

Reel 123A and 123B to 9.

Skipper Paul Myra was brought to talk to me because he has sailed vessels out of Lunenburg and lived beside them all his life. He rambles on, but his way of speech is typical. His ingenuity in training his men for a tug of war is perhaps the best part of his talk. In pulling they used a method of jigging like they do for jigging fish. His particular trade was that of ship's rigger, a very important function particularly in the days of sailing ships.

An occasional word cannot be made out; there is a blank in that case or a question mark.

For more of Paul Myra's stories and also a few songs, see reel 132.

Talk by Skipper Paul Myra, Lunenburg, rigger

Question: You say that you're not a captain and yet you were a skipper and a master. What's the difference?

Answer: That's all. I'm only a master of a boat because captains - well, Capt. Armit, you see, he's got a Board of Trade ticket. The majority of Nova Scotians in our town, that's about 2800 of a population, we ain't got one captain. That's a byword. That's what I'm tellin' them and they don't like me for to tell them, for the young fellows of to-day, they think they are captains, and if you don't speak to them they won't speak to you without calling them captain. Therefore I'll never call them captain because they are not a captain. If you go back to history and you see that the old Capt. Brown, Brown's shipping account, all the books that Brown put out, an old famous captain. He said, "Master," and then "Extra Master." Now how many people have we got in Nova Scotia that's got an Extra Master's certificate?

Therefore we're a skipper and we're a master, not a captain. Captain of the Salvation Army; captain of the army. Now anybody wants to come ask me questions in that, they can do so, and I know what I'm talking about.

Question: What should we call you? Skipper?

Answer. Skipper's good enough for me. Skipper Paul. I sailed in twelve different ships. I sailed four masters, and I sailed power boats, and I went in square riggers, Outside of the Cancally I never went in any square riggers. But if there's any man in Nova Scotia can beat me on a riggin' job, I don't care who it is, all the Publicovers, all that you've got, masters, if they can beat me, if they can trim me on riggin', then I'll take my hat off, which I know they can't, and I can make more knots than any skipper that you've got in Nova Scotia. And if they want to try me, just let them come where we are and I'll take them anywhere, because I can work knots for fun.

Question: Have you ever had races to see who could rig a ship first? The fastest?

Answer; Well, I could rig one that I have skippers that were going master. I ~~rig~~ worked a lot of skippers out of this town, and I did rig the Bluenose very fast.

Question; How fast?

Answer. Well, I think that I've taken down her topmast, taken out her mast, stripped her riggin', taken everything off of her, and put it back again - that's when she went to Chicago - and I think we was round about three and a half days. Then I beat the record in Sydney. I'd taken off in Lunenburg, I bought my wire in Robinson's and all my ? my pointjohns(?) seizen' wire and everything required to gang a riggin'. I jumped on the train that I seen was on to the freight by express, and sent it to North Sydney. The Bluenose come in there in distress with her riggin' carried away. I'd taken one man with me. The rest more or less was greenhorns. Angus Walters, he didn't do nothin', but

he was a good fellah, I liked him, and we went to Sydney. We arrived; Monday night I'd taken off, Tuesday I got down there, half past twelve I started, and missed a young sailor. I star made up a hook for to stretch riggin', I started to strip the riggin', and Thursday at twelve o'clock I had a gang a riggin' on to her with a greenhorn crew and then she had a little while with what we call the shrouds in the bowsprit, so I said we might as well do that. So he sailed around half-past three and he was very lucky that time He got down and he caught what we call the capelins, Newfoundland capelin and I started back for home. Then when she was cut down, the long mast - I cut it down and put a mast out on the wharf and the carpenters cut it down - and then I refitted her again. Therefore I did not rig the Bluenose first. Old Captain Tom Mader from Mahone Bay rigged her, but I went all over her on racin', and I rigged her three times. That's the reason I say I rigged her three times.

Question; That was your record, was it, for speed?

Answer; Well. I think in the Bluenose that was one of my record riggin', but I rigged these here schooners for \$185. I had to do it in three days. Fit a gang to riggin' and put it on to her, insulate and everything. But I had powerful men. I also had, if you were comin' over to the house I'd show you the strongest tug of war I trained; in '42 I pulled everything off, they never had a chance at all. I think it was 5 to 600 Norweigans over to the Norweigan camp, and they was trainin' all the time they was there. So I said to the boys one day, I said, "Listen, why not train for a tug o' war?" "No?" they said, "the Norweigans has got nothin' to do," and I said, "Yes, but you fellahs, look what you're doin'. We're workin' every day and in the night too splicin' and pullin' and tackles and doin' a lot of hand work, and look ~~at the way you're workin'~~ how you're musclin', the men you are, come on, get trainin'." I put the rope over the beam, I give them dead man's stick, I give them shinnyin' the loft, we used to work an hour and then always five minutes recess boys. Now see who can go aloft. Paul Crouse I think he's the strongest man. He's workin' in the Foundry, the strongest man I ever worked. Then Tarsel(?) he pulled with me, but I had to put him on as rigger to be a rigger, the night p'liceman in Lunenburg. Tarsel Eikle (or Oickle) and I had Freddy Walters and I had little Maurice Allan, horse riggin' in the Foundry to-day, Albert Allan - all the Allans from the Gafden Lots was powerful, was strong, and Maurice Axlan never knew his strength. He was only a shrimp, but he was the strongest man I ever worked in the riggin' loft.

Well I had one fellah, he was kind of a strong husky fellah, Willis Byards(?) He says, "What are ye talkin' about? Those fellahs is fresh. They're at it every day pullin' on a rope," and I said, "What are you talkin' about? But I'll bet you five dollars five of you can pull seven of them." And I said "I'll bet you ten dollars; I'll bet you a hundred dollars."

Well, they wouldn't take me up, so I said, "All right, you're fired. I never fired a man in my life, but you're fired in tug o' war; Fellahs, you can't work." Some of the other fellahs, I used to cheer 'em up, and I says, "I can only go so much. I'll help you out and if you can't afford new sneakers or whatever you want," so we got it down to shoes and rubbers, and we hadn't asked to weight ten over 1800 but they went over 1800 so we had to take some weight off of 'em, and they had to do it by skinnin' and pullin' and they took it down. They'd taken the weight off and I said, "That's fine. I have their picture. I have their cups and everything. Old Mr. Ryder, Rev. Ryder, he gave me one cup, and the other cup I won. So anyway we pulled over at the old curlin' rink. Now the old skatin' rink, it was floored over, and they had to pull on the floor, so I said, "I think that shoes and rubbers - they're goin' to pull with sneakers, I knew they was - shoes and new rubbers with a good ring on will stick to the board just as good as anything, but you fellahs, we'll do it by signalings. I'll show you what we're goin' to do. So we went out to Dayspring on a three-masterto put masts in. So in Dayspring they got a lot of well, Red Snyder and a lot of the fellahs. Maurice was livin' then and Mel was a relation through my mother's people and I said, "We'll anchor the sheers see, they were 66 foot tall. Up 30 feet they measured in diameter about 16 inches.

Question: You anchored the what?

Answer: The sheers. We call them sheers ~~xxxx~~ waxpole, the mast. Two pole are sheers. Three pole are tripod. One pole's a gin pole. So I said, "We'll anchor 'em. Listen, seven of you are carpenters. Come here, and five of my fellahs pull seven of you big fellahs. Well, they take a hold of the heel tackle on the sheers with a stopk line on it. I anchor 'em on a guy's aloft. They had to be buckled, so they take a hold of it and I said, "Pull it." Seven of 'em couldn't, so I said, "Take eight." They couldn't start it, so I said, "Five of my fellahs can start that, that's goin' to pull a tug of war!" Five of them took it and the first pull they moved it. I said, "Now there you are, see. Get that in your mind that if you can do that against them fellahs and they're workin' carpenter work, they're not ~~xxxx~~ workin' at ropin', and you're workin' at ropin' every day, and you got small size, big size, all different sizes so therefore I know that you can pull. Now I'm not pullin'. I'm the coacher. I'm coachin' you. So everybody's got to be trained, over with the weight on a single rope." Then they have five of them on one side and five on the other and pull in the loft. The loft is 38 foot long. Then go down aboard and you had to shin hand over hand to see how far up you could go. Well then you practise and that would show day by day for two months what we was doing.

So we went up to Debort. They called us to do a job and I have three sets of sheers up there just cuttin' the long mast down to shorten her. Put them on the wharf and the shipyard looked after cuttin' 'em down. Then we had to fit the riggin' and put them back. So they called me from Debort. 18,000 soldiers was there, so we went up there to put

the stack up. Stole away in the morning to get out of Lunenburg and I told the gang, "Come on, we'll go on and put it up. It won't take us long. It's only a little thing. I think it was 82 feet long and $4\frac{1}{2}$ in diameter, $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch steel, 4 on the top, so I had to take my little sheers, ~~xxxxxx~~ and my fifty-five footers. I think I can handle 'em with that by guyin' 'em good, so I went up there to do it. When we went up there to put the sheers up, I had 'em on two barrels, -you know how high a barrel is - a post across and put my lashings on, my blocks on and everything, so when we take the truck to pull nine ton of ice, she couldn't pull the sheers up. So I said, "Now I'll show you what main strength and stupidity can do; I can show you what man power can do. All right." They did not know what I was doing. ~~xxxx~~ I said, "Put your truck there for an anchor. Track her wheels, put her in reverse gear and chalk(?) her well to anchor her, and we'll use that for an anchor, and we'll take the handy-belly - we call another ~~anchor~~ the handy-belly - and put it through the main ~~and~~ and we'll lift the sheers by hand. But we got to do it on the spring. We gotta have the hinges of the sheers back that we got about fifty feet of a spring. When you pull, the bellies goes down and the heads will jump, so you got to make one - let her come back - I sing out two - three, let's go. And we took it up, we went up about twenty degrees. And the next time we went up we had forty-five degrees. Well then we had to look after all the guys, ye see, in the back.

There was an old colonel. Before we stoppe d the truck he told me, "That fellow's full of - what do ye say? self confidence - I heard him, see, and I said, "I'll come back at you. Don't worry; don't fool yourself. I know what I'm doing, and I know what those men can do, and that truck couldn't pull it," so I said man power could do it. Well, he walked away ye know, so after we got it up forty-five degrees I started to sing. I said, "I love a sergeant, I love a sergeant, I love a sergeant, yes like hell I do."

So we walked down and the old colonel came over and he shook hands with me, and he gave a speech on that in Debert, and said, "Have we got five me? Now we had some Cape Bretoners here that left Debert shortly after that, the time that they took the circus apart, the Legion, and they left Debert and they went over around China somewhere and some of them may never come back, poor devils, I think they ~~xxx~~ got hooked off over there. Well anyway, they wanted to get out of Debert. The colonel asks me, he says, "If you need any help-." I said, "No sir. We didn't come up here - We got a crowd of men." So they went to see the stack go up but they never seen the stack go up. We went to Truro, 12 miles from Debert, we stayed in the hotel there, and we got under way in the morning real early because we had a lot of work back here and I was givin' them double time, and I told them if we could pull a tug of war what I'd do for them. So anyway we went out early in the morning before they got up and we had everything ready in the night and it started to rain so we put our in

the stack and the next morning we went out and in a xx jiffy we had it standing up.

And I also put the big smokestack up in the Dockyard for Commander Jefferson. Did you know Commander Jefferson?

Answer; Yes, we all do.

Well, listen, I worked for Commander Jefferson He was the only man that could never keep his He was the only man who gave me charge of the dockyard in 1942, Commander Jefferson on remembrance day, which I didn't like to work on remembrance day, but it was the 11th day of November, '42, he said, "Listen boy, if you can put that smoke stack up, we got to have the heat," and I wouldn't go up. They ran after me long that after a while I went up, but I was workin' through Archie Powers. He had the contract, the Powers Brothers. So I went up. The old commander, he told everyone in the dockyard. He said, "Whatever he wants, give him." But there was only a few men there on remembrance day. The dockyard was closed. But I had the privilege to take charge of the dockyard, and I put the big smoke-stack up there.

And the old exhibition ground, then I went up when the navy went out, and the army went in, in the old exhibition ground in Halifax. I put one up in the Norwegian camp. I handled 44 masts that fall,

So we took on the Norwegians for a pull. We took the Foundry, the Lunenburg Foundry. We took on the firemen. So the first one they said, "You better take the Norwegians first." I said, "Very good. That's fine." So all the people around in the rink - there was a lot of people all around - so my daughter was there and I went over to Eloise and I said, "Eloise listen. Probably somebody wants to bet you. I ain't got too much money, to waste, so I'll give you 20 dollars. But go as high as fifty. Bet with anybody who wants to bet you, but be sure that you get your money because I'm sure of winning the tug o' war. Now, "I said, "I never trained a man that he couldn't do his work," and I said, "I trained fellows to tie up topsails and I even trained your mother to tie up a topsail," I said, "and she could tie it up and she could steer in a gale of wind too," so I said, "You just go ahead." So we started. The Norwegian, they come out double. We come out single. When we got out I said, "Halt!" and I said, "Up, salute!" So they all saluted and we stood faced to the audience, turned around. I said, "Left wheel." I didn't know nothin' about the army stuff, but outside of with the Legion; that's all I know about it. But anyhow they all turned round. It was all trained, mind, and it was snappy. They said we was snappier than the Norwegians. We was better on our march and on our turnin' and our salute than the Norwegian was, so I said, "now, Laurie Hebb, Ryder, they was there. Laurie, I think he used the pistol, and I said, "Take either end. You won't have no chance anyway," I said, "Now do you think that we got the rope loaded? We could load the rope, but we might get the loaded part." I said, "You know in ropes the riggers is pretty active and they could do things that probably you might get fivers in your hand, you might get pricklers in your hand, or something.

But you take any rope at all." The commander that was trainin' the Norweigans, he looked, and he said, "How," he said, "Is everything?" I said, "Everything is good sir. Fine sir." "All right." They take the north end; we take the south. They got the privileges of taking whatever they want. They take to the north, we take to the south. I stood, not in our fellahs, we had all even hands. A long man, they went together. A short man - one man might be short and still he's got long arms. There was no raise or fall in the rope. Everything was level. See we tried all that out. Now I said, "I'm not goin' to do any hollerin', but that's all I make a motion," and I said my motion was to take 'em, see, that would be to take 'em a step, to take 'em a half step would be that one. Just half, about half of me. To take 'em one step was over here, and they're watchin' me, you see. They're watchin' me, but we have one fellah that's facin' that way, and one fellah that's facing that way. Well, then, he's got to watch the fellah that's facin' me. Well I watched the Norweigans, see, so when I sung out to give, see, I have to sing out to give. To give was to give them to try to get a step on this. Therefore as soon as they went to give, they went to make another step, you see. Well then you got to do a trick. Before they get that step in, then you've got to pull, and you bring them right off of that and you can run ~~xxix~~ them right along.

So we fooled them there a little while and after a ~~xxxx~~ while I just went - like that - and they walked them over to the(?) Well, that Norweigan, the coach, he was a nice man. They was all nice men. I knew a lot of them, - and - and Petersons, and the coacher he felt bad and he gave it to them in Norweigan.

People from the Annapolis Valley came down and they beat the Lunenburg Foundry. That was in '47, I think it was.

Question? What about your men?

Answer; If I'd a had the same gang as I had in '42 I don't think you'd get anybody over Nova Scotia to beat 'em because they knew how to handle a rope. We beat the Norweigans and the Foundry and the Fireman, in '42. And it's pullin' on a rope if you overgrip your hand on anything, you take the ~~xxxx~~ out of you. You only got to grip as much as you can pull. Therefore anybody that's not used to pullin' on a rope, he'll take a rope and he'll squeeze it so hard that he'll take the strength, and as soon as ye see him slappin' his hands his strength is gone. Therefore you only got to grip as much as you're pullin', and relax. It's all in your wrist and your ankles.

Question; Who taught you that?

Answer; Well, we practised that from boys up. Pullin' on the rope to see who could beat, liftin' a wheelbarrow, pullin' on a rope, shinnyin' up aloft, One time I could shin to the mast head. Now I couldn't shin two feet, I don't think. I don't know whether I could hold my weight. I could make a jump off like that up on a wet rope and catch either hand, and any hand and hold at two and a half inch rope which is very hard small rope when its wet for to grip. See, hard jump. Just the same as I was on the mast head. The best trick I ever done was standin' on the peak halliards on a foresail with my one foot on the block and the other one on the halliard and the gaff was

was swingin' back and forth like that. Well I'm up on the foresail; I'm up probably about 65 feet. I have that in writin' any time you want it. I can show it to you. I have the job when standin' on the one foot wich don't get scared if you see because to-day - I'd try it to-day yet.

Question; On your one foot where?

Answer On the mast head of the ? out of Burin to-day, the

That was a wonderful trip. One foot, standing on my left, this one I got curled up, the south-west is over there, and I'm standin' looking aft. I ain't standin' forrard in case I'd fall I'd have to catch the peak halliard or the spink(?)spade and I stand there for three snaps, too long, she's divin' in. She's divin' this way and I'm comin' back with her. I never moved that left foot. I stood there for three snapshots. Snyder was the ~~Telegram~~ man at that time, and he says there - everything reads there - I got everything in black and white. You can see me standin' there, so I was goin' to bring it over to-night and show the last boat that I was in. And I was wreckin' in Cape Town the nicest boat and the cleanest boat, and no frag ends of any boat that went in Capetown for a long time. Question: Did your wife ever navigate your ship?

Answer; Oh yes. She did, the first trip she made in 1920 in the Hazel Myra; Aubrey Backman, he's the skipper now, he was mate and had a young crew and goin' out she started to take an instrument - I had two with - and she started to take the sun down. Well, after she got the sun down she worked the height of the sun, she worked the chronometer, I used to take my own time, the mate took his own time, and the wife took her own time, and she count seconds if she'd taken it in the bow, and she'd count a thousand and one, a thousand and two, a thousand and three, a thousand and four, a thousand and five, count seconds like that till she got to the chronometer just takin' that off and got her time ad she'd work it up ~~at~~ at her logs out of the epitome that we used to use then. She can ? and sign, and remainder, turn your time into longitude, and she could do that better than I could because she was more educated, so she wasn't long in learning that. Navigation was very easy in my time goin' to sea. Only thing tides and winds, and you had to figure a little by the moon,

Well anyway we made that trip, and we loaded in St. John's, Newfoundland, and went to Barbadoes, and from Barbadoes we went to St. Martin's; comin' home the crew got seasick. We had one little fella, Frenchie Joudrey, he snipped off the end of his finger one night in the mizzen boom, and the rest of 'em was seasick. I had a colored fella from Turk's Island with me; he got seasick, the cook was seasick, so it was up to the mate, the wife, and I. We run out the wind in the south-east, and we run in and caught a nor'wester in January. We wasn't over the northern part of the stream when the gale came from the nor' west, and the sky looked very threatenin' and dangerin' and we kept on sailin' a a little over the stream but we couldn't make it. We was caught on the edge of the stream where it's not so good, and we had to take in sail. So I told the wife, "Get your oilskins on, and when the other wind comes

you'll have to take the wheel." She says, "Now listen, we've got nobody on deck." I says, "What's the mate and I goin' to do? We can handle all the sail we have," so we lowered away. We had to spank her in. So we had the mainsail and the foresail, then the staysail and the jib. So the inner jib we had to put in the straitjacket. Called a straitjacket or a backbone. So we had to put her in the troughs of the sea, hittin' east, roundabout with the wind in the nor'nor'west and the wind from the southard that we run out of, but we still had the sea. So I said, "Well listen, I'll watch you a little while. You take the wheel now Mildred. I know you can do it. Don't be frightened." She said, "Yes Paul, but suppose if we be washed off the - she had a bowsprit, not a jib boom - and I said "You can take her to land can't you?" and she said, "I can take her in; I know the course and I could take her in, but that's not the thing." She said, "Why with the crew - " I said, "That's all right. She'll go in under this sail and you can get the crew out. It will get moderate after a while. Nothin's goin' to happen. We don't worryin'." I said, "Don't discourage the mate," so we went for the bowsprit and I said to Aubrey Backman, which was mate, "All right, you take the outside; you got the best stand for to stay. I'll take the footropes inside." So we went out. She ducked us under a little but we never mind that in small schooners, and when we come back I went back and I told her, "We got Gib's place stopped; now you still got to keep the wheel and we're goin' to put a reef in the foresail." So we put a reef in the foresail. We wasn't so long. We started round about seven o'clock and round about half past nine we had everything finished, and snugged up. So then we all went back and we hove her to. We hove her to on the port tack, which sometimes they won't heave to on the port tack ~~and come~~ on account of the sea and the wind changin'. But we hove her to anyway on the port tack, and we lay there. We're hittin' in to the norward and the wind then shifted about nor' west. We're hittin' round about 45 degrees which was not his course. That would be 4 points of the compass, also 45%, and she's layin' there like a bug, so I says, "Who's goin' to take first watch?" so the mate says, "We'll toss, see who takes first watch, you or I." I says, "All right Aubrey, but listen. You go down and turn in, and you worked hard to-day and to-morrow mornin' the cook won't be able to get up, so you'll have to get up and make a little breakfast." So we put our shutters on - she had box windows - so we put our shutters on all around her. So Mildred said, "Leave me stand. I can stand in the companionway and watch in case a steamer's comin'." I said, "Well there's two goin' down by now, passenger steamers, bound across I guess to England somewheres, or around Europe somewheres." I said, "Now listen, you go down and turn in. Aubrey turn in. I'll take the first watch. I'll call ye at twelve o'clock." So this is fine. I goes up; they turn in. I go down. They have a wash bowl. We had a bed and a pettee in the cabin, in the after cabin and I

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