

continue to play an important role in island life today (Meyer 2008). The area’s strong religious roots stem from revivals of the Second Great Awakening in the 1800s (Fahrenthold 2008). Most of the inhabitants of Smith Island are descendants of the original English and Welsh settlers. Islanders here speak a distinctive dialect which is a relic of these early settlers (American Folklife Center 2008). Some aspects of the language retain their Elizabethan roots, while the language has also evolved on its own to include pronunciations and phrases unheard in either Elizabethan English or American English (American Heritage Dictionary 2000). Each of the three villages (Ewell, Tylerton, and Rhodes Point) has a working harbor. Rhodes Point was originally called Rogue’s Point, for the pirates who frequented the island. Smith Island residents have made their living as watermen for generations (Meyer 2008). Even today, nearly every man on Smith Island is a crab fisherman, and Smith Island’s three towns are lined with crab shanties (Scheller 2000). Smith Island has never had a police force of any kind; when necessary, state or county police come over to the island from the mainland (Somers 1993). It lacked electricity until 1949, and street names and house numbers until 1991 (Meyer 2008).

Demographics³

According to Census 2000 data, Smith Island CDP had a total population of 364 in 2000. Census data for 1990 is unavailable for Smith Island. According to Meyer (2008), however, “the full-time island population has plummeted, from 675 in the 1980 Census to around 240 today.” Of the 2000 total, 48.9% were males and 51.1% were females. The median age was 50.5 years and 83.2% of the population was 21 years or older while 27.5% were 62 or older. Smith Island’s population has declined over the years as young people leave the island in search of employment opportunities other than fishing (Cooperative Living 2002).

The population structure for Smith Island (Figure 1) shows an aging population; the highest percentage of residents are in the 50-59 age category, while there are few children or young people living on Smith Island. Men far outnumber women in the 40-49 years age category, while women outnumber men for the population age 50-59.

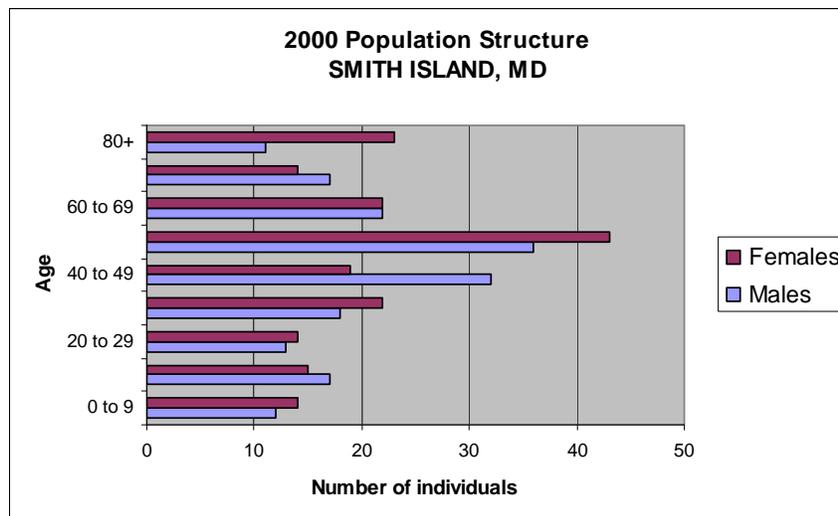


Figure 1. Smith Island’s population structure by sex in 2000

³ While mid-term estimates are available for some larger communities, data from the 2000 Census are the only data universally available for the communities being profiled in the Northeast. Thus for cross-comparability we have used 2000 data even though these data may have changed significantly since 2000 for at least some communities.

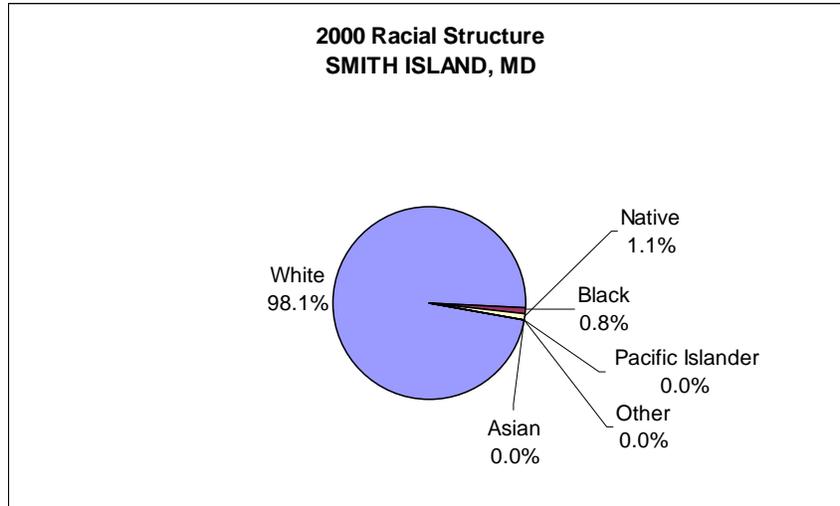


Figure 1. Racial Structure in 2000 (U.S. Census 2000)

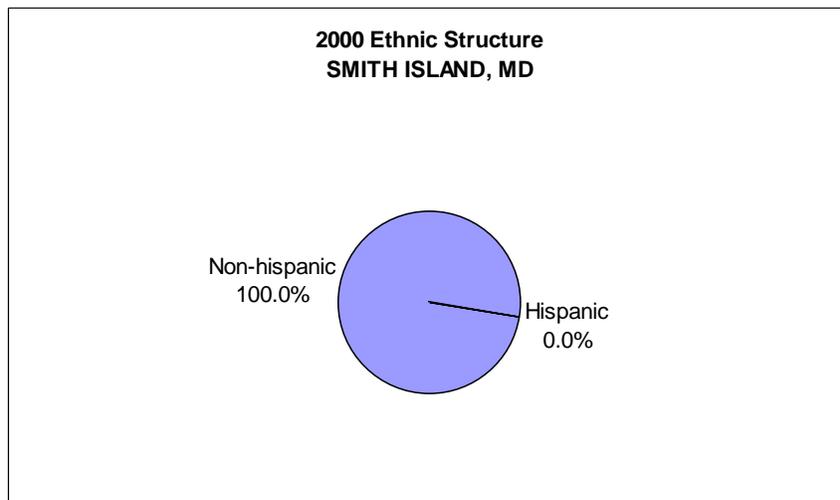


Figure 2. Ethnic Structure in 2000 (U.S. Census 2000)

The majority of the population is white (98.1%) with 0.8% of residents black or African American, no residents Asian, 1.1% Native American, and no residents Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (Figure 2). None of the population identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (Figure 3). Residents traced their backgrounds to a few different ancestries including: English (29.6%), Greek (2.2%), and Irish (1.9%).

With regard to region of birth, 81.2% were born in Maryland, 16.6% were born in a different state, and 2.2% were born outside the US (all of whom are US citizens).

For 97.8% of the population, only English was spoken in the home, leaving 2.2% in homes where a language other than English was spoken, including 2.2% of the population who spoke English less than “very well” (US Census Bureau 2000).

Of the population 25 years and over, 45.0% were high school graduates or higher, and 2.3% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Of the population 25 years and over, 35.0% did not reach ninth grade, 20.0% attended some high school but did not graduate, 29.7% completed high school, 8.7% had some college with no degree, 4.3% received an associate’s degree, 2.3% earned a bachelor’s degree, and no residents received either a graduate or professional degree. There is

no high school on the island and students have to attend high school in Crisfield, a daily trip on mail boat or ferry⁴.

Although religious percentages are not available through the US Census, according to the Association of Religion Data Archive (ARDA) in 2000 the religion with the highest number of congregations and adherents in Somerset County was the United Methodist Church, with 39 congregations and 4,381 adherents. Other prominent congregations in the county were Southern Baptist Convention (5 with 925 adherents) and the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) (2 with 801 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion was down 7.9% from 1990 (ARDA 2000).

There are three churches on Smith Island itself, all of them Methodist (Meyer 2008, Cultural Alliance 2008).

Issues/Processes

A study in the fall of 2007 found blue crab numbers in the Chesapeake had fallen to one-third of the population in 1993, and scientists are concerned about a possible crash in the population. Poor water quality and overharvesting are considered causes of the decline; of particular concern is the number of female crabs being harvested by watermen. While the Chesapeake Bay's crabs are not likely to go extinct, crabbers are having a tough time making ends meet between the rising cost of fuel and an influx of imported crab meat; the declining population could lead to economic disaster for the Bay's watermen (Fahrenthold 2007a).

As numbers of fish and shellfish in the Chesapeake decline, there are stricter fishing regulations and rules (Nitkin 2007, Kobell 2008). Recently, the State imposed additional regulations for catching female crabs (DNR 2008), upsetting local watermen who feel they have a difficult enough time making a living (Hazen, 2008, Kobell, 2008).

Recently, Smith Island cake, a specialty cake originating from Smith Island, was named Maryland's state dessert, and island residents are hoping this event will provide a boost in tourism and some resulting economic relief, particularly as crab catches continue to decline (Simmons 2008).

At less than five feet above sea level, sea level rise poses a serious threat to Smith Island (Scheller 2000). The island cluster has already lost 1,200 acres to the Chesapeake in the last 100 years (Anon. 2005). Erosion is a serious problem, and the Army Corps of Engineers recently completed a \$2 million bulkhead project at Smith Island to slow its course. Over the years, some houses on Smith Island have had to be abandoned as a result of erosion and rising waters (Nelson 2007).

Cultural attributes

Smith Island has a small museum, the Smith Island Center Museum, with exhibits dedicated to the island's working waterfront traditions including the crab industry, which is central to the island's culture and history (Meyer 2008). The Smith Island Crabmeat Co-op allows visitors to witness crab picking in progress through an observation window, or visitors can pay a small fee to tour the facility and sample crab meat (Meyer 2008). The watermen of Smith Island hold a ceremony each year to bless the crab fleet at the start of the season (Fahrenthold 2008). Smith Island also holds an annual Smith Island Day, which features skiff races and other traditional activities (Lutz 2006).

⁴ Pers. com. Dr. Michael Paolisso, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Maryland.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Economy

According to the 2000 Census⁵, 50.8% (163 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force (Figure 4), of which none were unemployed, none were in the Armed Forces, and 50.8% were employed.

According to US Census Bureau (2000), jobs in the census grouping which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining accounted for 25 positions or 15.3% of all jobs. Self-employed workers – a category where fishermen might be found – accounted for 53 positions or 32.5% of jobs. Transportation, warehousing, and utilities (20.2%), public administration (16.6%), and wholesale trade (9.2%) were the other primary industries.

Many of Smith Island's residents work as watermen. According to one resident, "Everybody on the islands is either a waterman or a waterman's wife—except the preacher," says Wendy Robertson, the local tourism assistant at the Somerset County Tourism Office on the mainland" (Evitts 2001). Smith Island Crabmeat Co-op, Inc. is a small 1500 square foot crab processing facility in Tylerton. Nine independent crab pickers work here, and produce 23,600 pounds of crab annually (RDC 2005). Major industries in Somerset County include seafood harvesting and processing, and poultry processing. The top ten employers in Somerset County are as follows: Eastern Correctional Institution (979 employees); University of Maryland Eastern Shore (950 employees); Lankford/SYSCO Foods (750 employees); McCready Hospital (275 employees); PNC (250 employees); Manokin Manor (165 employees); Rubberset Company (160 employees); Somerset County Developmental Center (150 employees); Custom Pak (132 employees); and Southern Connection (120 employees) (Somerset County Economic Development Commission 2008). At least 30 of the employees at the Eastern Correctional Institution used to be watermen, and some of them were watermen on Smith Island. As crab stocks have declined and fuel prices have increased, many of Smith Island's residents have left to pursue other careers (Fahrenthold 2007b). The local Smith Island Cake is being used as part of a new tourism campaign to supplement the local economy (Guy 2008).

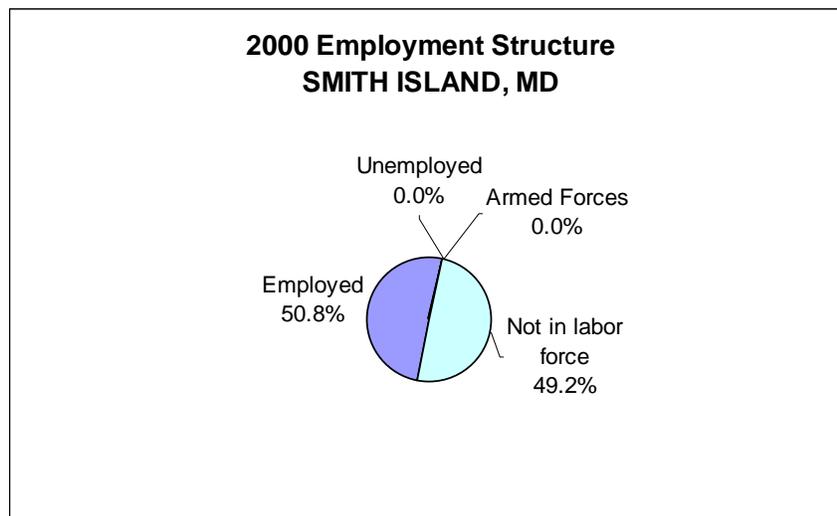


Figure 4. Employment Structure in 2000

⁵ Again, Census data from 2000 are used because they are universally available and offer cross-comparability among communities. Some statistics, particularly median home price, are likely to have changed significantly since 2000.

Median 2000 household income in Smith Island was \$26,324 (Census data for 1990 is unavailable for Smith Island) and median per capita income was \$23,996. For full-time year round workers, females made approximately 9.5% more per year than males.

The average family in Smith Island consisted of 2.92 persons. With respect to poverty, 14.4% of families and 22.1% of individuals were below the US Census poverty threshold. This threshold is \$8,794 for individuals and ranges from \$11,239 through \$35,060 for families, depending on number of persons (2-9) (US Census Bureau 2000b). In 2000, 58.7% of all families of any size earned less than \$35,000 per year.

In 2000 Smith Island had a total of 256 housing units, of which 65.2% were occupied and 85.5% were detached one-unit homes. Nearly half (45.0%) of these homes were built before 1940. Mobile homes accounted for 11.9% of housing units; 92.9% of detached units had between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was \$55,000. Of vacant housing units, 62.9% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of occupied units, 6.0% were renter occupied. “[T]oday, more than a third of the island’s 155 households are second-homers, according to land records and the island telephone directory” (Meyer 2008).

Government

“No local government or police maintain order on the island, but each community has its own Methodist church where local decisions are made, thus providing political as well as religious cohesion” (American Folklife Center 2008). The churches have taken over many of the functions that would normally be the role of the local government (Evitts 2001). Smith Island remains an unincorporated community within Somerset County.

Fishery involvement in government

Information on fishery involvement in government in Smith Island was either unavailable through secondary data collection or the practice does not exist.

Institutional

Fishing associations

“The [Maryland Watermen's Association](#) is dedicated to the interests of all who derive beauty & benefit from Maryland's Chesapeake Bay Waters.” While the Association focuses primarily on bay fishing issues, they also represent ocean fishermen where necessary. The MWA still broadly represent all those who work on the water in/of Maryland. The President of the Association also serves on the [Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#) which focuses on bay and ocean fisheries issues.⁶ However on Smith Island the MWA is primarily seen as a group that represents Northern bay issues. The Association is based in Annapolis, MD. There is also a Tangier Sound Watermen’s Association, which has been quite active in representing the area on fishery issues to the state, particularly to Maryland DNR, and is a more local group⁷. The Smith Island Crab Meat Cooperative, located in Tylerton, was formed in 1993 by the women of Smith Island. By 1996 they had secured funding for a new picking and packing facility in order to meet MD Dept of Health standards (Anon. 1998).

⁶ Community Review Comments, Kelly Clements Barnes, Administrative Assistant, Maryland Watermen’s Association, September 13, 2007

⁷ Pers. com. Dr. Michael Paolisso, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Maryland.

Fishing assistance centers

Information on fishing assistance centers in Smith Island was either unavailable through secondary data collection or the practice does not exist.

Other fishing related organizations

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore, about 21 miles from Crisfield, has a graduate degree program in Marine, Estuarine, and Environmental Sciences, including courses in Fisheries Science (UMD nd).

Physical

Smith Island is located about 13 miles west of Crisfield, and is accessible only by boat. Ferries travel year-round to Smith Island from Crisfield. There is also ferry service during the summer months from Point Lookout, Maryland and Reedville, Virginia. A mail boat travels to Smith Island from Crisfield twice a day bringing supplies (Cooperative Living 2002). Ewell is the largest of the island's towns, and home to most of the seafood-packing houses (Frommers 2008). Tylerton is separated from the other two communities by water, and is only accessible by boat (Meyer 2008). Smith Island has a marina, the Smith Island Marina (Smith Island Marina 2008), which has six slips (Visit Somerset County 2008).

Crisfield has a municipal airport, the Crisfield and Somerset County Airport. The next nearest airport is the Accomack County Airport in Virginia, 24 miles from Crisfield, and the nearest large commercial airport is the Baltimore Washington International Airport, 147 miles from Crisfield (Google Maps 2008).

INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES⁸

Commercial

The Smith Island Crabmeat Co-op is a crab picking cooperative where several women work picking crabs brought in by local boats (RDC 2008). It is the only operation of its kind in the world. Several years ago there were 15 women working here, but in 2005 there were only eight (Mansfield 2005). Clayton and Sons Seafood in Tylerton sells both soft shell crabs and oysters. Eddie Evans Seafood, in Ewell, is another business selling both hard and soft shell crabs, as well as oysters (Visit Smith Island 2008). While Smith Island is noted for the crabbing industry, oyster harvesting is also very important here. The Maryland Waterman's Association notes, "Smith Island oystermen live on their boats during the oyster season, going home on weekends" (Maryland Waterman's Association 2008).

⁸ In reviewing the commercial landings data several factors need to be kept in mind. 1) While both federal and state landings are included, some states provide more detailed data to NMFS than others. For example, shellfish may not be included or data may be reported only by county and not by port. 2) Some communities did not have individual port codes until more recently. Before individual port codes were assigned, landings from those ports were coded at the county level or as an aggregate of two geographically close small ports. Where landings were coded at the county level they cannot be sorted to individual ports for those earlier years, e.g., prior to 2000. 3) Where aggregated codes were used, those aggregate codes may still exist and be in use alongside the new individual codes. Here the landings which are still assigned to the aggregate port code cannot be sorted into the individual ports, so port level data are only those which used the individual port code. 4) Even when individual port codes exist, especially for small ports, landings may be coded at the county level. Here again it is impossible to disaggregate these to a port level, making the port level landings incomplete. 5) In all these cases, the per port data in this profile may under report the total level of landings to the port, though all landings are accounted for in the overall NMFS database.

Maryland federal landings data, which come primarily from Ocean City, are reported with a county and port. State entered data are reported under “MD unclassified” and Potomac River data are reported with county and port - the port code being the name of a river or a creek rather than an actual port. Thus no Smith Island landings, or even complete Somerset County landings, can be disaggregated for report here.

Similarly, only federally-permitted vessels are in the federal permit database. Vessels which are permitted at the state level only will not appear in the tables below. Thus there is only one home ported vessel listed for Smith Island, and only for 2002-2005.

Vessels by Year⁹

Table 1. Federal Vessel Permits between 1997-2006

Year	# Vessels home ported	# vessels (owner's city)	Level of fishing home port (\$)	Level of fishing landed port (\$)
1997	0	0	0	0
1998	0	0	0	0
1999	0	0	0	0
2000	0	0	0	0
2001	0	0	0	0
2002	1	0	0	0
2003	1	0	0	0
2004	1	0	0	0
2005	1	0	0	0
2006	0	0	0	0

(Note: # Vessels home ported = No. of permitted vessels with location as homeport, # Vessels (owner's city) = No. of permitted vessels with location as owner residence¹⁰)

Recreational

Some visitors come to Smith Island for sport fishing. Chesapeake Fishing Adventures operates a fishing lodge in Tylerton. They take guests fishing and provide a fishing pier, cleaning station, and grill for fishermen to clean and cook their catch. They target a number of species including striped bass, sea trout, flounder, blue fish, red drum, black drum, spot, and croaker (Chesapeake Fishing Adventures 2008). Evans Fishing and Sightseeing Boat Tours also offers to take visitors sportfishing. The county dock in Tylerton is a popular spot for fishing for rockfish (striped bass) and for crab jigging (Visit Smith Island 2008). Fishing charters are available through [Smith Island Marina](#); they also offer crab pots for their guests to use (Smith Island Marina 2008).

Subsistence

Information on subsistence fishing in Smith Island was either unavailable through secondary data collection or the practice does not exist.

⁹ Numbers of vessels by owner's city and homeport are as reported by the permit holder on permit application forms. These may not correspond to the port where a vessel lands or even spends the majority of its time when docked.

¹⁰ The Owner-City from the permit files is technically the address at which the owner receives mail concerning their permitted vessels, which could reflect the actual location of residence, the mailing address as distinct from residence, owner business location, or the address at which a subsidiary receives mail about the permits.

FUTURE

Between the decline of the crabbing industry, with a number of young people leaving the island (Elfenbein 2006), and the threat of sea level rise, Smith Island's future is uncertain (Scheller 2000).

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