

What to do with Bluenose II?

by Silver Donald Cameron

ISLE MADAME, NS –

Hon. John Hamm, Master
Time Ship Nova Scotia
Halifax, NS

Dear Skipper:

I wish to draw your attention to a punky plank in the ship of state which may become an emergency during your period in command of the vessel. I refer to the geriatric condition of the province's beloved schooner *Bluenose II*.

As you know, *Bluenose II* is a reasonably accurate replica of the fishing schooner which brought such pride to Nova Scotians in the International Schooner Races of the 1920s and 1930s. I say "reasonably accurate" because although her hull construction and sail plan are original, she uses Dacron sails and rigging, radar, GPS, and many other modern materials and devices. Her look, her configuration and her spirit are authentic, however, and those are the things that matter.

For all their grace and beauty, ships like the original *Bluenose* were not built to last. They were commercial vehicles, the 18-wheelers of their day. They paid for themselves quickly, and few lived longer than 10 or 15 years. The first *Bluenose* survived for 25 years, and her successor is already ten years older than that. Meanwhile the old ship has been repeatedly patched up, often in a hurry and with inferior materials. I doubt that she is unseaworthy, but she is no longer the ship which sailed uneventfully through a hurricane in 1964. If she were lost at sea... It doesn't bear thinking about.

As long ago as 1982, the provincial Minister of Tourism was talking about replacing *Bluenose II*, but nothing has happened, and we have no plan. The ship remains an important asset to the province – a glorious image, a classic of the shipbuilder's art, a daily reminder of what Nova Scotians have done in the past. She symbolizes a salty little realm which people want to visit, and as an ambassador she captures the imaginations of whole cities when she enters their harbours. Her loss would leave a large gap in our lives, but in 1992 her estimated replacement cost was \$6 million. Your government can't afford that. What do we do?

I am not a great admirer of public/private partnerships, but this is an ideal case for one. The sometimes-ridiculous history of *Bluenose II* (which I have written) demonstrates that government ownership and operation of the ship is fraught with problems. At the same time, the ship clearly represents the province and its people, and any replacement project would need the province's endorsement and participation. To me, the project cries out to be undertaken by an arm's length trust, funded by corporate sponsorship and organized by the industries which would most benefit from the ship – the marine industries, tourism, information services. As the voice of all Nova Scotia, the government should have strong representation on its board, and the right to charter *Bluenose III* when needed.

Meanwhile, *Bluenose II* could stay in Nova Scotia, visiting local ports in the summer while gradually and meticulously being rebuilt by volunteers and apprentices during the winter. That's how Jubilee Sailing Trust in Southampton, England, is building its second vessel, a 600-ton, 213-foot barque. I once favoured another traditionally-built *Bluenose* replica; I changed my mind after talking to Jim Creighton, a marine

enthusiast and boatbuilder who recently spent a week working as a volunteer on the JST project. The new barque is of modern wood-epoxy construction, and Lloyds of London gives it a life expectancy of 50 years, compared with 20 years for a comparable steel vessel -- but, says JST's master shipwright, its builders see no reason it should not last 200 years.

Two hundred years! If we build another traditional replica, we will have to replace her again in 25 years. Why not build a *Bluenose III* which pays loving tribute to our grandfathers, but will outlive our grandchildren? A ship which *looks* like a replica, but which we can send around the world to showcase our province's current capabilities by using today's techniques, materials and skills? Angus Walters, the revered skipper of *Bluenose*, would never have built a ship using less than the best available methods. Nor would our other legendary sailor, Joshua Slocum. "I am not the old fossil that some take me for," wrote Slocum. "I am not for old ideas when new are better."

Nor am I. We respect our ancestors' achievements by standing on their shoulders and seeing farther, not by crouching in their shadows and seeing less. Let's do something to inspire our own grandchildren. That's what the ancestors did.

Sincerely,
Silver Donald Cameron
Able Seaman

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AUTHOR NOTE: Silver Donald Cameron is the author of *Once Upon A Schooner: A Foreign Voyage in Bluenose II* (Formac, 1992). He lives in D'Escousse, Nova Scotia.