

Chesapeake Legacy

Larry Chowning's affinity for the ways of the water and the men and women who ply the Bay comes through clearly in his writing. He has obviously gained the essence of their occupations, but also the truth of their human situation. His knowledge of the waterman's condition comes from experiencing it first-hand. In 1981, he attempted to try fishing for a living. The friends he made while selling fish from the back of a pickup truck stood him in good stead when he began researching this book.

The thirty chapters in this comprehensive work encompass a wide range of subjects, from the fin-fishing industry at the mouth of the Chesapeake to the hoop net fishery for catfish on Maryland's Sassafras River. Among other fascinating topics included are the last annual shad planking event in Deltaville, Virginia, which ceased due to the 1994 ban on shad harvesting on the Chesapeake; an account of the entire pound net fishing process - the tarring of nets, the pulling of the poles by horses, and the setting of the stakes and nets - and the dead-of-night dragging for conch on the Bay. In addition to the details of the fisheries, Chowning includes some carefully illustrated how-to chapters on shaft-tongs, clam rakes, and rope bow fenders.

But it is Chowning's tales of people in this profession that are the strength of the book; he clearly has the ability to make the tales of the watermen real to those new to the lore of the Bay and to arouse feelings of nostalgia in those long familiar with the Bay's rich legacy.