

# MAINE IN PRINT

# 20th Anniversary

MAINE WRITERS & PUBLISHERS ALLIANCE

AUGUST 1995 VOL. X, No. 7

MAINE BOOK REVIEWS  
AUGUST 1995

## Maine titles of the month ■

**The Only Woman On Board: The Photographs, Diaries, Letters and Memorabilia of a Maine Sea Captain and His Wife, 1859-1908**, by Julianna FreeHand. Picton Press, 1994, 0-89725-155-5, 210pp., \$24.50p.

The centerpiece of this compilation is a remarkable record of a sea voyage. In January 1898 the *Grace Deering*, a down-easter, three-masted bark, slipped out of New York harbor under the command of Sumner Pierce Drinkwater. The 39 year old captain was accompanied by his 37 year old wife, Alice; the round trip voyage to Brisbane, Australia would take 14 months. Not only did the captain keep a ship's log, his wife kept a journal as well, and together they shot and developed photographs along the way. These provide an unusual and rare account of a journey, a marriage, and a seafaring way of life that was rapidly disappearing.

In all, the Drinkwaters left behind some 50 years' worth of journals, diaries, letters and photos. Author Julianna FreeHand discovered the collection while settling the estate of her Aunt Edith, who came to live with the Captain's second wife in 1942, shortly after Sumner's death (Alice died in 1915). FreeHand interweaves excerpts of these papers with extensive research; the book is crowded with facts that, while interesting, would have benefited from a stern editor's hand and clearer layout.

The journals and letters themselves are full of rich detail. Alice describes "steering" a Singapore rickshaw driver with a poke of her umbrella; Sumner boasts of a 17 pound sea turtle he caught for a 4th of July feast. He writes of an afternoon spent photographing Alice "partially nude" in their ship's quarters — a detail she omits; both fret about family members and finances. *The Only Woman On Board* has a focus much wider than that implied by the title. Maine readers will enjoy its attention to turn-of-the-century life in Yarmouth and the presentation of Maine's changing shipping industry.

— Sheila Curran Bernard

*Sheila Curran Bernard, an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker and writer, was the 1995 Dorothy M. Healy Visiting Professor at Westbrook College.*