

The Searunners' Cache

By Capwell Wyckoff

A review by David M. Baumann

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1,118 words

Albert Capwell Wyckoff wrote twenty-one juvenile adventure-mysteries that were published in the eight years of 1929-1936. Wyckoff was 26 when his first novel was published, and he was 33 when he stopped writing novels of this genre. He had done a lot of writing in those years, between two and three books a year. The twenty-one novels are comprised of the ten-volume Mercer Boys series, the four-volume Mystery Hunters series, and seven single titles—although the first two of these feature the same characters and can be considered a two-volume series. The last two single titles are the scarcest. These are *The Sea Runners' Cache*, published in 1935, and *The Search for the City of Ghosts*, published in 1936.

I own two copies of *The Sea Runners' Cache*, both in dust jacket. That's because I bought one by mistake, negotiating with a bookseller for an acceptable price and then realizing with a chagrining dope-slap that I already had a copy when I received the second one and set out with great satisfaction to place it on my shelf with the rest of my Wyckoff collection.

It was more than twenty years ago when I completed my collection of books by Capwell Wyckoff, and I read them all at that time. I have reread one or another of them in the intervening years. When Nick Klaus wrote to tell me that he had just read and written an article about *The Search for the City of Ghosts*, I had the idea that I could read the other scarce "final" juvenile book by Wyckoff, and then Nick and I could prepare joint articles on these two offerings. When he and I were in excited agreement over the prospect, I pulled *The Sea Runners' Cache* off the shelf and entered its adventuresome pages for the second time.

Since twenty years had passed, I remembered only a little about the story, but I quickly got into the tale. It's about three college men who have just completed their freshman year. These fellows, Scott Mack, Bruce Powell, and Calvin Borden had been roommates for the just-completed school year and had become good friends. They decide to spend the summer together if they can pull it off. Plans to go camping for the summer are quickly dropped when Scott receives a letter from his mother asking him if he is willing to spend his time off at her brother's place to help him solve a mystery. He agrees, and asks Bruce and Cal if they'd like to join him; they are enthusiastic about doing so.

Scott's uncle is known as Cap'n Ed, who lives with an unmarried daughter in a small seaside town in southern New Jersey. The boys' college is in the northern part of the state, so they don't have far to go. Cap'n Ed is a fisherman who does pretty well for himself. He owns a shed where he processes his catch, and has several men on hire who help him with fishing the ocean and local oyster beds. But for some time he's been the target of an enemy who has tried to ruin him by sabotaging his ships, his shed, or his catch. So far the damage has been more annoying than ruinous, but he is wary that the stakes may be about to get higher, and he has no idea who his enemy is or why he is such a target for the mischief.

Moreover, he has his eye on purchasing an old, beautiful stone mansion on the bay not far from the little cottage where he and his daughter now live. The mansion had been owned by a fellow named Ramsey who was widely known to be a smuggler, or "sea runner". Ramsey has recently

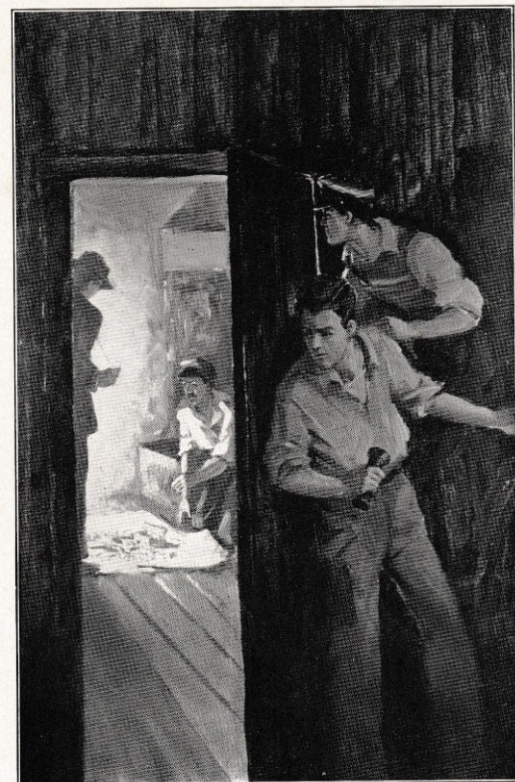
died and his heirs live in England; the heirs want to sell the place, and Cap'n Ed will be glad to take it off their hands.

Thing is, rumor has it that Ramsey had died with some of his ill-gotten goods still hidden in the mansion. Ed says that that is not likely, since "government men" had searched the place carefully and found nothing; nonetheless, it quickly becomes obvious that another party is immensely interested in searching the place for some sort of treasure, and someone is doing his best to slow down or even block the sale of the estate to Cap'n Ed. In a while, it becomes clear that there is, in fact, more than one party who is repeatedly searching the mansion at night. Scott, assisted by Bruce and Cal, are brought in to help Uncle Ed with both mysteries.

For most of the book, a variety of clues and a series of adventures gradually make both matters ever more clear. There are a couple of further sabotage attempts on Cap'n Ed's property, and the identities of those who search the mansion at one time or another are discovered step by step. Scott, Bruce, and Cal have several nighttime adventures as well as daytime excursions on both land and sea. They walk, they sail, and they swim. They run an errand now and again, visiting the shops of the nearby village and the home of a friend of Cap'n Ed's daughter. Each time they make a foray, they learn a bit more about what's going on, and by whom, and why, until all is clear. In the second half of the book, the lads are captured more than once, and threatened with being shanghaied or shot or both. Escape scenes are well done. In the end, it all falls into place.

My opinion? Well, it was a good story; not great, but good. In the wider context of the stories by Wyckoff, there are others that are better. This story does not convey the typical Wyckoffian atmosphere of being able to immerse the reader into the age in which the story is set. In this case, rather than being a part of the story, the reader watches it from the outside. Further, the threads of which bad guys are doing what and why become rather complex and eventually unconvincing, and the resolution just may be a teensy bit too pat.

The frontispiece depicts a scene toward the end of the book and is identified as such, and provides a little bit of a spoiler, which is mildly annoying. It is also the same scene as the cover of the dust jacket, although the latter is done in color, of course.



*They were busily engaged in spreading the jewelry
on the floor beside the lamp.*
(Page 216) (THE SEA RUNNERS' CACHE)

As I recall, *The Search for the City of Ghosts* is better done, but I turn this two-fer article over to Nick Klaus for his review of what was Wyckoff's final offering in the genre of juvenile adventure-mysteries.