

The World of the Oregon Fishboat: A Study in Maritime Folklife. By Janet C. Gilmore. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986. Pp. xvi + 271, appendices, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$47.50 cloth.

Reviewed by Timothy Cochrane.

The majority of *The World of the Oregon Fishboat* is a descriptive ethnography of the maintenance and adaptation of commercial fishing craft. A revision of Gilmore's 1981 dissertation, it is the first book in the American Material Culture and Folklife Series to address maritime folklife. It is also unusual for maritime studies in that Gilmore takes a "dock" or "waterfront" view of the folk process of readjusting boat design to meet new economic, technological, attitudinal, and ecological factors. In the final third of the book Gilmore examines the cooperation and conflict inherent in fishermen-marine servicemen interactions. Here the detailed ethnographic information logged earlier is neatly integrated and analyzed. Further, Gilmore articulates academic stereotypes of craftsmen - that they cannot be rural specialists who operate in a complex of economic forces, personal ability, and experience - which could have biased her study.

Among her many conclusions, Gilmore makes clear that the use of Oregon fishing boats involves an ongoing process of rethinking how to best match design with fishing technology, cost, and the given capabilities of a boat. In other words, a complex folk process extends beyond the initial construction of a boat into its everyday use. Or, fishermen never stop thinking about how to improve their craft within acceptable (folk) patterns. Gilmore's explanations for hull, superstructure, and gear changes emphasize cultural factors - principally economic, technological, and ethnic reasons. Environmental stimuli for

change are downplayed. Yet continual change must not alter the basic competence of the boat, such as safety and relative comfort of boat operations. Charleston and Coos Bay fishermen work within this dynamic of traditions insuring boat competence and design changes necessary for economic success.

Tracing boat alteration is a sometimes difficult, and almost impossible task. For example, the lengthy time span involved and the difficulty of documenting hull changes - even getting on a boat, as Gilmore documents - forces the fieldworker to rely on what fishermen say about what has been altered. This problem and others force Gilmore to be cautious in the form of ethnographic detail in the first part of the book. In *The World of the Oregon Fishboat*, a sense of human presence, of specific fishermen and marine servicemen, comes late in the text.

Gilmore's discussion of her fieldwork experiences among a primarily male occupational group is a welcomed addition. It also begs further questions of perspective in fieldwork, such as how would this book have been different if written by a participant-observer? What might have been emphasized if Gilmore had been welcomed onboard and gone fishing? And most important, how did differences in gender have an impact on the book's findings?

The World of the Oregon Fishboat is a detailed ethnography, occasionally overloaded with detail, which examines of the modification of Oregon fishboats and traditional behaviors which influence these modifications. Novel in its focus on waterfront activities and relationships, it is also sound scholarship. Its major detraction is price. UMI Press has again produced a book that many may want, but can't afford to own.