

(Continued from front flap)

Harshly criticized by his enemies for ruthless business tactics but loved by his employees, he was unapologetic in his quest for wealth, asserting “Spreckels’s success is California’s success.” But there’s always a cost for single-minded determination; the legendary family quarrels even included a murder charge. Spreckels’s biography is one of business triumph and tragedy, a portrait of a family torn apart by money, jealousy, and ego.

SANDRA E. BONURA is a historian, researcher, and writer. A retired professor of education and school counseling, she is the author of *Empire Builder: John D. Spreckels and the Making of San Diego* (Nebraska, 2020); *Light in the Queen’s Garden: Ida May Pope, Pioneer for Hawai‘i’s Daughters*; and *An American Girl in the Hawaiian Islands: Letters of Carrie Prudence Winter, 1890–1893*.

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AMERICAN HISTORY / WESTERN HISTORY / CALIFORNIA / BIOGRAPHY

“Imagine 150 years from now that no one had written the comprehensive history of Elon Musk. Sandra Bonura is the first biographer to give a heart and soul to Claus Spreckels, his era’s Musk. Fiercely independent, resourceful, and combative, Spreckels arguably altered the history of California more than anyone in his time. In this deeply researched biography Bonura paints a complete tapestry of Spreckels’s complicated business and family life, wealth beyond imagination, and the incredible drive of a titan without peer.”

—VINCENT J. DICKS, author of *Forsaken Kings: Emma Spreckels, the Surfer of Asbury Park*

“San Francisco occupies the tip of a peninsula, the thumb of a grasping hand around a storied bay. Anyone who deeply examines the history of the city begins to suspect the print of that thumb belongs to nineteenth-century ‘Sugar King’ Claus Spreckels. More than a century after his death, the mark of this blue-collar tycoon can still be found in almost every square mile of San Francisco.”

—WOODY LABOUNTY, president and CEO of San Francisco Heritage

“Anyone making a shortlist (however short the list) of the most important people that influenced the development of Hawai‘i in the late nineteenth century has to include Claus Spreckels. Sugar and the ‘Sugar King’ changed the economic and social make-up of the Hawaiian Islands, and Sandra Bonura takes us through the journey of his life and the profound legacy he left.”

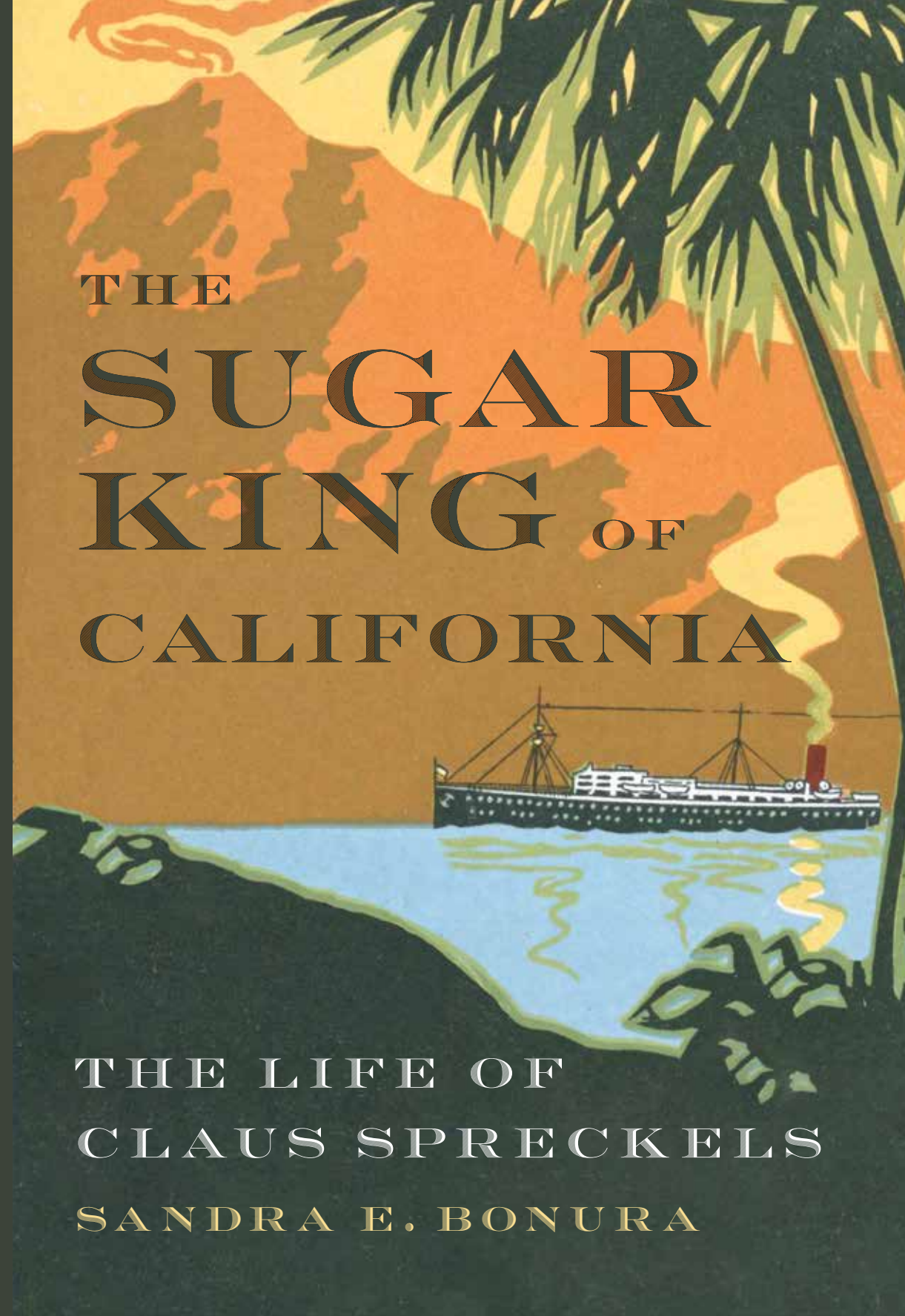
—PETER T. YOUNG, designated a Living Treasure of Hawai‘i by the Honpa Hongwanji and president of Ho‘okuleana LLC

“This book gives a taste of the American dream, lived by a poor German farmhand, who became one of those mythical figures who created modern California. Bonura presents Claus Spreckels’s life full of work, rude business methods, luck, and eventually moderation—and combines this with a touching history of his private life.”

—UWE SPIEKERMANN, former deputy director of the German Historical Institute in Washington DC



BONURA  
THE SUGAR KING  
OF CALIFORNIA



THE LIFE OF  
CLAUS SPRECKELS  
SANDRA E. BONURA

NEBRASKA

US \$39.95

Claus Spreckels (1828–1908) immigrated from his homeland of Germany to the United States with only seventy-five cents in his pocket, built a sugar empire, and became one of the richest Americans in history alongside John D. Rockefeller, Warren Buffett, and Bill Gates. Migrating to San Francisco after the gold rush, Spreckels built the largest sugar beet factory of its kind in the United States. His sugar beet production in the Salinas Valley changed the focus of valley agriculture from dry to irrigated crops, resulting in the vast modern agricultural-industrial economy in today’s “Salad Bowl of the World.” When Spreckels gave America its first sugar cube, he became “the sugar king.”

The indomitable Spreckels was a colorful and complicated character on both sides of the Pacific. A kingpin in the development of the Hawai‘i-California sugarcane industry, he wielded a clenched fist over Hawai‘i’s economy for nearly two decades after occupying a position of unrivaled power and political influence with the Hawaiian monarchy, while also advancing major technology developments on the islands. The Sugar King’s legacy continued as the Spreckels family developed large portions of California, building and breaking monopolies in agriculture, shipping, railroading, finance, real estate, horse breeding, utilities, streetcars, and water infrastructure, and building entire towns and cities from infrastructure to superstructure.

In *The Sugar King of California* Sandra E. Bonura tells the rags-to-riches story of Spreckels’s role in the developments of the sugarcane industry in the American West and across the Pacific, triumphing in a milieu rife with cronyism and corruption and ultimately transforming California’s industry and labor.

(Continued on back flap)