

vibrant narrative. Rather than alienate the shipwreck from surrounding events, Buchanan positions his account where it belongs, in context. The impact of the tragedy on York is abundantly clear, illustrated with descriptions of political chaos and the grieving of the Paxton family.

Buchanan has extensively researched a book that not only informs but also engages his audience. His dedication to detail and accuracy is commendable; he has succeeded in writing a credible account of a fascinating tale.

The book is intended for a general audience, but it has value for the student of Upper Canadian history, of the maritime history of the Great Lakes, for prospective maritime divers and those seeking to understand the relationships of the Indigenous population with the white newcomers.

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Steve Mullins. *Octopus Crowd: Maritime History and the Business of Australian Pearling in its Schooner Age*. Tuscaloosa, AB: University of Alabama Press, uapress.ua.edu, 2019. 336 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. US \$54.95, cloth; ISBN 978-0-8173-2024-9. (E-book available.)

This is quite an interesting history of pearling in Australian waters in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Pearling was not as we know it today, where the prize is a pearl for use in jewelry, but instead it was the harvesting of pearl shell. The shell was then used to create pearl shell buttons in the days before plastic buttons became common-place (generally following the end of the Second World War). Any pearls that were found were an unexpected bonus rather than the main game—buttons were generally where the big money was.

In Australia, the key pearling locations were Torres Strait, centred around Thursday Island, and at Broome in Western Australia. Steve Mullins has done an excellent job describing this at-times highly politicized industry, especially its use of a non-white workforce in the Australian colonies and then, in post-Federation Australia after 1901. The new Australian Government's "White Australia" policy caused significant issues for an industry that used mainly foreign workers. This, coupled with higher taxes, forced the main company, the Clark Combination, offshore to operate in the Aru Islands of the then-Netherlands East Indies; where taxes were much lower. This company, formed by James Clark, is central to the book and Clark's rise from orphaned son of a fisherman to one of the richest men in Australia is also a key part of the story.

Northern Australian waters became known for their quality pearl shell which fetched high prices at the sale-yards at Bull Wharf in London. The work,

though, was hard and disease, cyclones and groundings in poorly-charted waters took their toll on the fleet of luggers and their mixed crews of white, aboriginal, Japanese and islander crews. In the early days, there was also the risk of attacks by Australian aboriginals in remote areas. The difficulties were not just at sea—the waxing and waning of pearl shell prices, and the US McKinley Tariff Act of 1890 made it unprofitable to try and sell pearl shell in the United States, even with its larger demand for pearl buttons.

The financial, legal and political aspects are well covered with the pearlers fighting to not pay taxes for shell harvested beyond the three-mile territorial limit, as well as trying to prevent Japanese pearlers from being allowed into colonial Australia waters (even though skilled Japanese hard-hat divers were regularly used in Australian vessels). Much of the book covers the somewhat shady activities of pearlers and politicians alike and the title comes from a description of the industry as an octopus with its tentacles reaching far and wide into all aspects of colonial Australian life.

At times, Royal Navy ships on the Australia Station patrolled the northern waters to prevent foreign vessels, especially Japanese, from entering territorial waters, as well as stopping the illegal importation of non-white labourers. Dutch naval vessels in the Netherlands East Indies were also kept busy protecting native pearl shell beds from opportunistic Australian pearlers.

The fight between the small-time operators with one or two vessels against the large companies is also a key factor examined. Finally, the Government initiated scientific studies and early attempts at regulating the industry by setting a minimum pearl shell size limit for harvesting, to prevent over-collection and potentially wiping out of shell stocks. That said, the industry often self-regulated the size of pearl shell collected in order not to “kill the goose the laid the golden egg” or in this case, the shell that made the valuable pearl.

While at times a little verbose and prone to over-analysis, Mullins presents an interesting description of the bygone age of pearling in Australian waters. Pearling was hard work, and the men, and women involved did much to open northern Australia in the late-nineteenth century as well as creating a vibrant industry that flourished for over 50 years.

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