



Schooner was built to rival Bluenose

Roseway was rescued from river mud; one of six surviving Gloucester racers

By CHRISTINA SCHALLENBERG
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The Gloucester fishing schooner Roseway was built in 1925 to race the original Bluenose, but she never got the chance. She visits Halifax this weekend as part of the Tall Ships festival. (KATE WOOD)

A TALE OF TWO SCHOONERS

The Roseway is docked at the end of Salter Street in Halifax Harbour, and decks are open from 10am to 5pm.

If you are familiar with Bluenose II, you will find quite a few similarities between the two boats. They have a somewhat comparable hull shape and sail plan, though the Roseway carries less sail.

With her 137-foot length overall, she is also considerably smaller than Bluenose II (161 feet).

But the most striking difference between the two is the colour of the sails. Instead of the common white, Roseway has reddish-brown sails.

During the time when fisheries still relied heavily on sailboats, fishermen would often treat their cotton sails with a mix of red ochre, linseed or cod liver oil and pine tar to keep moisture out, turning the sails a reddish brown.

Though today's sails are made of synthetic materials, some boat owners still choose that traditional reddish colour.

IF YOU GO down to the harbour today and visit the Roseway, one of the many tall ships currently gracing the Halifax waterfront, you wouldn't guess that only seven years ago, this boat was slowly sinking into the mud in a small village in Maine. With water up to the floor of the main salon and the engine room completely flooded, she was in desperate need of repair and renovation. But the bank that owned the ship at the time was not going to invest in the costly restoration. Indeed, it would require a fair share of idealism to take on such a project.

Luckily for the Roseway, Capt. Dwight Deckelmann does not suffer from a lack of idealism.

He and his associate Abby Kidder had just founded the World Ocean School, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing youth education programs at sea, when they heard about the Roseway coming up for auction.

They decided to ask the bank to donate the ship, gave a 15-minute presentation to pitch their idea — and when they left the building that fine September day in 2002, they were the proud new owners of the 137-foot schooner. The agreed price for the deal was a nominal ten dollars.

"It was the first cheque the World Ocean School ever wrote," says Kidder.

Of course, there is no such thing as a free boat, and that's certainly true of a wooden one. There was a lot of work awaiting the new owners and they began promptly by pumping out the ship's bilges and getting rid of years of accumulated trash.

They then arranged for the Roseway to be towed to a mooring in Rockland Harbour, Maine, where Deckelmann and a friend spent two weeks tearing out the ship's interior, including 40 tons of iron ballast.

What followed was an 18-month restoration in Boothbay Harbour, Maine. Employing traditional methods of shipbuilding (to this day, the Roseway is held together solely by wooden pegs) a full-time crew of 12 skilled shipwrights hammered, sanded and sawed until the boat was seaworthy again. All said and done, the restoration cost around US\$1.3 million.

Now you wouldn't want to spend that kind of money on just any old boat, but the Roseway stands out from the crowd for several reasons. Built in 1925 in Essex, Mass., she is one of only six Gloucester fishing schooners remaining today, only two of which are currently sailing. She was designed not only with fishing in mind, but also for speed, in the hopes that she may beat the famous Bluenose in the annual schooner races between the Halifax and Gloucester fishermen.

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The two schooners never got to race, though, and Roseway never even served in the traditional cod fishery.

Instead, she entered a career as sports yacht for a rich Boston lawyer. She was extremely well cared for — even the coal for the stove was washed before being stored aboard — and was used to catch swordfish. The huge fish were harpooned from the bowsprit and then hauled aboard. To this day, Roseway holds the record for the most swordfish caught in one single day: 74 animals found their way into her fishhold that day in 1934.

Her remarkable history doesn't end here, though. Roseway was also the last sailing pilot boat on the U.S. east coast. She served the Boston harbour pilots from 1941 to 1973, then went up for sale and was outfitted for the tourist industry.

Sailing around Maine with up to 36 overnight passengers on board, she hosted many a lobster dinner and weathered many a storm. But upkeep of a wooden vessel is laborious and costly, and eventually her owners were not able to maintain the Roseway up to coast guard standards. She lost her coast guard licence, which meant a loss in revenue, and ultimately was repossessed by the bank. And that's how Deckelmann and Kidder found her in 2002.

Today, the Roseway sails out of St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands during winter and spends her summers in and around Boston.


The ship arrived in Halifax with four high school students from St. Thomas, USVI, on board. "None of them have ever been to Canada and certainly not sailed there. In fact, I'm not sure any of them have ever been to Boston, either — it's a big adventure for them," says Kidder.

The youth will spend more than two weeks in Nova Scotia this year, sailing with Roseway from Halifax to Port Hawkesbury, and then on to Sydney, Pictou and Pugwash.

They stand watch along with the crew and learn skills like steering, navigation and knot tying. In addition, they follow science classes relating to the physics of sailing, oceanography and astronomy.

Most importantly, though, they get immersed in a different culture and will return home filled with fresh ideas and, most likely, a newfound love for sailing.

Christina Schallenberg is a freelance journalist and oceanographer based in Montrea. She has sailed on Roseway, and will spend two weeks aboard her during her time in Nova Scotia.

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