



Boston Authors Club

September 2018 Newsletter

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BAC AWARDS PROGRAM
Wednesday, September 26 from 5PM to 7PM
Boston Public Library
Orientation Room (Dartmouth Street Entrance)

**JOIN US AT THE BPL IN COPLEY SQUARE ON
SEPTEMBER 26 TO MEET AND CELEBRATE THIS YEAR'S
HONORED BAC AUTHORS!**

*Award Presentations and Author Remarks
Honored Titles for Sale and Author Signing
Reception, Refreshments, Celebration!*

Featured Author: Eric Jay Dolin

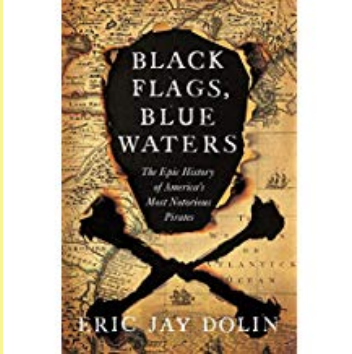
Eric Jay Dolin's prior books include histories of American whaling, fur traders, and lighthouses. He has also published more than 60 articles for magazines, newspapers, and

professional journals.



Black Flags, Blue Waters, Dolin’s latest book, is an “epic history of America’s most notorious pirates.”

In this interview, Eric talks about his piratical inspiration, the process he follows for researching and writing about nonfiction topics, and what he finds most effective in publicizing his books.



Q: Your 12 previous books featured subjects like the China trade, whaling, and American lighthouses. What inspired you to write your latest book, *Black Flags, Blue Waters* about American piracy?

This book’s origin story begins with my kids. After I finished *Brilliant Beacons: A History of the American Lighthouse*, I began searching for a new book topic. I asked Lily and Harry, who were then in their teens, what I should write about. When I raised the possibility of pirates, their eyes lit up, both of them saying, “That’s it, you have to write about pirates.” Lily even threw out two possible titles for the book: “Swords, Sails, and Swashbucklers;” and “Argh”—or, perhaps more emphatically, “Arrrgh”—which, I had to tell Lily, much to her chagrin, is a word that probably was never uttered by a Golden Age pirate, and is

more likely a creation of movies in which pirates dispense *arghs* with relish. My children’s strong support is, of course, not the only reason I wrote this book. But the fact that they were early adopters of the pirate idea, was encouraging. Great credit is also due to my editor and the sales director at Liveright, who loved the idea, and picked it from a list of eight book ideas I had generated.

Q: Could you talk about the research and writing process for this book? How long did you spend on the research and writing, and what types of resources did you use?

All of my books are on topics I initially know little about, so research is critical to becoming expert enough to write an authoritative and interesting book. I typically spend about nine months to a year doing research, and delve deeply into both primary and secondary sources. My outline is my book proposal, which lays out the chapters. Then, I create multiple computer files for each chapter, loading them with information I have gathered. These files grow quite voluminous, and they essentially contain much of the raw material – the facts, the stories, the quotes – that I use to construct the book. Once I complete most of the research, I start writing from the beginning to the end. I do additional research while writing to fill in holes. Once I have a complete draft, then I spend a month or so editing, filling in any remaining holes, and trying to make the narrative fun, fast-paced, and informative. The entire process, from research to finished book takes from eighteen months to two years.

Q: Do you have a favorite pirate character or historical incident that you featured in *Black Flags, Blue Waters*?

Pirates are not very loveable fellows, to be sure, but if I had to pick a favorite it would be Blackbeard, not only because of the larger-than-life mythology that has grown up around his exploits, but also because he had one of the most interesting piratical careers, and his life ended in a bloody battle with his head being hung from the bowsprit of his own sloop.

Q: In your experience promoting and marketing your nonfiction books, what strategies have worked best to increase sales? Which promotional activities do you enjoy the most?

As an author, I only have a few levers I can pull to get people to take a look at, and hopefully buy, my books. The best ways I have found to get the word out are via talks and social media.

I have given more than 300 illustrated talks on my books, and have about 50 on tap for *Black Flags, Blue Waters* (see www.ericjaydolin.com, for the list). Not only does this create potential readers, and sell books, but also the people at the talks might tell their friends about the talk and the book, thereby generating more interest and sales. I greatly enjoy these talks.

The only social media I really use much is Facebook. I have amassed about 5,500 who like and follow my professional page (@ericjaydolin). This is not a huge number, but it does allow me to get in front of many potential readers. Sometimes I boost (pay to advertise) particular posts that promote my books. I only do these posts occasionally, but from what I can tell, they can have a measurable impact. For example, one boosted post for my last book on lighthouses generated more than 2,000 likes, scores of comments, and hundreds of shares. The only way I could get a sense of whether this post worked was to watch the book’s ranking on Amazon, which did go lower during the week or so I boosted the post. I think this advertising does have some positive impact, and as long as I continue to believe that, I am willing to invest in this form of outreach. I enjoy posting on Facebook, especially when readers take the time to respond with comments.

Interview by Mary Cronin

authors! AUTHORS!

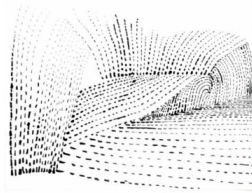
News About BAC Authors

Poetry Reading

Paula Bonnell will read from her chapbook *Tales Retold* (Finishing Line Press) at

**Rozzie Reads Poetry on Thursday,
October 25, 2018.**

Readings take place in Roslindale House, 120 Poplar Street (about a block from Roslindale Square)
Each invited author reads for 20 minutes, followed by refreshments and an open mic.



tales retold

Paula Bonnell

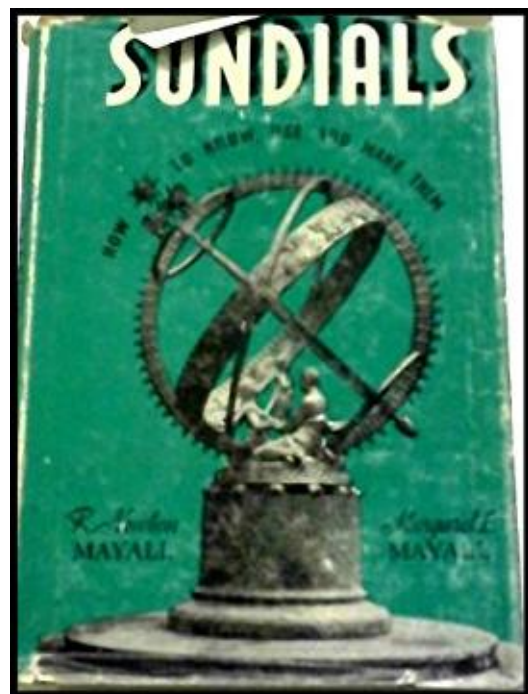


The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month, except for a combined June-July Summer Issue. Please send news about your activities, speaking, and new books (along with related pictures) to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com by September 26 for publication in the October 2018 newsletter.

Yesteryear at the BAC by Scott Guthery

Timeless Books by BAC Authors

One measure of a book's success is the length of time it stays in print. Fiction and poetry are in some sense timeless by their nature, and are entered in the race against the clock with a head start. In the non-fiction category, a history of any sort --- military, scientific, economic, etc. --- may have to work a bit to escape the trap of being a modern (read "fleeting") interpretation. Nonetheless, there are notable examples that have established themselves as classics. Barbara Tuckman's *Guns of August* comes easily to mind. Straight-up science writing, however, unlike books in these other departments, arrives at the starting line with shoes of lead.



As one writes science --- I'm thinking of books written for the



general reader not just for the other specialists in the field --- one is more than dimly aware that there are hundreds of contemporaries who are working day and night to make your book obsolete if not an embarrassment. There are, of course, scientific works that are remembered, if not revered, because of their impact on advancing science but these books rarely stay in print.

Thus it was with some small amusement that I discovered that a scientific tome by two Boston Authors Club members of yore --- Margaret W. Mayall and R. Newton Mayall -- first published in 1938 is still in print today. What science is as timely today as it was when

Superman first appeared? Sundials, of course.

The Mayalls were both astronomers. Of the two, Margaret was perhaps the more well-known in the field. She worked for almost her entire career at the Harvard Observatory where her particular specialty was variable stars. Her supervisor at the observatory was Annie Jump Cannon and, in fact, Margaret was awarded the American Astronomical Society's prize named after her boss in 1958. Newton Mayall was a civil engineer by training and a landscape architect by day.

The book, *Sundials: How to Know, Use, and Make Them*, was distilled from a series of articles that the Mayalls wrote for *Scientific American*. The book cost \$2.00 when originally published. It included a number of photographs, and received favorable comment. The reviewer for the Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada noted "[This] happy collaboration has produced a book which, as well as enjoying the necessary scientific authority, stresses the artistic and architectural importance of the problems associated with the creation and installation of dials of various types."

One is hard-pressed to think of a scientific instrument that is more eternally useful than a sundial or a topic that is more timeless than time.

One More Membership Reminder!

Full membership dues are \$50 annually and Associate memberships are \$25 annually for the calendar year. You can join and renew online by [clicking here](#). If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to Boston Authors Club and mail it to the following address:

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