

celestial navigation reached England" (p. 54) from continental Europe generally, and from Spain in particular, where Sebastian spent many years as a cartographer, cosmographer, and, less successfully, explorer. Yet to consolidate his reputation and promote himself to potential employers, he laid claim to his father's achievements in 1497. Very sensibly, Pope emphasizes that "Sebastian Cabot lied...not to mislead future historians, but to promote himself professionally among his own contemporaries" (p. 63). Nevertheless, the ensuing confusion *did* mislead later historians and added considerably to the confusion that came to characterize the landfall debate in later centuries.

Before plunging into that debate, Pope presents his readers with the five main landfall traditions — Bonavista, Labrador, Cape Breton Island, Maine or southern Nova Scotia, and the Straits of Belle Isle — complete with brief outlines of their individual historiographies as well as explanations of their respective strengths and weaknesses. Pope favours the last of the five, though he concedes that even this one is sufficiently problematical to leave the door open to one of the others. But then, Pope has already made it abundantly clear that there is unlikely ever to be sufficient evidence to support any one of the landfalls to everyone's satisfaction, and he engages in this discussion himself largely to usher in his chapters on the "invention of tradition" in 1897 and on the meaning and nature of discovery. Pope maintains that this process was shaped in part by the American celebration just a few years earlier of

the Columbus voyage of 1492, as well as by English Canada's desire for "their own founder-hero" in the aftermath of the 1884 celebrations in French Canada of the 350th anniversary of Jacques Cartier's first voyage. It is not a completely convincing argument. While the Canadian awareness of, and reaction to, American veneration of Columbus is demonstrable, the reaction to Quebec's cultural traditions is more circumstantial. Pope himself concedes that a distinction must be made between the invention of historical tradition "by what we might call historical artisans," meaning the intellectual and scholarly community, and "state-sponsored mass production of tradition" (p. 92). Neither Canada nor Newfoundland managed to match the American commemoration of Columbus in the mass-production of a Cabot tradition — Canada because of the constraints of its cultural duality, Newfoundland because of its economic constraints.

Pope closes with a discussion of the idea and nature of "discovery." Defying today's conventions, he insists that not only is it legitimate to define Cabot's voyage in 1497 as a voyage of European "discovery," but that efforts to disconnect Cabot from the idea of discovery do both Cabot and the aboriginal inhabitants of North America a terrible disservice. To deny Cabot's role as a "discoverer" is to reject the very implications and consequences of his voyage. This argument alone should make this book required reading for anyone interested in understanding the encounter of the Old World with the New.

Peter Watts and Tracy Marsh, *W. Watts & Sons Boat Builders: Canadian Designs for Work and Pleasure, 1842-1946*

STEVE KILLING

Watts, Peter, and Tracy Marsh. *W. Watts & Sons Boat Builders: Canadian Designs for Work and Pleasure, 1842-1946*. Oshawa: Mackinaw Productions, 1997. 208 pp., b&w illus., 196 photos. Cloth \$34.95, ISBN 0-9682808-0-3.

My interest in this new book, *W. Watts & Sons Boat Builders: Canadian Designs for Work and Pleasure, 1842-1946* by Peter Watts and Tracy Marsh is more than idle. I have admired the Watts skiff ever since I saw the photo of Collingwood harbour in James Barry's book *Georgian Bay: An Illustrated History* (Boston Mills Press, 1992). The photo, dated around 1880, shows the

harbour packed with handsome 20 to 35 foot boats, many built by Watts with the characteristic fine ends that suggest an easy motion through the water. Since then I have had the opportunity to look through the windows, and peer through cracks of the old W. Watts and Sons boat shop in Collingwood, rewarded by a glimpse of some old patterns, and century-old wood shavings. I can appreciate these boats on several levels; as a designer, their simplicity and pureness of form appeals to me; as a boater, I know how they must feel to sail; and as a keen admirer of historic vessels these are some of the best.

I didn't get past the introduction of this book before I had to stop and just stare. On page xv sits my favourite image in the entire book: a quiet little photo of a Watts dinghy resting in the boathouse. The head-on shot shows everything that is right about a Watts lapstrake boat: the sheer line is absolutely perfect with no awkward humps or hollows; from the near-vertical stem to the narrow transom each plank tapers so smoothly you don't even notice it is changing in width. Its subservient pose, obviously tucked under another much larger vessel quietly waiting for spring, is symbolic of the working vessel. Often ignored until it is pushed into service to bring home the next meal, save a life, or win a race, these boats seem to have all the patience in the world. The beauty comes from the graceful hollow of her bow accented by the lines of the lapstrake planking. As Marsh says, "The result is a splendid, almost sensual shape that functions with perfection...they are the pinnacle of good design."

The Watts shop built boats in carvel (smooth non-overlapping planks) and lapstrake (or clinker) construction. There are advantages of each, but my preference for the lapstrake construction has nothing to do with reason — it is the look of the thing. It is difficult to read the shape of a three-dimensional hull which has no lines on the surface to guide your eye. The point is well illustrated by a photo from the book showing the Toronto Lifesaving Service fleet of ten skiffs rendezvousing on a sunny day in Toronto. Their hull shapes come alive because of the shadow lines of the planking.

The Watts family made the long ocean voyage to Canada from Ireland in 1850. The original destination of brothers William and Matthew was Toronto Island where they built their first Canadian lapstrake sailboat. With a promised new railway line that would open up the south end of Georgian Bay, the brothers moved north and began their boat building legacy. Fishing was a prime industry and the Watts shop was busy supplying boats to the booming local fleet. Business was good. William's wife Susan, a native of Ireland, made the trip back to Ireland to give birth to each of their children — an indicator of their patriotism for their homeland, but also surely an indicator of the wealth they enjoyed from the boat-building business.

The book chronicles the contributions of the various sons in the firm W. Watts & Sons. William and Matthew, the pioneering brothers, started the business in Collingwood and various sons continued the legacy. Later

Matthew opened a new shop in Goderich and in 1870 William Jr and cabinetmaker Edward Trott moved to Vancouver to build boats for the west coast market. I found myself struggling to sketch out a family tree and wishing that Watts and Marsh, who know it better than anyone, could have helped me out. With several generations of Watts and an inordinate number of Williams and Matthews, it is hard to follow the lineage at times. But that did not lessen my enjoyment, for even though the family history is fascinating, complete with drownings, storms at sea, black sheep, favourite uncles, and underpaid sons, the focus for me is the boats.

A quick flip through the pages of this book reveals something that few people know about the Watts products. If one is familiar at all with the Watts boats, it is with the double-ended clinker-built "Collingwood skiff." A prime example is the sailing skiff *Nahma*, one of the few boats still in serviceable condition today and well documented by the National Museum of Science and Technology. But William Watts was a businessman as well as a boatbuilder and if a customer wanted a boat with a transom, then Watts would build him one. If a cabin was needed, the cabin went on. Engines instead of sails — a smart idea. Their contracts included large steam sailing vessels, rowboats, sailing skiffs, lifeboats — almost anything that floats. The drawings included in the book (and I would like to see more) curiously enough do not indicate the designer. This is not a fault of the authors — their almost 200 photos and images are crisply reproduced and documented — but humbleness on the part of the designer of the vessel. Normally a blueprint will note the project, scale, company and designer. The plans for the 12-foot square stern lifeboat at a scale of 1":1' prominently show the W. Watts & Sons Boat Builders, Collingwood, Ontario title block, but don't credit the draftsman. This was disappointing, as I would like to know which drawings William himself penned.

Government contracts to build lifeboats provided the steadiest work for the Watts shop. William realized the value of those contracts and kept them active with a combination of quality control and careful negotiation. In 1855 they began building corrugated metal lifeboats, an unimaginable step for wooden boatbuilders. But boats they were, and the resourceful Watts clan continued to build the best. The business passed from William to son Fred, but there the tradition stopped. Unfortunately for us the grandsons found fulfillment in jobs outside their father's shop and Fred carried on as the

only representative of the Watts family. The business struggled through the late 1930s and early 1940s until Fred Watts lost his battle with cancer in June of 1947.

When William and Susan's second oldest son, William Jr, moved to Vancouver he took some of the Watts technology with him. The Collingwood skiffs now had a western cousin dubbed the Columbia River skiff. William Jr formed the Vancouver Shipyard in 1902 and began construction and refit of larger vessels — up to 135 feet. They included towboats, power schooners; sailing vessels and skiffs. The west coast shop started to decline around the start of the depression when luxury capital was scarce. William Jr, then 67, decided it was time to retire and sold the business with one of the loveliest power launches I have seen still under construction. The new owner finished the *Cora Marie* with guidance by the ever-interested William Jr. She is a beautiful passenger ship with plumb bow, fantail stern, and private dining room. A fitting showpiece to end the west coast Watts line of boats.

I can't help but feel that the publishing of this book mirrors the Watts boatbuilding experience itself. Authors Watts (great grandson of William) and Marsh have an understandable obsession with those fine lapstrake hulls. There was probably a splinter of reason involved, but ultimately it was the single-minded drive to fulfill a dream that carried the book from idea to the bookstore shelves. When a search for the perfect publisher came up empty, in true Watts strong-willed style they decided to publish it themselves. We should be thankful for their perseverance.

In Marsh's foreword she concludes, "I thought that the completion of this book would relieve the desire to learn more about Watts and their wooden boats, but it has only added more fuel to the fire. Some day, there will be more." I look forward to more from this talented team, including the book's designer, Ronald MacRae. His clean layout and elegant chapter heads make the boat a pleasure to look at. If you like boats, history, rowing, sailing, fishing or just fine books, this one should be in your collection.

Wayne M. O'Leary, *The Tancook Schooners: An Island and Its Boats*

DAVID A. TAYLOR

O'Leary, Wayne M. *The Tancook Schooners: An Island and Its Boats*. Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994. 290 pp., illus., appendices, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth \$44.95, ISBN 0-7735-1172-5; paper \$17.95, ISBN 0-7735-1206-3.

The Tancook Schooners: An Island and Its Boats is a fascinating study of the roles one type of vernacular watercraft — schooners — played in the lives of succeeding generations of residents of Tancook Island, a small island located in Nova Scotia's Mahone Bay, between Lunenburg and Halifax.

In Chapter 1, after a brief description of the island's location and geography, the author presents a concise history of Europeans' possession (during the 1750s) and settlement (beginning in the 1790s) of the small island. He explains that although the original European owners of the island were British grantees, most of the people who actually settled it were Protestants from Germany and the German-speaking regions of Switzerland who came to Nova Scotia in connection with the British

government's efforts to establish a buffer against Acadian Catholicism. The majority of the island's settlers were peasant farmers without any experience with the sea, who naturally turned their attention to raising crops and livestock. The land was found to be quite productive and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, island residents were able to export surplus crops to Halifax and other cities in Nova Scotia. However, as the island's population grew it became apparent that there was not sufficient arable land to go around and so, by the 1870s, increasing numbers of residents began to turn to the sea. The story of *The Tancook Schooners* really begins at this point.

Chapter 2 addresses the genesis of the island's boatbuilding tradition. The first vessels, probably open fishing craft, were not documented, but the first vessel of sufficient size to be officially registered — a 29-ton schooner — was built in 1827. In addition to building schooners, the island's early boatbuilders also turned out a number of smaller craft, inshore fishing boats known as "lobster" or "jolly" boats. Another of the island's early boat types was a