

WHAT A DAY!

By

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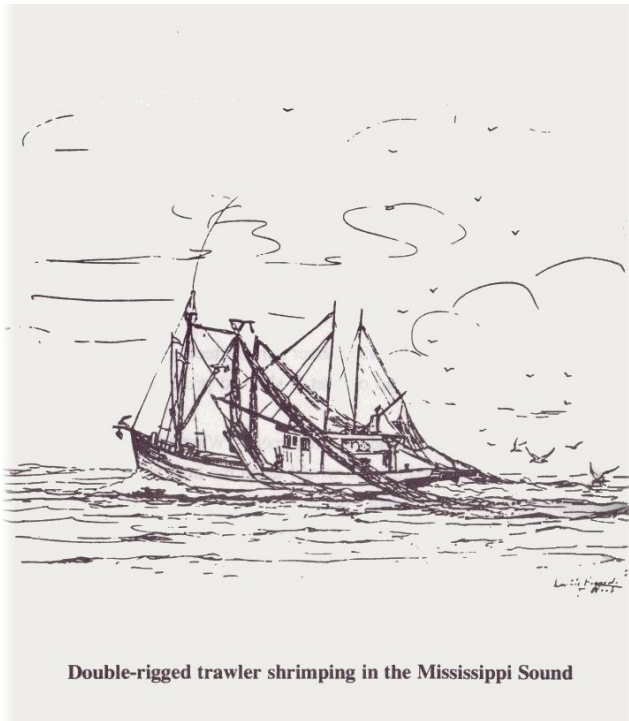
It was about three in the morning when Andrew Celovich woke to begin his first day on a shrimp boat. This was the time he would go with his father into the waters of the Mississippi Sound--his first time to help on his father's boat, "*The New Maria*". He had been out with him before, of course, just as everyone in the family had made short trips on the boat--but today would be different.

"Do you think you're up to it?" his father had teased gently. "It's not a pleasure cruise, you know."

"I know," Andrew smiled. "But I'm ready. I'll do a good job, I promise." His mother had worried about her fourteen-year-old son. "He doesn't need to go out yet," she had protested. "Wait a few years."

"A few years!" Andrew exclaimed. "What's wrong with now? Dad promised that he would teach me how to work on the boat--and then when I'm old enough, I can get a real job. It's not as if I'll be working for pay. This will be just for **learning** how to work. Please, Mom! Dad promised."

Jolene Celovich gave up gracefully. She knew how much it meant to the boy--and to his father. Lucas Celovich was very proud of his son, and he would be prouder. He had taught Andrew to be proud of his long heritage, schooling him in the story of the boats themselves.



Double-rigged trawler shrimping in the Mississippi Sound

Andrew knew a great deal about shrimping on the Mississippi coast. His father had always taught him about the fisherman's life he led.

The first fishermen, he said, had been the Indians, who taught the French settlers on the coast.

Early in the history of the region, Italian fishermen had introduced shallow-draft sailboats called "catboats" to the coast. Shrimpers then used seine nets and cast nets to catch shrimp.

As the years passed, a new type of boat was built, the fast Biloxi schooner, but seines and cast nets were still used by the fishermen.

It was not until the motorized trawlers came along, in the early 1900s, that shrimping became big business. Originally one clumsy seine was pulled behind the trawlers. Then another important invention, huge funnel-shaped nets called trawls, was introduced. The mouth of the trawl or bag is held open by water pressure against the flat trawl boards connected at the front of each side of the net.

Today diesel-powered wood and steel trawlers operate in coastal waters. Most commercial fishermen use a single trawl behind the boat, although double-trawls are also widely used. Some boats have as many as four of the huge nets, set at different lengths to prevent tangling.

Today, too, the shrimper does not have to depend only on instinct and experience and crude navigation instruments. He sometimes uses fish-finders and ship-to-shore radio and depth-finders. He is at home in the age of electronics and big business.

Andrew also knew a great deal about the life cycle of the shrimp itself. That, too, his father had taught him.

"You need to know all these things, Andy," he had said, "if you're going to be a good shrimper."

The adult shrimp, he told Andrew, spawns in the offshore salty waters from twenty to two-hundred and forty feet deep. "One female shrimp," Lucas said, "can lay as many as a million eggs."

"It looks like there would always be plenty of shrimp, then," Andrew pointed out.

"But only a very small percentage of them develop into adult shrimp," Lucas explained. "The eggs sink toward the bottom and hatch within twenty-four hours. Then the larvae are carried toward the estuaries by the tides and currents."

He continued to explain the cycle, knowing that Andrew was deeply interested in what he hoped would one day be his own work.

The shrimp develop in the estuaries, where they are protected and can feed and grow. When they are four to six months old, they seek deeper, saltier water, and the life



Catboat used before the modern day trawlers

cycle is completed with their spawning. The whole cycle to adulthood takes less than a year.

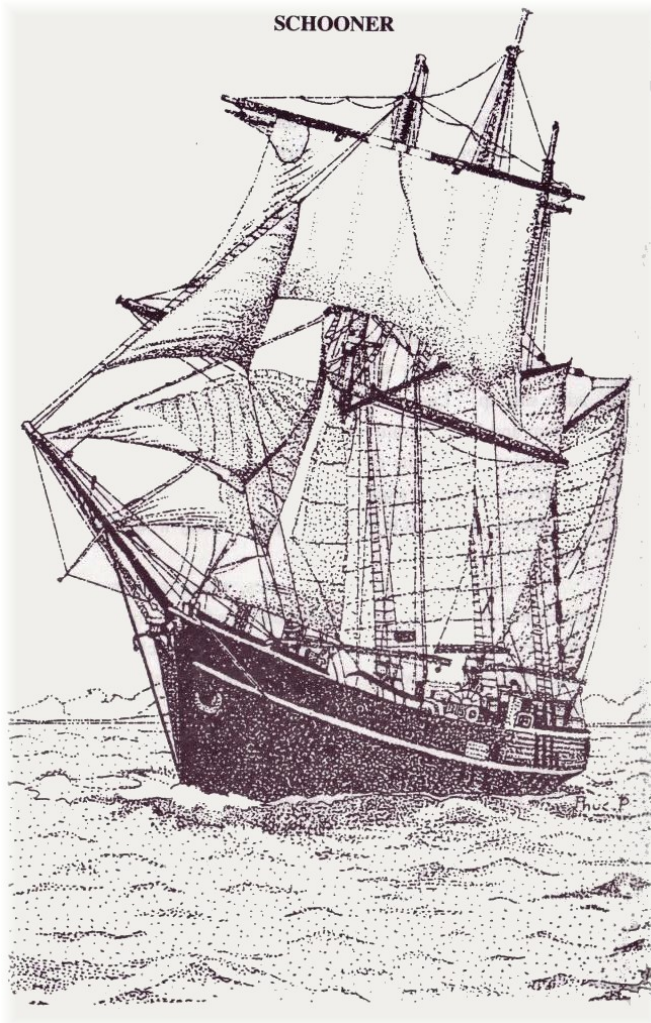
"Let me test you," Lucas Celovich had said. "How much do you know about the shrimp we catch?"

"I know what you've taught me."

"What kinds of shrimp do we catch here?"

"Brown shrimp, mostly. But a lot of white shrimp, too. Sometimes pink shrimp."

"How can you tell the brown shrimp?"



"It has grooves on the top of the head. White shrimp don't"

"How big do they get?"

"The brown shrimp maybe average fifteen to the pound. The females are larger. Adult shrimp can be from six to nine inches long."

"When do we catch them?"

"The brown shrimp run best from June to October; and we get them mostly at night. They're more than eighty percent of the catches on the coast. White shrimp are best caught during the daytime--mainly from October to January. You can find the brown shrimp in waters from sixty to one-hundred and twenty feet deep, but the white shrimp are usually in shallower waters."

"Good, Andy," his father had smiled, reaching out to ruffle his hair and almost embarrassing him by the praise. "You'll do," Lucas said firmly.

After Lucas finished his last cup of coffee, the two were ready. They made little noise as they left the house near the water and walked quietly down to the low pier where

"*The New Maria*" was docked. Everything had already been prepared. *The New Maria* was called a lugger, with a small cabin aft and a single rig. It was built of wood, though many shrimp boats today were made of steel, and it was about forty-two feet long.

Andrew had helped his father "ice up" the afternoon before, helping to shovel over one ton of ice into the hold. The hold was about six feet deep and thirteen feet wide and over eighteen feet long.

Andrew knew what to do first, as soon as he had placed his gear on the boat. He had brought extra clothes, because he would get soaking wet before the morning was over; he had boots with ridged soles and heavy gloves he would use in helping to "pick" or sort the shrimp from the fish and crabs and stingrays and other sea life caught in the net.

He moved quickly to take the lines off the boat as his father took the wheel and started the motor. Jumping onto the boat, he felt a surge of excitement at the movement into the water near Waveland. Standing beside his father, he felt the cool night air blowing gently across the water and watched curiously as a number of other boats moved ahead or behind them, their light reflected in the dark sea.

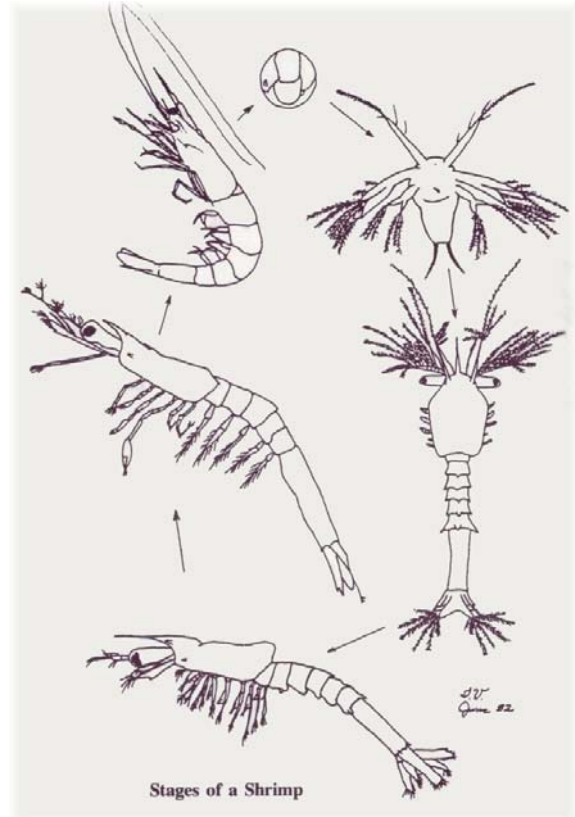
"Do you need me to do anything now?" he asked.

"Not now, son. Why don't you go take a nap while we go out? I'll wake you in plenty of time."

"Okay," he answered, moving toward one of the two bunks, past the small stove and the sink that helped to fill the small cabin. It took almost no time before he was asleep again, and it seemed no time at all before his father called him.

They were in waters a mile or so south of Bay St. Louis. He could see several other boats nearby, all of them stirring with life as the hour moved quickly toward sunrise.

Andrew took the wheel and kept the boat on a straight course as his father dropped the small "try-trawl" into the water. The "try-trawl" was a small sample net used to determine the number and size of shrimp in the area. After finding that shrimp were present, his father took the brakes off the drums, slacked the cable, and started to let the



big trawl go. He put the bag-line overboard first, then the trawl. The mouth of the trawl was held open by the water pressure against the flat boards attached to the outer wings of the trawl. The trawl was pulled through the water by lines attached to the boat rigging and to the boards. *The New Maria* had only a single trawl.



The net pulled heavily against the boat as it was dragged through the water. Andrew hoped that they would have a good catch. He knew that to his father a good catch would mean as much as four-hundred pounds of shrimp. He would consider that a good day's work. In the height of the season, the catches could often be larger, but he knew, too, that there were often disappointing times when the shrimp were just not there.

After approximately two and on-half hours, his father motioned to him to slow the boat and to help him begin the hard work of pulling up the net.

The boat rocked gently in the calm water as Lucas used winches to wind up the cables and pick the boards out of the water. The net stretched behind the boat, and Andrew knew that whatever shrimp had been caught would be in the "ail" of the bag. Using

what his father called the "lazy line," they pulled the net alongside the boat as Andrew steered *"The New Maria"* in a slow circle.

Then he went to help Lucas "trip the net" on deck. One person could do it, he knew, but it was easier with two.

He laughed when he saw that the tail of the bag was full of white shrimp. His father gave him a thumbs-up sign and grinned.

Then began the labor of picking the shrimp, separating the catch from the catfish which flopped on deck and the two medium-sized stingrays. There were a number of crabs, the blue crabs common to the coastal waters and highly prized by people who enjoyed good seafood. They would be separated and kept for sale later. Mostly there were shrimp.

"Be careful," Lucas warned.

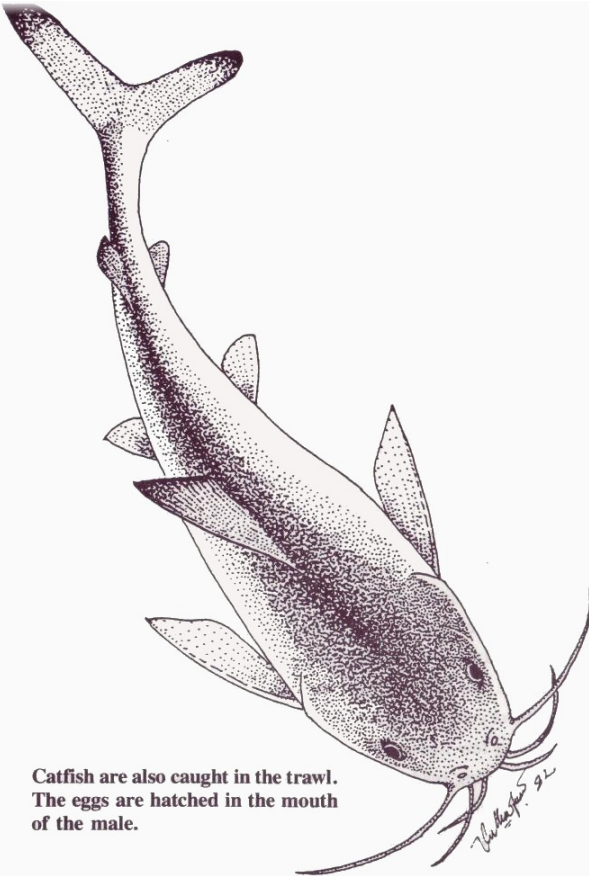
"I will." Andrew knew that the fins of the catfish could be very painful if one stuck into his hand and that the spiny tails of the stingrays were dangerous. The crabs, too, could reach out and clamp onto a finger.

"Good catch," his father said, helping to move the shrimp into the hold, where the ice would keep them fresh.

They made one more drag before mid-morning, this time even better, and Andrew knew that there must be about three-hundred pounds of shrimp in the hold. His father was pleased--and he was pleased, too, with Andrew. The boy had worked without complaining, stopping only for a cold drink and a sandwich a few hours after their early breakfast.



Building a Biloxi lugger



Catfish are also caught in the trawl. The eggs are hatched in the mouth of the male.

Getting ready to return home, Andrew helped to set the trawl boards on deck, then to hoist the tail of the trawl on the boom. He helped to shake out the net, the body of the trawl, and hoist it up on the davit, a smaller boom shaped like an upside-down "L". The wings of the trawl and the tickler-chain were left dragging in the water before Andrew shook out the net and piled it on the platform on the deck.

Going in, Lucas taught him something about the radio, telling him how to turn the VHF radio to Channel 16, to call the Coast Guard.

"You have to let them know where you are," he said, "but most of the time if you need help, it's best to contact another boat nearby on your CB-radio. They'll tow you in if they have to. That's a good feeling to know that these fishermen help you out when you need

help. You can depend on them. You know, today you don't just use your 'feelings' about fishing and your experience to be a good fisherman. You're part mechanic and part meteorologist and cook and--whatever. It's the kind of business where a man is still his own boss and he has to depend mostly on himself."

Andrew nodded, thinking that he would someday try to be as good a man as his father, hoping that he would have the same kind of gentle strength and endurance.

It was almost noon when "*The New Maria*" moved to the long factory pier. They waved to several of the men in the plant. In this business, almost everyone was acquainted with everyone else. That was another thing Andrew liked about his father's life. Their families had been in the seafood business for generations.

Andrew helped his father shovel the shrimp into large baskets and watched as they were placed on conveyor belts running into the plant itself.

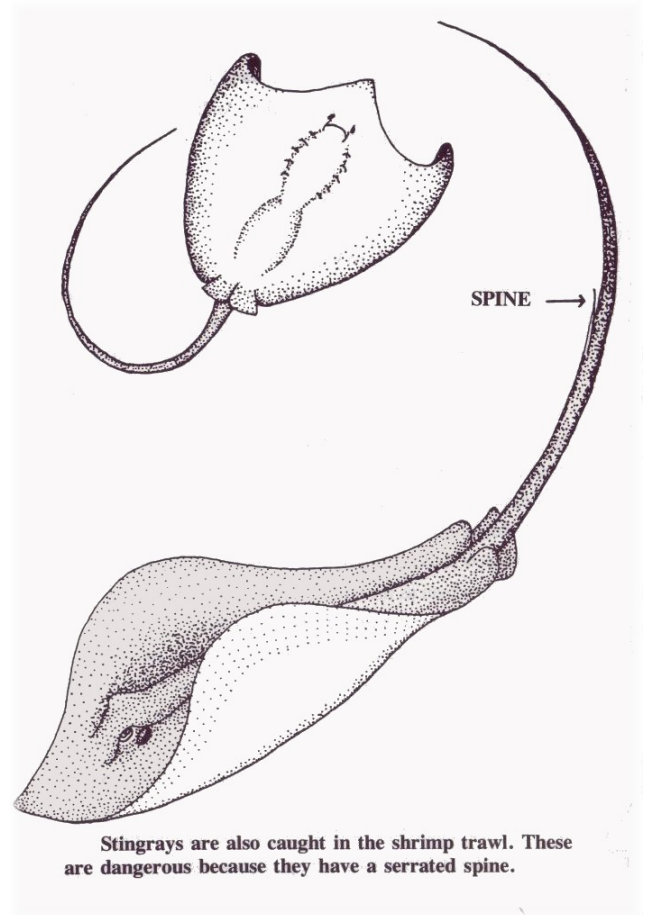
Finally they were at home, docked beside the familiar pier. He jumped off and tied the boat to the pier, then moved quickly to help his father check the net for tears. They would have to repair it that afternoon if they found any holes in the net. Andrew had learned long ago how to take care of the nets that were so important in the lives of fishermen everywhere.

Fortunately, everything was in good shape, and they began to wash down the boat, leaving everything ready for the next morning.

Andrew was tired. But he was happy, too, because he had learned so much and he knew that the next time he would do even better.

"Tired, son?" his father asked, putting an arm around his shoulders as they walked toward home.

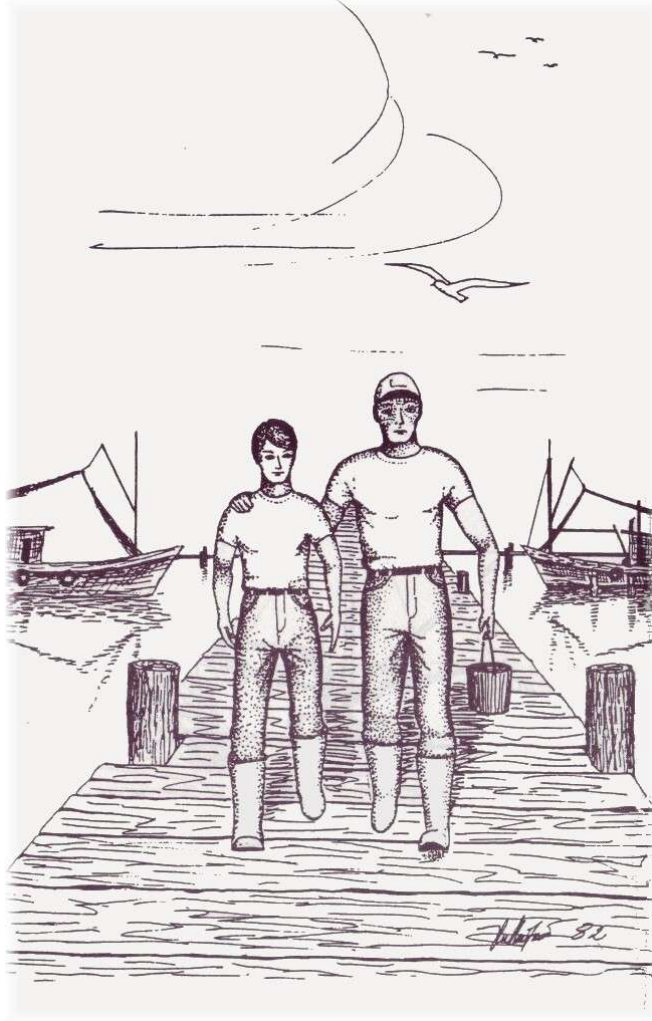
"Yes-sir," Andrew said, "I feel good, though."

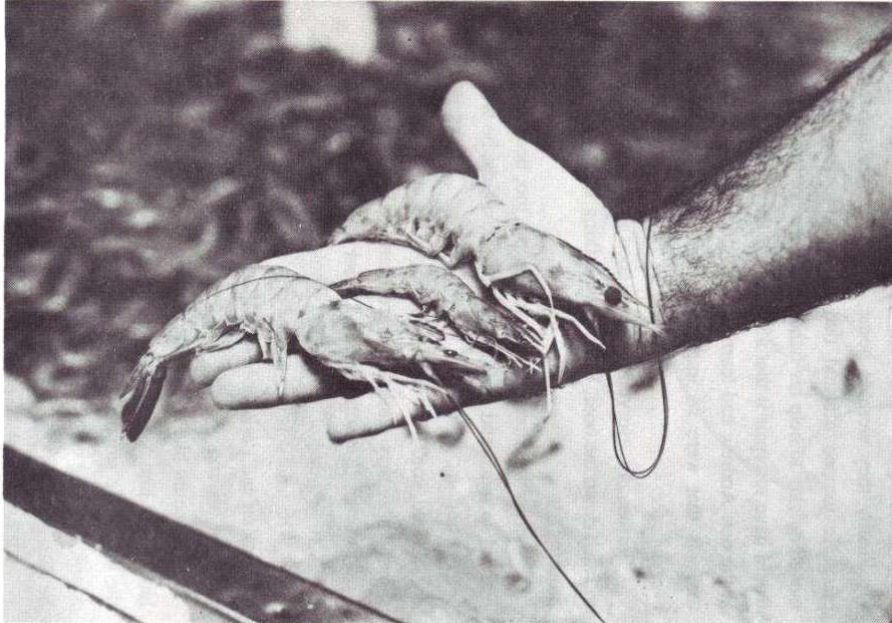


"You ought to," Lucas said firmly. "You did a good job, Andy," he said. "It was a good day's work and you did your share. You can't ask more of a man than that." He was very proud of his son.

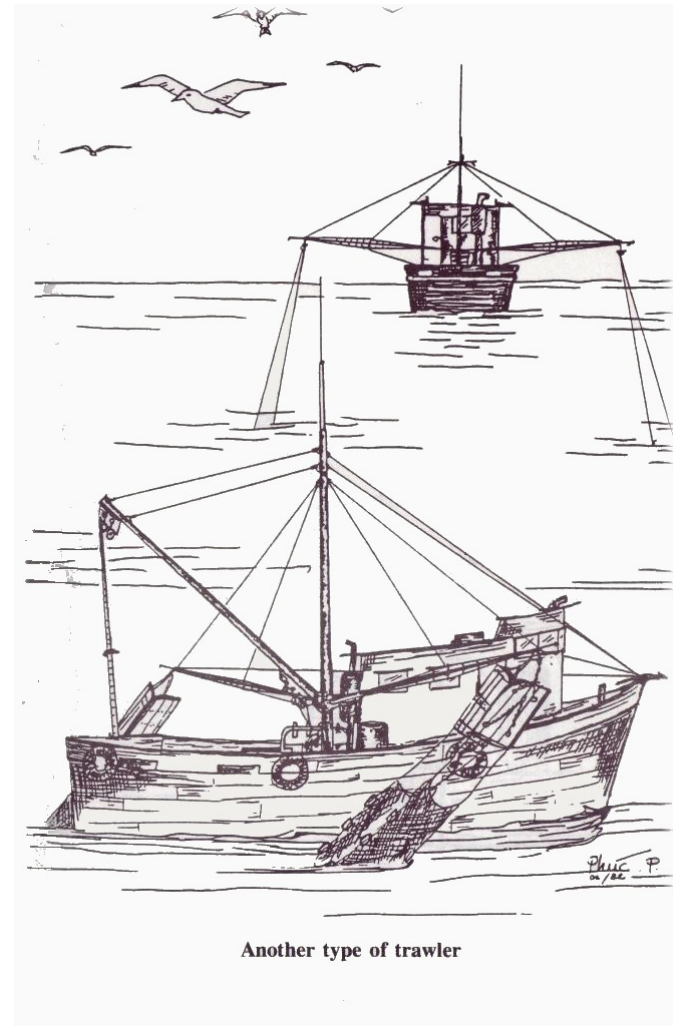
"It seems like more than a day's work," Andrew said, laughing at him. "But I liked being out there with you. I liked the day." He stopped and turned to look back at "*The New Maria*" resting calmly in the shallow water. It was beautiful, he thought.

"What a day!" he said to himself. "What a day!"





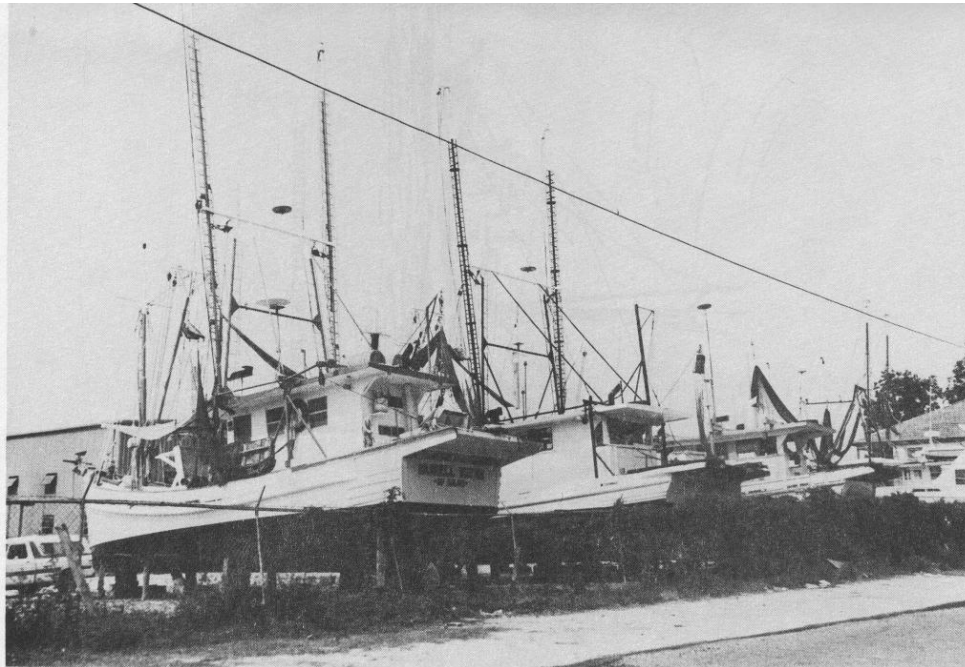
Shrimp from the Mississippi Sound



Another type of trawler

A GLOSSARY FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

aft	the rear of a boat
brine	saturated with salt
cable	heavy, strong rope of chain or steel line
conveyor	mover, belt that moves on rollers
cruise	trip over water
currents	movement of large water flow
cycle	occurring over a period of time
davit	crane-like device for supporting, lowering, or raising
drag	to pull through the water
drums	large cylinders
electronics	science of electrons and conductors
estuaries	areas where inland waters meet the sea
heritage	family background, inheritance
hoist	to lift overhead
hold	boat's container
larvae	immature life forms
lugger	small vessel lug-rigged on two or three masts
meteorologist	weather expert
rig	equipment for boat; to fit for use
schooner	type of sailing vessel having foremast and mainmast, with or without other masts
seine	fishing net that hangs vertically in the water
shallow-draft	the depth to which a vessel is submerged; 3 1/2 to 4 feet characteristic of many boats in the Mississippi Sound
slacked	loosened, let go
solution	dissolved material in liquid
spawn	to produce offspring
tide	rise and fall of the ocean waters and inlets
trawl	a strong fishing net for dragging along the sea bottom or through the water
winch	revolving machine on which rope or cable is wound when pulling in a trawl and unwound to let out the trawl



Repairing shrimp boats in the shipyard



Modern steel boat used for shrimping