

Chapter 1

The Life and Times of a Merchant Sailor

On August 7, 1894, at approximately 4:30 A.M., the Norwegian ship *Catharine* ran aground in a southeast gale off Santa Rosa Island, Florida, ending her working life as a merchant sailor. The ship hung on the sandbar for 28 days, finally breaking apart on September 5, 1894. Many factors contributed to the life and death of *Catharine*, including Canadian shipbuilding, British and subsequent Norwegian ownership, and Norway's reliance on old vessels to gain prominence in the shipping world.

1.1. CANADIAN SHIPBUILDING

Catharine was commissioned as *Eliza* and was built in the Canadian maritime province of St. John, New Brunswick (Figure 1.1). Historically, Canadian shipbuilding began in 1606 when French colonists constructed two small vessels to transport timber and dried fish back to Europe (Wallace, 1924:8). It was this utilization of the vast timber reserves that proved most profitable to the French, British, and, later, Canadians. Endowed with vast timber resources and eager European markets, Canadian builders began using timber to not only construct their ships but also as cargo to cut shipping costs (Argaez, 1977:317). By 1793, British North America had constructed 93 square rigged vessels and 71 sloops or schooners, prompting Patrick Campbell to state in 1792, "Strange as it may appear, yet true it is that Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have built more square-rigged vessels these

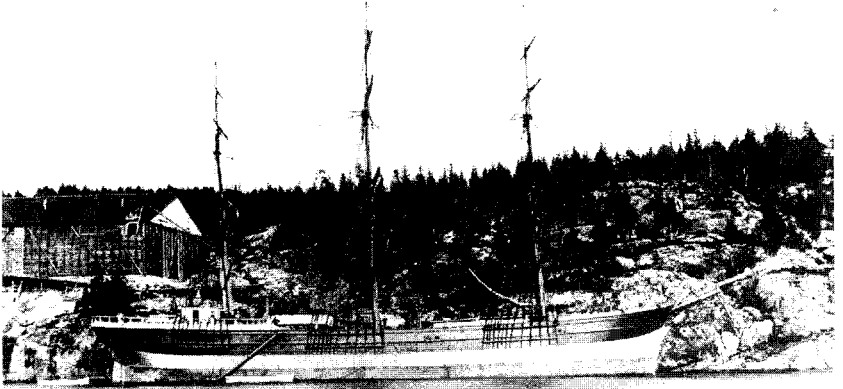


Figure 1.1. *Catharine* near the end of her career in Norway (Photograph courtesy of the Norsk Sjøfartsmuseum).

seven years and have now nearly as many as all of the United States together ..." (Spicer, 1968:20). However, it was not until 1807, when Napoleon and Russia signed the Treaty of Tilsit that effectively cut off all British timber supplies from the Baltic, did British North American reserves begin to be fully exploited in the Maritimes (Spicer, 1968:22).

The Maritimes or Maritime Provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland had both abundant raw materials (timber) and cheap local labor that made them excellent areas for shipbuilding. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1814, over 85 percent of the Maritimes' population earned its living from the forest (Macpherson, 1972:6). St. John, New Brunswick became the Maritimes' center of shipbuilding by the 1830s. Referred to as the "hungry 40s," the next decade was characterized by recession and debt. By 1849, with the repeal of the British Navigation Acts, which stated that all English goods had to be shipped in English or colonial vessels, New Brunswick and the Maritimes were economically revitalized (Spicer, 1968:87). Initially seen as a huge setback to British North

America's monopoly on shipbuilding, the repeal ultimately was responsible for the industry's huge success.

After 1849, world markets opened to all shipping nations and trade dramatically increased. In the 1850s and 1860s, the discovery of gold in Australia, the Crimean War and the U.S. Civil War pushed the need for longer routes and faster ships. "Liverpool and London brokers were rapacious for commissions and were urging Canadian shipwrights to build, build, build" (Wallace, 1924:71). New Brunswick builders responded to the world's need, eventually constructing 5880 wooden ships between 1820–1880 (Spicer, 1968–76).

Most ships built in the Maritimes were sold to British buyers. Canada, after all, was a British colony and protectorate. Even after Canada achieved "responsible government" or self-rule in 1867, England remained the primary buyer for Canadian built ships (Greenhill, 1988:205). It was a common practice for a shipbuilder to build on pure speculation without a buyer in place. A builder would often register the vessel in his own name or obtain a Governor's Pass, which allowed him to skip registration in New Brunswick, load it with timber, and sail it across the Atlantic to Liverpool (Spicer, 1968:77). Once in Liverpool the cargo and vessel would be sold together, turning a healthy profit (Macgregor, 1984:48). Most vessels commissioned in the Maritimes sold for between \$25 and \$40 a ton, making an average 1300-ton vessel worth between \$32,500 and \$52,000 without cargo (Sager and Fischer, 1986:12).

After the shipbuilding high of 1865 (new wooden sailing ships registered in New Brunswick: 1865–148 vessels, 1871–88, 1880–48 and 1890–45), the demand for wooden sailing vessels slowed (Saunders, 1939:111; Spicer, 1968:87; Wright, 1976:104). The development of iron- and steel-hulled sailing ships and the continuing use of steam ships signaled the end of the great wooden sailing ships of Canada's Maritimes. Canadian Maritime Historian Frederick William Wallace stated, "Iron hulls killed the British North American deep water square riggers, nothing else" (1924). By 1870, only 1.6 percent of New Brunswick's workforce was still employed in shipyards (Harley, 1965:688). As steam ships took over the freight market, wooden ships, like *Eliza*, were pushed to lower class freights, such as timber and guano, yet continued to thrive in world markets despite an ever-shrinking market share.

1.2. THE ELIZA

Based on lumber delivery records, the history of *Eliza* started sometime in late 1868 or early 1869 with the lying of the keel at John Fisher's yard (Quinton, 1868–1869). The ship construction site, at the foot of Charlotte Street, was situated upon the St. John River, adjacent to the Queen's wharf, directly across from St. John (Wright, 1976:108). John Fisher (1798–1882) began building ships in St. John as early as 1834, supervising the construction of the brig *Industry* for another builder.

The first vessel credited to Fisher was the brigantine *Widow*, built in 1845 (Wright, 1976). Fisher eventually built twenty-one vessels over a 25-year period, with a hiatus between 1858–1862 (Fisher's vessels include, *Widow*-1845, *Forfashire*-1847, *Warbler*-1849, *Phoenix*-1851, *Philanthropist*-1852, *Pedestrian*-1853, *James Fernie*-1854, *Mary Ann*-1854, *Vocalist*-1856, *Reformer*-1857, *Dorcas*-1863, *Triumph*-1863, *Eurydice*-1864, *Calliope*-1865, *Euterpe*-1865, *Albion*-1866, *Timandra*-1867, *Urania*-1868, *Eastern Light*-1869, *Peruvian Congress*-1869 and *Eliza*-1870) (Wright, 1976: 107–110). *Eliza* was his last vessel and was probably named for his wife Eliza Ann or his daughter Eliza A. *Eliza* was launched on October 1, 1870 and registered at St. John on October 28, 1870 (Public Archives of Canada, 1870). The St. John Shipping Register is presented in Table 1.1 and details the ships building information.

Eliza was carvel built (planked so that the seams were smooth and aligned). There was one laid deck (weather deck) with beams for a partial second deck (in the hold), and a raised poop deck in the stern. The lower partly laid deck was in the extreme forward and aft ends of the ship, making the entire amidships the hold (Crothers, 1997:94). The deck plan was typical of British North American vessels; a pilothouse was located immediately behind the mizzenmast in front of the aft skylights on the round or elliptical stern (Wallace, 1924:158). The forward house or round house was located aft of the foremast and housed the galley and carpenter's workshop, while the forecastle, or short raised foredeck, housed the crew forward of the foremast (Public Archives of Canada, 1870). Lifeboats were carried on the deck or upside down on top of the forward house, while quarter-boats or yawls (the ship's small boats) were lashed upside down on boat beams situated forward of the poop deck (see Figure 1.1).

Table 1.1. St. John Shipping Register Information

Official number	64486
Port of registry	St. John, New Brunswick
Number of decks	One with beams for a second partly laid deck and a poop deck (The weather deck is the upper deck and the partial deck is the lower deck. The space between the upper deck and the lower deck is the “tween” decks and the space below the partial deck is the hold) (Crothers, 1997:88–89).
Number of masts	3
Rigging	Ship
Stern	Round
Build	Carvel
Gallery	None
Head	Human figure (The St. John Register and the Port of Liverpool Records state that the figurehead was a human women)
Framework	Wood
Registered tonnage	1398.59 (gross) 1360.35 (net)
Length	193 feet 6 tenths
Breadth	38 feet 4 tenths
Depth of hold	24 feet 2 1/2 tenths
Master	Lemuel B. Chisholm

Eliza was a full-rigged ship: Each of its three masts (foremast, mainmast and mizzenmast) was fitted with a lower mast, topmast, top-gallant mast, and a royal mast, which were square rigged with square sails and yards (Paasch, 1997:1). British North American vessels typically had “built” lower masts that were constructed from several pieces of timber fitted together and surrounded at regular intervals by iron bands to confer strength (Spicer, 1976:35). At the end of the wooden ship era, however, a number of vessels had iron or steel lower masts installed in American, British, or European ports. It is unclear whether *Eliza* was launched with iron or wooden masts. It is apparent from archaeological evidence, however, that, by 1894, she was fitted with iron masts.

The 1894 Norwegian register (*Det Norske Veritas*) states that the vessel’s framework was wood. Archaeological samples indicate that the timber species used in *Eliza*’s construction consisted of spruce, birch, pitch pine or yellow pine, hackmatack (also known as American

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