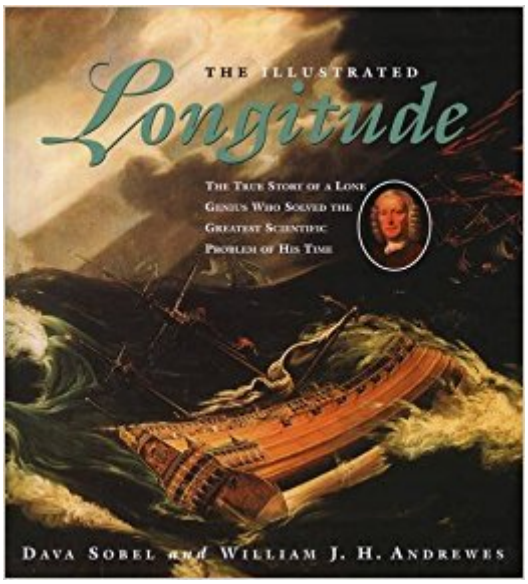
The Illustrated Longitude: The True Story Of A Lone Genius Who Solved The Greatest Scientific Problem Of His Time



Synopsis

The Illustrated Longitude recounts in words and images the epic quest to solve the greatest scientific problem of the eighteenth and three prior centuries: determining how a captain could pinpoint his ship’s location at sea. All too often throughout the ages of exploration, voyages ended in disaster when crew and cargo were either lost at sea or destroyed upon the rocks of an unexpected landfall. Thousands of lives and the fortunes of nations hung on a resolution to the longitude problem.To encourage a solution, governments established prizes for anyone whose method or device proved successful. The largest reward of Ã Â£20,000 - truly a king’s ransom - was offered by Britain’s Parliament in 1714. The scientific establishment - from Galileo to Sir Isaac Newton - had been certain that a celestial answer would be found and invested untold effort in this pursuit. By contrast, John Harrison imagined and built the unimaginable: a clock that told perfect time at sea, known today as the chronometer. Harrison’s trials and tribulations during his forty-year quest to win the prize are the culmination of this remarkable story.The Illustrated Longitude brings a new and important dimension to Dava Sobel’s celebrated story. It contains the entire original narrative of Longitude, redesigned to accompany 183 images chosen by William Andrewes - from portraints of every important figure in the story to maps and diagrams, scientifc instruments, and John Harrison’s remarkable sea clocks themselves. Andrewes’s elegant captions and sidebars on scientific and historical events tell their own story of longitude.

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Customer Reviews

The thorniest scientific problem of the eighteenth century was how to determine longitude. Many thousands of lives had been lost at sea over the centuries due to the inability to determine an east-west position. This is the engrossing story of the clockmaker, John "Longitude" Harrison, who solved the problem that Newton and Galileo had failed to conquer, yet claimed only half the promised rich reward. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

While sailors can readily gauge latitude by the height of the sun or guiding stars above the horizon, the measurement of longitude bedeviled navigators for centuries, resulting in untold shipwrecks. Galileo, Isaac Newton and Edmund Halley entreated the moon and stars for help, but their astronomical methods failed. In 1714, England’s Parliament offered #20,000 (equivalent to millions of dollars today) to anyone who could solve the problem. Self-educated English clockmaker John Harrison (1693-1776) found the answer by inventing a chronometer?a friction-free timepiece, impervious to pitch and roll, temperature and humidity?that would carry the true time from the home port to any destination. But Britain’s Board of Longitude, a panel of scientists, naval officers and government officials, favored the astronomers over humble "mechanics" like Harrison, who received only a portion of the prize after decades of struggle. Yet his approach ultimately triumphed, enabling Britannia to rule the waves. In an enthralling gem of a book, former New York Times science reporter Sobel spins an amazing tale of political intrigue, foul play, scientific discovery and personal ambition. BOMC and History Book Club selections. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I first read the Danson book, thinking this was the book Mark Knopfler based his "Sailing to Philadelphia" on. Afterwards I learned it was the Pynchon book that birthed the song. Longitude offers descriptive history of clocks and astronomy as two methods for finding longitude, which was so sought after for British shipping and sailing. Having traveled to London, I spent one day visiting the Royal Observatory in Greenwich after reading these books. Returning home after that experience, I was urgently wanted to re-read both books again.Sorbel writes enthusiastically and holds attention without including extraneous detail which might bog down the reading, and after reading Longitude the second time- now I want to go back to the observatory and also to the clock museum in Guildhall, which I did not see.The science of positioning on the Earth is fascinating and anyone who finds global positioning and astronomy intriguing should read this book

Although I stumbled across this book after I had seen the television production based on it back in

the mid nineties, starring Michael Gambon and Jeremy Irons, I didn't actually buy it and read it until I had watched the show again on recently. It's disappointing that there are no illustrations or photographs of Harrison's marine clocks, save the illustration of H-4 on the cover of the electronic edition of the book. But despite that the book was a pure joy to read and I appreciated the author's use of humor in her writing, which to me makes any book just that much better to read, even though it is indeed a rather serious subject. My hat goes off to Dava Sobel for making the subject of longitude extremely interesting to read about.

Suppose you wanted to figure out where you were on earth. You could make a fair guess at your north-south location between the North Pole and South Pole -- that is, you could determine your latitude -- by waiting for the sun to reach its highest point, then determining the angle from the horizon to the sun, then doing a bunch of math. But where you are on an east-west line -- that is, to determine longitude? This is much harder.This book tells the story of longitude and how the problem of determining longitude was solved. It begins with a particularly disastrous British naval accident in 1707, after which Parliament established an X-Prize of sorts for methods to accurately determine longitude, to be administered by a Board of Longitude. The story then follows the two methods contending for the prize: those based upon examination of the positions of astronomical bodies, and those based upon accurately tracking the time at one's home port. (Knowing the time in, say, Greenwich would provide the time offset to a known longitude. From there simple division into twenty-four hours would reveal longitude of precision determined by the timekeeping method.) The story particularly follows John Harrison, the eccentric autodidact who built the first truly accurate seaborne clocks, and his efforts to win the prize; but it also tracks the efforts of the leading scientific minds toward an astronomical method. Behind all this lie the politics of the Board of Longitude, in particular its excess of faith in astronomical methods, and disdain for chronometric methods, as the latter took the clear lead.This book is a popular account of the problem of longitude: if you're looking for an academic account of the story, look elsewhere. (And perhaps be wary of too easily accepting its assertions as fact: Wikipedia claims that the book unhesitatingly repeats a couple myths concerning the 1707 naval disaster, suggesting that perhaps not all facts this book relates are certainly so.) For that it remains entertaining throughout, giving a nice survey of story and its developments. It's definitely worth a read to get an idea of how ship-based navigation worked in a time before GPS and modern communication aids, and accurate clocks on every wrist (or phone, these days) -- which is to say, not always well.A few complaints about the Kindle edition specifically. That foreword by Neil Armstrong touted on the cover? No, not yours -- it's not here. And some of the

end bits mention illustrations of various clocks encountered in the book -- illustrations not in this edition. (In fact there are no images here beyond the cover image. I can’t tell if that’s a limitation of the Kindle edition, or of the original book [particularly as some reviews here discuss an illustrated version], so I can’t hold it against the Kindle edition specifically. Either way it’s a minor gripe you should be aware of.)In closing I’ll say one thing: I’ll never see the card with the sextant on it in theÃ Â 7 Wonders GameÃ Â board game quite the same way again.

I loved the detail and love that the author put into this book. We don’t often think how absolutely critical accurate time-keeping is. For example, our global GPS satellite system is "just" scores of super accurate clocks orbiting the Earth sending out time signals that allow us to calculate accurate Latitude/Longitude/Altitude. All of our computers world-wide depend on accurate time for many aspects of their operation. The stock market, medical devices, banking, etc. etc. rely on accurate timing. This book gives an amazing and engaging account of the early work done over decades to invent an accurate timepiece.

Mostly a bio about the man who invented the best chronometers (clocks) in the pre industiral revolution world... and made good navigation possible... if you are wondering what clocks have to do with navigation, then you need to read this... easy to do, short, concise and full of good info... not an ’adventure novel’... however, a good historical revelation...

If you think youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve been screwed by ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The ManÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ boy you should hear the story of John Harrison! The British Empire was built on its sailing vessels, and those ships used John HarrisonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sea clocks which measure longitude. Longitude was ridiculously hard to compute back in the day, the British government (and others) offered a sizable reward to the person who solved it. Due to bureaucratic b.s., greed, and scientific jealously John Harrison was never paid his full reward, had his intellectual property stolen, and was not given credit.

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