

UNIQUE EXPERIMENT

PEI Oysters Spearhead Battle Against Disease

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In the decade following World War II oyster production in the Maritimes expanded steadily. As a result average production statistics for the period mean little, but it seems reasonable to say that the fishery could sustain an annual yield of 30,000-40,000 barrels.

Practically none of these were exported to other countries and still the Canadian market was unsaturated. The relative contributions of the Provinces during this period could be roughly assessed by the statement that for every oyster Nova Scotia produced, Prince Edward Island produced two and New Brunswick produced three.

Within the Maritimes the principal producing areas were Miramichi Bay, N.B., Prince Edward Island (principally Malpeque Bay) and the Shippegan-Car-

Commencing in 1955 great numbers of oysters died in the waters of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. By the end of 1958, the entire producing coast from Caraquez Bay to Pictou Harbour had been affected, with the major exception of Miscou Harbour, N.B. and the minor exceptions of small producing areas here and there.

In the worst cases mortality has reached 99 percent and there seems no reason to doubt that this figure will be attained or approached in all affected mainland areas. Thus over half of the Maritime production of oysters has been removed from the market.

Biological investigations were directed from the Fisheries Research Board of Canada's Biological Sub-Station at Ellerslie, P.E.I.

It soon became evident that a disease of oysters was responsible for these deaths and sub-

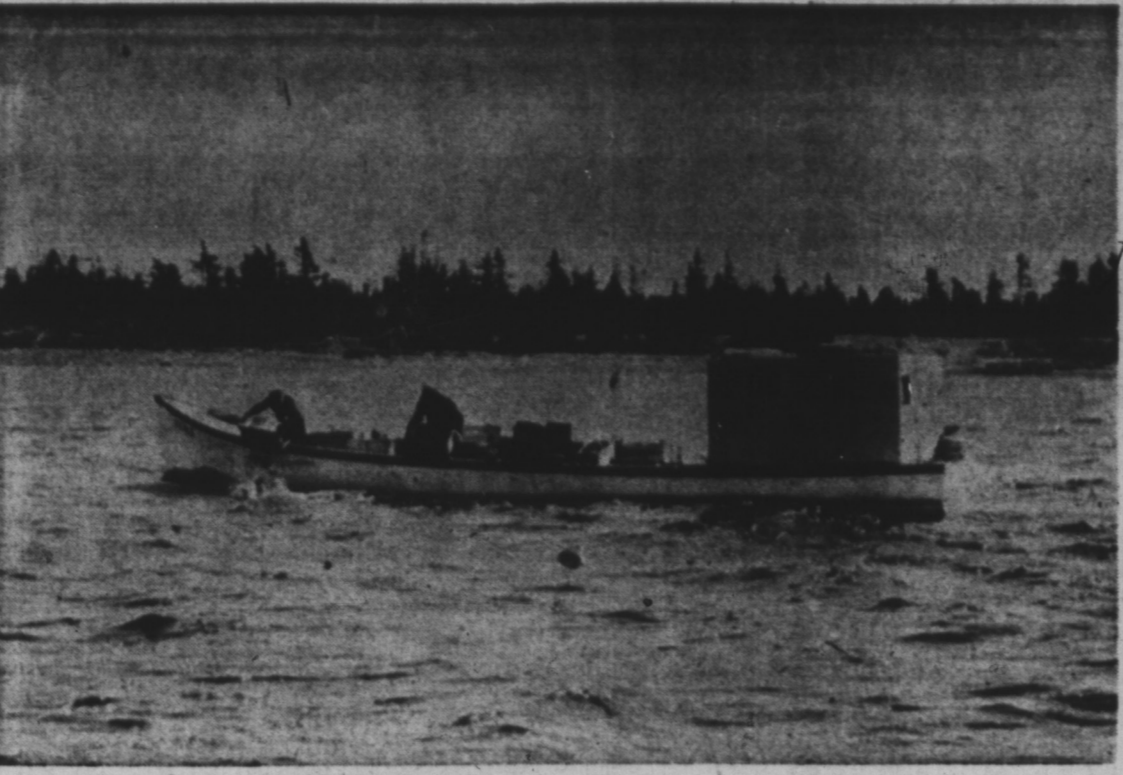
blishing mainland fisheries by planting Prince Edward Island brood stock there was obvious.

Small scale trials by the Fisheries Research Board in 1956 were successful. Consequently the Department of Fisheries announced a broad program of transfers which commenced in 1957, was continued in 1958 and will extend into 1959 at least. A transplant totalling 10,000 barrels will be made.

UNIQUE POSITION

Prince Edward Island occupies a position of increased importance in the oyster industry as a result of these developments. In the first place, the Island is now supplying most of the Atlantic oysters to the Canadian market at a very high price indeed.

In the second place the Island is the only locality that could supply the disease-resistant stock required in large numbers for breeding purposes in New Brun-



REPLENISH MIRIMACHI WATERS

them many thousands of dollars that would not have been realized otherwise.

Poor shape in oysters is caused by crowded conditions or soft bottom or both. Their offspring can grow to good shape, if given the proper opportunity. Therefore these misshapen parents were as good brood stock as any.

To the end of 1958 the Department of Fisheries had transferred 6,300 barrels of these oysters to various mainland areas. The scientists of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada have checked the success of these transfers to provide the Department with the answers to these vital questions:

- (1) Do the transplanted oysters live?
- (2) Do they spawn?
- (3) Are the spat so produced disease-resistant?

Positive affirmative answers can now be given to the first two questions. In fact the transplants from Prince Edward Island do live and grow while native oysters in mainland areas still die or grow poorly. Furthermore the Prince Edward Island transplants do spawn abundantly in good summers like that of 1958 while the few surviving natives spawn poorly, if at all.

Since the first good set of young oysters from these parents was obtained in 1958, it will be a year or two before a positive answer can be given to the third question, but indications from a light 1957 set in restocked areas already suggest a "yes" for this too.

If it comes about that the answer to all three questions is "yes" and nature provides a series of suitable spawning years, the re-

establishment of the mainland fishery is assured.

This will be the first instance of its kind in fisheries biology: the reconstitution of a disease-ravaged fishery using selected disease-resistant parents from another area—Prince Edward Island.



LOADING P.E.I. OYSTERS AT SUMMERSIDE

quet district of New Brunswick in that order of volume.

DISASTER STRIKES

Generally speaking, oysters from the last two areas were fished late and held for consumption during the winter, whereas those from Miramichi Bay, and from lesser areas not mentioned, were consumed immediately during the fall, principally in the city of Montreal.

sequent discoveries made it virtually certain that this was the same disease as had previously affected Prince Edward Island in the waves of epidemic oyster disease from 1915 to 1940.

USE P.E.I. STOCK

Since it was known that Prince Edward Island oysters were descended from the resistant survivors of these epidemics and passed the resistance to their progeny, the possibility of re-esta-

wick and Nova Scotia.

How to meet both these demands was a problem, but it was solved by the Federal Department of Fisheries' decision to buy only the poorest obtainable and to allow a special spring season for fishing them in Prince Edward Island. These shapes are normally unsalable and thus the creations of this special demand was not competitive with ordinary marketing.

Use Fisheries Plans Expansion

The Usen Fisheries Ltd. plant is busy expanding their frozen fish and fish meal plants. "The new plant has become a major link in an operation to supply fish to most of the 49 states". Thus, Irving Usen, President of Usen Fisheries Ltd., summarized the contribution of Usen Fisheries' newly acquired plant at Souris to his company's overall sales picture.

"Production exceeded our most optimistic estimates and I'm happy to see that such a large percentage of our fish came from inshore boats," continued Mr. Usen. "This year we hope to double our production, due to the construction of several new draggers and many plant improvements. This will mean more jobs and a larger income for the town of Souris."

Mr. Usen pointed out that during the last season his company installed a new fresh water system, several new conveyors and new skinning machines. The wharf was enlarged to handle more boats.

This year he hopes to install several more new conveyors; a completely new system for handling the round fish; a new heating system; and a new mechanized system for handling frozen fish in the freezer. This freezer, with a capacity of nearly a million pounds, is one of the largest in the Maritimes.

During the next packing season, the plant will employ approximately 100 people and accordingly the living quarters for the employees are being expanded and improved.

Fisheries Rate

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Fisherman's Loan Act which was set up more or less as a relief measure for needy fishermen. At that time the act was revised and a non-partisan board appointed to administer it.

Under the new setup, the relief element was done away with and straight loans were made available to fishermen. It was through this medium that the dragger fishing began.

A fisherman who can put up 30 per cent of the value of a dragger can receive a 70 per cent loan from the Government which they can repay at the rate of 15 per cent of their gross catch. This looks after both principal and interest. The fisherman, under these terms can pay for his boat in 8-10 years. The normal life of the ship should be 13-15 years.

are famous throughout the continent. The temperature of the waters in the Island bays and rivers is most favorable for the production of oysters with a high quality and flavour.

A recent addition to the fishing industry is the gathering of Irish moss. From this source alone about \$272,000 is realized annually. The moss is gathered and processed at a minimum of capital outlay and its harvest can be participated in by men, women and children.

(Surely with an ever increasing demand to feed an ever increasing population, Prince Edward Island fisheries will take on added importance as the years go by.)

PERUVIAN RAINS

LIMA, Peru (AP)—Torrential rains continued in the interior provinces of the country Sunday. Bodies of two more flood victims were found, bringing the total for the last two weeks to 30.

OTHER LOANS

In addition to loans through the Fisheries Department, the Provincial Government, through its Industrial Development Branch have enabled fishermen to start plants such as smoke houses and cold storage.

The Federal Fisheries Improvement Act makes it possible for fishermen and processors to secure loans through the industrial development bank. Last year \$101,000 was made available through this medium.

RESEARCH

The Federal Fisheries Department branch on the Island look after inspection and protection of the industry and supply technological and biological data from the research stations at St. Andrews, Halifax and Ellerslie.

Prince Edward Island oysters

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