

The Canadian Nautical Research Society
Société canadienne pour la recherche nautique

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**Keith Matthews Awards - Best book and article published in
2009**

The Keith Matthews Award, presented by the Canadian Nautical Research Society/Société canadienne pour la recherche nautique annually since 1985, is for the best book published in a given year by a Canadian about a maritime subject, or on a Canadian maritime subject written by anyone. Since 2006 the Keith Matthews Award has come with a cash prize of \$1,000, solidifying its reputation as Canada's premier nautical book award.

This year, publishers from Vancouver to St John's submitted a total of eighteen books, covering a wide range of subjects, for consideration for the Matthews Award. Following preliminary review and discussions, the Awards Committee decided to award two honourable mentions in addition to the Matthews Award for the best book.

Best book published in 2009

The winner of this year's Keith Matthews Award is the product of a scholar's life time work. However, in this instance our bookshelves are not overflowing with related works. This year's winner makes an important contribution to a subject of increasing prominence that is not widely known. The award goes to *The Fluid Envelope of our Planet: How the Study of Ocean Currents Became a Science*, by Eric L. Mills of Dalhousie University, published by the University of Toronto Press, ISBN 978-0802-09697-5 . Maritime historians devote considerable attention to what has happened on the seas, the vessels that have sailed them, and the commerce of them. Few books look at the oceans themselves. Maury's work on ocean currents may be remembered; the

voyage of HMS *Challenger*, 1872 - 76, may have been the subject of popular accounts, but what of the history of oceanography? Margaret Deacon's *Scientists and the Sea* was first published almost forty years ago, and there has been very little since.

Professor Mills has given us a book on a very important subject, and a very timely one in view of the central place of the oceans in the current questions about global warming. The subject is not just international in scope, but the research is also very wide ranging. Although much of the material is technical, it is elegantly written, and clear in its explanations. We also found the book a pleasure to read.

Honourable mentions

A number of the books submitted dealt with aspects of Canadian naval history. This spawned the question of whether the Society had already sufficiently recognized the work in this area, or if an award might yet be given. Indeed, *The Naval Service of Canada 1910 - 2010: The Centennial Story*, edited by Richard Gimblett, published by Dundurn Press, ISBN 978-1554-88472-8 was selected for an honourable mention.

The format of separate articles on specific topics seems to make the book more accessible to the general reader. Yet the topics presented chronologically have a coherence that is delightfully augmented by the review of maritime research and development, largely the work of Harold Merklinger. The book also goes beyond the "normal" bound of naval history by including Pat Jessup's chapter on "Naval Art in the Second World War" and Jim Boutilier's look into the next century.

Finally, Dundurn, the publisher, deserves congratulations for producing a handsome book in a large format that enhances the many illustrations. The sum total of all this work is a handsome and scholarly book that raises the profile of the Canadian navy and its role in our history, and brings it to a wider general audience.

The second honourable mention also goes to a well known subject, in this instance written by "an old hand" who has devoted much of his academic career to work in this area. The Committee is pleased to award an honourable mention to *Arctic Labyrinth: The Quest for the Northwest Passage*, by Glyn Williams, published by Viking Canada, ISBN 978-0670-06869-2.

One commentator wrote "the Williams book is a delight. It really identifies the key issues and goes for them – but in an accessible, entertaining way. And he tells a great story." Another has said, "A fascinating story well told of arctic exploration – surveys quite well the whole scene. Brings the discussion up to date with current issues associated with global warming and the potential opening of the passage." His subject, including naval expeditions, Hudson Bay Company explorations, private ventures in search of Franklin, and the relationships of British work with other countries, such as Russia, and our contemporary concerns, is all told in a easy narrative that belies the enormous scholarship necessary to reduce the complexities to such a manageable and accessible form.

Best article published in *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* in 2009

We have always acknowledged a close and important relationship between our annual conference and our journal. We expect the journal will be given first refusal for the publication of all the papers presented. So, in 2009 the subject of this year's award, the journal published several of the papers presented at the Champlain quatercentenary conference in Quebec in 2008. That one of those papers has been selected as the Matthews award winner allows us the opportunity to thank again the conference organizers, Serge Durflinger and Rich Gimblett for that excellent conference.

The committee was confronted with a difficult choice, for we had to choose from some wonderful papers from senior practised scholars. The committee has selected "The Myth of French Abandonment" by Jonathan R. Dull, published in the January 2009 issue. One member has written, "I find that the notion that the Seven Years War was a world war, with significant links between the various theatres, is poorly understood. This article was excellent in addressing that. And, for English-speaking audiences, the French angle needs airing." The article has been widely described as a "classic" because it "gives a new interpretive insight on a big issue: the relationship between European and North American operations in the Seven Years War from the French perspective." It was also the subject of many laudatory comments sent to the editor.

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In closing the Canadian Nautical Research Society's Awards Committee would like to extend its congratulations to all recipients, and its thanks to all the authors and their publishers.

Paul Adamthwaite,
President

William Glover,
Chair, Awards Committee