

Some Historical Facts about Lobster Fishing & Yarmouth Co

Yarmouth County Historical Society

1800 - Early in Yarmouth County history lobsters were so plentiful, following a bad storm many lobsters were washed up on the rocky beaches. Although some were cooked and eaten by nearby residents, lobsters were generally considered undesirable as food by many people. School children who brought lobster sandwiches for lunch were thought to be from poor families. Lobsters found on the beaches after storms would be collected in wagons and used as fertilizer in the nearby farmers vegetable fields.

Lobsters were fished in shallow inshore waters by grabbing their backs by hand or spearing them. Fishermen from Cape Forchu & Yarmouth Bar hunted for lobsters by torch light on calm evenings, spearing them in the tide pools as they crawled around in search of food. Fish heads & fish waste would be thrown out in the water & the lobsters would swarm to get the food making them easy targets.

1810 - Wooden lath lobster traps were first used in New England, so the lobster caught for the limited commercial market did not have damage and spear marks. American companies introduced the idea of using lath traps to fishermen in Nova Scotia in the mid-1800's.

1869 – Annual Dept of Marine & Fisheries Report - There were about 1000 men fishing from Yarmouth, Kelley's Cove & Yarmouth Bar in 232 skiffs/dories and 63 larger boats. Fishermen usually working in pairs, but also occasionally alone, would row out in dories or in small sailboats and fish as many traps as they could afford to build.



1871 – The lobster canning market in the United States begins to take off following the invention of the stamp can with hermetically sealed lids. Several new canneries are built in NS. The Dept of Marine & Fisheries recognized the growing business done in canning lobsters and the large numbers of these shell fish being caught yearly.

To protect the stock a closed season between 15 August and 30 September was recommended when lobsters were molting and considered unfit. By 1891 the closed season was extended between July 1 to December 31. The size limit set at nine inches (later 10 ½) from head to tail and the first lobster fishing licenses were issued.

The lobster fishery is one of the first fisheries to be regulated in Canada.

1877 – Enos Gardner the Fisheries Overseer for Yarmouth Co reports in the annual Dept of Marine & Fisheries there are two new lobster factories in Yarmouth County. One at Little River and one at Lower Argyle. The Parker Eakins company built a large lobster factory at the Yarmouth Bar in the early 1880s.

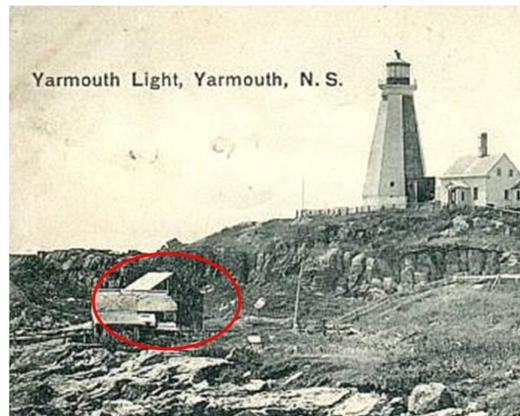
1878 – 1879. Yarmouth reaches its peak for registered shipping tonnage (sailing vessels & steamships), second in Canada only to the port of saint John NB. At this time there were about 2400 Yarmouth County men fishing from 543 small boats and 105 larger vessels (schooners).

1883 – Due in great part to the introduction of larger steam ships between Yarmouth and New England (Boston), shipping of live lobsters at better prices for the fishermen increased dramatically as public demand grew. Many specially built boats called “lobster smacks” with salt water wells (compartments) in the hull were also used to transport the live lobsters to market. Fresh salt water circulated through the well, kept the lobsters alive during transport. The Yarmouth Herald ad selling the “James Beckwith” which could carry 8000 live lobsters dates from 1895.



1893 (27 October). Prince A Nickerson (age 18) went hunting for lobsters among the rocks behind the Yarmouth Bar with 2 other young men. The two returned leaving Nickerson some distance further out. When he did not return at dark a search was begun but there was no trace. His body was recovered the next day. It was assumed he was seized by a fit of apoplexy and before he could recover, he drowned.

1894 - During the past year, 36,552 crates, or barrels of live lobsters, valued at \$230,127, have been exported to the United States from Yarmouth.



1895 - Lobster Cannery at Cape Forchu (Yarmouth Herald) - A large lobster factory is being built near the light house by Henry T D'Entremont and others. It is also said that a company is to be formed to build a marine slip. The D'Entremont factory building was built at the Cape (circled in image) but no other info about this operation has been found & it appears the lobster factory was never put in operation.

1901 - There were 22 lobster canneries in Yarmouth County. By the 1930's most canneries had gone out of business in favor of the lucrative fresh lobster market.

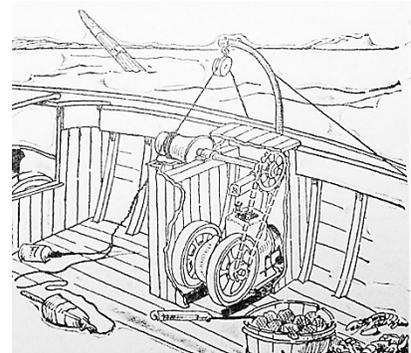
1902 - A Narrow Escape (Yarmouth Herald). Yesterday before the storm began, several lobster fishermen from the Bar went out to their traps, meanwhile the NW snow storm came on and the men had a hard time. Three of them in one dory, Mr. Henry Goodwin, his son Murray and John McNeil we're driven off the land by the storm and they did not return. The tug *Freddy V* was sent in search of them, and luckily found them, towing them safely back to the Bar. Two other boats had to wait out the storm under the lee of Cape Forchu until they could get safely back to the Bar.



1906 - As shown in this Markland Hotel tourist map from 1906, even in later years, you could still catch a few lobsters close to shore in tide pools like the appropriately named “Lobster Pond” in False Harbour.

1908 - Edgar Foote & his mate Tedford nearly drowned behind the Bar. Bringing in a load of lobster traps, their dory capsized throwing them into the water. It was very foggy at the time, & they had to cling to their dory, but their cries were finally heard by Mr John Crowell who was able to rescue them.

1910 - The first gasoline engines began appearing in fishing boats around 1900 but many still retained their sails as backup for the unreliable early engines. Engine powered trap haulers, built in Yarmouth, began appearing in the 1920s making the work easier.



1911- A Desperate Fight in a Motor Boat (Yarmouth Herald). Mr. Vinal Nickerson of the Bar had a serious fight with fire in his lobster boat on Wednesday afternoon that he will not care to have repeated. Before leaving the Bar and starting his engine he found his gasoline feed pipe had become frozen. He thawed it out and reconnected it but apparently there was ice in the connection. After the engine began running the ice thawed causing the joint to leak gasoline which caught fire, causing a small explosion. The engine box began to burn fiercely, and Mr. Nickerson started bailing water on it. With the help of other fishermen, they managed to tip the boat near shore, submerging it & extinguishing the fire.

Dumping Day 1950s leaving Yarmouth Bar; left to right, Three Sons II (John Cunningham), Last Hope (Clifton Sweeney) and Bea Mar (Edmund Boudreau).

