FINAL REPORT
Lake erie project/nea grant #32-5530-0009
Traditional arts program
Ohio arts council

Introduction

Using funds awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ohio Arts Council has been conducting a field research, publication and public presentation project on the traditional arts and customs of the commercial fishing industry in the Western Basin of Lake Erie (see attached maps for location). Our application to NEA requested support for the fieldwork phase of this project. Later phases of the project, to be supported by the Ohio Arts Council and the Ohio Sea Grant Program (part of the Ohio State University Center for Lake Erie Area Research), include (1) the preparation and local distribution of a publication on these traditional arts and customs, (2) the production of public programs on the project for fishermen and other local residents and (3) the preparation of teaching materials on the traditions of Lake Erie fishing by the Ohio Sea Grant Education Office to be used by area middle-school teachers. Now that the fieldwork and documentation for which NEA support was awarded has been completed, we are submitting this final report on the work completed thus far, which includes a plan for the work yet to be done.

The Occupational Context

Contrary to popular belief and recent journalistic reportage, Lake Erie continues to produce more fish for human consumption than the other Great Lakes combined, though much of this total catch is taken by Canadian fishermen from their own waters. Economic as well as biological changes, particularly those which mark the shift of government and business support from commercial fishing to sport fishing, are responsible for the shorter smaller and less profitable catches and general hard times of commercial fishing on the Ohio side of the Lake.

As a recent *New York Times* article pointed out, commercial fishing (and sport fishing, too, for that matter) is, in general, a process by which fuel is converted into fish. A boat leaves the dock, full of fuel and crew (both which cost money), and returns home, hopefully full of fish (which can be converted into money to cover expenses, to return a profit, and to buy more fuel to start the whole process over again). The many techniques of commercial fishing--designing, making and repairing boats and nets; knowing how and where to look for fish of certain species at different times of the year; the division of labor on the boat; the process of setting and pulling nets; the ways of outwitting the authorities by bending or breaking regulations; and so on--all of these have to do with minimizing the amount of fuel and money needed to catch the maximum tonnage of fish. Over the past century, technological innovations, including the manufacture of boats from steel instead of wood, the shift from sail to steam to gasoline power, the increased use of specialized fish-finding equipment, the improvement of Lake weather reporting, and, most importantly, the introduction of nylon nets after World War II to replace the more quickly-rotting cotton ones--have improved the outcome of the fuel/fish equation

on Lake Erie and elsewhere. These and other innovations, though, have become accepted by being fitted into a human system of knowledge, preference and effort, shared among fishermen as a group. Whatever the equipment, the techniques of commercial fishing are learned informally, by day-to-day participation in work situations where these techniques are practiced, their mastery is valued, and their bungling is chastised.

During the time of our fieldwork, Ohio Lake Erie commercial fishermen utilized one of three fishing techniques--trap-netting, gill-netting, and seining. Trap-netting requires an elaborate and carefully designed net structure which is set in the water at a right angle to the suspected path of traveling fish. When fish confront the long "lead" of a trap net, made of heavy-duty netting so that it can be seen by fish underwater, they turn and swim along it, hopefully into a series of successively smaller boxes of net which trap them alive inside. This type of fishing is done both close in and out away from shore, and the length and shape of the lead, the shape of the box openings, the dimensions of the boxes and the placement of the nets themselves all vary, depending upon time of year, the intended location of the net and the behavior of the species fished. Trap nets are marked in the water by buoys at the far end of the lead and at the box, topped by flags with the fisherman's name. Even with buoys and navigational equipment, considerable native ability is required to locate a trap net when the shore is too distant to use as a guide, and when the sky and water visually blend together.

Upon arriving at the box, the fishermen haul the net up next to the side of the boat and unload the fish (see photo 1), placing each allowable species in wooden or plastic containers and icing the catch for the trip back to the fish house. Trap nets are usually set every two weeks, depending upon weather, water and fish movements. A typical trap-netting trip begins at 7:00 a.m., can last until 3:00 or 4:00 p.m., and can involve the "pulling" of 12 to 20 nets.

As mentioned, trap nets need to be custom-made by individual fisherman with necessary skill, and their design depends upon a number of different biological and geographical factors. While some fisherman may scheme out their net patterns on graph paper (see photo 2), the actual construction of a hundred-foot long net structure with a series of complicated tapers of different angles in the boxes (made by counting "so many meshes over, so many meshes down" – see photo 3) is done largely by memory and experience in the net yard. In addition, Lake turbulence, damage caused in pulling and the rotting of effects of water render even the heavy, tarred netting used for trap net fishing in constant need of repair. On almost any off day, and sometimes even when part of a crew is fishing, someone will be on shore at the crew's net yard, retyping broken knots in the mesh, retarring worn areas in the net or cutting out and replacing rotted sections (see photo 4).

The trap net boat itself differs in design from boats used in other types of commercial fishing. Approximately 30 feet long, it has a small cabin at the bow and low sides for ease in pulling the nets out and fish into the boat. The deck is wide and flat, to accommodate the boxes of fish. Steel boats replaced wooden ones about 60 years ago. There were a number of boat builders and boatbuilding companies along the Ohio shore of the western Lake, but today there is only one metal-fabricating firm equipped to build commercial fishing boats, and this company has only repaired them for years, since the fishing business is not nearly lucrative enough to justify the expense of $20,000 for a new boat.

At the beginning of our fieldwork, Ohio gill-netting was limited, by law, to those sections of the American Lake east of the Vermilion River mouth, and the only three remaining gill-net ports were Vermilion, Cleveland and, just west of the Ohio-Pennsylvania border, Conneaut. In 1984, gill-netting was prohibited, period. A single gill net is roughly 6 feet high and 50 feet long, although a number of nets may be set end to end. They are made of very thin nylon mesh, which is translucent and thus more or less invisible to fish (see photo 5). Set, again, at a right angle to the presumed path of fish, the gill net catches fish as they swim through it and are caught by their gills in the mesh. Although there are legal limits to the size of the mesh, there is some leeway so that fishermen can adjust mesh size to the species of fish they seek. Gill nets are set either on the Lake bottom or closer to the surface, depending on the traveling habits of fish species in different areas of the Lake at different times.

The gill net is pulled into the boat by means of a motorized pulley set inside an open port at the front of the boat. Once inside, the nets are piled into boxes and the hands remove the fish, one by one**,** from the net (see photo 6). Free of fish, the nets are then sent back out via a similar pulley set inside the stern. Unlike trap net boats, gill net “tugs" (as they are often called) are completely enclosed, so that the time-consuming work of removing fish by hand can be done out of the sun and weather (see photo 7).
Seining is not done with a boat, but rather off the shore of the lake or of the shallow Sandusky Bay towards the lake's western end. A seine net (usually a half mile in length and ten feet high with a quarter mile line at each end) is towed out in a large circle from the shore seining site by a small boat or skiff. The net contains a large pouch or "pocket" at its center. The ends of the line, stretched out away from the site by poles, are drawn into shore by a powered winch, and the circle of line and net are pulled into shore over a three-or four-hour period, gradually drawing the captured fish into the pocket. When only the pocket remains in the water, its edges are lifted above water and staked in place and the crew members, who have moved a half-submerged skiff next to the pocket, pass fish into the skiff with a hand net or by hand where, still in the water, they are sorted and loaded into trucks (see photo 8).

The end of any fishing day comes at three or four or later in the afternoon--at the fish house. Although at one time there were a dozen or so wholesalers along the western Lake Erie shore alone, by the time of our fieldwork there were only three--Kishman Fish Company in Vermilion (the oldest existing fish house in the area, which closed after the 1983 fishing season to make way for riverfront condominiums--see photo 9), Shoreline Fish Company in Sandusky, and Port Clinton Fish Company in Port Clinton. In the middle or late afternoon, trap net and gill net boats and seiners’ trucks arrive at the fish houses, and the fish they bring, al ready sorted by species, are rapidly and efficiently conveyor-belted into the building, boxed, iced, weighed, labeled, and prepared for shipment via truck to fish markets, restaurants, throughout Ohio and the larger region. Whenever the pace of work at the fish house is slack (which is most of the time except the afternoon), there is much lounging about, joking, card playing, horse-betting, griping, and storytelling (see photo 10).

Ohio's commercial fishermen work under a very large number of regulations, conceived and written by the Division of Wildlife of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and codified by the Ohio General Assembly (the State Legislature). There are regulations on the length of the fishing season for each of the three (now two) fishing

techniques; on the possibility (which is now very slim) of obtaining a new commercial fishing license or transferring an existing one to another individual; on areas of the Lake which may not be fished at all or only at certain times of the season; on the total length of nets per license; on the maximum dimensions of individual nets; on proper identification of nets; on the size of mesh in nets; on the times of day when fishing is allowed; on the species that can legally be taken; and on the minimum size of legal species. These regulations change from time to time, of course, in response to changes documented by the Wildlife Division's biologists, and/or in response to more or less direct political pressure from sport fishing or other related interests.These regulations are enforced through detailed records that fishermen and fish house operators are required to maintain and submit, and, more directly, by unannounced spot checks of any part of a fishing operation by ODW enforcement officers, who are empowered to confiscate illegal catches and to arrest or issue citations to fishermen who break regulations.

To commercial fishermen, the most crucial short-term regulations are those concerning mesh size, since an increase in the means that entire net stocks become useless overnight and must be replaced at high cost; and those concerning fish size limits, since an increase in the minimum size for one or move species can mean wasted time throwing back undersized fish (remember the fuel/fish equation), and can also make existing nets unusable. The most problematic long-term regulations are those concerning legal species. Over the past twenty-five years, and especially since the Lake Erie "mercury scare," as fishermen call it, of the early 1970's, the number of permissable species has been severely reduced. A major loss occurred in 1972, when commercial fishermen were prohibited from taking walleye, the most popular sport fish in the Lake, often sold under the name of "pickerel" at fish markets and seafood restaurants all along the Lake and throughout the region. It is particularly irksome to commercial fishermen that the pickerel on Ohio restaurant tables be imported at high cost from Canada, on whose side of Lake Erie the fish can be caught commercially. "I never saw a line drawn on the Lake," said more than one fisherman. Whatever side of this controversy you take, it is clear that commercial fishermen have been lifet with fewer species to take, many of which are less desirable for human consumption and thus have a lower wholesale value—sheephead, gizzard shad, buffalo, suckers—"Junk fish," as they are locally known.

Over the past decades, sport fishing has grown to be a substantial business along the Lake, attested to by the increasing number of marinas, hotels, restaurants and summertime developments along the shoreline. The economic value of sport fishing is considerable, and the sport fishery is a business that the State of Ohio does not want to jeopardize. At the same time, it should be news to no one that commercial fishermen in general are either romanticized as hardy, individualistic "hunters and entrepreneurs" going one-on-one with nature in a way that those who work in glass or ivory towers can only dimply imagine, or, perhaps more frequently, as poor, uneducated idlers and heavy drinkers who contribute to the general ill-being of the shabby communities which they inhabit. As Janet Gilmore, who has studied Oregon's commercial fisheries, has pointed out, the first, positive stereotype conforms to the esoteric image commercial fisherman like, at least, to hold of themselves and the second, negative stereotype conforms to the exoteric image outsiders (including many Ohio sport fishermen) hold of commercial fishermen.[1] This negative stereotype also conforms to the image commercial fishermen, with some justification, think outsiders hold of them.

Fieldwork

Over the past two fishing seasons, we have spent a total of twelve weeks on or along the Lake, observing, interviewing and documenting the work of commercial fishermen on fishing boats, at shore seining sites, at local fish wholesale houses and at leisure in restaurants, VFW halls, bars, and at kitchen tables. We have interviewed active and retired fishermen, members of their families, wholesale distributors, State of Ohio biologists and wildlife enforcement agents. We were lucky enough be able to document the techniques and customs of gill-net fishing before it was prohibited by state regulation a year ago. And, although we were unable to find "the quilting fisherman" (an inside joke with Bob Teske), we did find active verbal, material and customary traditions shared among local fishermen, through which the culture and identity of this group are expressed.

The following materials were created or compiled in the course of our fieldwork:
1. Approximately 45 hours of tape-recorded interviews, some 40 hours of which have been transcribed. (A sample is included with this report.) Interview topics include: (a) personal biographies of commercial fisherman; (b) descriptions of work techniques and the ways in which they were and are commonly learned; (c) comparisons of the conditions of work in the (both "good" and "bad") "old days" with conditions tocay; (d) explanations of net design construction and repair techniques; (e) stories about unusual or eccentric local "characters" who are or were part of the occupational group; (f) examples of weather and fish-finding signs, beliefs and prediction practices, including stories of unexpected encounters with bad weather; (g) expressions of opinion about the actions of state regulatory agencies and sport fishing interests which have harmed the local commercial fishing industry, including narratives about run-ins with enforcement officers (what folklorist Tim Cochrane has called "authority stories") [2] and sport fishermen; and (h) expressions of occupational identity (many of which we have come to call "It gets in your blood" stories), including descriptions of the tradition of fishing within area families, stories about fishermen's dissatisfaction with other kinds of work on shore and narratives about the conflicts between the images fishermen hold of themselves and the images they believe others hold of them.

2. Approximately 1100 black-and-white photographs, all printed onto contact sheets, of which 400 have been made into 5x7 prints in preparation for selecting about 100 images for the final publication. (Samples are included in this report.) The photos document: (a) the three fishing techniques practiced in Lake Erie during the time of our fieldwork; (b) examples of the material culture of the occupation (boats, buildings, tools and other equipment—see photo 11); (c) net design, construction and repair techniques; (d) work activities at local "fish houses"; and (e) portraits of commercial fishermen and, in some cases, their wives and families. About 15% of these black-and-white photographs are copies of historical photographs from the files of the Great Lakes Historical Society in Vermillion, Ohio, or from local newspapers, especially the Toledo Blade, which regularly printed photographs documenting the local fishing industry.
3. Approximately 720 color slides, which duplicate in color the subjects covered in the black-and-whites. The slides will be used in the public programs mentioned above, and the Ohio Sea Grant Program is considering the possibility of working with us to prepare a

slide or slide-tape presentation from this material. All of the black-and-white photographs and color slides have been numbered and their subjects indexed for easy access. Copies of the contact sheets and slides, with indices, will be provided to the Ohio Sea Grant Program in Columbus and the Great Lakes Historical Society in Vermilion (located in the area where the fieldwork was done).

4. Approximately 200 Xeroxed pages of manuscript and other printed sources, catalogs and other descriptive materials from netting and commercial fishing equipment suppliers and articles on the commercial fishing industry printed in area newspapers over the past forty years. Some of this material was used in the preliminary research and some of it will be included in the final publication and later public programs.

Traditions

The most widespread traditions among area commercial fishermen are those of artful verbal expression. Not everything that fishermen say is so artful, of course, and a good part of their oral communication is tied up with basic on-the-job instructions and banter (in which occupational jargon plays a part) or with conversational topics shared with the population at large; e.g., current happenings, domestic life, sports, politics and the like. The artful talking we have concentrated on though, has both narrative structure and a specific connection to the life of the fisherman. In the final publication and other later products of this project, we will pay particular attention to a few types of narrative art; descriptions of work; comparisons of the techniques and conditions of work in the old days with those of today; memorates and other verbal evidence of folk belief and practice; local character anecdotes; the "authority stories" mentioned above and “it gets in your blood” stories, all of which reveal a generally-shared occupational identity among fishermen in the area (and which also link Lake Erie fishermen with fishermen in other areas, who share many of those verbal traditions).

Descriptions of work comprise explanations of the major fishing techniques and discussion of the history of the occupation; the customary methods used to locate fish and avoid bad weather and the design, construction and use of boats, nets and other equipment. Narratives of this sort describe, among other things, most of the customary practices and material culture of the occupation. The portrayal of custom and craft in the final publication and other presentations will use these narratives and accompanying photographs as evidence.

Narratives comparing the old days to today generally focus on one of two comparisons. The first is the difficulty of work then as compared to the relative ease of work today, brought about by innovations in technique and technology. Many older fishermen speak, for instance, about the days of "wooden ships and iron men,” as compared to day, when the boats are made of steel and the men supposedly of lesser stuff. The second is the abundance of fish in the Lake in the old days, as compared to today, when biological conditions and, perhaps more importantly, increasingly severe state regulations have created conditions of for commercial fishermen. Stories and expressions of opinion on this second topic are generally part of longer discussions about state regulations (see "authority stories” below).

Under good weather conditions, Lake Erie is not as dangerous as open waters can be, and Lake Erie fishing trips almost never last more than a day these days. Despite this,

commercial fishing is still a chancy business, and Lake Erie fishermen, like fishermen everywhere, are aware of the signs that can indicate either a propitious or a risky day's work, in terms of both yield and safety. Narratives evidencing folk belief and practice provide justification for the insider's knowledge of experienced fishermen—knowledge about where to find fish, how to predict the changeable Lake weather and how to ensure general good luck or at least avoid bad (carry St. Christopher's medals, never fish on Sunday, etc.). Whether based in biology or the supernatural, fishermen's beliefs and practices and the narratives which support them enable fishermen to bring in the greatest possible catch at the least possible cost, both financial and human, and indicate the importance of traditional knowledge and healthy caution. Some of these narratives simply express or describe a belief or practice without providing specific examples of practice and consequence, as in the case with this example of a good luck ritual:

Every crew member who comes on board puts a penny up here (on the "dashboard" of the trap net boat, by the wheel). That way, he always has something to bring back. Always. When they quit, they take their penny with them...that means that she (the boat) is always going to bring you back. The boat owes you that penny. The boat owes you, see? You don't owe the boat nothing, but it owes you because it's got your penny. So it's always going to bring you back. She always does. So far.

In this case, the fisherman ("he") always has a positive financial return from the trip, job or season—the penny on the dash—and, at the same time, the penny ensures that the boat ("she") has an obligation to bring the fisherman back safe and sound.Most of these narratives, though, follow the classic pattern—they describe a belief or practice, its observance or violation and the consequence—as in the following example, in which the punishing agency is not God or Mother Nature but the Division of Wildlife of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

I've always said, if you fish on a Sunday, you'll lose more fish the next week than you caught on that day. One guy, he went fishing on a Sunday and fished pretty good that day. The next week, he was out and had great fishing, but two days that week, he got inspected by the Wildlife and they confiscated his whole haul for wrong species and being undersize. So he shouldn't have gone out on that Sunday before, just like I said.

Local character anecdotes told by take Erie fishermen are similar to those told in other groups and other places--they recount the heroic or anti-heroic exploits of exceptional individuals. These individuals singled out for such treatment usually live out one of the two stereotypes mentioned above. In the stories told about them, they are either men," exceptionally hard and diligent workers who could do the work of many under the worst possible conditions, or they are notable rascals, drinkers or lay bouts who put more effort into escaping useful work than Most men put into doing it. Occasionally, the two are combined into a portrait of an all-round hard-working and hard-playing fisherman. Some stories also tell of fishermen who are particularly adept at staying one step ahead of state wildlife enforcement agents—a sort of "Robin Hood" role in which local fishermen like to cast themselves. One older fisherman, now retired, began his work

on the water by running illegal liquor across from Canada during Prohibition, and his many remembrances about that time also convey this image.

I was proud of what I did. I think I did some good. I went over there and bought it. I didn't steal it. It was legal in Canada to buy it and they sold it to me. And I brought it over here where people was tickled to death to get it and get good stuff. So what have I got to be ashamed of? I didn't steal nothing.

Authority stories describe the relations between commercial fishermen and the representatives of state agencies which regulate the local industry. Like any group of workers, fishermen do not appreciate interference from those whose knowledge is based only upon "theory," removed from the test of day-to-day experience on the Lake. Fishermen take considerable pride and glee in relating stories of enforcement agents who can't tell one species of fish from another, or bureaucrats whose boats run out of gas in the middle of the Lake and who must be rescued by a passing commercial boat and of Columbus legislators who are surprised and impressed by the knowledge of commercial fishermen. Not surprisingly, authority stories present authorities and sports fishermen, whom commercial fishermen regard as the bedfellows of the state government, in the worst possible light.

Yes, that's when I was fishing for Bickley down there. One of the old-time game wardens come in there with two young fellows one day. They had just come out of college. Didn't even know what the hell a fish looked like. Came in there and he was going through all the boxes and showing them what a blue pike looked like, and a sauger, a sheephead, perch. "Now put it down in your mind now what they are." That's what they learned what a fish was. They maybe never seen a fish before that. But that's the way they learned. They would go in there to be a conservationist for trees and wildlife and stuff like that.

Like I said, when I fished for Lay Brothers out of Sandusky there, whenever they (game wardens) wanted to put a fish fry on, they would go through all the boats when they come in and took the dinner buckets. Every dinner bucket would be loaded with fish. We used to get madder than hell at them, but we couldn't do nothing. They would just take the fish. They wouldn't arrest us or nothing. They just confiscated the fish. Then the next night or tow, you'd see where they had a big fish fry.

They arrested them two guys with their golf clubs on the golf course. You heard about that, didn't ya? They was out there on the golf course that runs up past Huron. Teed off, and they looked, and there was a big fish in the creek right there, the water's only that deep, you know. And they were over there, beating that fish and carrying on, with their golf clubs. It just happened that somebody seen 'em, and they got arrested. I guess it's not sportsmanlike to club a salmon with a golf club.

Although many fishermen we interviewed told us authority stories, nearly every fisherman told us another sort of story, which changed in detail from individual to

individual, but which was fundamentally the same for all. We have come to call this the it gets in your blood story, and it describes the fishermen's identity in their own terms.

Many times, even the pattern of conversation in which the story was told was the same. We asked about the nature of the work, and the fishermen would respond with detailed descriptions of hard work, long hours and low pay. They would dwell on the unfairness of the commercial fishing laws. The fishermen presented themselves as threatened individuals and as a threatened group. Why then, we asked, do you continue to fish? Given all the hardships, why do you choose to be a fisherman in the first place? There are other jobs available in the area; why not take them?

They usually respond with such stock phrases as: “It gets in your blood." "Once you've fished, you don't want to do anything else." "I like working outdoors and being my own boss." Specific occupational values are reflected in these statements. By saying it is in their blood, they are admitting that they cannot really explain the hold fishing has on them; it is intuitive, perhaps irrational and beyond reason. The activity has become a part of their psychological well-being. The word “blood” also suggests the traditionality of the work: their fathers and grandfathers were fishermen, and they have inherited the love of fishing from them. A sense of continuity, of being part of a tradition, keeps them from breaking that line. The fact that they all said basically the same thing shows their shared values and sense of community. The values of individualism and freedom are also projected here: the captain/owners are indeed their own bosses, and even the deckhands have more freedom than they would in factory jobs. They work long set hours during the season, but then during the off season, they are free to do what they want. Even though economic, governmental and biological conditions make them no longer as independent as they would prefer to be, fishermen clearly value their independence and regard it as an entitlement based upon their knowledge of the Lake and their history on it. The important point here is not so much the actual freedom and individuality they have, but that according to the stock phrases they say and the stories they tell, they see themselves as having them.

After the fishermen uttered one or more of these phrases, they often went on to tell a story for illustration, and these were the stories that showed remarkable uniformity. One example from Paul Leidorf, a 45 year old active trap-net fisherman, will suffice to represent the others. Mullen interviewed Leidorf and his friend and fellow fisherman Joe Herr on Herr's boat which was tied up at the fish house in Port Clinton (see photo 12). They were interested in getting their point-of-view across as they talked about their reasons for being fishermen. Leidorf emphatically stated the following:

Hey, we're free men. Once it gets in your blood...once you get on a boat, I can’t describe it, but once it’s in your blood, and you start at it...I started working on a boat when I was four years old; well, not working, but at least the old man was working and I was staying out of the way—Joe’s boys are the same. Once you get raised on these boats—I’ve had good jobs, and I’ve got enough education that I could go other places, and I worked on bearings and transmissions, and I hated that so bad I knew how many steps it took to get there...and it didn’t take as many steps to get out. Here, you work ten or twelve hours a day, seven days a week, but God damn, it’s a lot of fun, too.

This statement encapsulates the major values which are at the core of the fishermen's identity: freedom, independence, and an almost mystical attachment to the work, the continuity of tradition, and community. "We're free men" is a direct statement of their self-image; here it is stated defiantly against the sense of hostility they feel from the non-fishing community. Sport fishermen see them as pillagers of game fish, and the general public regards them as unkempt alcoholics. Their occupational identity comes from within the group but is in some ways a reaction to the negative ways they are portrayed from the outside; Leidorf's defiant tone here is a result of this. After his statement about freedom, he goes on to mention "blood," suggesting that their inner need to be fishermen is connected to their need for freedom. Family and identity are linked together when he refers to going out on his father's boat at the age of four, and he implies that his friend Joe is part of the same tradition because his sons are currently going out with him. These statements lead logically to a story to support and illustrate the values. His story is very short and imbedded in the rest of his statement so that it is almost indiscernible except in comparison to similar stories, such as Lewis Keller's wife's version:

He had—was it arthritis or rheumatism?—in his legs. And he had to go to the doctor with it. And the doctor said, "Lewie, you're going to have to get away from that job—away from that water." And so he told Lay Brothers. And he went to look for a job. Her left here one morning, came back that afternoon, he said, "Well, I got a job"....I said, "What kind of job is it?" He said, "Running party boats." (charter fishing trips for sports fishermen) I said, "Lewie, that's on the water! You're supposed to get..." He said, "I can't get away from the water." He said, "This way I won't be on it so much," and get wet like he did in fishing, but he couldn't give up that fishing.

The pull of the water is so strong that is willing to take a job catering to sports fishermen—who commercial fishermen believe are trying to rob them of the very independence the water provides--in order to somehow stay on the water. Other fishermen make their stories more complicated by describing the exact reasons for leaving the fish business, derails factory work, their relationship with their boss, and the final confrontation with the boss which severs their ties with the factory and frees them to return to the boats. Whether long or short, simple or complicated, the stories can be seen as one because they all follow the same pattern. The narratives heighten the image of the freedom-loving, independent fisherman by placing him in an artificial, human-made environment where these values are suppressed, and then they show the ultimate triumph of these values by the fisherman to his natural home on the sea.

The memory of this archetypal event in the fishermen's lives is maintained through the telling of the story, and each time they tell the story their identity is reinforced. Occupational memory and identity have become increasingly important as they perceive growing forces against them. As their very occupation itself is threatened with extinction, they hold on even more tenaciously to their identity and project it more defiantly through their experience narratives.

Public Presentations

As stated in our proposal, there will be three sorts of presentations of the traditional arts and customs of local commercial fishermen: an illustrated publication, appropriate for

both a general and a scholarly readership; a set of three public presentations, with slides and discussions, at sites within the area in which the fieldwork was done; and educational materials for Ohio middle-school teachers, to be prepared by the Ohio Sea Grant Education Program staff in cooperation with the two fieldworkers.

We are now assembling the manuscript for the publication, and we expect to finish it by the end of this summer. The outline for the manuscript is as follows:

1. Introduction: to be written by the fieldworkers. Topics covered: a brief history of commercial fishing on Lake Erie, general descriptions of major fishing techniques, an introduction to the traditional arts and customs of the occupation, a statement of the approach and the organization of the publication. (Some of this will be taken from and from papers read at recent scholarly meetings by the field-workers, copies of which have been sent to NEA.)

2. Narrative Sections: primarily taken from tape-recorded interviews, with background information provided by the fieldworkers. Organized into sections based upon recurring themes in fishermen's narratives. Final order may vary.

a. Descriptions of Work: fishing techniques and how they are learned, history of the occupation, work-related customs, material culture (with a subsection on net design, construction and repair).

b. The Old Days vs. Today: hard work vs. easier work, abundance vs. scarcity, “when men were men,” etc.

c. Beliefs and Practices: for locating fish, predicting bad weather, insuring good luck, etc. Memorates and personal experience narratives.

d. Local Characters: anecdotes of eccentric or heroic members of the occupation.

e. Occupational Conflict: with state government agents and sports fishermen/fishing interests, “authority stories,” etc.

f. Occupational Identity: "it gets in your blood" stories; fishermen's self-image as independent, self-made figures; the "call of the water" and dissatisfaction **with** other work; traditions of fishing.

3. Conclusion/Interpretive Essay: to be written by the fieldworkers; again, to be suitable for general and scholarly audiences. The idea of occupational identity; how it is revealed by these customary, material and especially narrative traditions.

4. Picture Section: of approximately 100 black-and-white photographs, both contemporary and historical. Topics covered: all three major fishing techniques; net design, construction and repair; boats, tools and equipment; fish house activities; portraits of fishermen and their wives and families; and miscellaneous (live hauling of fish to stocked ponds, minnow fishing and perhaps novelty photos). For economy’s sake, this section may be printed as a unit and inserted into the center the volume. If cost permits, though, photographs will be placed throughout the volume, near the printed information they depict.

We have had some preliminary discussions with the Director of the Ohio State University Press, and indications are that OSUP would be interested in publication of the volume. The Press has both a history of cooperative efforts with the Ohio Sea Grant Program (the most recent product of which is Milton Trautman’s The Fishes of Ohio) and a mandate from its Board to increase its publication activities in Ohio-related subjects, including Ohio folklore. The Ohio Sea Grant Program is willing to make a contribution to the cost of publication, and we are working with the Ohio Arts Council to identify funds

for a Council contribution as well. Once the manuscript is completed this summer, it can be reviewed and a publication schedule can be put into place.
The first of the public presentations is now being scheduled, and will be held at the Ohio State University's Lake Erie Research Lab on Gibraltar Island, just off South Bass Island, in July of this year. The other two (and perhaps more) presentations take place on the mainland during the fall and winter of 1985-6, in cooperation with the Ohio Sea Grant Cooperative Extension agents in the area.

The educational materials will be based on the material in the manuscript, and are thus waiting for the manuscript's completion. We have had some talks with members of the Sea Grant Education Office staff about this project and the classroom materials that might come from it, and their interest seems high.

This is an unusual project for the Education Office, and for that matter for the Sea Grant Program as a whole, which generally concentrates on biological, meteorological, engineering and economic studies. Educational materials produced by the Sea Grant are used in a variety of middle-school classes, and material from our project will, hopefully, create a new disciplinary audience for the program and expand its resources concerning life and work on Lake Erie in general.

Conclusion

The commercial fishing industry in Ohio is in serious trouble. Catches are smaller, as are income and profits, and state regulation has closed down a good part of the industry and threatens to effectively eliminate the rest of it.

This situation had both bad and good results for our fieldwork, There is simply much less of an occupation now than before--many fishermen, especially older ones, have left the business and work (and in many cases live) elsewhere; fewer boats go out each day; fewer fish houses remain open; many former gathering places of commercial fishermen are now filled with pleasure boaters; knowledge of the design and construction of nets is less common and that of boatbuilding is no longer put to use and is rapidly fading from working memory. In short, we found an especially striking version of the typical “you should have been here X years ago” situation familiar to cultural fieldworkers.

At the same time, the very hard going of the occupation seems to have created a resurgence of a more defiant expression of identity among local fishermen. As must be clear from this report, much of our interviewing ended up centering on some variation of this theme, and our publication will reflect the shape and content of those interviews. Had we done this project twenty or even ten years ago, the orientation of the fishermen and our reading of the traditional aspects of their work might have been quite different. Folklorists delude themselves if they think that their work alone will lead to the sort of social changes that they may hope for, even when those changes are also sought by their collaborators among “the folk.” There is no doubt, though, that folkloristic work can make a contribution to the understanding of the lively dimensions of a family, community or occupation that cannot be achieved by a strictly economic calculation or analysis--a human understanding that is necessary, but not sufficient, for any social change to take place.

We hope that our work thus far, and the publication and other products of fieldwork, will present the fishermen's point of view in a way that they would approve of,

and we hope it, along with their own efforts, will have some positive effect on the situation of their livelihood. We hope that our work will encourage other folklorists and students of culture to examine and report upon the narrative (as well as the material and performing) aspects of traditional art, and on the arts and customs of working groups of kinds. We appreciate the opportunity to have done this work and we encourage you to support similar projects in the future.

Timothy C. Lloyd
Ohio Arts Council

Patrick B. Mullen
Ohio State University

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