour – a more fitting and formal welcome was accorded them. Introductory niceties once observed, the Canadians were invited to join the discussions and the agenda was expanded to include the weighty issue of possible Confederation, a development the Canadians were determined to promote with all their considerable powers of persuasion.

A much-anticipated circus was in town, and all hotels and inns were full with Island audiences. (Predictably, this coincidence gave rise to satirical comments, then, and later, about two circuses being in Charlottetown.) As a result, most of the Canadians kept their accommodations on board *Victoria*, now a floating hotel. Ashore, discussions proceeded apace, and after two days of promising talks the Canadians hosted a champagne luncheon aboard their ship late in the afternoon of 3 September. Langley admirably captures the substance and the mood of these discussions and quotes a letter from Canadian delegate George Brown to his wife conveying that sense of purpose and excitement: “the banns of matrimony between all the provinces of BNA having been formally proclaimed ... the union was thereupon formally completed and proclaimed.”

It was aboard SS *Queen Victoria* then, on 3 September 1864, that it was

determined and declared that the provinces there represented were “affianced,” a pivotal moment on the road to Confederation. Although not quoted by Langley, eminent historian Peter B. Waite wrote of this gathering that “(t)his luncheon on the *Queen Victoria* in Charlottetown was, in a significant sense, the beginning of Confederation.” Other historians have made similar assertions about the importance of this watershed event.

Langley documents in welcome detail the subsequent discussions leading to the Quebec Conference, the second of the major constitutional gatherings, and the role the *Victoria* played in transporting and housing those involved. Sadly, the ship of Confederation did not survive long enough to play a role in Confederation itself. Ownership of the Baby fleet, including *Queen Victoria*, had been transferred to the government of Canada for reasons related to the economics of the business. (The ship then became the CGS *Queen Victoria* and, along with the other vessels, formed the beginnings of the Canadian Coast Guard.) The government soon discovered that assuming the duties and responsibilities that had been carried out by the Baby fleet under contract was a costly undertaking, and in 1866 *Victoria* was chartered out to a commercial undertaking involving shipping Canadian goods to Cuba and returning with Cuban goods (notably cigars, rum and fruit) for the Canadian market. Unfortunately, that was not to be: on its run home, the ship was caught in a hurricane off the Carolina coast and, after two days of struggling to stay afloat, sank below the waves.

In nothing short of a miracle, however, an American brig, *Ponvert*, hove into view and rescued all but two of *Victoria*’s passengers and crew. Before the ship sank forever beneath the waves, its bell was presented in gratitude to the skipper of the rescuing vessel who eventually gave it to his home port of Prospect Harbor, Maine. Despite repeated attempts at repatriation over many years, it remains there to this day. Those attempts and subsequent developments resulting, among other things, in the commissioning of an exact replica of the ship’s bell by Prospect Harbor (now Gouldsboro) and its presentation to the city of Charlottetown make for fascinating reading and could, indeed, merit their own book.

SS *Queen Victoria* played an important role in the history of Canada, yet its very existence is virtually unknown. John Langley’s book should go a long way towards contributing to greater public and political awareness of the ship and her place in the story of our country. For that he is to be congratulated.

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