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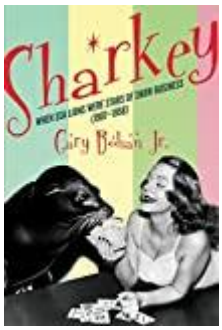
Gary Bohan. *Sharkey: When Sea Lions Were Stars of Show Business.* Excelsior Editions. Albany: Excelsior Editions, 2022. 316 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4384-8712-0.



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On the evening of Friday, December 13, 1929, a fire ripped through a home in Kingston, New York. The fire, caused by a kerosene stove, spread quickly and forced the inhabitants of the building to take refuge in a large pool. As the inferno raged, those trapped in the tub were forced to surface for air and then dip back into the water to escape the heat. By the time firefighters arrived, they found that all eleven sea lions in the tub, and one that had taken refuge elsewhere in the house, had died. This tragedy, detailed at the end of the first chapter of Gary Bohan Jr's *Sharkey: When Sea Lions Were Stars of Show Business (1907-1958)*, uses these deaths as a point of disruption between the early years of sea lion show business and the later years in the book. While it might seem odd to end the first chapter with something that occurs in the middle of the book's timeline, Bohan places this tragedy at the forefront of the book to serve as a touchpoint around which he builds his time line backward and forward. Overall, this works well, and *Sharkey* is a solid popular history book that brings a family's history of sea lion training to life for the reader.

Sharkey tells the history of trained sea lions in the entertainment industry. Modern readers will be aware that there were dogs, dolphins, and chimpanzees in the entertainment industry. But they may be less familiar with the history of sea lions. Beginning in 1907, sea lions appeared in vaudeville shows, in circuses, on Broadway, and eventually on television. Bohan traces this entertainment history by following a family of trainers —the Huling family from Kingston, New York— and their sea lions. Sharkey, who lends his name to the book title, was one of the last seals trained by Mark Huling and became a worldwide celebrity, starring in Broadway plays, meeting Franklin Roosevelt, and sharing billing with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald.

Bohan has a personal interest in this history: he is the great-grandson of Mark Huling. This familial connection allows Bohan to use a variety of sources to flesh out both the story of Sharkey and

the personality of his trainer. For instance, when discussing Huling's reaction to an attempted kidnapping of Sharkey in Boston in 1940, he states that Huling became so agitated that he did something uncharacteristic and cursed. In the notes, Bohan credits his father for "bringing to my attention this little-known personality trait of Mark Huling" (p. 276). In addition to the traditional primary sources of archived newspapers and films, Bohan uses his own family's keepsakes as sources. He states that "Martha Kaiser, a close first cousin of Mark, kept a diary that repeatedly references the Huling family.... The reminisces described herein are drawn from her diary" (p. 289). His access to these sources brings the history to life and makes the book extremely readable.

Bohan is primarily concerned with the history of Sharkey and Mark Huling's movement through the entertainment industry, at the cost of other details, such as the process of training sea lions. He only briefly touches on the process of catching, keeping, and breeding sea lions for the entertainment industry. In a chapter about Mark Huling's sea lion training school, Bohan spends only a few paragraphs detailing those methods. He describes the method for teaching the trick of balancing a ball on the nose. Mark would place a wood paddle on the animal's nose to get it accustomed to the pressure. When this was accepted, the sea lion received a fish. Eventually the paddle was replaced with a leather ball held in place by the trainer, and over time, the trainer removed more of their hand from the ball until eventually, the sea lion could balance the ball without the trainer's help (p. 40). The process of training is only mentioned a few more times in the book, with attention paid to how Mark spoke to his sea lions (conversationally) and his teaching Sharkey to perform tricks more slowly to make them look harder (p. 212). In addition to the lack of training details, Bohan is also not interested in interrogating the moral or ethical issues involved in animal captivity.

This book would be well received in undergraduate history courses. The personal links between Bohan and his subject encourage questions about historical methods and the way that historians access and analyze historical materials. And while Bohan is uninterested in interrogating issues of morality and ethics, the book would be wonderful for prompting students to think about the use of animals in entertainment using a species that is usually forgotten in these discussions. Overall, the book engagingly details the history of sea lion entertainment and prompts questions about how we can use this microhistory to understand larger themes in the history of animal-human relations.

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