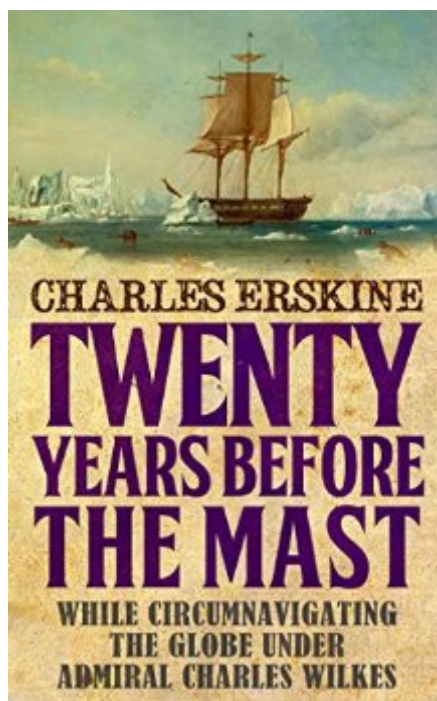


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# Twenty Years Before The Mast



## Synopsis

In 1838 the able-bodied seaman Charles Erskine joined the exploring expedition of Charles Wilkes who was setting out on a voyage of discovery around the world. From the Pacific to Antarctic to Atlantic, Erskine would travel with this expedition to the furthest corners of the Earth. He would go on to travel to some of the most unexplored regions, meeting men and women who had never seen westerners before. Along the journey the crew meet Patagonians, Fijians, Tahitians, Aborigines, and many other peoples. Although the Wilkes expedition was largely scientific mission, the ships were not always peaceful, indeed there were a number of armed conflicts with Pacific Islanders as the United States began to assert its authority across the globe. The ships and their crews had to withstand some of the most appalling conditions as they continued their expedition, from the heat-driven mirages of the South Atlantic to the brutal cold of the Antarctic seas. What makes Erskine's narrative so remarkable is that he is not writing from the perspective of an admiral or a scientific explorer, but instead from the viewpoint of a common sailor. Interspersed throughout the narrative are short ditties and sailor's songs that provide a vivid picture of the mentality of nineteenth century seamen. After the Wilkes expedition landed back in the United States Erskine spent only brief moments on dry land as he frequently registered under new ships and continued his journeys. Erskine's book is a fascinating first-hand account of exploration and maritime life aboard a tall ship. *Twenty Years Before the Mast* was published in 1896 towards the end of Erskine's life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An other excellent book written from a working-class perspective. My only complaint is that the author was quite old when he wrote it and the story tends to be a bit underwhelming. It lacks the fire and urgency of youth. This is an amazing edition, as well. It's got all the old antique-printing touches even though it's printed in 2006. There are a ton of great illustrations. The end notes are all excellent and helpful. There's also a great, informative historical introduction. There's even an index. The publisher's forward is a bit overbearing, what with it trumpeting R.R. Donnelley's global stature and prowess. I'd recommend not bothering to read it. And there are some real cheap copies available. Mine was only \$0.63! And it came brand-new, wrapped in plastic! I have some roots in Boston, as well, which made this book even more of a treat. Really wonderful. One in a million.

I read Nathaniel Hawthorn's Sea of Glory ....

see: [http://www..com/gp/product/0142004839?redirect=true&ref\\_=cm\\_cr\\_ryp\\_prd\\_ttl\\_sol\\_88](http://www..com/gp/product/0142004839?redirect=true&ref_=cm_cr_ryp_prd_ttl_sol_88) Charles Erskine's story is put into a larger context there. I recommend the book. This is an amazing book written by a man who started out unable to write and was taught to read by friends as well as by himself. It is not often that one gets a common seaman's point of view in the sailing literature. This is very valuable.

In 1838, the U.S. Navy launched its very first scientific exploration. Sailing from Norfolk, VA, with 6 ships and a corps of scientists under the command of Lt. Charles Wilkes, its mission was to explore the Pacific Ocean and to plant the U.S. flag around the world. After 4 years, they returned, having "discovered" Antarctica, charting Pacific islands, surveying the Columbia River, and studying Hawaii's volcanoes. The specimens they collected are in the Smithsonian today. This is a personal and readable account of that trip and this book describes an exciting and remarkable voyage. There are numerous maps, many illustrations, and a quite decent index. Travelers and history buffs will love this attractive, gift-quality book.

I love sailing and have read many sailing books, including Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast" and Erskine's "Twenty Years Before the Mast", and I prefer Erskine's. It's a down-to-earth story from a

common man about sailing life in the nineteenth century. A good read.- Hank Castello,  
Sailboats4Sail.net

I know of some of Erskine's story (on the EX Ex), but really wanted to learn more about his experiences. Still on the to-read list, though.

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