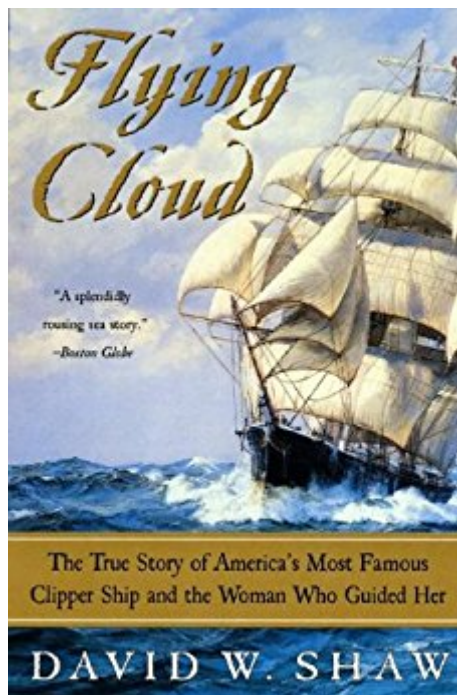




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Flying Cloud: The True Story Of America's Most Famous Clipper Ship And The Woman Who Guided Her



Synopsis

Flying Cloud is the riveting and thoroughly researched tale of a truly unforgettable sea voyage during the days of the California gold rush. In 1851, navigator Eleanor Creesy set sail on the maiden voyage of the clipper ship Flying Cloud, traveling from New York to San Francisco in only 89 days. This swift passage set a world record that went unbroken for more than a century. Upon arrival in San Francisco, Flying Cloud became an enduring symbol of a young nation's daring frontier spirit. Illustrated with original maps and charts as well as historical photographs, Shaw's compelling narrative captures the drama of this thrilling adventure. In a position almost unheard of for a woman in the mid-19th century, Eleanor Creesy served as the ship's navigator. With only the sun, planets, and stars to guide her, she brought Flying Cloud safely around Cape Horn at the height of a winter blizzard, faced storms, dodged shoals, and found her way through calms to make the swift passage possible. Along with her husband, Josiah, the ship's captain, she sailed the mighty 3-masted clipper through 16,000 miles of the fiercest, most unpredictable oceans in the world. Shaw vividly recreates 19th-century seafaring conditions and customs, for both the crew and the passengers who entrusted their fate to an untested ship. Including excerpts from letters and diaries of passengers, Shaw recounts Flying Cloud's victory in the face of adversity—including sabotage, insubordination, and severe damage to the clipper's mainmast that might have sunk her with all hands lost. But the ship triumphed and would ultimately sail the world. Flying Cloud brings to life, for the first time, the glory of one of America's most important seafaring tales and one woman's incredible achievements.

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Customer Reviews

The book tells a fantastic story of maritime trade in the mid-1800s and some of the people involved. Not only are Captain and Ellen Cressy center stage. They were a remarkable couple. Strong secondary roles are played by Lt Maury who created the sailing directions we still use today and Donald McKay the ship designer-builder. The story of clippers ships and ocean sailing competition is still being played out today in far different types of yachts. The strength of the Perkins and Ellen combination is that she was a full time and trusted navigator. Back in the days of sextants, navigating was an all day job. That Ellen did the navigating left Perkins with the time to drive his ship to its best. A remarkable combination, maybe the first one ever. It is still a best practice on racing and voyaging yachts to this day. The skipper and navigator must think as one while being two persons. The only complaint about the book is the charts, too few. The maps are helpful but I got so wrapped up in the story that I had to do more detailed research using my own pilot charts and internet resources. I grew up with this story being told and retold to me by my grandmother who was quite a sailor and navigator in her own right. Every trip I make with my wife as navigator is better than when she is not aboard.

The good aspects of this book are that it is quite informative and easy to read. Nautical terms are clearly defined and easy to understand. Several charts explain the Profile, Deck, Spar Plan, Sailing Plan, Points of Sail, and Wind and Water Currents. Diagrams also explain how a full-rigged ship is tacked (turned) and follow the course of the ship during its maiden voyage, which was most interesting around Cape Horn. Several photographs reproduce a painting and engraving of the "Flying Cloud", its builder Donald McKay, and Captain Cressy. Unfortunately no photo of Mrs. Cressy is reproduced. Still the charts, diagrams and photographs are very helpful. Another good aspect of the book is that Shaw provides quite a lot of information regarding the "Flying Cloud", which is why I bought the book.... Information is also given on how much water was carried, that it

was for drinking and not bathing, and what type of provisioning was loaded. Shaw writes about the nature of the cargo and that the value of the shipping costs equalled "Flying Cloud's" building costs. We are informed about the contents of the Medicine Cabinet, about the livestock taken aboard, about Celestial Navigation, the fact that fresh foods iced lasted for over a month, and much more. Here the book is very strong. The book is really about Captain Creesy's wife, Eleanor, who was the navigator on the journey described, and who worked as a partner with her husband. Shaw tries very hard to show what an intelligent and unusual person she was for her time, or really any time at all, and what an excellent navigator she was. She is portrayed as a kind, sensitive, concerned and brave person, popular with both passengers and crew alike, devoted to her husband and the ship. I can imagine that it must have been difficult to recreate her persona, from the doubtless scant sources. Shaw brings this off fairly well. The worst aspect of this book is that it is not the "True Story" of the Flying Cloud. All dialogues, and fortunately there are not too many, are invented, and are times rather tedious. For example, tender moments between Captain Creesy and his wife are not credible, and are also written, as most of the other dialogues, in an unmistakable Twentieth Century Style. This greatly distracts from the Story. Other dialogues, such as that of the Captain and the first Mate, Thomas Austin, are also much too obviously contrived, as are those between the passengers, which are just plain unbelievable. Shaw should not have titled the Book "The True Story", or he should have not included dialogues. It seems that Mr. Shaw had difficulties with these sections as the style shifts markedly between these and the maritime portions of the book, where he is much more knowledgeable and obviously more comfortable. For the reader these shifts are distracting..... Also Shaw would have done well to work with an Editor to correct the many stylistic flaws, especially in the dialogues. Had he done so, the book would have been great, instead of just a good read, and could have become a classic book in an often overlooked area of American History. I still recommend this book for leisurely reading. It's enjoyable to read and informative.

I have had a love affair with Flying Cloud since I was a school boy. (No, I wasn't around to ride on it! lol) But I never knew about the captain's wife being the navigator. Since I now have 3 granddaughters (11, 9, & 7), I think it will be an adventure for them to learn about this "remarkable for her time" woman who succeeded (and excelled) at a profession that was normally performed only by men. Indeed, most sailors considered it bad luck for there to be a woman on board a ship, captain's wife or not. While presenting a very detailed, technical (at least for this "lubber"), and factual history from "birth" to "death" of this amazing vessel, it often reads like a historical fiction novel, due to the author fleshing out the Captain and Mrs Creesy, the passengers, the officers and

some of the crew. I think "my girls" will find Ellen Creesy's accomplishments to be an inspiration as they grow into young women in this country where anyone can still achieve great accomplishments, and succeed at what you put your mind to.

When I was in my mid teens, a long time ago, I joined the Sea Scout Ship "Flying Cloud". This action has had an impact on my entire life. While a Sea Scout we were walking distance from an on the water maritime museum. Birthed the museum was a 300 foot full rigged ship. These and other things became a part of me. Reading "Flying Cloud", the story was fiction based upon fact. It gave me and anyone that would take the time to read it, an incite to the hardships that the common sailor faced on a daily basis. The story went deep into the living conditions or lack there of, of a sailor man. It was a gripping story and told of the courage of both the ships officers and crew. Working on a yard 100 feet or more above the deck with fierce winds, ice and snow, to make repairs to broken gear for hours on end without food or drink, "Flying Cloud" makes for a great read.

Absolutely fascinating on a multitude of levels - the technical end of handling and navigating an 18th century clipper ship was well written. For those interested in female pioneers, the Captain's wife's story is totally fascinating. My hat's off to her!! The only reason I gave 4 stars to the book is the illustrations were poorly scanned - no resolution, and I could barely read the callouts.

The story of the ship, the nautical descriptions and the charts were well written. But the narratives of the interactions between the Creesys were too flowery and boring. I skipped those sections.

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