

# The New Brunswick Sardine Fisheries

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THE sardine fisheries are now the leading fisheries of New Brunswick. They are concentrated in and around Passamaquoddy Bay, a branch of the Bay of Fundy. The fish from this area are noted for their fine flavor and health-giving qualities.

Half a century or so ago two men started fishing out of a boat. They were hard working, honest Irishmen. They sold their catch to a town in the United States some distance away where fish canning factories were then flourishing. One day they paused and wondered why they could not establish a canning factory on their own shore in Canada, which then consisted of a few fishermen's dwellings. In this way they would realise a better return for their catch than just selling the raw fish. This was the start of the town of Black's Harbour, now a prosperous community of 1,200 people, and the home of the Canadian sardine industry.

The largest sardine plant in the world, that of Connors Bros. Limited, is situated here, having a capacity of over 50 million tins per annum. There are, besides, two smaller plants in New Brunswick—one at Fairhaven, Deer Island, (capacity around 75,000 cases annually) and one at Beaver Harbour. This article, however, will mainly deal with the conditions of the industry as they prevail in Black's Harbour.

Sardines are caught in weirs located quite close to shore. Those weirs sometimes cover one or two acres. Poles, 50 or 60 feet long, enclosing the area, are driven down and the netting placed inside the poles. The sardines come in with the tide and are deposited in the weir, and thus fail to return when the tide goes out again, having been caught inside the weir. The Bay of Fundy, the main body of water here, is noted

for its high tides, 20 to 25 feet. The sardines are brought to the surface of the weir by scoop nets and dumped into small boats, thereafter transferred to a large power boat which waits nearby, and then they are rushed to the factory, canned by a very fast and modern process, and are ready and on their way to the markets of the world the same day.

The sardine weir is quite an institution along this part of the coast. There are several hundred of them. They often cost from three to five thousand dollars, and are generally owned by several families. If a man dies, the remaining partners are likely to carry on as usual, giving the widow what would have been her husband's share.

The sardines are processed and packed using the latest scientific methods. In 1933 a special research laboratory has been established in Black's Harbour, one of the finest of its type in eastern Canada. New products are continually being developed and placed on the market. The sea contains great wealth and the laboratories are steadily working and planning as to how this wealth can be made available to the consumer.

The industry is self-contained, as only the materials which are impossible to manufacture in Black's Harbour are brought in from outside, such as oil and tins. Besides the great sardine plant, the town contains a large factory for the manufacture of tin cans and a large lumber mill where hundreds of thousands of boxes in which the fish are packed are manufactured annually. There are also two large fishmeal plants which have been established in recent years to take care of the waste, also a plant to utilize fish scales and other by-products. All these by-products have a ready market and can be disposed of advantageously and this, of course, cuts down the cost of canning sardines.

The industry looks forward to the

establishment of further subsidiary industries, which will make the sardine industry more self-contained. Enormous quantities of vegetable oil are used in packing sardines, and there is little or no vegetable oil produced in Canada. Soya beans produce a very fine vegetable oil, and it is believed that there are kinds of soya beans that can be grown in the Maritime Provinces. The sardine industry is now carrying out experiments with the soya bean, and if this bean can be grown in quantities, large imports of vegetable oil, running into millions of dollars each decade, could be replaced by oil produced in the vicinity of the sardine fisheries.

Many carloads of tomato puree are also used in the packing of sardines. However, Canada produces this commodity and it does not have to be imported. Large quantities of this product are brought in from Ontario, British Columbia and other provinces.

While the sardine industry produces its own cans, it is, like other canneries, under the heel of the international tinplate cartel, which sets arbitrary inflated prices for tinplate considerably above the world price. Tinplate is produced from raw tin and scrap, and it is not too much to expect that here in the Maritime Provinces, possibly along the southern shore of New Brunswick, a tinplate mill could be established to great advantage.

All power used in the Canadian sardine industry is generated on the premises. Sawdust from the mill and waste lumber are turned into electrical energy. This source of power is supplemented by Diesel engines and steam power from coal. Needless to say the power costs are extremely economical.

The chief competition to the Canadian sardine industry comes from Norway, a

country whose labour costs in the fishing industry are very much lower than in Canada. Furthermore the Norwegian government subsidizes the local tinplate industry in order to keep tinplate prices normal for the Norwegian packer. In this way the Norwegian sardine industry has been able to circumvent the vicious stranglehold the world tinplate cartel has had on the canning industry.

Two-thirds of the local markets for sardines in Canada are supplied by the domestic industry and one-third by imports. The majority of these imports come from Norway, while some sardines are also imported from France and Portugal.

In the Canadian market the industry enjoys a tariff protection of \$2.00 per case. This has given the Canadian industry the lower price market. \$2.00 is not a very high protection on sardines selling at \$10 or \$12 a case but is sufficient for sardines selling lower than this amount.

It is also with Norway that the Canadian industry competes in the world markets. Canada has the lead in the lower price grades. New Brunswick sardines are sold in over a hundred different countries. Australia and New Zealand have always been large customers: China, India and Java also take their share. The West Indies are an excellent market and considerable quantities go to South America. Last year very large orders have come from South Africa. This increase alone represented 90,000 cases.

The increased activity, especially in the export market has made it possible to operate the New Brunswick sardine plants the whole year round while the factories along the Maine coast close in November for the whole winter. In that way the sardine fisheries have contributed a great deal to providing employment in the coastal district of New Brunswick.