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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Old Summer Hotels Were Not All Glamour

By NEIL A. MATHESON

A RECENT trip to North Rustico brought talks with Mrs. Jerome L. Peters, 91, and Lawrence Gauthier, 88. Mrs. Peters talked of the Cliff hotel where she worked when she was a girl. Mr. Gauthier recalled days of "really big" lobster catches, when prices were small.

Mrs. Peters recalled when the first motor truck came to North Rustico. It was owned by Ben Woolner and her husband used to go to town with Mr. Woolner at times.

She recalls when the area between Stella Maris Church and the shore road "was all woods". There was nothing else between the hill and the shore, she said.

She worked as a girl in the Cliff Hotel in Covehead. "I think the Davies people ran it," she said.

Only Kerosene Lamps

There were kerosene lamps to light at night, and clean and trim periodically.

These lamps would give poor light compared to today's electric and neon lighting. But nobody thought the lighting was poor, because they didn't know anything else at that time, Mrs. Peters said.

There were no bathrooms at that time, outside toilets, so Mrs. Peters, then a young girl, had to carry the slops from the rooms, take them downstairs and dispose of them.

The slops were dumped in the water closets, she told me.

At the time Mrs. Peters would have been in her middle to late teens, it would be perhaps 70 years ago, or more.

She got eight dollars a month, so far as she can recall.

But she got tips also. The tips would run to 20 or 25 cents. That was a lot of money in those days, I suggested.

"Well I just guess it was a lot of money," she told me. She used to wait on tables as well as do the work in the rooms of the summer hotel.

Travelled By Boat

She used to go to Covehead and back those days in a motor boat. The water would be very rough, and most of the time she would be sea sick when she got into the harbor.

They did not like it but there was nothing else to do at the time, Mrs. Peters recalled. She would stay all week at the hotel.

It's so different in motels or hotels now. "They have everything to work with," she contrasted to the skimpy tools to work with that they had in those earlier days.

Mrs. Peters' maiden name was Agnes Gauthier and she suggested I talk with her brother Lawrence Gauthier.

Heavy Lobster Trapping

Mr. Gauthier, 88, recalls getting 24,000 pounds of lobster in one year. The price was about three cents a pound. They get five dollars more now, Mr. Gauthier told me, than we were getting for 2,000 pounds more than half a century ago. He was taking the current price at 65 cents a pound for lobster – this was in the spring season this year.

We got \$60 dollars for 2,000 pounds of lobsters, they got this year \$65 for one hundred pounds, he observed.

But even at that low price – low by today’s standards – “it was the best way to make a dollar fishing”, he observed.

“We could catch all kinds of codfish in those days, but we couldn’t sell them fresh.” They dried them and kept them in hopes of a sale later.

We sold the codfish sometimes for two or three cents a pound. But even at that price there was no surety of selling them, Mr. Gauthier told me.

Tremendous Catches

Cod was plentiful, there were tremendous catches at times, but what was the use of taking them when you couldn’t sell them?

If you happened to see a truckman looking for fish, you would make a sale; everyone was looking for a truckman. I neglected to ask Mr. Gauthier, but I imagine the reference was to fish pedlars who got supplies at the shore and peddled them through the province. These people travelled through my own Rose Valley area, and likely through most other areas. The arrival of a fish pedlar with fresh fish was a welcome occasion at a country home.

But cod are not plentiful now, the draggers have ruined the cod fishing, Mr. Gauthier charged.

The first man to take a dragger out of Boston, some 67 years ago, said it was a great way to catch fish. But he added there would be no fish left to catch after a time, if draggers were allowed to fish.

‘His Words Came True’

“His words came true,” said Mr. Gauthier.

“You can’t take a cod here with a handline now.”

Mr. Gauthier had told me earlier about landing 24,000 pounds of lobster – he and his partner, James Blacquiere. The story of that feat is interesting.

Simon Pineau was running the factory that year and apparently lobster fishing had been poor the previous year, because Pineau was wondering if it would be worthwhile his supplying the fishermen.

But a terrific storm in the spring washed ashore 20,000 pounds of lobsters in a space of little more than one hundred yards on the shore.

Gauthier was working that year with James Blacquiere (since deceased) and they considered if that many lobsters washed ashore in a storm in such a short area of beach there must be a lot of lobsters out there to trap.

The Gauthier – Blacquiere pair took 1,147 pounds in 104 traps on the first day which would run 11 pounds to a trap. Contrast that with the one-half pound per trap that is

considered reasonably good fishing now, and you get the idea of how great that catch really was.

My partner could have taken 30,000 pounds of lobster that season, Mr. Gauthier said, but the factory over one week limited our catch they would handle to 600 pounds a day.

14 Pounds To A Trap

LAWRENCE GAUTHIER recalls one man who took 700 pounds of lobsters one day in 50 traps, which averages a fantastic 14 pounds per trap.

Fishermen didn't fish as many traps then as they did later on. A set of 300 traps would be a really big deal then, he told me. Many fished with 150 traps, which was considered fairly intense fishing.

Most fishermen believe the dragging for (Irish Moss) is ruining the lobster fishing. Mr. Gauthier is firmly of that opinion. "I predicted that when dragging started several years ago," he said.

Lobsters feed on moss, he told me, and that is a new one on me. I had never heard it before.

Gauthier recalls when he was active, that a fellow fisherman was out of bait for several traps, so baited them with moss, rather than leaving them with nothing in them.

Bait Was Good

THE CATCH from the Irish Moss bait was really good, the North Rustico veteran recalls. "I have never used it for bait, but this man used it that time and with good effect," he recalls.

It's an extra argument against the moss dragging. It suggests that lobsters are present where the dragger scrapes moss off the rocks, so it fits right into the argument the anti-moss raking fishermen have.

Not all the fishermen believe that dragging ruins the lobster fishery, but some do and Mr. Gauthier is one firm believer.