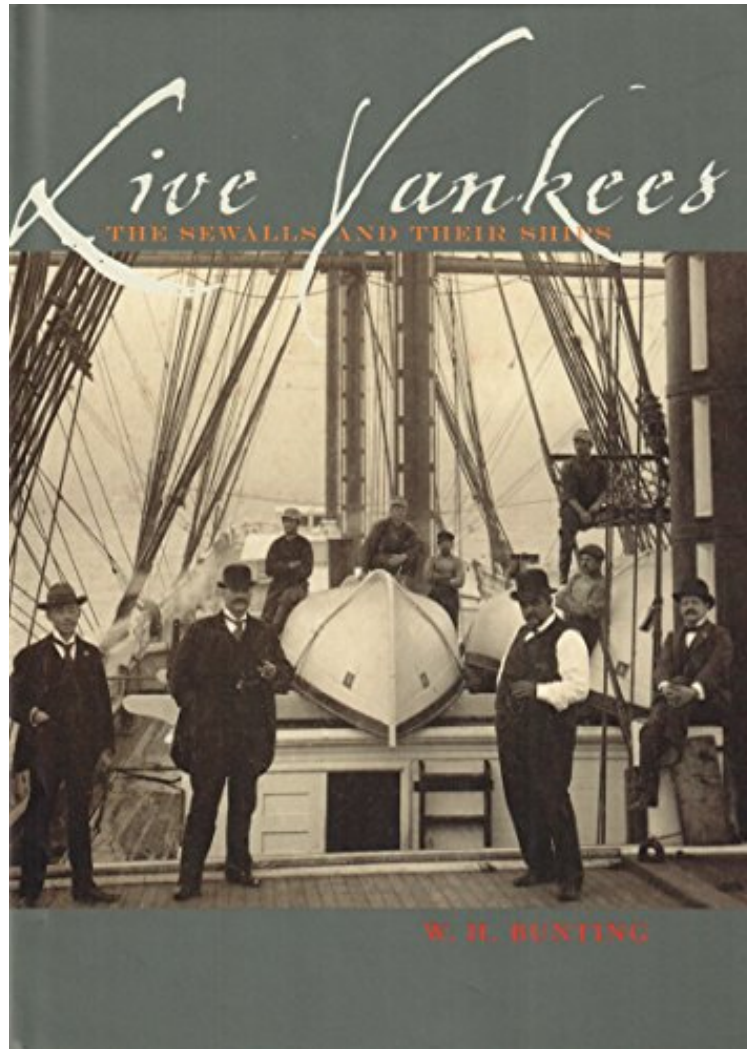


(Ebook free) Live Yankees: The Sewalls and Their Ships

Live Yankees: The Sewalls and Their Ships

W H. Bunting

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W H. Bunting : Live Yankees: The Sewalls and Their Ships before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Live Yankees: The Sewalls and Their Ships:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Maritime History as Taught in Business School?By A. Steven TobyAs technology changes, it is often unclear to people living at the time where the changes will lead. Few better illustrations of this point can be found than the tale told in the book "Live Yankees" by William Bunting. The book is the story of a ship-owning family, the Sewalls of Bath, Maine. While the descendants of Arthur Sewall (1835-1900), in many ways the protagonist of the story, helped fund the book, the author lays considerable stress on his efforts to avoid a tame, "official" history with all the controversies whitewashed. A previous book, also published with family support, "Sewall Ships of Steel" by Mark W. Hennessy (Augusta, ME: 1937), focused exclusively on the final phase

of the family involvement in sailing ships, but was known as a panegyric rather than a history. The author is known to me from his posts to the Maritime History Listserv, a Canada-based e-mail group focusing on scholarly exploration of maritime history in all periods. I am inclined to take his claim at face value. The book does read like real history, including episodes that, were I a Sewall descendant, I would prefer not to be exposed to public knowledge. Getting back to the changes in technology, those of us who have been professionally involved in the shipping industry are well aware that reducing labor requirements, rather than ship speed, efficiency, or even energy use, has been the driving force behind the evolution of merchant shipping from the 19th century to the present. A large clipper ship of the 1850's could carry 1,000 tons of cargo and would have had a crew of about 60. Today, a containership can carry 25,000 tons or more with a crew less than half as large. The advantage in labor use gets even bigger when the ship ties up in harbor and starts unloading. No more is there an army of longshoremen streaming down into the holds to wrestle boxes, bales, sacks, or bushel baskets of stuff from the corners of the hold to a position under the hatch where the cargo net is waiting to hoist it out onto the pier. Instead, a crane operator, with a handful of men below to guide the sling into position and fasten it to strongpoints on the containers, lifts each container off the deck stack or out of the hold and onto a waiting truck or railroad car. As a result, an ever smaller number of ships and seamen have been able to carry a rapidly expanding world trade at lesser and lesser cost per ton-mile. Today, many products that used to be made in the US or Europe are made in China and shipped to consumers in the former countries of manufacture, and cost less than they did when made in the consumers' countries. This is a two-edged sword: less cost per item means a higher standard of living in general, but with collateral damage to the workers whose jobs have been "outsourced", and even to those seeking a seagoing career as fewer and fewer seamen are required to man the world's fewer, but larger ships. The Sewalls had a hazy idea of only part of this dynamic. It was part of their traditional New England world-view to recognize that to make money, you had to participate in what later became known as the "race to the bottom" - you had to undercut the prices of your competitors, and the easiest way to do that was to reduce your own overhead and other costs. Accordingly, they neither built nor owned any clippers, even though between 1850 and 1854, because of the premium that cargo shippers and passengers were willing to pay for a fast ship, many clippers earned their owners the price of their construction in one voyage - and a clipper's construction costs were quite a bit larger than an ordinary ship of the time. The Sewalls recognized the advantages of increasing ship size, but as the Age of Sail was winding down they failed to recognize that steam power had the potential to reduce crew costs in addition to helping to make more dependable passages. Instead, they focused on the added cost of the steam engine, its engineers, stokers, and fuel, compared to the wind, which seemed to be free. In reality, the wind is free, but the masts, sails, and rigging to capture it and turn it to use, as well as the crewmen to handle them, are not - and when it doesn't blow, or if it blows from the wrong direction, the money spent on sailing equipment and sail handlers is not being amortized. The steam engine, by contrast, keeps chugging along the whole time the ship is under way, and every turn of the shaft is making money for the owners transporting cargo (as well as consuming fuel and labor). A steamship could often cover fewer miles between ports because it did not need to steer an indirect course to take advantage of stronger or more favorable global wind patterns, so even when sailing ships could go faster under favorable conditions, steamers could sometimes make faster passages and always more consistent ones. Mr. Sewall did recognize that a larger ship was more economical, even though it cost more to build, and he pushed wooden ship construction to its limits, or maybe somewhat beyond, in an effort to build larger ships without abandoning the infrastructure that had grown up around Bath for shipbuilding in wood. Eventually, he decided to make the jump to steel (by then, iron was already obsolescent, although still in use in many shipyards). Furthermore, instead of having his metal ships built on the Clyde in Scotland where most of the skills and facilities were at the time, he sponsored the erection of an entire new shipyard to do the work, right there in Maine. (I'm sure this ended up costing more). So, the picture that emerges of the Sewall ship-owning empire is not of a faceless bureaucracy but of a gifted, opinionated curmudgeon dominating his contemporaries with his uncompromising convictions - indeed, a very human face to the end of the Age of Sail. Like many people, Arthur Sewall had mastered his career employment, the business of running a shipping line and shipyard, and he couldn't let go of it even when faced by what must have been obvious evidence that sail power was obsolete. He was a good enough manager to hold it together until his death. We learn the trades the ships ran in, the cargoes they carried, and quite a lot about the captains who commanded them and their frequent problems with their crews. The book is a fat tome, over an inch thick, with both extensive text and black and white photos of the ships, locations, and people we meet in the course of the text. It is a well made book, showing that the subsidy from the Sewall family was not wasted; indeed, it compares favorably to books actually created at the turn of the century, around the year 1900 when Arthur Sewall died, except for my pet peeve, the footnotes being at the end of each chapter instead of the reader-friendly Victorian layout with them at the bottom of each page. With today's desktop publishing, there is no longer any excuse for relegating footnotes to the back of a chapter when a few keystrokes in Microsoft Word will arrange them at the bottom of the page. "Live Yankees" is unlikely to be replaced any time soon as the definitive history of the Sewall family business, and in addition, it is an entertaining read filled with riveting anecdotes. Its subsidy from the family has not corrupted it in any obvious way, and the author's use of the papers stored in the maritime museum comes through on practically every page, making it a priceless historical record. While

I, as both reader and reviewer, chose to fixate on one character, Arthur Sewall, and imagine a more dramatic tale from his point of view, Mr. Bunting should be praised for having much more discipline than I do. I would have made the book into more of a biographical novel, but that would have reduced its value as a historical document. The book fills in a sparsely covered period in the decline of commercial sail, skimming quickly over the technical features of the ships and concentrating on the business aspects. Future scholars will be in the author's debt, and casual readers will still enjoy the book if they don't try to absorb too much of it at a sitting. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. wonderful, absorbing book on a Maine ship building family By nimsan wonderful, absorbing book on a Maine ship building family, the process of ship building in New England in the 19th century and the hazardous trips these ships made around the globe. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Bunny McBride The story is extraordinary, as is the writing -- evocative, surprising, utterly engaging.

For nearly a century members of the Sewall family of Bath, Maine, built and managed a fleet of stout deepwater square-riggers? a fascinating story. Correspondence from their captains offers adventure of another kind? mutinies, shipwrecks, and "cannibal isles." No family has been more intimately associated with the history of the city of Bath, then among the most productive shipbuilding communities of any size in the world. Despite a veneer of old-fashioned formalized civility, international shipping in the late 1800s and early 1900s was a highly competitive, low-margin, and often cut-throat business. While the Sewalls' shrewd responses to market changes make a fascinating story, the surviving correspondence from their captains offers adventure of another kind. Sewall captains were required to make regular reports to the Sewall office, and this correspondence is a treasure-trove of stories about the voyages of Sewall ships-- surly crews, mutinies, plagues, shipwrecks, cannibal isles, destitute widows, and more, along with details of ship performance, weather encountered, trouble in port, and even lawsuits. The Sewalls also invested in railroads and other non-maritime securities and speculations, and also became involved in politics, but it is in the maritime world that they are best remembered. As the owners of the last surviving important fleet of American square-riggers engaged in worldwide trade, it was the Sewalls' fate to draw the curtain on this economic enterprise. No family had worked more assiduously, more stubbornly, or with more enterprise to delay the arrival of that day.

"A full-body immersion into the late, great age of sail." - DownEast Magazine "...tells the story of the family and their strong force of merchant vessels that dominated sea trade as the nineteenth century drew to a close and the twentieth century began. Drawing stories not just from the Sewall family themselves, Live Yankees also picks from the cornucopia of stories that played out on their ships. A biography of a family and a business, Live Yankees is well worth the read for those curious about business or seafaring history." About the Author W. H. "BILL" Bunting is the author of a number of critically acclaimed works of history including Portrait of a Port: Boston 1852-1914; Steamers, Schooners, Cutters, and Sloops: The Marine Photographs of N. L. Stebbins; A Day's Work: A Sampler of Historic Maine Photographs, 1860-1920 (in two volumes); The Camera's Coast: Historic Images of Sea and Shore in New England; Live Yankees; and Maine on Glass: The Early Twentieth Century in Glass Plate Photography. With Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., he wrote An Eye for the Coast: The Monhegan and Maritime Photographs of Eric Hudson and Maine on Glass: The Early Twentieth Century in Glass Plate Photography. Bill Bunting shipped as galley boy aboard the brigantine Yankee at age 13 and later completed a 25,000-mile world voyage as first mate of a 132-foot barkentine.