

A CENTURY OF B.C. FISHING

Writing in "Trade News", a publication of the Department of Fisheries, L.G. Swann points out that in the celebration this year of a century of progress for British Columbia it is well to remember that commercial fishing is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, of the industries which now play an important part in the social and economic life of the province.

Early records reveal that the Hudson's Bay Company was engaged in the salmon fishing industry in the early part of the nineteenth century. The company bought the salmon from native Indians, and salted and shipped it to the Hawaiian Islands and to the Orient.

In those days spears, dip nets, brush traps, weirs and wooden hooks were primitive but effective means of fishing and for many years salt was the only preservative used for export products.

Time has brought many changes. Today the British Columbia fishing fleet is among the most modern in the world. The total investment in fishing vessels and service boats in 1956 was upwards of \$43,000,000. Much of this is the direct concern of the 12,000 fishermen of British Columbia, many of whom can claim whole or part ownership of the vessels in which they operate.

In addition to the fishing boats another \$7,600,000 is invested in purse-seines, gill-nets, trolling gear and other types of fishing equipment.

Processing methods also have kept pace with modern manufacturing trends. From the first British Columbia salmon cannery, built by David Hennessy, Alexander Loggie, Alexander Ewen and James Wise, has sprung a widespread and progressive industry.

MANY CANNERIES

Early fishing methods tended to exploit salmon as they entered the mouths of rivers and inlets; canneries thus were built in clusters around these strategic points and fishing went on often within hailing distance of the cannery wharves. In 1917 British Columbia boasted 94 salmon canneries which in that year produced a total of 1,557,000 cases of canned salmon. The great sockeye runs to the Fraser River had developed a heavy concentration of fishing effort in this area and in 1901 there were 49 canneries on this river alone. This was the year when the Fraser River canned salmon pack totalled 900,000 cases -- the bulk of which were of the sockeye variety.

The earlier years of the B.C. fishing industry were productive of little else but salmon. However, the coastal waters were rich with other species and by the turn of the 20th century there was a rapidly growing halibut fishery. The completion of the Canadian Pacific and Northern Pacific railway lines to the Pacific coast opened up new markets for fresh

iced fish in eastern areas and it was not long before an intensive halibut fishery developed.

Both Canadian and United States fishermen extended their halibut fishing operations far out into the Pacific and within a few years the stocks of this species were suffering from the continued onslaught.

It was a realization of this dangerously competitive fishing that brought about the first treaty entered into by Canada as a nation and the first international agreement to protect and rehabilitate a fishery. The North Pacific Halibut Convention and the Commission which operates under it have made their marks in economic history. Halibut stocks in the Pacific are now established on a sound basis of sustained yield and are expected to increase for many years.

BIG HERRING TRADE

The herring fishery of B.C. began in the latter part of the last century, when a market was found in the Orient for herring brined, drained and packed into boxes with salt, marketed as dry-salt herring. This business increased and flourished up to the time of the second World War, when it came to an abrupt halt.

However, a new outlet had developed in the intervening years. Fish meal was being used extensively, first as fertilizer, then as domestic stock feed, and the oil extracted in the same manufacturing process was absorbed in blending processes which emerged in a variety of products ranging from cosmetics to shortenings.

This led to the construction and operation of reduction plants and for the past decade all but a very minor proportion of the annual herring catch has been processed in these establishments. British Columbia's output of fish meal normally ranges between 35,000 and 45,000 tons and the oil production varies from 25,000,000 to 40,000,000 pounds annually. During the Second World War several million cases of canned herring were produced and put into the British Commonwealth food pool.

In its years of development the B.C. fishing industry underwent growing pains, some of them severe and at all times serving to point up and emphasize some valuable lessons for succeeding generations.

In the salmon canning section of the industry the wasteful and costly methods of pioneering days were gradually being streamlined as new techniques were perfected. When marine power replaced cars and sails in fishing a marked step forward was evident. First came a brief period in which flotillas of fish boats were towed to and from the fishing grounds. Then came power into the fishing boats themselves. No longer was it necessary to maintain canneries on every salmon stream;

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