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Masters and Friends, Crimps and Abstainers: Agents of Control in 19th Century Sailortown *

During the shipping seasons of the nineteenth century merchant sailors thronged the ports of eastern Canada. Among their various needs ashore, lodging, entertainment, employment and credit predominated. Throughout much of the second half of the century three contending agencies waged a struggle in the sailortowns of Saint John and Halifax for the sailors' custom and for the control of the vital sailor labour market. Of the three, boarding house keepers, motivated by self-interest which often coincidentally operated in the sailors' favour, catered to the whole range of seafarers' needs and succeeded in controlling their activities ashore. Since boarding house keepers were neither scrupulous nor upright in their manipulation of the sailor labour market, they were challenged both by government operating in the interests of the shipowners and by moral reformers working for what they supposed to be the welfare of the sailors. The government, for its part, appointed employment agents to regulate the sailor labour market after the boarding house keepers had amply demonstrated their ability to tamper with the supply and drive up the wages of sailors. The shipping master, as he was called, and his deputies were expected to correct those irregularities in the shipping of seamen which the boarding house fraternity actively encouraged. Middle class reformers, for their part, spearheaded by the evangelical clergy, deplored the mischief, immorality and exploitation of the sailors and singled out the boarding house keepers as the principal landsharks who corrupted and deceived the helpless transients. The seamen's friends therefore banded together to provide alternative lodgings and pastimes for the visiting sailor. The dual challenge which the traditional commercial agency, in the form of the boarding house, encountered from the governmental and philanthropic agencies was briefly intensified in Halifax when, for the best part of the 1880s, the shipping office and sailors' home joined forces.¹ The experience of Saint John was different because here the boarding house keepers were powerful

* My thanks are due to Ian McKay for sharing his references and my interest in sailors.

1 The labels, commercial, governmental and philanthropic, are derived from Hohman who also examines two twentieth-century types of agency, the trade unionist and the international. His focus is primarily on the "organized attempts to deal with the seaman's shoreside needs and welfare rather than with his transgressions". E. P. Hohman, *Seamen Ashore: A Study of the United Seamen's Service and of Merchant Seamen in Port* (New Haven, 1952), p. 269.

enough to emasculate the shipping office and forestall the establishment of a sailors' home. The detailed examination which follows of boarding houses, shipping offices, and sailors' homes is designed to elucidate the major features of social and economic control in nineteenth-century sailortown.

The boarding house keeper, unlike the shipping master and seamen's friend, was a time-honoured member of the dockside community. He was to the sailor ashore what the ship's captain was to the sailor afloat, and not surprisingly the sailor usually referred to his dockside hotelier as his boarding master. Boarding houses had always existed in sailortown but the keepers normally moved into that business from another occupation which they often continued to follow. Seafaring itself bred boarding house keepers especially among local sailors. Other boarding house keepers owned retail businesses in sailortown which themselves relied on the sailors' custom. In Saint John, as late as the mid-1860s, the variety of boarding houses aptly illustrated the largely unspecialized nature of petty business enterprise. Of 102 self-styled sailors' boarding house keepers in 1864, only 13 of the 87 who can be identified are listed in the business directory as boarding house keepers. The other 74 included 10 grocers, 5 grocery and liquor dealers, 9 liquor dealers and tavern keepers, 5 tailors, 10 clothiers, 7 seafarers, 9 ship labourers and stevedores, 4 shoemakers and dealers, 2 butchers, 2 clerks (probably living with widowed mothers), a dry goods dealer, a hat and fur dealer, an oil clothing manufacturer, a druggist, an oil company agent, a lumber dealer, a shipbuilder, a blacksmith, a cutter, and a drayman. Since a large proportion of the shopkeepers maintained residences separate from their places of business, it was probably the rooms over their shops that were turned into accommodation for seamen.² While there is no way of gauging the contribution that sailors' business made to the income of seasonal and shopkeeper-boarding masters, critics of the more professional boarding house keepers of the 1870s in Saint John would have us believe that mulcting sailors produced a sailortown aristocracy, the members of which could afford to own pretentious residences in the Lower Cove-Reed's Point area where much of the port's sailortown was located. Amongst the boarding house elite who had gone from rags to riches within the space of a few years was James Miller of Germain street, locally known as "Spud Murphy".³

The other feature of sailors' boarding masters was their close association with petty crime, prostitution, illicit liquor selling and gambling. As a result

2 Petition of Undersigned Inhabitants of the City of Saint John, 29 February 1864, RLE/864, p. 2, No. 47, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick; Saint John City *Directory*, 1863 - 4, 1864 - 5, 1865 - 6.

3 *Daily Tribune* (Saint John), 28 December 1872.

24 *Acadiensis*

they acquired an unsavoury reputation and were looked upon by respectable society as a bad influence on sailors and as a likely source of unruliness rather than of order in sailortown. One underworld figure was Nicholas Berrigan, a Newfoundlander of "bad character" and a boarding house keeper on Upper Water street, the heart of Halifax's sailortown. He was accused in 1876 of being one of a gang of harbour pirates and was, within the space of six months, also charged in police court with selling liquor without a license, selling liquor on Sundays and to minors after he had acquired a license, illegally retaining the money of a sailor, and receiving stolen goods. The supreme court acquitted him on the piracy charge but society did not forgive him for allowing a penniless Irish sailor boy, taken ill in his boarding house, to suffer near fatal hunger, cold, and neglect in an unheated garret room.⁴ James Miller, our Germain street entrepreneur, kept one of the most lucrative boarding houses in Saint John but its reputation amongst uptown society was not enhanced by the death of a sailor there in 1890 after he had been thrown down the stairs and by the serious stabbing of another sailor the following year after a drunken row. Miller tried unsuccessfully to cover up both these incidents.⁵ For the sailors the boarding masters' membership in the dockside sub-culture represented a formidable challenge to their freedom of action ashore. The kind of competition amongst boarding house keepers which might have ensured the independence of the sailor was minimized by the boarding masters' need for solidarity to protect their interests against the frequent interference of the law.

Although the semi-criminal boarding house keepers were in general despised by the civic elite, they nonetheless effectively policed sailortown and, by imprisoning visiting sailors in their establishments, diminished the opportunities for them to come into conflict with the persons and offend the mores of bourgeois society. First aboard docking vessels, the boarding master or his runners secured boarders and helped them to convey their dunnage to the boarding house. The sailor enjoyed the hospitality and services provided by the house until his money was gone or credit used up, by which time the boarding master had found him another vessel. Since the boarding house keeper by tradition conducted the negotiations with the shipmaster, it was understood that getting the sailor aboard at the appointed time was the boarding master's responsibility. Through these various stages of the sailor's stopover, the boarding master was at pains to keep an eye upon him in order to safeguard his investment. For many sailors, therefore, the most they saw of the port was the inside of their boarding houses. For the Scandinavian

4 *Morning Chronicle* (Halifax), 31 December 1875, 17 February, 11 May, 21 July 1876.

5 *Daily Sun* (Saint John), 30 June 1890, 8 September 1891.

sailors crimped out of their vessels by boarding house keepers Hendrick Gullickson and Peter Henricksen in Halifax in 1884, all they saw was the inside of a fishing smack which was used for their concealment until they were shipped on vessels leaving nearby coves and harbours.⁶

The boarding master's control over his boarders was largely a financial one. A penniless or spendthrift sailor rapidly became indebted to his boarding master once he had been ashore for a few days and had indulged his propensity for liquor, women, and gambling and had filled his belly with decently cooked food. Against the risk that the sailor's advance note might not be honoured, the boarding house keeper covered himself by imposing excessive charges on the sailor for exchanging the note or for credit until the note was issued, for lodgings and drinks, and for related services such as supplying the sailor with a new outfit. This kind of control left the sailor little room for manoeuvre particularly if he was the archetypal Jack Tar who drank himself senseless during his stopover in port. The boarding master was often in a position to perpetrate a final indignity on his debtors by shipping them against their will.⁷

In the disputes that arose out of the master-servant, creditor-debtor relationship between boarding masters and sailors, neither resorted often to the courts. Among themselves they preferred a rougher kind of justice typical of people who had little confidence in the legal system. Admittedly their rows could result in the intervention of the police. When Thomas Reardon, a Saint John boarding master, beat up one of his boarders who refused to join the ship for which he had been engaged, he was fined 20 dollars for assault despite the fact that the sailor had been in the illegal act of deserting ship.⁸ In those suits that did appear before the magistrate, the parties often found satisfaction in compromise rather than conviction.⁹ In his capacity as the proverbial underdog, the sailor occasionally derived legal protection against his boarding master under the terms of merchant shipping law. When Donald McLeod, an Upper Water street boarding house keeper in Halifax, tried to keep the effects of an embarking sailor who owed him money, he was charged with detaining the clothing of the seaman and fined 20 dollars.¹⁰ In another case of a similar nature, however, the shipping law rendered the sailor's appeal to the court for the return of his belongings quite fruitless. The sailor,

6 *Morning Herald* (Halifax), 31 July 1884; *Acadian Recorder* (Halifax), 31 July 1884; *Nova-scotian* (Halifax), 9 August 1884.

7 *Morning News* (Saint John), 25 July 1864.

8 *Daily Sun*, 24, 25 April 1883; *Daily Evening News* (Saint John), 24 April 1883.

9 *Morning Freeman* (Saint John), 18 July 1868; *Morning Herald*, 1 August 1885.

10 *Morning Chronicle*, 25 November 1876; *Citizen* (Halifax), 24 November 1876.

who had been crimped out of the vessel *Aneroid* in Saint John, was turned out of his boarding house several days later when he could not pay his bill. The boarding master retained his clothes to cover his debts which prompted the sailor to seek redress at the Saint John police station. To his chagrin, the law provided no protection because he was a deserter.¹¹ Retribution, however, was probably the strongest motive on either side for an appeal to the courts. James Currie successfully brought a complaint against Martin Crowley, his Saint John boarding master, for selling liquor without a license. By means of this blatantly vengeful charge, Currie was protesting against the exorbitant bill he had received from Crowley which exceeded his advance pay by five dollars. The 37 dollar bill was made up of 18 dollars for four and a half weeks' board plus 19 dollars for incidentals, mostly drinks, over 150 of them.¹²

To some extent the sailor's ability to avoid the less agreeable aspects of his relationship with his boarding master depended on his experience and knowledge of the port. Novice, intemperate, and non-English-speaking sailors were likely to suffer most at the hands of their boarding masters. Boarding house keepers were not averse to using strong-arm tactics to protect their status as the bosses of sailortown. James Miller, for example, was implicated in a number of assault cases involving sailors. In 1879 he was in court for stabbing a sailor but the sailor failed to appear to prosecute. Ten years later he was committed on a charge of brutal assault on a Norwegian sailor in his boarding house. Apparently he had refused to give the sailor 25 cents of the 17 dollars and 50 cents advance in wages that he held to cover the costs incurred and as security for the Norwegian's fulfilling his new shipping engagement. Miller was acquitted. A different fate awaited Patrick Fitzgerald (known locally as Paddy Fitz), a 32 year old seafarer accused of assaulting Miller at Reed's Point in 1874. Given the option of paying a fine of 20 dollars or going to jail for two months, Paddy complained that "justice was all on the side of the boarding masters in this city".¹³

It would however be doing a disservice to the frequent identity of interest between sailor and boarding master to exaggerate the disadvantageous effects of the relationship for the sailor. In his role as employment agent, the boarding master could and did ensure enhanced wage rates which could favour the sailors who used his services but managed to resist exploitation; sailors who would never have been able to procure uniform rates if they had bargained individually with shipmasters. Moreover, the relationship between boarding master and sailor could be a warm one especially when it involved

11 *Daily Telegraph* (Saint John), 20 March 1877.

12 *Morning Freeman*, 6 April 1872.

13 *Morning Freeman*, 22 January 1874; *Daily Sun*, 27 September 1879, 25 November 1889.

Maritime sailors or frequent visitors to port. A young Nova Scotian sailor named Harris Barnes stayed in Saint John in 1862 at the boarding house of John Bartlett, a boarding master who remained prominent in the city for the next forty years. Two years later when Bartlett found Barnes ill and unconscious on board a newly arrived vessel, he arranged for the sailor's conveyance to the marine hospital and while Barnes recuperated, safeguarded his clothes, his sea chest, and the balance of his wages.¹⁴

Sailors less fortunate in their relationships than Barnes did try to resist the coercive power of boarding house keepers. The most effective method of resistance was to abscond from the boarding house, leaving debts unpaid or the proprietor holding an unredeemable advance note. The fact that boarding house keepers stood to lose when sailors fled goes a long way towards explaining the degree of control they tried to exercise over their charges. Their eagerness to make money out of the sailors and out of the employment patterns in sailortown led the boarding house keepers into questionable practices. Many of them, James Miller included, were accused of crimping sailors and harbouring deserters during this period. In 1873 the purpose of Miller's appearance in a boat off the anchored *Anna Camp* in broad daylight was held to be highly irregular by the magistrate who refused to believe his claim that he was merely offering a gift of tobacco to the sailors. In 1878 Miller was caught on the barque *Orontes* by the captain in the act of assisting an article seaman to carry off his clothes. Despite the contempt he expressed at the time of his capture for both the shipmaster and the magistrate, he avoided imprisonment by supplying the vessel with another seaman.¹⁵ As this case illustrates, the law against crimping was seldom effectively enforced. Indeed, it was the deserter himself who usually took the rap. When John Richards, another Saint John boarding master, was charged with enticing Olaf Olsen to desert in 1891, he escaped the three months' sentence simply by returning Olsen's clothes to the jail where Olsen, the other actor in the drama, was undergoing a term of imprisonment for the desertion.¹⁶ The Saint John Board of Trade blamed the lenient attitude towards crimps on ship-owners who very seldom troubled to prosecute the offenders.¹⁷

Nonetheless, the boarding house keepers of Saint John and Halifax never acquired the same reputation for being crimps as did their counterparts in Quebec. Crimping reached serious proportions in both ports only when the

14 Reminiscences of Harris H. Barnes, MG 1, Vertical MS File, Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

15 *Morning News*, 16 August 1873; *Daily Telegraph*, 16 August 1873; *Morning News*, 16 November 1878.

16 *Daily Sun*, 22 June 1891.

17 *Daily Sun*, 5 July 1883.

economic recession of the mid-seventies gave way to the prosperity of the early eighties. In the dying years of the age of sail crimping took on two new dimensions. The boarding house keepers directed their efforts mainly towards what they called foreign ships which were largely Scandinavian. The ubiquitous James Miller, for example, managed to wheddle his way out of yet another conviction in 1893 when he was charged with inducing two Scandinavian sailors to desert from the Norwegian barque *Ararat*.¹⁸ Since Scandinavian crews were badly paid, they could be enticed away by the prospect of higher wages and thus replaced the poorly paid British sailors of mid-century as the reserve of sailor labour. On the basis of his acquaintance with the manning of vessels in Saint John, the shipping master reported in 1880 that "There have been more Swedes and Norwegians in this port this year than men of any other nationality".¹⁹ The successful crimping of foreigners at a time when strict laws prevailed probably illustrates a degree of indifference on the part of the port authorities which might have been more vigilant had sailors of their own ships or those of England or the United States been involved. The second dimension of late-century crimping was the way in which the urban boarding masters expanded their operations so that they were supplying vessels and obtaining seamen in other ports and outports of the region.²⁰ Ironically enough, the expansion of their operations was facilitated by those speedy steam communications which were endangering the fabric of their own sailortowns.

In Saint John the boarding house keepers encountered a formidable challenge to their position as the bosses of sailortown, not from the other agents of control, but from the merchant elite who wanted to impose their rule on sailortown at a time when an increasing share of the port's trade was being carried in locally-owned vessels. The struggle that ensued resulted in the triumph of the boarding house keepers. And insofar as that victory must have involved the support of sailors, it represented an important endorsement of the traditional customs of sailortown. The struggle initially grew out of legal disabilities suffered by the boarding house keepers. Their well-being depended on an evasion of the New Brunswick statute relating to the shipping of seamen, which included a provision that an advance note could not be issued until three days after the sailing of a vessel.²¹ Strictly interpreted, this

18 *Daily Sun*, 10 May 1893.

19 *Daily Sun*, 15 July 1880; *Novascotian*, 19 May 1883; *Morning Herald*, 12 October 1883, 13 May 1890.

20 *Daily Sun*, 3 October 1881.

21 *Revised Statutes of New Brunswick, 1854*, Chapter 87: 'Of Regulations for shipping Seamen at the Port of Saint John', Section 10.

legislation left the boarding house keeper to extend credit to his boarder without the security of a note guaranteeing reimbursement out of the sailor's advance earnings. If and when the boarding master secured the note he still might encounter difficulty in gaining access to the certificate proving that the sailor had actually sailed as arranged. The evidence does not suggest whether protests were voiced by boarding house keepers before the 1860s; indeed it seems likely that the act was not enforced. By 1864, however, ship-owners and consignees were refusing to issue advance notes and were making it impossible for boarding house keepers to collect their debts after their boarders had left port. As a collectivity the boarding masters therefore petitioned the legislature to urge that the shipping of seamen act be amended to recognize the earlier custom, whereby advance notes were issued when seamen signed the shipping articles and could be negotiated as soon as the vessels sailed. This would also mean that the boarding master's responsibility for the sailor would end as soon as he was put on board. Otherwise the boarding master might be held liable for the sailor's desertion between the time the sailor was delivered to the ship and the vessel cleared harbour.

The failure of this petition encouraged the boarding house keepers to form an association powerful enough to impose its iron will on hiring practices in sailortown. The association not only insisted, in direct violation of the existing law, that advances should be issued by the shipper to boarding masters; but that these should be paid in cash. Faced with this radical departure from accepted practices, the employers protested that an illegal combination had been launched to obstruct the channel of legitimate trade but their shipmasters were obliged to pay the cash advance in order to get their crews. It took only two years for the shipping interests to give way and to petition the legislature for an amendment to the act which would legalize advance notes negotiable five days after the vessel had sailed.²² In response to this initiative by the employers, the boarding house keepers refused to accept a return to the uncertain advance note system.

Far from disbanding their association, the boarding masters were soon in a position to add insult to injury. By the early 1870s, before the onset of the depression, a local sailors' association had won an enhanced monthly wage rate from the shipowners, so that the general level of prosperity, coupled with a continued demand for seamen, provided the boarding house keepers' association too with a chance to make larger profits. In 1870 they began charging a commission fee to be paid in cash by the shipmaster, owner or consignee for every sailor supplied for shipping engagements out of the houses belonging to the members of the association. If that head fee had re-

22 *Acts of the General Assembly of New Brunswick, 1866*. Cap. XXI: An Act to amend Chapter 87, of the Revised Statutes. 'Of Regulations for shipping Seamen at the Port of Saint John'.

mained a moderate one, the Saint John shipping interests might not have protested but in times of chronic shortage of sailors, the fee rose. Furthermore, the practice was no longer confined to sailors boarding in the houses of the "ring". Their adversaries accused the boarding house keepers of exacting "blood money" for all seamen, including local residents, that a vessel might recruit independently of sailortown's bosses. They were also accused of withholding seamen from vessels whose owners or agents did not comply with the rules of the association.

The outcry aroused by these accusations in 1872 was largely ignored by the powerful, unyielding association. They refused to be disciplined. Their control of the sailor labour market brought the employers to their knees. As a feeble response the Saint John Board of Trade mooted the establishment of a harbour police force along the lines of the Quebec river police. But no force materialized and sailors stood by the boarding masters, one seaman claiming that far from being exploited by them, it was the owners and masters of vessels who robbed seafarers in Saint John, forcing them to go to court to recover their hard-earned wages. Unable to intimidate the sailors, whose labour they needed, the employers seemed to be venting their resentment over the higher wage scales on the boarding masters, whose fraternity, they claimed, was manipulating the sailors for its own selfish ends. The employers were now being forced to bear the cost of the incidental expenses of Jack's stopover in the port of Saint John.²³

While the exaction of blood money, pressing as it did on the owners, might have slightly diminished the financial exploitation of the sailors by the boarding masters, the might of the boarding house keepers' association could be as effectively turned against individual sailors as it was directed against the whole class of shipowners. Indeed, the association further reduced the small degree of freedom that a visiting sailor might enjoy in sailortown. The rules prohibited the members of the association from taking in any sailor who was indebted to another member. This meant that James Currie, who, as we have seen, had the satisfaction of causing his boarding master-creditor to be jailed

23 For the most significant documentation on the Saint John boarding house keepers' association, see Petition of 29 February 1864, RLE/864, pe 2, No. 47, PANB; *Morning Freeman*, 26, 28 April, 12 May 1864; *Morning Post* (Saint John), 25 April 1864; Petition of Shipbuilders Shipowners, and Merchants of the City and County of Saint John, 1866, RLE/866, pe 1, No. 6, PANB; *Daily Tribune*, 20, 24, 27, 28 December 1872, 7 January 1873; *Daily Telegraph*, 11, 16 June 1870, 28 December 1872, 14, 31 January 1873; *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette* (London), 29 May 1880. Members of the association tried to exact a higher rate of blood money for putting seamen aboard on Sunday (*Morning Freeman*, 11 February 1873). Halifax boarding masters also appear to have successfully exacted a bonus for their services during the sailor shortage of the prosperous early seventies (*Evening Express* [Halifax], 28 March 1874).

for selling liquor without a license, could not then find accommodation in Saint John.²⁴ Nor any longer could a sailor desert on his own initiative. If he changed ship, he could do so successfully only with the connivance of the association. Once shipped by a member of the association he deserted at his peril. When Benjamin Horton, a 29 year old Dane, deserted in 1874, he was unable to find a boarding house that would lodge him. It being January, his chances of employment were negligible, and he was forced to go to jail for shelter.²⁵

Saint John, during the second half of the nineteenth century, may present a unique instance of organized boarding house influence in sailortown. But even in that port the sailor at least had an ally against his employer in the person of the boarding master, though choosing between the two could be like choosing between the devil and the deep blue sea. At the same time society enjoyed the benefits of an unofficial sailor-minder who supervised the sailors' activities and imposed a form of control that protected the boarding master's investment and quite incidentally promoted the discipline, though not the reform, of sailortown.

The failure of the merchant princes of Saint John to overthrow the boarding house keepers of sailortown raises questions about the effectiveness of the second control mechanism, the government shipping office, which had been established several decades earlier to regulate the employment of sailors in the interests of the employers. The office came into existence in 1850 on the basis of an act of the New Brunswick legislature and was modelled on the Quebec shipping office of 1848. In both ports the transatlantic timber trade and local shipbuilding created a chronic shortage of merchant seamen, irregular hiring practices, and high sailors' wages.²⁶ The vociferous complaints of shipowners over the costs they incurred in these circumstances and the disorderliness of sailortown during the shipping season produced the government shipping office. This constituted, for its day, an extreme interference with the laissez-faire arrangements in port which had encouraged desertion and inflated wage rates.

The employment agent in the person of the shipping master was supposed to discourage desertion by identifying and reporting deserters when they tried to reshipe, regulate wage rates in his capacity as the intermediary be-

24 *Morning Freeman*, 6 April 1872. Very few sailors' boarding house keepers stayed outside the ring. *Morning Freeman*, 10 May 1864.

25 *Morning Freeman*, 27 January 1874.

26 More detail on these features can be found in my article, "The Decline of the Sailor as a Ship Labourer in 19th Century Timber Ports", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1977, especially pp. 36 - 43.

tween shipmaster and prospective crewmen, and bind seamen to their contracts by acting as witness to the signing of the shipping articles. But in Saint John, as in contemporary Quebec, the shipping master failed to reduce either desertion or wage rates. The challenge that the shipping office was supposed to pose to traditional boarding and hiring practices never materialized. There were three major reasons for the failure of the shipping master to emerge as the disciplinary authority in Saint John's sailortown. Firstly, the shipping master soon discovered that he could not recruit seamen directly. Sailors looking for ships did not usually walk into his office as independent candidates for employment. With the exception of the occasional recruiting forays into other ports for seamen, there is no evidence that the shipping master even attempted to find his own men. The first shipping master, Patrick Comerford, had earlier been an independent shipping agent in the port and was intimately acquainted with local hiring practices. Until the establishment of the government shipping office local hiring had depended on men like Comerford who acted as intermediaries between sailors looking for ships and and shipmasters looking for crews. The crews for the vessels of local ship-owners John Ward and Sons were supplied in the 1840s by Comerford but the endorsements on the shipping notes indicate that Comerford himself was dependent on the boarding house keepers for the supply of sailors who signed articles in his office.²⁷ In Saint John therefore the government shipping master stepped into the shoes of the private agents he superseded and either willingly or out of necessity continued the customary hiring practices of the first half of the century. Necessity seems the more likely incentive in the case of Comerford who was interested in reforming sailortown by promoting temperance and a sailors' home. Yet unwittingly he became another member of the sailortown fraternity, working in league with the boarding masters who continued to control the supply of seamen in Saint John. The influence of the boarding house keepers on the shipping office prevailed for many years. In 1882, for example, the shipping master engaged 2341 seamen as crew members on foreign-going vessels. Sixty-four per cent of the seamen were referred to the shipping office by twenty-five boarding house keepers. One half of the seamen so supplied came from the houses of six boarding masters situated in the dockside area from York Point to Reed's Point. Foremost amongst the six major suppliers of seamen was "Spud Murphy" Miller, now clearly the most powerful boarding master in sailortown.²⁸

27 See, for example, Ward Papers, Packet 4, Advance notes, crew of the *Avon*, February 1847, New Brunswick Museum.

28 The data for 1882 comes from the Register of merchant seamen engaged on ocean-going vessels at the port of Saint John, Book No. 2, Canada, Department of Transport, Records of Engagements and Discharges of Seamen at the Port of Saint John, New Brunswick Museum.

The only period of real tension between the Saint John shipping master and the boarding house keepers occurred in the early 1860s when Allan McLean served as deputy shipping master to his father James McLean, whom he succeeded in 1865. Two assault cases in the shipping office, each involving the deputy and a boarding master, reveal that the younger McLean did not take kindly to interference in such matters as the determination of the amount of sailors' advances. Nor did he appreciate the tendency of boarding masters to treat the shipping master as a clerk available for the convenience of business transactions between themselves and the shipmasters.²⁹ William McFadden, a prominent boarding master of the middle decades of the century, who was instrumental in the formation of the boarding house keepers' association, not only resented the curt and abusive treatment he encountered in the shipping office, but subsequently suffered the indignity of seeing one of his boarders, whom he brought to court for breaking a window of his house, sent on board the *Alfred the Great* unpunished, at the instigation of shipping master McLean.³⁰

A further reason for the failure of the shipping office relates to the manner in which it was run. While the government was willing to legislate into existence an office that was designed to regulate labour to the advantage of the employer, it was not prepared to pay for this departure from laissez-faire principles. The office operated on a fee structure. The shipping master posted bonds and maintained established rates for the engagement and the discharge of seamen, the rates under the Federal Department of Marine and Fisheries being fifty cents for an engagement and thirty cents for a discharge. The shipping master's captive clientele amongst sailors on foreign-going voyages provided the income for himself and his staff. The larger the clientele, the more remuneration for our government appointee. What this meant in practice was the shipping master had a vested interest in preserving the *status quo*; in encouraging the traditional mobility in the sailor labour market. Every time a sailor changed ship, the shipping master collected his fees. Articled seamen who remained loyal to their engagements made no contribution to the shipping master's income. Desertion therefore was good for the shipping office. As a result the shipping master lacked the incentive for interfering with earlier practices.³¹

29 *Morning Freeman*, 11 September 1860, 20 June 1861.

30 *Morning Freeman*, 15 August 1867.

31 Net income of the Saint John and Halifax shipping masters (Source: Canada, *Sessional Papers*, Annual Reports of the Department of Marine and Fisheries)

	1870	1871	1872	1873	1874	1875	1876	1877	1878
Saint John	\$ 737	978	722	1180	1832	1633	957	725	1436
Halifax	—	—	—	975	1108	902	—	1094	910

The failure of the shipping master to extend official control over hiring practices can also be attributed to the incomplete nature of his authority. Because he did not legally have the right to superintend hiring on all the shipping in port, he did not have access to the information that would have enabled him to catch deserters and curb the irregular practices against which the shipping interests railed. Until 1854 no captain in Saint John was required to engage his seamen before the shipping master. Thereafter the small-sized vessels engaged in coasting were never brought under his surveillance by law. For shipping seamen on coasting vessels under 80 tons register no regulations applied. On vessels over 80 tons operating under coasting articles, a witness's signature was required but not that of the shipping master.³² Eventually he also lacked the authority to regulate the manning of American vessels in Canadian ports. Until the matter became a controversial issue late in 1888, the Saint John shipping master (apparently unlike his counterparts in other ports) did insist on extending his jurisdiction to American ships: they could not clear customs without his certificate. The American Treasury Department, however, made it quite clear in 1889 that crewing arrangements in Canadian ports must be supervised by American consuls. This meant that late in the century a large proportion of the shipping lay outside the authority of the government shipping office. A ready outlet existed therefore for the perpetuation of crimping, desertion, and other irregular sailortown practices.³³

These three features, which in the long run made the impact of the shipping office on sailortown virtually negligible, applied also to Halifax. But the Halifax office made a more striking debut since it was established in a more hostile environment of strained employer-employee relations. On his appointment in 1872, the first shipping master, J. D. Cummins, met with a complete lack of cooperation from seamen and had to impose his authority in an officious manner in order to force articulated seamen to join their vessels.³⁴ The lackadaisical, if not perverse, attitude of the seamen towards their shipping agreements did not elicit the shipping master's sympathy when it came to their wage negotiations. Cummins began his work at a time when the expectations of the seamen were rising during the final flicker of the golden prosperity of the commercial economy. Their counterparts in Saint John had won a wage rate of 25 dollars a month to which sailors in Halifax also aspired. But the new regulatory office limited the rate in January 1873 to about 20

32 *Morning Chronicle*, 9, 10 July 1878.

33 *Morning Herald*, 24 December 1888; *Globe* (Saint John), 28 February, 12 June, 19 October 1889.

34 *Morning Chronicle*, 24 December 1872.

dollars per month. When Patrick Carroll, a seaman who refused to ship for under 25 dollars, intimidated another sailor, Huston Stairs, who had just left the shipping office after signing an agreement for 20 dollars. Carroll was arrested, convicted of assault and given the option of a 40 dollar fine or 90 days 'in durance vile'.³⁵ By the late winter when the Halifax rate had fallen to 18 dollars, the sailors regrouped, demanded 24 dollars and at least succeeded in delaying some of the shipping in port. Joseph Atkins, who shipped at the official rate of 18 dollars, subsequently refused to join his vessel unless he was given the higher rate. Cummins complained to the stipendiary magistrate who gave Atkins the option of fulfilling his agreement or going to prison for eight weeks.³⁶ Thereafter since there is no evidence of collective sailor resistance to the Halifax shipping office, we can assume that once the shipping master had settled in, he adopted the Saint John practice of recruiting sailors according to the customs of the port and quietly collected his fees. By 1875, if not before, shipping firms in Halifax were again procuring their seamen through the services of boarding masters such as Thomas Ward, long-time boarding house keeper in Upper Water street, and required the shipping office only for the completion of the formalities ordained by law. In the late 1880s the boarding house keepers had regained enough power to be recognized as the responsible agents for conveying seamen to their ships even in the outports.³⁷

Insofar as the two shipping offices performed their functions in a similar fashion, however, they affected the lives of sailors ashore in a number of ways. In some respects the shipping office was useful to sailors. It acted as a clearing house and information centre which enabled the sailor immediately on arrival to become aware of prevailing wage rates, types of voyages available, and the prospects for employment in the near future. If he trusted the shipping master it was possible for the sailor to use him as a binding arbiter when it came to disagreements with his captain over wages.³⁸ The shipping master was often willing to relay messages, forward mail, and act as a witness in court. The office could also serve sailors by protecting them against some types of exploitation. Shipmasters or employers were successfully brought to task for maltreatment of sailors through the interest of the shipping master. The frequent conviction of masters for shipping seamen contrary to law may have been a reprimand for failing to pay the shipping master his fees; it also meant that irregular articles that left the sailor open to deception were often

35 *Morning Chronicle*, 18 January 1873.

36 *Morning Chronicle*, 20, 22 March 1873.

37 *Morning Chronicle*, 15 January 1875; *Morning Herald*, 29 June 1889.

38 *Morning Freeman*, 5 November 1870.

disallowed.³⁹ In Saint John in 1873 the shipping master disqualified articles that had deceived seamen into engaging for a double round voyage to the West Indies when they thought they were embarking on the more usual single round trip.⁴⁰ In 1895 the shipping master intervened to protect the rights of seaman Thomas Rundle after his captain had forced him off his ship despite the existence of an unexpired shipping engagement.⁴¹ And even in the more sensitive realm of wages, the shipping master would protect the right of a sailor to the prevailing wage rate in circumstances where he had unwittingly made a verbal agreement with a shipmaster to ship at a lower rate.⁴²

At the same time sailors did have reason to fear the activities of the shipping office. The shipping master, under the power given him by various shipping acts, had the authority to capture and charge renegade sailors, authority that in the pre-shipping office period had been only haphazardly enforced. He was most concerned to discipline seamen who committed the indiscretion of refusing to comply with their shipping agreements and join their ships. Usually the sailors were brought before the police court and, on conviction, sent aboard their vessels. To ensure that the court's directions were followed, the shipping master could call on the police to assist him in forcibly putting the sailors on board.⁴³ In Halifax in 1874 seaman John Gibbs suffered a different fate. Because he was also guilty of using abusive language towards the shipping master he was given the option of paying a fine of 10 dollars or going to jail for 60 days.⁴⁴

The sailor knew too that an office designed to meet the needs of ship-owners was not likely to operate in the interests of the sailor. Havelock Wilson, the seamen's union leader in Britain, voiced the suspicions of sailors when he referred to shipping masters as "Government-paid crimps".⁴⁵ These suspicions were particularly well founded in circumstances where the shipping master, anxious to ensure the loyalty of seamen articulated in his office, personally travelled with them to ports as distant from the Halifax office as Parrsboro.⁴⁶ While the office imposed an uneven degree of discipline on hiring practices and sustained its bureaucratic procedures out of self-interest,

39 *Morning Freeman*, 20 October, 18 December 1866, 28 March, 6 August 1867, 30 January 1868; *Morning News*, 25 May 1868, 26, 27 February 1869.

40 *Daily Tribune*, 27 December 1872.

41 CO 2/738, Canada No. 10716, ff. 269 - 76, Public Record Office.

42 *Morning Herald*, 28 June 1883.

43 See, for example, *Morning Freeman*, 30 May 1867; *Morning News*, 10 July 1868, 21 July 1870; *Morning Herald*, 27 October 1881.

44 *Morning Chronicle*, 2 March 1874.

45 J. H. Wilson, *My Stormy Voyage through Life* (London, 1925), p. 77.

46 *Morning Herald*, 17 August, 8 October 1881, 7 October 1882.

its major impact on sailortown was its physical presence. For the sailor it acted as a constant reminder of the employers' determination to interfere with port traditions. The sailors did not burn down the building as they did in Quebec, but both inside and outside the office they brawled, drank, loitered, swore and generally made a nuisance of themselves, evidence of sailor resentment of manipulation.⁴⁷

Neither boarding masters nor shipping masters were concerned with reforming the character of the sailor. What impetus to reform existed in the nineteenth century emanated from outside the boundaries of sailortown and formed the third type of control over sailors' activities ashore. The intrusion into the lower streets by the so-called sailors' friends — missionaries, business men, and middle class women — began as early as the 1820s with the British and Foreign Seamen's Friend Society in Halifax but became significant only in the 1840s. The motivation behind the friends' mission to seamen was partly a feeling of guilt: the ports depended on the labour of sailors for prosperity; surely then Jack's welfare ashore should have a pre-eminent claim on local benevolence.⁴⁸ But since Jack was also thought to be in need of moral and spiritual reformation, he was not given the opportunity to express his views on what form society's gratitude towards him should take. This was decided for him and assumed the guise of religious services, reading rooms, coffee rooms, and temperance lodgings. The friends believed that the most appropriate boarding house for the sailor was a home away from home, which they did not equate with the exploitative regimen and raucous atmosphere of the crimp's den. Sailors' homes were seen as a necessary alternative to the low boarding houses where gambling, drinking, and the wholesale robbery of the sailor prevailed, and where the only literature was "a pack of cards and the only parlour the tap room".⁴⁹ Through the reform of the sailor, moral and social activists might succeed in divesting sailortown of some of its taverns, shady boarding houses, and gambling dens. The reform of the sailor would also further the great temperance cause. Temperance advocates claimed that drink was at the root of all the evil things that happened to Jack ashore and brought him most frequently into contact with the police.⁵⁰

47 *Morning Chronicle*, 10 April 1873; *Daily Tribune*, 13 December 1873. For the burning of the Quebec shipping office, see Hawkins to Leslie, 25 July 1849, and Symes to Leslie, 25 July 1849, RG 4 C1, vol. 273, No. 503, Public Archives of Canada.

48 See, for example, *New Brunswick Courier* (Saint John), 16 January 1847.

49 *Daily Sun*, 29 April 1890; *Daily Tribune*, 30 December 1872; *Morning Herald*, 27 December 1883.

50 *Morning News*, 15 March 1854. In Halifax in the 1880s, 50 per cent of the sailors brought before the magistrate were charged with drunkenness and related offences. Halifax Stipendiary Magistrate Papers, XXX: Return of Persons before the Police Court.

In order to win the support of the shipping interests for their most ambitious project, the sailors' friends pointed to the beneficial effects which sailors' homes would have on the seaman's conduct at sea. Temperate seamen, imbued with Christian deference, were likely to perform their seafaring duties with greater loyalty, assiduity, and sobriety and thereby enhance the employer's prospects of profit. Certainly the longest-lasting sailors' home was governed by a set of rules and regulations which reflected middle class notions of the qualities desired in wage earners of the industrial age: punctuality, hard work, temperance, thrift, and obedience.

The friends' major enthusiasm, the establishment of sailors' homes, reached climaxes in the middle of the century and again in the last couple of decades of the century. Plans for a home in Saint John were launched in 1846 with a wide range of merchants' support and the project even received a grant from the legislature. The depression of the late forties delayed its implementation until 1853. Then the home opened its doors only with the help of further funds from the New Brunswick government. The bankruptcy in 1857 of this sailors' home and its sponsoring body, the Saint John Seamen's Friend Society, an incorporated joint stock company, was the first significant indication of the futility of public attempts to discipline sailortown and mould it in the interests of a well-ordered, modernizing society unless those attempts were sustained by a considerable financial investment.⁵¹ Significantly no sailors' home was attempted again until 1890, the activities of the Mariners' Friend Association established in 1864 being entirely religious in character.

By the end of the century middle class women had become deeply involved in rescue work and reform movements in Saint John. Yet the prospects for extending their efforts to include merchant seamen were not very promising. The Women's Christian Temperance Union had already tried and failed to sustain a combined coffee room and reading room for sailors.⁵² Its failure did not deter a woman named Mary Hutchinson who, with her father's money and the example of Halifax, St. John's, and Montreal before her, built a "palatial" sailors' home on St. James Street, which was centrally heated, gas lighted, and endowed with running hot and cold water and indoor WCs.⁵³ Hutchinson hoped that the home would become self-supporting. Certainly she refused to conduct any public campaigns to support the institution at its inception or to save it from an early demise. She welcomed the voluntary help of the women who formed the Ladies' Seaman's Friend Society in 1891 but the

51 *Journal of the House of Assembly, New Brunswick*, 1846, p. 201; 1854, p. 261; Petition of President, Directors and Company of the Saint John Seamen's Friend Society, RLE/856 - 7, pe 2, No. 38, PANB.

52 *Progress* (Saint John), 15 December 1888.

53 *Globe*, 11 February 1889; *Daily Sun*, 7 February 1890.

assistance of a handful of women was an insufficient mainstay. Moreover, despite warnings against running a "straight-laced home, with a gospel meeting every evening", Hutchinson would not compromise her principles in order to attract greater business.⁵⁴ When it became clear by 1894 that the home could not pay its running expenses, its doors were closed after an existence of only four years.⁵⁵ Not enough public support could then be encouraged by the seamen's friends to take over this private venture. It was succeeded by a seamen's mission building in Water street with the limited aims of providing gospel meetings and an afternoon and evening reading room.⁵⁶

In Halifax at least two small-scale sailors' homes were attempted unsuccessfully in the 1840s. The second venture grew out of the activities of the local seamen's friend society of 1844, known as the Bethel Union, and the inspiration derived from a visit of Boston's missionary to seamen, E. T. Taylor, in 1846.⁵⁷ No other home materialized until 1862 but the short life of this voluntarily supported institution, despite wide-ranging endorsement from the city's businessmen, and the failure of a number of other schemes in the sixties and seventies were caused by the predominant local interest in naval rather than in merchant sailors. Since most of the impetus behind the establishment of a home for bluejackets was derived from the temperance movement, considerable conflict arose between the seamen's friends and the admiral, who refused to deny his men their grog.⁵⁸ It was not until the late seventies that the futility of combining efforts with the naval authorities fully dawned upon Halifax reformers. Then a sailors' home, which enjoyed a life of almost twenty years, developed out of a night hostel set on foot by James S. Potter, a dour Scot and Presbyterian city missionary, and the recent interest shown by the city's elite in the welfare of seamen generated by the establishment of a branch of the Church of England's St. Andrew's Waterside Mission. The highlight of those twenty years was the opening of a new building in 1888. This considerable undertaking was made possible by the amalgamation the previous year of the directors and directresses of the sailors' home of 1879, the seamen's mission of 1881, and the seamen's rest of 1884 to form the Halifax Seamen's Friend Society. Conceived as a silver jubilee memorial, the home

54 *Progress*, 15 December 1888.

55 *Daily Sun*, 20 January 1894.

56 *Daily Sun*, 9, 14 March 1894.

57 *Acadian Recorder*, 28 August 1841; 1st and 2nd *Annual Reports* of the Halifax Bethel Union, 1846, 1847; *Novascotian*, 3 August 1846; see also retrospective letter of G. Ray Beard, *Morning Herald*, 19 March 1886.

58 Minutes of the Halifax City Mission, 2 July 1862, MG 4, No. 42, PANS; *Annual Report* of the Halifax City Mission for 1862, p. 10.

was located on the corner of Upper Water street and Bell's lane, slightly north of the earlier rented premises between George and Duke streets. Immediately it experienced financial difficulties. Despite a 10,000 dollar bequest from Sir William Young the friends were unable to discharge a debt for a similar amount which the 26,000 dollar project had incurred. Like Hutchinson's home in Saint John, the Halifax venture was not self-supporting and its debts steadily mounted. Amongst the appeals launched to save the home were futile applications to the British government to provide an annual grant for the facilities provided for naval sailors who outnumbered the civilian seamen for the first time in 1889.⁵⁹ Deteriorating finances finally forced the home to close in 1896. At the end of the century some non-commercial sleeping accommodation for sailors was still available under the auspices of the Seamen's Friend Society but that was patronized largely by naval sailors.⁶⁰

While it may have been unrealistic for the projectors of sailors' homes to have believed that such enterprises would pay for themselves, the sailors' home movement in the 19th century failed for reasons other than inadequate financial backing. The seamen's friends had powerful opponents to contend with, ranging from boarding house and tavern keepers, to shipping interests, to the sailors themselves. As a rival to private enterprise in sailortown, the sailors' homes aroused the opposition of boarding master and liquor seller (frequently one and the same person) because they attempted to interfere with traditional hiring practices and because they were run on strict temperance principles. As a hiring device, the cosy arrangement whereby the government shipping master's office in Halifax was housed under the same roof as the sailor's home represented a critical piece of anti-boarding house propaganda. The message clearly was that seamen boarding in the sailors' home would have priority when it came to filling the requests for crewmen placed with the shipping master. The manager, James Potter, proudly reported soon after the home opened that, in the first quarter of 1880, 121 of his 180 boarders had been shipped.⁶¹ Since Halifax boarding masters were not as vocal as their Saint John counterparts, their response is difficult to gauge, though they did criticize the home as a bogus charity.⁶² The marriage between the sailors' home and the shipping office was however short-lived, the two agencies going their separate ways on the opening of the new sailors' home in 1888. Thereafter, for example, the shipping master no longer protected the home's inmates by himself conveying them to the outports to join their ships.

59 *Morning Herald*, 23 January 1886, 29 June, 29 July 1889.

60 *Acadian Recorder*, 27 January 1899.

61 *Morning Herald*, 15 April 1880.

62 *Morning Herald*, 8 March 1883.

Instead he placed his trust in boarding house keepers who did not hesitate to encourage the sailors' home recruits to forsake their temperance pledges before they went on board.⁶³

In Saint John the boarding house keepers were probably not unduly upset by the establishment of the Hutchinson home built to accommodate about 40 men. Nonetheless by 1892, it had begun to act as a minor source of supply for the shipping office, the attraction for shipmasters being cheaper sailors, since Mary Hutchinson required no blood money. This incursion into the sacred realm of the boarding house keepers demanded a vigorous response. They adopted a "boycott" whereby they refused to provide seamen for any vessel which engaged a proportion of its men from the sailors' home. As a result, shipmasters discharged their sailors' home recruits. Lack of prospects for shipping through the home discouraged the patronage of sailors. The boarding masters, however, graciously provided alternative boarders for the home: they encouraged Hutchinson to take in "sick and broken-down sailors" from their houses — "their own wrecks" as it were, who required charity and would be unable soon to re-enter the sailor labour market.⁶⁴

The liquor sellers, for their part, had good reason to be perturbed by the Halifax Sailors' home because it not only afforded competitive accommodation but its manager also challenged the right of liquor sellers to exist in sailortown. This extreme stand represented the personal vendetta of James Potter who spent his spare time pursuing violators of the liquor licensing laws. Initially, in the early stages of his management of the home, he received considerable civic support for his attempt to impose a ban on the sale of liquor in the vicinity of the sailors' home. By the late 1880s, however, the public and the Seamen's Friend Society itself had become disenchanted with Potter and unwilling to back his campaign for prohibition which was being conducted through the highly controversial Law and Order Society. In addition to the liquor issue, accusations that his management of the home was self-serving, autocratic, heartless, and excessively puritanical resulted in a confrontation between Potter and the board leading to the manager's resignation in 1891. His Halifax supporters claimed on his departure that the Seamen's Friend Society had listened to the clamour of the liquor interests against Potter's temperance activities and appeased them by dismissing him.⁶⁵

While the boarding house and tavern keepers had a vested interest in an unreformed sailortown, the indifference which usually characterized the attitude of the shipping interests towards sailors' homes is more difficult

63 *Acadian Recorder*, 29 June 1889.

64 *Daily Sun*, 24 January 1893.

65 *Morning Herald*, 9, 19 November 1880; *Acadian Recorder*, 9 January 1889; *Morning Herald*, 14 January, 6 May 1889; *Morning Chronicle*, 9 December 1890; *Daily Sun*, 27 April 1891.

to explain. The support of shipowners, builders, and merchants was prominent in the ventures in Saint John in the forties and fifties. Indeed the chamber of commerce was instrumental in airing the subject of sailors' homes in the initial discussions of 1846.⁶⁶ Thereafter, however, the matter was allowed to drop and was revived only in 1893 when Mary Hutchinson indicated her inability to carry on with the management of her sailors' home. A committee, which included businessmen and manufacturers, mostly unconnected with shipping, expressed a willingness to assume responsibility for the home if its regimen could be altered to make it more attractive to sailors and less of a moral prison. They were apparently unable to reach agreement with the owner who persisted with her venture for a few months longer, at the same time expressing her dependence on the shipowners of the port. If they "would only speak a good word for it", she told a newsreporter, "there would be no difficulty in keeping it open, for many of the sailors simply go where they are directed".⁶⁷ To the sailors' home, however, they were not directed.

In Halifax the local supporters of the sailors' home movement and such allied activities as missions to seamen constantly complained about the lack of support from the very shipping interests that the projects were likely to benefit. Only a handful of the many shipowners and shipping agents participated actively, including A. G. Jones, who was involved in trade through Halifax, and T. E. Kenney, the largest Halifax shipowner of the 1880s but with little involvement in the port's own trade. Both were federal politicians with self-interested reasons for supporting good causes.⁶⁸ By the time of the construction of the new home and the formation of the Seamen's Friend Society, even this token support had been lost, very few of the shipowners subscribing to the building fund or acting as directors. Since this development coincided with the separation of the shipping office and the sailors' home, we are left to conclude that the earlier modicum of interest shown in the home by shipowners and agents was more concerned with economy than reform.⁶⁹ On the basis of the scanty concrete evidence we have, it appears that by 1890 local shipping firms requiring seamen went to the sailors' home only when the boarding houses were empty. The reason suggested was the disrepute into which the home had fallen under the management of the fanatical James

66 *Morning News*, 2 March 1846.

67 *Daily Sun*, 20 April 1893.

68 Jones elsewhere went on record as an opponent of sailors' rights. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, Vol. XXX, 1890, col. 4403; *Morning Herald*, 8 January 1891.

69 The Halifax capitalists who were prominent in the venture were outside shipping: men like S. M. Brookfield, master builder and company director, and J. C. Mackintosh, stockbroker, civic politician and company director. The fortunes of the Halifax sailors' home can be traced through the *Annual Reports of Halifax Sailors' Home, 1880 - 7* and of the Seamen's Friend Society, 1888 - 93, some of which are extant only in the newspapers.

Potter.⁷⁰ A. W. West, prominent in the port's West Indies trade, claimed that he could not "get one of his captains to go to the home to get a crew, they look on the home as the last resort in such a case".⁷¹ West, however, was a property owner in sailortown. His tenants sold liquor and they may also have kept boarding houses. Since the sailors' home functioned as a rival to the commercial facilities for seamen, it may have incurred the hostility of local landowners whose property was already suffering an increasing burden of taxation and whose tenants' livelihood was being endangered by the temperance campaign.

If the sailors' home threatened the investment of the shipping interests in local property, it also called on them for financial contributions at a time when their profit margins in the shipping business were rapidly diminishing. The unhealthy state of their trade did not endear them to the welfare of their employees. In fact the shipping interests were fed up with regulations designed to protect the sailors and considered the reforms of Samuel Plimsoll, the real sailors' friend, to be a threat to Canadian shipping. Shipowners who preferred *laissez faire* at sea may also have adopted a *laissez faire* attitude towards the welfare of the sailor ashore.⁷² In fact their lack of interest in local reformist schemes, whatever the limitations of those schemes, was indicative of a heartless attitude towards their employees in general.

If the petty shopkeepers and shipping magnates of sailortown generally scorned the sailors' homes, what was the attitude of the sailors themselves? We have no way of knowing what kind of sailor willingly patronized these establishments.⁷³ If they tended to be temperate, family men who appreciated

70 *Morning Chronicle*, 1 December 1890.

71 *Acadian Recorder*, 9 January 1889.

72 See, for example, *Daily Sun*, 22 January 1891, 2 November 1893.

73 We do know their rating.

Boarders in Halifax Sailors' Home (exclusive of naval sailors)

Source: *Annual Reports*

	1880	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1890	1892
masters	19	16	15	14	13	14	11	17	16	14	20
mates	88	89	88	76	61	75	51	62	39	41	56
cooks/stewards	80	62	96	63	70	90	66	71	48	54	49
able seamen	536	644	550	552	441	434	363	515	349	304	548
ordinary seamen	58	70	71	52	74	48	32	25	22	47	43
engineers	10	5	12	6	9	5	8	4	4	—	—
firemen	17	19	58	28	43	41	23	33	13	47	62
carpenters	—	8	—	11	4	14	6	—	—	6	12
fishermen	—	—	—	—	—	61	100	41	117	221	95
boys	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
doctors	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
cattlemen	—	—	—	—	—	16	16	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	815	913	890	802	715	799	661	788	608	680	885

facilities for writing letters home and opportunities for saving money, they represented a minority in a workforce which, regardless of nationality, was overwhelmingly young and single. Furthermore, sailors' homes did not have a monopoly of beneficial measures for sailors. The powerful boarding house keepers of Saint John were able to forestall the establishment of a sailors' home between the mid-1850s and the early 1890s specifically because they provided facilities for men of stable habits. Given a choice of lodgings offering similar services, a sailor probably preferred the boarding house whose keeper could talk to him in terms he understood. The proprietor of the sailors' home, on the other hand, was likely to adopt a condescending, punitive, or righteous attitude towards his charges. Undoubtedly there were sailors who preferred the sailors' home but a much greater number wanted to spend their time in the more tolerant social atmosphere of boarding houses, taverns, eating houses, and shops.

Nevertheless, the sailors' homes did perform some useful functions which differed entirely from those of the boarding houses. The Halifax home proved its earnestness to operate as a non-profit making venture by cashing sailors' advance notes without charge. It also provided seamen with ample opportunities to take the temperance pledge, secure medical attention, and transmit allotment notes to their families.⁷⁴ In addition it was a refuge for two special categories of sailors. One was that of shipwrecked sailors, whom the federal and foreign governments boarded in it until transportation could be arranged to convey the unfortunate crews back to their home ports.⁷⁵ The other category comprised unemployed and destitute sailors of whom there must have been many in slack seasons and lean years. Since Potter's first venture in 1876 had been a refuge for the destitute homeless, regardless of occupation or sex, his subsequent concentration on sailors would tend to suggest that, in his experience, seamen formed the most numerous group of vagrants in the city. The sailors' home of 1879 retained, as a separate department, a night refuge for destitute seafaring men whose only alternatives were the jail or the poorhouse. Without immediate prospects of shipping engagements, unemployed sailors were unlikely to find places in sailors' boarding houses. Potter in fact claimed that the night refuge sheltered "friendless and moneyless sailors, who have been kicked from boarding houses because they have nothing to pay".⁷⁶ For the Seamen's Friend Society the refuge became the most costly and therefore least satisfactory aspect of the operation. But, by the time the sailors' home had virtually ceased operations as a hostel

74 *Morning Chronicle*, 25 April 1890; *Herald* (Halifax), 31 January 1893.

75 *Morning Herald*, 18 March 1880, 23 February 1883.

76 *Daily Sun*, 30 August 1888. For criticism of Potter's management of the refuge see *Morning Herald*, 24, 25 December 1889.

for merchant sailors in the mid-1890s, the refuge may have been rendered unnecessary by the Salvation Army's establishment of a refuge and shelter house on Hollis street which undoubtedly catered to the destitute sailors of the port.

No account of the failure of the late nineteenth-century sailors' homes can be understood without an appreciation of the new pattern and rhythm of sailors' lives ashore which was being introduced and established by the steamship. Seamen working on steamers which did business in Halifax and Saint John were generally only briefly in port and needed far fewer facilities than they had done as hands on sailing vessels.⁷⁷ Even for the large sailing vessels which were now foreign-owned, the pressure to work the obsolete freighters flat out in order to compete with steam meant that they stayed in port as short a time as possible and frequently disallowed shore leave to their crews. The need of the ports to control sailors was accordingly diminished. For this reason, it can be argued that the sailors' friends who actively pursued measures for the reform and protection of sailors with renewed vigour in the latter decades of the century were backward looking and intent on solving problems prominent a generation earlier. As the *Sun* explained in 1893:

The St. John of today is vastly different from the St. John of twenty years ago. Then the deals exported went in sailing vessels, many of which paid their crews off here. Now the steamers do a very large part of the business and their crews always stay by them. The foreign vessels visiting the port retain their crews as a rule. This leaves only the men who come here in vessels flying the British flag to be provided with boarding houses.⁷⁸

Sailortown itself was being transformed by forces beyond local control, forces which operated in the interests of reformers because they shortened a sailor's stopover in port and improved his conditions of employment sufficiently (often making him an employee of a steamship company) to lower the rate of desertion. In a sense, then, the failure of the costly sailors' homes signalled the passing of the problem which had stimulated the philanthropy of the seamen's friends. As a commentator remarked retrospectively in regard to the defunct Halifax sailors' home in 1897, "the changing conditions of the port had largely swept away the source it was designed to succor and be sustained by. 'The sailors are not here' ".⁷⁹

Changing circumstances equally affected the older institutions of sailor-

77 *Acadian Recorder*, 31 January 1895, 27 January 1899.

78 *Daily Sun*, 26 January 1893.

79 *Acadian Recorder*, 17, 18 February 1897.

46 *Acadiensis*

town. The dissolution of the sailors' homes did not, for example, represent a victory for the boarding house keepers; by the turn of the twentieth century they too were disappearing from sailortown or turning their houses into working class tenements.⁸⁰ With the decline of the sailing vessel, most seamen became visitors rather than short-term residents and sailortown, as their predecessors had known it, ceased to exist.

80 By 1901 - 2, the boarding houses of three of the leading keepers of the 1880s had been turned into housing for themselves and various families of onshore workers. See the listing by streets for John Abbott and John Bartlett of Brittain street and Dennis Costigan of Pont street, Saint John City *Directory*, 1901 - 2.