

ashore and amenities like table tennis aboard no longer a rare exception but a standard.

While the book might not provide much new analytical insight into the history of tanker shipping, it provides the maritime historian an insight into how these ships changed the everyday life at sea for their crews, especially as the author had served as a professional mariner on tankers. Consequently, the book can be easily recommended to any maritime historian interested in the post-World War II social history of seafaring, especially given its low price. It can also be recommended to newcomers to the field of maritime history as it provides a brief but solid overview of the history of tanker shipping throughout the twentieth century. Altogether, it might not be the most relevant new publication in the field of maritime history research, but it is a welcome addition to the existing literature.

Finally, it should be mentioned that scholarly readers are only one part of the target audience for maritime history publications and that there is also another potential target audience for this book – the large group of people somehow directly or indirectly connected to the ships of the post-World War II BP tanker fleet as crew members, shipyard workers, office personnel in the company headquarters, or family members of one of these groups. While Solly's new book may be of interest for scholarly readers, it is most likely that it is this second target audience that the author and the publisher had in mind when working on the book. While the book can be recommended for scholarly readers, for this diverse group it can be recommended even more, being a short but comprehensive overview of the development of the BP tanker fleet after World War II. It provides enough historical information but also enough illustrations to bring back memories of a time when these ships were part of someone's life.

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**Weir, Robert F, edited by Andrew W. German. *The Watch's Wild Cry: A Voyage Aboard the Whaling Vessel Clara Bell*
Lyons Press; Mystic Seaport Museum, 2024**
xxvi + 228 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, glossary
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Whaling journals are some of the most important primary sources for the history of the US maritime industries of the nineteenth century and were

often written by well-educated men who joined the maritime industries for only some portion of their lives. They therefore tend to provide a quality of information that is to a certain degree comparable to the modern concept of participatory observation instead of the typical journal of an average sailor of the nineteenth century that often takes the basics of the industry for granted.

One of the prime examples of a journal with the quality of participatory observation is Robert F. Weir's account of his voyage on the whaler *Clara Bell*. Covering the period from 1855 to 1858, it is today part of the collection of Mystic Seaport Museum. The curators of Mystic Seaport have been aware of the unique quality of the book since its acquisition and are now providing a reproduction of the full text of the journal with only slight editing for a more coherent reading experience. Interspersed throughout the text are reproductions of the drawings included in huge number throughout the original journal. These are equal to the quality of the text when it comes to understanding the work and life on an American whaler. To help the reader with the understanding of the text and the drawings, short explanatory text sections are provided explaining terms, tools, processes, geography, etc.

The journal covers the whaling journey of the *Clara Bell*, a typical New England whaler of the heydays of American whaling. Weir, son of a prominent artist, served for some years on whalers, followed by a stint on the *USS Richmond* during the Civil War before working as an artist supplying illustrations for *Harper's Weekly*. He ultimately became a civil engineer in New York. He was not, therefore, the typical merchant mariner or whaler, but was to a certain degree comparable to Richard Henry Dana, whose famous book *Two Years before the Mast* also can be understood as participatory observation. What sets Weir apart from Dana or Herman Melville are the illustrations he included in the journal and which provide visuals of the whaling industry of high artistic and documentary quality. The text might not have the literary quality of Melville's fictional *Moby Dick* but provides a unique insight into the whaling industry, including the dichotomy between extreme boredom and phases of extreme activity. Consequently, it allows the modern reader an understanding of what it really meant to serve on a whaling vessel and how this industry resulted in extreme mental challenges for anybody involved. It also shows why and how the meetings with other whaling vessels at sea were of such an importance for the crews of whaling ships. These occasional meetings were not only a chance to get in touch with people other than the crew of their own vessel during voyages that often lasted two or three years, but a rare chance to get news from home, even if it might have been yesterday's or yesteryear's news. Furthermore, when Weir

offers explanations of activities like, for example, the cutting of the blubber into pieces to be dried out, the passages may seem overly detailed, but they provide at the same time the extreme level of detail required to understand the production processes of an industry that was one of the most important industries of the US during the nineteenth century. Between the lines, it also can be read how whales were already mainly a commodity for the crews of the whalers but not yet the industrial raw material they would become during the whaling of the early twentieth century. Finally, Weir describes a surprisingly large number of visits to ports and islands in the Indian Ocean where the ship re-supplied and exotic fruit became a welcome addition to the diet of the crew. The book concludes with some poems written by Weir during his whaling journey and an editorial postscript summarizing Weir's post-whaling biography.

Andrew W. German, former director of the publications department at Mystic Seaport Museum, is not only the editor of the book but is responsible for the well-written introduction placing the journal into its historical context. He also wrote the explanatory texts helping again and again to contextualize the text of the journal itself, resulting in the journal being easily accessible for any reader, regardless whether they are familiar with the history of whaling or not.

Finally, the publisher needs to be lauded for making this most relevant source on a highly important chapter of American maritime history easily available to a broad readership. The relevance of the book for any maritime historian interested in nineteenth-century American whaling goes without discussion, as well as for the New England historian interested in the maritime dimension of the history of the region. More importantly, due to the combination of the easily accessible original journal text with the carefully crafted explanatory sections, the book can also serve as an introductory text for any historian who is interested in understanding the whaling industry as a backbone of the New England economy of the nineteenth century or as an entry point for any engagement with the maritime history of this era. It might even be used as a text in any entry-level university class dealing with maritime history or the relation between men and the (maritime) environment in the nineteenth century.

With its comparatively low retail price, the book is a welcome addition to any library or private collection in the wider area of maritime history, regardless of whether the book is viewed as a well-edited primary source to be used as a base for further studies or just as an interesting read and an insight into an industry of the past. Finally, for those who have read *Moby Dick*,

walked the planks of the *Charles W. Morgan* at Mystic Seaport Museum, or who might simply be interested in the history of the relations between men and whales at a time before the discussion on whaling had become the necessary discussion about how to save the globe's largest mammals from extinction, Weir's journal in this carefully edited edition might be the perfect choice.

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