Clarion Review

Historical

Treasures: Gold, Oil and Wives
M. “Cal” Calvache
CreateSpace
978-1-4515-0407-1
Four Stars (out of Five)

Treasures: Gold, Oil and Wives tells the compelling historical tale of Thomas Chatfield, a sixteen-year-old boy from Cornwall, New York, who is discontent with his lot in life. Thomas works at a cotton mill and is a younger son in a family with too many boys. He yearns for something more, so he changes his name to John Thomas and runs away to seek his fortune.

Luck is with our hero, and he finds temporary work aboard a cargo ship that takes him to the small town of Cotuit in Cape Cod. Thomas then secures another short-term position with a retired sea captain named Seth Nickerson. By the end of his first winter away from home, Thomas has been all but adopted by the Nickerson family. He decides on a career as a sailor, but is lured to California by the promise of gold. He does not strike it rich, however, and quickly returns to sea. He works diligently, learns quickly, and spends his free time with the Nickerson family, eventually falling in love with Seth’s granddaughter, Florentine. Thomas is promoted to captain for his third whaling expedition and after a four-year sojourn as captain, he is able to retire and raise a family.

Living life on a parallel course is Bethuel Handy. Bethuel is Thomas’s eventual brother-in-law. Raised to be a sailor, Bethuel also spends time in the California gold mines before returning to life at sea.

Author M. Calvache, who is the great-great grandson of Bethuel Handy, has done an excellent job of weaving fact with fiction. *Treasures* is based on two historical sources, the journals of Thomas Chatfield and an 1860 San Francisco newspaper article about Bethuel Handy. The story is seamless and will give the readers a good sense of what life was like for a sailor in the mid-nineteenth century.

The author paints a particularly vivid picture of the dangers of whale hunting. For

example, he writes:

> *Bethuel managed to drive the iron into his ugly head just before he hit. This secured that razor sharp object in the whale and out of the boat but it didn't strike a vital region. The angry monster took the middle of the boat in his mouth as the men dodged that tooth filled abyss. He lifted us, boat and all, and tossed us into the sea.*

The book has one significant problem. The first part of the 1860 newspaper article is included near the end of the book, completely halting the story. The characters are depicted reading this long article about Handy, and a brief epilogue sums up Thomas's career. This is an abrupt and unsatisfying ending to an otherwise exciting story. The ending would have been more successful if readers had been provided with a look at the characters' futures.

Despite this flaw, the hopes of two young men and the excitement of a life lived at sea are beautifully conveyed here. Readers will enjoy accompanying Thomas and Bethuel on their journey in search of gold, oil, and wives.

Catherine Thureson