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Review by Catherine J. Johnson for the *Vancouver Sun*

*The Island of Canada: How Three Oceans Shaped Our Nation*

by Victor Suthren

Maritime history at its seafaring finest. Victor Suthren has a passion for accuracy, detail and marine adventure and it shows. *The Island of Canada* is about as comprehensive as it gets, from ships' munitions, "...the *Burlington*, 44 guns, the *Kingston*, 60 guns, and the behemoth *Saint Lawrence*,... with no fewer than 112 guns..." to explicit battle scenes, "...their screams and cries, the crash of the collapsing rigging and the grinding of the hulls as they splintered on the rocks..." It's the working in of plausible, yet imaginative, detail that keeps Suthren's work from bogging down under a heavy cargo of fact.

But Canada an "island?" Readers may be left scratching their heads over this spin on our national identity. It may even seem egocentric and contrived. That we are a nation shaped by oceans, lakes and rivers there is, of course, no doubt, and chapters adroitly chronicle that shaping from the Ice Age onward. The reader is taken on remarkable human migrations and first fishing and hunting trips of First Nations and Inuit people. We are witness to Viking exploration and the greed and glory of the fur trade, European adventuring and Royal battles for sovereignty. Little known facts emerge throughout *The Island of Canada*, such as, "Another great myth about pirates' exploits is that they carried out their foul deeds only under waving palms...or the coral lagoons of the tropics," but in the north "the fishery became a rich prize that the pirate brethren could not resist, particularly off Newfoundland."

Suthren also examines the "quasi-piratical world of the armed Canadian privateer" and how the role figured in providing the country with much of its early wealth. During the War of 1812 the *Liverpool Packet* did quite well for Canada according to the *Boston Messenger*: "That an insignificant fishing schooner should have captured and carried home eight or nine sail, valued at from \$70,000 to \$90,000, within twenty days of the time she left Liverpool, N.S., is shameful. A few weeks ago she captured, within ten miles of Cape Cod, vessels with cargo worth \$50,000." Chapters devoted to shipping on the Great Lakes and Canada's navy are filled with interesting data.

A particularly engaging chapter in *The Island of Canada* is that of The Great Schooners. Suthren's passion for sailing and sailing vessels is obvious. The reader is transported to the decks of Canada's beloved fishing schooner *Bluenose* "as she thunder(s) ahead," during the 1921 International Fishermen's Trophy, "...winning the first and second races handily." The tie that binds sailors to their ships is touchingly noted when upon losing the Lipton's Cup in 1930, *Bluenose* captain Angus Walters claimed "that it was his mistakes that cost *Bluenose* the cup, not the qualities of the ship." And after weathering a hurricane, "I was never prouder of her."

The Introduction to *The Island of Canada* contains generalizations about Canadians that have the potential to be insulting, as do the last two chapters and the Epilogue. It is unfortunate that the author did not use the term "we" when referring to mistakes that we Canadians have made throughout history, as that would have softened the blows. Here again in these four sections (which are largely personal opinion), the term "island" may not hold water with readers.

Canada's development as a maritime nation has a "turbulent, colourful history" and this book has got it all. It is an ideal read for mariners, history buffs and any reader who enjoys learning. In addition, *The Island of Canada* would be a valuable resource for students.

Catherine J. Johnson is an author, editor, sailor and former towboat operator on BC's coast.