

Eric W. Sager with Gerald E. Panting — *Maritime Capital. The Shipping Industry in Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Pp. xviii, 289.

This book was inspired by the Atlantic Canada Shipping Project, which from 1977, through very generous Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SHRCC) funding, elevated Canadian maritime historical writing to international prominence. Winner of the 1991 Keith Matthews Prize from the Canadian Association of Nautical Research, it was an excellent example of the wise use of research funding by the SSHRCC. No historian has either benefited or contributed more to this effort than Eric Sager, whose *Seafaring Labour. The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914* (1989) was favourably reviewed.

It is difficult for us to grasp the importance of shipping to the economies of the Maritime provinces before 1914, for today Canada's deep sea fleet is inconsequential. With 1.3 million tons on registry by 1880 — the vast bulk of them built in the Maritime provinces —, the Canadian fleet was at least for a very short time the fourth largest worldwide after the UK, USA and Norway. Thereafter, shipbuilding in the Maritime provinces collapsed, and by 1900, the wooden fleet had been reduced by two-thirds. When a new shipbuilding boom occurred during the Great War (1914-1918), it took place less in the Maritime provinces than in Ontario and Quebec.

The authors explain why Maritime shipowners, despite vast experience both in shipbuilding and in trade, did not invest in iron, steam-powered ships when they became essential to overseas commerce. Their answer is found partly in more attractive investment opportunities elsewhere in Canada from the 1870s, and partly in the very outlook of the merchant elite of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia who, before 1914, dominated shipping. They instinctively understood the economic theory of comparative advantage, and saw that the cost of substitution of iron for wood and steam for sail were comparatively higher in the Maritimes than in the United Kingdom, so shipowning and shipbuilding in Canada lost its appeal.

They see deep-sea shipping as a form of exploitation of colonial labour and resources, serving the interest of merchant capital, which contributed to their uncontested dominance as the elite of Atlantic Canada for much of the nineteenth century. Ships were essential to the merchants' control of markets and hence their annual profits and accumulated wealth. More controversially, they suggest that this merchant-dominated economy retarded the prospect of sustained growth and economic diversification. To do this, they have to ignore agriculture, which absorbed more capital and was more important to the Maritime economies in any given year than shipping and shipbuilding. They wrote:

To the extent that locally built fleets helped to establish and to preserve merchant dominance, petty commodity production, and even non-capitalist social relations, the shipping industries contributed to relatively slow transition to industrial capitalism (18).

The expanding capitalist sector in mining (coal and iron), sawmilling, shipbuilding and in shipping sustained small rural proprietors, who supplied the needs of the merchant shipowners.

Building upon the work of other Canadian scholars of shipping, forest industry and merchant elite — notably Graham, Lower, McClelland, Alexander, Matthews, Rice, Sutherland, Acheson and Wynn —and adding their own innovative research,

they provide details of the changing face of the shipping industry. Initially, it answered the needs of regional trade while, later, it became international. Their sample covers the eight principle ports, led by Saint John, and 80 percent of all tonnage on colonial registry. After 1815, they demonstrate, as others have, that vessels were increasingly built for sale in the UK and elsewhere, and by the mid-1840s, as the UK market began to whither, ships were built almost exclusively for Maritime shipowners who carried on trade from ports other than in British North America.

The explanation of why colonials wanted to own wooden sailing vessels, which their British competitors were increasingly after the 1830s disinclined to buy, they find in state policies in the UK, USA, and in the Maritime colonies and provinces. They also assign responsibility to the Crimean War, the 1854-1866 Reciprocity Treaty, the US Civil War and the restructuring of colonial import duties. The Crimean War stimulated shipping demand and added to inflation, though the authors are largely guessing about its impact on the shipping industry. They are in safer waters when adopting Matthews' view that the Civil War stripped the high seas of US shipping and created heightened but short-term international demands for shipping. This left British North American shippers well placed to assume a commanding presence as carriers for US trade. This ocean shipping phase, however impressive and proud the achievement, proved far less enduring and perhaps less important than the building of fishing and coastal schooners which remained part of the "regional economy well into the twentieth century" (88).

Additionally, they argue that the growth in Maritime ownership of oceanic shipping was a function of limited export opportunities. For Nova Scotia, this meant fish, wood and agricultural products which, in most years, comprised about three-quarters of the value of her exports. For some reason, they ignore re-exports, so important in the Caribbean trade. They argue, with little evidence, and, here, social historians will be interested that, as wealth from importing and exporting these goods was slow to expand, rapacious Maritimers embarked on an extensive ownership of deepsea vessels to carry both their own goods and, more importantly, the freight of foreign merchants between foreign ports.

The authors attempt to estimate merchant wealth, which continued to rise, they believed, until the 1870s. They make shrewd guesses about shipping profits (133ff) by taking samples of vessels registered at Saint John, Yarmouth, Halifax and Windsor, which entered London and Liverpool in 1863, 1873 and 1883. They conclude that "most ships were earning 20 percent or more of the value of the capital employed" (135). Another way to estimate wealth has been satisfactorily achieved by the use of probate records, but this, they did not attempt. One such study shows that wealth accumulated by the elite accounted for almost all new wealth in the 1850s and 1860s. It was the sharp decline in economic prospects from the mid-1870s for owners of wooden ships which led to the flight from this form of investment. Before that, they cut labour costs by reducing man/ton ratios, so that fewer men were used to work the same tonnage on faster crossings. By ensuring that real wages fell, shipowners forced Maritimers away from all but the coastal and regional routes, and substituted cheaper labour from abroad.

One of the reasons to explain the timing of the decline of wooden ship building — deforestation — they did not consider. Cape Breton, for instance, and much of Nova Scotia, by the early 1860s, had trashed its forest of species useful for ship-building. Spruce, slow-growing and for ship building inferior, alone remained in

abundance, but the best of that had all but disappeared. Unchecked new growth was largely balsam, a wood useless for ships, but with a limited market as mine props and a larger later market for paper making. Deforestation accounts for the early disappearance of shipbuilding in Cape Breton and Pictou, as much as the opportunities which simultaneously opened in the 1860s for investment in coal mining.

Thereafter, Maritime shipyards were celebrated only for their exceedingly fast but ugly rum-runners and beautiful but archaic wooden-hulled sailing schooners. *The Bluenose*, the most famous of these, is thus more a symbol of poverty and backwardness, which characterized Nova Scotia in the 1920s when she was built, than of a vigorous, modern industrialized economy, which so many confident shipowners of the 1860s believed was just over the horizon. This, the authors, with much financial support, scholarly encouragement and cooperation, have so usefully portrayed.

Julian Gwyn
University of Ottawa

Adrian Shubert — *A Social History of Modern Spain*. London: Unwin Hyman Limited, 1990. Pp. x, 292.

This is a richly innovative, thematically taut analysis of the formation of modern Spanish society, that process by which Spanish men and women adjusted their lives to the fundamental forces of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (a market economy, urbanization, industrialization) and to the cultural and social consequences. Spaniards, moreover, had to do so in terms and ways congruent with their traditional institutional and intellectual structures if they were to be successful. Divorced from ideology, the terminology neutral, Shubert's text recounts the adaptation of old and creation of new social groups; the configuration and re-configuration of a system of relationships at the national and regional level; and the conflicts engendered in this process which the Liberal State tried to resolve at the same time it sought to develop an identity and an efficient governing mechanism. Chronologically, Shubert organizes his data in an attempt to explain why these efforts ended in failure with the Spanish Civil War of 1936, and why they have succeeded since 1975.

Spain's progress toward an advanced industrial society and a democratic state (under a monarchy, the only one restored in twentieth-century Europe, as emblem of the traditional) is firmly sited within the European pathway: "Longer and more circuitous, but ultimately it led to the same place" (262). As for the much debated 'bourgeois revolution' of the Marxist proof texts, scholarly evidence now suggests that the transformation of European economies was not carried out abruptly, nor by a new social class, either in its economic or its political phase.

We have now a framework for future research: not that Spain is 'different' (a view so ably exploited by Franco for tourist profit, *inter alia*), but rather a variant of the European experience and as such offering data for social historians that is as valuable as that of France or Germany to flesh out the tired but necessary concept of 'Modernization'. Balancing statistics with anecdotes and enriching it with workers' autobiographical perceptions, Shubert recounts the way that men, women and children began to live longer; moved to cities or emigrated to Latin America or Europe