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Ruling revives P.E.I. interest in trawlers

Stiffer opposition to foreign vessels in the Gulf of St. Lawrence waters may develop, locally, if the province goes into the building of steel trawlers.

This is a strong possibility, in view of recent action by federal authorities in amending the ship construction assistance regulations, to permit paying a 50 per cent subsidy on construction of new trawlers, without the necessity of withdrawing an order from service.

The withdrawl clause had stopped this province from entering the field with larger steel trawlers, as it had none in the industry to withdraw. For more than a year, local provincial fisheries had waged a battle against the clause.

INTEREST IS KEEN

It is believed, though confirmation is not immediately available, that there is keen interest in the construction of steel trawlers of up to 115 feet in length. At least one application is believed to have been received, and possibility exists that others for steel trawlers of approximately 75 feet are in the offing.

One of the strongest reasons for construction of the new ships is fes Council of Canada and paves the way for this province's entry the fast-appearing necessity of Island-owned trawlers ranging further afield to make paying catches. The smaller, wooden ships now in use cannot remain at sea so long, nor go so far as the largest steel vessels.

In November last year, the P.E.I. Fisheries Federation passed a resolution asking for this change in regulations, and it was sent to Hon. Leon B. Balcer, minister of transport, and the Canadian Maritime Commission.

Information was received by A. Walthen Gaudet, chairman of the Fishermen's Loan Board, of the change being made. Notification came from the Fisher- into the field of steel trawler operation.

It is believed at the present time that New Brunswick already has four such trawlers under construction, two near Bathurst and others at St. John.

There has been keen competition in the traditional fishing grounds, and the large ships sent by European countries have made serious inroads. It has been said one of the results is to make it more difficult for Island-based ships to get consistent catches within their-limited field of operations.

10,000 BARRELS OF P.E.I. OYSTERS WERE TRANSPLANTED IN N.B. AND N.S.

'IT'S BEEN A GOOD LIFE'

Island's oldest fisherman recalls colorful early days

By NEIL A. MATHESON
Provincial-Farm Editor

Few men have such a panoramic view of the province's fishing history as Vincent McGrath who at 90 can look back on 78 years, man and boy taking his living from the sea.

Most people look upon the fisherman of other years as an unfortunate sort of craftsman, beset with natural storms and financial troubles at home, though modern day fishing, particularly in lobsters and oysters, has developed into a fairly profitable undertaking.

But the Morell fisherman who was acclaimed the province's oldest fisherman last fall by the P.E.I. Federation of Fisheries, has always made a success of the battle with the sea, and the storms, and all the other hardships faced by "the men who go down to the sea in ships". It's been a good life he told this paper at his home recently.

WORKED TIRELESSLY

One gets the feeling talking to Mr. McGrath that he was a successful fisherman, for he was always doing something to bring in the dollars right through the year. That idea is backed up solidly by fishermen from neighbouring towns and villages as far away as Souris. His fellow craftsmen look upon his as a man who always worked tirelessly and efficiently to make the best of every opportunity.

Chatting with Mr. McGrath is like a journey into the past with one's feet on the ground of the present.

Contrasts he paints between the fishing of today and its good prices, and the arduous and discouraging struggles of the past are startlingly interesting.

Three crates of lobsters will bring $100 now, he said — that was prior to the opening of the fall season— "but I recall getting $1.35 per crate for them when I was a youngster", said the man who explained that that price was paid by packers who supplied the boats. But even at that the contrast was sharp, he observed.

The Morell man who never needed a doctor until he was 80, and then only because of a twisted finger, recalls that cod was the mainstay of the industry in the early days. He bought a 20-ton schooner at Alberton, while still a young man for $600 and five men fished from it with two dories.

HARBOR GOOD

The harbor at Morell was good at that time and would handle the schooner, "but it's sanded up now and as crooked as the deuce", he said. Fish was salted on the schooner and Mr. McGrath recalls they received $4.50 for their first load which was sold at Port Hood in Nova Scotia "which was a good price at that time." The market didn't wann hake or haddock then, he explained.

Mr McGrath had a physical checkup from a doctor a few weeks before this paper visited him and was told his heart and lungs were good, and he had no blood pressure trouble. That was the only other visit to a doctor, with the exception of an operation to remove a cataract on his eye several years ago.

He has "smoked a bit at intervals. drank some rum," and he liked to shoot geese, ducks and partridge.

13 ON ONE SHOT

"We used to have good spring shooting, for a couple of weeks, as early as St. Patrick's Day and even before that" said Mr. McGrath who recalls seeing a man bring 13 geese down with one shot. The gunman was in a barrel submerged to water level in the stream as the geese swam up the river. There would be 500 geese or more in the bay at one time, he recalls.

There were plenty of oysters in those days but they were not the right shape for top prices, and brought about $5 a barrel, he said.

"I fished everything," the genial Morell Irishman declared. There were eels in winter and he sold them to New York at 30 cents per pound in the rough. An old butter box full brought $10 in U.S. currency and exchange was high enough to boost that considerably. It was 12 cents on the dollar at one time, and later was 15 cents, he said.

He was able to make more than $13 a day at smelts "and many's the hour I spent at it", he said.

Winter was the best time for catching eels as the fishermen speared them through the ice. "We fished them every day after smelt fishing until we started to rig out for lobsters when that season arrived", he said.

HEAVY WORK

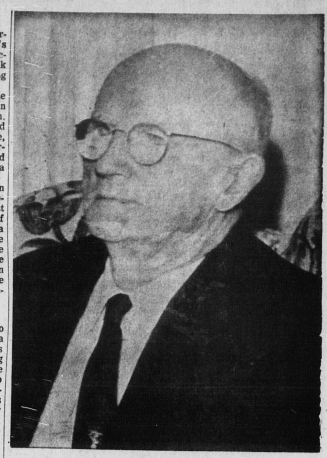
But it was heavy work spearing eels through the ice, as the poles with the spears were 25 feet long. "But it was worth it" as Mr. McGrath and a companion made $42 one afternoon during a particularly good run. They would be worth $100 or more today, he said.

Mr. McGrath remembers that salmon fishing was good in the bay in other years though there's none now. "I've seen them take up 75 salmon in a boat and they brought 10 cents each to the fishermen then - - that would be economical eating for such a tasty product. They would average up to eight pounds and might go as high as 25 pounds in individual fish, he reported.

Mackerel fishing is good sport, "There's nothing like it to put the life in you", he said.

Fishing was better in the old days as there were fewer boats fishing. There are 70 boats fishing now along a portion of the North Shore that had less than 10 boats in his early days, he said.

But he expects to see an improvement in the Lobster fishing, for example, because of the new size limit regulations in force now. It should improve the industry, he believes.



VINCENT MCGRATH—A TIRELESS WORKER

Island test may open new era for oysters

The federal fisheries department is out to beat the oyster at its own game — the reproduction of oysters.

If it succeeds, a whole new era will be opened for the Atlantic Oyster industry, now plagued by disease and weather vagaries. It will be good news as well for oyster lovers across the land.

Work was started this past summer on an experimental oyster hatchery on P. E. I.'s famed Malpeque Bay, now the heart of the Canadian oyster industry.

The hatchery will test on a fairly large scale a relatively recent conviction that oysters can be persuaded to spawn efficiently and well under controlled artificial conditions, that the larvae can be fed and that an adult oyster can be obtained.

Fisheries scientists hold high hopes for the experiments which may free the industry from the present uncertainties of oyster regeneration.

Dr. A. L. Prichard, director of conservation and development at fisheries headquarters in Ottawa, says the hatchery experiment "shows real potential," although it may be another two years before the full results are known.

SLOW RECOVERY

Meanwhile the oyster industry is slowly recovering from a disastrous outbreak of disease that practically wiped out the rich New Brunswick and Nova Scotia stocks.

Disease resistant oysters from Prince Edward Island have been transplanted in the stricken areas to save the beds from extinction.

The hatchery idea is the result of investigation into oysters which became intense about seven years ago when the mysterious our disease struck along the New Brunswick and Nova Scotia shores.

Atlantic oysters shun cold water and Canadian stocks are located mainly in the warmer southern sector of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Prior to 1950 New Brunswick supplied 57 per cent of the Canadian output, P. E. I. 32 per cent and Nova Scotia the remaining 11 per cent.

But by 1960 the oyster disease had just about eliminated the mainland stocks and P. E. I. was producing about 80 per cent of Canadian output. In that decade the total take fell from about 7,500,000 pounds to 3,500,000 pounds.

It was the second Canadian appearance of the disease which also has plagued oyster beds of the United States Atlantic shore. Between 1915 and 1918 P. E. I. beds were all but exterminated by it.

CARRY DISEASE

Some of the P.E.I. oysters, however, were resistant to the disease and from this small percentage the Malpeque Bay stocks were rebuilt to normal size over a 20-year period.

The resistant oysters remained carrriers of the disease — which has no effect whatsoever on humans who eat the oysters. It is thought that an illegal transplant of seed oysters from P.E.I. to the mainland beds caused the new outbreak.

Federal scientists have since transplanted 10,000 barrels of P.E.I. oysters to the diseased areas and these are producing a new breed of disease-resistant oysters to repopulate the once-rich beds.

It will be another five to six years before the industry gets back to normal. In the mean time, oyster prices which shot to $40 per barrel from $10 during the decade of the disease probably will remain high.

Atlantic oysters will not spawn in water below 68 degrees. A cold, late spring sometimes ruins the mid-summer spawning period. Or a rainy autumn may wash cold rain water into the bay and wipe out the baby oysters. In either case a whole season's reproduction is quickly lost.

PLANTED IN FARMS

At present the industry is entirely dependent on the collection of baby oysters - - called spat - - from natural spawning beds. These are replaced on the "farms" which are small areas of seashore leased for oyster cultivation.

There are more than 1,400 such leases in the gulf waters, averaging 2½ acres in size. Some employ divers.

The hatchery idea was first tested by Roy E. Drinnan of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada. Using, controlled water temperatures, he managed to induce oysters to spawn under laboratory conditions and from the fertilizer eggs hatched swarms of larvae.

The larvae must feed for about three weeks before developing into baby oysters which cement themselves to the near-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Fisheries provide 1,500 with work

Employment for well over 1,500 people in the southern Kings area is created by the fishing industry. Approximately 350 boats and a number of draggers work out of the ports of Annandale, Launching, Georgetown, Cardigan, Newport, Lower Montague, Gaspereaux, Sturgeon, Murray Harbour North, Murray Harbour South and Beach Point.

These boats employ approximately two men per boat and the draggers have a crew of five. There are also four to five factories to handle the various types of fish.

The live lobsters are also hauled by refrigerator trucks to the markets. The area has two full time fisheries officers, one a protection officer the other an inspection officer.

This spring drifting ice and on shore winds created one of the most hazardous opening seasons in the lives of most of these men. The date was set ahead to May 16 and few were able to run lines and set their traps until nearly two weeks later. A gentleman's agreement as to the starting day and time was agreed upon by fishermen in several of these ports. In areas where they were able to set traps many had losses of approximately 75 for every 300 run. These losses were due mainly to the return of the ice and the onshore winds.

In the off season many of these hardy seamen turn to boat building, repairs to traps and nets and some build most of their own traps. Many also augment their income by farming.

In a lighter vein, many enjoy participating in the several regattas in the area. Also in recent years some have made their boats available to the tourists for deep sea fishing.

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