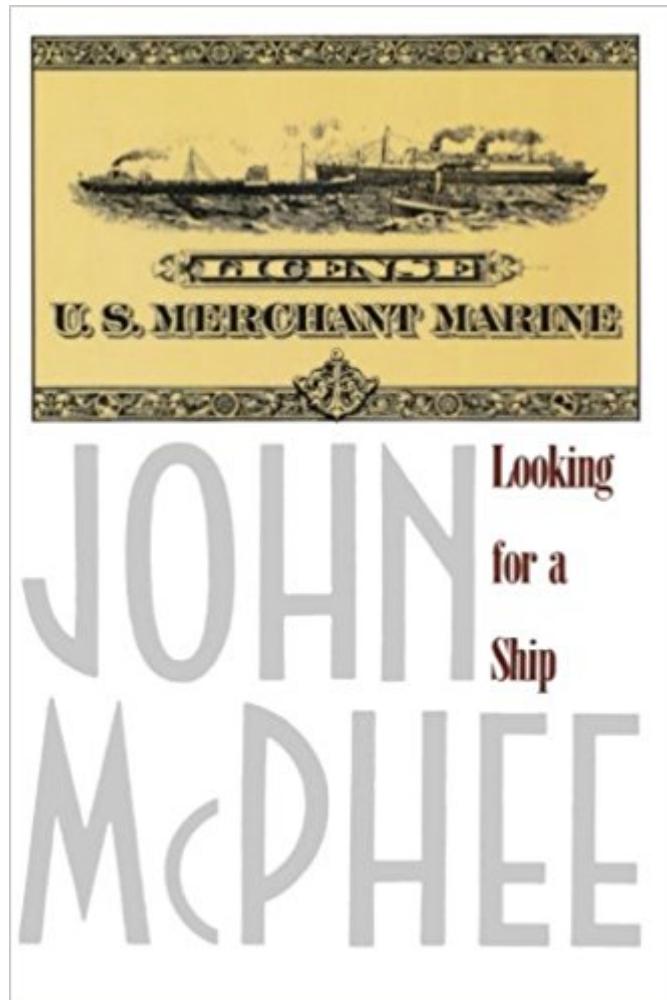


The book was found

Looking For A Ship



Synopsis

This is an extraordinary tale of life aboard what may be one of the last American merchant ships. As the story begins, Andy Chase, who holds a license as a second mate is looking for a ship. In less than ten years, the United States Merchant Marine has shrunk from more than two thousand ships to fewer than four hundred, and Chase faces the scarcity of jobs from which all American merchant mariners have been suffering. With John McPhee along, Chase finds a job as a second mate aboard the S.S. *Stella Lykes*, captained by the extraordinary Paul McHenry Washburn. The journey takes them on a forty-two day run down the Pacific coast of South America, with stops to unload and pick up freight at such ports as Cartagena, Valparaiso, Balboa, Lima, and Guayaquil— an area notorious for pirates. As the crew make their ocean voyage, they tell sea stories of other runs and other ships, tales of disaster, stupidity, greed, generosity, and courage. Through the journey itself and the tales told emerge the history and character of a fascinating calling.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

McPhee joined a friend, merchant mariner Andy Chase, on a 42-day voyage from Charleston, S.C., through the Panama Canal, down the Pacific coast of South America. A gem of a book, this leisurely, unpretentious log is a paean to the United States Merchant Marine, a declining institution battered by international competition and lowered cargo rates. The ship's New England captain "couldn't find his way around a traffic circle" but manages to outmaneuver a tropical storm. Porpoises and albatrosses accompany the SS *Stella Lykes* on a cruise laden with much talk of stowaways, collisions and cocaine smuggling, of pirates both legendary and contemporary (the

modern variety carry bolt-cutters and walkie-talkies). McPhee's (*The Control of Nature*) clean, lean prose displays his sharp eye for telling detail and arresting incident. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Known for his books on natural history, such as *The Control of Nature* (LJ 4/1/89), *Basin and Range* (LJ 4/1/81), etc., McPhee brings his considerable storytelling ability to bear on the plight of the U.S. merchant marine. Accompanying Second Mate Andy Chase on a 42-day run down the west coast of South America aboard the S.S. *Stella Lykes* , McPhee provides the reader with stories and tales of modern seafaring life and the problems of making a living as a merchant mariner. This book is both an engrossing tale of the sea, with excellent detail and humanity, and a disturbing portrait of the merchant marine--a once-great American institution that made its presence known around the world. Highly recommended for public libraries. Previewed in *Prepub Alert*, LJ 5/15/90.- Harold N. Boyer, Marple P.L., Broomall, Pa. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read looking for a ship in the early 90's when it first was published. Like all John McPhee books, it allows you to experience a new world through the adventures of the author. I have recommended this book to teens who are interested in attending maritime colleges. While the book is a bit of a downer since it describes the poor state of the US flag shipping industry, it is a fascinating look at the lives of merchant seamen. I highly recommend this and in fact all books by McPhee.

This book reminded me a lot of one of my all-time favorites, "Travels With Charlie" by Steinbeck. McPhee's writing style, and his ability to describe in an interesting way the lives of ordinary people, was very similar to Steinbeck's book. Granted, I have always been a sucker for books about life at sea, but I highly recommend this to anyone who would like to learn about an industry upon which we all so heavily depend, whether we know it or not. The book is set on a voyage from Charleston to Valparaiso, Chile and back through the Panama Canal. The author becomes a "P.A.C." (or "Passenger in Addition to Crew") on a container ship on which his friend, Andy, is a Mate. The book begins with Andy waiting in a union hall in Charleston hoping to land a job on a ship, which gives you a very interesting insight to the recent (book published in 1990) decline in the American merchant marine industry. The author and his friend find a job aboard the *Stella Lykes* headed for South America, and encounter many interesting situations, such as pirates, mechanical problems, and incompetent pilots, not to mention a host of interesting crew members. Interspersed in these

stories are many interesting passages about the merchant marine industry in general, which I found fascinating. Some of the reviewers criticized the book for not having a set plot or being disjointed. While it is true that the story is not always presented in chronological order, I thoroughly enjoyed the author's style of bouncing around in time to relate a point. Nor does the story have a climactic plot, but that is not really the point of the book. It is simply a well-written story of one person's experience on a 42-day trip.

Following WWII the American merchant marine was downsized almost to oblivion. Shipowners found that ships could be built and crewed more cheaply by constructing in overseas yards, hiring third world seamen, and registering in other countries, such as Liberia and Panama. By 1955, when I investigated the possibility of a seagoing occupation, there were few jobs, and the hundreds of downsized but experienced American seamen were more than enough to fill the available deck and engineroom berths. McPhee stays away from finding cause for the situation and just tells it like it is. Although the book is aimed at a narrow audience, it makes the situation of finding a maritime job as real as it can get on paper. Since there are few non-fiction, modern era books covering this topic, readers wanting more on the legal and regulatory environment might find the "American Merchant Seaman's Manual", published by Cornell Maritime Press, of interest. Those interested also in inland towboat operations will enjoy the chapter on that subject in McPhee's "Uncommon Carriers".

It's a good read if you're interested in seafaring. It's also interesting to read how the commercial shipping has changed internationally (at least at the point this book was written in about 1990, I think).

This is an older book (1991 time frame) about the US Merchant Marine by one of my favorite non-fiction author's John McPhee. In the same manner that he made Geology come alive through his *Annals* series, he brings the mostly unknown world of the Merchant Marines to life in this book. I like how he intertwines stories about the ships and the officers on them. I learned a lot of great facts that I did not know, especially about "flags of convenience".

I've always had an interest in geology and so first came to know John McPhee's work through "Basin and Range". His books are very dense of information, not trashy summer novels; however "Looking for a Ship" is both informative and very readable. He takes passage on a freighter. What sets the trip apart from the typical tramp/coastal freighter travelogue is that he is on a US flagged

ship owned by Lykes Brothers, Inc. So in addition to the Latin ports of call there is highlighting of the decline in US shipping and the implications of that decline.

The tone was a little bit uneven, but I really enjoyed reading this book. Seems to be well researched and it provides lots of insight into a world that few know anything about. I would recommend this book for anyone interested in the ocean, ships and/or shipping.

A fascinating glimpse of life at sea for a merchant mariner and crew as depicted by a gifted writer. Though this narrative goes back some years a volunteer shipboard visitor in the Port of Philadelphia like myself finds it timely and insightful in so many ways. McPhee is exceptional.

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