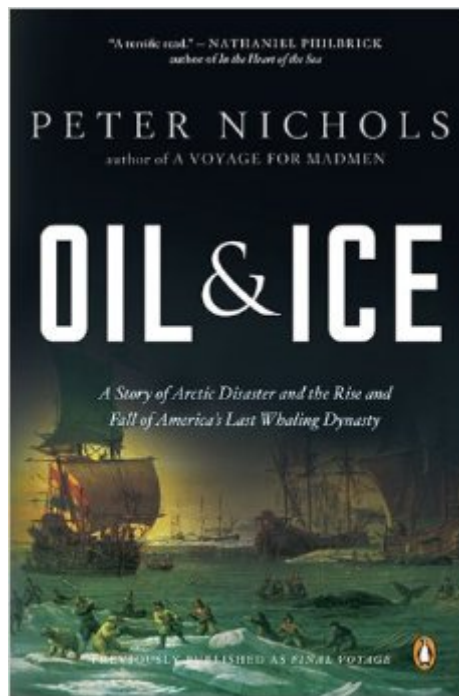


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Oil & Ice: A Story Of Arctic Disaster And The Rise And Fall Of America's Last Whaling Dynasty



Synopsis

"Peter Nichols has crafted a terrifyingly relevant historical narrative...A terrific read." -Nathaniel Philbrick, author of *In The Heart of the Sea* In 1871, America's last fleet of whaling ships was destroyed in an arctic ice storm. Miraculously, 1,218 men, women and children survived, but the disaster was catastrophic at home. *Oil and Ice* is the story of one fateful whaling season that illuminates the unprecedented rise and devastating fall of America's first oil economy, and the fate of today's petroleum industry.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First off, "caveat emptor", as the saying goes. (Geez, I hope I spelled that right. My Latin is a little rusty!) If you are looking for "just" a straight-forward adventure story this may not be quite what you expected and you might be a bit disappointed. However, if you are the sort of reader who doesn't mind an author meandering wherever his curiosity might lead him, then I think you will enjoy this book. The "trapping" of the 1871 fleet in the ice off of the Alaskan coast actually takes up a minor portion of the book. (Northeast winds blew ice away from the coast and opened up a narrow channel so the ships could pursue whales to the north. Unfortunately, the favorable winds only lasted a short while. When they shifted and blew from the southwest, the ice moved back in and trapped the fleet.) Most of the book deals with other topics that capture the author's fancy: Religious persecution of Quakers in New England; the rise and fall of the Quaker community in New Bedford, Massachusetts; mini-biographies of the seafaring/merchant Williams and Howland families of New Bedford; a brief history of the whaling industry; the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania and the start of

Standard Oil; etc. Personally, I didn't mind all the digressions from the main topic of the book. Mr. Nichols writes very well and a lot of this stuff was fascinating. (Did you know that Quakers could be, and were, whipped or executed for failure to remove a hat?!.....Also, one reason Quakers were so successful in business, besides hard-work, was their reputation for scrupulous honesty. Apparently nice guys can sometimes finish first.) However, I could also see that if you had your heart set on reading a rip-roaring adventure story set in stormy seas you might feel a tad bit "cheated". That being said, I found this to be a first-rate read... very interesting and enjoyable. Please just be aware that, depending on your expectations, you may be getting more or less than you bargained for.

You should be warned that this is rather less a tale of maritime disaster and Arctic suffering than it is a history of whaling in Nantucket and New Bedford, mixed with an account of the prominence of Quakers in that industry, with a focus on a couple of particular families. I suspect most readers want to get to the "good part" where the unlucky whalers get trapped in the Alaskan ice, but if so, they will be frustrated, as the author endlessly delays reaching that point. There's a great deal of cutting from one locale to another and jumping back and forth in time. And way too much of "The aptly-named Sir Not-Relevant-to-this-Tale once lived near Boston, and was the grandson of So-and-So, and married the fifth cousin of What's-Her-Face. He owned a wharf. This...is not his story." My advance copy had all of two illustrations and no maps. More of the former and some of the latter would've substantially improved the book. The author did significant research, it appears, and is clearly enthusiastic about the topic, but this is a workman-like effort at best, and given the nature of the actual denouement, I think the marketing of the book is rather misleading. It's all right for what it is--as long as you're looking for a general survey of 19th century American whaling.

This is a good book but the promo material is misleading. The title of the book and the liner notes hint that the primary focus of the book is the ill-fated whaling journey that stranded the whalers north of Alaska. In reality, the book only deals with this event in an almost cursory way. The stranded ships are dealt with in small doses throughout the book and in a summary way at the very end of the book. Rather, the book's main focus is the developmental history of the whaling industry in New England and the families who comprised it. It's all interesting but not at all what I expected. This is no detailed account of the ill-fated whaling venture to which the promo material refers.

I bought this book on my travels without first having had the opportunity to review the comments by the consumers (readers) on . I enjoyed the brief history of the whaling industry and its place in New

England's rich history during the 18th and 19th centuries. I particularly enjoyed the author's interposing in the narrative comments taken from the actual logbooks of some of the whale ships to corroborate his historical research. However, Nichols wandered from the whaling history to the religious persecution of the Quakers in New England in the 17th century to the discovery of oil in Western Pennsylvania, and the human interest story of the Howland family in New Bedford. The back of the book's dust cover is very misleading and if one is anticipating this is going to be an exciting, hair-raising, spine tingling adventure of the final voyage of a 19th century whaling ship and crew on the open seas, you will be disappointed. The narrative of the incarcerated whale fleet in the Arctic Ice in 1871 doesn't even come into focus until the 15th and 16th chapters, (the book has 18 chapters) a grand total of 20 pages! The book can hardly be construed as "one of the most gripping sea stories...", "a haunting story on the grandest scale", or "a terrifyingly relevant historical narrative". Quotes taken from the back of the dust cover!

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