



Fur Traders from New England: The Boston Men in the North Pacific, 1787-1800 (Northwest Historical Series)

Briton C. Busch, Barry Gough

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"Boston Men." The term was used generically by native peoples for years to refer to any American trading furs in the Pacific Northwest. Why? Because the first Americans to engage in fur trading on the North Pacific Coast were all from Boston-pioneers in the trade long before Americans made the first overland trek to the Pacific.

The earliest accounts of the Northwest fur trade comprise this new work, prepared and edited by two top scholars in the field. They have gathered original narratives of the earliest stages of the fur trade: William Dane Phelps' "Solid Men of Boston," William Sturgis' "The Northwest Fur Trade," "William Sturgis on the American Vessels and the Maritime Fur Trade," and "Account of the Vessels Engaged in the Sea-Otter-Fur-Trade on the Northwest Coast from 1787 to 1809," compiled by William Tufts, Esq., from his own memoranda. These rare documents are brought together under one cover to reveal the the inner-workings and alliances on which the early fur trade depended.

William Dane Phelps' "Solid Men of Boston" ranks as among the great texts of American maritime enterprise, and is published here in book format for the first time. It was the first history of the Northwest coast fur trade, compiled from original documents, invaluable ship logs, letters, journals and personal narratives.

The first description of the pioneer American vessels fitted out of the Northwest Coast trade, the *Columbia* and the *Lady Washington*, is presented by Phelps. His is the only description of the voyages of the *O'Cain* and the experiences of the *Winships*. "Solid Men of Boston" clarifies the link between Yankees and the Northwest Coast, and with the Hawaiian Islands, Alaska, and Alta California.

The Columbia River colonization experiment figures prominently in Phelps' narrative. It was the first American attempt to establish a base on the Northwest coast, just months before Astor's famous Tonquin voyage to Astoria. John Kendrick's many alliances with Northwest Coast peoples are treated in detail. The validity of the Kendrick deeds and their consequences still inspire controversy.

"The Northwest Fur Trade," William Sturgis' original account, accompanies Phelps' text. It is an important recollection of the operation of the commercial fur hunt. Before Phelps' own "Webfoot" adventures, Sturgis had sailed on four voyages in the Boston maritime fur trade. The Sturgis history recounted here set down a tradition of early fur-trade narratives.

The final two appendices contain a further account by Sturgis on American vessels in the Northwest trade, and William Tufts' list of American vessels on the Northwest Coast, 1787-1809, drawn from James G. Swan's *The Northwest Coast, or Three Years' Residence in Washington Territory* (1875).

The historical introduction to the work provides a detailed background to the text, supporting and clarifying its conclusions. A full bibliography and analytical index enhance the presentation.

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