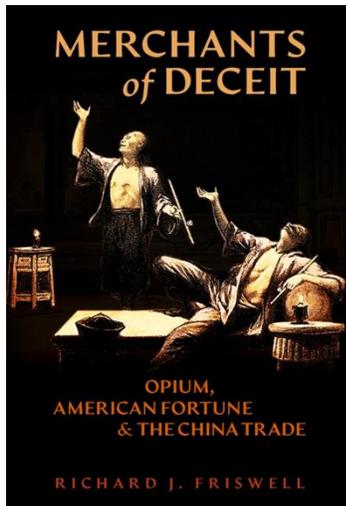


## **Brief Synopsis: Merchants of Deceit: *Opium, American Fortune & the China Trade***

By Richard J. Friswell

Hammonasset House Publishers (2022)



**Merchants of Deceit: *Opium, American Fortune & the China Trade*** traces the life and times of 19<sup>th</sup> century Connecticut resident, Samuel Russell, who made his fortune selling opium during the height of the China trade, in the period 1820-40. A combination of historical research of life in Canton, China, during that period—both for Western businessmen and Chinese living under the centuries’-old rule of Qing-era dynastic emperors—brings these competing forces together to reveal **a little-known chapter in American history**, an elusive game of cat and mouse that would, in turn, alter the course of world history.

The new world Samuel Russell entered in 1819 was one cloaked in mystery for centuries. A restless and ambitious man of thirty, this Connecticut mill-goods agent had just arrived in Canton, China, following a tempestuous months’-long sea passage. His hope: that there, in this far-flung destination on the other side of the world, he might make a name—and fortune—for himself.

It is in feudal Canton, China, and in the Portuguese coastal trading outpost of Macao, where he wins friends and allies; attracts enemies and adversaries; succumbs to love’s temptation and comes to know devastating loss; strikes a bargain-or-two with the devil; saves lives, even as he puts millions more at risk. And while he places his trust in only a handful of men, he is often plagued by doubt and self-recrimination, isolation, fitful dream-addled sleep, and profound loneliness. In the end, he comes to know tragedy and betrayal, as a series of events forces him to flee China for his very life.

*“IT’S A BONE-CHILLING JANUARY day in `28, when we once again clear Macao Roads, the treacherous, reef-strewn gateway from the South China Sea into the protected waters of the Pearl River. And, except for my perilous brush with death in a South American hospital and a risky engagement with a slave revolt there, at least I can claim it was an ‘uneventful’ sea voyage from Boston. Heavy sheets of cold, gray rain sweep down from looming fissures overhead, slanting across the Pearl’s broad estuary. The deluge obscures the Macao skyline and, to the east, blankets the distant, low-slung archipelago beyond Lintin Island.”*

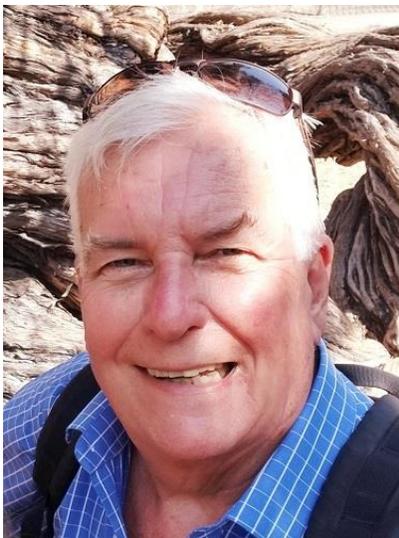
**Merchants of Deceit** is a carefully researched record of the China Trade as it existed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a cultural historian, my task as a writer was to link fictional events to documented facts affecting the actions and decisions of men who committed to sell a contraband drug in a nation where expulsion and even deaths were the consequence of being caught. Elaborate

elusive systems involving the natural features of the Pearl River and a long list of authorities who had to be 'satisfied' before an American trader like Sam Russell could ever arrive safely at his offices in Canton, becomes the book's central narrative.

**Merchants of Deceit: Opium, American Fortune & the China Trade**, by Richard J. Friswell, is available through major book retailers, and on Amazon and other book sales Internet sites. 310 pages, 40 illustrations \$27.95 U.S.

<https://www.amazon.com/Merchants-Deceit-Opium-American-Fortune/dp/0996616969>

### Richard Friswell



Richard Friswell is a cultural historian and Visiting Scholar at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, where he co-directs the William Wasch Seminars, the university's adult education outreach program. He has written nearly 400 critical essays on art, design and history of art. His previous books include a series of essays entitled, *Balancing Act: Postcards from the Edge of Risk and Reward* (2015) and *Hudson River Chronicles: In Search of the Splendid & Sublime on America's 'First' River* (a historical fiction work about American painter, Thomas Cole [Hammonasset House Publ.], 2019). His latest book *Merchants of Deceit: Opium, American Fortune & the China Trade* (2022) considers the life and times of Connecticut resident Samuel

Russell and his experiences in Canton during the period 1819-1832. His books and lectures both deal with topics of cultural history through the imagined eye of a cultural historian and storyteller. He speaks widely on topics related to the 'Modern Era,' a time during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century when Western civilization was experiencing rapid change in the face of the Industrial Revolution and widespread political upheaval. He lives and writes in Branford, CT.