The Northern Mariner / Le marin du nord

Volume 31, Number 4

(Winter/Hiver 2021)

CONTENTS

Conference Proceedings

Guest Editorial

Articles

Commentary

Book Reviews

Guest Editorial

The Pacific Gateway and West Coast One-Fifty: Nautical Contours of Celebration

Michael L. Hadley

Welcome to the West Coast of Canada, wherever you are in the world. These words reflect the spirit in which we opened the first virtual conference ever held by the Canadian Nautical Research Society (CNRS) in June 2021. It was on an international scale – from Germany to Japan, and stations in between. We had gathered to celebrate Canada's Pacific Gateway, and to mark the 150th anniversary of the province of British Columbia's joining Confederation on 20 July 1871. For many of us who live here – and some who dream of it – this is soul country. Immigrant-writer Malcolm Lowry confessed as much in his *October Ferry to Gabriola* (1970) on behalf of contented immigrants like himself: "this love for one's land had little to do with patriotism…." Rather, it emerged from the gradual awareness that "those wild forested mountains and the sea were their whole life." Or again, in the words of BC writer Michael Poole's *Ragged Islands* (1991): "people have always been drawn by an aura of lost Eden that hovers like sea mist over the islands and inlets, promising a free life on a starkly beautiful shore." So, welcome aboard, and let us begin.

If you spread out before you a large topographical map of British Columbia, you will see a remarkable sight: huge mountain ranges stretching 730 miles from south to north and rising like phalanxes of defending armies blocking access to the sea. Reaching some 640 miles from east to west, the provincial territory breaks into the coastal region and touches the rugged shores. Here the land is penetrated by long fingers of the sea that form deep and often narrow fjords; the steep shores on either side bear the scars of primeval geological upheavals and glacial gouging – they have been carved by powerful rivers raging down to meet the ocean tides.

Now, change your perspective: unroll a folio of nautical charts to examine the rugged and challenging coastal contours. Viewing from seaward, you will see a ring of lighthouses along the western edge of Vancouver Island. They mark the continental limit of what has become known as the Graveyard of the Pacific, the last resting-place of over two thousand ships. It extends from the USA in Tillamook Bay on the Oregon coast to the tip of Cape Scott some 350 miles from Victoria. Two visions highlight the approaches to the Gateway we celebrate today: i) the rugged enterprise of seafaring that explored and led to the development of new dimensions of trade, colonization, industry, and defence; and ii) a national dream of railroads spanning the Canadian provinces by finally punching their way

through the mountains to the sea. These forces converged in what we now call BC's coastal Gateway.

With a prescient grasp of a navigator's view, Margaret Ormsby, a formidable UBC historian in the 1950s (during the undergraduate days of CNRS members like Barry Gough, Jan Drent, and myself) cast the scene in perspective. "Off the coast of British Columbia," she wrote, "the Pacific Ocean completely belies the name given to it by Magellan. Whipped by cruel winds, the waters of the sea strike islands that rise as the peaks of submerged mountain chains, or attack an indented mainland shoreline, swirling at the base of cliffs and dashing into narrow inlets and straits." When writing these words in her *British Columbia: a History* (1958) – a book celebrating the centenary of BC's founding as a Crown colony – Ormsby was breaking new ground. She was exploring the creative tensions between the maritime and continental worlds. Or, as BC humorist Eric Nichol put it that same year in his upbeat "Short history of BC," published in *Maclean's Magazine* on 10 May 1958: "Unfortunately, in return for being joined by rail with the east, British Columbia had promised to join Confederation, thus making possible the national motto, *A Mare Usque Ad Nauseam*."

Years later, on 14 June 1960, BC captured it all with the romantic Latin motto "Splendour sine Occasu" – Splendour without Setting. BC's rather flamboyant flag projected the heraldry: a huge setting sun over blue ocean waves – all surmounted by the Union Flag and the British Crown. It asserted the old imperial adage that the sun never set on the British Empire. So far, so good, for if the sun goes down here on BC's West Coast, it also goes up somewhere else. Perhaps some clairvoyant had seen that our Gateway's future lay in Asia.

First Nations peoples have occupied this impressive region for thousands of years. Long before the arrival of other peoples, Indigenous Peoples had established their cultures, their languages, and customs, their fishing, hunting, and trading patterns, and their diplomatic and martial traditions. They explored, traded, and fought their battles in their storied seagoing canoes. Built for both serviceability and beauty, as present-day teachings remind us, these canoes evinced an essential harmony between performance and spiritual meaning. The Indigenous canoe exemplifies the variety of relationships that bound First Nations' people to their world. In both painting and design, the vessels reflected their profound relationship to the Creator, to the spiritual forces that permeated land and sea, and to their primal links with all living creatures.

Yet none of this dissuaded European explorers motivated by the papal Doctrine of Discovery that enabled them to acquire all territories not ruled by a Christian prince. So, explorers came to the BC coast in increasing numbers – Spanish, French, English, American, and Russian among them – throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They came – and they claimed. They all left their legacies. Captain John T. Walbran's fascinating *British Columbia Coast Names: Their Origin and History*, first published in 1909, celebrates the region's colourful early story – though with an overwhelmingly British bias. Thus, Howe Sound and its principal headlands and islands near the Port of Vancouver commemorate Royal

Navy players in "The Glorious First of June" 1794, when a British fleet trounced the French. In all, the names put a European stamp on everything. And when the Great Man theory seemed exhausted, surveyors even named an island after a horse named Thormonby who had won the Derby in 1860. But when, generations later, the winds of reconciliation began to prevail: the Strait of Georgia (after George III) and its adjoining channels was renamed the Salish Sea. That was in 2009; and the Queen Charlotte Islands became Haida Gwaii through the Haida Gwaii Reconciliation Act of 2010.

Varied talents laid the groundwork for a Gateway. In the years 1791-93, the expeditions of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra and George Vancouver marked the first European surveys of the coast. Under sail and oar, their small ships challenged even the flood currents and swirls of Arran Rapids, their crews hauling the boats by rope from shore when the current became too strong. Throughout the nineteenth century British Admiralty surveys – under sail, oar, and steam – embarked from Esquimalt. Settlers and speculators, miners and surveyors, saloon-keepers, and tin-horn gamblers followed in their wake. And when the Atlantic coast fisheries declined in the 1880s, many ships from the Cape Breton fleet sailed around Cape Horn to Victoria to join the seal hunt. Esquimalt, which had become a Royal Navy base in 1855, became the Pacific base of the Royal Canadian Navy in 1910. Later, skipper-pastors of both the Anglican and United Church built ships for medical missions. The Shantymen's mission followed off the West Coast. The logging and fishing industries developed; so, too, did business. Coastal passenger service between frontier sites commenced in the 1890s. Beginning with Union Steamships, and later joined by vessels of the CPR and CNR, these voyages forged new economic and social links among pioneering communities. They surged through the famous Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Running from the open Pacific, the ninety-six-mile-long Strait of Juan de Fuca separates Canada from the United States. Named in 1787 by fur trader Charles William Barkley, captain of the *Imperial Eagle,* its waters lead eastward along the shores of Vancouver Island before turning southward into American territory and seaports via Admiralty Inlet and Puget Sound; they also turn northward into Haro Strait, and on to the Strait of Georgia. These waters reach on upward through Johnstone Strait, Queen Charlotte Sound, and into Alaska. Here at the top of BC waters some 465 miles from Vancouver – and just south of the Alaskan Panhandle – grew what has now become the thriving and expanding international transshipment port of Prince Rupert. Founded in 1910, it had long been envisaged as the Western terminus of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. It gained fame as a ship-building and ship repair centre. The northern city now boasts the Fairview Container Terminal. With its wide range of tides, the port offers a depth alongside of fifty-nine feet at low water.

Prince Rupert boasts a boat-building tradition whose mythology and aesthetics rival the lore surrounding the aboriginal canoe: the family-owned Wahl Boatworks. With its skilful blending of artistic form and nautical function, it was one of the most successful boatyards on the BC coast. Wahl and his six sons produced over

one thousand vessels. Their boats – trollers, gillnetters, and halibut boats alike – were regarded as works of art. In the words of shipping reporter, David Rahn, "Wahl boats are graceful, lovely riding sea boats, functional as you could wish for; but fishermen love them for their beauty."

The pageantry of BC's nautical history has loomed large since the earliest days of canoes, tall ships, bride-ships, and steamers. As Barry Gough has recounted in his masterful *Juan de Fuca's Strait* (2012), some of the finest and most famous ships crowd the national memory: George Vancouver's sloop-of-war *Discovery,* William Broughton's brig *Chatham,* Alcalá Galiano's brig-rigged *Sutil,* Cayetano Valdés' topsail schooner *Mexicana*, and the Hudson's Bay Company's steamship *Beaver*. The 84-gun ship-of-the-line *Ganges* passed this way during the Gold Rush days of 1858-59. Others followed: the British battle cruiser *Hood* in 1923; the liner *Queen Elizabeth* in 1942 to be re-configured as a troopship; warships patrolling during World Wars I and II; naval vessels heading to Korea in the 1950s. Canadian Pacific Railway Empresses connected Vancouver and Asia, and the equally grand P&O Liners *Oronsay* and *Orsova* linked Vancouver with the UK and Australia. And in the post-modern era, ubiquitous and massive container ships, piled high and ugly, working their way between the deep-sea ports of Vancouver, Prince Rupert, and Asia.

Indeed, the Gateway's story is also the story of the Canadian Coast Guard, Royal Canadian Navy, Fisheries and Oceans, and the Canadian Hydrographic Service, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Marine Service. In the years 1940-1942, for example, the RCMP's Vancouver-built vessel *St. Roch*, commanded by then-Sergeant Henry A. Larsen, became the first vessel to transit the Northwest Passage from west to east. Displacing some 300 tons, and just 104 feet long, she was known by Northern Indigenous Peoples as "the big ship." She made the return voyage in 1944. On 29 May 1950, she also transited the Panama Canal, thus becoming the first vessel to circumnavigate the North American continent. Retired from service on her return, she became the centre-piece of the Vancouver Maritime Museum where she continues to draw admiring visitors.

Many of us will want to add our own favourite deepwater visitors. My own list would include the Midway-class aircraft carrier USS *Coral Sea* in June 1960. Over a hundred-thousand Vancouverites lined Stanley Park and docks to welcome her as she eased her way into Vancouver Harbour and squeezed beneath Lion's Gate Bridge. She had to remove some eleven feet of her maintop and, even then, had only ten feet of water beneath her keel; or, the French helicopter carrier *Jean D'Arc* in 1972, and in 1973 the German training cruiser *Deutschland* (on which I served as naval liaison officer in Canadian waters). Or again, USS *Ranger,* a Forrestal-class carrier in August 1992. International fleets of tallships regularly called at our Gateway: for example, in 2005 Russia's 354-foot three-mast sailing frigate *Pallada* (with Jan Drent aboard as naval liaison officer). She won a Guinness award for having reached a speed of eighteen knots under sail.

The romance of sail has marked our Gateway waters since the earliest days of the province. Today, indeed, yachting in every form has become a major industry

with its facilities for yacht design, boat building and repair, and with hospitality services and charters in marinas along the whole coast. Perhaps it all began with John Voss's *Tilikum* in May 1901. She was a 38-foot dugout canoe fitted out with 254 square feet of sail, and bound for London. Generations of small boat sailors followed on their great adventures, some of them solo. Others competed in the annual Swiftsure sailing races, or in the equally famous Victoria-Maui Race. Capping these sagas in September 2019, seventy-six-year-old Jeanne Socrates arrived home in Victoria in her Swedish-built 38-foot *Nereida* – 339 days at sea alone. She became the oldest person to sail solo nonstop around the world. In July 2020 local solo-sailor Bert terHart docked his 43-foot Ontario-built sloop *Seaburban* in Victoria harbour after his 267-day non-stop globe-circling voyage.

The city of Vancouver was just one year old when the CPR railroad broke through the mountains and reached tide water on 23 May 1887. Built on land on which First Nations had lived since time immemorial, it became known as Gastown. It comprised a small area of docklands in what is now East End Vancouver. In its heyday, Gastown was a raw settlement; home to assorted docks, Gassy Jack's pub, and Hastings sawmill. Yet it formed the focal point of industry. Over 15,000 Chinese temporary workers had built the railroad; 600 of whom had died through accident and the harsh conditions. They had all come through the Gateway in order to find the longed-for *Gam Sun*, the "Gold Mountain," which seemed to have promised happiness and financial success. Photographs of driving "The Last Spike" of the railroad suggested that the engineering feat had all been the work of whites – well-heeled bearded ones in top hats. By 1900 Vancouver had become the leading commercial centre on the West Coast. Ships in the trans-Pacific trade called regularly and the Vancouver Stock Exchange opened in 1907. With the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 ports in the UK and in Europe became accessible.

Economic visions and reality triggered the need for harbour infrastructures and port facilities. The port operated independently until 1936, when the federal government gathered all national ports under a single authority known as the National Harbours Board, reporting directing to Parliament. The Second World War launched a building boom, with major facilities and supporting industries for warship construction.

Yet labour unrest and strikes marked the development of the Gateway during its early years, mostly over the right to organize, and disputes between workers and bosses. Racially inspired immigration policies led to violence and what we would now regard as the violation of human rights. The racially motivated head-tax on Chinese amounted to the price of a home in Vancouver, or the equivalent of two year's wages in China. Anti-Asian riots arose in 1887 and 1907. The Vancouver General Strike of 1918 broke out over labour's demands for higher wages, and its rejection of conscription, as well as anger over government censorship of so-called "socialist" publications. Newspapers like the *Daily British Colonist* and the *Vancouver Daily Sun* kept readers informed about "communist" influences. The Vancouver General Strike of 1918 broke out over labour's demands for higher

wages and was violently opposed by soldiers returning home from the trenches.

The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 triggered responses in the port cities of Prince Rupert and Vancouver. Newspapers like Prince Rupert's *The Evening Empire* gave blow-by-blow accounts of what amounted to a domino effect: the national union president of railway workers called his members to stage a strike against the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway; the International Longshoreman's Association followed; and then the Fish Packers Union, until in June 1919 the city's *Evening Empire* announced Prince Rupert's general strike. Tensions in Vancouver continued through the twenties and thirties. Thus, a strike in 1923 saw members of the Vancouver and District Waterfront Works Association forming picket lines – only to be confronted by 350 opponents armed with shotguns. Or, in 1935, "the working class" – to use an expression of the day – fought the Battle of Ballentyne Pier over the right to collective bargaining. Then came "Bloody Sunday" in June 1938 when combined forces of the RCMP and city police broke up a six-week sit-in strike at the Post office. They used tear gas and truncheons. At a time when governments were bent upon disbanding relief camps, the unemployed and homeless men had been demanding things that governments either would not, or could not, provide. The press blamed the labour unrest on "communist-led" protesters. Most famously, the year 1942 saw the forced evacuation of Japanese-Canadians and the confiscation of their fishing fleet. The Royal Canadian Navy was complicit. Altogether, labour issues and racial prejudice weave unsettling threads throughout Gateway lands.

Today, the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914 points us both into the past as well into the future. The ship had arrived in May that year carrying 376 Punjabi immigrants – all of them British subjects. As a commemorative harbour-front plaque first explained in 2014, "its arrival provoked strong anti-Asian backlash." Backed by the army, authorities held the passengers aboard for two months. HMCS *Rainbow* eventually escorted the ship and her passengers back out to the open Pacific. In the words of a new trilingual plaque – in English, French, and Punjabi – unveiled at the memorial park by defense minister Harjit Sajjan in 2016 after the Prime Minister's formal apology in Parliament: "This incident continues to resonate in our history and is a symbol of the early struggle of South Asian Canadians for justice and equality." The memorial park in which it stands reflects current thinking on justice and reconciliation.

Vancouver has faced and overcome other challenges as well: oil spills, fire, and threats to public health. On 14 January 1970, to take but one example, the 28,000-ton P&O liner *Oronsay* steamed into harbour with what the press called "an epidemic of typhoid on board." She was quarantined for three weeks, while eighty-three passengers and crew were hospitalized for treatment. According to an official report: "The investigation of this epidemic required the immediate creation from existing facilities [ashore] of an effective, functional, emergency health service." This pandemic response proved to be a remarkable achievement and was perhaps a harbinger of BC's approach to COVID-19 today.

Dramatic demographic shifts have characterized the Gateway's development.

Predominately white and British in 1901 – the first year in which statistics were kept – by 1979 nearly forty percent of children in primary school were learning English as a second language. Like the rest of Canada, the region was fast becoming multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-lingual. Once called Gastown, Vancouver has undergone drastic changes in population. And so-called "ethnic" writers like Judy Fong Bates (*China Dog—and other Tales*), Wayne Choy (*The Jade Peony* and *Paper Shadows*), and Joy Kogawa (*Obasan*) are now mainstream in the Gateway's international culture.

All the harbours in the region merged under one operational control in 2008. Known today as The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority, it encompasses a port running from deep inside Vancouver harbour, then south around Point Grey to Canada's container docks at Deltaport, and far up the Fraser River as far as New Westminster, which in the old Colony days had been touted to become the capital of BC. Together they constitute Canada's largest port, and the third largest in North America. Its facilities trans-ship and transport goods between Canada and more than 170 world economies. Container traffic is expected to triple by the year 2030. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian trade with China has increased by 18 percent. In terms of imported and exported cargo at Vancouver, that made China our largest trading partner, with Japan second, and Korea third. On 18 June 2019, the Government of Canada approved the much-disputed Trans-Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project. It will add the final one-thousand kilometers of pipeline, delivering prairie oil down to tankers at the Burnaby docks by the end of 2022. It is expected to increase the system's oil-carrying capacity from 300,000 barrels per day to 900,000.

The progress of human endeavour is often marked by a trail of literary metaphor. Thus, we speak of the tides of history, the surge of innovation, and the currents of political change. In doing so we often lose sight of the nautical forces that shape our world. BC writer Tom Koppel draws our attention to the global context before us. His vivid *Ebb and Flow: Tides and Life in our Once and Future Planet* (2007) explores the existential dimensions of our aspirations:

> tides are among the most powerful, inexorable, and often destructive forces in nature, eroding and engulfing shorelines and driving vicious ocean currents, whirlpools, and tidal bores that have claimed countless lives. As an agency of creation, they are largely responsible for everything from the origins of life on Earth to how plants and animals adapt to their particular coastal habitats, from the rotational periods of Earth and Moon to how we build our port facililties and coastal cities.

Gateway, in this context, is so much more than number crunching, trade and commerce, and national defense. Gateway means not just a way in, but a way out. It means connection, community, and international relations. While steeped in the past, it implies a vision of the future.

The presenters at this conference could not address all the issues. Yet, each presenter offered us a rich and unique component of a much greater nautical mosaic. Reproduced in this volume are the written versions of four such presentations:

"The Development of Canada's Pacific Gateway in the Age of Steam Globalization 1871-1940" by Jan Drent; "All but Forgotten: Early Measures for Maritime Safety on Canada's West Coast" by Clay Evans; "Foot of Carrall: The Historical Maritime Gateway of Gastown," by Trevor Williams; and "Canada's Pacific Gateway … to the Arctic," by Nigel Greenwood. Enjoy!

Michael L. Hadley is an award-winning writer, multidisciplinary scholar, yachtsman, and former naval officer. He is Professor Emeritus at the University of Victoria, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and lives in Victoria, BC. (Contact: pilgrim33@telus.net)