

Motor Vessel *Bluenose* Ferry



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This article, written by Captain Hubert Hall, was first published in the Yarmouth Vanguard on September 27, 1994.

My first encounter with the *Bluenose*, as with many of the most meaningful experiences of my life was purely an act of fate or good luck, whichever you prefer to call it. This encounter happened while serving as a very young deckhand on the Yarmouth owned freighter *Patricia Sweeney* which was on a regular run between Montreal and Corner Brook for the duration of the navigation season in 1955. We finished loading in Montreal and sailed for Corner Brook early in the evening of May 24. I knew that the *Bluenose* was then under construction at Lauzon, Quebec; but I can't recall knowing that her launching was to place the next day. As luck (or fate) would have it, as we neared the Davie shipyard sometime in the morning of May 25, we could see what appeared to be launching preparations underway. There were tugs standing by and flags were flying between the masts of the *Bluenose*. We were hugging the shore as near as possible to the shipyard and were very surprised to see the *Bluenose* suddenly start to slide down the ways. It seems fate was still playing her hand, when on December 20, 1955, I was back in Yarmouth and with the same camera in hand that I had used to photograph the *Bluenose* at her launch, I got another photo of her arriving for the first time in Yarmouth.

In the spring of 1959, I applied for and got a job as seaman on the *Bluenose*. At that time the Prince Edward Island ferry service, which was also operated by Canadian National, was expanding its fleet on the Cape Tourmentine-Borden run and required deck officers. I was fortunate enough to have the necessary ticket and was transferred to that service as a Second Officer. I remained there until the end of 1964 at which time I moved to Halifax to spend the winter at school to secure my Master's ticket.

The *Bluenose* again entered my life during the winter of 1965. While she was in Halifax on refit, I heard that there was an opening for a Second Officer coming up. Since I did not really want to spend the rest of my career on the PEI run, I applied and after being interviewed by the Senior Master, was accepted for the position on the condition that I get my Master's ticket by that June. This, I was able to do and I was back on the *Bluenose* to stay. The years from 1965-1970 were good ones, the schedule was stable, traffic was good and the crews morale was good. Discipline was rigid, especially for the officers and clear lines of conduct and association were well established. The ship was run on a combination of traditional nautical

values and customs originating with the Royal Navy, Canadian National Steamships "Lady" boats and Newfoundland common sense seamanship.

For most of the year the crew worked on a 20 days on and 8 day off system based on an eight hour day. During the summer fun the deck and steward's departments worked a one trip on- one trip off system that left little time for off duty activities.

Lying about 20 miles west mouth is the well-known Lurcher Shoal, which during this period was still marked by the Lurcher Lightship. The lightship was stationed a few miles southwest of the actual shoals and was an alteration point on our course to and from Bar Harbour. We always looked forward to passing the lightship and depending on the direction of the tide, sometimes passed very close around her stern. Her crew would wave and sometimes we exchanged whistle salutes.

It was with a great deal of sadness that we learned the lightship would be permanently withdrawn on October 1, 1969. I was on duty on that day and have recorded on film the lightship on station on that sad day. After being laid up for a while she became a cadet training ship at the Canadian Coast Guard base at Port Edward, NS. Her name was changed to the Mikula.

In 1970, the Prince of Fundy arrived and things started to change, never to return to normal. The only good thing about her arrival was that a bow thrust was installed on the *Bluenose*; which helped immeasurably with docking the ship. On the negative side, there was a noticeable drop in crew morale caused by a drop in traffic and from the feeling that we were forced to vacate what had up until then been "our" dock, to permit the new ship that was well below the standards we were used to. Then came the traumatic news that the *Bluenose* was to be laid up in the winter and that we were to operate a ship to Portland. We very sadly sent the *Bluenose* off to Borden, PEI and joined the Marine Cruiser, which had been brought to Yarmouth by a Newfoundland crew. This was a tremendous shock to us all. We had been used to a spotlessly clean and well maintained ship and had no idea what it was like to work on and run a ship that was well below the standards we were used to.

In the fall of 1977, we took the *Bluenose* to Shelburne to lay her up for the winter. It was a tricky little manoeuvre to dock her in the space allocated which allowed us about 10ft from the laid up Mercator One. One of the problems of that period was what to do with the *Bluenose* during the winter

while we operated to Portland on another ship. The solution finally settled on was to tie her up at the inside of the Lobster Rock public wharf. Some dragging had to be done to make space enough available for a ship that size. In 1976, the Senior Master retired and I was appointed to succeed him. This position carried some extra administrative and management responsibilities over and above the regular Master duties but was never recognized by the company as an official title. It took several years of lobbying and prodding to have the company make an official position as Senior Master on the *Bluenose*.

The company took a much smaller part in the day to day operations of the ship than they later did and it was almost unheard of to call head office on a regular basis. In fact, it was almost frowned on as an unnecessary expense to make long distance calls to Moncton. They used to say of the *Bluenose* that the service ran itself without their interference. That changed! By this time the *Bluenose* had become too small for the traffic offering, both in total capacity and deck space available for turning trailer trucks, buses, motor homes and house trailers around the sharp turners necessary to exit the ship and news of a replacement was in the air.

In August 1982, the Marine Superintendent and I made a round trip to North Sydney for the replacement vessel, which had been purchased from a Swedish company. Neither of us were impressed with the condition of the *Jutlandica*. The Superintendent could foresee the large amount of maintenance money required for the ship and the passenger spaces left a lot to be desired. As it turned out, we did get this ship and after an extensive facelift in the winter of 1983, she emerged as the *Bluenose*.

I shall never forget the last sailing of the *Bluenose*. I guess it did not really sink in until the morning we left Bar Harbour for the last time in October 1982. As we backed away from the terminal and gave the traditional three whistle salute, there was a very large lump in my throat that just would not go away. On that crossing to Yarmouth, we were met by our old rival from the Portland run. She had deviated from her normal course to give the *Bluenose* a "goodbye" salute. This too brought the lump in my throat larger than ever. Our arrival back at Yarmouth was somewhat anti climatic and after a few formalities including a presentation of the ship's bell and builder's plate to representatives of the Yarmouth County Historical Society for display at the museum on Collins Street, it was all over.