The Folklife Expressions of Three Isle Royale Fishermen: A Sense of Place Examination

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THE FOLKLIFE EXPRESSIONS OF THREE ISLE ROYALE FISHERMEN:

A SENSE OF PLACE EXAMINATION

A Thesis

Presented to

the Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Timothy S. Cochrane

May 1982
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THE FOLKLIFE EXPRESSIONS OF THREE ISLE ROYALE FISHERMEN:

A SENSE OF PLACE EXAMINATION

Recommended May 24, 1982

Lynwood Montec
Director of Thesis

Camilla A. Collins

Approved July 6, 1982

Edward Gray
Dean of the Graduate College
Preface

The bleak future of commercial fishing on Isle Royale helped motivate me to undertake this study. However, more than venerating the past for its own sake, I wanted to see how and what outsiders can learn from the hard-won knowledge and regard fishermen have for Isle Royale. The underlying premise of this study was best expressed by David Brower when he wrote:

The places that we have roots in, and the flavor of their light and sound and feel when things are right in those places, are the wellsprings of our serenity. There must be something in them as important to us as a home slope is for Douglas Fir, an importance a geneticist has in mind when he says, "Plant local seed stock." Alienation does not come easily to living things; even in migration they contemplate a return. Granted, the affinity for the milestone places in a man's life is an affinity that is largely unstudied. . .

In short, I believe island fishermen were, to a degree, local seed stock and they have much to teach outsiders about Isle Royale.

Many island and "regular" people contributed to this study. I appreciate their help in putting me up for a night, finding a reference for me or just exchanging ideas. Ingeborg Holte, Stan Sivertson and Buddie Sivertson deserve special thanks; they made this thesis possible and enjoyable. Karan and Ingeborg Holte were especially helpful and generous in opening up their fishery to me. I would like to thank Lynwood Montell, Yi-Fu Tuan, Camilla Collins, Barbara Allen, LeAnn

and Pete Oikarinen, Stu Croll, Bob Janke, Thom Holden, and Noel Poe.

My family also was invaluable; thanks to my parents, Jean, Monty, and Olie.
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THE FOLKLIFE EXPRESSIONS OF THREE ISLE ROYALE FISHERMEN:
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Timothy Cochrane

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Directed by: Lynwood Montell, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Camilla Collins

Department of Modern Languages

Western Kentucky University

and Intercultural Studies

Selected forms of three Isle Royale fishermen's folklife expressions--material folk culture, social folk custom, and narrative folklore--were documented and analyzed. The informants are representative of the group of Scandinavian fishermen who operated commercial fisheries on Isle Royale from the 1880s to date. Documentary and analytical emphasis centered on occupational aspects of their folklife expressions and the fishermen's perception of the island archipelago. Accordingly, special interest was focused on the fishermen's interplay with the Lake Superior and Isle Royale environs. Selected folklife expressions were analyzed to uncover fishermen's cognitive and affective responses to their insular environment. Analysis of their folklife expressions revealed the depth of fishermen's knowledge, interest, and acceptance of "the island" environment.

Complicating the documentary and analytical goals of this study were two major influences that have disrupted the fishermen's livelihood; namely, Isle Royale became a national park and the depletion of lake trout numbers in Lake Superior. The continued existence of commercial fishing on Isle Royale is threatened, as is the fishermen's folklife expressions. Consequently, the change brought about by outside influences has changed fishermen's perception of Isle Royale.
INTRODUCTION

THE THESIS TOPIC AND METHODOLOGY

Isle Royale is an island archipelago in northwest Lake Superior (see figures 1 and 2). Lake Superior's nature, often times turbulent, cold and unpredictable, deeply affects Isle Royale fishermen's lives. Since the 1830s European immigrants have fished Isle Royale waters. By 1900 the ethnic makeup of fishermen was almost entirely Scandinavian and predominantly Norwegian.

Isle Royale's Scandinavian fishermen are proud and determined individuals. They have had to be to thrive in Lake Superior's fierce weather and relatively meager fishery resources, as well as the economic and legislative heartbreaks. Commercial fishing in Isle Royale waters has always been a laborious and oftentimes dangerous task. Through the years, fishermen have worked long hard hours for a modest economic return.


3. Lake Superior's cold and clean water is a relatively sterile habitat for fish. The other Great Lakes were much better fish producers in comparison. For more information see, U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. U.S. Bureau of *Commercial Fisheries Digest* No. 27 (1950).
Figure 1. Map of Lake Superior
Figure 2. Map of Isle Royale
Isle Royale commercial fishing history is the story of successive groups of immigrants who tried fishing and moved on. Whatever the reason, most fishermen did not stay long. Those who did were mavericks. The three fishermen I interviewed are exceptions to the rule that most fishermen came to "the island" and moved on.\textsuperscript{4} Ingeborg Holte, Stan Sivertson and Buddie Sivertson come from long time Isle Royale fishing families. Even today with commercial fishing almost over on Isle Royale, the island remains a crucial, perhaps dominating, portion of their lives. Ingeborg is a vivacious eighty-one-year-old who is of Swedish descent and who fished from Wright Island in Siskiwit Bay. Stan is a successful businessman who runs a fish company in Duluth, is sixty-nine years old, is of Norwegian descent and who fished from Washington Harbor. Buddie is Stan's nephew who also grew up in Washington Harbor and now works as a commercial artist. Unlike Ingeborg and Stan, Buddie spent only a few seasons fishing while an adolescent (see Appendix C for more information on Ingeborg, Stan and Buddie).

Isle Royale fishermen, especially those from families that stayed on the island for many years, shared much in common. They shared a potentielly dangerous occupation, a unique and insular island home, and often times they shared family kinship and/or ethnic allegiances. Some island fishermen identified so intensely with their occupation that

\textsuperscript{4} I have adopted the fishermen's definition of a "fisherman." A person is a fisherman if he or she grew up or was employed at an Isle Royale fishery, regardless of sex. Ironically, most "fishermen" are no longer fishing for a variety of reasons that will be explained in later chapters.

The "island" is the fishermen's name for Isle Royale. Other people familiar with Isle Royale have adopted this name as well.
it took precedence over ethnic group identification. For example, when I asked Stan Sivertson, "Which would you consider yourself first, a Norwegian or a fisherman?" He responded, "Oh, I guess I'd have to be a fisherman."  

Fishermen were intimately involved with the Lake Superior environment. Fishing success depended upon the Scandinavian fishermen's understanding of and adaptation to fresh water conditions and fish. Fishermen's involvement with Isle Royale's littoral area was so consuming that they knew little about the island's interior. Ingeborg Holte summed up the fishermen's perspective when she said, "We loved the island from the lake."  

The number of commercial fishermen on Isle Royale has varied tremendously since the peak period of Scandinavian immigration into the Upper Great Lakes area circa 1880-1900. Table 1 graphs the number of Isle Royale fishermen by year from 1886 to 1980. The graph illustrates the quick rise and periodic decline of commercial fishermen (see Appendix A, Historic Timetable, for more details). The major upswing of fishermen on Isle Royale between 1886 and 1894 corresponds with the Scandinavian immigration, commencement of regular boat service and the opening of larger markets in the midwest by railroad. The gradual

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5. Interview with Stanley Sivertson aboard the Wenonah at Winigo Ranger Station, Isle Royale, Michigan, 11 July 1980.


Table 1. Number of Commercial Fishermen on Isle Royale by Year: 1880-1980
downturn from 1894 to 1920 indicates the trend in which island fishermen moved on to more lucrative jobs on the mainland. The sudden downturn in numbers of fishermen from 1930 to 1937 shows that a majority left Isle Royale due to acquisition of their fisheries by National Park Commission land agents (see Appendix A, Historic Timetable, for more details). The subsequent slow decline in numbers of fishermen illustrates the natural attrition of older fishermen until 1965. In 1965, the combined effects of new fishing restrictions and trout decimation further eroded the remaining numbers of Isle Royale fishermen.

Much has changed for the island fishermen since the heyday of commercial fishing seventy to eighty years ago. The boom period of commercial fishing on Isle Royale, when the A. Booth and Company's steamer America served the island, is long past (see figure 3). However, those days are well remembered. Most stories, buildings, customs, and selection of fishery sites stem from this boom period when there were, at minimum, one hundred fishermen on Isle Royale. Since the heyday of commercial fishing, numerous influences have dissuaded fishermen from continuing fishing. Concomitant with the decline of fishing, folklife expressions have declined as well. Some folklife

9. With help from Stan Sivertson, I compiled a list of ninety-eight fishermen who operated on Isle Royale circa 1920. In this time period, fisheries dotted the many sheltered bays and harbors of Isle Royale.

10. By folklife expressions I mean the totality of artistic manifestations or communication of a group who 1) share one or more interests, 2) communicate by oral or imitative means and 3) those manifestations or communication are traditional in character.
expressions have persisted, some have been altered and others had to be reconstructed from the three fishermen's recollections. The present study is limited to the modern or Scandinavian period of commercial fishing on Isle Royale, a period running from the 1880s to the present. This time limitation fits in neatly with the collective memories of the Johnson and Sivertson families, since they have been on Isle Royale for approximately one hundred and ninety years, respectively. 11

The idea for this study grew out of my informal interest and contact with the fishermen. During my four summers as a seasonal park ranger on Isle Royale, I was fortunate to meet many of the remaining fishermen, especially those in Siskiwit Bay and Washington Harbor. From my first contact with the fishermen I was much impressed and intrigued. I was intrigued by their knowledge of and affinity for the island. They seemed to be enthusiastically interested in learning more about the island. From these first impressions, the ideas for this study began to coalesce in the spring of 1980. I spent my fifth summer at Isle Royale in 1980 documenting their folklife expressions, while happily and fortuitously ensconced at the Holte fishery at Wright Island.

Living at Wright Island was a godsend; I became much, much more familiar with the fishermen and the traditional livelihood commercial fishing affords. In addition, living at an isolated fishery for days alone gave me an appreciation for the old fishing days on Isle Royale when isolation was a fact of life.

11. Johnson is Ingeborg Holte's maiden name. Her father, Sam Johnson, was a well-known Isle Royale fisherman. For more information about the fishermen see Appendix C, Biographical Information.
The decision to study only three commercial fishermen's folklife expressions was made for purely practical reasons. First, I decided to work with the three fishermen I had met most often, namely, Buddie, Stan and Ingeborg. Second, I needed to keep the study at a manageable size. Three people seemed to be ideal for my purposes since there would be a variety of experiences and responses without my being overwhelmed with differences.

This study had two purposes: (1) to document selected folklife expressions, especially occupational folklife expressions and 2) to analyze the fishermen's folklife expressions as a means of substantiating and delineating the nature of their relationship to Isle Royale. In other words, I wished to explore the fishermen's knowledge of and affinity for Isle Royale. For special insights in the analysis I used sense of place scholarship ideas.

A related but secondary purpose to the above requires some explanation. Isle Royale National Park policy and national legislation have said, in effect, that economic endeavors such as commercial fishing are incompatible with wilderness ideals. Isle Royale was designated a wilderness in 1976, although it had been administered as a de facto wilderness for years. However, I believe the assumption that economic endeavors are incompatible with wilderness ideals is a simplistic conclusion and open to debate. Furthermore, this assumption has never been tested on Isle Royale. I wanted to examine the assumption

that a tradition-bound occupation such as commercial fishing was and still is detrimental to Isle Royale's natural resources. Or, conversely, are there positive lessons to be learned from Isle Royale commercial fishermen? And, if so, what are they?

The three fishermen's folklife expressions are the key or baseline data to this study. Thus, without a clear understanding of what is meant by the key words, folklife expressions, much of the subsequent analysis will be of little worth. The term folklife expression best expresses what my subject matter or baseline datum is. Folklife expressions are "folk-culture in its entirety." Subsumed under folklife expression are all other types of folklore, including verbal, partially verbal and non-verbal folk cultural forms. The study of folklife expressions is an "holistic approach" which examines "elements, be they social, material or linguistic, that distinguish one community from the other." In a broader sense, the study of folklife expressions is the study of the personality of a place or community. Similarly, this study attempts to distinguish the special characteristics or personality fishermen see in Isle Royale. Folklife studies uses a macroscopic approach and prefers to use emic folklife expression


categories when at all possible. Finally, most folklife studies, as does this study, "insists on historical as well as ethnographic methodology." After this introductory overview, the study is broken down into five chapters. Chapter I, The Geographical and Cultural Context of Isle Royale Commercial Fishing, attempts to provide the reader with a detailed picture of the folk group of island fishermen. Discussed in Chapter I is the island as a unique geographical entity, commercial fishing history, division of labor in the occupational aspects of fishery life, seasonal rhythm of fishing and the bleak future of commercial fishing on Isle Royale.

Chapter II, Selected Material Folk Culture, examines occupational material folk culture of the fishermen. Implicit in this chapter and the others that follow is the assumption that commercial fishing and fishery life was the primary catalyst in formulating an island folk group. There was a flourishing and creative folk culture on Isle Royale.

15. Don Yoder, "Folklife Studies in American Scholarship," in American Folklife, ed. Don Yoder (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), p. 4. Emic folklife expression categories are categories that are recognized by the group using them. For example, moose stories is an emic category recognized and used by fishermen.

16. Ibid., p. 5.

17. A folk group is a number of people who: 1) share one or more interests, 2) share artistic expressions which are traditional in content and 3) communicate by oral or imitative means.

18. Material folk culture is the physical manifestation or artifact, made by a folk group member. Learning to make or use material folk culture is often done by imitation, rather than through explicit instruction or memorization. The entire context of making, employing, or disposing of the artifact(s) is relevant for study.
Royale, spawned in the main by commercial fishing. Other shared experiences of island residence, daily contact with Lake Superior, kinship ties, and ethnic allegiances, helped solidify the people into a very cohesive folk group. Chapter II is subdivided into three sections, two of which are fishermen's categories of their work day, namely, "on the lake" and "shore-work." The third section, fisher-folk biology, is my analytical construct which explores fishermen's ideas about Lake Superior fishery biology. Unfortunately, numerous material folk culture expressions were not examined, such as domestic architecture, flower gardens, Greenstone jewelry making, dress, knot making, fish cleaning techniques and more. Exclusion of these material folk culture forms in this study was necessary to keep the study to a manageable size.

Chapter III, Selected Social Folk Custom, examines the few purely social and recreational occasions in which the fishermen participated.19 These festive occasions were the pleasant exceptions to a normal pre-dawn to dusk work day. The first two social folk customs considered, "coffee" and "picnics and boat days," are still viable today, although diminished in length and enthusiastic participation. In contrast, the "Fourth of July" has not been celebrated for many years.

19. Social folk customs are the observances held by folk group members. They are partially aural and are partially based on physical entities. The definitional emphasis is on the process of group interaction.
Selected types of fishermen's narrative folklore are examined in Chapter IV. There is a wealth of narrative folklore among fishermen. Their categories of personal experience stories, namely, moose stories, shipwreck stories, and family stories, are considered in detail. Also examined in Chapter IV are place-names and place-name legends and local character anecdotes. Isle Royale fishermen lived in a preeminently verbal society. Most of the information passed along was by word of mouth. Written information in newspapers, books or the like rarely served the island community. Due to space limitations, numerous genres of narrative folklore were not investigated, such as migratory legends, proverbs and folk speech like "the α-land," or "blowing fresh," or "gang of nets."

Chapter V, the Conclusion, intensifies the discussion of how these selected folklife expressions are indicators of the fishermen's

20. Social folk customs are the observances held by folk group members. They are partially aural and are partially based on physical entities. The definitional emphasis is on the process of group interaction.

21. There were very few forms of electronic media on Isle Royale until recently, with the exception of radio. Although the adoption and use of the radio did not become possible until high-powered stations or antennae were developed. See Appendix A, Historic Timetable, for more details.

22. Blowing fresh is an esoteric term for wind that is just beginning to pick up and become a factor in commercial fishing. Often blowing fresh is used to describe a lake breeze (winds blowing from lake to shore) which typically occur during calm, clear summer afternoons. Gang of nets, again an esoteric term, is one continuous line of nets. The length of a gang of nets is dependent on the number of nets needed to fish a particular fishing ground. According to Buddie Sivertson, most of the "old-timers" used to pronounce island "α-land." The accent, unmistakably Scandinavian and perhaps Norwegian, is now recounted by Buddie with considerable glee.
perception of Isle Royale. The conclusion tries, using sense of place ideas, to sum up how the three fishermen view Isle Royale and their special insights about the island environs.

Fishermen's folklife expressions are highly revealing of their attitudes about and behavior on Isle Royale. For example, material folk culture expressions often provide lasting, visible clues to the nature of fishermen's behavior on Isle Royale. Or, the types of social folk customs can be revealing of the direct involvement fishermen prefer to have with the island environment. Finally, the wealth of moose and shipwreck stories demonstrates the fishermen's interest in the surrounding littoral environment.

Sense of place ideas augmented my discussion of the character of fishermen's relationship with Isle Royale. Interpreting Ingeborg's, Stan's and Buddie's folklife expressions with sense of place concepts was difficult at times. It was difficult because of the condition of sense of place scholarship, namely, it is young, interdisciplinary and burgeoning with new ideas. It is also highly theoretical and amorphous in study technique. Sense of place involves the study of affective, psychological and behavioral responses of people to the environment. In addition, many of these responses are affected by the environment in which the expressions take place or to which they pertain. Often times sense of place studies examine the entire cultural matrix of people to uncover clues of their relationship to the environment. Rather than examine the full range of socio-economic aspects of commercial fishing on Isle Royale, I have limited this study to include only selected folklife expressions relating to that experience.
A few more comments about sense of place studies will help explain what it endeavors to do. Cultural geographers and anthropologists are the primary parents of sense of place scholarship. Together they have devised a new theoretical stand concerning culture/environment relationships. These scholars see culture and environment as one sphere, each one affecting the other. A cultural expression is affected by environmental factors. For example, a fishery site location is dependent upon environmental factors such as water depth, slope and so on. Concomitantly, the environment as perceived or utilized is affected by cultural filters. For example, if the size of the island can be grasped as being finite in size, fishermen are more likely to treat island resources judiciously. Donald Hardesty calls this mutually influencing interaction of the environment and culture "reciprocal causality." This view contrasts with the earlier view of culture and environment as distinct spheres impacting on one another as in environmental determinism or cultural relativism. Furthermore, sense of place studies focus on the process of exchange or reciprocity between culture and environment.

Current sense of place scholarship tends to examine the experiential components of place, namely, the combined effect of physical setting, human experience and culturally-based meanings. The tendency towards


studying place as it is experienced is explicated by the following statement:

For the purpose of studying man's perception of environment it is useful to focus on the functional environment, that is, the portion most pertinent to the people or person being investigated.25

Perhaps a closer look at what is meant by the word "place" will additionally help to clarify what is meant by sense of place studies. In this context place is not synonymous with a locale or landsite. Place usually includes an unchanging locale, but this is not always the case with scholars. Place can move with nomadic or highly mobile people or can be internalized in a person's imagination. For example, for some fishermen the memory of living at Isle Royale may be more important than living at the island. Place has attributes of permanence, security, nourishing qualities, and a center or organizing principal for people.

One important discovery of sense of place studies is that "the topography is always 'trying' to match an image."26 Or restated, three landscapes enjoy consistent appeal throughout most cultures; that is, they come closest to matching an appealing image. They are the island, seashore and valley. Yi-Fu Tuan states that "the island seems to have a tenacious hold on the imagination . . . [Western man] has a tradition of identifying enchantment with insularity . . . "27 He

notes that our cultural heritage is replete with exaltation of the island idea from the Greeks and the Celts to the present time. Even for the Ojibwe, who ceded Isle Royale to the United States Government, islands figure positively and prominently in their mythology. Later Anglo-American cultural association with islands included enchantment (or escapism) and security because of their insularity.

One point concerning sense of place studies is worth reemphasizing. Concerned scholars are recognizing the increased importance of culturally held symbols, individual experience and sensory capabilities in creating an individual's sense of place. In essence, place is currently understood less as a physical entity and more as a crystallization point where an individual's emotions, experience, and cultural background coalesce to compose a unique sense of place.

This study's focus is unprecedented in academic scholarship. Edmund Bunkse's work is most similar to this study, but there remains many differences between the two studies. 28 Because this work is an initial attempt to integrate folklife studies with sense of place ideas it should be considered a test of the worth of integrating these disciplines.

On the level of daily experience, folklife expressions communicate, often implicitly, a fisherman's sense of place. Folklife expressions are also integrated with a fisherman's sense of place. Each affects

the other in reciprocal causality. For example, a fisherman's attitude about his fishhouse affects how he would tell a story in that fishhouse. In short, a fisherman's sense of place is a contextual component of a folkloric performance. Or, conversely, a social folk custom such as a picnic at Little Greenstone Beach affects how a fisherman feels or thinks about the island environs. In other words, a folklife expression can act as a cultural filter which shapes how a fisherman sees, values and experiences his or her island home.

The methodology employed in this thesis was developed to accommodate a sense of place examination of folklife expressions. Briefly outlined, I read all sense of place literature that is applicable in analyzing folklife expressions. I focused on sense of place scholars' interpretation of man/environment relations. Concurrently, I read about the history of commercial fishing on Isle Royale and throughout the Lake Superior region. I then conducted preliminary interviews with eight fishermen during the summers of 1979 and 1980. From the library research and interviews I developed a list of core questions designed to stimulate verbal documentation of all aspects of folk culture to be studied. At this point, I narrowed my study to include only three fishermen and to exclude discussion of their folk art. I decided to exclude folk art from this study due to the difficulty of interpreting

29. A folkloric performance is the process of communicating a folklife expression. It is the event in time in which folklife expressions are conveyed to others. For example, the inclinations of the people celebrating the Fourth of July, the place it occurs, and the traditional way of celebrating the "Fourth" make each celebration unique.
Buddie's and Ingeborg's paintings. 30 I further refined my question list to stimulate sense of place related responses. In addition, I developed a question file to be documented through site visitation and photography. I also put together a list of aspects of social folk custom to note while a participant observer at the Holte fishery.

I conducted in-depth fieldwork with three fishermen, which included, in varying degrees, taped interviews, notes, photo documentation and participant observation. Site visitation in the summer of 1980 included measurements of docks, fishhouses, net reels, boat slides and proximity of structures to one another and to the water. Each fisherman was asked a minimum of eighty-six questions concerning twenty-four major topics. Generally, I asked sets of four or five questions for each topic. Each question varied in scope and focus, and at least one of these questions was open ended. 31 I then identified and divided all the documented folklife expressions into emic categories where possible and etic categories otherwise. 32 Finally, I analyzed each category of folklife expressions for characteristics that indicate a

30. Folk art is a field of folklife expression. It is characterized by folk performances that result in more formal products than other folklife fields. Fishermen's folk art included folk music and dance.

31. Utilization of a finding list appeared to be the most exacting method of eliciting candid sense of place responses. Actually, the fishermen responded the least well to direct sense of place referent questions. Instead, the most revealing sense of place responses came unbeknownst, embedded in a story or metafolklore.

32. Emic categories are categories recognized by an insider or a folk group member. In this instance, moose stories is an example of an emic category of the fishermen. Etic categories are analytical constructs placed on folklife expressions by an outsider, a non-folk group member. Fisher folk-biology is an example of an etic category.
particular attitude towards Isle Royale or a consensual way of behaving while on the island. In this regard, I was careful to note characteristics of folklife expressions which were held in common and which were manifested individually.

My aim was to uncover some of the fishermen's affective and cognitive responses to Isle Royale. For example, the analysis of dock building techniques can tell us much about what the fishermen knew of lake currents, strength of crib construction and the like. Also, the analysis of social folk customs such as coffee can tell us much about how the fishermen felt about their homes and visitors.

The final methodological step was to interpret the fishermen's folklife expressions in light of sense of place ideas. Obviously, advantage will be taken of ideas already formulated by sense of place scholarship. However, interpretation of some of the fishermen's affective and cognitive responses to Isle Royale will necessarily be my own. The result, then, should be a heightened and more complete understanding of the commercial fishermen's relationship to and thoughts about Isle Royale.

A caveat of working with three fishermen is that pan-Isle Royale generalizations can only be tenuously rather than authoritatively made. However, each folklife expression was unique in its universality or localization of expression. For example, the material folk culture of island fishermen is likely to be very uniform because of its visibility and economic importance. Because of these two factors it was imitated freely throughout the island. Narrative folklore and social folk custom were more fluid and thus were more likely to be
different, at least topically, with each fisherman. There was little
economic incentive to mimic neighbor's stories or celebrations.
However, there were forces that served to moderate individuality in all
folklife forms, such as occupational and residential identification,
family kinship and intra-fishery visitation.

One potential bias that should be discussed is the potential
to over-encourage anti-National Park Service ("the Park") or anti-
Michigan Department of Natural Resources ("the DNR") sentiment in the
fishermen's responses. Negative sentiment is due to the NPS and DNR
actions that have worked to the detriment of island fishermen and con-
tinued fishing (see Chapter II and Appendix A for more information).
The key for me as interviewer was to avoid over-enticing negative responses
to governing agencies and yet not discourage their airing either. The
need to remain as objective as possible was important since narratives
with overt or covert reference to the NPS and DNR are highly demonstra-
tive of a fisherman's sense of place. Questions which refer to the
NPS especially bring forward vehement responses from fishermen. An
example of an emic category of narrative folklore that portrays a
fisherman's contact with authority figures is ranger and game warden
stories. These stories often detail a morally repulsive character or
expose hypocritical behavior on the part of the game warden or ranger.
Buddie Sivertson recalled the following information in response to my
question, "Did fishermen ever procure wild food stuffs?"

33. The Park and DNR are fishermen's names for Isle Royale National
Park and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Both agencies
share jurisdiction of the Isle Royale environment.
Sivertson: They shot moose illegally over there.

Cochrane: Occasionally?

Sivertson: Occasionally in the fall, when things got a little rough. They would... The harbor [a few Washington Harbor fishermen] would shoot a moose. And the harbor would split the moose up. And if they didn't get back to town they would shoot another one. They used to share them with the game wardens.

Cochrane: Really?

Sivertson: Yeah. The game wardens many times would supply a moose to the fishermen. You know, if they had shot two... by mistake [We both laugh.] They would bring one in to the fishermen.

Cochrane: Yeah, you're right, no one was rejected there. [We both laugh.]

Sivertson: The fishermen never wanted to get caught shooting a moose. They had that much respect for the law and things. Sometimes it became necessary. And so there was always a kind of an eye out for the boat, you know, carrying the ranger. I think his name is Bill Lively.

Cochrane: Yeah, I've heard a little bit about Bill Lively. He was a trapper, too, in the winter. [Sivertson is surprised.]

Sivertson: But, I remember one time my dad was telling me about. He and John Skadberg and a few of the other guys were hunting down by Windigo [an area on Isle Royale with the densest moose population] one day late in the fall. And, ah, they heard these two shots over the hill from them. They didn't know what was going on but they hid their rifles anyway. And they went up over the top of the hill. And there was Bill Lively with two moose down. [I start laughing.] And Bill says I'll take the small one here, its enough for me for awhile. But you guys can have the big one, you know. [We both laugh.]

Buddie's anecdotes make fun of the hypocritical game warden and seemingly foreign laws governing moose hunting. Positively depicted are the steps sometimes necessary to survive on a remote island and an early-day ethic of fishermen, namely, to make their own rules to insure their well being.

34. Interview with Howard Sivertson, Two Harbors, Minnesota, 15 April 1980.
The declining state of commercial fishing exerts certain biases on me as documentor and on the fishermen I interviewed. The golden, memorializing days of commercial fishing are upon us. The memorializing is localized, commercial fishing having become a regional symbol of pride and uniqueness along the Superior shoreline. As a regional symbol it represents the old, romantic and labor-weary days of Scandinavian fishermen and settlement of Lake Superior's shoreline. To a degree, status and pride can be accrued to those individuals who were or are now commercial fishermen. Curiously, this institutionalizing of commercial fishing as a regional symbol distorts and balloons the economic importance of fishing in a region dominated economically by mining, the lake trade, lumbering and later tourism.
CHAPTER I

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

OF ISLE ROYALE COMMERCIAL FISHING

Isle Royale is a geographical anomaly. Its 210 square mile surface area is anchored alone, surrounded on all sides by a moody fresh water sea. Isle Royale is the geologic twin of Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula; both consist of layers of volcanic and postvolcanic sedimentary rocks. Between the two lies the heart of the Lake Superior basin. Ben Chynoweth, an Isle Royale aficionado, said the following about the relationship of Isle Royale and Lake Superior:

The story of Isle Royale and the story of Lake Superior are the same story. To begin the legend of Isle Royale, to reveal its cabalistic records, one must look to the lake; the behavior of the lake, the history of the lake . . .

The natural history of Isle Royale is unique because of its insular location in Lake Superior. The "big lake" produces climatic conditions that effect all quarters of life on Isle Royale. The massive, cold body of water separates Isle Royale from the nearest mainland by


3. The big lake is the fisherman's and region's name for Lake Superior.
approximately fifteen miles. \(^4\) Lake Superior has been an effective bar-
rier against invasions by a variety of plant and animal species. Season-
ally variable lake currents encircle Isle Royale and affect the location and
depth of fish populations. Dense fog and lake haze are common in the
spring and early summer and often obscure harbors, bays and major
portions of the island. Fogs and lake haze typically occur when the
big lake is calm. Mid-summer squalls are highly localized and pose a
sudden threat to watercraft on the lake. The most dangerous sea and
weather conditions, however, occur during the fall. Storms are both
more frequent and fierce during the fall months. Winters on Isle Royale
are very cold. Shore ice locks up the protected bays and harbors and
isolates the island from boat access. An extremely cold and calm
winter can produce an ice bridge that connects Isle Royale with the
nearest mainland—the Canadian mainland to the north.

The island archipelago has over 200 satellite islands and at
least as many reefs, submerged rocks and dramatic drop-offs. Variable
water depths and temperature provide excellent habitat and spawning
grounds for lake trout, lake herring, ciscos, and marginal habitat for
whitefish. In essence, Isle Royale's topography is shaped like a series
of breaking waves, gently sloping upwards on one side and crashing down

\(^4\) Descriptions of Lake Superior tend to get lost in hyperbole.
However, the big lake does defy sober description. For example, ten
percent of the world's fresh water is in Lake Superior. It is cold;
the average temperature is \(41^\circ\) Fahrenheit. Its deepest point lies 733
below sea level. It is clear; visibility on a clear day is twenty to
thirty feet down. It is also relatively pure; you can drink from it
freely. And it is treacherous; hundreds of shipwrecks lie on Lake
Superior's rocky bottom.
on the other. This generalization is equally true for the island's submerged topography. The wave trough and crest comprise a parallel ridge-valley topography which lies in a southwest to northeast direction. The lake and island interface is deeply scored by bays, harbors and jagged relief.

The island's short and cool growing season, rocky soil, and rugged topography precluded much agricultural activity. Instead, throughout man's recent tenure on the island, a variety of wild animals have occupied it. For example, moose have resided on the island since 1900, woodland caribou lived there until circa 1936, coyotes were common until driven off or killed by the newly arrived wolves circa 1946-1950, and beaver were island residents before animal populations were recorded.

Natural resources that humans came to exploit on Isle Royale include timber, especially on the southwest portion of the main island; copper, which is found in almost a pure state; a largely grass-free environment, which is soothing to hay fever sufferers; solitude; wilderness; and, of course, fish.

The history of man's tenure on Isle Royale began with aboriginal copper miners hundreds of years ago. However, the cultural and historical background pertinent to this study began with the Scandinavian immigration into the Upper Great Lakes region, which began in the 1850s and crested in the 1880s and '90s. The ethnic makeup of Isle Royale fishermen reflects this influx of people from Norway, Sweden and Finland. Most lake fishermen predating the Scandinavian immigration moved on to different occupations, leaving the fishing to
the newcomers. Rakestraw comments on this ethnic group displacement when he writes:

During the early period the fishermen had been mostly Cornishmen, Englishmen, and Frenchmen. By the turn of the century these nationalities began to drift to other occupations, and their places were taken by Scandinavians. Norwegians, Swedish, and Swede-Finns (Finns who lived in Finland but spoke Swedish) came to Isle Royale, either as seasonal fishermen or year-around residents.

The modern period of commercial fishing is demarcated by the coming of Scandinavian fishermen, along with other changes. Other changes characteristic of the modern period include (1) fishermen's social and economic ties to Minnesota rather than Michigan or Wisconsin, (2) advances in fishing technology, (3) fishermen becoming island residents throughout the fishing season, (4) radical changes in market preferences, (5) enlargement of markets by better transportation (first by rail and then by highway) and (6) the advent of tourism on Isle Royale (see Appendix A, Historic Timetable, for more information).

Few of the newly arrived immigrants could speak English, and they tended to settle in ethnic and family enclaves on the mainland and on Isle Royale. Characteristically, those immigrants who became island fishermen came directly to the west Lake Superior region from the old country. Soon after their arrival in Duluth or Two Harbors, Minnesota, they made their way to Isle Royale fisheries. Island fishermen would fish the "summer season" from April/May to November/

December depending upon the weather and fishing regulations. Immediately upon the closing of the Isle Royale fishing season the fishermen would move to the Minnesota north shore and winter there. In their winter home area, the fishermen would fish lake herring, if weather permitted. Interestingly, many of the immigrants had been fishermen or mariners in the old country.

Several Duluth-based fish companies began regular boat service to Isle Royale in the late 1870s and '80s. The fish companies competed to take advantage of the burgeoning numbers of island and north shore fishermen. "Fish company boats" provided numerous services, including hauling freight, mail service, and the passenger business of fishermen, north shore citizens and tourists. It is impossible to state which Duluth-based "fish company boat" first served Isle Royale on a weekly basis. However, Cooley, LaVaque and Company's tug, Siskiwit, began to serve Isle Royale in 1876, and other companies were quick to follow. Independent steamers such as the R.G. Stewart would also make Isle Royale "runs" to pick up fish for delivery to early-day Duluth fish companies such as Stone-Ordean. The giant of Duluth-based fish companies, the A. Booth and Company, began Isle Royale boat service in 1887. This Chicago-owned, Great Lakes-wide, fish company was destined to quickly monopolize the Isle Royale fish trade. Although A. Booth and Company had offices along the south shore of Lake Superior, its

Duluth office ran the fish, freight and passenger service to Isle Royale. Included on the boat service to Isle Royale, and economically more significant, was service to the Minnesota north shore and Fort Arthur, Ontario, Canada.  

A few years after commencing boat service to Isle Royale, the A. Booth and Company began a policy of "staking" immigrant fishermen at Isle Royale. Booth was not the first fish company to stake Scandinavian immigrants on Isle Royale to fish; however, they were the only company to do so profitably. They procured the use of an island in Washington Harbor, Booth Island, and would extend credit that included housing, clothing, and transportation--nearly everything a fisherman needed to start fishing. Booth also extended generous credit to independent fishermen on Isle Royale. Indeed, many immigrants became island fishermen because of this attractive offer of capital, no matter if they fished for themselves or for Booth. In short, A Booth and Company functioned as a company store for many fishermen. The lure of

8. The north shore of Minnesota from Two Harbors northward was served exclusively by boat until 1924. In 1924 a trunk highway was completed that linked the north shore with Two Harbors and Duluth, Minnesota.

9. At least two other fish companies tried and were unsuccessful in staking men on Isle Royale. The two companies that I have identified as staking men were Cooley, LaVaque and Company and Edgar Johns' fish business. The first try occurred before the Booth Company venture and the latter occurred in the midst of Booth's dominance of the Isle Royale fish trade.

10. In between 1888 and 1894 Booth Company averaged approximately $1,500 in credit for "fishermen's outfits" on the north shore and Isle Royale. The peak year in this period was 1893 when they lent $6,000 worth of fishing gear on credit. The real worth of $6,000 in 1893 shows how active an interest A. Booth and Company took in stimulating immigrants to become fishermen. See "Lake Superior Interviews," Volume 1, p. 36.
credit was so great that the little, rocky, steeply-pitched Booth Island was packed with houses and fishery buildings.

Two major shifts in market preference earmarked the modern period of commercial fishing on Isle Royale. Both market changes occurred in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Prior to the modern period most fish caught on Isle Royale were siskiwits or fat trout. The siskiwits were prepared for market by salting them down and putting them in kegs. The kegs of salted fish were then transported to market on sailing vessels or "schooners" which came to the island once or twice a year. Because salt acts as a preservative, the fish would keep for long periods of time allowing infrequent shipments of salted fish. In contrast, the new method of transporting fresh fish packed in ice had to be done frequently and efficiently. Occurring immediately on the heels of weekly boat service to Isle Royale came the market change towards lean trout. This preference for lean trout is still prevalent today.

The second major shift in market preference was the sudden demand for frozen herring. Prior to the turn of the century herring were caught exclusively for use as a bait fish. However, the large Scandinavian immigration into the Upper Great Lakes created an instant market for frozen herring. Ingeborg Holte summed this up succinctly when she said, "Herring were caught and frozen to meet the demands of the Scandinavian farmer in Minnesota and the Dakotas. They [her father's

11. The increase in the frequency of boat service to Isle Royale augmented but did not initiate change in market preference. A much larger factor than frequency of boat service to the north shore and Isle Royale was the development and widespread use of railroad refrigerator cars. Refrigerator cars opened up huge new fish markets in midwestern cities.
fish company] would freeze herring in hundred pound sacks and the farmer would munch on it all winter."^{12}

Concurrent with the change in market preferences, fishermen adapted their technology to accommodate this change. Fishermen built insulated rooms in their fishhouses to store ice and iced fish ready for transport. Also, fishermen tried to time their "lifts" to allow only enough time to clean the fish and pack them in boxes before the fish company boat arrived. This practice minimized the fishermen's use of their precious and limited supply of ice.

Compared to fishermen on the mainland with road access, Isle Royale fishermen were saddled with extra freight fees. The extra charges significantly eroded the take-home pay of island fishermen. However, a healthy fish population on Isle Royale, especially lake trout, offset the unavoidable fee for trans-lake freighting.

The Duluth-based fish companies further affected island fishermen by economically and socially tying the fishermen to the Minnesota north shore. In short, the fishermen did much of their business with the fish companies and had relatives living on the north shore. Factors contributing to the change in orientation of the fishermen from Michigan and Wisconsin to Minnesota include (1) the route of A. Booth and Company boats established a shipping pattern, (2) the influx of Scandinavian fishermen and the start up of Duluth-based fish companies coincided and reinforced one another, (3) until 1924 the lake trade was the only means of transportation along the north shore and Isle

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Figure 3. Steamer *America* in Washington Harbor at Singer's Resort. (Courtesy Isle Royale National Park)

Figure 4. Mackinaw Boat on Lake Superior circa 1890. (Courtesy of the National Archives)
Royle (this was also the time of settlement for most fishermen),
(4) Duluth was a major center for selling and transporting fish by
rail to other large cities, and (5) ships running along the north
shore were less likely to be threatened by storms.

Few island fishermen secured legal title to their island
fisheries. This legal neglect was to play havoc with their ownership
rights at a later date when land condemnation proceedings would be
initiated to establish Isle Royale National Park. Six reasons why
the fishermen did not secure land titles include (1) lack of money
at the time of settlement and squatting was a customary practice,
(2) it was common for fishermen to move from fishing station to
station, making it impossible to secure a land title for each move,
(3) there was little human settlement on Isle Royale at the time;

hence, securing a land title seemed like a superfluous legal matter,
(4) large tracts of land were owned by absentee and foreign mining
interests making purchasing small tracts of land difficult, (5) as
immigrants who did not speak English, the fishermen were unaccustomed
to American legal matters and (6) the county seat for Isle Royale was
on Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula requiring a special trip to complete
a land transaction.

The Scandinavian immigrants brought with them a repertoire of
commercial fishing knowledge which had to be adapted to and augmented
to meet Lake Superior conditions and fresh water fish. For example,
they brought with them knowledge of how to use gill nets and setlines
that, with little change, were successful on Lake Superior. The correlation of Scandinavian fishing techniques with successful fishing is strong enough that Stan Sivertson noted that to fish well "You had to fish Scandinavian." Fishing technology advanced steadily from the 1880s (see Appendix A, Historic Timetable, for more information). A major change was the shift from Mackinaw Boats powered by sail or oars (see figure 4) to motorized watercraft. The gasoline-powered engines made longer and faster runs to fishing grounds possible, consequently improving the overall fishing potential. Later, by the 1930s, engines became more reliable and contributed to improved maneuverability. Secondly, the net material was evolving from cotton and linen to nylon and now to monofilament; similarly net "corks" were evolving from cedar to aluminum to plastic. As a result of these technological innovations, it took less time to maintain nets, they were stronger and they "fished" better or were more efficient. Experimentation led to advances in the type and

13. Gill nets are flat nets suspended vertically in the water with meshes that allow the head of a fish to pass but entangle it as it attempts to back out of the mesh. Hooklines or setlines were a complicated way of fishing by individual hooks baited with herring. The hooks, on individual lines of varying depths, were all connected to one long line suspended under water. Hooklines might be set for miles in a straight line.

14. Pound nets are the exception to Stan's assertion. Pound nets are Scottish in origin. They were introduced to Lake Superior in 1864. Hence, the acquisition of pound net skills by Scandinavian island fishermen is an unique chapter of Isle Royale commercial fishing history. Generally few island fishermen used pound nets for three reasons. First, the rocky and deep bottom conditions precluded its use. Second, its new and foreign technology inhibited its use. And, third, pound nets were very expensive and few fishermen could afford to make a large investment in an experimental net. Stan Sivertson, 11 July 1980.
techniques of fishing. For example, well-established fishermen tried pound and purse seine nets. Other fishermen discovered that they got better results baiting their hooklines with only the backs of herring rather than the whole fish. Fishermen experimented with fishing technology to improve fishing efficiency in order to, in Stan's words, "outfox the fish, since fish are smart."16

Despite advances in fishing technology and hence efficiency, much of the material culture, fishery life adapted to seasonal conditions, and marketing of fish was traditionally done. The best example of a stable and yet continuously efficient form of material culture was the use of and reliance on gill nets. The use of gill nets is noteworthy because gill net fishing in the fall constituted the best or most profitable and yet most risky form of fishing employed at Isle Royale. The seasonal aspect of fishing remained the same, that is, certain fish were sought at specific times with fishing technology that was adapted to conditions prevalent at that time. For example, gas boats would be "tied up" at the dock on the lee side of the prevailing wind unique to each season. Duluth-based fish companies remained the fish dealers and Duluth the distribution center throughout the modern period of commercial fishing.

15. Only those technological advances appropriate to Isle Royale conditions were adopted by the fishermen. For example, gasoline-powered net lifters minimized the sheer strength needed to lift nets from deep water. However, net lifters could only be housed in the large fish tugs. Tugs were not commonly used on Isle Royale because they were too large to be efficiently employed at the rocky island archipelago.

The fishermen living at Washington Harbor (Grace, Booth, Washington and John’s Island) composed the largest fishing settlement on Isle Royale. For example, Stan named eighteen families that lived in Washington Harbor circa 1920, without slowing or straining his recollection. In contrast, Wright Island, where the Johnson/Holtes live, is one of the most isolated of Isle Royale fisheries. Why only one family lived at Wright Island in the modern period is open to conjecture; however, single families at an isolated fishery was a common situation at Isle Royale. These two fishery situations, that of the isolated fishery and the “harbor” of fishermen, represent the two extremes of fishery life on Isle Royale.

Isle Royale fisheries, no matter how many resident fishermen, were relatively miniscule settlements surrounded and dwarfed by pristine land- and seascapes. Only a few feet to either side of the fishery was a wilderness. Fishermen enjoyed living in this unusual location and circumstance. They lived in two disparate landscapes: one littered with equipment and domestic flower gardens and the other unmistakably

17. Interview with Stanley Sivertson aboard the Wenonah at Windigo Ranger Station, Isle Royale, 29 August 1980.

18. While at the present time and ever since circa 1910 Wright Island has been occupied solely by the Johnson/Holte family, prior to 1910 Wright Island and Hopkin’s Harbor was a fishery enclave made up of a few families. Through a rental agreement with the Merritt family of Rock Harbor the Johnsons became the sole occupant of “Wright’s.”

Environmental and economic factors as well as legal factors contributed to the isolated situation of the Wright Island fishery. Factors such as the distance to freight service (oftentimes the Johnsons had to transport their catch to the middle of Siskiwit Bay to meet the fish company boat), proximity to an adequate but not bountiful fishing grounds, and a small harbor probably retarded interest in settling at Hopkin’s Harbor.
wild. For example, island residences were built with a clear view of the harbor, and if possible, on a hill to improve the view (as well as to improve drainage). From a rise, a fisherwoman could spot her husband coming off the lake, gauge the bustle of activity in the fishhouse, or watch moose grazing for submerged aquatic plants. Fishermen appreciated what Lowenthal calls a "functional landscape" situated in an untrammeled environment at large. In other words, their fisheries might seem unkept to outsiders, but since the fishery landscape fulfilled its function for fishermen, "there [were] no grounds for complaint." Fishermen appreciated both the utility of a functional landscape and the ideal qualities of a wilderness environment.

There were two distinct kinds of fishermen operating on the island. The two groups were herring fishermen and a larger, more dominant and diversified group of fishermen who fished for a variety of commercial fish, including herring. It is the second group of fishermen with which this study is most concerned. In contrast to herring fishermen, they had more diversified equipment, larger boats, ventured further out on the lake, especially during hookline fishing, and could potentially make or lose more money. Fishermen with more diversified operations needed more help in the boat and on-shore and could afford hired help if it were a successful and established fishery like the Sivertson and Johnson/Holte operations. Typically, a fisherman would hire one man or perhaps two who worked on a share basis. Many

20. Ibid., p. 72.
independent fishermen on Isle Royale got started by working on a share basis with established fishermen. The ranks of hired men were made up of two kinds: young bachelors or young family members getting a start in the business and old men who had tired of the burdensome duties of owning their own fishery.

The practice of employing hired men was halted with the alarming reduction of lake trout numbers in the 1950s, trout being the economic mainstay of island fishermen. In short, most if not all fishermen could not afford hired men and their wives began to help out on the lake in lieu of hired men. Ingeborg spoke of this to Mrs. Sommer when she said, "During the time when fishing was more of an industry you could afford a hired man or two. It was more of, a much better time because it was easier to do. And then as the trout were depleted because of the lamprey, I think. Then we couldn't have any help, and then, most of us women helped." Mrs. Sommer then asked, "That's when you got involved?" Mrs. Holte acknowledged, "That's when I got involved. I must say I loved it. It is such an exciting thing."21

Herring fishermen were content with fishing only for lake herring; consequently, they had less investment in nets, used smaller boats (skiffs), set nets closer to home in protected waters, and few if any had hired men working with them. Fishing for herring was a less profitable and less risky enterprise than fishing trout, whitefish and menominee. Herring fishing was a more transitional occupation than diversified fishing. Herring fishermen typically made one of

two choices: (1) they quickly got out of fishing all together or,
(2) if they were successful or enjoyed fishing or both, they expanded
their operations to include the take of a variety of fish species.
Herring fishermen were generally newcomers and had to locate in the
less desirable and unclaimed harbors, bays and islands of Isle Royale.

Ethnic enclaves or settlements in harbors also typified Isle
Royale fisheries. For example, Washington Harbor was predominantly
Norwegian and Chippewa Harbor was Swedish, its occupants being one
large extended family. On occasion there was a correlation between a
type of fisherman and ethnicity. For example, Hay Bay fishermen were
predominantly Finnish and were herring fishermen. The fish company
practice of staking fishermen on location sometimes created pockets of
mainland townspeople staying in enclaves on the island. For example,
many of the fishermen on Booth Island were from Knife River, Minnesota.

As inferred above, the role of the fisherwoman in the family and
in the enterprise of fishing began to change in the modern period of
commercial fishing. Prior to this change the fisherwoman worked
primarily in the household to the degree that Ingeborg would remark
that her mother "never went near the fishhouse."22 The role of the
fisherwoman in the earlier times was explained further by Buddie when
he said:

In those days, the mother's first commitment was to the
husband not the children. And so the father and mother
stayed over from spring to late fall. This was the general
thing and the children stayed with relatives or baby sitters

or something . . . I usually stayed with relatives in those months when my mother was with my father at Isle Royale.23

During these times the fisherwoman was the complementary half of the fisherman. Her realm and responsibility were everything that did not involve fishing, that is, cooking, washing, taking care of their children when they were together and providing a home life for her family and guests. The fisherwoman would typically join her husband at Isle Royale a week or two after he opened the fishery in the spring and stay until late fall when they would leave together. In the late 1930s and '40s the role of the fisherwoman began to change. Fishermen began to accompany their children back to the mainland for the school year. And, as mentioned above, by the early 1950s the role of the fisherwoman changed drastically in response to economic hardship.

On the island children contributed to the fishery enterprise by doing odd jobs such as dipping cedar net floats in linseed oil and rubbing them dry to make them more impermeable to water, collecting wood for smoking fish and for heating stoves, dressing fish, and collecting berries for jam. An important responsibility among trusted boys was the care of fertilized fish eggs that were awaiting shipment to the federal fish hatchery at Lester River, Minnesota. And there was plenty of time for play, which often mimicked commercial fishing. Boys in their mid to late teens helped their fathers on the lake; by their early twenties, if their family fishery was successful, they started out on their own.

Commercial fishing on the island was and is variable, demanding and responsive to natural processes affecting the fishing enterprise. The following is a characterization of the main activities in a calendar year for an Isle Royale fisherman. This characterization is especially true for a fisherman operating between 1930 and 1950 and, with a few exceptions, is a fair portrayal of a fisherman operating between 1910 and 1950. When winter begins to abate in late February or March the anticipation and preparatory activity necessary to return to the island begins in earnest, or, as Buddie said, "The juices start flowing." Ingeborg described a homesickness she gets for the island in early spring: "Especially towards spring, oh, there is a feeling especially towards spring. Things begin to thaw and you begin to think, oh boy . . . I still do get a real longing for the island."\(^{24}\)

Preparation included planning, shopping and storing food for the next six or eight months, mending nets, and repairing and reconditioning equipment. The last preparatory task on the mainland was painting the bottom of the gas boat or fish tug used in transporting gear, fishermen and relatives to the island. Fishermen frequently celebrated the night before their departure. The festive occasion typically included excessive drinking, merry making and goodbyes. In the early days, before 1930s and early '40s, most fishermen came to the island aboard the large fish company boats (see Appendix A, Historic Timetable, for information on fish company boats serving Isle Royale). Later, when the

\(^{24}\) Interview with Ingeborg Holte, Wright Island, Isle Royale, 19 August 1980.
large vessels ceased service, the fishermen made the crossing from
the Minnesota north shore in their gas boats and tugs.

The fishermen came to the island as early in the spring as ice
conditions would permit, a period extending anywhere from March 15
to May 1. More often than not, adverse ice conditions in Duluth
Harbor held up the first ship leaving for Isle Royale. Oftentimes
fishermen arrived at Isle Royale when their fisheries were still
ice-bound, and they had to drag their boats over the ice to their
docks. Getting there before the ice break-up was a slight nuisance,
but it insured that the fishermen were able to collect enough ice
for use in transporting fresh fish. Upon their arrival at their
fishery the fishermen put their nets away, opened their fishery
buildings, cut and stacked wood, and made ready for the year's fishing.
In only a few days' time after their arrival, the fishermen had their
bait nets in the water and began to fish trout with hooklines.

Hookline fishing required long hours of labor, necessitating
work hours from pre-dawn to darkness. Hookline fishing involved
long hours because it was, in essence, two independent fishing
operations. First, bait fish had to be caught. Fishermen had to
travel to where the bait fish, herring, could be caught in early spring
in the shallow bays where the water temperature was warmer. For the
Holtes/Johnsons this meant a twenty-mile trip to Rock Harbor to catch
herring. After "lifting" and "picking" herring from gill nets, the
fishermen returned home, cleaned fish, and started out to set their
hooklines. Hooklines were often set in deep water, necessitating
another long "run" out to the open lake. Fortunately, spring and
early summer is the calm season; however, fog is a common problem at
this time. Before the hookline was set, up to 500 hooks were baited
with herring backs.

Efficient employment of hookline fishing involved understanding
and opportunely using lake currents, fish habitat and behavior,
navigation through fogs, and dexterity in removing trout and replacing
herring on hooks while the boat was moving along to the next hook.
Hookline fishing continued until early or mid-July when fishing began
to slow down and the influx of tourists put pressure on the fishermen
to curtail their fishing. The Fourth of July marked the final days of
hookline fishing.

About the Fourth of July, fishermen switched to gill nets, setting
long strings or "gangs" of gill nets. July and August were relatively
poor fishing months, but fishermen stayed busy with shore work. July
was a common time to seam new nets with "corks" or net floats and
sinkers. Fishermen prepared for the excellent fall fishing during
slow summer months. Although gill net fishing in July and August was
marginal, another incentive hastened fishermen to set their nets.
Fishing grounds, especially grounds used for gill nets, were claimed
on a first-come basis. Long-standing fishermen were somewhat exempt
from this custom. Gill net fishing grounds for trout were highly
localized near spawning banks. For exceptional fishing grounds such
as McCormick's Reef location, the fishing pressure was intense. Most,
if not all, Washington Harbor fishermen fished McCormick's.
For island fishermen as well as all Lake Superior fishermen, fall
meant storm season, making hazardous conditions for nets, equipment
and life. The lake's awesome and dreaded force was deeply respected
and feared. Stan summed up his attitude toward the lake when he said,
"Well, I've always been afraid of it. [He laughs.] I've always been,
and it's a good thing to fear Lake Superior a little bit, or any
lake... ."25 Fear and almost a reverent respect for Lake Superior
was perhaps a universal attitude among island fishermen.26 One big blow
could demolish one's nets by dragging them across the rocky bottom and
cutting them up, destroying them by sheer stress, balling them up, or
sinking them. More than a few fishermen were wiped out by one big
storm. Still, if losses could be minimized, fall was the real pay-off
period. The fish -- trout, herring and whitefish -- spawn in successive
weeks, making possible heavy catches.

Since the early 1890s island fishermen have taken fish spawn (eggs
and milt), fertilized them, and cared for the spawn until the fish com-
pany boat picked them up for the fish hatchery.27 Fishermen began "to
take" spawn for two reasons: (1) to insure the health of island fish
populations and (2) in response to encouragement from hatchery per-
sonnel. With the same object in mind, that of insuring healthy fish

25. Interview with Stanley Silvertson aboard the Wenonah en route to
Windigo Ranger Station, Isle Royale, 22 August 1978. Interviewed by
Steve Wright.

26. Few, if any, fishermen learned how to swim. Being able to swim,
however, would not significantly improve your chance of survival if
you were immersed in the lake. Lake Superior is so cold that doctors
estimate you will die of hypothermia within 15 to 20 minutes.

populations, another method has been put into practice since the 1930s. The "new" method was to halt all fishing activity during some portion of the spawning season in the fall. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources was and is the governing agency that decides if and when there will be a "closed season" in the fall. Often because of closed season, or, alternately, cold weather, the fishermen moved back to Minnesota for the winter months. If a family's finances were hard pressed the family might winter on the island. Wintering on the island was more common during the depression years; it saved the cost of boat fare, money to rent a winter residence and splurges that would occur when in town. The few fishermen who wintered on Isle Royale typically supplemented their incomes by trapping beavers, muskrat, mink and other fur-bearing animals. Most fishermen who returned to the mainland for the winter were idle, since few could find paying jobs that allowed them to go in April or May and return to the island.

Isle Royale fish populations and thus fisheries have been historically unique to some aspects and events that occurred to fish populations and fisheries on the north and south shore of Lake Superior. In general, a more diverse number of profitable commercial species inhabit Isle Royale waters. In comparison, north and south shore fishermen were specialists in catching whitefish, or herring, or trout. More importantly, prior to the 1950s when Lake Superior's fishery biology was altered, island fishermen alone enjoyed undiminished, healthy lake trout populations and, to a lesser extent, whitefish populations. Isle Royale fish populations were an exception to the lake-wide rule of commercial species depletion. North and south
shore fishermen experienced reduced catches because of diminished fish populations, principally whitefish and trout, as early as 1894 and 1905, respectively. While the explanation for the drop off in commercial fish populations circumshore vary, two common causes were cited, namely, overfishing and pollution. Prior to the 1950s, and resuming with a reduced importance in the mid-1960s, trout have been the economic mainstay of island fishermen. While trout fishing and the importance of trout was on the decline, lake herring became most important for island fishermen. In earlier days herring was a secondary species or was used as a bait fish. But in the late 1950s, the remaining fishermen tried to stay economically solvent by fishing for herring. It was a losing battle from the beginning. And by the early 1960s herring numbers were no longer substantial enough to merit commercial fishing, no matter what their market price was.

After the early 1950s the lake biology, in essence, went crazy. The numbers of many indigenous fish species plummeted while the numbers of exotic species increased dramatically. Specifically, the early 1950s trout and whitefish populations plummeted lake-wide; sea lamprey numbers reached a peak, while preying on trout, whitefish and later herring; the smelt population increased; and by 1960 the lake herring population had crashed.

Generalizations made to account for the radical change in lake biology often become polemical, accusatory, and hypothetical. Any account of what "really" happened is interpretation and is a highly

speculative interpretation at that. Questions regarding population recovery of trout, whitefish and herring and their current numbers are also hotly debated. And to complicate matters, one's political view might sway one's biological interpretation. There are two vocal and polar camps of thought about what happened in Lake Superior. First, there is the camp of fishery biologists and sports fishermen, who, incidentally, are also very influential politically. This group suggests that the sea lamprey and commercial overfishing are to blame. They advocate vigorous lampricide programs, control the numbers of commercial fishermen and catch of fish. They also advocate stocking of fish, both indigenous and exotic game species. The second camp is made up of commercial fishermen and sympathizers. This group advocates a return to the Lake Superior fishery status quo, that is, the return of indigenous species. They argue this could be accomplished through an active and enlarged hatchery program, lampricide program and strong measures to curtail the smelt population. They accuse the "managers" of toying with lake biology to suit political pressures, such as making sure there are exotic game fishes for sports fishermen. Ultimately, I believe, the "answer" to what happened and what should be done lies not with which side can make a convincing case, but with which side has the most political pull. From this perspective the fishermen are continual losers in policy changes and in the rhetoric of why changes are needed.

Augmenting the political pressure of what island commercial fishermen derisively call "sport fishermen interests" are other factors which
have curtailed and nearly ended commercial fishing on Isle Royale.

The first adverse factor for the continuation of commercial fishing was the acquisition of land for Isle Royale National Park in the mid-1930s. Interestingly, most fishermen gave tacit approval for making Isle Royale a national park, since they did not see their enterprise as being in conflict with National Park ideals. Island fishermen were terribly wrong in their assumption. Through eminent domain proceedings and, in the fishermen's eyes, unscrupulous threats by NPS land acquisition agents, fishermen without land title were allocated "fishing leases" on a "special use permit." In effect, a fishing lease means one family's fishing days on Isle Royale are numbered; they will expire with the death of the fisherman and spouse. This was perhaps the biggest blow to a future for commercial fishing on the island. Ultimately, it robbed a fisherman of the incentive to update his equipment, keep his operation in top shape, and kept his family from taking as active an interest in commercial fishing as they may have otherwise.

Subsequent NPS regulations and threats denied fishermen traditionally-used resources to maintain their fisheries, such as poles for net markers or cleared areas for net repair and the like. In addition, well-known leisure activities suddenly became illegal, such as berry

29. Those few fishermen who had legal title to their fishery prior to NPS land acquisition proceedings became life leases. A life lease meant one's children born prior to the establishment of the National Park would be allowed to return to their island homes until their deaths. Life leasees could also come and go as they pleased in contrast to fishing leasees who were required to go to the island and fish each year or forfeit their claim.
picking, picnics with beach fires, and rock hounding for greenstones, copper and agates. Moreover, a subtle policy shift was afoot primarily with the Michigan DNR and to a less degree the NPS where commercial fishing was seen as an inconvenience and even a threat to sport fishing on the island. When Ingeborg protested to a Michigan DNR official about regulations aimed at curtailing commercial fishing, she was told candidly that "fishermen didn't pay enough taxes." In other words, island fishermen did not possess enough political power to insure their way of life. In the 1940s, '50s and '60s regulations were enforced which, in effect, sided with sport fishing interests, even without substantial evidence that commercial fishing had a detrimental effect on sport fishing. For example, one regulation which was suddenly enforced was the change of status of fishermen from resident to non-resident status with a three-fold increase in license prices.

The next blow, too, was devastating. Between 1954-1957 the trout population radically decreased. The Michigan DNR responded to the fish population threat by closing commercial trout fishing on the island from 1960 to 1967, although the devastation had already stopped commercial fishing of trout by 1957. Since 1967 the Michigan DNR has allowed population assessment fishing or a small number of trout to be taken by each fishermen with a fishing lease. The limited catch or "quotas" were and still are a goodwill gesture to allow old-time


fishermen to stay in business on a small scale. In 1967 and 1968 the Michigan DNR introduced a new ruling, called limited entry, through which many Isle Royale fishermen lost their fishing claims. Limited entry allowed only those fishermen who had been continuously fishing (through the lean, unprofitable years of the late '50s and '60s), to resume commercial fishing of trout. In the late '60s and '70s the federal and state fish hatcheries have planted millions of trout, herring and whitefish populations. In spite of these actions, the lake biology has been altered and is in flux, while the 160-year-old era of commercial fishing on Isle Royale is coming to a close.

SELECTED MATERIAL FOLK CULTURE FORMS

The material folk culture of Isle Royale commercial fishermen is preeminently functional. Island material folk culture is closely allied to the material folk culture of fishermen on the north and south shore of Lake Superior. To observers who are unfamiliar with commercial fishing the island's material folk culture and its fishermen seem foreign and unique. Early visitors to the island were quick to note the unusual architecture of the fisheries, the odd shape of the mackinaw boat, the dress of fishermen and so on.\(^1\) Other than a few local color descriptions of fisheries and fishery life, little was carefully documented about the fishermen's material folk culture. The material culture that received some attention was fishing technology—especially the type of nets used, boat-types and function and the transportation of fish to market.\(^2\)

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1. A revealing example of a visitor's impression of island fishermen and fishery life is Charles Parker Connolly's, "A Feather in His Cap: A Story of Isle Royale, Michigan," Northwest Minnesota Historical Center, Duluth, Minnesota. Connolly's manuscript depicts fishermen as rustic, uncomplicated and as Scandinavian noble savages. His local color descriptions can be realistic but are more often extremely romantized.

2. The documentation of these aspects of material culture was a by-product of inquiries into the economic and biological conditions of Lake Superior fisheries. For example, see U.S. Congress, Commissioners of Fish and Fisheries, *Report of 1886, 50th Cong., 2d sess., 1891, Miscellaneous Document No. 133*. 

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Due to space limitations, selectivity in the material folk culture expressions to be studied was necessary. Those expressions selected occur within the following divisions: "on the lake," "shore-work," and fisher-folk biology. On-the-lake material folk culture forms considered are navigational techniques, weather and lakelore (see Appendix B, Weather and Lakelore) and recognition and division of fishing grounds. The section on shore work will document and discuss occupational architecture such as fishhouses, nethouses, "boat slides" or ramps, net reels and docks. The final section on fisher-folk biology seeks to uncover fishermen's attitudes and ideas about Isle Royale fishery resources.

Discussion of island material folk culture in isolation from other folklife expressions distorts the overall picture of how fishery life was lived. Knowledge and use of material folk culture did not occur in isolation. Instead, daily chores and activities are patently integrative of all folklife expressions. For example, fishermen navigating their gas boats are affected by place names such as Doden and Domen and place-name legends such as the fisherman and his two dogs that were frozen in their sleep at Menagerie Light House. Also, it is important to note that analytically imposed folklife categories can distort the true picture of fishery life. For example, discussing lakelore independently of weatherlore obscures rather than elucidates complex interaction between them. Although:

3. Doden and Domen means death and doom, respectively, in Swedish. Ingeborg believes that her father, Sam Johnson, and his brother, Mike Johnson, named these two reefs in Siskiwit Bay. Ingeborg Holte, 17 August 1980.
lakelore and weatherlore can exist independently, the primary impetus for reading the weather and subsequently the lake is for on-the-lake safety and more efficient fishing.

The curtailed status of commercial fishing on the island directly affected fieldwork documentation. Material folk culture fieldwork was reconstructive, often-times verbal, and interpretive in the sense that a fisherman would, for example, tell how it was on the lake. Alan Dundes calls this interpretive commentary of the informant "metafolklore." Direct or even participant observation was conducted where possible to document weatherlore and lakelore, occupational architecture and fishery layout, and, to a limited degree, boat operating techniques.

Male and female sex roles greatly affected a fisherperson's knowledge of a particular material folk culture form. However, as mentioned before, since the depletion of trout in the 1950s sex roles have changed drastically. Many fisherwomen who formerly worked exclusively at domestic chores began going out on the lake and assisting in the fishhouses. Thus, some provinces of material culture are shared more in common today than in pre-trout depletion days. For example, Ingeborg learned how to operate a boat and to navigate on the open water only recently.5


5. The procedure by which Ingeborg learned to drive boats emphasized verbal instruction. In contrast, most fisher youths learned how to operate a boat by imitation. Ingeborg Holte, 5 August 1980.
Among the first material folk culture information a newcomer on Isle Royale learns is the biography of a boat from fishermen and most other island residents. Tracing back the ownership of a boat is generally quite easy since such knowledge is highly valued among island fishermen and others. The most revered type of fishing craft is the gas boat. Most island fishermen's gas boats were made on the north shore by master boat builders. Gas boats were made between twenty and twenty-eight feet long, usually open-decked, with a wooden hull, square stern with tiller, and inboard engine mounted at mid-ship. The gas boat era ran from the 1930s to the 1950s. These dependable craft did not become obsolete by naturally evolving circumstances; instead they became obsolete when the trout depletion forced the end of lake trout fishing.

On the Lake
Navigational Techniques

Navigation on the big lake was and is still an art. A remarkable spectrum of conditions can be encountered on the water and must be safely negotiated. For example, wave height, wave direction, "chop," currents and depths of water can affect navigation of Lake Superior. Visibility can range from miles to inches, due to fogs which obscure objects.

6. More often than not the master boat builder on the north shore was a Mr. Hill of Larsmont, Minnesota. Mr. Hill's son, Reuben Hill, followed his father's footsteps as a master boat builder. For more information the latter, see Ryck Lydecker, "Craft Revival Swells on Great Lakes," The Seiche 5:1 (Fall 1980): 1-2; 5.

7. Chop is the uppermost wave conditions. Oftentimes the chop will run many degrees counter to the larger swells or waves.
Navigational techniques held in common throughout the island were typically learned by being on the water with a more experienced fisherman. Specific navigational proficiency of a fisherman depended on personal inclination, physical ability such as good eyesight or hearing, and perseverance. Generally, navigation on clear days caused little problems and was easily mastered. Tricky navigation through reefs and the need to locate small net floats and buoys miles away honed navigational techniques even in the best of weather. Where possible prominent landmarks were used to ascertain the proper channel into a harbor, through a reef, or to locate one's nets and specific fishing grounds. If possible two or three landmarks were used to mentally triangulate a fisherman's position or help establish a better course on which to run.  

8. "The green bunch" or "the landslide" are two examples of landmarks that were used by fishermen to orient themselves to their fishing grounds or those of others.  

9. The green bunch was a particular grove of trees on the main island that was adjacent to the profitable fishing grounds off McCormick's Reef. The landslide was located in Washington Harbor near a crumbling cliff of rocks.

Navigational techniques used when visibility was poor, or when the locations of nets were more difficult to find, were more sophisticated. The most common technique was a timed compass course. To reach a destination, a compass course would be taken at a preset speed and preset time. For example, a fisherman would run

9. Interview with Stanley Sivertson, Duluth, Minnesota, 4 April 1980.
south-southwest at 1400 rpm for fifteen minutes. Many fishermen did not have tachometers in their boats so they would run a compass course at a speed "that sounded right" for the allocated time. A variation of a timed compass course would be taken to find particularly difficult sets. A compass course would be taken to parallel the gang of nets on a predetermined side. After making sure he had gone by the closest net, the fisherman would make a right-angle turn and run until he came upon the floats of his own gang of nets (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Navigational Technique Used in Dense Fog

If a fisherman became disoriented on the lake, the most common action taken would be to stop his boat, turn off the motor, and listen. While momentarily adrift all kinds of stimuli would become noticeable, and from these clues the fisherman could reorient himself. The most common and effective stimuli used by fishermen to reorient themselves were sounds. Sounds, such as breakers on a shore or reef and bird sounds (including sounds in which the fisherman could distinguish the bird species or number), helped the fisherman reorient himself. For example, hearing warbler songs would tell the fisherman he was


11. Interview with Stanley Sivertson, aboard the Wenonah, Grand Portage, Minnesota, 10 July 1980. Stan added that hooklines were much easier to find this way because they had more floats than gill nets.
dangerously close to a shoreline. Or, if light conditions permitted, seeing the bottom or recognizing "green water" provided enough clues to resume safe running. However, if the fisherman was still unsure of his location, he would cautiously run a course towards the main island until he could see the silhouette of the shoreline. Based on the silhouette, the color or shape of the bottom, and shore sounds, the fisherman oriented himself and headed for home or to his fishing grounds. On extremely rare occasions two other means of "dead reckoning" were used, namely, the fragrance of plant life and the echo of sounds from a shoreline. Tuan touches upon the remarkable sensory skills people such as island fishermen can develop when he writes, "People can develop exceptional perceptual acuity in the course of adapting successfully to the challenge of a harsh environment." Fishermen's navigational skills and techniques bear testimony

12. Green water meant shallow water at depths up to forty feet. Green water was noted in the early spring when the lake was clearer. Later in the season the lake becomes stirred up and visibility decreases. Stan Sivertson, 10 July 1980.

13. A common optical distortion in fog was noted by both Sivertsons. In essence, objects first appearing out of the fog are distorted. Buddie mentioned objects tend to "rise," while Stan mentioned objects can be exaggerated in size. Buddie Sivertson, 15 April 1980; Stan Sivertson, 10 July 1980.

14. Both Ingeborg and Buddie mentioned an instance of reckoning by smell. For Ingeborg it was the fragrance of Balm of Gilead growing on an outer island that provided enough clues for her and her husband to figure out where they were. Ingeborg Holte, 19 August 1980. Buddie mentioned the smell of "tiny red flowers" that grew profusely on North Gap Point that "told him where he was." Buddie Sivertson, 14 February 1980.

15. Tuan, Topophilia, p. 77.
to their 'successful adaptation' to the capricious Lake Superior environment.

Even with these navigational skills, fishermen would occasionally not know where they were in a fog or storm. Buddie encapsulated a feeling of reorientation most fishermen experienced versus a much more alarming condition when he said "There is a difference between being lost and not knowing where you are." While many fishermen momentarily did not know where they were in fogs, few, if any, felt lost.

Moderating the unstabilizing effect Lake Superior fogs and storms could have on fishermen was the security rendered by having the island always in sight, or if not in sight, then in the mind's eye. Buddie acknowledged this security backup when discussing navigational techniques designed to find one's way out of fog when he stated "You always had the island."

Perhaps most significant in the fishermen's attitudes affecting boat navigation and operation was their freely expressed fear of the big lake. Fishing on Lake Superior, like elsewhere, was a dangerous occupation. The possibility of death by drowning was very real, as some island families have been struck by such tragedies. Prudence towards the lake was seen as a positive virtue, whereas hesitation to act while on the lake was known to be destructive and even fatal.

Learning to operate a gas boat was rarely formally taught. A more informal education of watching, imitating and occasionally


17. Ibid.
exchanging questions and answers between father and son was most common. For Buddie, formal instruction came only when he did something wrong or was being careless. Early in life, boys and girls would be allowed to play in boats in the sheltered bays and harbors. For example, Ingeborg and her brother mimicked their father's fishing operation, fishing with cast-off nets in a small skiff in Hopkins' Harbor.

Captainship, or the mastering of a boat's operation, including navigation, mooring procedures and understanding a boat's limits, was held in high esteem by island fishermen. Captainship and the mastery of a vessel's operation were deeply respected by all fishermen. Owning and operating a large vessel was one step better. The respect for captainship was nowhere better revealed than when favorite boats were discussed. The boats were almost always mentioned with their respective captains—for example, the America with Captain Smith, the Winyah with Ole Berg and so on.

A few boat operating rules were typically unvoiced but stringently minded. They were (1) do not run a boat at night; (2) check to make sure enough life preservers are on board for each person; (3) check to make sure there is a compass on board and enough gas; and (4) have a navigational chart along, but do not trust it; trust yourself.

Instead of conceptualizing their boats as potentially dangerous, fishermen trusted their gas boats. Stories of these craft performing

18. Ibid.
miracles, in effect, to save fishermen were common, and demonstrate the high value fishermen placed on their boats. Among island fishermen, boats served as transportation to work and as a work tool, as a recreation vehicle, and as a means of communication. Fishermen identified with their boats as attested by their affinity to speak of their boat's history, maker, and of adversities overcome while in their boats. Fishermen not only identified with their boats, but they also could be identified by them. For example, Washington Harbor residents could tell which fisherman was in the harbor by the sound of the boat engine. Tuan's statement about one effect machines can have on their users was true for island fishermen and their boats. He writes, "Tools and machines enlarge a person's world when he feels it to be a direct extension of his corporeal powers." For Stan, the experience of spaciousness felt while in a boat is associated with the pleasant feeling of freedom, as evidenced in the following exchange:

Dr. Rakestraw: What are the major rewards of life on Isle Royale?


20. An excellent example of this type of story of a miraculous escape from the elements is found in Peter Olkinen's, Island Folk: The People of Isle Royale (Houghton, Michigan: Isle Royale Natural History Association, 1979), pp. 12-14. John Skadberg, a fisherman from Hay Bay, Isle Royale, relates how his boat was struck by lightning and was still operable. Although the engine wiring was severely burned, the engine started and the boat carried Skadberg to safety.


To close this section, let us examine how the fishermen's experiences in a boat was or was not a provisioner of a sense of place. Fishermen's feelings toward gas boats were often indirectly expressed and thus had to be inferred. However, comments about gas boats express attributes which are similar to sense of place attributes. For example, fishermen felt a strong sense of identity with their boats while on the lake. Their boats were a center or a focal point of their occupational identity. And fishermen generally felt secure while on the water; they had a deep familiarity and affection for their gas boats, and boats reflected upon their past and present owners.

Fishermen conceptualized their boats in only two ways that kept these craft from being powerful places, namely, the questions of permanence or specific location and the ultimate security of boats. Although scholars are in disagreement as to the primacy of a particular location in providing a sense of place, at minimum there should be what Tuan calls "a pause in movement."24 Literally, of course, boats were vehicles of movement; however, on a more symbolic level they provided a temporary pause and refuge, a centering locale from which to venture out on the lake. But gas boats typically did not inspire feelings of a specific or settled location among fishermen. Boats acted only as a temporary form of security from the lake. Gas boats were, in essence, fragile shells on a volatile fresh-water sea. Isle Royale fishermen, all other factors aside, preferred to be on land than on the lake.25 Despite

24. Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place, p. 138.

these characteristics, Isle Royale fishermen's experiences with boats portray a deeply felt relationship which was largely unconscious. Gas boats were a much appreciated tool, not a source of security or a provisioner of feelings of permanence.

Weather and Lakelore

Island fishermen had much at stake in reading the weather and lake signs. Accurate predictions opened up the opportunities of economic success and safe conduct. Poor predictions meant a loss in fishing gear, a loss in profits, and perhaps the loss of life or limb. The importance of weather and lakelore in a fisherman's life is witnessed by the fact that they were the most commonly told emic category of fisherylore. The weather and lakelore documented were surprising in character. It was extremely empirical in nature, and sober and terse in character, rather than being superstitious or lyrical. Most important was the fact that fishermen's weather and lakelore were the products of sensitive and highly localized observation.

Curiously, the weather and lakelore I documented was devoid of directly stated magical beliefs, omens, good luck devices and customs, or control devices. This dearth of magical or superstitious beliefs runs counter to the accepted interpretation that, "Coal miners and fishermen as well as rodeo performers and gamblers are in occupations and situations that are replete with ritual magic."26 In short, the same authors go on to say that the physically threatening and

The unpredictable character of marine environments provides the impetus for ritual magic. Certainly, as stated above, the Lake Superior environment was sufficiently hazardous to produce the unpredictability and threatening character of a marine environment. If one accepts this premise, where then is this concern with unpredictability expressed?

It was expressed in one way by the marked drive for localized and empirical observations.

A commonly held belief that "the island makes its own weather" best expresses the tendency for localization of weather and lakelore on Isle Royale. Some weather and lakelore was so site specific that its intended validity was meant for only one small area—for instance, Wright Island or McCormick's Reef. For example, while in her residence Ingeborg could tell the approximate wind direction by the warmth of her home. She could do this by her intimate knowledge of how the wind is affected by the surrounding trees, outer islands, main island, length of sweep across open water and by knowing which winds are likely to be cold, moderate or warm. Stän and Buddie knew that fall weather affecting fishing conditions from McCormick's Reef to Washington Harbor had a common pattern. A morning that began with a light northwest wind would commonly switch to the southwest in the afternoon, thereby making a longer, wetter and rougher ride home from the fishing grounds. By knowing this pattern, fishermen could circumvent this probable discomfort by rescheduling their work day. These two examples underscore a claim made by E. Estyn Evans who wrote "Probably the element
of folklore that most clearly reflects direct regional observation and experience is weatherlore."\(^{27}\)

The keying of weather and lakelore responses in the interview context bears mentioning due to the unusual problem that was encountered. Questions designed to elicit weather and lakelore responses were successful only if they contained specific environmental references such as time of year, place, sea conditions, visibility, and wind direction. Questions regarding lake currents, which are perhaps the most sophisticated island phenomena to predict, had to be especially condition specific. This predicated rule of asking only condition specific questions to elicit in-depth responses meant that I had to inquire about present conditions. I simply could not make up conditions realistic enough to stimulate the fishermen's responses.

There was much interest among Isle Royale fishermen to make weather and lakelore "good" for a specific locale (see Appendix B, Weather and Lakelore for specific examples). Indeed, the preference for accurate, localized weather predictions kept the fishermen from placing too much stock in marine forecasts, since such forecasts are general in pronouncement. Even today fishermen make their predictions and subsequent involvement on the lake by relying upon reading their barometers, wind direction, applying weather and lakelore, and lastly, listening to marine weather forecasts. The current, second and third generations of Scandinavian fishermen place more credence on weather forecasts than

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their parents or grandparents ever would.\textsuperscript{28} Meteorological knowledge, such as reading cloud and sky signs, flourished with the first Scandinavian fishermen. Currently, such meteorological knowledge has greatly atrophied and is barely present among today's island fishermen.

Another form of weatherlore that has languished tremendously in the last thirty years on Isle Royale is rhyming couplets. Popular couplets such as "red sky at night, sailor's delight" owe their continued existence on Isle Royale as much to tourists and written sources as to fishermen. However, there was a tradition of these sayings among the older and past generations of island fishermen. Ingeborg mentioned that her husband knew dozens of rhyming weather sayings.\textsuperscript{29} I recorded only three rhyming weather sayings, and one was barely recognizable as such. The barely recognizable variant of a weather saying was illustrative of much island weatherlore. It was extremely site specific and unstructured. For example, Ingeborg mentioned, "Mackerel skies mean high winds, or winds up high, but not at Chippewa Harbor. And mares' tails mean rain."\textsuperscript{30} Ingeborg's saying is a variant of two rhyming couplets namely, "Mackerel sky and mares' tails, make lofty ships carry low sails. . . . Mares' tails are mackerel sky, Never long wet, never long dry."\textsuperscript{31} Whatever the form of the weather saying, its accuracy was most important.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Stan Sivertson, 10 July 1980.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ingeborg Holte, 19 August 1980.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Ingeborg's saying is accurate for Chippewa Harbor which is protected from northwest and west winds. Furthermore, her saying is accurate in nothing that mackerel skies or alto-cumulus clouds are a sign of an approaching warm front and subsequent rain showers.32

In sum, island fishermen's weather and lakelore had little or no repeated narrative structure such as formulaic openings or closings, meter or rhyme (see Appendix B, Weather and Lakelore, for more examples). It was typically expressed in a casual context, was succinct and often was site specific. Finally, a premium was placed on weather and lakelore that accurately predicted the weather to come in the next day or two.

Fishing Grounds

The documentation of Lake Superior commercial fishermen's, and especially island fishermen's, fishing grounds has been neglected by academicians.33 Perhaps this neglect is due to the generally emic character of fishing ground knowledge, or to the complicated arrangements of fishing grounds claims by various fishermen. Such claims were many-faceted because of the flexibility needed to meet the seasonal aspect of fishing and the current market preference for fish types. Also, the varying degree of fishing pressure on fishing grounds altered

32. Ibid., pp. 95-96. Weather Wisdom is an excellent book in its analysis of the accuracy of weatherlore. I have adopted much of Mr. Lee's analysis of mackerel skies and mares'tails in the discussion above.

33. Lawyers and fishery biologists have not been slow to document selected aspects of fishing grounds knowledge, especially on Lake Superior's south shore. Native American fishing claims have made fishing grounds a legal issue, prompting much research in this area.
the type of claims made by fishermen on a particular fishing ground. Regardless of the reason for documentary neglect, a study of island fishermen's fishing grounds is revealing of fishing customs, sophistication of fishing knowledge, and the nature of territoriality among fishermen.

A complicated set of environmental conditions produced a good fishing ground. Some of the conditions were the right kind of bottom for each kind of fish sought, water temperature, water depth, lake current, spawning times of fish, and the proximity of the grounds to the fishery. When the first Scandinavian immigrant fishermen set their nets in Isle Royale waters there was much to be learned, especially the location of good "sets" within fishing grounds. Knowledge of the location of good sets was kept as quiet or secretive as possible in the beginning of the Scandinavian period of commercial fishing. A fisherman would typically have to find his own good set by experimentation, or by trial and error. For example, John Johns stated in 1894, "We cannot tell just where to locate our nets to catch fish only by trying. We know, of course, that the fish are in the fishing grounds, but do not know in what part of the grounds."34 However, as Ingeborg noted about the early days, the inefficiency of the trial and error method in net location was offset by the great numbers of fish.35 The hard earned knowledge of good sets was passed along to succeeding generations, less by word of mouth and more by working the location in tandem with

an experienced fisherman. Also, experienced fishermen would watch or listen for evidence of their neighbors having had a "heavy lift." In short, if a fisherman did well with a particular set, his neighbors or competitors knew about it. After the first or second decade of the Scandinavian period of commercial fishing on Isle Royale, it was common knowledge among the fishermen where the good sets were located.

Generally, "old-timers" (the veteran members of the first generation of Scandinavian fishermen) fishing sets were recognized and respected. However, where the fishing competition was most acute, such as off Todd Harbor in the 1890s and early 1900s, it was less likely that fishing ground claims would be recognized from one year to the next. For most island fishermen, or non-old timers, fishing grounds claims were established twice a year. One claim would be made for hookline fishing and another for gill net fishing. Once a fishing ground was claimed by setting a net, it was recognized as that fisherman's for the duration of that method of fishing. Varying degrees of fishing pressure were created by the particular requirements of hookline and gill net fishing. Hooklines, which were employed in deeper water, were less centralized in placement, thus creating less competition for a particular ground. Alternately, gill nets were extremely site specific and thus created intense competition. At McCormick's Reef the great number of gill net buoys (there are two to each net), visible during the days of intense fishing competition, made Captain Oberg remark

"McCormick's would look like a porcupine's back." Fishermen setting gill nets inside Siskiwit Bay had less competition, and traditional fishing claims were respected from year to year. Thus, the rare infraction that did occur in Siskiwit Bay was seen as being particularly flagrant. Ingeborg remarked that "harsh words or a bop in the nose" generally got the interloper to move his nets. Again, an older fisherman who had had long-time sets in one area was more likely to have his claim respected. Conversely, younger fishermen tended to view "the lake as free" with little regard for traditional fishing claims.

The division of and respect for fishing ground claims is an example of territoriality among island fishermen. Geoffrey Hayward has noted characteristics of the "territoriality of home" which apply to the fishing ground situation at Isle Royale. Many of Hayward's characteristics of the territoriality of home, namely personalization, defense, familiarity and belonging, are manifested in fishermen's claims of fishing grounds.

One example can illustrate the degree of personalization made by a fisherman regarding his fishing grounds. Ingeborg observed, "My father never got over the fact [laughing] that 'that boat' [the steamer Glenlyon] went down there [off his fishing ground near Menagerie


Island]. Sometimes you would think from listening to him that it
had done it on purpose." Personalization was also due, in part, to
the great risk involved in fishing and the detailed involvement spent
at a gang of nets. Certain sets were known for destroying nets, and
the fishermen would try to minimize their losses through varying
techniques.

The second characteristic of territoriality that is true for
island fishing ground claims is defense. Ingeborg's mention of "a bop
in the nose" is but one aggressive way a fisherman might defend his
fishing grounds. The third and fourth characteristics of territoriality,
namely familiarity and belonging, are interrelated and are best
discussed together. A sense of belonging or an emotional bond is the
outgrowth of a deep familiarity with the island. It is much easier to
substantiate the fishermen's familiarity with their fishing grounds
than to substantiate their sense of belonging to their fishing grounds.
An example of Stan's familiarity with McCormick's Reef fishing grounds
is his knowledge of sets that required less adjustment of anchor lines
to position the gill nets properly. In short, Stan has a mental map
of the bottom conditions all along McCormick's Reef. An example of a
group of fishermen recognizing and respecting the proprietary rights of
a set is John Skadberg's set by "landslide." Decades after Skadberg
stopped fishing the site and after vegetation had obliterated evidence
of a landslide, it was still identified as Skadberg's and by its
peculiar name.

Hayward mentions one indicator of the territoriality of home that is not applicable to island fishing grounds. Fishermen would rarely, if ever, associate predictability with fishing grounds or fishing; rather, the unpredictability of the success or failure of a fishing ground typifies the experience of nearly all island fishermen.

Shore Work

Shore work for an island fisherman occurred in an area designed and constructed to be of practical use. Not only were the obvious occupational structures such as fishhouses, nethouses, boat slides and so on functional in purpose; so were the less obvious structures and areal arrangements. For example, fishermen preferred to live close to their work. Their residences, if constructed by themselves, were close by their dock and fishhouse. Or fishermen would clear a long strip of ground of all loose matter so they could mend their nets in the bare area. A clean area was important in keeping sticks and other vegetation from entangling in their nets. Such net mending areas were usually located in a sheltered area, away from blustery winds and, if possible, situated to face the south to take advantage of the sun's heat. Washington Harbor fishermen opportuneley used the abandoned bowling alley at Singer's Resort as a place to mend nets (see figure 6).

Occupational Architecture

Island occupational architecture was predominantly wood.

The close proximity of wooden structures to the lake, if not in the

42. Oikarinen, Island Folk, p. 53.
lake, caused rapid deterioration. Building deterioration was accepted and overcome by constructing easy-to-make structures to succeed the old ones. For example, during the Johnson/Holte tenure on Wright Island they had three different fishhouses. Observers have been quick to pronounce that fishery buildings were makeshift affairs and that fishermen were aesthetically ignorant not to take better care of their buildings. However, island commercial fishing never made a fisherman well-to-do, and luxuries such as investing money and effort in bright, new structures were unheard of. The economic position of fishermen deterred the continual upkeep of their fisheries. One advantage gained by having a succession of structures was that the new structure could be better situated. For example, the Johnson/Holte family at Wright Island moved their fishhouse from the wet and exposed meadow area to the present-day dry and sheltered location to the east of the meadow.

The occupational architecture of an island fishery is not unique and has antecedents and counterparts on both the north and south shore of Lake Superior. However, even among intra-island structures there is a great diversity in construction techniques, building materials, and division of interior building space. The lack of uniformity among many fishery structures is due to physical, economic, and historic forces. First, the isolated and distant position of island fisheries made shipping costs prohibitive. Consequently, structures were made of native materials, most often logs, some stone, salvaged materials

from abandoned buildings (lumber camps, Civilian Conservation Corps buildings, resort buildings, and mining-related structures), flotsam and shipwrecks. When and where a fishery was established influenced what materials would be available for construction, what the building would be used for, and what site specific resources could be used or overcome. A good example of an island fishery affected by all three building criteria was the herring fishery at Stone House Island. The small, split island was so isolated from a plentiful wood source that the fishery buildings were made predominantly of native sandstone. Because Stone House Island was a herring fishery, fewer buildings were needed. Finally, because of its extreme location, dangerous exposure, and tiny harbor it never became a highly valued fishery site.

Even though there were differences between intra-island fishing structures, there were many similarities in design, construction, and near universality in function. Structures having common design and construction traits include docks, net reels, hand-carved net buoys, boat slides, fishhouses, and nethouses. Also, many construction techniques and layout of fishery grounds and structures were shared in common. For example, the shape and placement of net reels were uniform throughout the island. Net reels were made with four "blades" attached to a revolving center span log. The center span log was held up by a cross piece nailed to two vertical posts sunk into the ground. Even the length of the center span log was similar, logs being 14 to 16 feet in length.
The most common denominator in fishery architecture is function. All fishhouses for example, function alike even though they may be built or designed differently. In the following "tour" of island fishery architecture, the function of the structures will be emphasized and other uniformities will be discussed as they arise (see figure 7).

Fishery architecture begins and ends at the dock. Docks serve as temporary storage areas, pathways, and as moorage for boats. In the heyday of commercial fishing two or three rigs, with two men to a rig, would "tie up" at one dock. Docks were crowded with empty fish boxes, fishing gear, empty propane bottles awaiting shipment and the like.

Docks were one of the most uniformly constructed structures at Isle Royale. They were made up of a series of log cribs or a rectangular log framework, anchored in the water by boulders. A series of log cribs was the foundation for planking, which made up the walkway of the dock. Fishermen were particularly opportunistic in utilizing pulp sticks as cribbing material. A crib would be built on the shoreline out of shallowly notched logs which were then spiked together. The interstices between logs were purposely left open. After the crib was built at the right height (the height from the lake bottom to a foot or 18 inches above the water surface), logs were inserted in one of the lower interstices to form a floor. The crib would then be pushed

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44. Pulp sticks were eight-foot-long logs intended to be made into pulp wood products. They were rafted in great log booms to paper mills located on the mainland. Many times a storm on the lake would burst open a log boom and scatter pulp sticks along Isle Royale shores. Some recessed coves and harbors of Isle Royale would have hundreds of pulp sticks lying along the shoreline.
Figure 6. Sivertson family member mending a net in the Old Sivertson Fishhouse. (Courtesy Isle Royale National Park)

Figure 7. Isle Royale Fishery Settlement circa 1891. (Courtesy of the National Archives)
or pulled into the water and filled with boulders just so the crib 
was barely buoyant. While still afloat the crib would be towed into 
position and sunk with the addition of more rocks. Positioning and 
sinking the crib in the right location was the tricky part. The crib 
had to settle into place in line with other cribs and at the right 
depth. Usually the lake bottom was at a slight slope away from the 
shore so the lakeward side of the crib had to be built up to level out 
the crib exposed above water.

At Washington Harbor construction of a dock was usually undertaken 
by two men, the rig owner and a hired man. On rare occasions when 
more muscle power was needed a few more men would help. At isolated 
fisheries, such as Wright Island, all male family members might help 
in building a dock. Most fisheries had a second or supplementary dock 
which served as moorage for extra boats or as further protection from 
rough seas.

Crib docks could only be built where the lake bottom was gradually 
sloped. This restriction was an unviolatable criteria in dock location. 
Properly constructed docks were of such importance to a fishery that 
few fisheries were located at sites with steeply pitched bottoms.

Crib docks were successful in withstanding the tremendous pressure 
of winter ice. Other types of docks, such as driven pole docks, do not 
withstand winter ice as well. Although the three fishermen did not 
know exactly why crib docks withstood winter ice, the docks were
appreciated for their durability.45

The development of larger and heavier boats in the Scandinavian period of island commercial fishing has required a succession of water depths off a fishery dock. Generally, depths needed to keep a boat from going aground increased until the trout depletion days. Many early fisheries, such as the Kluck fishery on Hat Island, were established in what would be considered today shoal water. The pattern of increasing water depths at fishery docks can be used to ascertain the approximate date a fishery was abandoned.

A fishhouse is the "same as a house out on a dock."46 Most often, the fishhouse was in the center, with dock space on all three sides facing the lake. The most common type of fishhouse on Isle Royale was a one-story frame structure. However, the earlier form of a one-and-one-half story log structure was still in existence. The older log buildings typically used club moss as chinking material. Frame construction fishhouses were considered superior since they were built easily and quickly and put less weight on the dock and crib foundation. However, frame fishhouses became affordable only when processed lumber could be salvaged or perhaps even purchased.

45. Two theories were offered as to why crib docks withstood pressure from winter ice. First, cribs would ride with the ice; they are lifted up by the ice but they always settled back in place. Second, crib docks with their filled-in-cribs created shallows which freeze first when cold weather comes. By freezing first they freeze fast to the shore and bottom and gain extra strength from their frozen position.

46. Stan Sivertson, 10 July 1980.
A fishhouse was the occupational hub of the fishery. The fishhouse had a large doorway, five feet wide at a minimum, that opened out onto the dock. The tendency of having a large door was so marked that when the Sivertsons reassembled a purchased Civilian Conservation Corps building, they only made one change. They enlarged the doorway. There was at least one window to each side of the fishhouse; however, most windows were draped with gunny sacks to keep out direct sunlight and heat. Fishhouses were and are invariably cool, since they are located over the lake. The cooler the fishhouse the easier it was to store ice and fresh fish awaiting shipment. Inside a fishhouse were dressing benches for cleaning fish, wooden and waxed cardboard crates to ship fish, and a scale with which to weigh boxes of fish. Also, inside the fishhouse were spare motors, tools, a work bench for motor and equipment repair, and a lead-maker forge for fabricating net sinkers. Miscellaneous boat equipment and bags of salt for making brine were also to be found in a fishhouse. A "dip hole" (a hole in the fishery floor to allow free access to the lake) was found universally in fishhouses. Water was taken from the dip hole to clean the dressing benches and floorboards. Typically a fishhouse had rafters or cross beams which acted as a de facto storage area for items which had to be kept dry.

Off to one side of the fishhouse and on dry ground were strings of net reels. A trail would connect the fishhouse and net reels. Net reels were used to wind up nets for inspecting, drying, mending, and cleaning. Net reels were rotated by hand power at the speed desired.
On the water's edge, below the net reels and away from foot traffic, would be one or two wooden boat slides. If possible, boat slides were located on sandy or pebble bottoms. Boat slides were, in essence, large log ladders extending into the water on one end and extending well above the high water mark on the other end. Boat slides were situated where the slope of the ground, above and below the water surface, was quite shallowly pitched. They were made by spiking cross timbers onto long logs. The cross timbers were placed at three to five foot intervals. Boats were pulled out of the water on the slides to make major repairs or just to drydock the boat. Many of the abandoned gas boats on Isle Royale still sit on rotting boat slides.

The trail that would commence at the fishhouse and wind past the net reels often terminated at the nethouse. Nethouses were located in more out-of-the-way places than fishhouses since they were less critical to the daily operations of the fishery. The nethouse was essentially a storage shed for nets and net specific equipment such as floats or corks and net sinkers. Ideally a nethouse consisted of one large dry room, where air circulation kept the stored nets from mildew. Nets were stored neatly wound up and hung from cross beams. Most nethouses had few windows since little light was needed in a storage area. On Washington Island abandoned resort buildings were used as nethouses.

Other fishery buildings included a residence or two, perhaps a small wash house, a small fish smoker, and an outhouse. The Holte/Johnson fishery had an additional outbuilding that housed a small
"power plant" or generator. No commercial fishermen at Isle Royale
built a boathouse to house their boats. A few fishermen built boat
ramps, much like a boat slide except more elaborately made for daily
removal of their boats from the lake.

Extremely peaked roofs were characteristic of most fishery buildings
built from raw materials. Typically, the roof pitch was between 30 and
45 degrees. The extreme slope made up in strength what the notoriously
small and widely spaced rafters lacked.

Specific site-related criteria needed for a successful fishery
operation can be identified. Choosing a good harbor was an
important decision, since a successful operation was dependent
upon a good harbor. The following are criteria for choosing a good
harbor: (1) "good water," or enough water at the dock and to the
fishing grounds to keep the fisherman's boat from scraping or hitting
bottom; enough water for maneuverability inside the harbor;
(2) adequate shelter from heavy seas; (3) a gradual slope to the lake
bottom so crib docks could be easily constructed; a water depth
not exceeding ten to twelve feet where the dock was to be constructed;
(4) close proximity of the harbor to fishing grounds; (5) adequate area
for fishery buildings; (6) high and dry ground for the residence
buildings and to minimize the numbers of mosquitoes, black flies and
"no-see-ums" present; (7) shelter from cold off-shore winds, if
possible.\textsuperscript{47} One site rarely, if ever, fit all of these criteria.

\textsuperscript{47} "No-see-ums" or biting midges, are notorious for their small
size and yet their capability to raise large welts. "No-see-ums" is
a regional term for midges.
Instead, tradeoffs of the desired criteria were made in choosing a fishery site. However, the first three criteria were musts for a successful island fishery. During the heyday of commercial fishing, attempts were made to establish fisheries in locations that did not meet the first three criteria. For example, at Long Point the Saul fishery had marginal shelter at best. The hope was that the absolutely unbeatable proximity to excellent fishing grounds at McCormick's Reef offset the labor of pulling boats out of the water daily. The Saul fishery did not stay in business for long.

Fishery location is predicated on environmental conditions. The cultural landscape (the fishery) is intimately related to and is dependent upon the physical environment (the island's geology, limnology, geography, biology and so on). This relationship between the cultural landscape and natural environment is an example of one landscape axiom postulated by Pierce Lewis: "the axiom of environmental control." Lewis states: "Most cultural landscapes are intimately related to physical environment. Thus, the reading of cultural landscape also presupposes some basic knowledge of physical landscapes." In sum, fishery location is but one example of how island fishermen recognized environmental limits.

**Fisher-Folk Biology**

Isle Royale fishermen developed their own theories about how the lake functioned, how fish behaved, what fish ate and so on.

Their theories were formulated and tested through years of observation and experience. Fishery theories that helped produce more successful catches were judged to be very accurate. Fishermen such as Stan Sivertson impressed me with their continual interest in understanding the lake. Stan was remarkable in his sensitivity to look for new ways to predict and understand what was happening below the water’s surface. Each island fisherman’s theories were severely tested to explain what went wrong with the lake in the early 1950s and how over-exploitation of fish fit into the overall picture.

The question of whether or not over-exploitation of island fish occurred immediately preceding the effects of the sea lamprey is contested. Fishery biologists and park managers contend that the whole lake was over-harvested. The fishermen I interviewed were unanimous in their contention that the island’s fish stock was not over-fished in the late 1940s and early ’50s. A third group contends that a new fishing technique--floating gill nets--over-exploited island fish populations. However, over-fishing elsewhere on Lake Superior is an agreed-upon fact. All parties agree that even if island fishermen did over-harvest fish, over-harvesting occurred four to six decades after it occurred elsewhere on the lake.

There are numerous reasons why Isle Royale fish populations remained healthy until the 1950s. First, on a comparative basis there was less fishing pressure on Isle Royale than on the south shore of Lake Superior. Island fishermen used equipment adapted to island conditions, namely, smaller rigs without gasoline-powered net lifters.
In other words, there were few fish tugs operating in island waters.

Second, the economic incentive to fish in Isle Royale waters was curtailed by the additional heavy shipping costs incurred with transporting fish to Duluth, Minnesota. The extra shipping costs and isolation of island fisheries, in effect, cut back the number of island fishermen. The hardy fishermen that came and stayed faced extra shipping costs which prompted them to fish harder. Third, fall storms gave reprieves from fishing pressure by destroying nets, creating unsafe areas for nets which were spawning grounds for fish, and by causing storm bound days when a fisherman never had the opportunity to set his nets in the water.

There is agreement among fishermen and biologists that the sea lamprey was the most harmful agent in ravaging trout and whitefish numbers lake-wide. However, Stan and Ingeborg claim that the introduction of smelt contributed greatly to the depredation of trout and whitefish numbers. For example, Stan believes that smelt helped upset the balance of Lake Superior's fishery resources by eating trout fry and out-competing the trout's main prey, herring.

Ingeborg, Stan and Buddie all believed the lake used to be better the way it was. Fishermen would like to see a return to native species. Also, they feel let down in that the hatchery programs they rigorously supported were cut back in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. Commercial fishermen's lobbying efforts for fish hatcheries are over 100 years old. Lake fishermen's lobbying efforts were largely responsible for the

establishment of the federal fish hatchery at Lester River, Minnesota in 1887. Island fishermen were unflagging supporters of hatchery efforts that affected Isle Royale. They supported both the taking of fertilized eggs in the fall and the planting of trout fry in the spring.

Island fishermen were taking spawn at least as early as 1893. Fishermen would take care of the fertilized eggs for a day or two until the fish company boat picked up the spawn and transported it to the Lester River Fish Hatchery.

A close look at the work involved in taking spawn underscores the strong support fishermen had for the hatchery program. The initial procedure of fertilizing the roe occurred on the lake. After a female fish was picked from the gill net its roe was removed and placed in a wet pan. Then, similarly a male fish's milt was poured on the eggs and the spawn stirred with a fish's tail. This peculiar type of stirring was done to insure more fertilization of eggs and to keep human bacteria from coming into contact with the eggs. Next, the spawn was poured into a bigger pail and the cloudy, milt-saturated water was poured off. Fresh water was added and the pail's contents dumped into a keg containing the day's spawn. All of this activity occurred on the lake in the fall when rough seas were commonplace.

At the fishhouse the eggs were poured onto moss-laden trays. The moss kept the eggs moist between the twice-daily dunkings. Fishermen

50. U.S. Commissioner of Fish, Report of 1886, p. XLIII.
tell stories about taking egg trays "to bed with them" to insure the eggs were kept at the proper temperature. Great care was taken to remove the discolored, non-fertilized eggs from the trays. On the average, twenty quarts of fertilized eggs made up a fisherman's shipment.

Although partially reimbursed for tedious and time consuming task involved with taking spawn, the fishermen were glad to do it. They saw it as "self-preservation" and as a "good idea." Fishermen were also glad to see trout fry brought back to the island in the spring and early summer. Stan remembers the America bringing "a deck full of cream cans of fry" back to Isle Royale.

One attitude fishermen had towards fishing as an occupation was that it was like farming with native species. They provided food for other people. The lake was seen as a productive resource where fish can grow and mature. What is taken out must be put back in, with an indigenous replacement. Trout, herring, whitefish and menominee were seen as native, wild species, not as a domestic species. Their nativeness is important to insure, since Ingeborg, Stan and Buddie believed a native fish is a better fish in the long run. Stan was particularly concerned about the strange and foreign behavior hatchery fish sometimes exhibited. Convinced that hatchery conditions were

51. Stan Sivertson, 10 July 1980.
54. Ibid.
responsible for the odd behavior of hatchery fish, Stan spent time thinking how hatcheries could replicate more natural conditions. All three fishermen felt the superiority of native fish was self evident in their better taste and less fatty tissue. However, the taste of native species was thought to have changed because they have been preying predominantly on smelt.

With the exception of bolstering fish numbers by hatchery efforts, fishermen were advocates of natural conditions and native species. They appreciated the lake's natural resources as they were originally when they first had contact with them. Despite the devastation caused by the sea lamprey and perhaps smelt, fishermen believed that the fishery resources had an integrity and internal balance which should be respected. Much like a farmer gambling with a crop, they harvested a renewable resource. The testy island environment and the dimension of harvesting wild species made the island fisherman into an occupational biologist. Finally, Ingeborg, Stan and Buddie care deeply about the lake, through both "hard and good times."

55. Ibid.
CHAPTER III

SELECTED SOCIAL FOLK CUSTOMS

The best remembered and most fondly recalled social folk customs of island fishermen were the celebrations and the annual festival. These social gatherings helped establish an occupational and geographical identity. They were times of fun, relaxation, social stimulation, education, and always informality. Moreover, social folk customs were the major interludes from work fishermen had during the fishing season. The context ranged from wild hilarity at Fourth of July festivals to storytelling and catching up on the news during "coffee." Also, the degree of spontaneity ranged from impromptu picnics and coffee to the Fourth of July which was planned weeks in advance. Generally, only fishermen, a few guests or relatives and perhaps some resort people would be the participants in the celebrations and at the Fourth of July.

The three forms of social folk customs to be examined in depth are (1) coffee, (2) boat days or picnics, and (3) the Fourth of July. Coffee is still being practiced by fishermen and summer people. The legacy of boat days lingers on in a subdued fashion when people meet the mail boat. However, since few fishermen take part in the celebrations, most of participants are summer people and National
Park Service and National Park Concession employees. Fourth of July festivals are no longer held. The lack of participants and the deterioration of fishermen's folk culture halted the celebration. The end of Fourth of July festivals is significant since they were the fishermen's most overt expression of group identity. Today fishermen rarely, if ever, get together en masse to celebrate being island fishermen. During the "Fourth," fishermen could at one time socialize freely and have fun together. Their work-day world did not allow much time for leisurely socializing or playful behavior. The loss of the Fourth of July festival among fishermen is indicative of the twilight period of island fishing culture.

One social custom that bears mentioning briefly is religion. The dearth of religious sentiment among many fishermen is curious. Ingeborg, Stan and Buddie rarely expressed orthodox religious sentiment in the interviews. For example, none of them complained about the lack of religious services on the island, nor did they institute services or ceremonies of their own. Instead, neighboring fishermen or families that were "religious" were pointedly named as such, highlighting the unusualness of their neighbor's sentiment.

Coffee, boat days or picnics, and the Fourth were exceptions or breaks from daily life at a fishery. They were exceptions in that they

1. "Summer people" is Ingeborg's term for people who originally owned a vacation summer home on Isle Royale. Today these people are the life leasees. NPC is the acronym for National Park Concessions, and is the concessionaire which runs the tourist facilities at Isle Royale today.

interrupted the work day but, more importantly, they relieved the
tedium of isolation. These three customs flourished and likely
originated in a period when visitation was at a minimum. For example,
until post-World War II times, when there was a radical increase in
private boat visitation to Isle Royale, a new boat in the harbor with
strangers aboard was a welcome sight. Often times the strangers were
invited to coffee or to dinner. Or, if a guest or relative came to
visit for a few days, fishermen relished the occasion.

The increase of visitors coming on private boats has affected island
celebrations and festivals. For example, coffee or visiting was a
mechanism which served to increase fishermen's social exposure during
times of extreme isolation. Now, the continual appearance of "friends"
at a fisherman's dock strains the customary upbringing of a fisherman
and precludes much work from being done. The customary hospitality
of fishermen is well known and now is abused.

The relative location of island fisheries and the number of
fishermen available to join in a celebration affected the type of
celebration observed. For example, boat days which were fervently
enjoyed at Washington Harbor when the *America* was operating were not
celebrated at Wright Island. Instead, at Wright Island picnics were
celebrated. Picnics were pleasant excursions for a limited number of
participants. In the heyday of commercial fishing at Washington Harbor
there were dances, baseball games, gambling and mass picnics during
the Fourth of July. A few years later the activities on the Fourth
dwindled to "planking fish" on the point, a little music, and pecker later in the day. 3

Because of their insular location, fishermen had to do everything themselves to make a celebration or festival a success. The intimidating force of Lake Superior and transportation fees formed an effective barrier to importing entertainment. In short, fishermen realized they were self-reliant for entertainment; hence, whatever fun they had in their social gatherings they could take credit for. Totally self-reliant entertainment promoted pride for being a fisherman and underscored the fact that they were islanders.

Coffee

Coffee is the social folk custom in which island fishermen welcome strangers and fellow fishermen into their homes. The following account of coffee by a school teacher who visited Wright Island in fall, 1932, is still true today:

Then we came back to Wright's Island, where we were royally entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Holte, a charming couple. The delightful custom on this island seems to be "coffee" wherever and whenever you stop. And these hospitable folks are not one whit flabbergasted by the appearance of a boatload of 10 voracious passengers. Freshly baked rolls and cake and hot drip coffee made us friends of the Holtes for life! 4

Friendship or warm feelings between host and guest is a continually

3. Planking fish is a festive way of cooking trout. Large filets are wired onto a flat board which is placed in the ground vertically, with the filets facing a bonfire. The fish cooks slowly and in full view of the participants. Planked fish was popular among fishermen in the 1940s and '50s.

noted after-effect of coffee. Other matters stated in Dorothy McQuown's diary entry are worth mentioning. For example, homemade foods such as rolls, pies, breads, and cake were always offered in generous quantities. Coffee, too, was a must. Jams and jellies made from island berries were typically offered. Besides the food, conversation and storytelling were common activities. Great concern was extended to make sure guests were made comfortable, both physically and socially. The hospitable act of physically comforting lake travelers is a good idea since often they were wet and chilled. One example of the social hospitality I observed was the Holtes' effort to make sure everyone was spoken to and listened to. Finally, as McQuown notes, coffee was offered spontaneously to whomever might stop by to visit.

Among its many functions, coffee allowed the fisherwoman to demonstrate her cooking skills. Great pride was taken in the quality of the baked goods offered. These very rich foods had an appropriate place for lake travelers and fishermen who burned up a tremendous amount of calories in the course of the day. Today, with circumscribed work loads, these rich and sweet foods seem indulgent and heavy to fishery visitors.

The conversational component of coffee is often overlooked. Conversation played a much larger and important role among island people in the first decades of this century than today. The island was preeminently a verbal community that depended on conversation for news of the outside world, intra-island doings, education and entertainment. During coffee, guests and hosts exchanged news freely, with conversation
topics ranging widely. A great degree of latitude was tolerated and even encouraged in conversation topics. However, tempers often flared up when a neighboring fishery or non-traditional fishing practices were mentioned. For example, a flare-up might be about the time a fisherman set his nets, the aggravating personality traits of the neighbors, or, more recently, the degree of attachment a neighbor might or might not show towards the island.

Coffee is a good example of what folklorist Linda Humphrey calls "small group festive gatherings." Humphrey explicates these social events in the following:

First, we have the idea of eating together as a form of intimate and meaningful communication which creates cohesion. Second, we have a folk group, not isolated, illiterate, or permanent, bound by the sharing of food and by eating together. And third, we have behavior, less explosive than that normally associated with festival, yet still a break from the ordinary, a release having a special time and place, and in most cases considered by the participants to be festive. 5

Coffee fits in with Humphrey's criteria of small group festive gatherings, with one exception, namely, coffee participants are isolated. Group cohesion is produced among all participants (not necessarily fishermen) who share coffee. Fishermen sharing coffee do not have to rely on coffee to develop a rudimentary sense of a group. Instead, coffee affirms group cohesion stemming from occupational, family, ethnic or residential ties among fishermen.

The common experience of crossing Lake Superior helps to provide cohesion among coffee participants. Crossing the lake tends to produce respect for its size and hint at its power. Fishermen are all but too acquainted with the size and power of Lake Superior and enjoy hearing other people trying to understand the lake. The uniqueness of the setting of coffee on Isle Royale also produces group cohesion. The fact of being on the island is less important than an attitude commonly assumed by visitors and fishermen alike, namely, personal identification with the island. The island's limited size is seen as personal, less awesome or fearsome. Tuan's idea about the ease with which people come to identify with a natural geographical unit is very true of people's perceptions of Isle Royale. He states, "People can more readily identify with an area if it appears to be a natural unit."6 Augmenting the feeling of group cohesion among coffee participants is the camaraderie of lake travelers and the personal identification most visitors have for Isle Royale. The camaraderie of being on the island and sharing coffee in the heyday of commercial fishing cannot be over emphasized, since there were very few fishery visitors at that time.

Ironically, coffee is the predominant inside or indoor custom for celebrating being on the island. Coffee is carefully cultivated in a warm, secure, and domestic atmosphere which contrasts sharply with the natural environment. More than merely being situated inside, coffee honors a fisherman's home. The context of coffee, inside a fisherman's home, emphasizes feelings of shelter from an otherwise wild and rocky

archipelago. The sheltered and settled character of a fisherman's home is coffee's underlying message. George Matore's comments about the nature of houses explains how a fisherman's home is experienced by all visitors during coffee. He writes:

Most important is the house which serves as a rallying point, and which we so justly call the abode, the abiding place. All gains of activity in space should be compensated for by a gain of stability in one particular spot in nature.

Coffee welcomes people into the stability and calm of a fisherman's home. Or, to restate Tuan's idea, having coffee in an island home constitutes a highly pleasurable "pause in movement."

Island homes are an extension of their fishermen residents, as they are full of inner significances for each fisherman. For example, at Wright Island Ingeborg's paintings and sculpture give an unmistakable character to the Holte home. So, too, does the furniture with its unique history. For example, the floor book shelf was originally the blacksmith's tool box at the Mead Lumber Camp at the head of Siskiwit Bay. A green wicker rocker came from the lightkeeper's family at Menagerie Island. In short, the furnishings of the Holte residence are rich with island and family history.

Coffee is a complex social phenomenon between hosts and guest. Guests benefit from their hosts' concern for their welfare as lake travelers. Conversely, the host fishermen receive news and positive feedback about their homes from their visitors. Guests' compliments,

observations, and presence help the fishermen articulate feelings of home. Through the experience of welcoming company into their home the fishermen reawake to the pleasantries and uniqueness of their home.

The fishermen's reexperiencing of their place on the island is stimulated by their guests' interests. Generally, guests are vacationing and thus are seeking pleasantries and novel experiences in their vacation. The effect a vacationing group has on a busy occupational group is difficult to gauge. However, as a rule of thumb, as boat traffic increases so does fishery visitation, resulting in more dramatic changes in the way a fisherman experiences his place. Conversation and coffee with visitors make fishermen more conscious of their thoughts and feelings about their island home.

**Picnics, Boat Days, and Other Social Gatherings**

Boat days, picnics, and poker were festive gatherings for island fishermen. In contrast to coffee, however, they were not centered around food. In addition, these three activities were intra-fishing group gatherings only, while coffee was appropriate for intra- and inter-group gatherings. The most common time for picnics and boat days was after the fish company boat came on Sunday to pick up fresh fish. Although the boat came twice a week, once on Wednesday and again on Sunday, Sunday was boat day.

The fishery situation (either isolated or in an enclave of fishermen) affected the kinds of gatherings held. In Washington Harbor, boat days consisted of times when the "whole harbor" turned out dressed
in "their best olds." The fishermen would wait for the boat to get their mail and afterwards linger on in bunches to converse. Boat day was primarily a festive occasion for women and children, the men being busy transferring their catch to the boat and, in turn, receiving their fishing supplies. The fact that Washington Harbor had deep water and numerous fishermen residents meant the fish company boat had enough business to warrant "tying up" or stopping momentarily at the dock. Most often, the America tied up at the Booth fishery dock on Booth Island. Fishermen from the neighboring islands conducted business from their boats on the seaward side of the America, while Booth Island fishermen conducted business from the company dock. Regardless of which bay door the fishermen did business in, the presence of the America or the Winyah in the harbor generated festive spirits.

At Wright Island matters were quite different. The America rarely went into Hopkin's Harbor because business was too light to warrant a special stop, and the harbor was too small for easy maneuvering. The fish company boat stopped "outside" in the center of Siskiwit Bay with smaller boats pulling alongside. The Holtes and Johnsons transacted their business on the open lake. Hence, there was no incentive to dress up, meet the boat at the dock, or, for that matter, to greet tourists departing the boat to go to a resort. In addition, few people went to meet the boat in Siskiwit Bay, there being supplies to transport. "Picnics" developed in lieu of boat days and often included rock hunting at Little and Big Greenstone Beaches. Many times another couple

from a neighboring fishery would meet the Holtes "after the boat" and go to look for greenstones.  

If need be, the Holtes took along a picnic lunch. Advantage was taken, as at Washington Harbor, of the lull at "the end of the [fishing] cycle." As the fish company boat would not be back for a few days, a fisherman might relax for an afternoon if he cared to. Or if fishing was good, or the fisherman "was serious" or was dedicated, boat days or picnics were rarely celebrated. When fishing decreased during the 1950s and '60s, fishermen had more time for relaxation, but the fabric of fishing culture was coming undone.

Other intra-group festive gatherings were held. Again, the differing fishery situations affected the form of these gatherings. For example, in the 1940s and '50s poker was played on Saturday nights by Washington Harbor fishermen. A siren "was cranked up" to spread news of the game and an "alarm clock went off at 10:30 or 11:00" p.m. to announce the end of the game. The early break-up of the game insured a good night's sleep for the fishermen who rose at 4:00 or 4:30 a.m.

At Wright Island, when the Johnson children were growing up in the 1900s and '10s, once or twice a year excursions were taken to a neighboring fishery. The nearest fisheries were three, four, and

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9. Ingeborg Holte, 17 August 1980. Greenstones are precious gems found, though rarely, on a few Isle Royale beaches.


11. Ibid. The siren was taken from the America and was a hand crank model.
seven miles away. Such visits were day-long affairs. The children washed up beforehand and Mrs. Johnson dressed up as "if she was going to town." However, a seat had to be brushed clean of fish scales for her before the family took off. These visits were reciprocated between families. Typically, the large, mid-day meal was shared. Fish were rarely on the menu on such visits. Ingeborg stated this plainly when she said "you don't offer a fisherman fish."13

Another kind of social gathering occurred at Washington Harbor in the heyday of island fishing. During good weather in the summertime, fishermen and their families congregated on someone's porch or on a point to watch the sun set. Fishermen could relax at this time because the impending darkness put an end to their day's work. Buddie responded to my question "What is your favorite memory of Isle Royale?" with this reply:

The front porch of grandma's house on a warm summer's night, you know, when, ah . . . . The people at Isle Royale always paid attention to the weather. They were always very aware of what was around them, what was coming as far as weather was concerned. And ah, they appreciated beauty. I think all of them appreciated beauty in many ways. And I would think the one thing that sticks in my mind would be sitting on my, my grandfather's porch when I was a kid and having Stan [his uncle] who would always play, not always, but on nights like that would come out and play the concertina. But on a night when it's calm and the sun is setting through the gap [between islands]. The people would perk up and kind of wind up at my grandfather's porch. From down the rest of the island, maybe fifteen or twenty people over there sitting on the rocks and sitting on the porch. And as the sun got lower, towards the

horizon, people quit talking, you know. They just had, just come over to watch the sun go down.

And they would just watch it. And they would watch it for maybe fifteen minutes, with hardly any words spoken. And they, as it disappears, they would start to murmur again. And maybe my Uncle Stan would start up the concertina. As long as people were around they would always ask, "Play something," you know. So he would play some of these old Norwegian songs, you know, some of these old country songs. And then fishermen would start to sing.

And, pretty soon that would start, you know how on those quiet days how the sound echoes through the island, you know. And pretty soon you hear the creak of oarlocks from the Barnums and the Andrews. And from the point across the bay over there on Booth Island. And pretty soon people would be rowing up to the dock, you know. And they would get out, and not much is said. And they would come up and sit on the rocks. And everyone is singing you know. And nobody said, "Let's go out and sing tonight." It just kind of happens.

Quite a few of them, these songs are sad. And these people have been away from home for quite awhile now, you know. They migrated over here, when? maybe twenty or thirty years before that. And they would play these old country tunes. And tears would begin to run down the eyes of these tough fishermen, you know. And it's kind of like a sad ending to a show—in a way kind of like a warm, sad ending... 14

The mood of these gatherings was reflective, appreciative and nostalgic. Many fishermen's thoughts lingered on the old country. But there was more to these evenings than nostalgia since the Barnums and Andrews (millionaire neighbors) also attended. Analysis of what the evening gatherings meant to the individual participants and to the group as a whole is extremely difficult. For our purposes, however, it is important to note that there were highly reverent as well festive island gatherings. Also, hard-working fishermen did take time to appreciate their island homes and neighbors.

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With the exception of the impromptu evening gatherings at Washington Harbor, all of the gatherings considered meant fun and relief from work. They were more purely recreational than coffee. Recreation is the common function throughout these festive gatherings, although the individual circumstance of boat days, picnics and poker varied tremendously.

Fourth of July

Fourth of July was the only true festival celebrated by island fishermen. Characteristically, it was celebrated intensely; it was all festivals combined into one. Fourth of July celebrations included food, games, drinking, occasional fights, evening dances, boat races, even bowling and baseball at Washington Harbor, storytelling, dressing up, and festive behavior. Fourth of July celebrations were a relief from the earnestness of island commercial fishing. It was an all-day affair that occasionally lasted longer. However, the objective was to do it all in one day. For example, great pride was taken by many fishermen that their operations were back to normal the next day after wild Fourth of July celebrations.

Today, Fourth of July narratives are lightheartedly told and are popular. Even legislation such as prohibition hardly affected the

15. Festivals are special events for a folk group. Festivals often include ceremonial acts which honor the sponsoring folk group and performances which entertain the festival's participants. Many other folklife expressions such as music, dance, games and the like occur as part of a folk festival.
drinking traditions and customs observed on the Fourth. Liquor was easy to acquire because of the island's proximity to Canada and because the boat service to Isle Royale included a stop in Canada first. Prohibition only added a degree of enjoyable surreptitiousness to Fourth of July celebrations.

During the halcyon days of commercial fishing, Fourth of July celebrations were held in at least two island locations, one at Washington Harbor and the other at Rock Harbor. Other locations less frequently used included Hay Bay, Fisherman's Home, Tobin's Harbor and Fish Island. The exact locations were unimportant; what was needed was a place to tie up or beach one's boat and a cleared area for dancing. Washington Harbor Fourth of July celebrations benefitted from being adjacent to the Singer Resort on Washington Island. A dance hall, gambling room, and bowling alley were used while the resort was in operation and even after it was abandoned. The Johnson and Holte families celebrated the Fourth at Rock Harbor, since it was closest and relatives lived in the vicinity. For the Holtes the Fourth had an added measure of excitement. They went from their relatively isolated fishery to a party made up of one half of the commercial fishing population. Typically, the Johnson and Holte families

16. Both homebrew and bonded alcohol from Canada circumvented the intended effects of prohibition. One drinking custom widely practiced at the Fourth deserves mention. Once the seal of a bottle of alcohol was broken the entire bottle's contents had to be finished that day.

17. After the Singer Resort was abandoned, fishermen appropriated the use of the empty buildings. Fishermen found new uses for many of the buildings. For example, the bowling alley became a new-mending area and resort cottages became homes or nethouses for many fishermen.
would rendezvous with other families from Siskiwit Bay and proceed
together to Rock Harbor.

Fourth of July was a different day from the rest. Buddie
mentioned that "fishermen looked funny, because they wore shoes" [normal
footwear was rubberized knee or hip boots]. Perhaps more unusual
was the fact that fishermen slept in until 7:00 or 8:00 a.m. No one
went out on the lake to fish. Teenage sons could borrow their father's
gas boats and play around with them. Regardless of the shape or state
of their boat, it was important for the male teenagers to be in
possession of one during the Fourth. Notoriously tight-fisted fishermen
became generous and serious ones turned foolhardy on the Fourth.

Overindulging in food, drink, and merry making was commonplace.
Fishermen of all ages played baseball in a hummocky meadow at Washington
Harbor. Buddie noted that the only standard piece of baseball equipment
was a pocket flask in a back pocket. Baseball teams were made up of
one island's residents versus another; for example, the teams would
often be Booth Island versus Washington Island. The selection of a
partisan umpire was important to the fortune of one's team.

Fourth of July festivals were perfect examples of what Victor
Turner calls "communitas." The Fourth was a festival which occurred

19. Ibid. Often at times a particular umpire was purposely selected
because he had no knowledge of the rules of baseball.
(Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969), p. 96. Communitas is a state
of being that is opposite to societal norms and accepted socio-political
distinctions. People involved in communitas are "neither here nor there;
they are betwixt and between positions assigned and arrayed by law,
custom, convention and ceremonial." Ibid.
in a "'movement in and out of time' and in and out of secular social structure."\(^{21}\) Characteristics of behavior on the Fourth of July are characteristics of communitas. For example, on the Fourth there was (1) an absence of property individually held, (2) an equality among participants, (3) a homogeneity within the group, (4) an absence of social status, (5) unselfishness and (6) foolish or unusual behavior exhibited.\(^{22}\) The Fourth was an "unstructured or rudimentarily structured" event.\(^{23}\) It is important to note that the "anti-structure" of the Fourth takes fuller meaning when considered in the light of the "structure" of the rest of the fishing year. Structure and communitas are dependent upon one another. Turner speaks of this when he writes, "Social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and in-equality."\(^{24}\)

Fourth of July festivals were held for numerous reasons. Turner and island fishermen would agree that the Fourth provided an outlet from the structure of daily life. And the Fourth came at a time when fishermen were less pressed with daily chores. It fit in with the lull in fishing and the change over from hookline to gill net fishing. Fishermen's rationales for why the Fourth was celebrated downplayed patriotic reasons. Instead, the Fourth underscored the mid-summer or

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 106.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 96.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 97.
halfway point of the fishing season. Plus, the weather on the Fourth was as good as could be expected for an all-day festival held outside. Ingeborg mentioned that even rain did not stop or subdue the festival.

Rather than celebrating America's history of independence, with which many fishermen were unacquainted, they celebrated the economic opportunity and personal independence open to them in America. They were, in Ingeborg's words, "above all Americans." However, fishermen did not incorporate overtly patriotic themes into their celebration of the Fourth of July.

The most important result of the Fourth was the group solidarity and residential identity it generated. The process of creating group identification through a festival is described below and is a perceptive explanation of the Fourth of July's main function among island fishermen:

The central function of the festival seems to be to give occasion for men to rejoice together—to interact in an ambience of acceptance and conviviality. In the case of general participation festivals, the festival is often the only occasion in which the members of a community come together. On this occasion, they interact; the interaction is satisfying, therefore likely to be repeated. The satisfaction creates a bond between the participants; they have had pleasure in each other's company. They identify with each other; in a general participation festival the individual relates to, and identifies himself with, the community. Thus, the festival is a prime device for promoting social cohesion, for integrating individuals into a society or group and maintaining them as members through shared, recurrent, positively reinforcing performance.25


The Fourth of July celebrated being an Isle Royale fisherman. And it was the favorite day for island fishermen. Dwindling numbers of fishermen through the 1930s, '40s and early '50s changed the format and zeal for the Fourth. Finally, the devastation of trout fishing in the mid-1950s sealed the end of Fourth of July festivals for island fishermen. However, many island fishermen still feel the occupational and residential identity which made the Fourth of July an important date in their calendar.
CHAPTER IV

SELECTED NARRATIVE FOLKLORE

The fishing community on Isle Royale was predominantly a verbal society. The sheer volume of fishermen's folk narratives was staggering. Stories, gossip, and news were all part of daily life at a fishery. Fishermen shared so many experiences and conditions that they had a rich stock of communally held knowledge, skills and narrative folklore. Thus, island fishermen made up a "high context group."¹

One common narrative form among island fishermen, namely, "story kernels," presupposes such a high context folk group.² Story kernels constitute a conversational genre of folk narrative; they are abbreviated stories, lacking a specific length, structure or climax. The fishermen's frequent use of story kernels underscored the high degree of in-group cohesion and interest they felt.

Fishermen's narratives had a strongly developed first person perspective, as evidenced by the wealth of personal experience stories.

1. Særre Toelken, The Dynamics of Folklore (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), p. 51. High context groups are groups that feel a particular closeness as one immediate community. They share a great deal, such as folklife expressions, economic and social interests, language and the like.

Fishermen also often told where the personal experience came from, when it happened, and by whom it was told. Giving credit to the person who experienced the action or to the person who supposedly made up the story was a valued part of the storytelling tradition on Isle Royale.

Interpretative commentary by the storyteller placed an emphasis on asserting that most stories were true. Contrasting the emphasis on the veracity of many narratives was an equally strong emphasis on relating the unusual and remarkable experiences of daily life. Restated, what was shared in the majority of the fishermen's folk narratives, whatever their genre, was an acute sense of amazement coupled with unquestionable credibility. However, the tendency towards expressing the remarkable rarely went as far as including supernatural motifs.

Island fishermen's narratives put a premium on humor. Ingeborg's and Buddie's quick wit made them popular storytellers and conversationalists. Their stories blended humor, education, and surprise into a highly esteemed form. In Stan's stories education took precedence over humor. His narratives tended to be more empirical; thus, they might be classified more as oral history.

The narrators' experiences and interests were mirrored in the type of stories they told. Ingeborg's favored genre was family stories, which placed a high degree of importance on her family, her childhood, and her residence on Wright Island. Stan's favorite narrative types

were local character stories, local legends and personal experience stories. Buddie loved to tell humorous narratives of all kinds, including jokes, anecdotes, ethnic stories, dialect stories, and personal experience stories. All three fishermen's stories revered the past on Isle Royale, although not always in a solemn demeanor. Their stories made it clear that Isle Royale was a different world years ago. For example, Buddie told a story in which fishermen were depicted as being so frugal in the old days that they transported their large cook stoves to and from the island.

Sivertson: Oh, one little... anecdote about what the fishermen used to have to do in the fall, when the America came. They only had one cook stove that they used all winter in Duluth. And they used it in the summer at Isle Royale. This was one of those huge cook ranges, you know, one of those big Monarchs.

Cochrane: Yeah.

Sivertson: Must have weighed a thousand or two thousand pounds. But they had to keep those functioning because they never knew when the boat was going to come and pick them up in the fall, you know. So they used that stove all the time to cook their meals, heat their house and everything like that. So when the whistle blew out there... .

Cochrane: [laughing]

Sivertson: ... they would dump the ashes out of the stove... . Put wooden handles, you know, put wooden logs underneath the corners and carried that stove. Maybe four guys carried that stove down to the dock, into the boat, and rowed it out where the America was. And hoisted it aboard the America -- that hot stove. [More laughter ]

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4. Buddie Sivertson, 14 February 1980. Buddie's story is heightened dramatically by an esoteric implication. The threat of being left unprepared on the island for the winter adds a degree of tension to the story. Many island stories deal with the motif of being abandoned on the island for the winter.
Buddie's story is an excellent example of an island folk narrative that dramatically contrasts the truth of the story with its unusual nature. It is also an example of an immigrant story that stresses the hardships of the immigrants' early days in America.

Buddie's story is illustrative of another characteristic theme of island storytelling, namely, the primitive and yet delightfully functional aspect of fishermen's technology. Reinforcing this theme of island folklore is a common Isle Royale folk belief: one can get by with what is on hand with some ingenuity. Other examples of this kind of ingenuity are beating wrenches on empty 55-gallon gas barrels as fog horns, constructing docks and buildings from "pulpsticks," and keeping perishable food in the fishhouse near the cool lake water.

Storytelling audiences have changed from an intra-fishermen audience to an inter-island audience. From 1890 to 1940, the audience was almost exclusively fishermen. After the increase in private boat visitation and then "trout depletion," fishermen's audiences were more likely to be composed of tourists and NPS and NPC employees. The change in audience had a corresponding effect on the type of story told and internal characteristics of each story. Earlier audience-pleasing stories about hostile NPS officials, local characters, and stories involving sophisticated fishing knowledge began to slip in popularity. In their place came stories of wolves, storms, and more colorful stories of shipwrecks. The change in story repertoire did not occur uniformly over the entire island. Instead, those fishermen who were most heavily affected by non-fisherman visitation (especially in the
Rock Harbor area) changed their repertoires to suit their new audiences.

The devastation of trout numbers and the subsequent break from serious fishing, combined with the tremendous rise in fishery visitation, affected the storytelling tradition on Isle Royale in another way. The break and subsequent leisure time allowed certain fishermen to become accomplished storytellers. What had earlier been an inclination to tell stories became a polished and relied-upon skill. Not only had the audience changed for the fishermen storytellers, but it became expedient for fishermen to gear their stories to their new audience's interests. Fishermen who accommodated the endless number of "friends" with stories were well thought of by tourists and NPS officials. They received covert and sometimes overt favors for their hospitality. It was beneficial for fishermen to be accommodating to non-fishermen guests.

There were at least three gifted raconteurs among the fishermen I met or learned about--Pete Edisen, the late Milford Johnson, and the late Ed Holte. Ed Holte specialized in local legends while Pete and Milford's forte was personal experience stories. All three could tell a good story no matter what their specialty was. Pete and Milford gained recognition and acclaim as Isle Royale storytellers as well as experienced hands.5

Stories told among fishermen audiences were told in a variety of settings--out on the lake, while dressing fish, at coffee, during the

Fourth of July and whenever an audience was nearby. Fishermen who worked in twos, the most common work arrangement, told stories throughout the work day. Narratives that were terse and typically unstructured were told in almost any environment. Also, visual jokes rather than narratives were exchanged between occupants of different boats on the same fishing ground. Hand signals, gestures, and an occasional shout were all there was to these jokes. They were told, in Buddie's words, "to screw the others up a bit." 6

Moose and Wildlife Stories

"Moose stories" were fishermen's favorite animal stories. They were told often enough to be recognized as an emic folk narrative category by island fishermen. For example, I asked Buddie, "Do you know any animal stories?" And he responded, "Yes, I have a couple moose stories," thus testifying to the popularity and emic nature of moose stories. 7

The fact that moose and wildlife stories became such a popular emic genre of folk narrative reveals a great deal about fishermen/animal interactions. For example, fishermen preferred stories about wild animals to those about domestic ones. There are a few stories about dairy cows swimming from island to island and family pets that were smuggled on Isle Royale against NPS regulations, but they are the exceptions rather than the rule. There is also a preference for wild pet stories rather than domestic ones. The following two stories

7. Ibid.
of Ingeborg's are illustrative of the friendly relations between 
fishermen and their fellow inhabitants, wild animals. Ingeborg told 
me about a weasel family that used to frequent their place on Wright 
Island.

Holte: We had some other young fellows stay overnight. And they 
had their sleeping bags up in the house. And towards, in the 
morning...this one fella heard something purring, you know 
[laughing]. And then he found out it was coming from his 
sleeping bag [more laughter from both of us]. And he couldn't 
figure this out; he knew we didn't have a cat. And up comes 
the weasel [laughter] out of his sleeping bag! Boy, was he 
sartled.

But the strange part of it was, that's when they began turning 
white and there wasn't any snow on the ground, they changed.

Cochrane: Changed temperament?

Holte: Yes. They were afraid of us. And they lost their desire to 
be around, you know, and being around us; they were really afraid 
of us.

Oh, we had a cute mink here too. That had a, just about... 
I don't know what had happened. He had a half tail, I guess. 
And he would come out of the woods. We called him the Inspector 
[laughter]. And he would look in the door here.

Cochrane: The back door of the kitchen?

Holte: Yeah, yeah, the kitchen door. He'd take a peek at that and 
go down the trail and take a look in the other house. Then 
he'd go over towards the nethouse and inspect over there. And 
he would come back to the fishhouse, especially if Ed was there. 
And he'd sit there until he got fed.8

Most fishermen had very benevolent feelings toward wild animals.

The Holtes actually looked out for their well being. For 
example, on one occasion the Holtes helped a family of beavers recover 
their winter food cache by towing it back to its moorings; on another 
Ingeborg fed rabbits fresh bread. The Holtes named a resident moose

"the tourist" because he showed up at Memorial Day and disappeared at Labor Day.

Stories about moose and other wildlife had two, sometimes conflicting, tendencies. First, as with most island stories, there was a flair for the unusual, dramatic and humorous. Moose stories were also full of action and often had anthropomorphic interpretation by the fishermen storytellers. Second, these stories had a documentary tendency to them. For example, Ingeborg's story about the weasel included an attempt to explain the behavioral change of the weasel in an objective or documentary way. Other wildlife stories have this documentary component—for example, Stan's story of a swooping owl that nearly attacked a fellow fisherman.9 Some of the documentary portions of wildlife narratives are startling in their attention to detail and animal behavior. Commercial fishing and life on Isle Royale honed the fishermen's skill in observation. The contrast and sometimes conflict between the tendency towards embellishment and humor and the tendency towards empirical observation characterizes Isle Royale wildlife stories as well as other genres as mentioned earlier.

The storytellers' sex and experience at a fishery affected their inclination to tell moose or wildlife stories. Generally, the more isolated the fishery, the more popular wildlife stories were. The Holtes' interaction with wildlife was more frequent than the

9. Stan Silvertson, 11 July 1980. By comparing Stan's description of the owl and Jim Wynne's description (see interview with Jim Wynne, Siskiwit Bay, Isle Royale, Michigan, 18 July 1978), it appears the same "funny owl" attacked a lumberjack later that year. The owl attacked a lumberjack as he came out of his shack and poked one of his eyes out.
Sivertsons' at Washington Harbor. Hence, the Holtes likely told more wildlife stories. Also, fisherwomen were somewhat more inclined to tell wildlife stories than men. Both Ingeborg and Myrtle Johnson at Crystal Cove liked to tell about wild animals they have encountered or befriended. Perhaps because Ingeborg and Myrtle spent more time at the fishery, they became more involved with the resident mammals and birds.

Fishermen did not tell many stories about fish encountered while fishing commercially. There were no "fish stories" about fish that got away or fish of amazing size in the context of their normal work day. Fishermen did tell fish stories, but only in the context of sport fishing or trolling. Fishermen's taste or preference of animals as storytelling subjects is interesting. Animals that are peripheral to one's fishing operation are favorite subjects, while animals that are crucial to their livelihood, fish, are discussed in a conversational or non-artistic manner.

The fact that moose stories were the most popular wildlife story type can tell us much about fishermen's attitudes towards Isle Royale. Other wild animals such as gulls, fox, eagle, beaver, raven, and mergansers were as plentiful as moose on Isle Royale. Why then did moose become the fishermen's favorite? Their stories depicted moose as highly comical animals, except for Ingeborg's moose story that will be discussed later. Most stories, however, were built around one assumption, namely, moose are highly unusual animals. For example, moose were described as being gangly in shape and yet perfectly suited
for the Isle Royale environment. Moose were also depicted as having
very expressive or human-like facial expressions, while their actions
were totally unpredictable and often enigmatic. The high numbers of
moose on Isle Royale also underscored their unusualness. Moose are,
in essence, natural storytelling subjects. Fishermen especially liked
to tell moose stories to outsider audiences. The enthusiastic and
frequent telling of moose stories points to the fact that moose were
a special entity to fishermen. Fishermen saw moose as symbols of
Isle Royale that illustrated their conception of the island as unusual,
wild, and insular.

One particular moose story that I recorded on Isle Royale is also
popular in northeastern Minnesota and western Ontario. The story
centers on a man riding a moose while it is swimming. Technically,
the story is a migratory legend. Buddie told the story to me in an
abbreviated form; a more fully-developed variant was told by Milford
Johnson to Pete Oikarinen. This variant of the story is somewhat
unusual since the narrator, Milford Johnson, claims not to have witnessed
the action but to have done it himself.

I rode a moose one time. That was on Lake Ritchie. Dr. Oastler
wanted to give me fifty dollars to do it. He kept on for
several days. "You're chicken. You're chicken. You're not
going to do it." So I got disgusted and said, "Well, by golly,

10. The moose population on Isle Royale in the 1930s was perhaps the
densest moose population per square mile in the world. Even into the
1950s and '60s, the number of moose on Isle Royale was astounding.

11. I have documented variants of this story in Ely, Minnesota; Dryden,
Ontario, Canada; and Grand Marais, Minnesota. Interestingly, all these
towns depend economically on tourism. This story might be a case of
the locals spoofing the gullible tourists and newcomers.
I'm going to try it." So we paddled up to this bull moose. He must've been three or four years old. He wasn't full grown yet, but he was big enough. We got up right alongside of him, and I got on him from the canoe. He was swimming as fast as he could, but we could easily catch him. And I hopped on him. So he headed for shore. I had to lie right flat on him because he could get his hind legs up so doggone high he would've touched mine if I was riding him like a horse. I was worried. Lying on my stomach, I grabbed him by the antlers. And boy I was wondering how this was going to work out when he got on shore so his feet could touch bottom. I had to make sure that I got off before that happened. And I did. I was on him for about ten minutes, and that was long enough. So I slid off, and I was afraid of what was going to happen. I slid right back and gave him a little shove so he wouldn't touch me with those hind legs. By golly, that moose, he kept for shore. It wasn't far until he touched bottom. Then he stopped. And, oh boy, I thought, now what's going to happen? That doggone Dr. Ostler was off quite a ways. He should've been closer. Wow, I didn't feel so hot right then--for a minute or two. So I started swimming for the canoe, but he didn't follow.12

Milford is an excellent storyteller. The wealth of detail and localized elements belie the story's status as a migratory legend. Whatever genre this story is placed in, it is a regional favorite. Variants typically include motifs of making a bet or accepting a dare, riding the moose, and concern for dismounting when the moose is nearing the shore.

Many moose stories were educational and convey a moral message, much like the stories in medieval bestiaries. Regardless of their function, moose stories were always humorous except for Ingeborg's story of being chased and cornered by a moose at Little Greenstone Beach. This was one of Ingeborg's favorite stories, and she has published an account of it.13 Ingeborg chronicled a cow moose's attempts to drive

her and her husband from the beach. Much of the drama of the story comes from Ingeborg's shock that a moose did that to her. She wrote, "It is silly, but I felt as though a lifelong friend had turned against me." Later she and her husband saw the reason for the cow moose's hostility: her newborn calf had drowned and had washed up on the pebble beach. Ingeborg then understood the cow's hostility and sympathized with the moose's maternal instinct. However, the moose's behavior still bothers Ingeborg. One of the reasons it does is that, in Ingeborg's mind, moose shouldn't behave that way. The benevolent symbol of Isle Royale, a moose, tried to kill the Holtes. The event has caused Ingeborg to rethink her relationship with moose. In sum, this story and others demonstrated Ingeborg's tendency towards didactic wildlife stories and anthropomorphism, her keen observational skill, and her concern for wildlife.

Buddie's and Stan's moose stories were humorous and were not intended to be educational or moralistic. For example, in their stories, moose chased picture takers who got too close, moose rubbed against homes and shook their walls, and moose were chased away so the children could play outside. One of the more common themes was a person running into a moose at night. Buddie told me the following story about his Uncle Gus.

They [the moose] were just all over. If you had to walk down the path at night, if you didn't have a flashlight, you carried a stick in front of you [laughter]. Like a blind man . . . "my uncle Gus ran right into one one night.

14. Ibid.
My Uncle Gus, he was coming around the corner of a building and he was coming, and you know it was dark. You're visiting somebody and you forget your flashlight and it turns dark. So you have to go home in the dark. . . He went around the corner of this house and ran right smack into this thing. I mean ran his face right into the side of a moose [laughter].

Moose stories such as Buddie's were popular with fishermen and tourist audiences alike. The preference for moose stories was not affected by the change in audience. Moose became the symbol of Isle Royale for NPS and NPC employees as well as island fishermen. Moose stories are now being told by NPS and NPC employees and other park visitors.

One wildlife story subject, wolves, was not very popular among fishermen. Most fishermen disliked wolf stories because of the associations wolves bring to mind. Fishermen saw wolves as harbingers of a new era on Isle Royale -- one in which fishermen are to be phased out. Fishermen rarely reacted negatively to wolves because of their reputations as sinister, cowardly, and bloodthirsty beasts. Instead, fishermen associated wolves with events that occurred simultaneously with the appearance of wolves on the island. When wolves first appeared, fishermen were feeling the full weight of NPS and DNR decisions affecting their future; at the same time, the trout were fast being depleted so that commercial fishing for trout was not economically expedient. Fishermen experienced very hard times with little sign of improvement when wolves were observed, proliferated, and received public recognition


16. I only recorded two instances where wolves were despised for their "imperial" predatory behavior. Ingeborg Holte, 17 August 1980; Stan Sivertson, 10 July 1980.
in the 1950s and '60s.

Fishermen associated wolves with the NPS, which compounded their negative reaction to wolves. Many fishermen told stories which held the NPS responsible for introducing wolves to Isle Royale. Fishermen disagreed with NPS officials and wildlife biologists on how the present wolf population was established. The disagreement centered on whether the four "zoo wolves" the NPS introduced to Isle Royale lived and bred with the wild wolves which appeared on the island at approximately the same time.\footnote{For an excellent summary of the introduction of the zoo wolves on the island see Allen, 	extit{Wolves of Minong}, pp. 16-19.} The disagreement further focused on whether an individual wolf, "Big Jim," lived and was incorporated into a wild pack.\footnote{At least four fishermen maintained that Big Jim lived and bred with wild wolves. The fishermen are Stan Sivertson, Milford Johnson, Ed Holte, and Pete Edisen.} Fishermen felt comfortable around moose, but not so with wolves. Moose were symbols of Isle Royale to them, while wolves were symbols of a new and foreign era to the fishermen.

Even though fishermen were disdainful of wolves and hence wolf stories, their new audience "requested" such stories repeatedly. As a result, fishermen's story repertoires are shifting to include previously untold wolf stories. Ingeborg and Stan tell personal experience stories about wolves to outsider audiences. One of Ingeborg's wolf stories ended with a moral, in which she stated, "It's worth it sometimes, to be the cow's tail" since she was fortunate to see wolves because a group had left her behind.\footnote{Ingeborg Holte, 19 August 1980.} Ingeborg walked
slowly up the path to Siskiwit Lake and had four timber wolves cross
the trail in front of her. Another of her stories noted the
"beautiful" sound of wolves howling at night.

**Shipwreck Stories**

There have been over 325 shipwrecks on Lake Superior in recorded
history, and there have been numerous shipwrecks off Isle Royale
itself, some of which have taken their toll of human lives. For
example, there have been three major shipwrecks in the vicinity of
Washington Harbor alone. Both large prestigious ships and small water
craft have been wrecked on Isle Royale's reefs and submerged rocks.
The dense fogs of spring time and the fierce fall storms with wave
heights occasionally reaching thirty-one feet have contributed to the
demise of many ships. Many of the Isle Royale shipwrecks occurred in
stages, that is, the ships would run aground, stay aground on a reef
for hours or days and then be pushed from the rocks by storm waves
or wind. The exceptionally clear lake water makes some wrecks visible
from the water surface and intrigues scuba divers to explore the wrecks.
For example, the bow of the America lies only two feet below the
surface of Lake Superior and is so clearly visible that fishermen and
tourists remark about its haunting presence.

Ingeborg, Stan and Buddie had divergent experiences of and
attitudes about shipwrecks. Ingeborg had little personal experience
with shipwrecks since she often went to Minnesota with her then

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20. Ryck Lydecker, *The Edge of the Arrowhead* (Duluth: University of
school-aged daughter before fall storm season. Fall storm season was the most common time for shipwrecks to occur in Siskiwit Bay. This was especially true before the 1920s when the Keeweenaw Canal was built and diverted shipping lanes away from Siskiwit Bay and Menagerie Light. Prior to the building of the Keeweenaw Canal, lake freighters would steam for Siskiwit Bay and Menagerie Light to seek refuge from fall storms, sometimes running aground on Siskiwit Bay reefs and islands. Ingeborg's only well-developed shipwreck story was about not salvaging "anything good" from the wrecked and abandoned Glenlyon. 21 However, the story pertains more to her father's refusal to become interested in the wreck than the wreck itself.

Like Ingeborg, Buddie had little experience with Isle Royale shipwrecks. He was two years old when his parents took him to see the Cox wreck on Nut Shell Reef. Buddie's shipwreck stories were products of the storytelling tradition at Washington Harbor, and they were especially influenced by his father's stories. The narratives were uniformly humorous. For example, he mentioned that so much fruit floated out from the sinking America that "whenever you wanted fruit you just stuck your pike pole down the same dip hole you were talking about, and there was bound to be a banana bunch going by at the same time." 22 Washington Harbor residents tell numerous local legends about the quantity and variety of fruit bobbing around Washington Harbor after the America sunk. Fishermen rejoiced, at first, at the

surprising appearance of free fresh fruit. Many overindulged, and there are stories about fishermen not being able "to look at a banana." 23

Buddie told another story about what occurred after the Cox was abandoned:

Seeing Nels Wick, an old fisherman, you know, who wore the baggy pants and dirty clothes, you know. And that was kind of ragged and patched and all this kind of thing. Nels Wick had gotten up on the main deck of the Cox. You know, they could climb up because the Cox was right down in the water. They could walk right up the deck. Everything was at an extreme angle, of course, and the ship had been abandoned so everything aboard was fair game, you know. So Nels Wick went in this cabin. No one was paying much attention; everyone was grabbing, getting what they can. And some people started missing Nels Wick. Saying, what happened to him, you know. And he came out of this cabin. He came [out] a dapper gentleman, with a brand new white suit and ah [laughter], and a straw hat and cane and all that [more laughter]. And he rode home in those clothes in the old fish boat. 24

Besides its obvious humor and other elements, Buddie's narrative demonstrates a common concern expressed in most shipwreck stories, namely, a deep respect for the law. Fishermen rarely salvaged any material from a wrecked ship before it was officially declared abandoned. After the ship was abandoned, it was considered fair game for salvaging. From various wrecks fishermen gathered dishes, furniture, fire extinguishers, paintings, lumber, clothing, and other detachable items for fishery use.

Buddie's story exhibits another characteristic of shipwreck stories: they are more about what happened after the ship had wrecked

23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
or was "up on the rocks" than about the ship being wrecked. Fishermen rarely went aboard a ship before it went down; hence their story interests were about salvaging materials or incidents which occurred while the boat was up on the rocks. The "sinking of the America" is the only exception I recorded.25

Removing materials from wrecked ships such as the Cox, the America, or the Glenlyon was not accomplished without fear or worry. Fishermen knew that at any time the ship might slip off the reef into deeper water. Hence, few fishermen ventured deep into the ship's holds. Ironically, a few fishermen got seasick while inside a wrecked ship. The water sloshing around inside the ship and the unnatural pitch in which the ship lay made some fishermen nauseous. Shipwrecks were startling places for fishermen. They were startling places because they were reminders that fishermen, too, could go down in Lake Superior. However, fishermen's stories reveal that fishermen were not overly apprehensive about shipwrecks. Salvaging materials from a shipwreck was looked upon as a somewhat spooky and special opportunity to recover goods and materials. One of the two narratives I recorded with a superstitious motif concerns a shipwreck. Stan told this story about the Cox.

And then one time, I think it was in August, the 8th of August, Gus Bjorlein and I were out and we went over there [to the Cox] from our nets on a dead calm day. And we saw something one time, something blurry white back by the stern in deep water.

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25. This is Stan's title for his story about the America's wreck in Washington Harbor. Stan Sivertson, 10 July 1980.
But most of the time we went out there, there was wind on the water or the water was riled up so you couldn't see six or seven feet [down] in the water. But this day, we noticed by the boat, we saw this white thing down there. We didn't know what it was. So anyway, we went aboard the boat and found nothing at all. And by this time the boat had been up there long enough to be abandoned. So anyway we decided let's go back there. So we hooked up big trout hooks on the line and got in the boat and pulled up these beautiful canvases that we could cover our boats with, with eyelets, you know. We picked up five of those. Well, in the meantime when we moved back there it was a dead calm day, not a breath of air. And the boat had been laying up there for two, three months in storms and everything else. And all of a sudden, where we went back there, just before, about fifty feet, all of a sudden a big, huge mast broke off. And came down right where we had just moved the boat.26

This memoir is an exception to Stan's preference for stories and observations which are highly rational.

The sinking of the America had an importance to island fishermen that went beyond that of other shipwrecks. The America was and is the symbol of the glory days of commercial fishing on Isle Royale. It embodied the heyday of fishing with its style, size, and reliability. Fishermen felt so much pride in it that, for example, Ingeborg's mother made Ingeborg a new dress for each trip they took on the America.27 It was the pride of A. Booth and Company's fleet operating out of Duluth as well. She was 182.6 feet long and had a 937 gross tonnage capability at the time she sank on June 7, 1929.28 The heyday of commercial fishing sank with the America. Its demise was important


27. Ingeborg Holte, 6 July 1977.

enough to island fishermen that they developed a cluster narratives about her fine captain (who was asleep at the time of the wreck), her value, her seaworthiness and her unfortunate wreck.

Shipwreck stories hold an immense fascination for today's tourist. Generally, the closer the narrator's involvement with a shipwreck, the more arresting the story becomes for tourists. Stan has found the tourist interest so intense that every day he stops his ferryboat, the Wenonah, over the wreck of the America, to recount the story of its sinking and to mention to his passengers that his mother and father, with a broken leg, were aboard the slowing sinking ship. His story of the wreck, complete with his family's involvement, grabs tourists' attention.

Fishermen told comparatively few detailed shipwreck stories to other fishermen. Full-blown shipwreck and bad storm stories developed after the change in audience from fishermen to tourists. Fishermen did talk to each other about where the Kamloops went down or how all the flour on the Glenlyon became paste when it sunk, however. The location and circumstances of the shipwreck interested the fishermen most, because shipwrecks became benthic landmarks for fishermen. Tuan explicates the importance of landmarks for people such as island fishermen when he writes, "A homeland has its landmarks, which may be features of high visibility and public significance, such as monuments, shrines, a hallowed battlefield or cemetery." As fishermen's benthic landmarks, shipwrecks were both functional and symbolic.

29. Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place, p. 159.
For tourists, shipwreck stories exceed the popularity of moose stories. However, for fishermen, moose stories are most popular if the shipwreck story does not involve a family member. Whatever the audience preference, moose and shipwreck stories are symbols of the unusual, exotic and unique character of Isle Royale. Moose and shipwrecks are an important part of fishermen's conception of Isle Royale. They are, in David Sopher's words, "a particular component of the landscape [which] stands for a place" and which "may develop through complex interaction(s) between the different views of insider and outsider." 30

Family Stories

Fishermen did not have an emic term for family stories. However, their immediate and artistic responses to my interview questions convinced me that they recognized family stories as an emic genre. Family stories are personal experience stories whose main subject is the narrator's family. Family stories told by the fishermen were most often about the early experiences of family members on Isle Royale. A representative example of a family story is Ingeborg's response to my question, "Why did your father come to Isle Royale?"

Oh, he came to, the reason he came to Isle Royale, there was a cousin who was here, who was at Little Boat Harbor. It's near Fishermen's Home. And he fished with him for awhile but he didn't stay there for long. Because they neglected to tell him about black flies [laugher], those little black flies, you know. And he spent quite a bit of time working

at the net reels. And he got the choice jobs, the ones fishermen hate. He was infected from those black fly bites that he just swelled up and was sick. He got out of there in a hurry.\textsuperscript{31}

On the whole, family stories were serious, with some allowance for humor. Generally, narrators recounted another family member's experience. Many of the stories described the hardships family members braved. The action portrayed in family stories most commonly took place out of doors at Isle Royale.

Family storytellers were predominantly female. Family stories were Ingeborg's forte; included in her repertoire were stories which contained morals. The folly of overweening pride or bad manners was a commonly expressed attitude in her stories. For example, Ingeborg told about the only NPS superintendent who "wanted to fit in with the fishermen."\textsuperscript{32} While Ed Holte was out fishing in the spring, this superintendent decided he would do Ed a favor by cleaning up his house (Ingeborg had not come to the island yet). Among the objects he cleaned was the coffee pot. Ed came back from the lake and saw the clean pot and was furious. He did not believe coffee pots should be cleaned with soap. Ed spoke his mind, "right then and there."

Ingeborg hastily added, "He could have waited."\textsuperscript{33}

The three fishermen's family stories depicted events that occurred pre-1950 and more commonly pre-1940. Family stories were typically

\begin{footnotes}
\item[31] Ingeborg Holte, 17 August 1980.
\item[32] Ingeborg Holte, 15 February 1980.
\item[33] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
about the old days when the Scandinavian fishermen settled in and grew accustomed to Isle Royale. Family stories served to remember and vividly describe family members that had died. For example, I learned a great deal about Ingeborg’s father, Sam Johnson. Although there was a tendency towards depicting the early days of commercial fishing, the narratives were surprisingly free of wistful or romantic sentiment. However, the stories expressed a memorializing sentiment of how difficult the old days were for family members. For example, the topics of stories included clouds of bugs getting the best of a fisherman or the Sivertsons being evicted from Barnum Island by John Johns. Nor did the stories shy away from mentioning the drudgery of commercial fishing work. Sam Johnson’s eight-mile row from Chippewa Harbor to Wright Island with all his family and belongings aboard was one of Ingeborg’s favorite stories. Edward Relph has mentioned how drudgery and attachment to place may be related. He writes, "Drudgery is always a part of profound commitment to a place, and any commitment must involve an acceptance of the restrictions that place imposes and the miseries it may offer."34 Obviously, Sam Johnson was committed to staying on Isle Royale because he accepted the drudgery that living and working on Isle Royale entailed.

Most of the three fishermen’s family stories were predicated on accepting Isle Royale conditions or customs. For example, the most trying day a fisherman faced was a storm-bound day. Such days meant

entire gangs of nets might be destroyed. The following story is an example of Sam Johnson's struggle to accept the implications of a storm-bound day:

Cochrane: Tell me about weathering a bad storm. Would Ed or your Dad be particularly frustrated or upset?

Holte: During a storm? Are you kidding?

Cochrane: Tell me what would happen. Tell me a little bit about that.

Holte: Well, my father, he would go into ah... He never said anything. He would just be real quiet and look real solemn. And Mother would say, "Don't say anything." And we whispered [laughter], and tip-toed around the house... .

Cochrane: Would there be an hesitation to go out the next day?

Holte: Oh, no. They went right out. Of course, they almost knew what had happened [to the nets].

The family stories I documented had two tendencies in style and content, depending on their intended audience. Among an intra-family audience the stories were the least polished and were more bluntly character revealing, for example, Ingeborg's story about her husband and his behavior when the coffee pot was cleaned. In contrast, those family stories that were intended for more public audiences were more polished and more "safe" in content, for example, Ingeborg's story about her father rowing his family from Chippewa Harbor to Wright Island. In short, fishermen choose less controversial family stories for an outsider audience.

Finally, it is interesting to compare the triggering event of a family story and a similar event that did not become a family story.

For example, the eviction of Stan Sivertson's father from Barnum's Island by John Johns became crystallized in narrative form by the Sivertson family. The narrative explains how Sam Sivertson returned to the island in the spring of 1894, only to be met by John Johns with a supposed title to Barnum Island. Johns gave Sam Sivertson one day to move his fishery to Washington Island, and Sam made the move. Consequently, the validity of Johns' "piece of paper" is questioned. In contrast, the NPS eviction of Art Sivertson (Buddie's father) and the subsequent burning of his fishery has not been transformed into a fixed narrative form. Rather, the account is typically related as oral history. A similar event which has not become a family story is the Holtes' losing their claim to life leasee rights during the land acquisition proceedings of the Isle Royale Park Commission. Losing one's fishery in a haze of legalistic and compulsory land condemnation proceedings is not appropriate storytelling material for fishermen.

Family stories were most commonly the province of the fisherwoman. An examination of who told family stories reveals that women had the responsibility for remembering early family history that occurred on Isle Royale. The sobering responsibility of remembering family history affected the storyteller's recounting a story about deceased family

36. Stan likes to tell this story to interested, non-fishermen audiences. He frequently tells this story to his passengers on the Wenonah. I tape recorded two variants of this story; Stan Sivertson, 4 April 1980; Idem., 11 July 1980. The two variants are very similar in plot development, word choice, and delivery.

37. I do not know why losing one's fishery to the NPS is not an appropriate storytelling subject. Perhaps the new, nonfishing audiences are not interested in these developments and their disinterest retarded its development as a story.
members. For example, family stories were generally less dramatic than other narratives and were less likely to be humorous. They had less tendency towards embellishment and exaggeration. Instead, family stories stressed the hardships that fishermen's parents and grandparents faced and overcame. Family stories were narratives of older days that were meant to instruct family members in terms of family history.

Place Names and Place-Name Legends

There is a wide discrepancy between today's officially recognized place names for Isle Royale and those used by fishermen. For example, Fred Dustin, the author of an article on Isle Royale place names, gives numerous place names different from those recognized and used by Washington Harbor fishermen. Official cartographers virtually ignored fishermen's place names for Isle Royale. Thus, most island fishermen worked in and talked about places with esoteric names.

Island fishermen had a plethora of place names for the environs they lived in, that is, the littoral area of Isle Royale. They had very few esoteric place names for places in the interior of the island. The Scandinavian fishermen named reefs and shallows with names such as "Nut Shell Reef," which is now Cox Reef, The Flats, Outside Reef, Redfin Reef, Hog Back Reef, Gilbertson's Farm, and Domen and Doden Reef." Scandanavian fishermen also inherited


39. Domen and Doden mean death and doom in Swedish. Ingeborg mentioned that her father, Sam Johnson, and his brother, Mike Johnson, named these two reefs close by Wright Island. Ingeborg Holte, 19 August 1980.
many place names from their fishing predecessors of different ethnic origin. For example, the origin of the name "Hopkin's Harbor" off Wright Island remains a mystery to all of those concerned. The most esoteric place names island fishermen identified were reefs and shallows. Indeed, much of the fishermen's intimate knowledge of subsurface topography is being lost with their retirement and deaths.

Both place names and place-name legends are declining among island fishermen today. Place-name legends have been most deeply affected, while place names are still commonly used. Each category has been affected in different degrees by the change in storytelling audience and the breakdown of fishing folk culture. Place-name legends are more dependent on a thriving fishermen community. Their more esoteric character demands, in effect, an in-group audience. I suspect that even in the heyday of commercial fishing, place-name legends were a relatively rare narrative genre. Certainly they were never recognized as an emic genre of folk narrative among island fishermen.

Island fishermen's place-name legends are typically short and mono-episodic, and a high percentage of them are etiological or ascriptive. Unlike family stories, place-name legends were the storytelling province of both sexes.

Fishermen's place names emphasized naming after natural phenomena over persons by a ratio of two to one. This statistical emphasis contrasts sharply with ratios derived from Dustin's article on Isle Royale place names. The place names he documents are divided fifty-fifty between natural phenomena and important personages. W. F. H. Nicolaisen's
comments on place-name referents is an accurate synopsis of fishermen's place names. He writes, "...names thus brought into being very seldom refer to major geographical features and hardly ever to man-made ones but usually to minor configurations of the landscape, at least in terms of absolute size or importance."  

Dustin recognizes another category of place-name origins, namely, non-English place names. Dustin's non-English place names are predominantly of Ojibwe origin. Fishermen, too, recognize many non-English place names; however, instead of originating from Ojibwe, they are of Norwegian or Swedish origin. Non-English place names comprise a minor category compared with place names named for natural phenomena or historic personages.

From the fishermen's preferences in place names, those related to natural phenomena, we can see a major orientation in their lives. Place-name preference is but one of many indications of the fishermen's interest in the natural world. Other indicators include the seasonal adaptation of fishing, navigational techniques, weather and lakelore, and so on. All of these indicators illustrate the degree to which natural phenomena were integrated into island fishermen's work and thoughts. Patrick Mullen's perceptive comments about the orientation of Texas Gulf Coast fishermen to the natural world is true of the Isle Royale fishermen as well. Mullen writes:

The occupation of fishing places a man close to nature so that he cannot help but be aware of natural occurrences around him. He must also know as much about them as possible because his personal safety and occupational success depend on his knowledge of nature. Observations and knowledge about nature are accumulated over the years into traditional empirical beliefs.41

There were at least three functions that place names and place-name legends served for island fishermen. First, place names served to isolate, identify, and begin the development of a character for a place. For example, the place name "Gut Bay" isolated and identified a nearby bay as a place to dump fish guts and trash. Gut Bay became a distinct place with a distinct purpose and became important for Washington Harbor fishermen. Second, naming places begins the process of becoming familiar with them; from familiarity can come feelings of security about places. Paul Shepard states the importance place names can have for people, when he writes, "An environment without place names is fearful."42 Third, place-name legends provide all the satisfaction of legend narration while developing a unique character of a place. They are told to satisfy local curiosity about the origin of a place name. In short, place-name legends encourage fishermen to develop a richer familiarity with and interest in their environs.

Local Character Anecdotes

Local character anecdotes were and are a very popular folk narrative genre among island fishermen. Local character anecdotes peppered each


42. Shepard, Man in the Landscape, p. 41.
interview regardless of the subject matter at hand. Despite local character anecdotes' popularity, fishermen never developed an emic term for them. Instead in this section I have adopted Sandra K. D. Stahl's definition of local character anecdote. She states that a local character anecdote can be "Any story that illustrates the character of a real local individual..." and that "moves from a normal stance to an abnormal extreme stance through the direct channel of one-tracked, almost surreal 'logic'."43

Fishermen liked to tell about amusing or bewildering incidents involving an eccentric neighbor. Thus, fishermen might tell an anecdote about a light keeper, an NPS ranger, a logger, summer people, or other fishermen. Anyone could be the subject of a local character anecdote, although men were more commonly the subject of these anecdotes. The selection of people in anecdotes was egalitarian, mirroring the egalitarian social structure on Isle Royale prior to the arrival of the NPS. For example, fishermen would tell local character anecdotes about the reserved and yet unpretentious millionaire who lived on Barnum Island. Anecdotes clustered around unusual individuals such as Bill Lively (a Michigan game warden), Ed Hinzberg (a shy lighthouse keeper), Sels Wick and Ted Gill (comical Washington Harbor fishermen). Barbara Allen and Lynwood Montell summed up the tendency to cluster narratives around people such as Bill Lively when they wrote:

Certain events or persons in the past may, for various reasons, take on particular significance for a community. When that occurs, a cluster or complex of interrelated narratives develops, each dealing with a different aspect or episode within the larger event of the person's life. 44

Local character anecdotes made light of people who exhibited unusual behavior, albeit the unusual behavior depicted in anecdotes share stock characteristics. Richard Dorson noted the tendency of local character anecdotes to depict stock characteristics when he wrote:

The qualities of low cunning and rustic ignorance distinguish the local eccentric, who thus conforms to the world-wide figure of the trickster and the fool. His eccentric behavior may include, on the positive side, low cunning, effrontery, chicanery, verbal cleverness at making sharp retorts, or special offbeat talents like a genius for gadgetry. On the negative side, local characters display shiftlessness, parsimony, degeneracy, stubbornness, stupidity, and gullibility. 45

The following local character anecdote of Stan's is an excellent example of a rustic or absurd explanation a local character may offer.

They had a big diesel engine out there [at Rock of Ages Lighthouse]. And in the days the diesel engines were "hot" [they had hot tube engines that were predecessors to modern diesel engines]. And they were hard to start. They were semi-diesels. And Ed Hinzberg met us one day, you know. And I said, "I hear you're having a lot of trouble with that engine there." Because one day I was out lifting nets and I would hear them in there trying to start it. Bang, Bang. . . . And then it would start. And then he would say, "Oh, talk about trouble!" He said, "We worked on the big engine," he says, "all morning!" He says, "And we tried to start it and we tried and we tried," he says, "we went up [stairs in the lighthouse]


in the galley and we were going to have a cup of coffee. And
all of a sudden, BONGO! He said, "There was a big explosion,
and he says, we ran down the stairs and there the engine had
started by itself." [laughter].

The humor in Stan's story is partially dependent upon the audience's
familiarity with old semi-diesel engines. However, even without this
specialized knowledge, Ed Hinzberg's story is funny. Stan's anecdote
loses much of its humor when it is read rather than heard. It is
a dialect story with a heavy-accented Norwegian imitating the slow
deliberate speech of a recluse light keeper. It is ironic that Stan
performs this anecdote as a dialect story since the majority of dialect
stories on Isle Royale make fun of fishermen of Norwegian ancestry.
Stan departed from his normally taciturn demeanor to perform an
exaggerated imitation of Ed Hinzberg's actions while telling the
anecdote.

There is an element in island local character anecdotes of telling
a "good one on another," or good-natured bantering. The tendency to
revel in telling a story on a neighbor about his eccentric behavior
is often reflective of a community with close ties. Levette Davidson
suggests a function that the bantering in local character anecdotes
serve. He states:

Their stories served, during the period when they were
orally current, to increase the attachment of both narrator
and listener to the community. Such characters and such
stories contributed—and still contribute—gaiety to small
town life.47

47. Levette J. Davidson, "Gassy Thompson and Others: Stories of
Island people who became the subjects of local character anecdotes were notable because their behavior differed from the accepted patterns. Island local character anecdotes testify to the fact that fishermen were tolerant of some irregular behavior since they found much of it to be funny. The element of ribbing one another also underscores the strong ethnic, individual, and occupational rivalries that fishermen engaged in during the halcyon days of commercial fishing. Stan tells an anecdote which illustrates the ethnic rivalries occurring on Isle Royale thirty or more years ago.

We had a fisherman fishing for us and he really was a top-notch guy. You know, real quick, running around the railing of the boat, tying knots, mending nets, faster than anyone—than these two Swedes like Einar and Carl. They couldn't run quite as fast.

But anyway one night we went to this party and after the party I was playing the concertina. And so he had gone out a little earlier. Then I come along and Clara [Stan's wife] was with me. And here's this guy lying on his back in the rain, right on the path. And I says, "Come on, get up." "No, it's so nice," he says, "warm rain feels so good, I'm going to lay right here on the path." Well then, we begged him and his wife was there. "Come on now, so you can go home and go to bed and get out on the lake in the morning." And it was about one quarter of a mile down to his cabin.

Anyway, no sir, he would not get up. And finally another woman came along that was just visiting there. And she seen him [and said], "What are you doing laying down in the path with the rain falling on you for? Get up you old Swede." Boy, he popped up quick [laughter]. "I am not a Swede," he says, "I am a Norwegian" [more laughter].

Tuan mentions how rivalries can serve to augment people's sense of place when he writes, "To local people sense of place is promoted not only by their settlement's physical circumscription in space;

an awareness of other settlements and rivalry with them significantly enhance the feeling of uniqueness and identity." Fishermen felt rivalries with one another and differing island settlements rather than rivalries with the fisheries or fishermen of the Minnesota north shore. There might be a rivalry about who caught the most fish, who worked the fastest, who had the superior boat or boat engine, and so on. However, some local character anecdotes mock the folly of what intense competition can do. For example, fishermen were careful to get to an early start on the day and make use of every daylight hour. One anecdote tells of an enthusiastic fisherman who in haste got up to go to work too early, completed his work, and was tying up his boat at the dock without noticing it was still dark out.

Fishermen have a sub-genre of local character anecdotes which I have labeled, for lack of an emic term, "authority stories." They are anecdotes about authority figures, including game wardens, Coast Guard personnel—if threatening—and NPS rangers. Authority stories comically point out the contradictory beliefs or hypocritical behavior of authority figures.

Stories about NPS rangers are the most common topics of authority stories. And the majority of ranger stories center on one ranger, "Baggley," who also happened to be the first ranger on Isle Royale. An anecdote of Buddie's is representative of this type of local character anecdote and gives a clear picture of fishermen's thoughts of Baggley.

49. Tuan, Space and Place, p. 166.
Baggley was the big boogie man, and if you didn't like somebody you would say, 'he's like Baggley.' One of the things they said, they always used to compare my grandmother, who was a very loving person, with Baggley. In fact, she was so loving [they said] she even cried when Baggley left the island [laughter].

Baggley is the symbol of a foreign and colonial spirit to fishermen. The appearance of authority figures in general and NPS rangers such as Baggley resulted in the loss of autonomy and self-determination of accepted practices and customs. Fishing techniques, residential claims, foodways, fishing grounds, customs, and recreational activities have all changed as a result of intervention by authority figures.

Fishermen's responses to authority figures can best be understood when the concept of islands is injected into the discussion. Fishermen conceive of themselves as islanders and rangers as outsiders. Tuan's paradigm of island/mainlander or outsider interactions explains the situation on Isle Royale succinctly. "The importance of island as place is that it tends to encourage the 'us vs. them' distinction—"we islanders vs. mainlanders." Our cultural conception of islands, and the distinction often drawn between islanders versus mainlanders, compounds the perceived differences between fishermen and rangers.

Local character anecdotes are still viable today because they entertain and educate two audiences, fishermen and tourists. Even today with fewer fishermen, the tourist audience appreciates the anecdotes enough to request them and keep them orally current. For


51. Yi-Fu Tuan, Letter, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 16 February 1982.
tourists, local character anecdotes provide a window through which they can see and meet past and present island residents. In addition, the humor is accessible and appreciated by tourist audiences. For fishermen, local character anecdotes reinforce occupational and residential identification. Humorous local character anecdotes, like many other folk narratives, emphasize a shared past. Such anecdotes are reminders of past realities of living on Isle Royale; they embody shared attitudes and customs. The following local character anecdote and its explication illustrates how these anecdotes can appeal to the interests of two diverse audiences.

There were these two fishermen at Hay Bay, Ed Kavolick and Bjorlein. They were two old bachelors who used to live and fish together. Then, one morning at breakfast... Kavolick was watching Bjorlein cook. And he accused Bjorlein of not washing the eggs before he boiled them [laughter]. Kavolick was outraged, you know. And an argument and hard feeling ensued. Bjorlein moved out immediately—that morning. And he built his own place, right next door. He built his own house, the works. Except that he still shared the fishhouse. And they wouldn't talk together for years.52

Both fishermen and tourists can laugh at this story. The tourist audience gets to "meet" two grumpy, stubborn, and slightly irrational fishermen. For fishermen audiences it underscores, in a negative fashion, how tight living conditions were at island fisheries. There was little privacy at a fishery. The narrative underscores the folly of working separately; the more common practice was working in teams. The anecdote also asserts how important a fishhouse is for fishermen.

52. Ingeborg Holte, 7 August 1980. This story is from my notes and should not be considered a complete version of the story I was told. Both Ingeborg and Karen Holte told me this "folktale."
since it is shared by two silent and stubborn fishermen. For a tourist
audience, the fact that the two fishermen still share a fishhouse
pokes fun at their stubbornness and stupidity. Local character anecdotes
were and are didactic and humorous for both audiences.

The examination of local character anecdotes, like that of
many other narratives, reveals that a fisherman's feelings toward
Isle Royale are influenced by the quality of social interactions
experienced while on the island. The quality of fishermen's social
interactions and their experience with the natural environment together
comprise a fisherman's feelings and thoughts about Isle Royale. Furthermore,
Lowenthal argues that to isolate social experiences from
environmental responses distorts the process of examining a person's
sense of place. He states:

Yet it is clear that the environment as experienced is a
seamless web, that social and physical considerations form
an interacting system, and that expectations and behavior
relate to social and physical environment in combination,
not in isolation.53

Another sense of place scholar, David Sopher, emphasizes the importance
of social interactions in formulating a person's conception of home--
which is a component of a person's sense of place. He writes, "... the primary content of home, from what people say, is not the material
landscape but people."54 Sopher's statement applies only in part to a
fisherman's perception of Isle Royale. For example, Sopher's statement

53. David Lowenthal, "Research in Environmental Perception and

does not concern the direct interaction island fishermen have with Lake Superior and Isle Royale. Ingeborg's anecdote about the two irreconcilable bachelors primarily concerned with social interaction, implicitly relies on connotations Hay Bay brings to mind. Hay Bay is a small bay that is notorious for being buggy and closed in, connotations which augment the anecdote's concern with tight, closed in living. The contextual background of the anecdote supplements the anecdote's depiction of the results of "cabin fever."

Local character anecdotes are about, at minimum, the nature of human relationships at Isle Royale. The discussion of other aspects of fishermen's folklife expressions has stressed the fishermen's involvement with the natural environs. To paraphrase David Lowenthal, social and environmental experiences form a seamless web in fishermen's perception of Isle Royale.

Much of Ingeborg's, Stan's, and Buddie's narrative folklore is in transition due to strong legislative and economic influences. And the change in audience composition from predominantly fellow fishermen to tourists has deeply affected the storytelling tradition of island fishermen. For example, stories that are popular today have survived or have been reworked to suit the interests of the new audience of tourists. Differences in sex, experience, age, and personal inclination of the three fishermen further diversify the type and content of their narratives.

Still, some aspects of the fishermen's narrative folklore has remained unchanged throughout the modern period of commercial fishing.
Humor was and is a key element in their narrative folklore, for example. Fishermen's narratives also reveal the direct ties fishermen continue to have with the natural environment. Fishermen's place-name preference, for names which refer to natural phenomena, is an example of their interest in the island environment. Family stories seem to have remained stable in content and form throughout a tumultuous period for commercial fishermen. However, fishermen's drive to document family history has grown to include island history--especially a history of their tenure on Isle Royale.

Interestingly, the content of fishermen's narratives was focused more on their nonoccupational life than on their traditional livelihood. For example, there were no "fish stories" stemming from the enterprise of commercial fishing. However, the context of commercial fishing and island life was evident in many of their stories such as local character anecdotes about eccentric fishermen.

Fishermen's narratives played an active part in the process in which they collectively synthesize a particular character for Isle Royale. The interaction of the storyteller and audience produces a story that makes covert and overt statements about how they perceive Isle Royale at that particular time and place. However, those statements about Isle Royale often remain consistent from one storytelling performance to another. In addition, because island fishermen share so much in common the likelihood of a uniformity of statements about the character of Isle Royale increases. An example of fishermen's
views about Isle Royale is their choice of moose and the America as symbols of the modern era of island commercial fishing. In contrast, fishermen's narratives pointedly make apparent that rangers and wolves are inconsistent symbols of the fishermen's perception of what is appropriate for Isle Royale's character.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The wisdom and knowledge inherent in fishermen's folklife expressions is dissipating like lake haze in the afternoon sun. The special history of island tenure and interests of fishermen have given them insights into the island environs that are irreplaceable. For example, navigational techniques, weather and lakelore, knowledge of fish behavior and habitat, dock building techniques, wild animal observations and the like are the result of hard earned work, interest and thought. There is an urgency to document the many lessons that could be learned from fishermen while there is time to do so.

Scandinavian fishermen of the modern period had a plethora of creative, sophisticated and distinctive folklife expressions. They had a rich array of folk narratives, customs, material culture and art. This thesis represents an attempt to document some of these complex and varied facets of expressible culture of only three fishermen. Island fishermen's expressions were not simply interlocked with fishing; they also had folklife expressions that arose out of the desire or need for entertainment, education and a sense of aesthetics. Most everyone could tell a good story, make a boat slide, have a good prank ready for the Fourth of July, read weather signs and so on. Fishermen were, as a
group, highly expressive, egalitarian, individualistic and hard working people.

They made Isle Royale their home and felt a kinship to it that was unique among island residents. Sharing a unique and insular island home affected fishermen's thoughts and feelings. For example, they had to share among themselves because there literally was no other choice. Interestingly, none of the fishermen I interviewed complained of feeling trapped or isolated while on the island. Evidently, those who felt trapped or island-bound moved back to the mainland. Instead of feeling island-bound, most felt life on Isle Royale was the normal way of living. Island life made them self-reliant and they liked it that way.

Island life affected the way in which fishermen viewed the natural environment. Living on Isle Royale taught them there was only so much natural and man-made resources. For example, a fisherman who ran out of ice to pack fish in was in trouble, or, if he needed an engine part, he would often have to make one. The nature of island life made fishermen conservators of many resources and materials that they might need later.

Island fishermen exploited their natural resources less than their counterparts on the north and south shore of Lake Superior. Explaining why they did so is fraught with speculation. Nevertheless, it is an important issue and explication should be attempted. First, fishermen's conception of the island as having limited resources certainly affected their rate of exploitation of resources. Other
factors contributed to slow the rate of resource exploitation. Second, fishermen used appropriate technology for the Isle Royale environs. They used gas boats rather than fish tugs, continued labor-intensive fishing practices that used traditional forms of fishing technology such as gill nets and dressing fish by hand. Third, economic handicaps of island life retarded the growth of Isle Royale fisheries. Because of the extra shipping fees, island fishermen had less dollar return for each pound of fish caught. They were at the mercy of fish companies such as A. Booth and Company in setting fish prices, since Booth controlled a virtual monopoly of freighting island fish to market. Island fishermen had to work harder and longer to make the same amount of money as mainland based fishermen.

Most island fishermen accepted their economic position and stayed on because they loved to fish. Hence, Stan would say "Fishing wasn’t always profitable, but it was always interesting." Those families that stayed on Isle Royale, such as the Sivertsons and Holtes, enjoyed and usually excelled at commercial fishing. Besides their affection for fishing, there probably were as many reasons for staying on Isle Royale as there were fishermen who stayed. But stay on they did, through economic hardship, loss of autonomy, physical and verbal harassment and the curtailment of a traditional way of life.

Another reason to continue fishing on Isle Royale was the pride fishermen had in their work. They felt good about putting food on the

Stan Sivertson, 13 September 1965.
market for others. In retrospect, they said they stayed because they liked the quality of life they had on the island, although they did not recognize this at the time. A sense of place scholar, Yi-Fu Tuan, helps explain, in part, why fishermen felt so strongly about the island. He states: "Humble events can in time build up strong sentiment for place." The long hours "dressing fish" with cold hands, cleaning nets, running a boat in fog to a gang of nets, and the like, built up strong sentiment towards the island. Living on Isle Royale gave fishermen a special identity recognized by themselves and by others on the Minnesota north shore. Ingeborg's, Stan's and Buddie's narratives reveal a strong interest in and awareness of the island environs. For example, their weather and lakelore is uncanny in its attention to localization within the Isle Royale environment. Additionally, their moose stories are characterized by keen observation and anthropomorphic interpretation of moose behavior. In sum, they converse particularly about the island because they have an intense interest in what goes on there. Their stories exist in their peculiar form not because they resided there but because they wanted to live there.

One element of commercial fishing that Ingeborg, Stan and Buddie found continually interesting was their interplay with the natural world. Fishing success was dependent upon reading natural phenomena and adapting to them, and pleasure while fishing might be derived from watching a bald eagle survey the water for "belly up" fish. More

2. Tuan, Space and Place, p. 143.
importantly, fishermen's homes were situated in a wilderness. The natural world was their playground, work environment, and neighborhood. Their folk culture integrated many elements of the natural world. The island environment became a source of wonder, education, enjoyment, food, and a storehouse of materials to be tapped when needed. For example, minks became pets; sea conditions stimulated study, fear and puzzlement; crib docks were used because they withstood the pressure of winter ice; and picnics allowed fishermen to explore their hunches about island geology while hunting for greenstones and agates. The natural world was an important part of a fisherman's life even if he was stuck on shore mending nets in Singer's Resort Bowling Alley. For example, he might be in the bowling alley because rough sea conditions forced him to repair his nets and stay off the lake or he might rig his anchor lines to fit the varying water depth off McCormick's Reef.

Fishermen's perception of Isle Royale has changed in this century. The impending end of commercial fishing and the right to live on the island, the change in numbers and kinds of visitors and other influences have changed their perceptions. Tuan offers one reason for this change when he writes, "Attachment to place would not have found expression but for the fact of exile: home becomes vividly real only when juxtaposed against its contraries—foreign country and journey."3 The loss of some of fishermen's folklife expressions and the reorientation of others to outsiders testifies to a changing perception

of the island. For example, the end of the practice of taking spawn for fish hatcheries, the loss of many place-name legends and the end of Fourth of July celebrations affects how fishermen view Isle Royale. And, the dwindling numbers of fellow fishermen is in the minds of the remaining fishermen and affects their thoughts about the island.

Fishermen have become more conscious of their sentiment towards Isle Royale since "the NPS takeover." For example, Ingeborg and Buddie feel a calling to paint island scenes on canvas that are beautiful and nostalgic. They want others to know of Isle Royale's beauty and history. For Ingeborg, communicating by painting has its problems. Her attachment to Wright Island is such that she finds it difficult to paint any other island scene. She has a lingering attachment to Wright Island that surpasses her interest in other places, although she admits Chippewa Harbor is prettier. Stan, too, is compulsively linked to Isle Royale and to Washington Harbor in particular. For example, he sets aside his fish business in Duluth each summer to captain the Wenonah on her runs to Isle Royale. The attraction to return to the island, even if only momentarily, and to be a captain out on the lake again outweighs the desire to run the Sivertson Brothers Fish Company in Duluth.

There is another element of Buddie's and Ingeborg's painting that is symptomatic of a general feeling many fishermen have towards Isle Royale today. They have an urge to document fishery life as it was.

Tuan, again, can help us decipher this urge. He writes, "In times of diffidence, when the future seems closed or uncertain, the past may be mined for support."5 All three fishermen feel an urge to record and pass on the history of commercial fishing and fishery life on Isle Royale. For example, Ingeborg set up a commercial fishing exhibit with her own gear at the Cook County Museum in Grand Marais, Minnesota. Stan talks continually to his passengers on the Wenonah about Washington Harbor and commercial fishing history. He feels a strong urge to document and communicate island history. He is, among other things, a self-appointed folk historian.

What is the nature of the change of fishermen's perceptions and attitudes towards Isle Royale? On a general basis there has been a shift from feeling rooted to the island to a conscious feeling of liking the Isle Royale environs. Even Ingeborg's, Stan's and Buddie's differences in age, sex, experience, and ethnic background are steamrolled by a general shift in attitude and perception of Isle Royale. Edward Relph has more exacting terminology and meanings for rootedness and sense of place. Relph's term for rootedness is "existential insideness," which he defines as

The most fundamental form of insideness...in which a place is experienced without deliberate selfconscious reflection yet is full with significances...Existential insideness is part of knowing implicitly that this place is where you belong.6


In contrast, Relph's term for sense of place is "empathetic insideness," which he explains as

... emotional and empathetic involvement in a place. ... Empathetic insideness demands a willingness to be open to significances of a place, to feel it, to know and respect its symbols. ... /

Ingeborg and Stan were jarred from their positions as existential insiders to empathetic insiders. Buddie moved from one position to the other but under less duress. He grew up when the change in attitudes and perceptions was afoot. For example, the Isle Royale Park Commission was already acquiring and condemning land; more regulations and regulatory officials were present and so on. The coming of large groups of tourists in their own boats in post World War II times cemented the change in attitudes and perceptions among island fishermen. Through interactions with numerous visitors, fishermen began to view the island in another way. They learned to consciously cherish the island, rather than living on it with an unspoken bond towards it. With an uncertain future ahead, fishermen could not maintain attitudes and perceptions that were derived from an earlier time. The attitudes and perceptions born out of the heyday of commercial fishing were languishing while newer, more conscious attitudes and perceptions were developing.

The discipline of folk studies and sense of place studies often share the same subject--a folk group in the city or country. They both deal with cultural intangibles, however, with different ends in

7. Ibid., p. 54.
mind. Folk studies methodology can do much to extract attitudes and perceptions of folk groups. Sense of place scholarship could profitably use folk studies' ability to get at underlying attitudes and perceptions. Rather than inventing a type of ethnography that suits its purpose, sense of place studies can rely upon the documentary techniques and expertise of folk studies. Scholars in both fields could happily profit from more interdisciplinary work and sharing of knowledge.
Appendix A

Timetable of Significant Events Affecting
Historic Commercial Fishing on Isle Royale

1618 Two French fur traders, Etienne Brule and Grenoble, were the first white men to see Lake Superior. Grace Lee Nute, Lake Superior (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1944), p. 19.

1658 A fairly representative map of Lake Superior was available to the French Court. Ibid., p. 21.

1797-1798 The Northwest Fur Company built a small canal at Sault Ste. Marie to transport goods to and from Lake Superior. The canal bypassed the Sault Ste. Marie rapids allowing an increase in trade. The canal was destroyed during the War of 1812. Ibid., p. 1.

circa 1800 The Hudson Bay Company or their rivals, the Northwest Fur Company, probably established a fishery station on Isle Royale. Rakestraw, "History of Isle Royale, Part II, Fisheries," p. 1.

1837-1847 The American Fur Company operated a commercial fishing venture on Isle Royale. At least five fishing stations were established. Fish were caught with gill nets and hooklines and were salted and put in barrels to await shipment. Nute, Lake Superior, p. 177. The American Fur Company schooners William Brewster and Siskawit transported the fish to market. Siskiwits or fat trout were the preferred market fish. Rakestraw, "History of Isle Royale, Part II, Fisheries," p. 3.


1856  A government road between St. Paul and Duluth, Minnesota opened for the first time. Frozen Lake Superior fish were dog-sledded to St. Paul markets in the winter time. Matti Kaups, "North Shore Commercial Fishing, 1849-1870," Minnesota History 57 (Summer 1978): 49.

 circa 1864  Pound nets, of Scottish origin, were introduced to Lake Superior. Halverson, "Commercial Fisheries," p. 10.


1871-1879  The second period of historic copper mining on Isle Royale took place. Three mines were in operation. This was the most successful mining period on Isle Royale, which created a corresponding increase in the island population. Rakestraw, "History of Isle Royale, Part I, Historic Mining," p. 3.

1875  Isle Royale Lighthouse on Menagerie Island was established. U.S. Department of Interior, "Great Lakes Lighthouse Survey," not paginated. In the 1930s light keepers were no longer needed to man the light. The opening of the Portage Canal on the Keweenaw Peninsula made the lighthouse obsolete. Ships no longer needed the light to find refuge in Siskiwiit Bay from fall storms. Instead, ships headed for the shelter of the Keweenaw Peninsula and the Portage Canal. Roy Oberg, 24 July 1980.

1876  Cooley, LaVaque and Company ran a shelter boat to Isle Royale on a regular basis. "Lake Superior Interviews," Volume 1, p. 20.

1880-1900 Salted or pickled siskiwits were still the preferred market fish. Stan Sivertson, 11 July 1980.

1886 The A. Booth and Company opened doors at their new office in Duluth, Minnesota. The presence of A. Booth and Company in Duluth stimulated the fish trade. Kaups, "Norwegian Immigrants," p. 24.


1889-1894 Many Isle Royale fishermen were subsidized by loans from A. Booth and Company. Booth extended credit to fishermen to stimulate the establishment of fisheries. "Lake Superior Interviews," Volume I, John Coventry, p. 36.


1890s Mechanical refrigerator railroad cars became commonplace. Improvements in transportation and refrigeration opened up larger fish markets. Blegen, Minnesota, p. 394.

1890 Fresh and frozen fish took the lead in market preference, slowly replacing the demand for salted and pickled fish. Kaups, "Norwegian Immigrants," p. 32.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1894-1904</td>
<td>Whitefish were overexploited on the south shore of Lake Superior. Halverson, &quot;Commercial Fisheries,&quot; p. 12.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900-1910</td>
<td>Significant tourism on Isle Royale began. Ships regularly carried tourists to island resorts. Tourism affected fishermen in two ways: (1) an intra-island fish market developed and (2) some fishermen supplemented their incomes by guiding tourists. Stan Sivertson, 10 July 1980.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900-1915</td>
<td>The numbers of island commercial fishermen reached its peak. In the 1920s, more lucrative jobs on the mainland began drawing fishermen from Isle Royale.</td>
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<td>1905</td>
<td>The &quot;MATAFFA&quot; storm on Lake Superior damaged twenty-three ships. It is often referred to as &quot;the storm&quot; by Great Lakes mariners. Holden, Letter, 30 October 1980.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-1934</td>
<td>Prohibition made inroads into the tourist trade on Isle Royale.</td>
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circa Linen replaced cotton as the most popular gill net material. Ibid.

1926-1930s The Crescent, a freight and passenger boat, owned by the Johns family served Isle Royale fishermen. However, most fishermen conducted business with the A. Booth and Company's boats. Interview with Edgar Johns and Glen Merritt, Duluth, Minnesota. 12 September 1968.

1928 The America struck a rocky ledge in North Gap, Isle Royale and sunk. Within a year the A. Booth and Company closed doors at its Duluth office and stopped boat service to Isle Royale. Chynoweth, "Here's Isle Royale," p. 235.

1929 Hans Christianson's Winyah commenced Isle Royale service. The Winyah became the America's replacement. Ibid.

1930-1937 Many island fishing families wintered on Isle Royale to keep expenses at a minimum. Stan Sivertson, 29 August 1980.


1932-1939 Domestic refrigeration was augmented by the use of butane and then propane gas refrigerators. John Nolte, Letter, 8 October 1980. Skell propane outlet in Duluth opened in 1934. It was the most conveniently located propane outlet for island fishermen. Ingeborg Holte, 6 July 1977.


1931-1938 Private landowners were acquired for Isle Royale National Park. In 1935, the U.S. Government was taken to court by one third of Isle Royale's original landowners who contested the compensation terms for condemned lands. Basic terms were $1.00 per acre for mineral rights and $4.00 per acre for surface rights with some compensation allowed for improvements. Hakala, "Isle Royale," pp. 50-52.

1936 The Isle Royale Fishermen's Association was established to lobby for fishermen's rights--especially the continuation of commercial fishing. "Resolution of the Isle Royale Fishermen's Association," Isle Royale, File # 714, Natural Resources Division, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

1936 A major forest fire on Isle Royale burned one fifth of the island's surface. Fishermen helped the Civilian Conservation Corps fire crews. Hakala, "Isle Royale," p. 55.

1938-1944 The number of Isle Royale fishermen declined by one third in response to the establishment of Isle Royale National Park.

1939 The Lighthouse Keeper's Service was absorbed by the U.S. Coast Guard. U.S. Department of Interior, Great Lakes Lighthouse Survey, not paginated.

1940 Isle Royale National Park was established when Secretary of Interior Ickes accepted all deeds to island lands for the U.S. Government. Hakala, "Isle Royale," p. 53. Most island fishermen applied for and received special use permits from the National Park Service allowing them to continue fishing. Isle Royale National Park Files, Isle Royale National Park Library, Mott Island, Isle Royale, Michigan, 1961.

circa 1942 Washington Harbor fishermen's communal ice house was burned down by the National Park Service. Fishermen were forced to devise individual ways of storing ice. Stan Sivertson, 17 July 1980. The National Park Service began a concerted effort to burn abandoned buildings that continued for twenty-five years.

1944 Christiansons' retired the Winyah from Isle Royale trade, replacing it with the Detroit. Chynoweth, "Here's Isle Royale," p. 235.
The Sivertson Brothers' Disturbance began Isle Royale service from Grand Portage, Minnesota, with Roy Oberg as captain. Hakala, "Isle Royale," p. 74.

Nylon replaced linen as the preferred net material. Downs, Fish of Lake Superior, p. 7.

Sea lampreys were found in Isle Royale waters. Wallis, "An Evaluation," p. 7.

A changeover in spring fishing technology from hooklines to floating Gill nets occurred. The success of floating Gill nets quickly made hooklines obsolete. Stan Sivertson, 10 July 1980.

Last home forged lead weights were made by island fishermen. Buddie Sivertson, 15 April 1980.

Chirstiansons' Detroit retired from Isle Royale service. Hakala, "Isle Royale," p. 73.

Sea lamprey numbers were at their height in Lake Superior. Lake trout numbers plummeted. Halverson, "Commercial Fisheries," p. 16. Fishing operations were curtailed because lake trout numbers were drastically reduced. Fishermen could not afford a hired man, subsequently, many fisherwomen began to take a more active role in the commercial fishing enterprise. Ingeborg Holte, 5 August 1980.

Sivertson Brothers replaced the Disturbance with the Voyageur I. Hakala, "Isle Royale," p. 74.

The remaining numbers of island fishermen decreased by one half. Island fishermen had two choices: (1) quit fishing and wait for the return of lake trout fishing, or, (2) fish lake herring and try to stay in business. "Herring fishing" was a marginal enterprise for island fishermen. Ingeborg Holte, 17 August 1980.

The Isle Royale lake herring population collapsed due to sea lamprey depredation. Herring fishing was no longer an alternative to lake trout fishing. Many fishermen were forced out of commercial fishing all together. Downs, Fish of Lake Superior, p. 8.

1962  All Michigan waters of Lake Superior were closed to lake trout fishing. Lake Superior lake trout fishing remains closed to date, except for small scale or "population assessment" fishing. Asa Wright, Letter, 22 September 1980.

circa 1960s  Marine band radios were first employed by a few Isle Royale fishermen, although radios were typically mounted in fish tugs rather than skiffs. Stan Sivertson, 29 August 1980.

1967  Michigan Department of Natural Resources opened up lake trout fishing, under the population assessment program, for a few island fishermen. Initial catches were small. Janke, 23 November 1979.

1968-1970  "Limited Entry" regulation enforced by Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The regulation said, in effect, only fishermen who had been active in previous years were permitted to continue fishing. A number of idle island fishermen were permanently excluded from fishing and thus had to give up their special use permits and their right to stay on Isle Royale. Wright, Letter, 22 September 1980.

1973  Sivertson Brothers replaced the Voyageur I with its successor, the Voyageur II. Roy Oberg remained captain. Oikarinen, Island Folk, p. 64.

1974  The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources stocked 25 million lake herring in Lake Superior. Other states resumed active stocking programs. Downs, Fish of Lake Superior, p. 15.

Appendix B

Weather and Lakelore

Island fishermen depended upon weather and lakelore for fishing success and safety. Their weather and lakelore expresses, in the main, empirical beliefs of two kinds: (1) weather signs and (2) fishing aids. The following list of weather and lakelore that I documented in the summer of 1980 is divided into these two categories. I have subdivided fishermen’s weather signs into categories of empirical beliefs about fog, wind and sky, lake, and miscellaneous subjects. Unfortunately, the list underemphasizes the fishing aid category since I was not able to go fishing and document these sayings where they are more likely to be found.

The following list is not a verbatim rendition of fishermen’s weather and lakelore. Too many of these sayings were recorded in my field notebook to claim a faithful replication of the sayings. After each saying is a number corresponding to the empirical beliefs in Patrick Mullen’s, I Heard the Old Fishermen Say (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), where a corresponding belief is mentioned. Listed last is the name(s) of the fishermen I collected the saying from or the number of times I documented the saying.
Weather Signs

Fog
Smoke from a forest fire and fog make extremely bad visibility. Stan Sivertson.

Fogs exaggerate size and distort objects when they first come into view. Buddie and Stan Sivertson.

When the lake is cold and the weather is warm, usually in spring and early summer, expect fog. Eight times.

Fog in the spring and early summer often dissipates in the afternoon. Three times.

The reason you can see shore in the fog is because the trees absorb the fog. Ingeborg Holte.

Fogs that last a long time usually come from the east-southeast or northeast. Ingeborg Holte.

Fog can be produced by a warm in-shore rain over the cold lake. Stan Sivertson.

Wind and Sky

There's not much wind when there's fog. Five times.

Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky at morning, sailors take warning. Mullen #152. Ingeborg Holte.

In August, heavy morning dew means the wind will blow from the southwest later on. Ingeborg Holte.

A common November wind pattern, during whitefish fishing, is east shifts to southeast wind when a low pressure system moves in. Stan Sivertson.

In the fall, at McCormick's Reef, a northwest wind will likely move to west-southwest in the afternoon. Stan and Buddie Sivertson.

Fall storms at McCormick's Reef move from east to southeast to southwest to northwest. Stan Sivertson.

The wind tends to pick up in the afternoon on Isle Royale. Six times.
Mackerel skies mean high winds or winds up high, but not at Chippewa Harbor. Mullen # 164. Ingeborg Holte.

Mares' tails (clouds) mean rain. Ingeborg Holte.

Northwest and southeast winds mean the main house at Wright Island will be cold. Ingeborg Holte.

Good weather never follows northeast winds. Mullen # 249. Ingeborg Holte.

Look for squalls after a period of exceptionally warm weather in the summer time. Ingeborg Holte.

Low tufted clouds mean a bad storm. Mullen # 171. Stan Sivertson.

Lake

When the lake gets warm the fish go deep. Seven times.

Pollution in the lake causes it to freeze less often. Ingeborg Holte.

Shallow water on the south shore of Isle Royale makes boating dangerous. In a storm, waves break far off shore making it very difficult to get to shore. Stan Sivertson.

The roughest weather is in the fall. Twelve times.

Lake currents are erratic after the lake is warmer than 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Stan Sivertson.

Currents vary by depth after the lake turns 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Stan Sivertson.

Lake water is "green" or very clear until the lake turns 45 to 50 degrees. Stan Sivertson.

The distance and time between wave crests can tell you what kind of weather is approaching. Two times.

Waves sweep around the southwest end of Isle Royale from two different directions. Buddie Sivertson.

Currents are affected by air pressure and wind direction. Buddie and Stan Sivertson.

Big seiches mean "dirty" or bad weather. Ingeborg Holte.

A big dead swell means a bad storm is approaching. Stan Sivertson.
Miscellaneous

Low pressure systems in the summer aren't too bad, but low pressure systems in the fall can mean bad weather. Stan Sivertson.

The island makes its own weather. Eleven times.

The weather from mid-August to the fall equinox is unsettled.
Three times.

Fishing Aids

Moonlit nights mean poor fishing. Mullen # 226. Stan Sivertson.

Rough seas mean better fishing with hooklines. Stan Sivertson.

When fishing is poor at a normally productive set, a storm is coming and its time to take some nets out of the water. Ingeborg Holte.

The fall of the year is the best fishing. Mullen # 254. Seventeen times.

Erratic currents mean erratic or poor fishing. Ingeborg Holte.

If a seiche is strong, water "will work hard" or move violently so it's time to take out some nets. Ingeborg Holte.

If a current is strong, water "will work hard" or move violently so it's time to take out some nets. Ingeborg Holte.

High winds turn the lake over causing water temperature changes, hence, a change in the depth of fish. Stan Sivertson.

In early spring fish seek the warm water at the end of the bays, where a stream might flow into the lake. Five times.

Fish are always seeking a certain temperature; they move to find and stay in this temperature. Four times.
Appendix C

Biographical Information

Ingeborg Holte

Ingeborg Holte was born in 1901 on the north shore of Minnesota. Her full name, which she rarely mentions, is Ingeborg Christina Paulina Johnson Holte. She is the youngest of four siblings; her two brothers have passed away and her older sister lives in Florida. Ingeborg grew up on Isle Royale, first at Chippewa Harbor and then at Wright Island, during the summer months and at Two Harbors, Minnesota in the winter. Her parents were already married and had two children before they moved from Sweden to the Lake Superior country. Her father and his father were fishermen, while her mother was a schoolteacher in Sweden. Her mother never adjusted well to the move and died when Ingeborg was in her early twenties. After her mother's death Ingeborg and her father, Sam Johnson, moved to Grand Marais, Minnesota. There she met her future husband, Ed Holte, who also came from a fishing family, but was of Norwegian descent. Ed was a superb mechanic and oscillated from being a mechanic to a fisherman for the rest of his life. Ingeborg and Sam Johnson talked Ed into coming to Wright Island as a fisherman. Ingeborg and Ed Holte had one child, Karan Holte. In 1971 Ed Holte died at Wright Island. Since her father's death, Karan has returned to Grand Marais to be closer to her mother.
Ingeborg is an energetic woman, who now paints and is involved in Grand Marais, Minnesota civic affairs. She is deeply committed to commercial fishing. For example, she puts together the commercial fishing exhibit at the Cook County Museum in Grand Marais. Earlier, she had worked as a secretary in her father's and brother's fish business in Duluth, Sam Johnson's and Sons. Ingeborg is a very frank person with definite opinions. She cares about her home on Isle Royale to the degree that she finds it difficult to paint any other island scene but Wright Island. She tries to visit her fishery every summer, although Odin Alrech is doing her fishing for her at Fisherman's Home. Ingeborg has written memoirs of her experiences as a fisherwoman and some of them have been published in Women's Times, a Grand Marais monthly magazine. Her conversational skills, paintings and writings reveal a highly sensitive and imaginative communicator.

Ingeborg had been interviewed three times before and was wary of the interview process. One session particularly had soured her response to being interviewed. In it, mechanical problems distorted the recording of her finger-accordion music. Hence, she was slightly nervous during the recording process. Interviewing her on her front porch at Wright Island relaxed her considerably. At one point, we stopped the session to identify a song bird singing nearby.

Stanley Sivertson

Stanley Sivertson was born in 1913 in Duluth, Minnesota. He is the youngest of four siblings, two of which are female and two male.
Stan is a second generation Norwegian-American. Stan grew up in Washington Harbor when it was the largest fishing settlement on Isle Royale. The Sivertson family is a longstanding commercial fishing family. His brother and two sisters stayed on Isle Royale and fished as well. Stan is married and has three children. His wife, Clara, also is from a longstanding commercial fishing family from Grand Marais, Minnesota. Stan and his brother, Art Sivertson, started a successful fish business in Duluth, Minnesota. At present, Sivertson Brothers is the major fish company in Duluth. As a sideline to fishing, Stan owns two passenger ferries, the Wenonah and Voyageur II, that serve Isle Royale. Stan captains the Wenonah in the summer, while Clara runs the fish business in Duluth.

Stan is a private person. Instead of talking about his family he prefers to talk about Lake Superior commercial fishing or lake biology. He is thoroughly knowledgeable about all aspects of commercial fishing and is, in essence, a fishery biologist. He can present sophisticated arguments about the biology of Lake Superior to any audience. And, Stan is continually alert to learn more about commercial fishing and lake biology.

Stan has a remarkable memory and is regarded by Washington Harbor residents as the local historian. Stan was oblivious to the tape recorder during recording sessions. He has been interviewed numerous times, including on television and on the radio. He likes the idea of having his ideas and views aired to a non-fishermen audience. He
thinks the continued existence of commercial fishing is dependent on letting others know what is presently occurring on Lake Superior. Stan is a casual, concerned and methodical narrator.

Howard "Buddie" Sivertson

Buddie Sivertson was born in 1930 in Duluth, Minnesota. Buddie lived on Washington Island in the summer and in Duluth in the winter. He grew up when the National Park Service influence was prevalent at Isle Royale and when many fishermen were leaving the island. Buddie, too, is of Norwegian descent and is Stan's nephew. His father, Art Sivertson, was one of the most vocal fishermen to object to policies which curtailed commercial fishing on Isle Royale. For example, Art Sivertson was instrumental in the Isle Royale Fishermen's Association that lobbied for continued fishing. In the early 1940s the National Park Service burned down Art Sivertson's fishery, maintaining that he had violated the rule of yearly occupancy. Buddie is divorced and has three children who also have an active interest in Isle Royale.

Unlike Stan and Ingeborg, Buddie did not fish much. He did work a few years while a teenager for his uncle or his father, but never owned a rig of his own. Instead, he went to art school, served a stint in the Navy, and then settled back to Duluth to work as a public relations man and commercial artist for a bank. Buddie did not like the work with the bank and was looking to do something else when he was divorced. After the divorce, Buddie quit his job in Duluth and moved northward to a remote cabin outside of Two Harbors, Minnesota.
At "the cabin" Buddie began to document in paint, in both oil and watercolor, the north country and Isle Royale commercial fishing history. Since this time he has sold paintings and conducted art workshops for a living. Buddie opened an art gallery in Grand Marais, Minnesota in 1980.

He is an animated narrator who loves to laugh. Many of his stories were learned from his father and other Washington Harbor residents. At first, he was nervous at the prospect of being interviewed on tape. However, he quickly forgot about the presence of the tape recorder as he lost himself in conversation and stories. I especially liked interviewing Buddie and found it very easy and fun to do so. For example, one day Buddie and I talked for eight hours before we got down to the business of tape recording.
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