

Your View: Latest Spinner book is a must-read for all in New Bedford

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The latest book from Spinner Publications Inc. — "A Picture History of New Bedford, Volume One: 1602 to 1925," is absolutely riveting.

Throughout SouthCoast and beyond, "The Picture History of New Bedford" written and edited by Spinner Publisher Joseph D. Thomas, Alfred H. Saulniers, Natalie A. White, Marsha L. McCabe and Jay Avila (there were also many contributing writers) has already generated more enthusiasm about this great city than any hundred speeches spouted by office-seeking politicians.

I have seen people who ordinarily dismiss history as "boring" instantly captivated as they flip through the pages and encounter the haunting images of our city's past: vintage photographs of whaling mansions and three-decker tenements, commercial streets and farms, trolleys and theaters, churches and lighthouses, boats and factories, hospitals and fire departments, streetcars and ferries, hotels and ball fields.

Among the scores of influential figures we meet in this very readable volume are explorer Bartolomew Gosnold, Native American leader Metacomet, whaling captain and philanthropist Paul Cuffee, abolitionist Frederick Douglass, inventors Lewis Temple and Ebenezer Pierce, Civil War hero Sgt. William Carney, World War I ace Frank Baylies, educator Elizabeth Carter Brooks, historian and poet Daniel Ricketson, photographer Albert Cook Church, longtime Mayor Charles S. Ashley and Capt. Daniel F. Mullins, "father of modern-day commercial fishing."

However, this is not a volume that focuses solely on the famous. So-called ordinary men and women, sailmakers, coopers, blacksmiths, ice cutters, glassmakers, shoemakers, textile millworkers, sewer workers, cemetery workers, road builders and others whose names are lost to history are celebrated here as much as the powerful founding families of New Bedford: the Russells, the Rotches, the Rodmans.

Most captivating to me are the contributions and institutions of the immigrants from Quebec, England, Portugal, the Azores, Madeira, Cape Verde, Ireland, Poland, Lebanon, Germany, Greece, Poland, Sweden and Italy, as well as many other countries.

This volume is replete with inspirational stories about upward mobility, or "The American Dream."

I confess I took particular delight in the inclusion of many stories related to French-Canadians and Franco-Americans: the building of St. Anthony of Padua Church, one of the most spectacular churches in New England, the close encounter whaling adventure of Arthur Cotnoir, the lengthy harness racing career of Joseph Bolduc, and the prominent architect Louis E. Destremps, whose buildings included the Orpheum Theatre, Car Bar and the Star Store.

North End, South End, West End, Downtown. After reading this book, one concludes the entire city of New Bedford is all one big "historic district."

We New Bedfordites can be thankful we have Joseph D. Thomas not only for this volume and its forthcoming sequel, but for his tireless work and dedication over the past three decades preserving, promoting and disseminating the collective history and culture of our people. He ranks, in my opinion, amongst the greatest historians our city has ever known.