

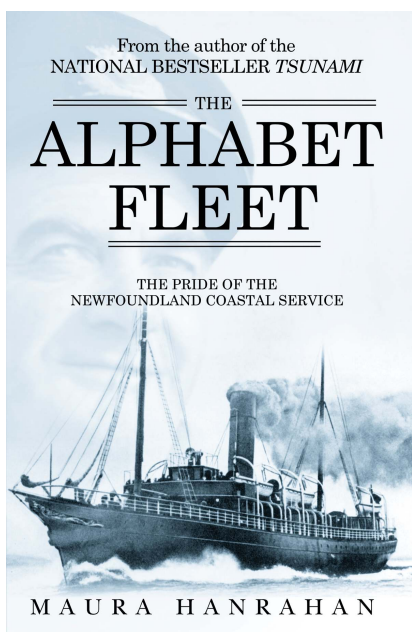
Railway Coastal Museum History e-Bulletin: Volume IX

Erin Chafe
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The Alphabet Fleet: The Pride of the Newfoundland Coastal Service By Maura Hanrahan- Book Launch at the Railway Coastal Museum!

Clear your calendars for September 27th! From 5pm until 7pm, the Railway Coastal Museum is pleased to announce the launch of Maura Hanrahan's new book, *The Alphabet Fleet: The Pride of the Newfoundland Coastal Service*. Maura will be here at the Museum to talk about her much anticipated new release!



The following is an excerpt from the new book. It will be on sale at the Railway Coastal Museum on the evening of the Launch and thereafter for \$19.95 plus tax.

"The harbour rang with oohs and aahs as she approached. Police officers tried to push the crowds back, fearing that someone would land in the drink. Because excitement was general, the cops' task was not an easy one. Newsboys squeezed through to the edges of the finger piers, their eyes narrowing as they focused on the sight before them.

With her gleaming plates, shiny black funnel, freshly painted white rails and flags aflutter, she was nothing short of beautiful. She steamed in through the Narrows, between the headlands that stand over St. John's Harbour like loyal sentries. Then, with the grace and hidden strength of a ballerina, she turned, pointing her bow toward the crowds. They sighed again, as if responding to a courtly gesture.

It was October 13, 1897, and the SS *Bruce* had arrived. Newfoundland and Labrador's memorable and enduring relationship with the Alphabet Fleet had just begun. According to her registration documents, the *Bruce* was 237 feet long and 33 feet wide; her gross and net tonnages were 1,154 and 1,041, respectively. Built by Glasgow's A. & J. Inglis for railway titan Robert Gillespie Reid, the *Bruce* had two masts (like a schooner), two decks, and was fitted for both sail and steam. A steel ship, she averaged a respectable 15.5 knots on her trial trip. The *Bruce* had berths for 160 people, 70 of them first class. *The Daily News* sang her praises: "Her equal as a passenger ship has rarely or ever been seen in St. John's Harbour."

Indeed, the *Bruce* was nothing less than a beauty. Her dining saloon was fitted with dark mahogany panels fringed with gold, the saloon's chairs upholstered in blue morocco, and its floor covered in Turkish carpet. The *Bruce* had a large smoking room and "a special apartment" set aside for ladies. The newspapers lauded the vessel's complete installation of electric lighting, including a searchlight, her deep-sea sounding apparatus and compasses, steam steering gear, and winches.

Notably, the *Bruce* was ice-strengthened, with closely pitched frames, extra protection for her shaft and propellers, and a belting of greenheart — hard American tropical trees — around her hull. The Reids' new ship would need all these innovations, and more. She was soon nicknamed "the ice crusher," and through her career, she would carry half a million passengers, beginning with 1,000 daily in her inaugural summer.

The *Bruce* made a memorable journey on Wednesday, June 30, 1898. She was waiting at the pier in Port aux Basques when the first regular express train arrived from St. John's. The 548-mile journey across the island had taken a full day,¹ but now passengers were delighted to embark on the *Bruce*. Some were going to work in the Cape Breton coal mines, which were expected to last for 1,000 years. Others were taking part in a holiday promotion and were on their way to celebrate Dominion Day, Canada's national celebration on July 1. First-class passengers paid \$11 for their tickets while a steerage passage cost \$6. With Captain Patrick Delaney² in command, the *Bruce's* run was highly successful."

1. Most accounts give a journey time of 27 hours, but others say 24 or 15 hours.

2. Delaney, wrote a contributor to the *Evening Herald* some years later, sang in a “superb baritone that would have made his fortune in concert halls. But the winds and the waves, the whaling boats and sealing ships, and the passengers who are fortunate enough to sail with him about Newfoundland are his only audience.”



Maura Hanrahan is the author of several books, including *Domino: The Eskimo Coast Disaster*. Her book *Tsunami: The Newfoundland Tidal Wave Disaster* is a Canadian Bestseller. *Tsunami* won the 2005 Heritage and History Award and was shortlisted for the 2005 Rogers Cable Newfoundland and Labrador Book Award. Hanrahan is also the author of the East Coast favourite, *The Doryman*, which was shortlisted for the 2004 Heritage and History

Award. She is a past winner of the Lawrence Jackson Writing Award.

Hanrahan works as an independent anthropologist with Aboriginal organizations in the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as at the national level. She has a social sciences Ph.D. from the London School of Economics. Her website address is www.maurahanrahan.com.

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We'd Love to Hear it!**

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**We Also Appreciate any Feedback
or Questions You May Have.**

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