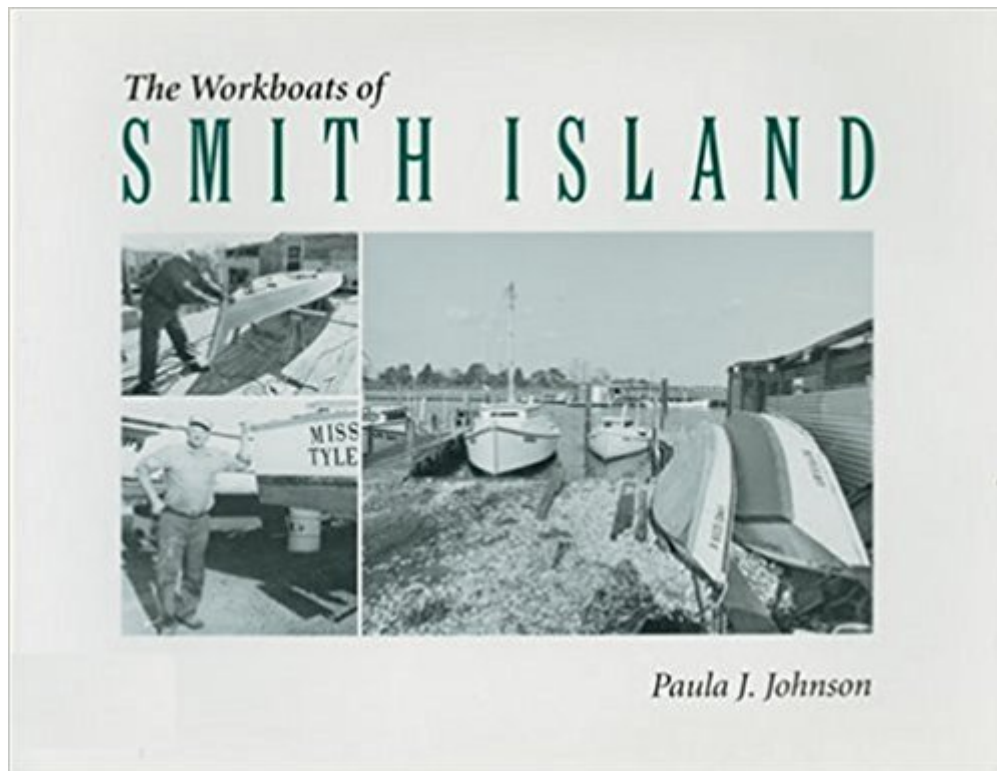




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The Workboats Of Smith Island



Synopsis

"The people of Smith Island need their boats. They depend on their boats to make a living. They depend on their boats to go back and forth to Crisfield... That's what keeps Smith Island going, these boats these people have around here. It's the only way." —Larry Marsh, Smith Island

Smith Island, the largest Maryland island in Chesapeake Bay, remains one of the most interesting communities on the Atlantic coast. Smith Islanders speak a sort of Tidewater English, are devoted to the Methodist faith, and maintain an intense relationship with the waters of the bay. For generations, they have relied on fishing, oystering, and crabbing for their livelihood and have developed workboats that reflect the conditions—both natural and cultural—of local waters. In *The Workboats of Smith Island*, Paula J. Johnson looks extensively at the remarkable variety of boats—documenting in fascinating detail their design, construction, and use—and the watermen who depend on them. Johnson identifies the three vessel types most common on Smith Island today: crab-scraping boats, deadrise workboats, and skiffs. Every Smith Islander, she notes, owns at least one workboat, and many have two or even three, requiring each for a different purpose—harvesting "peelers" (blue crabs in various stages of molting), oystering or crab potting, and providing basic transportation. Johnson talks with Smith Island's watermen and boatbuilders, as well as their families and neighbors, about the history and future of the island and about the boats that dominate the island's cultural landscape. She includes dozens of photographs and drawings of Smith Island's distinctive watercraft. The result is a singular portrait of a community inextricably linked to the water. "Paula Johnson has made a meaningful and substantial contribution to the literature of Chesapeake Bay maritime culture. Focusing on the community of Smith Island and its dependence on the Bay, *Workboats of Smith Island* will surely attract a variety of audiences, from scholars to general readers with an interest in the Chesapeake region and its maritime heritage." —Quentin T. Snediker, Mystic Seaport Museum

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Customer Reviews

Skiffs, crabscrapers, deadrise workboats—some islanders own three or more. Some boats are older than their owners. Molded fiberglass still hasn't quite replaced carpentered wood (Johnson even compares dollar costs). This big-hulled book will be a prime addition to the self-respecting Bay library. (Baltimore Sun) A book that is technically correct and friendly to read... The Workboats of Smith Island represents a top drawer job. Buy it, read it, and preserve it for posterity. (Wooden Boat) The Workboats of Smith Island provides a rare glimpse into a significant fleet of working watercraft in one of the Chesapeake's most fascinating and important watermen's communities. The book sets a standard of excellence for documentation of traditional workboats and their relationship to the people who build and use them. John Valliant, Executive Director, Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum) Traditional boatbuilders in the Chesapeake region do not use blueprints or plans to construct their crafts. Working with consultants, Johnson 'took the lines' off of two workboats and documented their construction... She also recounts various watermen's ideas about naming, painting, maintaining, and equipping their boats. (Watermen's Gazette) Johnson has produced a record for the ages of the look and lines of the crab-scraping boat, the skiff, and the deadrise workboat—the three basic Smith Island boat designs... Excellent technical drawings. (John Goodspeed Easton Star Democrat)

Paula J. Johnson is the maritime specialist in the History of Technology division of the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution. She edited and contributed to *Working the Water: The Commercial Fisheries of Maryland's Patuxent River*.

Smith Island is the preserve of some of the most individualistic Americans to be found anywhere. Cowboys of the Bay. Isolated and dependent upon small boats for commerce, transportation, livelihood and as a cultural icon, the Smith Islanders have produced a variety of watercraft that are much like the Islanders themselves, cranky, idiosyncratic but subject to the tides of change. The text leaves much unsaid and unillustrated such as the Hooper's Island drake tail, a boat fashioned after

the fantail of early destroyers. Building details are well illustrated but limited and the history of deadrise workboats, bugeyes, catrigged crabbing skiffs and the infamous gunning punts are not that well explained. The advent of the new wave of crab boats such as Buddy Evans BHM hull and the role of Robbins, the Jones Brothers on Hooper's Island and Markleys are poorly represented. Otherwise this is the best treatment of Smith Island since Chapelle's.

Anyone who is interested in deadrise workboats should buy this book. There are many books that describe the lives of Chesapeake watermen and there are some books that describe the design and construction of older fishing craft ("American Small Sailing Craft" by Howard Chapelle), but this is the only book that I am aware of that features actual lines drawings and construction information for the deadrise workboats that can be seen presently on the Chesapeake Bay. My only gripe is that the book features drawings for just one example of each type of boat (skiffs, crabscrapers, & deadrise workboats) used by the watermen.

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