



Two Years Before the Mast

Richard Henry Dana Jr.

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This legendary account of a voyage around Cape Horn captures the majesty and misadventure of life at sea in the early nineteenth century

In 1834, nineteen-year-old Richard Henry Dana left Harvard University to enlist as a deckhand on a brig sailing from Boston to the California coast. For the next two years, he recorded the terrifying storms, awe-inspiring beauty, and dreadful hardships of the journey in a diary he would later expand into this riveting memoir of “the life of a common sailor at sea as it really is.”

Dana spares no detail in portraying the wretched conditions he endured and the cruelty of the ship’s captain, but he also paints vivid, unforgettable pictures of natural wonders such as icebergs and schools of migrating whales. His descriptions of the missions and presidios of pre-Gold Rush California captured the imagination of the country when the book was first published in 1840, and they serve as valuable historical documentation to this day.

An instant classic and inspiration for contemporaries such as Herman Melville, *Two Years Before the Mast* is one of the most remarkable and influential adventure stories in American literature.

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Two Years Before the Mast Details

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From Reader Review Two Years Before the Mast for online ebook

Drew Porter says

This is a contemporaneous first hand account of two years spent as a merchant seaman off the coast of California. It is rich in detail, which sometimes makes for slow reading. As a native Californian, I found his account of what coastal California looked like in the 1830s fascinating.

Seth says

It reads sort of like a diary, sectioned off by date headings, and loaded with details about the weather, and concerning the architecture and operation of the ship. Much terminology is slung about with the presumption that the reader will understand: bowsing the kedge, reeving the hawser, reefing and furling, studding-sails, leeches (not the kind that suck your blood), bunts (not the baseball kind), heaving the log, main-gallant sails, royal top-sails, jibs, yards, halyards, etc. If you're not a sailor it's easy enough to look them all up - but you'll have to, if you want to understand a significant portion of what Dana means to convey. This made the book a bit more of a study than I first realized I was getting into. There are many anecdotes and lots of descriptive writing, but not a lot of character development, which is as one would expect of a memoir that does not pretend to be a work of art. It gives a clear and detailed picture of a man's experience on a merchant ship in the early 19th century.

Albert Cooper says

This is a true classic sea adventure. It also depicts California before it was over settled.
