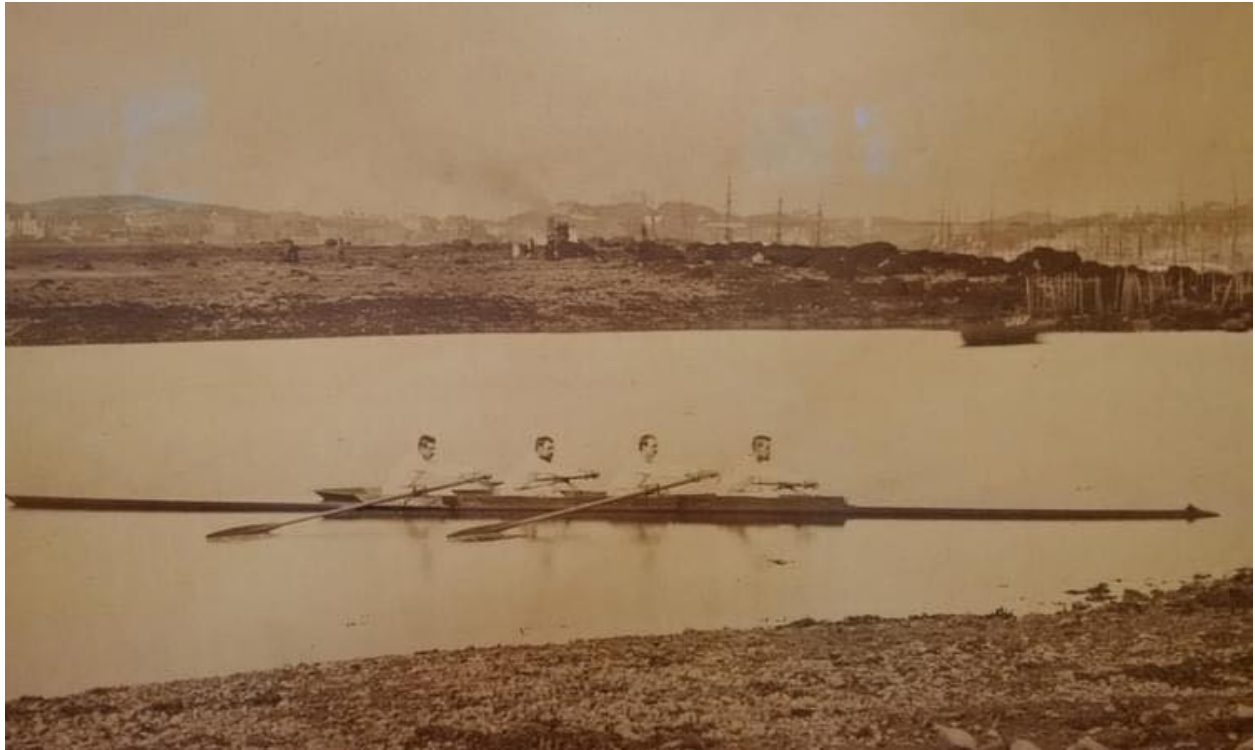


NB rowers taught the world 'we could take anybody on'



COLIN MCPHAIL - May 26, 2017

Saint John • At the Flood household, an old black and white photo of the Paris Crew hung in the study, an image a young Brian Flood gazed at daily. To him, now decades later, the photo of those plucky Saint Johners who shocked the world, our nation's first sports heroes, stands as a metaphor.

It was an important source of inspiration for him and his brother, the late Henry Flood – a decorated rowing tandem from Renforth soon to be inducted in the New Brunswick Sports Hall of Fame.

“From the Paris Crew, Henry and myself learned that we could compete with anybody in the world,” Flood said. “You can come from this neck of the woods and go against anybody and we learned in our rowing career that we could take anybody on.”

He and other local rowing enthusiasts continue to preserve that legacy. Their latest effort aims to ensure the story – a classic worthy of a heritage minute – resonates with the region's young rowers.

To celebrate Canada and the Paris Crew's 150th anniversary, the organizers of the premier New Brunswick high school rowing regatta renamed the event the Paris Crew High School Rowing Championships. The showdown, featuring a quartet of local schools, takes place Saturday on the Kennebecasis River at the Renforth Wharf.

A Paris Crew trophy was also commissioned and paid for by those enthusiasts, passing the hat around. Flood said it was not unlike the scene in the Saint John mayor's office at 8 p.m. on April, 22, 1867.

Just weeks before confederation, the mayor and a group of citizens decided to send a local crew to the World Championship Regatta, a major rowing event tied to the International Exposition in Paris. The hat was passed, so to speak, around the community, raising \$4,000 and another \$2,500 was donated by the New Brunswick government. Accounting for inflation, that's a six-figure investment today.

Flood, who wrote and published a book detailing the story with brother Henry, said the four-man crew was to be the provincial representative at the global expo.

A passage in *Saint John: A Sporting Tradition 1785-1985* quotes a New Brunswick reporter at the time: "Although to the great International Exposition we have sent no elaborate works of art, no specimen of ingenious handicraft, no samples of the products of mine and field, we have nevertheless sent to Paris such an 'exhibit' of our energy, our hardihood and pluck as shall render up famous among all the famed at the grand international tournament."

And so they went, greeted with derision and contempt when they arrived.

"They were three humble fishermen and one lighthouse keeper. When they arrived in Paris they were ostracized. They were dressed in brown leather pants and pink caps and leather breeches. Their boats were funny," Flood said.

"It was a big joke until the proof was in the pudding. They won twice and it was seven days after Confederation. That was July 8 and it was considered a good omen for Canada."

Robert Fulton, George Price, Samuel Hutton and Elijah Ross returned home to great fanfare, but the national heroes weren't finished. In the years to follow, the underdogs pulled off more stunning upsets, including a race witnessed by Mark Twain.

"He absolutely loved the Paris Crew," Flood said. "He was extolling their virtues because they were the underdogs, all the betting were against them and they whipped the Ward brothers for the championship of America."

The photo of the Paris Crew is still in the Flood family, hanging in brother Chris's family room. He echoed his brother in describing the impact the crew had on the sport in the area, where it remains popular and continues to produce new talent. Linking the high school championships to the Paris Crew, he said, shows the up-and-comers anything's possible.

"It's a classic old world versus new world battle and they pushed through all that resistance. Their victory is something all Canadians are proud of," said Chris Flood, who heads the

Kennebecasis Rowing Club.

“It makes perfect sense to have a regatta named after this group. [...] Someone’s got to the break through that barrier and, way back when, they were the first to break through.”

The inaugural Paris Crew trophy will be awarded at 1 p.m. at the wharf to the points leader from Saturday's races. One of Rothesay Netherwood School, Rothesay High School, Saint John High School and Harbourview High School will emerge triumphant, and the action runs all morning.