

Pierre Camu. *La Flotte Blanche: histoire de la Compagnie de Navigation du Richelieu et l'Ontario, 1845-1913*. Ottawa: Invenire 2011. 232 pp., illustrations, maps, tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, index. CDN \$34.95, paper; ISBN 978-0-98687-166-5.

Following on the publication of two earlier major works on shipping on the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence: *Le Saint-Laurent et les Grands Lacs au temps de la voile, 1608-1850* (Montreal 1996), and *Le Saint-Laurent et les Grand Lacs au temps de la vapeur, 1850-1950* (Montreal 2005) this volume continues the themes of the earlier books but centres on the growth of a single enterprise, best known as the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company. The author is a distinguished economist, geographer and scholar whose work has explored the development of agriculture, industry, and trade centred on the St. Lawrence basin and *La Flotte Blanche* (The White Fleet) is an important contribution to the history of shipping in Canada.

The history of the company is explored in a conventional chronological fashion with the volume divided into three sections. The introductory chapter is the one that best demonstrates the author's interest in geography and economics. He details the territory which formed the catchment basin for trade which the company sought; defining it as the areas in the St. Lawrence valley where the density of population reached a threshold of 20 to 30 persons per square kilometre. He discusses population change, agricultural production, shipping tonnage and other changes brought about by, and contributing to, industrialization and urbanization. He then moves to the modest beginnings of the venture, dealing with the founding of La Société de Navigation du Riche-

lieu in 1846 with a single, small, paddle-steamer serving communities in the Richelieu valley and linking the region with the port of Montreal. Within ten years, the focus of the company had shifted to the river ports between Montreal and Quebec.

The second section of the book deals with the outcome of the merger with the Canadian Navigation Company in 1875 which extended the territory of the company, now renamed the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company, from the Lake Ontario ports of Hamilton and Niagara to the Saguenay, with extensive services in the Toronto-Quebec corridor. Here too, Camu provides considerable background on the geography and economy of the territories served (including up-state New York ports) and the changing demographics of the region. While there is no shortage of charts and tables this contextual information creates an expectation of discussion of how the development of the company related to these changes. Unfortunately there are few links between the statistics and the company's activities. For example, there are extensive statistics on number of vessels, tonnage, cargo and passengers for each year between 1875 and 1915 but no indication of the proportion of these which relate to the Richelieu and Ontario vessels. There is also only cursory mention of any of the competitors for the shipping business in the St. Lawrence region so it is difficult to determine the extent to which the company was the dominant player or whether it was one of a large number of companies competing for business.

The final section of the book covers the period 1910-1913, "la grande fusion des sociétés de navigation intérieure", a period in which more than 22 companies came together in a series of acquisitions, mergers, and take-

overs which eventually resulted in the formation of Canada Steamship Lines. These final chapters draw heavily on the work of Stephen Salmon including his essay "This Remarkable Growth: Investment in Canadian Great Lakes Shipping, 1900-1959" published in *The Northern Mariner / Le Marin du Nord* in 2005. Although the period covered is short in contrast to the other sections of the book it does introduce some of the other firms active in the region such as the Quebec and Gulf Ports Steamship Company, the Ontario and Quebec Steamship Company, Inland Lines, and the Northern Navigation Company which are barely mentioned elsewhere in the text.

During the almost 70 years of history of the company, it operated some 55 vessels which followed technological changes from wood to steel and paddles to propellers in ships which ranged from under 100 tons to over 4,200 tons. Almost all of the steamers were painted white which gave rise to the name "The White Fleet." Camu provides details of the acquisition, service, and disposition of these ships. Remarkably, the first company vessel, the *Richelieu*, was still afloat more than a century after the company was founded, although under different names and different owners. Many of these steamers are shown in the volume and the images are properly treated as illustrations rather than decoration. Other illustrations show the routes of the vessels and newspaper advertisements of schedules and fares. The index is woefully inadequate and unfortunately, reduces the ease of access to what could be an extremely useful reference work as well as a narrative.

Any history of a business is reliant to great measure on the archival resources which have survived and Camu is fortunate that an extensive collection

of the Canada Steamship Lines records was transferred to the Queen's University Archives in 1973. The richness of these records, which includes an almost complete set of the minute books of the company, creates a dependence on the formal legalistic history of the company and underplays the social role the company played in the region. It is often the lack of corporate records which makes company histories seem uncritical with a tendency to focus on the larger-than-life personalities to inject interest in the story. It is refreshing to see how the skillful interweaving of corporate activity and the character of the company leaders can be enhanced by coverage of the geographical and economic context in which the action is carried out.

This history of the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company should be added to any listing of significant research into the history of North American shipping companies and underscores the need for more work on the history of similar concerns. *La Flotte Blanche* is well-researched, well-written, and well-presented and deserves to be better known as it sets a high standard for the history of shipping companies.

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Phil Carradice. *The Battle of Tsushima*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen and Sword, www.pen-and-sword-co-uk, 2020. xvii+184 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography. UK £19.99, cloth; ISBN 978-1-52674-334-3. Distributed by Naval Institute Press.

Author Phil Carradice is a journalist and broadcaster who has penned some 60 books and is a regular at the BBC. This particular book is a popular history account of the seminal naval battle of the