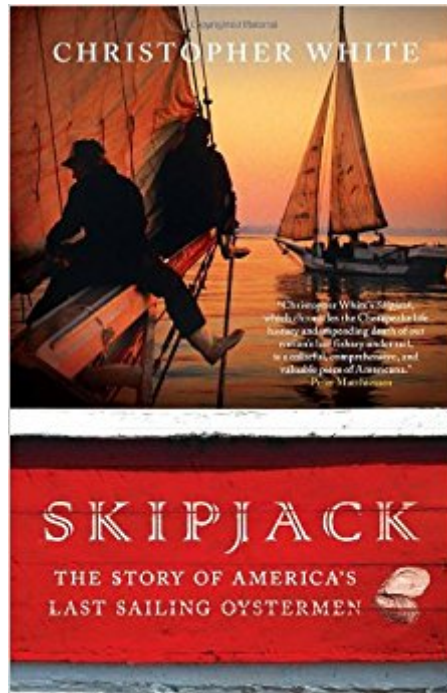


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# Skipjack: The Story Of America's Last Sailing Oystermen



## Synopsis

In *Skipjack*, Christopher White spends a pivotal year with three memorable captains as they battle man and nature to control the fate of their island villages and oyster fleet. Through these lively characters, White paints a vivid picture of life on a skipjack, a wooden oystering sailboat. But this last vestige of American sailing culture is rapidly dying. These captains must set aside their rivalry to fight for their very livelihood. With so many obstacles, it is not certain the fleet will survive the season. Hinging on its success, the viability of the nation's premiere estuary and the survival of a classic American town hang dangerously in the balance.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In late March 1978, biologist and science writer White (*Chesapeake Bay*) joined the crew of the sailing ship *Rebecca T. Ruark*, a "skipjack" that was "among the last sailboats still employed in commercial fishing in North America." Renting a cottage in Tilghman, a village then untouched by development and tourism, White spent the next year chronicling the lives and community of the oystermen. In order to preserve the oyster population, an 1865 Maryland law limited the dredging of oysters to sail-powered ships; for over 140 years, this "enforced obsolescence" approach worked; now, however, the oyster population of the Bay (once "king of the American oyster") is plummeting for reasons not entirely clear, though pollution, disease and more efficient fishing methods have all contributed. Naturally, what's at stake is not just an important sea creature but a way of human life; White mines information and testimony on every aspect of community life, from family recipes to

skipjack races to oyster wars, in a moving account. Examining the circumstances and difficult decisions of men like the skipper of the Rebecca, a third-generation oysterman, White provides on-the-ground insight into the possibilities and problems of simultaneously sustaining a community and an ecosystem. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

[An] evocative portrait of the nation's most beautiful and poignant vocational anachronism. It's an action-packed tale, complete with waterborne grudge matches, on-deck shootouts, fierce winter storms and suspenseful escapes. (The Washington Post)[A] colorful, comprehensive, and valuable piece of Americana. (Peter Matthiessen, novelist and non-fiction writer, twice winner of the National Book Award)The world has almost run out of fish, as modern technology strips our oceans bare. Christopher White's Skipjack is a compelling story about how the wisdom of the past can help us protect the future of our fisheries. If you savor seafood, White's chronicle of the gritty life aboard America's last sailboat fishing fleet is a tale you need to hear. (Trevor Corson, he author of Secret Life of Lobsters and The Story of Sushi)Well written, and carefully researched. Chris White's brilliant use of the waterman's vernacular and his intimate knowledge of multiple generations of watermen combine to make this an excellent treatise on a culture that is clearly disappearing. (Gilbert M. Grosvenor, former editor and Chairman of National Geographic Society)At a time when the last great wildernesses are melting or going up in smoke, it's comforting to know that these watermen still exist-and that a writer as insightful and lyrical as Christopher White is on hand to document their fiercely independent way of life. (George Reiger, Wanderer on My Native Shore, and former Conservation Editor, Field & Stream)The author spent a year with the captains of three skipjacks, as they balanced politics and tradition, environmental and economic issues in their struggle to harvest oysters from their wooden sailboats. (Wooden Boat)A stunning portrait...(White's) keen eye and lively prose together draw a clear image of a place where work, nature, and a deep connection to regional history are interwoven. Join the author as he rides along with the last vestiges of a great American tradition. (National Fisherman)Exciting and poignant as a few aging men and boats struggle to keep a remarkable way of life alive just a little longer. (Bay Journal)

Like "Skipjack" author Christopher White, I had the unforgettable opportunity to spend some time on Tilghman Island, sailing with Captain Stanley Larrimore aboard the Lady Katie. Cap'n. Stanley used to bring his craft out of the water after oyster season, and clean her up for weekend sailing tours. My

mother and I went aboard three years in a row, participating the last year in the races off Sandy Point. White captures the salt-of-the-earth (sea?) essence of the watermen (and women) who inhabit this glorious but demanding stretch of Chesapeake shoreline. His evocative style has you shivering in cold winter blasts, and dozing enveloped by the scents of home cooking. For anyone of (or familiar with) the Delmarva Peninsula, this book is a must-have; for those who'll only learn of the fast-fading lifestyle through literature, this is the definitive book.

I bought this book during the Thanksgiving Holiday weekend and read it while a storm raged outside. The book was a very pleasant surprise! I had never heard of Christopher White, but he has written an exceptional book, one that I have placed on my bookshelf beside William W. Warner's *Beautiful Swimmers* and Varley Lang's *Follow the Water*; my favorite books about the Eastern Shore and the Chesapeake Bay. Christopher White's gift for capturing the dialog of the Watermen is exceptional, and he uses that gift to propel his captivating, funny, and finally, very moving story to its sad ending. I've seen many of the Skipjacks mentioned in his book, at dockside in Tilghman Island, Cambridge, and other ports, at the Skipjack races, and out on the bay. It breaks my heart to read of their abandonment and destruction, and the disappearance of the way of life that sustained them for over a century. I will remember this sad and beautiful book for a very long time. I recommend it to anyone with an interest in the Bay, its unique watercraft, and above all, the Watermen who sail on it.

This is a very good book, well written. Tells the tough life of the skipjack clan and the hardship of the Chesapeake oyster. To hear about the beauty and the toughness of the skipjack makes me wish I had the opportunity to go back in time just to be with the men, ship and oysters. This is a great book for the armchair captains.

"Skipjack - The Story of America's Last Sailing Oystermen". This book preserves a way of life. The skipjacks and captains and crews are fading away. The cause; we have killed the oysters. My great grandfather had many skipjacks built and he sailed them up and down the Chesapeake Bay. Drugging for oysters required you to slow down and get in tune with the wind and Christopher White became part of this community and was accepted. Mr. White was able to capture the nuances of the way of life. Thank you

This was a present to my husband, who races sailboats of all kinds. He is enjoying this bit of history, especially since we have Skipjacks on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

I had the grand opportunity of spending a weekend on Tilghman Island and Dogwood Harbor. One afternoon was spent with Capt. Wade Murphy and this is his story about commercial skip-jacks and their centuries old industry going extinct. This book is a first hand look with great tales as well as oyster education tidbits. Worth the read if you are interested in the Chesapeake or skip-jacks and affiliated.

This is a very well written story about the life of the skipjack watermen. The nicest thing about it is that you don't have to know the people or even what a skipjack is to read and enjoy it. I now live on Deal Island and know that it is all fact. However, Captain Art Daniels is not the only skipjack captain to sail from Deal Island. There are three skipjacks that sail from here. The Somerset with Captain Walton Benton and the Fanny Daugherty with Captain Delmas Benton both sail from Deal as well. This year, oystering is best in the Tangier Sound so many of the Tilghman watermen are oystering there. It is really sad to watch one of the skipjacks sail on the sound and know that someday soon there won't be one there to watch. I recommend this book to anyone that enjoys reading.

A very well written story of Maryland's unique watercraft, told from first-hand experience. A wonderful introduction to the colorful and fascinating men who sail the Chesapeake Bay for "orsters."

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