

ARGONAUTA

The Newsletter of



**The Canadian Nautical
Research Society**

Volume XXV Number Three
July 2008

ARGONAUTA

Founded 1984 by Kenneth MacKenzie
ISSN No. 0843-8544

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ARGONAUTA is published four times a year—January, April, July and October

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Annual Membership including four issues of *ARGONAUTA*
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Editorial

First an apology. This issue of *Argonauta* was sent out late, in fact after the Annual General Meeting had taken place in early August at Quebec. The conference was a success in one of North America's most spectacular cities. We have a new president but for the time being ye editors have published the report delivered by Rich Gimblett who handed over the appurtenances of office to Paul Adamthwaite, August 9, 2008. A full report about the conference, with the new president's report will follow in the October issue of *Argo*.

MDS.

President's Corner

As I prepare these quarterly notes, my last as President of our Society, I am drawn to reflect back over the three years I have been privileged to occupy the post. The time has gone by incredibly fast, and I am pleased to report that we have made wonderful progress on many fronts, even if it is still incomplete in some respects.

Thanks to my immediate predecessor Jim Pritchard, the groundwork was in place back in July 2005 to tackle the major challenges then facing the Society – stabilizing our finances and regularizing production of *The Northern Mariner* – although both of these only came to be

accomplished mid-way through my watch, the former through the enormous combined efforts of Treasurer Walter Tedman and Membership Secretary Faye Kert, and the latter with the transfer of editorship from Bill Glover to the team of Roger Sarty and Paul Adamthwaite. At the AGM this year, Faye will report modest growth in our membership, and Paul will announce the TNM catch-up as being ahead of schedule with the October 2008 number expected to be mailed in that calendar month.

The trick now will be to parlay a predictable publishing schedule into attracting lost members (especially institutional subscriptions) back into the fold. It is important not to underestimate the enormous debt the Society owes those listed above in this paragraph, because without them we would exist in a much-reduced capacity.

Of course, we would nonetheless exist, if only through the continued medium of our newsletter *Argonauta*, recently described by someone else as “the glue that binds us.” This effort too must not be under-estimated, although the regularity of *Argo*'s appearance could easily lull one into that frame of mind. But editors Bill Schleihauf and Maurice Smith have made it an important source both for members' news and upcoming conference notices as well as for the publication of research notes and their always insightful editorials.

Beyond these basic “deliverables”, in one of my earliest Corners I laid down a number of markers, the accomplishment of which I have reported on before so will not dwell upon here other than to simply enumerate for the record: the establishment of our own web-site; the increase in the number and value of our prizes (see the report elsewhere in this number by Committee Chair Serge Durlinger); and the on-line availability of past issues of *The Northern Mariner* (which Paul Adamthwaite has just advised is now complete – see http://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern_mariner/on_line_content.html).

There have been some unexpected but delightful surprises along the way. The most important of these has been the broadening of the relationships with our sister organizations. The world maritime history community is small enough that there has always been a good deal of cross-pollination amongst our numbers. However, the past two years have each seen significant developments. The first was the adoption by NASOH (the North American Society for Oceanic History) of *The Northern Mariner* as their journal of record, which has been to our immense mutual benefit in broadening the range of learned articles that can be brought to your attention as well as in achieving publishing efficiencies which allow membership rates to be kept down. A second partnership of note was the generous financial assistance offered by the Society for Nautical Research in support of our summer 2008 Conference in Quebec City, which added measurably to the success of that event.

Speaking of conferences, it is worth noting that the afore-mentioned Quebec 2008 conference, along with last year's in Churchill, were ambitious undertakings realizing two “firsts” for our Society – Churchill's being our first foray into the Arctic oceanic region; and Quebec's being our first really bilingual conference (achieved through another important partnership opportunity, in pairing with the Canadian Navy who provided the simultaneous translation amongst other assistance).

For all this progress, a number of challenges remain. There is of course the perennial issue of “growing the Society”, and if one thing especially worries me it is that we have been unable to make any real progress in attracting students to maritime history, for without development of such a future generation there can be no long-term survival of our field of interest.

At least at the higher end of leadership of the organization we have brought several new members aboard Council, with some new recent developments in that respect which I shall leave to my successor Paul Adamthwaite to introduce to you in his next column, presuming ratification of their (and his) appointments by the membership at the AGM in Quebec. But even there all is not especially rosy – we need more, younger folks to step up to the responsibility of eventually assuming command of the Society. That means getting involved at various levels to understand the many constituent elements we comprise and our respective needs.

Still, the Society has faced bigger challenges and succeeded, and with such a track record I have enormous confidence in our future. I would be remiss if I did not extend my thanks on your behalf to all of Council, who have dedicated so much of their personal time and energies as volunteers of the Society to meeting your needs – in practically every item I described above, someone of their number was responsible for slogging to make it happen. I can pass charge of the “Good Ship CNRS” to Paul with a relatively clean conscience, knowing he will have their – and your – continued support.

*Rich Gimblett,
President CNRS*

News and Views

Past issues of Northern Mariner on line: The link noted below, just in case you missed it is an outstanding marine history resource with a very good search engine. The on-line availability of past issues of *The Northern Mariner* (which Paul Adamthwaite has just advised is now complete – see http://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern_mariner/on_line_content.html).

Self-published Marine History Book:

You all will no doubt be fascinated that my seventh book is now published - *Three Princes Armed*, again co-authored with Capt. Bob Darlington (like our *Canadian Naval Chronicle* - Vanwell, 1998).

It tells the complete history of the CNR's Prince ships, *Prince David*, *Prince Henry* and *Prince Robert*. Built in 1929-30 for the B.C. triangle run between Vancouver, Victoria and Seattle but mostly employed in cruising, they were taken up by the Navy in 1939 as Armed Merchant Cruisers. Converted in 1943, *David* and *Henry* were Landing Ships Infantry on D-Day and at the south of France, etc., and *Robert* was an A/A cruiser. Sold at war's end, *Henry* became *Empire Parkeston* for trooping duties, and *David* and *Robert* went to Greek interests, with *Robert* finally to Italian hands.

The book, in semi-soft cover, tells their whole history, including their rationale enthusiastically promoted in 1929 by the CN's President, Sir Henry Thornton, until the last ship was scrapped in 1962. There are numerous photos throughout. I wrote the pre- and post-war histories, Bob did the wartime stuff, much based on D HIST and NAC files and a long article published in 1970, when I could still speak to most of their C.O.'s and even pre-war sailors. It is self-published by Bob Darlington as no Canadian publisher showed sufficient interest. We were anxious to get it out while there is still interest among those involved. It will not be available in stores probably, because their required discount is too much.

The book is available by return mail, on receipt of \$25 in Canada, \$30 to the U.S.A., and \$35 to any overseas address. Buy it for your naval friends, or family for Christmas, or to donate to local schools.

Cheques or money orders to: Fraser McKee, Ste. 2104, 1320 Islington AV., Toronto, ON, M9A 5C6.

Send me your address if you would like a coloured flyer on the book to post locally.

Fraser McKee

A Real 'Coffee Table' Book?

Maritime 'coffee table' books are not to everyone's liking, often light weight in academic quality and really no more than an excuse to put together a bunch of photographs. But one came to hand recently that really is spectacular, maritime and above all, for its size amazingly cheap. It may not be available, certainly at the low cost I found it, but is assuredly worth a look-see. While book reviews are the purview of the Northern Mariner, this is a bit outside their norm.

Fighting Ships 1850 - 1950 - 17" by 12 1/2", its text by Sam Willis, and a foreword by respected British historian Dr. N.A.M. Roger. It is from Quercus Publishing PLC, London, in 2008, and printed and bound, not surprisingly, in China. Although noted on the inside dust cover as £50:00, bound, not surprisingly, in China. Chapters in Canada had them for \$29.99.

The River Palace, A new Book by a CNRS Member

Over the years members will have seen the occasional post with reference to a book that Rick Neilson and I were working on. The latest may have been a thread last spring with respect to the gender of ships in modern manuscripts (which were successfully quoted to our disbelieving copy editor). In any case, *The River Palace* is finally available.

So, in the spirit of Olaf's book announcements, the publisher's website has the details here:
<http://www.dundurn.com/books/vmchck/river-palace/detailed-product-flyer.html>

From that description: "In 1855, the Kingston, an iron steamboat built for John Hamilton (1802-82), appeared in the Great Lakes. When the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) came to British North America for the first royal tour in 1860, the Kingston became his floating palace for much of his time between Quebec and Toronto. Many steamboats claimed to be floating palaces. The Kingston was.

The Kingston was wrecked many times and survived spectacular fires in 1872 and 1873. Late in her career, she was converted into a salvage vessel and renamed the Cornwall. In 1930 she was finally taken out and sunk near one of Kingston's ship graveyards. There she remained until diver and co-author Rick Neilson discovered her in 1989. Today, the once palatial *Kingston* is a popular dive site and tourist attraction."

Walter Lewis

Conferences and Symposia

Call for Papers

The 2009 Annual Conference of the North American Society for Oceanic History, Steamship Historical Society of America and National Maritime Historical Society

Hosted by the California Maritime Academy,
CSU
Vallejo, California

"Ports, Forts and Sports: Maritime Economy, Defense and Recreation through Time and across Space," the 28th Annual Conference of the North American Society for Oceanic History (NASOH) co-sponsored by the National Maritime Historical Society and Steamship Historical Society of America, will be hosted by the California Maritime Academy in Vallejo, California, May 14-17, 2009.

The Conference Program Committee invites proposals for papers and sessions exploring

all fields of study related to saltwater or navigable freshwater environments.

Suggested areas of research include, but are not restricted to, archeology and anthropology, arts and sciences, history, and/or museum exhibitions. Proposals that identify the unique characteristics and influence of maritime economy, defense and recreation in the Pacific and other ocean regions are especially encouraged.

The Program Committee welcomes the submission of individual papers and full sessions, preferring panels with three papers and a chair. Proposals should include a brief abstract of 500 words for each paper, plus a one-page abstract for proposed panels, and a brief bio of 200 words for each participant, including chairs.

Graduate students are strongly encouraged to submit proposals for presentations. Accommodations for PowerPoint

presentations will be provided; however, any other requirements, including audio-visual equipment, special outlets, or accommodations for disabilities should be included in the proposal.

Scholars interested in chairing sessions are welcome to send a brief bio to the Program Committee Co-chairs. Please note that all participants must register for the conference. Specific questions may be directed to Program Committee Co-Chair, Bill Thiesen at thiesen@earthlink.net.

The deadline for submissions is December 1st, 2008. For further information, visit NASOH's web site at www.nasoh.org and click on the "Annual Conference" button.

Send or email submissions to the two Program Committee Co-Chairs listed below:

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William H. Thiesen, United States Coast Guard, Co-Chair

Catherine M. Green, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
C. Douglas Kroll, College of the Desert
Christopher P. Magra, California State University-Northridge

Salvatore R. Mercogliano, Central Carolina Community College

Amy M. Mitchell-Cook, University of West Florida

James M. Morris, Christopher Newport University (emeritus)

Brian J. Payne, Old Dominion University

Warren C. Riess, University of Maine

Gene Allen Smith, Texas Christian University

Kathleen B. Williams, Cogswell Polytechnical College

Channing M. Zucker, United States Navy (ret.)

Call for Papers/Appel de communication

Pacific Navigation/la navigation sur le Pacifique

August 12-15, 2009 Victoria, BC

The Canadian Nautical Research Society will host its annual conference for 2009 in Victoria BC.

Papers topics may include exploration, trade, war, ships, individuals, indigenous peoples, shipwrecks, marine disasters and any other topic related to maritime activity in the Pacific. Papers on such topics in other geographic areas will be considered on their merits. Proposals should be directed to:

Dr. Michael Hadley
802-630 Montreal Street
Victoria BC
250 598 4886
email: mlhadley@telus.net

and Robin Inglis
4165 Doncaster Way
Vancouver, BC V6S 1W1
604-816-4852
email: robininglis@hotmail.com

The conference will be held in the historic downtown section of Victoria.

Activities will include guided visits to local sites relating to the conference themes.

An optional overnight group excursion by ship at the end of the conference to Barkley Sound on Vancouver Island will also be offered.

Bursary available for students presenting a paper in English or French.

Administrative enquiries should be directed to:

Jan Drent
1720 Rockland Avenue
Victoria BC V8S 1W8
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Email: jdrent@pacificcoast.net

Cunard: The Early Years

By

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Introduction

The British merchant marine and shipbuilding industry was not as strong even in the early nineteenth century, by comparison to its supremacy later on, although transport and communication with overseas territories always remained a critical issue for the British government. In this paper, I will discuss how British policies towards Canada and the USA promoted the rise of the Cunard Line: the most important British liner shipping on the North Atlantic from the late 1830s.¹

The direct mail service between Halifax and the UK

¹ Before the Constitution Act of 1867, Canada was called "British North America". In this paper, I use 'Canada', instead of the historical term.

The Post Office, under the supervision of the Treasury, had managed Britain's overseas mail service since the act of 1815. Due to the unsatisfactory financial record, at that time the British government favoured privatization of the mail service.² In 1836 a parliamentary committee concluded that the mail packets managed by the Post Office should be replaced by contracts with private ships. In addition, the Admiralty would take over the remaining operation because the Government thought this service could serve military purposes as well.³ The Admiralty took over the packet service on 16 January 1837. Sir William Edward Parry was appointed as the Comptroller of Steam Machinery and Packet Service on 19 April 1837, though his knowledge of steam was quite limited.⁴ He held the opinion that British shipping could achieve an advantage on the ocean and the British government could assist it by offering mail

² Ann Parry, *Parry of the Arctic* (London, 1963), 191 & 193.

³ Letter from the Treasury to the Post Office, 10 January 1860, in the Archives of the Royal Mail (thereafter POST) 51/92.

⁴ Kay Grant, *Samuel Cunard* (London, 1967), 88 and A. G. E. Jones, 'Rear Admiral Sir William Edward Parry' in *Musk-Ox* no.21 (1978) 8. For a description on Parry's activities in this position, see Parry, *Parry of the Arctic*, 189-196.

contracts. Once this policy was implemented the Admiralty asked for the first tender for the Liverpool – Dublin service.⁵

Up until the 1830s, in addition to the Royal Navy, the British still occasionally relied on captains and crews, to carry mail across the North Atlantic. British merchants both in Canada and in the United Kingdom wished to gain a more efficient method. In 1837, some politicians in Nova Scotia had contacted the British government, via the Colonial Office, to argue the importance and advantages of steam communication between Halifax and the UK.⁶ Later, Joseph Howe, William Crane and Thomas Chandler Haliburton arrived in England to promote their proposal.⁷ It might be suggested that the British government was also anxious to establish a direct steam service to Canada as communication with the UK at that time mainly through New York. An uneasy Anglo-American relationship made the British government keen to obtain a communication line outside the USA.⁸ It was probably this potential conflict between Britain and America that encouraged the British government to strengthen British shipping on the North Atlantic.⁹ Moreover, the memory of the Canadian rebellion of 1837 was still fresh and it was thought it might be necessary to secure the transport of troops from Britain to Canada.¹⁰ The introduction of the steamship provided an opportunity to upgrade transatlantic transport and the Liverpool-Dublin service proved

successful. As a new expensive technology at that time, the steamship liner service required huge investment which few ship owners could afford.

In September 1838, the British Government decided to establish a direct mail service to Halifax and therefore the Treasury, responsible for the expenditure, informed the Admiralty that this service should be arranged by mail contract after an open competition.¹¹ On 7 November 1838, the Admiralty advertised in *The Times* to invite tenders to carry mail from Britain to Halifax and New York. There were two tenders received: The Great Western Steamship Company on 13 December 1838, asked for 45,000 Pounds annually for carrying mail from Bristol to Halifax. Two days later, the St. George Steam Packet Co. submitted their tender, which asked for £45,000 annually to carry mail from Halifax to Cork, Ireland, where they used a feeder service to Liverpool.¹² The St. George Steam Packet Co. asked for £65,000 to extend the mail carrying to New York. The Great Western Steamship Co. would not go to New York and the St. George Steam Packet Co. would terminate in Ireland. Perhaps this was the reason why the Admiralty was dissatisfied with both.

Samuel Cunard's trials

In February 1839 Samuel Cunard, a successful Canadian businessman in Nova Scotia, went to England.¹³ He had already come up with similar ideas a few years before about carrying the British mail to

⁵ Actually, the first packet section that the Admiralty took over was Falmouth in 1823, see Jean Farrugia and Tony Gammons, *Carrying the British Mail* (London, 1980). The first contract was in 1837 see Philip Bagwell, 'The Post Office Steam Packets 1821-1836 and the Development of Shipping on the Irish Sea' in *Maritime History* 1:1 (1971).

⁶ J. C. Arnell, *Steam and the North Atlantic Mails* (Toronto, 1986), 46-8. See also J. C. Arnell, *Atlantic Mails* (Ottawa, 1980), 1-92 for postal communications from the early eighteenth century to 1839.

⁷ F. Lawrence Babcock, *Spanning the Atlantic* (London, 1931), 34 & Frank Staff, *The Transatlantic Mail* (London, 1956), 69.

⁸ Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *Square-Riggers on Schedule* (Princeton, 1938), 260.

⁹ For a brief account on the crisis, see Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America 1815-1908* (London, 1967), 79-83.

¹⁰ Arnell, *Steam and the North Atlantic Mails*, 49.

¹¹ Arnell, *Steam and the North Atlantic Mails*, 49.

¹² Geoffrey Body, *British Paddle Steamers* (Newton Abbot, 1971), 65-6. Hyde claimed Samuel Cunard received one copy of this tender in November 1838 in Nova Scotia. See Francis E. Hyde, *Cunard and the North Atlantic, 1840-1973* (London, 1975), 5. It is amazing if it is true because he denied this in 1846. The source that Hyde used was probably Samuel Cunard's evidence in 1853, which was slightly different from what he had said in 1846. See the note below.

¹³ In 1846, Samuel Cunard told the Select Committee on Halifax and Boston Mails that he had not known about the advertisement of the tender until he arrived in England on February 1839. See his evidence Q158-9 & Q235-8. See "The Select Committee on Halifax and Boston Mails", in *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1846 (563) (thereafter *BPP*, 1846(563)).

North America. Actually Cunard vessels had sailed to Boston under a mail contract between Halifax and Boston since 1827.¹⁴ At first, Cunard met Joseph Howe and other fellow countrymen, who had previously discussed the service with the Great Western Steamship Co., and all the people from Nova Scotia decided to work together.¹⁵ Samuel Cunard began to attend parties frequented by London's high society, seeking out more opportunities to present his plan.¹⁶ He persuaded Parry, his old friend, to accept his proposal, even though it was different from the Admiralty's initial plan.¹⁷ Cunard also met Charles Wood, an influential politician at that time, persuading him by warning that American shipping would become stronger and threaten the British merchant shipping.¹⁸ Cunard asked for £85,000 for carrying mail to New York or £60,000 for carrying mail to Boston. In March, the Admiralty revised their plan, which required a larger boat between Liverpool and Halifax and a feeder service between Halifax and Boston for carrying American mail.¹⁹ Later, Henry Goulburn MP told Cunard that the Treasury could not subsidize by more than £60,000 a year at that moment. Though he had no suitable vessels, Cunard got the contract by private negotiation, on 4 May 1839, to use three boats for carrying mail from Liverpool to Halifax and Boston

under the subsidies of £55,000.²⁰ After securing the contract, Cunard went to Glasgow to meet Robert Napier, an important shipbuilder. His introduction enabled Samuel Cunard to meet George Burns and Charles McIver, two excellent shipowners active in the shipping business between Liverpool and Glasgow. Cunard, Burns and McIver became business partners.²¹ Most subscribers of shares of the new company were from Glasgow.²² The new company chose Liverpool as their home port because it was closer to Glasgow than Bristol, Falmouth, Plymouth or Southampton, which were the four other ports that the Admiralty had chosen. Meanwhile, the railway connection between London and Liverpool had just been completed in 1838, which speeded up the transport from the south of England.²³

Initially, Samuel Cunard planned to make Halifax the terminal and to use a feeder service to Boston. The business community in Boston however, convinced Cunard to change his mind.²⁴ Some authors claim that in the early days Cunard Line was unwilling to sail to New York owing to strong rivals there, including *The Great Western*.²⁵ Two months later, Cunard Line and the Admiralty agreed to revise the contract to use four boats and the Admiralty would pay them £60,000 every year. Soon Napier found the original ship was too small to meet the Admiralty's demands and the Admiralty

¹⁴ J. C. Arnell *The Bermuda packet mails and the Halifax-Bermuda mail service 1806 to 1886* (Beckenham, 1989), ix.; Babcock, *Spanning the Atlantic*, 33 & Hyde, *Cunard and the North Atlantic*, 2. Hyde suggested that Samuel Cunard had got the contract of 1839 because of his excellent previous performance.

¹⁵ James A. Roy, *Joseph Howe* (Toronto, 1935), 65 & Staff, *The Transatlantic Mail*, 70.

¹⁶ Babcock, *Spanning the Atlantic*, 37-8 & Hyde, *Cunard and the North Atlantic*, 5-8.

¹⁷ Parry had known Cunard well during the 1810s when Parry was appointed in Nova Scotia. See Grant, *Samuel Cunard*, 93-4.

¹⁸ Before entering shipping business, Cunard had controlled the coal supply in Nova Scotia. See John Bassett, *Samuel Cunard* (Don Mills, Ontario, 1976), 37-8. See also Grant, *Samuel Cunard*, 104 & Hyde, *Cunard and the North Atlantic*, 3.

¹⁹ Letter from Samuel Cunard to Charles Wood, 11 February 1839, in the British National Archives Adm 1/4497 and Arnell, *Steam and the North Atlantic Mails*, 51.

²⁰ *BPP*, 1846 (563). Samuel Cunard's evidence, Q198, 222, 249. The various select Parliament Committees were interested in the first Cunard Contract. Later, the Canning Committee specially inquired into this as well. Samuel Cunard had written to Viscount Canning, on 11 March 1853, to explain this matter. The letter on the first contract of 1839 has been reprinted in Staff, *The Transatlantic Mail*, 140-2.

²¹ Grant, *Samuel Cunard*, 93-9. Samuel Cunard failed to raise capital in Halifax and Boston, where the merchants were quite conservative. Even George Burns had refused this business from Parry before he met Cunard.

²² Michael Moss, 'The interest of the shipowner and shipbuilder must clash?' in Leo M. Akveld, Frits R. Loomeijer & Morten Hahn-Pedersen (eds.) *Financing the Maritime Sector* (Esbjerg, Fiskeri-og Sofratsmuseets, 2002), 153.

²³ Grant, *Samuel Cunard*, 99. In 1838, after this railway was completed, the British Post Office also began to send mail to Ireland from Liverpool. See H. A. Gilligan, *A History of the Port of Dublin* (Dublin, 1988), 121.

²⁴ Grant, *Samuel Cunard*, 99 & 104-5.

²⁵ Babcock, *Spanning the Atlantic*, 42-3.

revised the contract again on 19 July 1840 for the next seven years. Samuel Cunard could also use bigger mail ships for Boston, where the merchants were not satisfied with the initial plan of a feeder service.²⁶ Meanwhile, the Treasury authorized the postage of mail carried by Cunard to be 1s. per half-ounce to Halifax and 1s. 2d. per half-ounce if sent anywhere other than Halifax.²⁷ This policy obviously discouraged the sending of mail to Canada via the USA. In addition, owing to its cheaper rates, Cunard Line could carry more mail than the other shipping companies, especially the American ones.

Parry agreed to a reduction of the sailings in winter owing to the bad weather.²⁸ The contract was revised again on 28 August 1841 and Cunard Line received £80,000 annually for five vessels. It is worth noting, as a Post Office Secretary later admitted, the subsidies to Cunard Line, so far, were not only for mail carrying but for shipbuilding as well.²⁹ The contemporary British government also admitted that the mail contract to North America was not only in consideration of postal revenues since the subsidies that Samuel Cunard had received much exceeded the cost of the mail carrying.³⁰

Although Halifax was the nearest port in North America to the UK, it had a serious disadvantage compared to New York in relation to carrying mail further westward. Navigation on the St. Lawrence River was expensive and dangerous in winter.³¹ In 1841, by private negotiation, Cunard contracted with the British Post Office to carry mail from Halifax to Quebec via Pictou on the St. Lawrence River at an annual subsidy of £1,550. Later in the same year, the provincial post office remained dissatisfied with this new service. In their opinion, the old coach service was

good enough and cheaper. Despite a request from the British Post Office, the provincial Post Office in Canada refused to pay half of the subsidies. Therefore, Cunard Line reduced the service from three sailings on the St. Lawrence River every week to two sailings every month.³² Owing to the business slump and rivalry with the Great Western Steamship Co., the Admiralty agreed to increase the subsidies to £90,000 every year from October 1843.³³

Objections, Parliamentary inquiries and new contracts

In 1844, once the railway from Albany to Buffalo was completed, the commercial function of Halifax declined. In the same year, the American Congress passed the Anglo-American Postal Convention to authorize the transit of European goods to Canada, which landed at Boston duty-free. The British could send the mail to Canada via the USA without examination or delay. It has been pointed out that Samuel Cunard was helpful in promoting this postal convention.³⁴ This development also promoted the Anglo-American transport business, from which Cunard Line could benefit. The decline of Halifax and the rise of railway service to Canada via the United States led Cunard Line to abandon the mail service to Quebec on the St. Lawrence River in April 1845. Thereafter subsidies were reduced to £85,000. Without open competition, Cunard signed a new 12-year contract in July 1846 and began to carry mail to New York. The annual subsidies were £145,000, of which £85,000 were for the service to Boston via Halifax and the other £60,000 were for the direct service to New

²⁶ Babcock, *Spanning the Atlantic*, 48-9.

²⁷ Staff, *The Transatlantic Mail*, 77.

²⁸ To reduce costs, the ship that Napier designed was small and Parry was not satisfied. See Grant, *Samuel Grant*, 95-6.

²⁹ Evelyn Murray, *The Post Office* (London, 1927), 57-8.

³⁰ The announcement in Parliament of Thomas Spring Rice, who was the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1839. See Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office* (Princeton, 1948), 187.

³¹ William Smith, *The History of the Post Office in British North America* (Cambridge, 1920), 221.

³² Grant, *Samuel Grant*, 118.

³³ The British National Archives Adm 12 /411:21; the authorisation of the Treasury, 25 October 1843. *BPP*, 1846(563) Samuel Cunard's evidence, Q171. Frank Staff claimed that Samuel Cunard and William L. Maberly, the Secretary of British Post Office, persuaded the Postmaster General that it would be advantageous if the mail for Upper and Lower Canada could be sent via Boston. Samuel Cunard claimed this was an expensive service and obtained more subsidies. See Staff, *The Transatlantic Mail*, 76.

³⁴ Warren Tute, *Atlantic Conquest* (Boston, 1962), 46 & Grant, *Samuel Cunard*, 125-6.

York.³⁵

Since 1839, the Great Western Steamship Co. had found difficulty competing with Cunard Line because the latter received subsidies. In 1842, they had written to Robert Peel to complain about this unfair treatment.³⁶ In 1846, the Great Western Steamship Co. strongly objected to the new contract and stated they thought it was an unfair decision as it was decided by private negotiation.³⁷ Some Birmingham merchants also argued that they would benefit if the mail service departed from Bristol, where the Great Western Steamship Co. was based.³⁸

The British Parliament decided to hold an inquiry about this mail contract. In the minutes of evidence, the representative of the Great Western Steamship Co. argued that the Admiralty paid Cunard Line for their new shipbuilding. Moreover, he argued that the Admiralty initially asked for the service to New York via Halifax. The Great Western Steamship Co. had operated a direct service to New York at that time and was unwilling to call at Halifax because it would take longer to arrive at New York, which might cause them to lose business. Meanwhile, due to the preference the British government had given to Canada by sending mail to Halifax, the Great Western Steamship Co. had concluded that the British were unwilling to carry mail to the USA. In any event the contract that the Admiralty had accepted was for the mail service to Boston, even if not New York.³⁹ But the Great Western Steamship Co. failed to persuade the Select Committee, which recommended that Cunard Line was the best option for carrying mail to North America.

The contract of 1846 demanded weekly sailing to North America in summer and fortnightly sailing in

winter. As already stated, under this contract, Cunard Line began to carry mail directly to New York, though the mail service to Boston via Halifax was maintained. Actually, the main terminal of Cunard Line was New York from then on.⁴⁰ In 1849, the completion of the canal system made transport by water between New York and Quebec less costly and more convenient.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the completion of the railway between Montreal and Portland Maine, further encouraged trade between the USA and Canada.⁴²

In 1853, the Admiralty contract was revised and Cunard Line operated weekly sailings all year for which it received annual subsidies of £173,000. This decision was made according to the recommendation of the Committee on Postal Contract (the Canning Committee). The British Post Office strongly objected to this decision, however the negotiations were held in private.⁴³ The postage from the UK to Canada, carried by Cunard Line, was reduced again in 1854: 6d. per letter via Halifax and 8d. for each letter via the USA. The British Post Office still tried to stop the mail to Canada being sent via the USA, though many sources pointed out that the American route had been advantageous. Also, the postage to the USA still remained 1s.; a high amount.⁴⁴ At the same time, the Canadian Post Office began to subsidize the Allan Line, a Canadian shipping company, for the mail service. The British Post Office imposed a discriminative policy by regarding the steamers of the Canadian shipping companies as if they were American vessels, even though they were controlled by the British or Canadians and sailed under the British flag.⁴⁵ Therefore, the mail carried by the Allan Line to Canada would pay 1s. in

³⁵ Up to 1846, the copies of various tenders, contracts and relevant extracts of correspondence with Cunard Line can be found in the appendix of the *BPP*, 1846 (563).

³⁶ John R. Stevens, "An examination of the factors which link Bristol dock policy with the development of the tramp shipping of the Port 1840-1890" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Bristol, 1940).

³⁷ Milner Gibson MP's question in the Commons, 15 June 1846, in *Hansard* LXXXVII, 481-2.

³⁸ Appendix no.11, *BPP*, 1846 (563).

³⁹ *BPP*, 1846 (563). Captain C. Claxton's evidence, Q133-6 & Q138.

⁴⁰ Body, *British Paddle Steamers*, 68 & T. W. E. Roche, *Samuel Cunard and the North Atlantic* (London, 1971), 16.

⁴¹ Smith, *The History of the Post Office in British North America*, 285.

⁴² James C. Bonar, "CPR Co. and its contributions towards the early development and to the continued progress of Canada", vol. II (1950), 32. (manuscripts deposited in the Senate House Library in London).

⁴³ Letter to the Treasury, 14 November 1857, enclosed in 'The Postal Communication with North America' in *British Parliamentary Papers*, HC1859 Session I (230) XVII. (thereafter *BPP*, 1859 (230)).

⁴⁴ Staff, *The Transatlantic Mail*, 95.

⁴⁵ Smith, *The History of the Post Office in British North America*, 287.

comparison to the 6d. paid for carriage by Cunard Line. This protectionist policy obviously advantaged Cunard Line.

National interests and the “threats”

As well as the UK, after June 1847, the American Government also subsidized a particular national flag carrier to carry mail to Britain and Europe, for national security purposes and in order to reduce the financial loss to other countries. Unfortunately the shipping company - the Collins Line – continued to suffer a loss. In August 1857, the American Congress decided to terminate the subsidies to the USA-owned Collins Line six months later. It was suspected that Samuel Cunard also received this information and wondered whether the British government would follow this revision of policy by the USA.⁴⁶ With the support of the Admiralty, Samuel Cunard urged the British Post Office to renew his contract.⁴⁷ In 1857, despite the secret agreement of fixed rates and pooling with the Collins Line, Cunard Line had warned that the Collins Line, under the official subsidies of the American Government, was a threat to Britain’s merchant marine.⁴⁸ Although Cunard Line asked for the renewal of their contract. In November, the British Post Office advised the Treasury, following the recommendation of the Canning Committee in 1853, that the mail contract should be decided by public competition. Meanwhile, the Post Office preferred a short-term contract. The Post Office thought the rapid technological improvements in shipbuilding might provide the Post Office with more options for vessels to carry mail.⁴⁹ But a month later, the Admiralty

pressed the Treasury to authorise the subsidies in ‘the national interest’.⁵⁰

The Treasury thought it was too early and refused this application on 2 March 1858. Cunard Line asked the Admiralty for help on 20 March 1858 and applied again two days later. There is evidence to indicate that the Admiralty pressed the Treasury to accept this application. In June, Cunard Line renewed the contract for the next ten years to 1868.⁵¹ This was a generous contract because Cunard Line did not need to pay any penalty if they delayed in sending the British mail to North America. Later on, the Collins Line was unable to maintain business without subsidies and ceased its operation in February 1858. Cunard Line had become the most eminent shipping company on the North Atlantic during the mid-nineteenth century.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is doubtful that the Britain’s maritime ascendancy on the North Atlantic from the mid-nineteenth century onwards would have been maintained as smoothly without official support. Before the use of the telegraph, regular and efficient sailings that carried mail were the most effective method of communication by encouraging the circulation of information and which benefited business. On the North Atlantic, British merchants were anxious to secure a better mail service for their businesses. In addition to the national security concerns, the British Government also wished to promote the wider circulation of mail between Canada and the UK, to bring both of them closer together.⁵² Therefore, political involvement

⁴⁶ In the Select Committee on Packet and Telegraph Contract of 1860 (thereafter the Committee of 1860), the members pressed Samuel Cunard to answer whether he had known the Collins Line would soon cease when he applied to renew the contract in 1858 and Samuel Cunard denied that he had.

⁴⁷ The letter from Cunard Line to the General Post Office, 19 October 1857 and the letter from the Admiralty to the Treasury 26 October 1857, in “Correspondence relating to the conveyance of mail (North America)” *BPP*, 1859(230).

⁴⁸ Hyde, *Cunard and the North Atlantic*, 39-45. Hyde claimed that Cunard Line benefited from this agreement with the Collins Line.

⁴⁹ Letter to the Treasury, 14 November 1857, enclosed in the *BPP*, 1859(230).

⁵⁰ The letter from the Admiralty to the Treasury, 21 December 1857, in the *BPP*, 1859(230).

⁵¹ See the Treasury minutes, 2 March 1858 and the letter from Cunard Line to the Admiralty 20 March 1858. The Admiralty pressed the Treasury again in the letter dated 29 March 1858. The Treasury minutes, 20 May 1858, revealed the authorisation was due to the recommendation of the Admiralty. All the above is enclosed in the *BPP*, 1859(230). See also the Committee of 1860, G. A. Hamilton’s evidence Q1269 & 1282. Letter, dated 21 October 1858, from G. A. Hamilton of the Treasury to J. O. Lever of the Galway Line, in *The Times* (London), 23 October 1858.

⁵² Robert M. Pike, “National interest and imperial yearnings: empire communications and Canada’s role in establishing the Imperial Penny Post”, *Journal of*

supported the attempt to introduce a direct mail service to Canada and the Admiralty was very influential in relation to the subsidies to Cunard Line, to the extent that its measures served as a kind of protectionism that included shipbuilding as well as the shipping business. Meanwhile, personal networks determined that Cunard Line was to secure the subsidies, being favoured at the expense of the Great Western Steamship Co. as Cunard line was paid more than it cost to carry the mail. The mail contracts helped Samuel Cunard secure the net revenues despite the freight market fluctuations. Rent-seeking behaviour could be observed with the rise of Cunard Line: Samuel Cunard could misuse the subsidies, to which his company had privileged access for the Atlantic route, to cover his loss somewhere else. Political interference declined once Anglo-American relations improved from the 1840s on. In addition, improvements in inland transport in North America increased the advantages of the USA route. Therefore, Cunard Line abandoned some parts of its contracts for business reasons, as part of its strategic adjustment. The British Government had fed an infant shipping company, through private negotiations but found it difficult to manage the overgrown private monopoly which followed.

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