

Book Reviews

Eric Allaby. *The Sea Wins: Shipwrecks of the Bay of Fundy*. Halifax, N.S.: Nimbus Publishing, www.nimbus.ca, 2022. 268 pp. illustrations, glossary, notes. CDN \$26.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-77471-137-8.

Most maps depicting the Bay of Fundy lying between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick suggest a seemingly benign and interestingly shaped body of water north of the Gulf of Maine. The funnel-shaped area's chief claim to fame is the height of its tides, reportedly the highest in the world. More detailed charts of the area, however, tell the story of a much more dangerous bay, especially at its eastern end where islands, ridges, outcrops and isolated "sunkers" abound, and where the bottom can rise up from fathoms deep to inches in the length of a steamship or on a change of the tide. In addition, the huge tidal flows create cross-currents which can carry a vessel off a safe course, a danger exacerbated by frequent fogs and storm conditions. In early years, this was compounded by the absence of navigation aids, making for a dangerous passage. The port of Saint John, New Brunswick, on the north side of the bay has historically been one of Canada's major ports, ice-free and linked by rail to central Canada and the American mid-west, so sail and steamer traffic through the bay has been high.

It is this area, and in particular the mouth of the Bay of Fundy between Yarmouth and the island of Grand Manan, where Eric Allaby sets the stage for a series of shipwreck accounts. The volume covers the stories of some forty wrecks covering the period from 1741 to 1976 but only four are before 1840. Marine archaeologists will shudder at Allaby's accounts of his early diving explorations, blowing up wrecks in order to recover brass and copper from the wreck sites. By the 1970s, however, he had taken training and was recognized as an underwater archaeologist, and for several years worked with the New Brunswick Museum on a project funded by the National Museums of Canada surveying wrecks in the Fundy region. It appears that he began much of his research for this volume in this period and has continued for decades. Allaby was one of a group of marine scholars and researchers who met in Maine in 1971 and became a founding member of the North American Society for Oceanic History (NASOH). He has written a number of volumes of local *The Northern Mariner / Le marin du nord* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2022), 589-646

history and was formerly the curator of the Grand Manan Museum.

Aside from the personal accounts of the author's diving (and dynamiting) visits to the vessel remains, most of the information appears to have been gleaned from contemporary newspaper coverage and from secondary sources concerning the wrecks. A thin listing of endnotes is included, but only when direct quotations are used, and for the most part, the sources are unidentified. The tales told do not constitute an inventory but more of a miscellany. Allaby writes for a popular audience in an engaging style making the demise of every ship, sail as well as steam, a fascinating story. Collectively they cover a wide range of marine disasters which horrify the reader with the varieties of ways by which ships, crews and passengers have met their end. Overall, Allaby does an excellent job of recounting what is obviously the subject of a life-long passion. His direct involvement in finding and visiting the wrecks over decades of research is both informative and entertaining.

That being said, the author might have been better served by his publisher as the volume tempers the fascination of the events with frustration stemming from the way the volume is arranged and presented. In trying to give the forty-odd episodes some order, they have been grouped into somewhat arbitrary chapters with a multitude of subject approaches. Some chapters are chronological, others are arranged around specific hazards such as named reefs. Some wrecks are linked by their possible causes – such as fog, incompetence, or currents. While a full index may not have been necessary, it would have been useful to have a listing of the names of the vessels whose stories have been told.

The book is illustrated with photographs, a number of the author's skillful drawings, and by maps showing some of the area's many rocks, islands and ledges. Unfortunately, the maps do not have the scale noted which reduces their value for those unfamiliar with the area. There is an appendix of nautical words and phrases for land-based readers, while additional definitions are scattered, almost at random, throughout the text. The rationale is not apparent – for instance, "deals" is in the former, "scantling" in the latter.

While the volume deals with a specific geographical area possessing several unique characteristics and hazards, it is also a stimulating introduction to the nature of threats to sea transport in the eras of both sail and steam. Despite being somewhat moderated by improvements in aids to navigation and larger and more powerful vessels, the threat of tides, currents, and rocks in the areas where sea meets shore remains. In giving dimension to these powerful forces, Allaby's book rises above being simply a local history. For this reason, I would recommend it for anyone interested in exploring how and why ships come be cast ashore and lost on reefs and ledges.

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