

Keith McLaren. *A Race for Real Sailors: The Bluenose and the International Fishermen's Cup, 1920-1938*. Madeira Park, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, www.douglas-macintyre.com, 2021. 256 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. CDN \$32.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-71672 267-7. (E-book available.)

Historically, fishing was considered the most dangerous and challenging way to make a living. The vocation came to the general public's attention largely thanks to two literary works, Herman Melville's 1851 novel *Moby Dick (or The Whale)* and Rudyard Kipling's 1897 book *Captains Contentious*. These adventure stories focused upon rugged seamen engaged in perilous but romanticized seaborne occupations. By contrast, yacht racing was an international, nineteenth century sport for wealthy gentlemen sailors typified by the America's Cup challenges. The contestants had to strictly abide by hull design, waterline dimension, and suits of sails rules. Ordinary folks could better relate to races for rugged yet beautiful working fishing schooners sailed by Canadian and American rivals. The International Fisherman's Cup became the blue-collar equivalent to other more celebrated seaborne sailing races. The home ports were the fishing towns of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, and Gloucester, Massachusetts. Ironically, most of the contest participants on both sides traced their ancestry to one or more of the Canadian maritime provinces.

Several books and articles have been published focused on fishermen's cup races and events leading to the contestant's qualifications, but most seem biased from the American point of view. Canadian author Keith McLaren covers the same group of stories in a more balanced and thoughtful way. The first part of the book introduces the reader to the relatively shallow fishing banks stretching from the Gulf of Maine to just southeast of Newfoundland. The next section illuminates many of the dangers of fishing under sail. There were two distinct ways of fishing from the late nineteenth century up until the very earliest twentieth century; either by handlining directly from the mothership or else from dories, by handlining or more likely drift lining. In the next fascinating chapter, "A Skipping Stone," the author discusses how more than 200 years of evolution culminated in the second decade of the nineteenth century into the schooner, arguably the peak in fishing-boat design. Sadly, at that point, mechanization quickly took over and this means of catching fish led to the extinction of these grand old vessels.

In 1920, the America's Cup was contended by specially built racing yachts *Shamrock IV* and *Resolute* who usually faced off in light winds near Sandy Hook, New York. Schooner fishermen disparaged these races as timid, being only good in light breezes. Alternately, some decided that the annual competition among Grand Banks fisherman to be the first to bring their catch

to market in rough water and near gale conditions constituted a test for “real sailors.” (Think sleek Formula One car races on prepared tracks as opposed to contests with heavy duty pick-up trucks on rough terrain.) Perhaps monitored and controlled races between the best of schooners and actual fishermen might offer a more realistic contest.

McLaren then introduces two sets of characters: first vessels, designed and originating in neighbouring countries; second people, captains and sponsors of these vessels who were competitive, colourful, occasionally flawed, but sympathetic. They contended against each other, off and on, from 1922 through 1938.

The first formal vessel race pitted the *Delawana* of Lunenburg against Gloucester’s *Esperanto* and was won by the Americans. This mortifying loss set the stage for the design and building of what became the celebrated *Bluenose*. The Americans countered with several challengers, *Mayflower* and *Elsie* in 1921, *Henry Ford* in 1922, and *Columbia* in 1923. Finally, came the 1930 *Gertrude L. Thebauld*, that raced until 1938. Although technically still a working “fisherman,” it was the most yacht-like of all the schooners. In presenting the ships’ details, the author describes them as personalities possessing strengths, vulnerabilities, and quirks. Each of these races were hotly contested where weather, ocean racecourses, and interpretations about enigmatic rules significantly affected the results; but ultimately, the Canadian vessels prevailed, and the image of *Bluenose* is still embossed on the northern nation’s dime coins.

Next came colourful Canadian captains such as Albert Himmelman, argumentative, stubborn Angus Walters, and ship-builder William James Roué. Their American counterparts were highly regarded Marty Walsh, taciturn and physically tough Clayton Morrissey, tenacious tactician Ben Pine and ship designer Thomas McManus. Each captain’s tough, combative character played central roles both during and between the cup matches spilling over into nationalistic pride of their fellow citizens. (Although more than 80 years have passed since the last official race, the citizens of Gloucester hold quasi “schooner races” on Labor Day and, for a time, held international fishing dory races for less prestigious trophies.)

The author superbly furnishes background information about each vessel, their preliminary races, their strengths and weakness, the details of the ocean course and weather they were forced to navigate. McLaren’s exceptional talent is evident as both a storyteller and skilled sports announcer. Schooner races are lengthy affairs with strategic tacking, luffing battles, and split-second timing of raising or lowering sails. More dramatic are scenes of the crews dealing with rails awash under dramatic heels with crews leaning to windward with their lee scuppers buried into the sea from the tremendous press of wind as they cope

with high seas and gales. As a spectator, one observes this from afar, but in this work, the reader becomes an onboard spectator struggling along with the seamen, sharing the exhilaration of a race well-run or the disappointment of a hard-fought loss. “These sailors were amateurs in the root sense of the word, men who competed for the sheer love of the thing itself, testing their mastery against that of their peers. That’s what echoes down through the years—the beauty and danger of a working life under sail, and the pride of the men who did it.” (9)

Canadian McLaren presents a thoughtful neutral narrative of the hard-fought cup race series and their qualifying rounds replete with some stately images along with wonderful action-packed photographs of the ships and their captains. His work, while quite an exciting read in places, is scholarly and includes a wide range of source material gleaned from the local archives of the two maritime cities and other places. Many books and articles have been published about these colourful contests over the years, but this scholarly and non-partisan work is among the best.

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Venner F. Milewski, Jr. *Fighting Ships of the US Navy 1883-2019: Volume 3-Cruisers and Command Ships*. Sandomierz, Poland: MMP Books, mmpbooks.com, 2022. 431 pp., illustrations, glossary, bibliography, index of ship names. UK £35.00, US \$52.99, hardback; ISBN 978-83-66549-02-9.

While every historian and lover of history is unique regarding the books they acquire, one thing is probably universal – we add to our collections for different reasons. Some books in my collection support ongoing research goals, others are by authors I have read over the years and find investing in their work to be extremely valuable and enjoyable. Some are there simply to support my own interests and fill in gaps in my knowledge and understanding. Finally, there are the books everyone owns, those containing the technical knowledge and details that are essential in the modern industrial age to understanding history. Sometimes not the most exciting texts, since they really don’t pull the reader into a compelling history of events, they are still extremely valuable for their technical content. This makes them handy references to support other works.

Milewski’s *Fighting Ships of the US Navy 1883-2019: Volume 3* fits perfectly into the last category. He provides the reader with a massive text delving into the details of cruiser design in the United States Navy and its evolution over the last 130-plus years. Divided into eleven categories of