

exigences de son époque et conçu par l'être humain dans le but d'approfondir l'entendement de son cadre naturel. Il est possible de voir en Cassiodore le précurseur d'une longue lignée de modernistes opiniâtres. En effet, celui-ci était convaincu qu'en éliminant le comput, l'être humain ne serait désormais en mesure de vivre que dans l'ignorance la plus complète. Il alla même jusqu'à dire que « it is impossible to distinguish from other living creatures anyone who does not understand how to quantify [c'est-à-dire savoir utiliser le comput] » (Borst, p. 27). L'implantation de l'ordinateur dans les écoles n'est-elle pas une façon de prévenir qu'une grande partie de la population de demain soit « numériquement illettrée » et par le fait même laissée-pour-compte?

Bien que les deux auteurs aient une position différente au sujet du rôle joué par les instruments scientifiques dans l'évolution de la conception du temps, les ouvrages constituent une véritable mine d'information. Les notes

sont nombreuses, pertinentes et issues d'une remarquable quantité de sources primaires et secondaires. De plus, il est impossible de passer outre la recherche iconographique exemplaire de Dohrn-Van Rossum. Trop souvent, les écrivains oublient la richesse et la pertinence des images et des gravures. Les quelque 70 illustrations mettant en vedette clepsydres, sabliers, cadrans solaires, horloges mécaniques et publiques soutiennent mieux que toute autre chose la thèse de Dohrn-Van Rossum sur la transformation profonde de l'ordre temporel au terme d'un long et fructueux Moyen Âge. En somme, ces deux ouvrages méritent une lecture attentive par ceux et celles qui se demandent pourquoi, en cette ère de globalisation planétaire, nous en sommes rendus à déterminer la valeur numérique d'une transaction boursière en fonction des 9 192 631 770 oscillations par seconde de l'atome de césium. Le vieil adage qui prétend que « le temps, c'est de l'argent » ne se mesure donc plus en jours, en heures ou en même secondes, mais en nanosecondes!

## **Eileen Reid Marcil, *The Charley-Man: A History of Wooden Shipbuilding at Quebec, 1763–1893***

**DAVID MCGEE**

Marcil, Eileen Reid. *The Charley-Man: A History of Wooden Shipbuilding at Quebec, 1763–1893*. Kingston: Quarry Press, 1995. 439 pp. 271 illus., ISBN 1-55082-092-3; paper, \$32.95, ISBN 1-55082-093-1.

"The Charley-Man" is a song that workers used when moving heavy timbers in the shipyards of Quebec City. "Charley was a good man," the gangleader would sing out. "Chaaarley-man," gangs of up to one-hundred men would call in response, prolonging the first syllable to time the length of their pulls. The song of the workers could be heard for miles around. This book has clearly been the result of similarly long and heavy labours by Eileen Reid Marcil. It is absolutely crammed with information on the wooden shipbuilders at Quebec, the nature of their business, the yards, the markets, and the trades that supported a once-bustling industry.

Those familiar with the history of technology in Canada, books on Canadian ship building, and a great deal of maritime

historiography in general, will appreciate the book for several reasons. One is that the book is beautifully yet informatively illustrated, something all too rare in histories related to technology. Another is that Marcil includes a historiographical review of previous books and doctoral theses written about shipbuilding in Quebec. She also gives a valuable assessment of the available source materials, describing what can be found in them as well as the kind of problems they present. In addition, she has included a bibliography, as well as appendices that list all the wooden shipyards of Quebec and all vessels they built. Finally, Marcil has fully documented each of her chapters.

For all of these reasons, this book will likely become the unavoidable starting point for future historians of wooden shipbuilding at Quebec. Indeed, combining the methodological underpinnings of the book with the fact that it is one of the only modern and published accounts of wooden shipbuilding in Canada, it might not be going too far to say that this book

will become a fundamental reference work for shipbuilding in eastern Canada as a whole.

There are two general questions about the shipbuilding industry in Canada at this time. What led to its growth and peak of production in the 1860s? And what led to its virtual disappearance in the 1880s?

The traditional answer to the first question is that Canadian shipbuilding was integrated into the colonial timber trade with Britain, where there was not only a thriving market for wood, and hence a demand for shipping, but also a market for wooden ships in their own right. The traditional answer to the second question is that the advent of more economic steam and steel cargo ships destroyed the market for wooden ships everywhere in Canada, including Quebec.

Marcil accepts both arguments but, despite her initial review of the literature, eschews any further involvement in the historiographical debate. She takes it as her goal to chronicle the "sum total of the effort of the individuals involved," rather than locate the industry in the economy of the province, identify its place in the imperial scheme of things, or look at the issues in terms of technological development. "There was no intention to prove or disprove any theories," she writes in the introduction (p. 23). The reader will not, therefore, find any major contribution to economical, political, or technological or historiographical arguments here.

One can only sympathize with the organizational problems Marcil faced in dealing with the sheer mass of evidence she has gathered. Nevertheless, it is to be regretted that she decided not to get involved in the scholarly debates, particularly over the impact of steam and steel, since her knowledge places her in a unique position to discuss the issues from the point of view of Canadian shipbuilders.

Moreover, the lack of an argumentative framework may be seen to have had some negative results on the narrative structure of the book. For example, the initial chapter on the timber business in which shipbuilding was embedded is separated from discussion of the shipbuilders by a chapter on historical background. Two chapters on yard locations

and facilities separate a discussion of the shipbuilders from a discussion of the nature and operation of their businesses. Two more chapters on materials and trades separate the discussion of shipyard business from an account of the kind of ships built, the markets held, and the decline of those markets. Similarly, for some reason shipyard workers are briefly included in the chapter on shipbuilders, but a discussion of the trades they practised can only be found four chapters later.

What this organization means is that information on individuals and firms is spread throughout the book, making it difficult to get a clear sense of the careers of individual shipbuilders, the problems they faced, the way in which they saw their efforts as integrated into the world around them, or even a sense of the shipbuilders as a class. Similarly, the fragmentation that results from the chapter structure makes it difficult to get a sense of the social identity of the shipyard workers. In an odd way, therefore, the rejection of some sort of argumentative or historiographical framework (perhaps on the grounds that it would be too academic, and therefore too dull?) works to frustrate the avowed goal of the book — to form an impression of the "sum total" of the lives and efforts of the individuals involved in the shipbuilding industry at Quebec.

Another result of the chapter structure is that this book does not present a "vertical" or chronological account of shipbuilding at Quebec over time — again because the information on individuals and firms is spread throughout the chapters. Rather, the book represents a "horizontal" panorama of the various elements of the industry, which makes it difficult to get a firm sense of the key problems faced by shipbuilders as the industry developed over the decades.

These comments aside, one can only respect the tremendous amount of work that went into *The Charley-Man*. And one can only wish that more maritime historians could convince their publishers to include the kind of scholarly apparatus found here, doing the future a favour by laying sound foundations for later investigators.