



The new Bluenose was built at the Lunenburg Industrial Foundry in Nova Scotia.

Bluenose captain Angus Walters, with the International Fisherman's Trophy.



# REBIRTH of an **ICON**

Canada's floating ambassador sails again, thanks to those who are keeping Nova Scotia's boatbuilding tradition alive



BY STEPHEN BLAKELY

There are few places in the world more tied to the sea than the Maritime Provinces of Canada. And no place in the Maritimes is more legendary for boatbuilding, especially wooden boats, than the historic, picturesque town of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.

Lunenburg is the birthplace of the original Bluenose, perhaps the world's most famous wooden fishing schooner, which for almost 20 years beat every competitor the Americans could put up against her for the International Fisherman's Trophy. The same boatyard in Lunenburg is where her successor, Bluenose II, was built in 1963. It's also where that boat's replacement — a very modern but still traditional wooden schooner — has recently been built and is being fitted out.

Sea trials for the new Bluenose began in early June, then the boat will tour Nova Scotia, carrying on the role of Canada's best-known floating ambassador.

Such is the depth of skill among the many generations of shipwrights, carpenters and metalworkers here that tall ships from all over the world set sail for Lunenburg when they need repair and maintenance — as does the Canadian navy, with some of its modern steel supply ships and warships. Lunenburg is also a destination for many commercial and recreational boat owners who want to commission or repair vessels, whether in fiberglass, metal or high-tech composite wood/epoxy construction. The new Bluenose is helping to keep alive not only a proud maritime tradition but also a wide range of local boatbuilding expertise and skills that go back more than 250 years.

Whether you arrive in Lunenburg by land yacht or by boat, you will find it to be among the most charming and remarkable harbor towns in Canada. It is one of only two entire communities in North America to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site — Old Quebec City is the other — an architectural gem, a perfect harbor and a center of world-class boatbuilding.

### Bluenose I and II

The original Bluenose, designed by William Roué as both a fishing schooner and a raceboat, was launched by the Smith & Rhuland Shipyard in Lunenburg in 1921. The Halifax Herald had established the International Fisherman's Trophy the year before to test the mettle of the working schooners out of Canada and Gloucester, Mass. that fished the Grand Banks.

The contest stemmed partly from the friendly rivalry and informal races between the Canadian and American fishermen. The schooners always raced each other, as the first boat back with a full load of fish usually got the best price. Another major factor was the disparaging view that all schooner men had of the America's Cup boats, which they considered to be ridiculously expensive and fragile toys sailed by dilettante "yachtsmen," especially after the New York Yacht Club canceled a 1919 race because 23-knot winds were considered too much. For the tough old "salt-banker" schooners and crews, sailing through full-blown gales

# The builders of Bluenose

By Stephen Blakely

**T**he Lunenburg Industrial Foundry, which provided the yard and the mechanical systems for the Bluenose project, is the largest ship-building and repair facility in Lunenburg Harbour. It has two marine railways capable of hauling yachts and ships, and its own metal casting and heavy-duty machining and fabrication shops.

A local beach with very fine green sand — ideal for making casting molds — is the main reason the factory was built where it is. That sand is still used to cast anything a customer may need, from cast-iron tall ship fittings to 1,600-pound ship propellers.

Lunenburg's deep bench of marine talent makes it a popular place for repairs, overhauls and new builds. At any given time, at least a couple of tall ships can be seen tied up at the Lunenburg docks. The Canadian navy routinely sends ships and barges there for refit and repair. "One of the great things about this place is that we can make just about anything," says Kevin Feindel, general manager of the foundry. Perhaps its most high-tech project is a "solar concentrator" that uses sunlight to melt metal.

The foundry has remained remarkably diversified, having once made cast-iron stoves and furnaces. More recently, it moved into the power generation business, marinizing diesels in collaboration with Ford and Isuzu. Its engine shop produced containerized diesel generators used by the Canadian armed forces, among other customers.

Propellers are a staple. One room in the foundry's casting plant is filled with dozens wooden prop molds. In fact, one of its prop brands is named Bluenose.

Hollywood has come to Lunenburg more than once. The Smith & Rhuland Shipyard built the full-size replica of the *Bounty* that was used in the 1962 film "Mutiny on the Bounty." (Search the archives at SoundingsOnline.com for Soundings' coverage of the tall ship's sinking in Hurricane Sandy last October. Keyword: *Bounty*.) Two years ago, a German film company

used the foundry's old casting sheds for scenes in an upcoming remake of "Moby Dick," for which the company painted the 1800s-era wood-shake factory buildings to look like Nantucket, Mass., during whaling's heyday. Other films with scenes in or around Lunenburg include "Dolores Claiborne" (1995), "Two If by Sea" (1996), "Simon Birch" (1998), and "The Weight of Water" (2000).

## Snyder's Shipyard

Traditional wooden boatbuilding skills are what has kept Snyder's Shipyard going for the past 136 years on the banks of the LaHave River just nine miles from Lunenburg. Once one of several yards along the river, Snyder's is practically the only commercial wooden shipyard left. The others



Wade Croft, co-owner of Snyder's Shipyard.



Bluenose under sail in 1938.

and storms in the North Atlantic was just another day's work.

The Fisherman's Trophy rules called for a "real" fishing schooner that had worked the Grand Banks for at least a full season. The sleek Bluenose was Lunenburg's response to the challenge: 161 feet overall, 112 feet on the waterline, a 27-foot beam and a 285-ton displacement. Under its legendary captain, Angus Walters, Bluenose defeated its first American challenger in October 1921, and in an 18-year racing career she never gave up the trophy, winning her last race in 1938. The exploits of Bluenose became an intense source of pride and entertainment to Canadians, especially during the brutal depths of the Great Depression.

The marriage between Walters and his schooner is considered one of the most perfect unions ever struck between man and boat. Such was his command of the vessel that his crew kept silent during a race so he could listen to what Bluenose was telling him as he pushed her limits.

The toughest contest he ever won was against a massive storm that ripped through the fishing fleet working the shallows off Sable Island in April 1926, sinking several boats and drowning dozens of men. Walters spent eight hours lashed to the helm, beating into the worst of the storm and guiding Bluenose through sandbars and boiling surf, saving his ship, his crew and himself from otherwise certain death.

Ultimately, wooden sailboats were no match for motorized steel trawlers, and the era of fishing schooners came to an end with the advent of World War II. Despite the efforts of Walters and others, Bluenose was sold to the Caribbean freight trade in 1942, and her masts were cut down. She grounded and sank on a reef off Haiti during a

went out of business as technology changed. “There used to be five or six boatbuilding shops along here at one time, but that ended because of fiberglass,” says Philip Snyder, co-owner and master shipbuilder, whose father bought the yard in 1944. “We are one of the last wooden boatbuilders here, and we’ve been here a long while.”

Snyder’s had done maintenance and repair on the old Bluenose II for decades, and it was responsible for the bulk of the carpentry work on the new schooner. The yard has specialized in building wooden commercial boats — mostly fishing vessels, such as longliners and druggers that work the Bay of Fundy and other waters off Nova Scotia. Its most recent project is overhauling and fiberglassing the hull of an old 65-foot wooden dragger called Final Venture, transforming it to a floating shrimp factory that will work in the ice fields of the Bay of Fundy.

The yard also builds recreational boats and is the only authorized builder of the 23-foot sloop version of the original Bluenose, also designed by William Roué. Fiberglass versions of the daysailer are available, but Wade

Croft, the other co-owner of Snyder’s, notes with pride that “wood goes faster than the glass models” in the local Bluenose 23 races held every year and “always wins.”

Other than Bluenose, Snyder’s most high-profile project was the custom modification of a tugboat — Theodore Too — used to promote a children’s TV show produced in Halifax. The instantly recognizable tug still tours Halifax Harbour and visits boat shows all along the East Coast.

### Covey Island Boatworks

Just down the LaHave River is Covey Island Boatworks, which specializes in the most high-tech wood boatbuilding techniques being used today. Started 30 years ago by master shipbuilder John Steele, the employee-owned yard does refits and builds custom yachts using composite wood/epoxy technology. Covey Island made the cold-molded keelson, ribs, frames and deck beams for the new Bluenose, which will add strength to the vessel.

“We build 40- to 60-foot oceangoing cruising boats, both sail and power. We’ve been focused almost entirely on building schooners in recent years,” Steele says.

Steele’s specialty is the combination of wood, epoxy and various fabrics used in composite wood/epoxy construction to optimize wood’s strengths and minimize its weaknesses. As his website says, “Over 30 years and 89 yachts, we have developed and refined wood/epoxy boats to a ‘fare-thee-well.’”

With the completion of the Bluenose project, Steele is semiretiring from Covey Island Boatworks and plans to move aboard his own boat, Papa I, a 71-foot gaff-rigged schooner he built with his adult children. Although Steele personally built the hull, one daughter finished the interior, another made the sails, and his son did the spars and rigging.

Steele’s boat reflects one of his abiding interests in wood: recycling it. Before Papa I was a boat, it was an aircraft hangar. “I bought a Canadian air force aircraft hangar that was about to be demolished and salvaged the wood,” Steele says. “I hadn’t seen Douglas fir like that. It was violin-quality, so I recycled it into the Papa I.” ■



Kevin Feindel (left), general manager of the Lunenburg Industrial Foundry, and John Steele, head of Covey Island Boatworks.

storm in 1946. Years later, out of respect and regret, the Canadians placed a plaque on the wreck to honor its watery grave.

In 1963, the Oland & Son brewery commissioned a replica of Bluenose to promote its new Schooner beer. Constructed from the original plans in the original Lunenburg shipyard by some of the same shipwrights who had built the original, Bluenose II was sold to the government of Nova Scotia for \$1 to serve as a goodwill ambassador, tourist attraction and symbol of the province. To enshrine the unblemished record of the original Bluenose, the replica was never allowed to race. Almost 50 years later, leaking, “hogging” — an upward bending of the hull about amidships — and worn out, she was decommissioned in 2010 and disassembled in Lunenburg.

### New build or restoration?

The new Bluenose was deemed by Transport Canada (the national regulatory agency) to be a “restoration” because it uses just enough of the old boat — masts, sails, rigging, some ironwork and interior paneling — to carry on the name Bluenose II. This is a matter of some controversy because the entire structure of the vessel (the hull) is totally new, from keel bottom to cabin top and from stem to stern. This technicality preserves brand-name recognition and avoids the potential marketing problem of calling her Bluenose III.

By whatever name, this is a dramatically different boat on the inside that merely looks like her ancestors on the outside, and modern electronic and navigation gear is the least of it. Perhaps the most important change is that its owner, the province of Nova Scotia, decided to build

it both to Transport Canada requirements and to the more exacting class standards set by the American Bureau of Shipping. This was done out of an abundance of caution and to ensure the highest level of safety for the crew and paying passengers that Bluenose will carry around the world during the next 50 years or so. It also added greatly to costs and time: What started as a \$14 million project is now \$16 million and climbing, and the launch date was pushed back months.

The shipwrights deliberately exempted regulatory delays from their bids. “Everything must be approved in advance, and as we go we are subjected to rigorous tests,” says John Steele, head of Covey Island Boatworks, one of the three local boatbuilders to work on the new Bluenose. “It’s an extremely bureaucratic process and not normal at all.”

Because of Transport Canada and ABS requirements, the new Bluenose is heavier and stronger than either of her predecessors. In addition to the laminated and cold-molded keelson and frames, the keel and planking are made of Angelique, a gypsum-infused teak-like South American wood that is very dense, heavy and rot-resistant. Between the cold-molded epoxy laminates and the Angelique, carpenters at Snyder’s Shipyard — another of the local builders — burned through more than 200 industrial-strength band-saw blades.

The regulators also required double or triple the amount of fasteners in the hull, including heavier-gauge bolts throughout. Not only are the deck beams made of laminated wood and epoxy, but they are also glued and mated to the hull with stainless steel knees for support — part of what is described as the “silver bullet” that will force the new boat

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# Lunenburg: a special place

By Stephen Blakely

**K**evin Feindel is a good example of how deep the roots go in Lunenburg. He and his wife are descendants of immigrants who arrived there 260 years ago on one of the very first ships that brought settlers to the well-protected harbor.

"When I'm down here at the foundry, I'm very close to where our ancestors came ashore in 1753 from Germany," says Feindel, general manager of the Lunenburg Industrial Foundry. "My wife and I live eight miles away, and we joke that we've come a long way."

Although boatbuilding has a long tradition throughout Nova Scotia, John Steele, head of Covey Island Boatworks, says the work force in Lunenburg stands out for its talents with wooden boats. "At one time, Nova Scotia had

like almost all port towns and cities along the Nova Scotia coast, Lunenburg also played a role in rum-running during Prohibition.

Given Lunenburg's highly skilled carpenters, it's not surprising that they customized the homes they built. One distinctive element in many of the charming and colorful old houses that cling to the steep sides of the harbor is the "Lunenburg Bump" — a five-sided dormer unique to the area. The original settlement (Old Town Lunenburg) has remained largely intact and has some of the oldest architecture in Nova Scotia. One of the most stunning local buildings is the Lunenburg Academy, which is now the town's public elementary school.

Lunenburg's fortunes followed the decline of the fishing industry, and the federal and provincial governments responded by restoring the waterfront and developing the town's sea-based heritage for tourism. The Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic began on the docks in 1967 aboard Canada's oldest saltbank schooner, the Theresa E. Conner, which is still its flagship. The museum has grown to include a large complex of historic buildings on the waterfront, along with other ships and boats, an aquarium and a range of exhibits, many geared toward children.

The museum is also home to the "Bluenose Shrine" — the actual silver International Fisherman's Trophy that Bluenose won and never lost, along with artifacts from the old schooner. Two small but intriguing nearby exhibits not to be missed are of Sable Island — truly a "graveyard of the Atlantic,"

where hundreds of fishermen perished — and of the colorful local history of rum-running. A great read (available in the museum's store) is an autobiography by Hugh Corkum, "On Both Sides of the Law." Corkum was a very successful local rum-runner who later became Lunenburg's longest-serving and a flamboyant chief of police.

In 1992, Old Town Lunenburg was designated as a National Historic District by the federal government. Three years later, it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List as the "best surviving example of a planned British colonial settlement in North America."

Today, shipbuilding and fishing remain mainstays of the local economy, as demonstrated by the town's busy commercial waterfront, the Lunenburg Industrial Foundry and the big Highliner fish-processing plant at the far end of the harbor. But

the town is also gentrifying and has several high-end restaurants, excellent bed & breakfast inns, even a boutique distillery, Ironworks, in a beautifully restored wooden warehouse near the docks.

One of Lunenburg's more remarkable attractions is Elizabeth's Books, which opens whenever the owner feels like it (usually after 6 p.m.) and stays open as long into the night as he wants. The jammed and eclectic store is owned by Chris Webb, a colorful Englishman who named the store for the owner who sold it to him, a good friend who died of cancer. Webb is a former merchant mariner who served on 50 ships and traveled the world before dropping anchor in Lunenburg. His odd hours are kept with fellow mariners in mind.

"In the summer the harbor will be filled with 50 to 60 boats from all over the world. And they come ashore, and late at night I'm the only place that's open," Webb says. "I've sold books here at 1 in the morning. It suits me being a night person, and it suits a lot of other people, too." ■



The Dory Shop  
on Lunenburg's  
waterfront.

the second-largest commercial sailing fleet in the world, second only to the Brits. We build a lot of boats," he says.

The town was planned and laid out by the British, who sponsored a shipload of "foreign Protestant" settlers, mostly from Germany and Switzerland. They arrived in 1753 largely to counter French Catholic settlements elsewhere in Nova Scotia. Lunenburg was named in honor of Britain's King George II, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, and it built a thriving economy based on farming, fishing and shipping.

During the "Bluenose Era" of the 1920s and '30s, when Lunenburg developed a major fishing industry, its harbor was crammed with sailboats, and its shores were literally covered with fish-drying flakes. In 1940, when Nazi Germany invaded Norway, the Norwegian whaling fleet put into Lunenburg for safe harbor. The Norwegian government in exile set up Camp Norway on the edge of town to train and house several thousand Norwegian sailors and soldiers, who either shipped out to war or worked refitting ships. And

## Why was she named Bluenose?

Bluenose is depicted on the back of the Canadian dime, she was on three issues of Canadian stamps, and she appears throughout Nova Scotia in name and pictures. As a proud national icon, the federal and provincial governments agreed to finance a replacement when Bluenose II was retired. True to the boat's heritage, she was built in the same shipyard in Lunenburg (now the Lunenburg Industrial Foundry) and to the original lines of her ancestors. Also true to her history, the new boat is painted black, not blue. "Bluenose" is a nickname for Nova Scotians that dates from the 1700s, and it reflects neither the color of the vessel nor the bow. (Several earlier boats also bore the name.) The term is of unknown origin but possibly refers to the mottled, purplish-blue potato once a staple of Nova Scotians or to the fishermen's blue woolen mittens that transferred their dye when used as a nose wipe.

- **Bluenose website:** [www.bluenose.novascotia.ca](http://www.bluenose.novascotia.ca)
- **Lunenburg Marine Museum Society/Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic:** [www.museum.gov.ns.ca](http://www.museum.gov.ns.ca)
- **Town of Lunenburg:** [www.lunenburgns.com](http://www.lunenburgns.com)
- **Covey Island Boatworks:** [www.coveyisland.com](http://www.coveyisland.com)
- **Lunenburg Industrial Foundry:** [www.lunenburgfoundry.com](http://www.lunenburgfoundry.com)
- **Snyder's Shipyard:** [www.snydersshipyard.com](http://www.snydersshipyard.com)
- **Lunenburg Shipyard Alliance:** [www.thelsa.ca](http://www.thelsa.ca)
- **Nova Scotia Boatbuilders Association:** [www.nsboats.com](http://www.nsboats.com)
- **Nova Scotia online:** [www.novascotia.com](http://www.novascotia.com)
- **Canada Border Services Agency:** [www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca](http://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca) (search keyword: boat)



The new Bluenose was built to Transport Canada and American Bureau of Shipping standards.

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to keep its shape into old age. "The structure is hugely massive and bonded and cold-molded together. It's unbelievably strong," Steele says.

Two 225-hp John Deere diesels provide power. The rudder, which was buoyant wood in the first two Bluenoses, is 6,000 pounds of solid steel in the new one.

### It takes an alliance

To build the new Bluenose, three local shipbuilding/repair firms with different but complementary skill sets came together to create the Lunenburg Shipyard Alliance, the entity that received the Bluenose contract.

- **Covey Island Boatworks** is a composite wood/epoxy builder known for its custom sailing yachts and motoryachts. It built the laminated keelson, laminated frames and deck beams, and other cold-molded elements that add tremendous strength to crucial structural parts of the boat. [www.coveyisland.com](http://www.coveyisland.com)

- **Snyder's Shipyard** is a wood and fiberglass builder that has specialized in commercial fishing boats for more than a century. Snyder's built Bluenose's traditional centerline structure, including the keel, forefoot, stem and deadwoods, as well as the planking and the decking. [www.snydersshipyard.com](http://www.snydersshipyard.com)

- **Lunenburg Industrial Foundry and Engineering** is a major commercial shipyard, the biggest local employer and the successor to the Smith & Rhuland yard, where the original Bluenose was built. "The Foundry," as it's locally known, provided the mechanical systems (including engines, shafts and props), tanks, plumbing and electrical work. It's where the new Bluenose was built and launched, practically on the same site where the original one was 91 years earlier. [www.lunenburgfoundry.com](http://www.lunenburgfoundry.com)

Although all of these firms are shipbuilders, their core skills do not overlap. "It's a perfect relationship because everyone works within their area of expertise," Steele says. "The reality is we could have bid against each other and then hired each other as subcontractors, or we could have cooperated. It made a lot more sense to collaborate."

Adds Kevin Feindel, general manager of The Foundry: "We're

more diversified. The other firms don't have the facilities we do, but we couldn't have reconstructed Bluenose without them."

Wade Croft, co-owner of Snyder's Shipyard, notes that his business had done maintenance on Bluenose II for many years, including an extensive renovation in 1995. Many of the 40 to 50 carpenters and shipwrights his yard had working on the new Bluenose are sons or grandsons of men who built the first two Bluenoses, and the Nova Scotia Boatbuilders Association brought in many apprentices to learn traditional wooden boatbuilding skills.

One of the most poignant moments came in early 2012 when carpenters attached the final plank, which was autographed by every man and woman who had worked on the hull before it was painted. Because of insurance regulations, this particular "whiskey-planking" ceremony marking the completion of the hull exterior was alcohol-free, unlike the tradition among boatbuilders that gives the ritual its name.

With three or even four generations of Lunenburg boatbuilders having a hand in creating a Bluenose, local pride in this schooner — and the skills to build it — runs very deep. Whether you call her Bluenose II, Bluenose 2.1 or Bluenose III, the new boat keeps alive a strong local tradition, an illustrious national symbol and a beautiful schooner. "It's a craft and an art that's being rejuvenated," Croft says. ■

*Washington, D.C.-based freelance writer Stephen Blakely sails an Island Packet 26, Bearboat, on the Chesapeake Bay.*