If at First, You Don't Succeed: Alexander Cuthbert and the Battle of the Atalanta



How they were built, in the great out of doors. Peck family archive

Alexander Cuthbert, who would make his name in building sailboats, became a mariner just in time to see the end of sail. John Molson had ordered the first steamboat in Canada in 1809, since then steam had overtaken almost all shipping on the Great Lakes. By 1859, most of the commercial schooners had their masts and rigging removed and the hulls gutted, ending their career as a tow barge. The steam ships were usually about 150-220 feet in length and cost about $20-45,000. Power was from the low-pressure system, where steam would be produced at low pressure in the boiler, introduced into the cylinder, pushing the piston down and as it did so, the steam would condense, forming a vacuum which would suck the piston back up, providing the motive power to turn a paddlewheel or a propeller. The low-pressure engines were very slow,

rarely producing speeds over 5 mph, but they would get to their destination on time and in the transport business, that made the difference. In fact most of the steamships of the time were hybrids, and had both masts and steam power, but the money was in the engines, and as those powerplants became more powerful and reliable the sails eventually disappeared altogether, the remaining masts eventually to be used only for navigational purposes. A few sailing schooners remained in commercial service, mostly to haul non-time sensitive, low-value bulk cargo such as lumber or coal.

Cuthbert was part of a transformational generation including William Polson, a steam engine designer and founder of Polson Iron Works, Alexander MacDougall, who would design and build the whaleback series of lake freighters, as well as Robert Davis, who would establish his own boatyard at Kingston. Cuthbert was born in the north of Scotland in 1840 and came with his family to what was then known as Upper Canada and settled in Frenchman's Bay, near the village of Pickering. Cuthbert learned the cobbling trade from his father, but a working life spent in a cramped workshop making boots and shoes was not for him. He began building ship models, and then gravitated to building small sailboats and finally left to pursue a career as a ship master and boat builder. His first sailboat contract was the John A. MacDonald, in 1866, then the Norah and then one of his best and fastest boats to date, the Annie Cuthbert. He also made himself available as a racing captain for hire, and caught the attention of James Gifford, a lawyer and businessman who had recently served a stint as an Ontario MPP. Gifford purchased an American built racer which he named the Gorilla. The Gorilla was not particularly attractive, with a strange sweptback bow that made it look like a cross between a rowboat and Roman trireme. But it was lightly built with a large amount of canvas, and it was fast and in the hands of Cuthbert, a winner. With Gifford having the connections and Cuthbert having made a name for himself both as a winning builder and racing skipper, they convinced the Royal Canadian Yacht Club to sponsor a shot at the America's Cup itself.



The Gorilla, at left-centre. It was fast, it didn't need to be pretty. This New York built sailing sloop was the spark to the Cuthbert-Gifford America's Cup challenge.

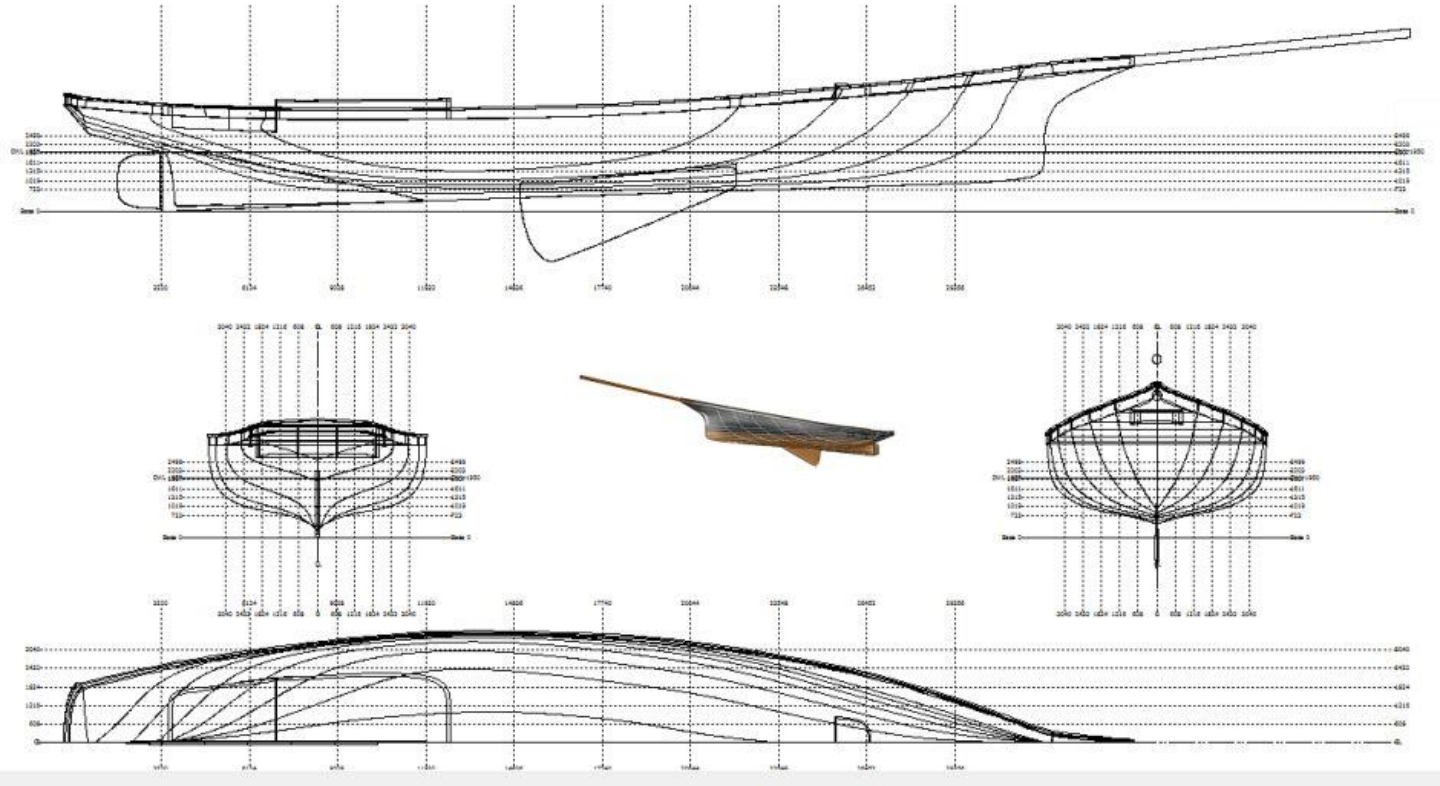
The America's Cup was actually made in Britain for a British race in 1851. Americans in a schooner named America showed up and took the trophy home and kept it. The trophy itself is I can only describe it as a sterling silver, grotesquely ornate and thoroughly ugly thing that you can't even take a celebratory drink from, as there is no bottom. The "cup" was donated in 1857 to a non-profit entity under an agreement known as "The Deed of Gift" which set out a system of rules to be followed for any such challenge. The rules were both specific and a little vague; the challenge had to come from an organized yacht club, it would take place on the waters nearest the location of the club who had previously won (this was New York City) and entry was exclusive to sailing craft, no steamboats allowed. The first race was in 1870 and the second in 1871, the Americans, represented by boats from the cup holder, the New York Yacht Club won both times, in each case by a fleet of defenders against a single challenger; in the 1871 challenge a broken spar on the main defending schooner resulted in a second schooner brought in against the solitary British boat; not surprisingly, the American boat (or more correctly fleet) won. The British countered that the Americans were effectively gaming their victory and that

was the end of British involvement until 1893. The Americans had to cede that point (only after winning the 1871 competition) and restricted the race to one challenger and one defender. True to form, they found a way around that rule as well as we will see later. In May 1876, the New York Club received a challenge letter from the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, located in Toronto.

The gentlemen of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club were well-off, none were rich. Toronto was booming, but the city and the businesses in it were still relatively small, in the 1870's no one would qualify as a millionaire; the big money men and big businesses were in Montreal and their pastimes were houses and horses. The truly big money men were in New York City; fortunes of $10-15 million were not uncommon; writing a cheque for $20,000 for a fast sailboat and a professional crew was nothing for the sort of men who would bet $10,000 on a pair of raindrops coursing down a train window (true story). For the well-heeled thousandaires of Toronto, the kick in for the syndicate members was $100 each, even though that was a strain, particularly for a leisure time activity. The syndicate operated as what we now call a limited liability partnership, most partners' liability is their investment, the main partner has unlimited personal liability, in this case, that was Gifford. The lead partner has effective control over the project, but they are on the hook if something goes sideways. On the other hand, a win could put the new country into international prominence, in sailing and boatbuilding the equal of two of the world's marine superpowers. It might be enough for Gifford to make a serious run at Parliament, possibly even into the Prime Minister's office itself. This isn't as stupid an ambition as one might think, Justin Trudeau's amateur prizefight success against a considerably more buff opponent spoke to his capacity for careful planning and canny action under pressure. Still, the project was risky, and both Gifford and Cuthbert were well aware who and what they were up against, and they had to have an edge. That edge was simple, more sail. By comparison, the race-winning Bluenose, built almost fifty years later, had a waterline length of 143 feet and 10,000 square feet of canvas; Dufferin had a waterline length of 81 feet and 20,000 square feet of canvas. Sheer size and force might just do the trick. The design origin was disputed, the American press said Dufferin's hull was a copy of the racing yacht Cora, which was built by a Patrick McGeehan of Chicago, against which Cuthbert had already raced. Cuthbert had a number of successful designs already and unless he had gone swimming underneath Cora's hull, this is unlikely.

At the time, the racing yacht of choice was a schooner, a two masted boat, with a mainmast fore and a slightly smaller mast aft. There were generally mainsails, trapezoidal sheeting attached to the masts, and a triangular topsail on each. At the fore, there was the jib, another triangular sail (or sails, there could be two or three) that provided some steering control as well as additional

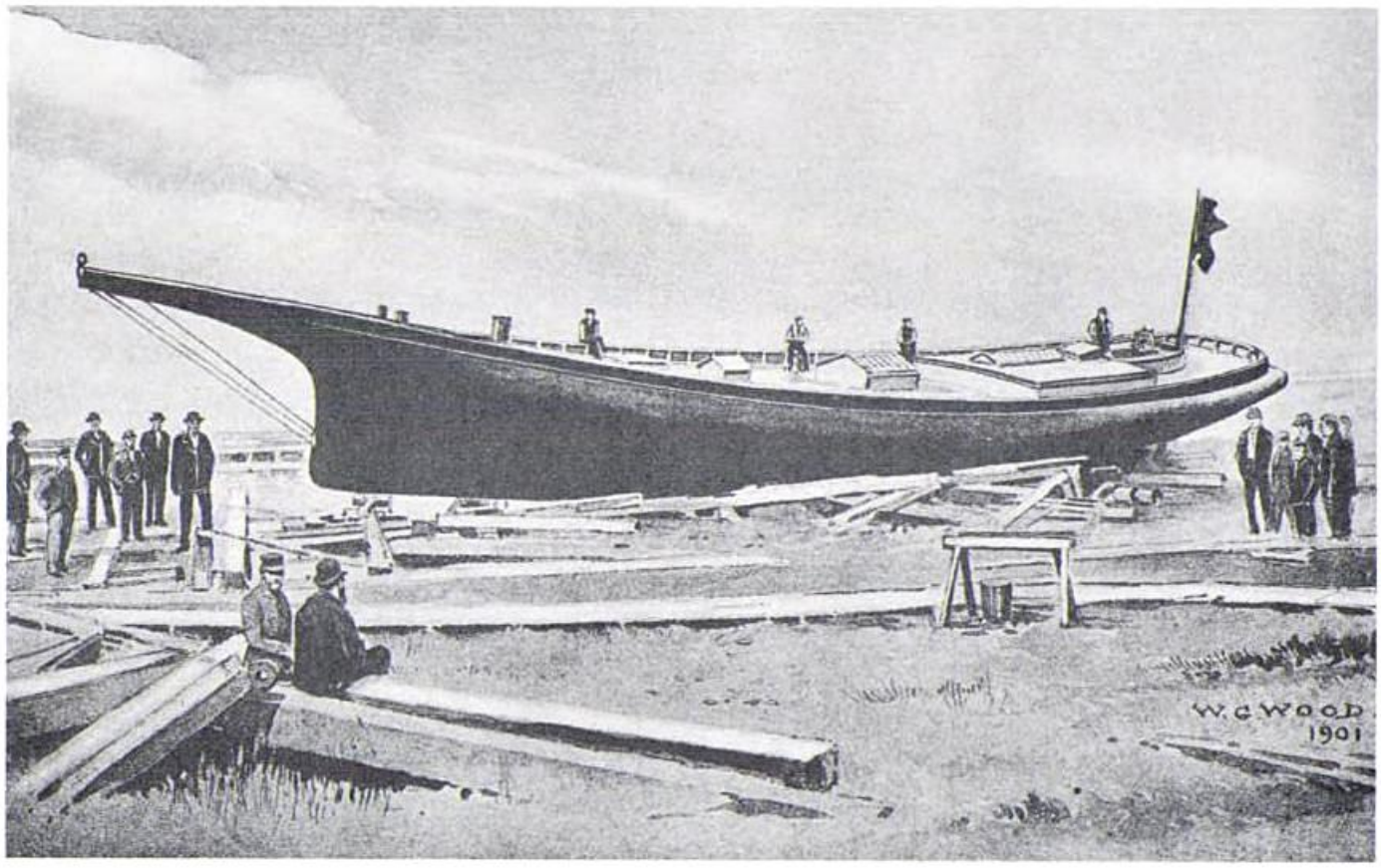
speed, in the form of the balloon jib. Sometimes there was a square topsail, on the foremast and unlike the other sails that were more or less parallel with the hull, the topsail was perpendicular and provided another power boost. At the time sails were made of cotton or linen duck (doek is Dutch for cloth). White oak was used for the keel, frames, stem, stern and all other structural support. The hull planking was white pine. I never understood the preference for white pine. It is only intermediate in terms of rot resistance and why it was preferred over native yellow cedar, which is extremely rot-resistant I do not know. Both trees were abundant in Ontario, the fact is the cedar became the wood of choice later in the 1890's and stayed as such up to the advent of fibreglass and aluminum in the 1960's. My best and only guess was that clear cedar was hard to obtain, while clear pine was much easier and cheaper. Still the pine planking on a later racer called "Canada" built in 1899 was grey after 100 years in the great outdoors, but still solid once you shaved off the weathered surface. Also, there was the question of frames v. ribs. Frames were sawn pieces of oak cut from a single tree trunk and scarph-jointed together to make the required hull curvature. Ribs for the Canada were 2" X 2" oak boards that were cut green, put in a steam box (rule of thumb was half-hour per square inch) and then once softened by the steam heat, were yanked out and stuck in the hull sides and clamped to the planking (usually every fourth plank was missing, so a clamp could be applied. With the frame approach you would build the frames first and then attach the planks after, working your way down from the top to the keel. All large wooden sailing ships were built this way. With the rib approach you would still have to build frames to temporarily attach the planks, and then remove the frames one by one as they are replaced by oak ribs. The benefit of this approach is that the frames are re-useable, and you can build multiple copies of the original boat. The Countess of Dufferin was made with the cut-frame method; at what point Cuthbert changed to the steam rib method I do not know. I would assume that a racer needs to be light, and ribs are lighter than frames, most likely his later boats were racing sloops, which were smaller than the previous schooners and likely rib structured. As for the masts, they were some type of conifer, it is one of the few trees that grows with a very straight trunk, up as much as 60 or 80 feet when mature. By the 1870's southern Ontario had been so heavily logged it was increasingly difficult to find very tall trees. That was just the wood, there were also a hundred other items that every wishful amateur always forgets in any wood boat project, chocks, cleats, nails, screws, paint, nuts and bolts, metal for the rudder and steering apparatus, lead, or steel blocks to serve as ballast, sails, ropes, an anchor, even a stove onboard to cook meals while on a long trip. The bills began to add up quickly. Was there potential help elsewhere, possibly the Governor General himself, who was also a sailor?



The Countess line plan.

Frederick Temple Blackwood, better known as Lord Dufferin, was a peer by birth and a senior civil servant by occupation and an adventurer in his youth, making a tour of the arctic regions around Greenland, Iceland, and the open sea north of Norway. He became Canada's third governor general in 1872. The Countess of Dufferin was named in honor of his wife, a nice gesture and possibly loaded with some hope that the sports-minded Governor would be sufficiently honored to write a cheque to help with the project. He did not, having money issues of his own; later he would go into partnership with fraudsters, although he claimed to be innocent and was never charged. Gifford and Cuthbert were on their own and had to cut costs any way they could. The planking for the Dufferin came straight from the sawmill and attached as they were, leaving the hull surface "as rough as a nutmeg grater" so one New York journalist put it. There was no windlass for the anchor (another item being skipped), when it was time to go, the crew lined up on the foredeck to play tug of war with the mooring ropes. This was a big boat, 81 feet long at the waterline, overall 101 feet, a beam of 23 feet. Estimates of it's weight varied wildly, one source stated 95 tons, another 200. The first set of masts were procured in Kingston, and the rigging and tackle from Grant and Fayette of Oswego, New York at a cost of $500. The Dufferin was launched on May 12, 1876, and on her way by the second week of June, with Cuthbert and a bare-minimum voyage crew of 9. The actual race would require a

complement of 22 sailors in total, the additional men would take the train from Cobourg to Montreal and then on to New York. That was the plan, anyway.



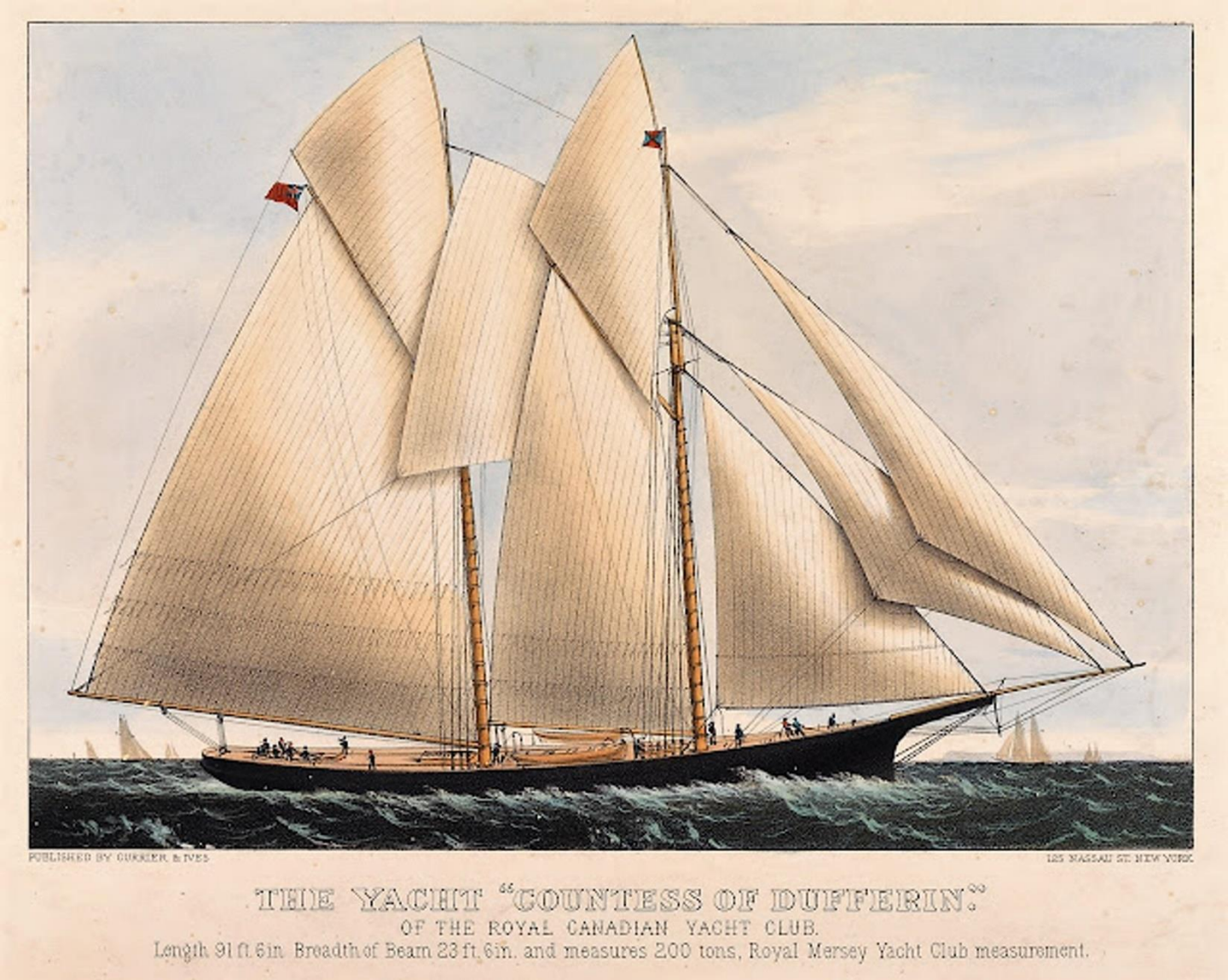
COUNTESS OF DUFFERIN

Third challenger for the America's cup (1876), as she appeared on the ways ready for launching at Cobourg, Ontario. From a wash drawing by W.G. Wood, after a photograph used by courtesy of Alexander G. Cuthbert, son of the vessel's designer and builder.

There were problems almost immediately. The mainmast had a habit of twisting under full sail; it was too thin and possibly still too green, Cuthbert had to make a stop in Montreal for a new and more solid one, again more upgrades needing more money they didn't have. This wasn't entirely Cuthbert's fault, most of the marine outfitters in the area had shifted their sail business to small pleasure craft and the Dufferin needed ship-sized masts that most likely were simply no longer available locally. The two-thousand-mile trip was uneventful, but even more issues became apparent once the Dufferin reached New York and had a chance to see the competition yachts firsthand. Reporters said that the boat was "over-canvassed" a vague sounding criticism but is this really a problem; I suggest you dial up photos of the Herreshoff-built Reliance, the

1903 Cup winner. It looks like a sewing needle attached to a Kleenex, the absolute limit of sail vs. safety. But there were definitely issues with Dufferin. The sails were not well fitted to the spars, being too big and prone to wrinkling and bagging. (I suspect they were bought secondhand, off another long gone and much larger schooner).

The owner of the American boat Madeleine was Benjamin Butler, politician, businessman and Union Army general, particularly noted for his stint as military governor of New Orleans, so controversial Lincoln fired him not once but twice. The war was over, and Lincoln was gone, so Butler could concentrate on rebuilding his reputation and having some fun while he did so. The Madeleine was made of wood, but like many wood boats of the time had a copper sheathed bottom, which kept barnacles from attaching. Madeleine was pulled from the water and the metal polishers set to work, putting on such a shine one could shave in it. It was also lighter, a mere 180 tons as opposed to 200 for Dufferin.



The Countess at full 20,000 square feet of sail. The schooner on the dime, Bluenose, had 10,000 square feet. Compare the 5'5" crew member average height on deck with the masts.

The first race was decided on local knowledge the Canadians did not have. Madeleine avoided the waters where a flood (incoming) tide water pressure was very high. Usually this is a function of the seabed geography, certain underwater features cause incoming tidal forces to be stronger in some locations as opposed to others. Cuthbert had no firsthand knowledge of this effect and sailed right into it and the Dufferin slowed down as it fought though to open water, most of the race was effectively lost at this point. Catching up was impossible and Madeliene won by 10 minutes. The next day the winds were rather weak, and this seemed to hurt the Dufferin more, it was almost eight hours from start to finish and Madeline won by 26 minutes. The Madeleine's crew was just too good and their boat just a little faster. Or was that the only

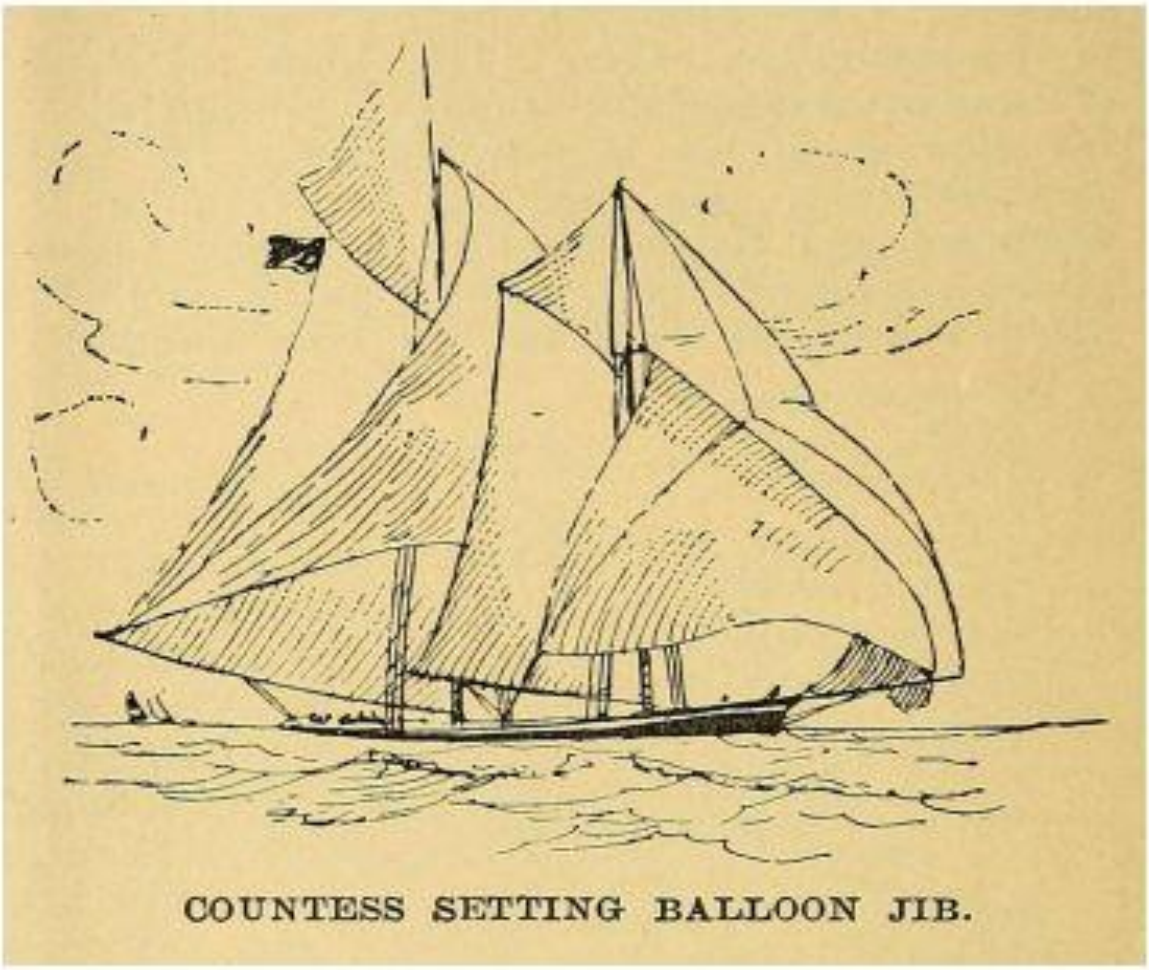
reason? The commentator for the race noted for the first race, that Cuthbert “did not follow convention” and stick to Madeliene’s course to avoid the high-speed flood tides. What does this mean? Was Cuthbert informed of this? I assumed that if he had been informed, he would not have gone the wrong way and got caught in the tow. Cuthbert and his crew were resolute amateurs, not necessarily because they wanted to be, or had some higher moral dedication to the gentleman sailor principle, there simply was not the money to pay them to train full time. The endless bootstrapping could only go so far, and they still had covered the costs to make their way up the St. Lawrence and around Cape Breton and from there to New York City harbour.



The Countess at the dock.

The New York journalists referred to Madeleine's crew as "experienced sailors" and that the boat was "tried and re-modelled and fixed over until they were as good as could be made".

Where did they find the time to carry out all this work? The problem with the Deed of Gift was not in what the rules said, but what they didn't say. In the latter 1800's most people worked 59 hours a week, ten hours Monday through Friday and for some reason, only 9 hours on Saturday. (this was reduced to 4 ½ hours by the 1920's and finally Saturday more or less disappeared as a workday after the war, except for retail businesses). Sunday morning meant going to church, then lunch and finally you had the afternoon off, which for many men meant playing sports, baseball in the summer and ice hockey in the winter. For those next to water, this meant rowing or sailing. Yacht and rowing clubs began to appear in the 1860's, complete with regular contests and competitions throughout the season. This is where the issue of amateur v. professional began to get complicated. The general theory of the time, and to some extent to today, is that certain sports are intended to be based in the amateur principle (most notably the Olympics, according to the rules set in place by Baron de Coubertin); the sport was a pastime, and the player worked a regular job, and could only practice their sport during leisure hours, which as noted, were restricted to evenings or Sunday afternoons. Outdoor water sports were particularly weather-dependent, you couldn't row a scull in waves and wind, but you couldn't sail when it was calm. Even with wind, there was always a challenge, light winds made the racecourse boring, high winds were dangerous; if you capsized you could be in real trouble, sailboats were heavily laden with ballast, usually stones or lead, they would go down quickly. Rescue boats were rowed, and it could be a long time before you were picked up if you went into the water, assuming you could survive, as no one wore life jackets at the time (they were advertised in Eaton's catalogue but were for women and children and seagoing ships). What this meant was that you had maybe 30 Sundays in the season, maybe half of those had a decent breeze. A few hours out on the water once a fortnight was not going to make you the greatest of all time, but assuming all your competitors were coping with the same limitations, at least it was a fair fight when regatta day arrived. But there was always that desire for an edge, for your team to beat the other team and the accordant desire to bend the rules, or possibly break them, just a bit, as long as no one could find out or really do anything about it, and that meant the more time spent on the water, the better. The job of professional athlete was just coming into sports culture, someone who played a sport and was paid for it, on a full-time basis. As noted rower Ned Hanlan had turned pro and lived in part on competition prize money. The professional-amateur line was at play even a hundred years later with snickering in the sports press when it was revealed that the victorious "gentleman" of the 1980 Cup challenge, Dennis Conner, was essentially a paid professional athlete. With Canada's challenge in 1983, the skipper had been similarly set up with a non-sailing "job" doing promotion and PR work, but he admitted openly to reporters that his real 9-5 work was preparing for the big race. No one bothers asking any more.



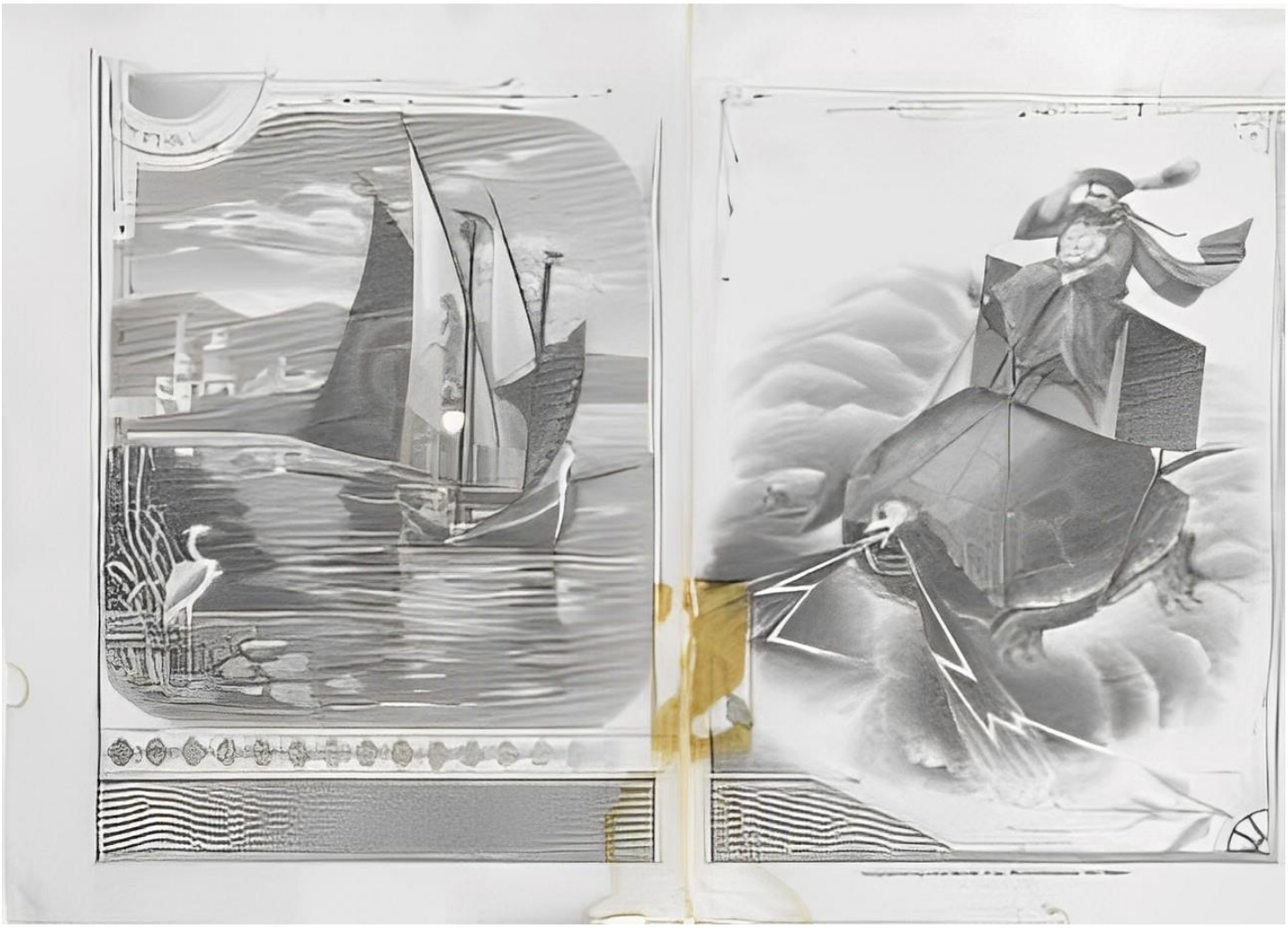
The Countess in racing mode.

Cuthbert had planned to make changes to the boat, shortening the overhang on the stern to save weight, fix the mast and sail issues and take another shot at the cup the following year. He tried to get support from associates back home to back his plan to buy Gifford out, that was turned down. The syndicate had finally run out of financial steam or willpower to continue. The Dufferin was listed for sale at a price of $5,000, most likely the total construction cost. But the boat had no business value and was essentially just a $5,000 toy. Now there was another problem. It appears that a lot of the financing for Dufferin was just that, a series of accounts payable on top of more payables, and another layer after that. Cuthbert had used his charm and skills of persuasion to get enough cash to get the project underway, after that it was order after order of goods and lumber and an accumulating chain of payment delays. Creditors began to register with the courts for the unpaid amounts. As the Dufferin was still docked in New York City harbour, payment enforcement fell under the jurisdiction of the City's Marshals. The

Marshal was the civil judgment enforcement officer, the one who actually collected the money from a court judgement, for which he received a fee of 5% of the monies recovered. The yacht was sold to the first offer that came along, a businessman from Chicago; the offer was a fraction of the list price, this was never disclosed I suspect it was about $1,000 to $1,500, the proceeds were distributed to the business creditors, the syndicate members got nothing; as the principal, Gifford ended up being stuck to cover the unpaid bills. Their stake was gone, the boat was gone, there was no cup, even the papers, particularly the New York dailies criticized the challenge as shambolic; too little money (true), poor craftsmanship (not true), an undertrained crew (partly true), the nerve of those Canadians thinking they could challenge the American juggernaut and it's deep-pocketed sportsmanship. No one questioned the fairness of money being the determinant for success in sporting activities, this was promoted as being completely reasonable and has dogged competitive sports even since; to win the big prizes you need to spend the big dollars.

Gifford did not run for public office again and returned to his law practice. The Royal Canadian Yacht Club stuck to local races. After 1876 there were no Cup challengers; the British remained uninterested. It's fun to be on top, less so after a while when you realize no one else wants to play. But the Canadians had not been idle, Cuthbert finally found new backers in the Bay of Quinte Yacht Club, set up in the small town of Belleville. The Bay of Quinte supporters were even less well-heeled than the Royal, mostly sawmill operators, single factory owners and small-town professionals such as doctors and lawyers. To allay fears after what happened to Major Gifford, Cuthbert decided to act as the boat owner; he would take on all the risk on his person. He just needed some cash and the consent of the Club. The challenge letter was sent to the New York Club on May 16, 1881, and accepted in a return letter on June 12. The challenge was to be made by a boat called the Atalanta; the only problem was that no such boat existed at that point and only the acceptance letter provided the leverage to jumpstart the project. The main funding appeared to come from the Flint and Holton Lumber Company. Billa Flint and Ezra Holton had built this enterprise through exploiting timber in Hastings County, the company was passed on to Flint's adopted son Gregory, who had married Holton's daughter. By 1881 Flint Sr. was largely retired, Gregory now ran the mills and like many entrepreneurs then and now, had an affinity for sports and was willing to sponsor a competitive activity ostensibly for publicity, but most often just because. He provided workspace for the Atalanta construction, and also provided the lumber and materials for the project on a pay when you can basis. At least Atalanta, as a sloop would be, in theory, a more manageable and affordable project. The racing schooner with its two masts had been replaced by the racing sloop, with a single mast and smaller sail area. The new boat would be 64 feet at the waterline and 46.6 tons and in theory

this size of boat was rated for 3,118 sq feet of sail, Atalanta had over 5,000 square feet, still at least just a quarter of what had been on the Dufferin five years earlier at a total build cost of $2,100. Since construction had begun so late, there was a mad rush to get the boat seaworthy even for the 1881 season at all, and not to make the B.Q.Y.C. have to ask for an extension to 1882, which wouldn't have been granted anyway. The boat was launched and ready to sail, more or less, by early October, and even as it sailed out into Lake Ontario, Cuthbert and his shipwrights were still nailing down the decking and doing the very basic finish work below. A full trip up the St. Lawrence and around the Maritimes and down to New York was simply out of the question, there wasn't enough time, so the boat would have to go through the Erie Canal, it was the only way. Sailing through this narrow waterway was almost impossible, the cost of a small steam tug out of the question, Cuthbert went old school and hired a team of mules to pull the boat from a now little used path at the bank, his men using barge poles to keep the craft away from the muddy sides. Worse still was finding out that Atalanta's draft was too deep for the lock stations, so the crew had to shift the ballast to one side of the bilge to heel the hull over so it could be pulled through, and then right it once more out the other side. There are a total of 35 locks on the canal from the Lake Ontario entrance point to Albany, so this should give one some idea of the epic hassle of the trip. Once they reached Albany, they were now in the Hudson River itself and could sail the rest of the way. News about the transiting problems reached the press, and they dubbed Atalanta, "the Canadian Mud Turtle" and there is even a cartoon of Cuthbert, clad in Scottish shop finery, crowned with tam-o-shanter and tartan scarf flying in the breeze as he steered such a creature through rough seas, lightning bolts issuing from its mouth.



Alexander Cuthbert enroute to New York, on his mud turtle

Once Atalanta reached New York on October 30, familiar problems began to resurface. The extra men needed for the race would not be coming, I suspect because the was no money to pay for their train trip or food and lodging. It was already past the season, now the first week of November and Cuthbert literally threw himself on the generosity of his adversaries, who agreeably rounded up a brace of amateur local sailors to get the program moving again. A weeklong break was granted so Atalanta could be hauled out and the rough plank surfaces hand-planed to some degree of smoothness. Once again, there was the issue of excessive and poorly fitted sails, and Cuthbert realized this wasn't going to work and spent the hull improvement time cutting down the sail size and tightening the fabric, so it didn't crease and bag.

Canada had but one challenge craft, the defending Americans had a small fleet of racers to pick from. All of them cost $20-25,000 each just to build; the Pocahontas, the Gracie and Mischief,

so in raw dollars, the America spend on the Cup was $70-80,000, probably more, against the Canadian spend of $2,100 -$2,500. Mischief was unique as it had a forged iron hull while the other two were made of wood. Its design was the work of naval architects applying mathematics and fluid science, rather the old school rule of thumb to whittle a half model out of wood (Atalanta's half model hull still exists and is on display at the Bay of Quinte clubhouse, as is the model for the Countess of Dufferin). Mischief was chosen as it had a smaller gross weight handicap (three minutes) as opposed to Gracie (seven minutes). The Deed of Gift says nothing about weight handicaps, so why this became an issue is not clear, but it caused a lot of ill-will in the New York club, not the least of which was the shifty personal attributes of Mischief's owner, Joseph Busk. Mischief was hauled out and its hull sanded to a mirror smoothness, tinned with lead and as with Madeleine, polished to an absurd degree.

There were supposed to be three races, the first was scrubbed due to fog, Mischief won the remaining two by a half hour margin in each case, over a 30-mile course. The reporters blamed Atalanta's loss on poor sails and an untrained and unpracticed crew with little knowledge of ocean competition, but what really happened this time, particularly given that the winning margin was even greater than between the Dufferin and the Madeleine.



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Atalanta, with its balloon job unfurled.

The first race started at 11:15 AM on November 9. Neither boat spread their topsail. Mischief's main sail was spread fully, Atalanta's were partly reefed for good reason, hit by a sudden wind blast the boat almost went over and the safety tug kept close to the Canadians in case they did so. Once out on the open water, both craft spread their jib topsails, Mischief's crack team did this quickly, Atalanta seemed to be fumbling for several minutes with theirs and once it was done the boat began to heel over badly and they had to take it down again. At the turn point in the course, Mischief slid around comfortably, Atalanta missed the marker buoy and had to do a quick circle to get it right the second time. Over the three-four-hour race, Mischief beat Atalanta by 28 minutes. The second race was run the next day, the gun went off at 11:30. This time it seemed to be a real race until 1:13 PM Atalanta's spinnaker-boom snapped and its crucial speed sail, the balloon jib collapsed, and the race was effectively over. Still, when the boats reached the turn around point on the course, Atalanta was only 2 minutes behind Mischief, even though the balloon jib had been out of action a half hour earlier. Mischief gained a further 36 minutes on the disabled Atalanta, which finally made it over the line in the late afternoon November dark of 5:30PM. However, it's worth noting, that if you do the arithmetic, the time loss between 1:13, arriving at the turn and finally making to the finish would indicate that prior to the failure, poor sad-sack Atalanta was actually ahead of shiny big-bucks Mischief. The idea that Atalanta was an inferior craft does not, as they say hold water. However breaks and crashes are part of sporting competition and compounded with the dumb mistakes of the first race, the Americans kept their cup.

Still, the actual issue of exactly who what country won (or lost) what is hard to assess. Cuthbert came with half a crew, all Canadians, but had to recruit Americans to make up for the missing race complement. Still, Atalanta's owner lived in Canada, his family lived in Canada, all his boats were built in Canada; he had even carried out some of the shipwright work himself. As for Joseph Richard Busk, it was hard to pin down exactly where he lived or even where he was at any given time. Like many modern wheeler dealers, he was a citizen of the world. He maintained a house, not in New York, but in Newport, Rhode Island, 175 miles away by train. Not only was he not American (he never took out U.S. citizenship), he was not even British, as had been reported, but he had in fact been born in the Russian Imperial capital of St. Petersburg. His paternal grandparents were from Gothenburg in Sweden. His main business Stateside was as a cotton broker working for Rathbone Brothers of Liverpool. According to the Deed, the nationality of the actual boat owner (or owners) was not material, as long as these persons were paid up members of the challenged club (Busk was that, at least, the NYYC now has a branch in Newport, although it is not clear Busk had anything to do with this). So the America's Cup

remained in America, after having spent 30 times that of the challenger, won by a crew of highly trained, full-time salaried sailors, in a boat owned by a foreigner. In spite of what had been a fairly easy victory, the America's Cup advisory board decided to amend the Deed to exclude any yacht club not in a city that bordered on salt water. Since the American money was in the coastal cities (how little times have changed!) and most Canadian money was in on inland waters, this effectively eliminated any competition from anyone on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes. This move seemed baffling and more than a little vindictive; there was no clear reasoning ever put out for the change. I suspect they were more than a little afraid of the Canadians, and that with time and some extra dollars and a little more practice time their rag-tag team and rough $2,100 craft might humiliate the Americans and their lovingly burnished $25,000 super-sloops. Well and truly beaten after this, Cuthbert called it quits and returned to his trade on the shores of Lake Ontario.

Cuthbert may have been the most storied and formidable figure in racing sailboats, but he wasn't the only game in town. Cecil Marlatt, the owner of a large tannery in Oakville, commissioned a shipbuilder named Captain James Andrew to build a racing schooner called the Aggie, named for Mrs. Marlatt. Having survived the Countess of Dufferin fiasco, the R. C. Y. C. was back in the game with Aggie, which would go on to win 83 races; albeit all local ones, international competition would have to wait for the coming of the racing sloop Canada in 1899.



Marlatt/Andrews Aggie, still hard at it in the 1920's.

Cuthbert was in Cobourg once more, working on another sailing yacht project when he passed away in 1890 at the age of only 49, leaving his wife, nine children a still well used fleet of sailing and steam craft, and an estate estimated at nothing. There was no one of his stature, that is no one who could do it all, and did, since then.



The next big thing, the first successful international challenger Canada. Built in New Brunswick, it became a sensation in Ontario.

The Countess of Dufferin was raced for several more years, before being set up as a floating restaurant for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. After that the hull was towed out into Lake Michigan and sunk. Atalanta also raced for some years and finally ended up in New Orleans, with an engine installed, as an excursion boat. There was no further information on it after 1910. The last of Cuthbert's boats, the Katie Gray, was still afloat in the early 1930's a sixty-year lifespan and was finally left on the banks of the Moira River, to return to the elements. Aggie lasted even longer, from 1887 to 1945, when it was wrecked near the Burlington Bay lighthouse.



Katie Gray in the 1920's, the last survivor of the Cuthbert Fleet.