

Filename: Canada.pdf
Title: 2. Gloucester, Mass. Interviews by Joint Fisheries Commission. November, 1893.
Location: National Archives, College Park, MD. RG 22, Box No 17, E44, Stack Area 150, Row 1, Compartment 17
Source: RG 22. Records of the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Records of the U.S. Fish Commission & the Bureau of Fisheries. General Records. Records of the Joint Committee Relative to the Preservation of the Fisheries in Waters Contiguous to Canada & U.S., 1893-1895. Interviews 1893-1894, Lake of the Woods, Gloucester, MA.

Page 37 [1]

Joseph O'Brien, Harbor Inspector and
Fishery Overseer for County of St. John, N.B.,
July 6, 1893.

Sixty-five years old, and has always lived in St. John. Has had experience on the St. John River up to Fredericton.

The following information was given by him orally:

19 saw mills on the river in County of St. John, which extend up to the Kennebecasis, about 7 miles above the mouth of the river. From here up to Fredericton only a few small shingle mills. In most of the St. John district mills they burn the sawdust and they are now beginning to sell the ashes for fertilizing purposes. Sold both locally and to the states. There are also in St. John District 26 lime kilns, and they throw into the river a good deal of the unused lime. They have been fined at times for so doing. Also in this district

Page 38 [2]

the city gas works, two cotton and one nail factory, letting in tar, dyes and acids. The tar floats on water, doing damage to nets, boats, lines, etc. The acid from nail works, used in cleaning wire nails, corrodes the metal work of boats and vessels, as well as attacks the lines.

At Musquash there is a saw mill run by water. This is the only saw mill in the St. John District outside of the river.

Above St. John District the first important saw mill is that of Gibson opposite Fredericton, which lets all its sawdust and edgings run into the river. The Dominion Government has kept a dredge at work in the river nearly ever since the Confederation for the purpose of dredging out the channel which had filled partly at least from the sawdust parried down the river. Is certain that the sawdust would have seriously interfered with navigation except for dredging.

Page 39 [3]

A large part of the refuse from the saw mills in the upper waters and branches remains more or less where it is placed, until the time of heavy freshets after severe rains, especially in the spring, when this stuff is washed down the main river, some of it reaching the city of St. John.

Did not know of any tanneries on the New Brunswick side of the St. John River.

Says salmon do not go over Brand Falls, which he thinks have a descent of 45° or more. At times of low water the falls are about 30 feet high; at high water about 60 feet high. The salmon used to go up to the falls, but of late years they have not been found above the upper pool which is about 9 miles below the falls.

Salmon are first seen in the estuary of the St. John in April and May, when they are scattering. The main run is in June and the first part of July. Begin fishing for them

Page 40 [4]

about June 1. Are taken in weirs and with drift nets. The city sells the right to fish 24 weirs in and about the harbor, subject to Dominion Government regulations. The weir rights are sold yearly on the first Tuesday in January. A weir costs to erect from \$300. to \$400. They fetch annually at auction from \$100. to \$1200. per year. The higher figures are not paid now. Last year one paid \$800. Some of them stocked as high as \$3000. a season but many very much less than this and some do not repay the license. They are put up during the first spring tides in April, and the season for fishing them ends August 15. The inner pound has been usually supplied with a wooden bottom, although sometimes formed by natural bottom where suited to the purpose. Mr. O'Brien has himself patented a grated bottom, which allows small fish to escape, through. The fish which he mentioned particularly in this connection were the young Gaspereau.

Page 41 [5]

Some of the weirs are also fitted with a gate which may be hoisted up allowing all the fishes to escape. The number of Mr. O'Brien's patent, Canadian Patent Office, No. 30892. The inner weirs of St. John harbor are all net weirs; the outer ones and those along the Bay of Fundy shore are brush weirs. The mesh of the net weirs is 2 ½ inches, which gets smaller with use and repeated tarring.

Drift nets are used in the harbor and along the coast to Point Le Preau and to the Wolves. The salmon fishing is being ruined by these drift nets which pay no license. The fishermen have been using them for 40 years past. Says the salmon coming from the westward pass through the northern channel of the Bay of Fundy, and it is in this channel that the nets are fished. The salmon do not immediately proceed up the river, but play along the shore where they enter the weirs. Above St. John city the salmon are taken in

Page 42 [6]

fixed gill nets set off from the shore. The salmon proceed up along the shore, not in midstream. Salmon swim near the surface, and are generally taken in the upper part of the drift nets which are made shallow, as there is no need for a deep net.

During 1892 the outside fishermen using the drift nets, about 60 boats, caught an average of 75 salmon during the season, averaging about 12 pounds each, valued at \$1.50 apiece. In 1893 they have done better, but the season is not yet over. In 1893 only 8 to 10 salmon were taken a day in all the weirs in the harbor.

Unusual number of grilse taken this year and last. Thinks something should be done to prevent the taking of such small fish, weighing from 4 pounds upward. Thinks no use of continuing the hatching unless some measures are also taken to stop the destructive methods of fishing. Formerly would take in the weirs in

Page 43 [7]

the harbor from 140 to 175 salmon on a tide.

Thinks over fishing has had more to do with destruction of salmon than pollution. Considers that illegal fishing is going on. Are allowed to ice fish and sell them out of seasons, and thinks that some of the fish so sold, judging from their appearance, were captured at about the time of sale, etc.

The salmon storage pond at St. John covers at high water about 5 acres, at low water less than 1 acre. Depth at low water about 20 feet; at high water about 40 feet. This is the third year of its use. Hope to stock with about 400 salmon. Stripping is done between October 25 and November 10. Has found more females than males in the stripping. In stripping females all the eggs in each fish are found to be ripe at once. In consequence of the smaller number of males a part of the milt only may be used at a single stripping, and the male may therefore be stripped more than once. The parents are set free immediately

Page 44 [8]

after stripping. The spawning fish average about 12 pounds.

Physical observations in St. John Harbor have been taken in connection with tidal observations. The Meteorological service of the Dominion Government. Taken by Mr. Hutchinson.

Gaspereau are the first taken as early as March. There are three runs. First, large fish which run in March and April. Second, called grey back, smaller, shorter, with relatively large heads, go up in May. Third, June 1 to middle, the last schools, or blue backs. These are more like sea herring, smaller, rounder, more pointed at the head and harder than gray backs.

The old fish come back right after spawning. The first run do not spawn in the river, but in the lakes and marshes, and in among the trees, when the water is high. They spawn in lakes Grand, French and Quacko, and in the Porto Bello marshes. They all spawn in May and up to the middle of June.

Page 45 [9]

The young fish come down all the season, the last to spawn being the last to come down. The young gaspereau come back the next spring about 3 to 4 inches long. By September the returning young fish have become very few. The close season for gaspereau begins July 1. During open season there is also a weekly close season from Friday evening to Monday morning. Large

quantities of young gaspereau are destroyed on the weirs. They are allowed to fish in the lakes where they spawn.

Three sizes of young gaspereau are found in the spring measuring 4, 7, and 9 inches long.

No law to enforce use of such contrivance as that of Mr. O'Brien above described for weirs.

Gaspereau fishing ends July 1; after that a larger mesh (4 inches) is put in the weirs for salmon, up to August 15.

Shad arrive about May 20. They go right up the river and come out in about 3 to 4 weeks.

Page 46 [10]

They ascend the river 50 to 60 miles, and enter in to the lakes to spawn. The young shad come down in August and September at which time they are about 3 inches long. They return next year, being from 9 to 12 inches long. There is also a run of shad along the coast, beginning in July and continuing until into September. They are caught along shore in Bay of Fundy, by boats using drift nets. The fishermen in the harbor begin to fish for spring shad in April with drift nets.

Sturgeon and bass fishing is at present absolutely prohibited in the river on account of their failure.

Drift nets not used in the bay after second run of shad is over.

No quantity of sea herring of good size enter the harbor, or are caught close to St. John. Small herring sometimes abundant in the harbor. Large herring are caught at head of bay, but fishermen generally go to Grand

Page 47 [11]

Manan or in that direction for them. About 10 years ago, during one year, large herring were very abundant at mouth of harbor, and some 200 or 300 vessels engaged in fishing for them. Does not remember such an occurrence previously, and none has occurred since.

The fishing off St. John is nothing now compared to what it was formerly. Practically no line fishing inside of the line of the river water. Hake sometimes come into the harbor in the winter and are found as far as 9 miles up the river, where they are caught under the ice. The tide is felt as far up as Fredericton. No lobster fishing in or about the harbor.