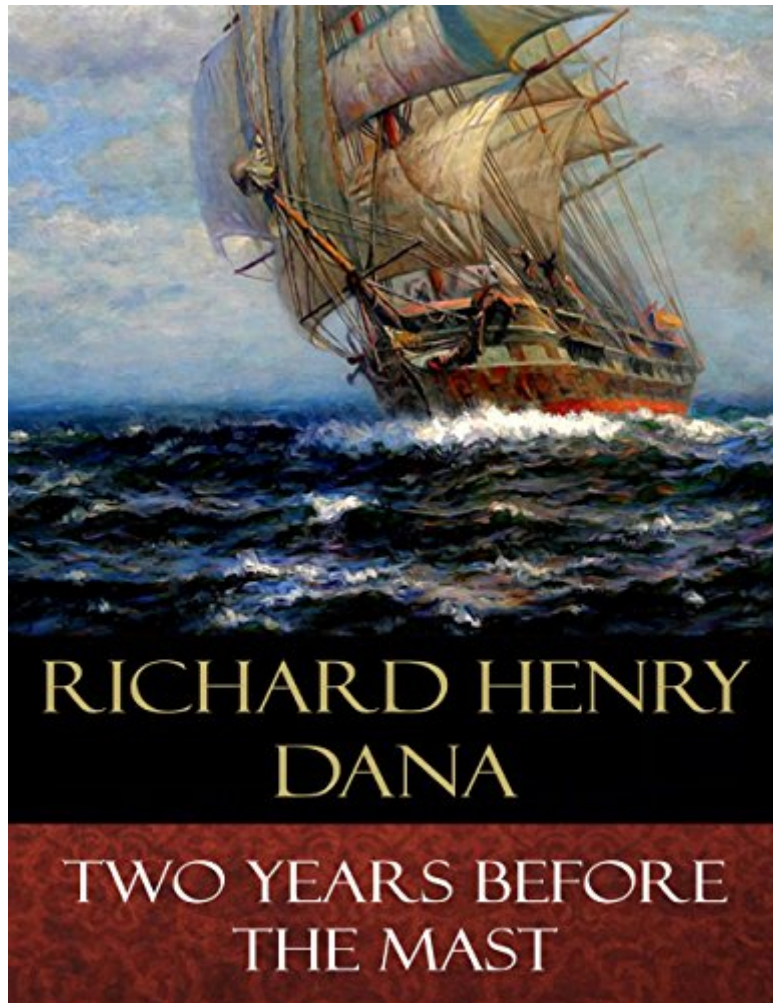




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Two Years Before The Mast



Synopsis

Two Years Before the Mast is a memoir by the American author Richard Henry Dana Jr., published in 1840, having been written after a two-year sea voyage from Boston to California on a merchant ship starting in 1834. A film adaptation under the same name was released in 1946. The term "before the mast" refers to the quarters of the common sailors, in the forecabin, in the front of the ship. His writing evidences his later sympathy with the lower classes. He later became a prominent anti-slavery activist and helped found the Free Soil Party. In the book, which takes place between 1834 and 1836, Dana gives a vivid account of "the life of a common sailor at sea as it really is". He sails from Boston to South America and around Cape Horn to California. Dana's ship was on a voyage to trade goods from the United States for the Mexican colonial Californian California missions' and ranchos' cow hides. They traded at the ports in San Diego Bay, San Pedro Bay, Santa Barbara Channel, Monterey Bay, and San Francisco Bay. Richard Henry Dana Jr. (1815-1882) was an American lawyer and politician from Massachusetts, a descendant of an eminent colonial family, who gained renown as the author of the American classic, the memoir Two Years Before the Mast. Both as a writer and as a lawyer, he was a champion of the downtrodden, from seamen to fugitive slaves and freedmen.

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Customer Reviews

Even after almost 150 years, this book is the greatest narrative on early California history I have ever read. If you skim through the in-depth descriptions of ship building and sailing, you will find Dana's insight into the people, landscape and lifestyles of coastal California exciting and enticing. As I drive up and down the coast today, I think of the ports, the Mexican families and rancheros, and the cusp of a changing world he was fortunate to experience. I have read this book once, and will re-read it again and again. It was well to have this as mandatory reading in high schools at one time.

Two Years Before the Mast (with or without the supplement) gives the reader a sense of the California coastline (from San Francisco to San Diego) including the geography, towns, missions, economics, population, culture in the early-mid 1800's. This is California before it is California. The reader also develops a true sense of what it is like to be a sailor, on a large sailing boat, on an adventure/trip that lasts 2-4 years on average, leaving the great port of Boston, rounding the cape and exploring the Pacific ocean. Richard Henry Dana is a very thoughtful and observant participant in the voyage and activities and has a generous nature and perception. His details are so keen you feel as if you are sailing on the Pacific landing at the ports, mending and cleaning on the rolling seas. Great read for those who have any interest in California, sailing and industry in the 1800's.

This is a mammoth read & one that takes a lot of concentration, definitely a masterpiece of its time. The story is extremely descriptive & I would think written as an educative book, in that era, which of course it has been used in more modern times. Some of the language is hard going, the French paragraphs & also the formal Russian names are confusing. The history & politics also I found I had to skim over as I found much of it hard to understand. The personalities & characters, I enjoyed & found very interesting the continual striving of some of the main characters in their thoughts & feelings & their attempts to find themselves. Anna, I thought to be rather superficial & narcissistic & so too her brother, whereas the other main characters had more substance & personal growth.

Two Years Before The Mast is written as a journal that skips over the mundane boring days, to give you a fantastic view into life on a merchant ship plying the West Coast in the 1800s. Written by a common sailor about life on the ship, Two Years was a refreshing change from most books and

movies, like Master & Commander, that are written from or about the ship's officers. The duties and daily pattern of life for a common sailor is the base of the book, but the personal relationships between crew members, officers, and landlubbers really bring it to life. You'll see lots of sailing terms, so it will help to have a resource to translate these terms, but you don't actually need that to enjoy the book. Most of the text is clear and easy to read, though there are times when you'll also run into unfamiliar figures of speech. Overall, it was a well-written book that I had a hard time putting down.

I read the book (wonderful) But as the ship (one of many) cruised up and down the coast picking up cow hides (thousands) I wondered what happened to all the meat from cattle the ranches were slaughtering. California had small population (1830's) They couldn't ship it back East. I found out,,,they let it rot in giant piles. The ranchers inherited huge herds of wild cattle (introduced by the Spaniard) They had little value until the hide trade appeared. they also would render the tallow. The meat had no value, until later when the population grew. The cattle are suspected to be the precursors to the Texas longhorns. I found this interesting, Hoped you might too. The book is a must read on so many levels. Living in California (near the coast) I see things differently now.

I'd give 5 stars if I understood all the jargon. These seamen worked! And in all sorts of weather. and hanging onto the ship's rigging, loading and off loading..all by hand., no hi-lo's or power tools. And so much to do in just sailing. You get a real sense of place and task. The extra chapters were quite welcome. Will try to scout up the movie - Allen Ladd U believe.

Book is a classic, Covers the life of sailors 1835-6, more specifically the author's life on board sailing vessels, Pilgrim and Alert as they collected hides for their cargo in California when it was pretty well desolate. Includes observations of going around Cape Horn outgoing and incoming. Very difficult book to read primarily because of the format. The book was 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 inch margin to margin with a lot of sailing terminology. Although only 189 pages long it took a long time to read as one page would equal about 3 to 4 pages of a normal book. It was also pretty boring as a sailor's life in those days was. If you must know what sailing was like in the old days, it is a must read. Do not expect to find it glamorous or full of adventure, it has none of that. A sailor's life in those days was boring, harsh and at times very painful.

Live the actual life of a young lawyer who spent two years as a sailor on the ships that plied their

trade along the coast of California in the 1800s. This is the earliest American citizen's description of the small communities of Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Monterey. As a 70 year old woman, I was so mesmerized I think I got blisters from hauling up the sails.

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