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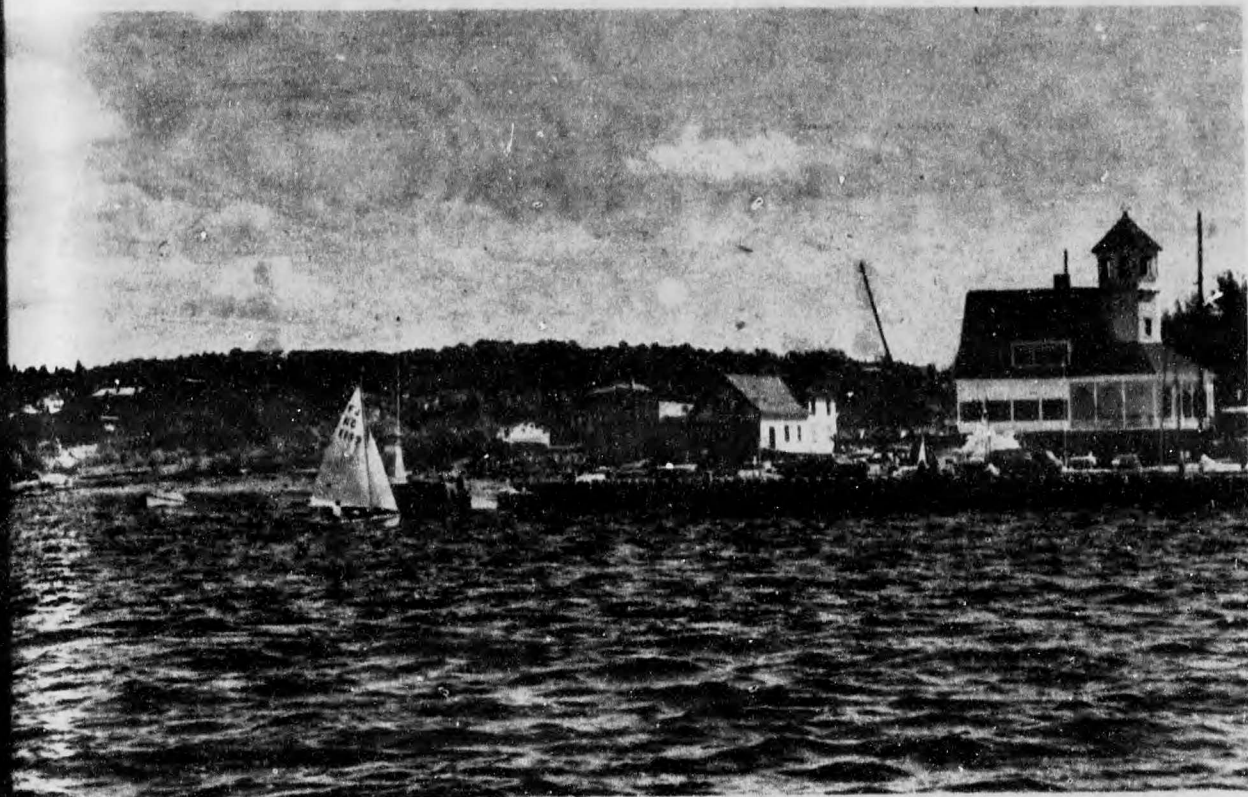
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Don't let the beautiful appearance fool you. The St. John and many of its tributaries are seriously polluted.

representatives of Staley, however, maintained that the company would not be increasing the amount of effluent put into the river and in fact intended to install new pollution control equipment which would reduce the load.

Robert Hunter, a consulting engineer, said during the period from June 15 to September 15, no potato grinding was conducted and only about 145,000 gallons per day of effluent were discharged into the river during the remainder of the year, approximately 721,000 gallons of waste water would be discharged per day.

Hunter added that once new treatment facilities were completed at the plant, the pollution load during the winter period might be reduced to 285,000 gallons per day.

The plant operates 12 months a year and grinds potatoes and tapioca as raw materials. At the hearing, Donald Barringer, manager of the plant, and James Dusten, regional manager of the company, admitted that although the present five acre holding lagoon and sludge treatment system were designed to purify 90 per cent of the waste material, sometimes only 30 per cent was actually treated.

"There is no way of knowing what waste charge is being put into the stream now or when the new facilities are installed," said Hunter.

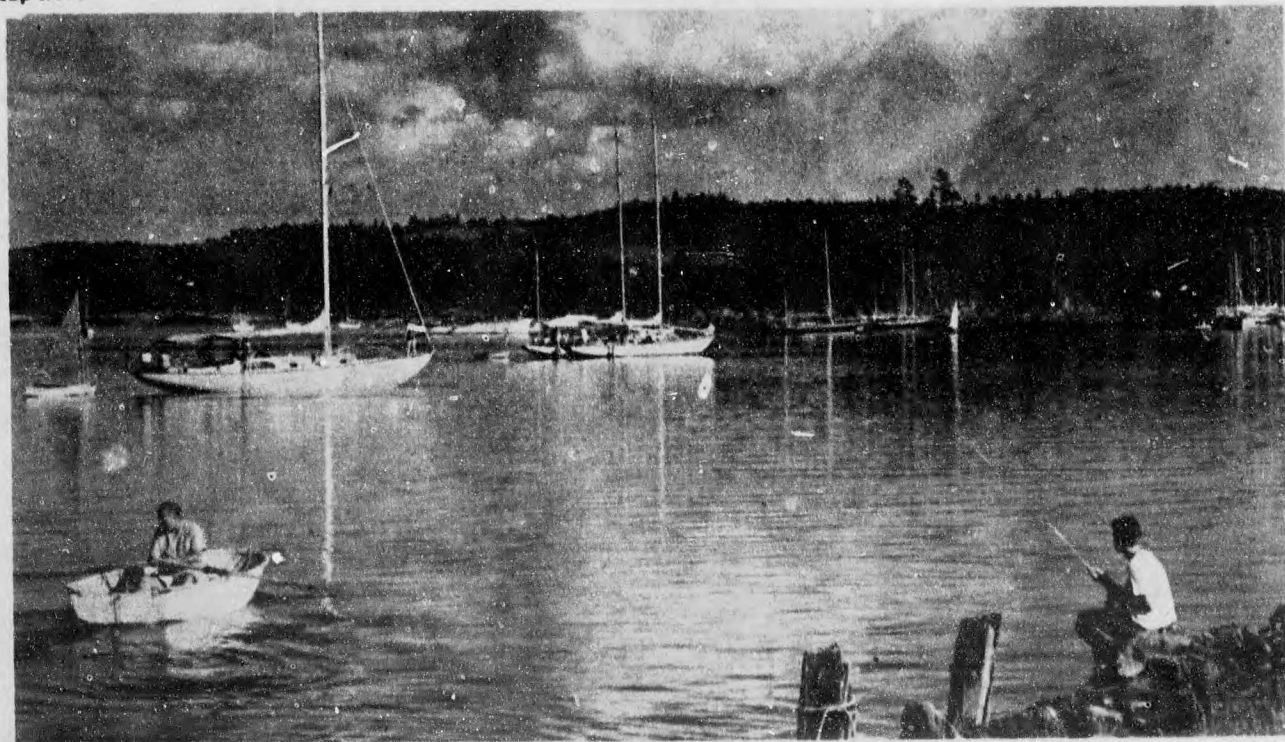
Stuart White and Phil Jordan, lawyers for the Houlton Fish and Game Club, objected "almost every point that was made by the company," it was reported.

Also there to raise objections was David Olmstead, a Fredericton lawyer and member of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick. Olmstead protested the application on public grounds.

Olmstead maintains that the pollution of the Meduxnekeag River violates the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty between the U.S. and Great Britain which prohibits the pollution of waters which cross international boundaries. However, since this treaty has previously been violated many times before, he doesn't expect it to have much effect this time.

It does, nevertheless, bring up another point — whether or not the Maine system of water classification is constitutional. According to the U.S. constitution, Olmstead told us, treaties including the Boundary Waters Treaty, are the supreme law of the land. However, according to Maine classifications, the Meduxnekeag is classed C at the border, a classification which allows a considerable amount of pollution. "Class C waters...shall be of such quality as to be satisfactory for recreational boating and fishing, for a fish and wildlife habitat and for other uses except potable water supplies."

Because the Maine classification system conflicts with the Boundary Waters Treaty in this respect, Olmstead contends that the system is void. He intends to use this argument at the next hearing. However, the pollution fighters had better not pin their hopes on this one either; in the 50's the Maine Supreme Court ruled that the system was constitutional, although they did leave the matter open for dispute.



Apparently there are fish in this stretch of the lower St. John, but that isn't the case all along the river system. Reports have it that there are none in the Meduxnekeag River.

Olmstead expects that Staley's will get their license anyway, although there will probably be certain conditions attached for the installation of pollution control facilities. He hasn't much faith in the tribunal of the Maine State Department of Environmental Protection in fighting pollution. "It hasn't been a strong body; in fact it's very permissive."

At the hearing, the Staley representatives insisted that the river, which is classified B2 at the plant and C at the border, would not be downgraded if they got their license. "I have my doubts about that," said Olmstead, "the classification will probably be lowered."

Olmstead doesn't accept Staley's argument that the pollution load will not be increased; "I can't assess what their case is. I don't know whether they're stringing people along or what." He added that at the present, Staley's is only putting 150,000 to 300,000 gallons of effluent in the river per day whereas they have applied for a license to discharge up to 700,000 gallons. He's very worried at the consequences of pouring this amount of effluent into a river the size of Meduxnekeag.

The Meduxnekeag, of course, is already seriously polluted, not only by the Staley plant but also by sewage from the town of Houlton. The starch plant actually was in operation long before Staley's took it over in 1967. Olmstead, who grew up in Woodstock, said "It's always been a rotten river."

However, he did say that before his time, the Meduxnekeag was "one of the finest trout streams around." He added "If it was cleaned up it would be a tremendous recreational stream. I don't think New Brunswickers use it to its full potential but the potential is there."

Actually, just what effect the effluent from the starch plant has, or will have in the future, no one seems to know. Part of the reason is the irregular nature of the discharge which makes it difficult to assess just how serious the pollution is. Brian Barnes, director of the environment section of the New Brunswick Dept. of Fisheries and Environment, made the rather elementary observation that the effect on the river would be significant when potato grinding was being carried out and a large volume of effluent being discharged,

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