California State College at Fullerton

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Fishing in Newport Beach

Oral Interviews With

Mr. T. A. (Tommy) Thomas

by

Charmaine Tichenor

July 14, 1970

INTRODUCTION

Once a mainstay of the economic life of Newport Beach, California, the commercial fishing business and allied canning industry have rapidly dwindled in volume in recent years, and have been equally rapidly outpaced by the growing number of private pleasure boats in Newport Harbor, recently estimated at over 8,000 small craft. Therefore, the era of fishing and the canning of fish for commercial use in Newport Beach has passed.

As one who has spent a lifetime closely connected with the fishing and canning industry of Southern California, and who has been associated with the business of Western Canners of Newport Beach from 1936 to the recent sale of the cannery site in 1969, Mr. T. A. (Tommy) Thomas proved to be an excellent interviewee. His memory was keen and he brought forth vivid pictures of the activity and daily life of both the cannery workers and the fishermen who supplied Western Canners.

Three interviews, each approximately an hour in duration, were held in the offices of Western Canners, 3010 Lafayette, Newport Beach, California. The interviews were held in November and December of 1968. Mr. Thomas was in his office daily during this time, although the plant had ceased operations. The interviewer was unable to speak with Mr. Walter M. Longmoor, the senior partner of Western Canners, due to his failing health. However, Mr. Thomas describes Mr. Longmoor's

association with Western Canners in some detail in the third interview.

The interviewer, Mrs. Charmaine Tichenor, a history major graduate of California State College at Fullerton, Fullerton, California, completed the final portion of this project in July of 1970. In the period of time between the editing and the completion of this project, the interviewer was pursuing a Master's degree in Library Science, Immaculate Heart College, Hollywood, California

In a preliminary discussion between the interviewee and the interviewer, the goals of the Oral History Program of California State College at Fullerton were outlined for the benefit of Mr. Thomas. During the next meeting the first tape recording was made. Subsequent tapes were made one and two weeks later. Mr. Thomas very graciously donated several photographs of the cannery in operation, many of which have been incorporated into the text of this project. Other material donated by Mr. Thomas are included in the supporting documents portion of this project.

A verbatim transcript was made of the three interviews. These transcripts were then edited by the interviewer Corrections which were made at this point were intended to make the copy more readable and to eliminate the redundancy of everyday conversation. The edited copy was then sent to Mr. Thomas for his approval. He edited it slightly and returned the transcripts, from which the final copy was made.

The interviewer wishes to express gratitude for the

patience and guidance of Dr. Gary L. Shumway, Oral History Program, California State College at Fullerton, and to Miss Linda Herman and Mrs. Kay Heil, of the Special Collections Department of the Library at California State College at Fullerton, for their assistance and cooperation in making this project possible.

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Fig. 4. Western Canners Building
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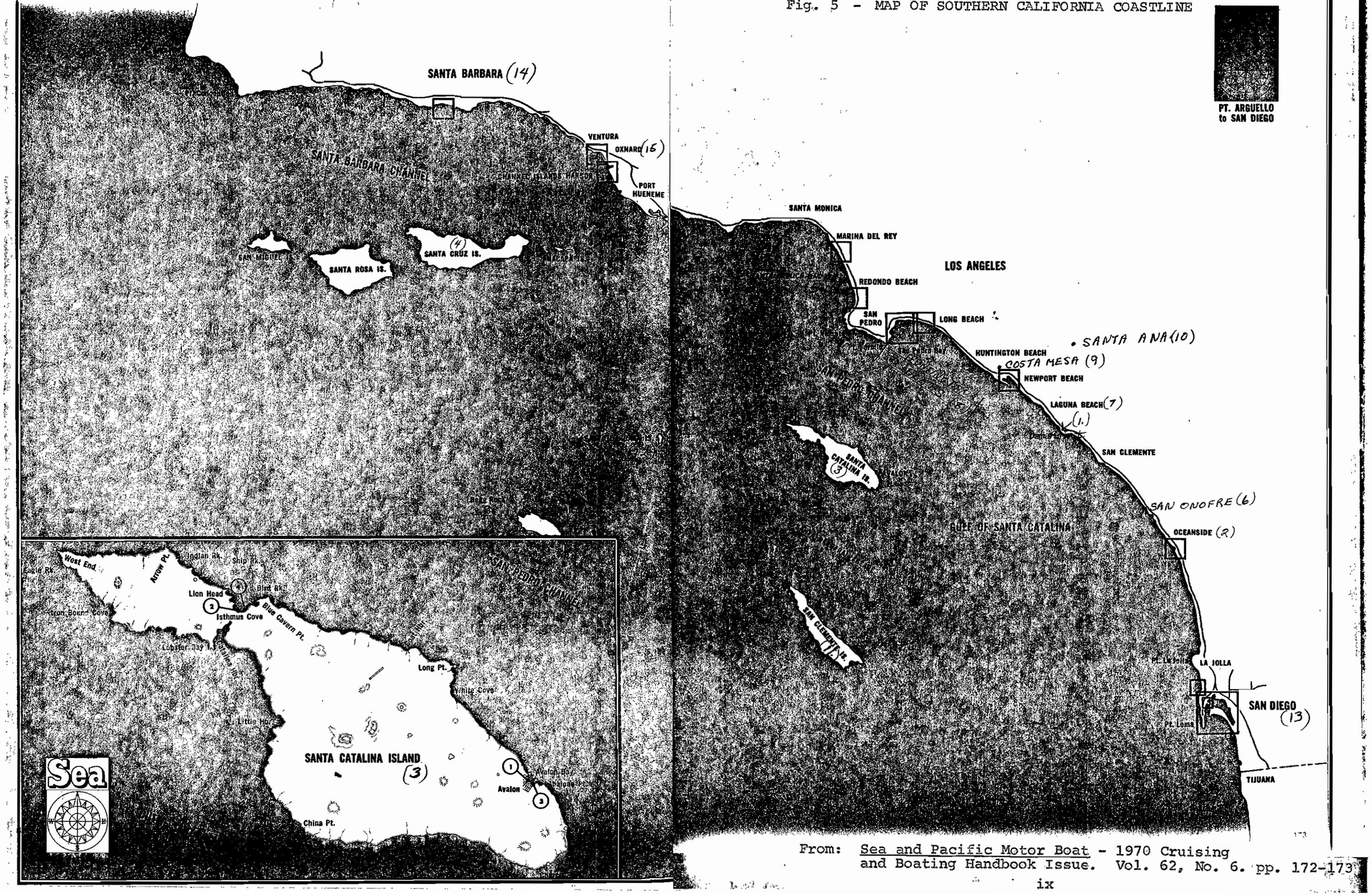

From: Sea and Pacific Motor Boat - 1970 Cruising and Boating Handbook Issue. Vol. 62, No. 6. pp. 172-173

Fig. 6 - San Pedro,
Terminal Island,
Los Angeles Harbor

APPROX. LOCATION OF ANTONIO THOMAS' BAKERY

FISH CANNERIES

Fig. 6 - San Pedro,
Terminal Island, Los Angeles Harbor

From: SEA and Pacific Motor Boat
1970 Cruising and Boating Handbook Iss
Vol. 62, No. 6, p. 178.

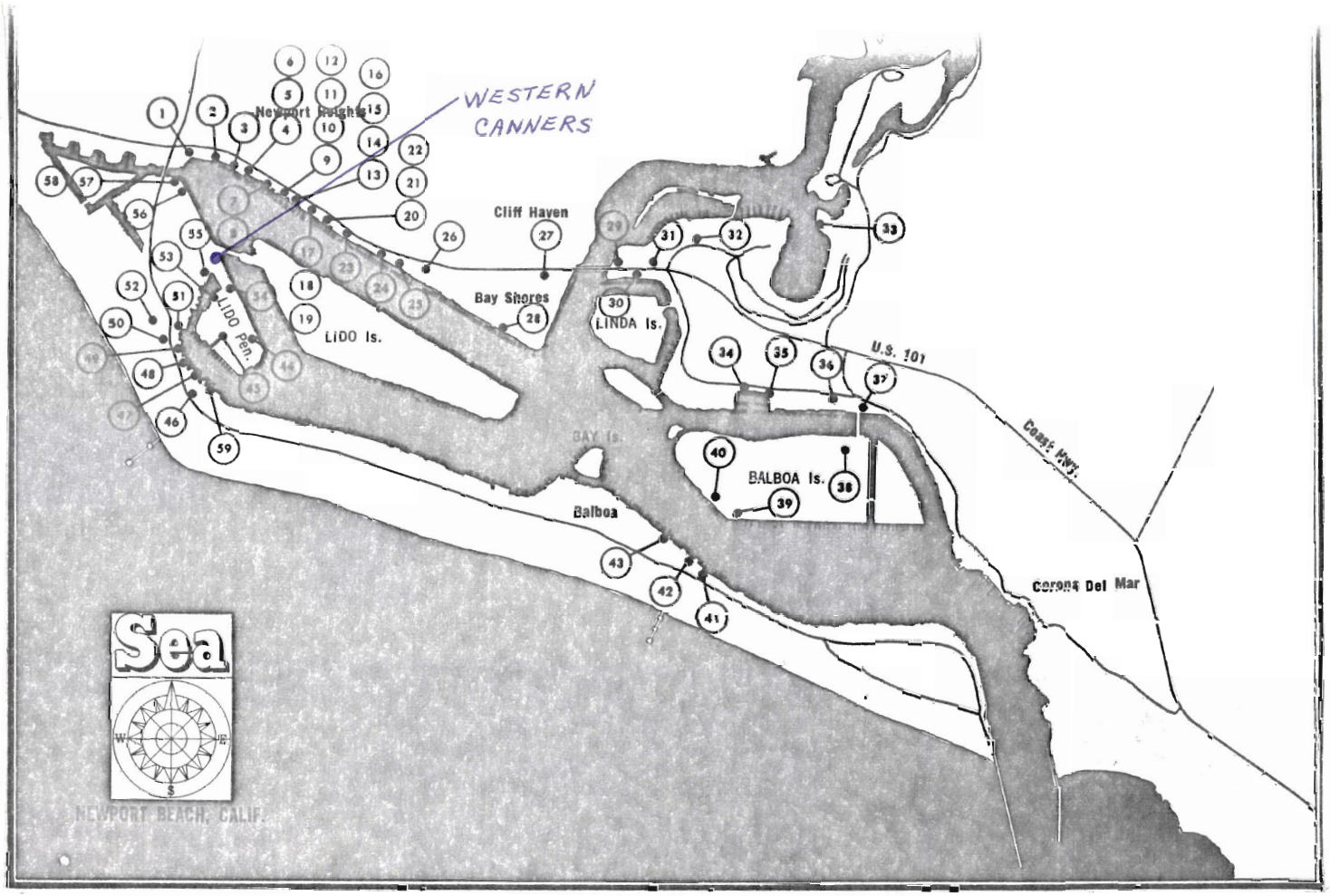

Fig. 7. Map of Newport Beach

From: Sea and Pacific Motor Boat - 1970 Cruising and Handbook Issue. Vol. 62, No. 6. p. 180

California State College at Fullerton O.H. #75

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW BETWEEN: DATE: November 30, 1968

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. T. A. (Tommy) Thomas

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Charmaine Tichenor

SUBJECT: Fishing in Newport Beach

C.T.: I'm talking today with Mr. Thomas of Western Canners. This is November thirtieth, nineteen sixty-eight, and we're here in Mr. Thomas' office in Newport Beach. Well, Mr. Thomas, I think I would like to start from the beginning today; where were you born?

T.T.: I was born in San Francisco in nineteen hundred and seven, spent two years in San Francisco and then my folks[1] moved to Los Angeles. In nineteen seventeen, we moved to San Pedro; my dad was in business in San Pedro, in the bakery business.[2] He wanted to make a baker out of me, but as all sons and fathers don't get together, I didn't like the bakery business, so I went out on my own. I went to work in the fish canneries in San Pedro[3] in nineteen twenty-three. I was still going to school and working in the summertime, but after spending two or three summers there, I decided that the fish business wasn't for me.

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[1]Mr. Thomas' parents were Antonio and Christine Thomas.

[2]Antonio Thomas' bakery business was called the "Liberty Bakery," and it was located on Sixth Street in San Pedro, in the 400 block. (See Fig. 6)

[3]Mr. T. A. Thomas first went to work for the Van Camp Sea Food Company in San Pedro.

The biggest trouble was that it was seasonal work. Today, the canneries are in a little bit different phase, they're year 'round operations because they import fish from Japan, and from Africa and all over the world, so it makes it more of an all year 'round job, but speaking of the earlier days, it was seasonal, maybe four months in the winter, and maybe three months in the summer.

C.T.: What were they canning, Mr. Thomas, what kind of fish?

T.T.: The same kind that we're canning today---only the fish were plentiful in those days. They were canning tuna, albacore, mackerel, sardines and anchovies. The anchovy packing was for export only, not for domestic use.

C.T.: Is that true? United States was canning for export? Or was this just the Pacific Coast?

T.T.: Well, all your canneries in those days were on the Pacific Coast. We didn't have any Eastern canners, and today at this time I think there are only two Eastern Coast canneries, most of them are on the Pacific Coast. In Seattle and up and down the Pacific Coast, but our fishing operation in those days was different. Fish were plentiful, and every other species was packed for domestic use---except the anchovy. And I should say, maybe a little squid was packed in those days. The squid was exported too, because none of the people here in this country knew the quality or the protein value of squid. But then after spending two or three summers,

and falls, too, there at the canneries, I decided that that wasn't for me. So I decided then to go to sea. And another thing too, I was a dropout. /Laughter/

C.T.: I see. /Laughter/

T.T.: Seventh grade dropout. /Laughter/ So I had to go to work too, for many other reasons, my folks were not in a position to maintain good jobs. I tried to go to sea, but that didn't work either, because I was seasick all the time.

So I had to give up my sea ventures and come back to the land and I went from one job to another. Then in nineteen hundred and thirty-six, I met one of the owners of the canneries here in Newport, and he asked me if I'd like to come down and go to work for him here in Newport.

C.T.: What was his name?

T.T.: Mr. Longmoor, who is today my partner. So he said, "Well, come down on a Sunday, I need some help and at least you can work that one day and help me out and then we'll go from there." So I came down, spent the Sunday here, and I'm still here. And that was in nineteen thirty-six.

C.T.: When you finally settled down, you did a good job of it, didn't you? /Laughter/

T.T.: Well, /laughter/ I want to think so, anyway, because we've been here so many years and worked so hard at it. We were a small operation. Today it is kind of hard to be a small operator with these big canners who have stations, buying stations all over the world. We had to depend on

local-caught fish, and as it has turned out, the fish have disappeared.[4] The bigger canneries are still operating because they import their fish. The mackerel and sardines, which we call "wet" fish have practically disappeared, but the bigger canneries are still maintaining their tuna operations.

C.T.: Now is tuna more plentiful than the mackerel right now?

T.T.: It is if you go looking for it. In other words, they have bigger boats today, they go all the way to Africa, they go down to South America, they fish off Samoa[5] and Tahiti, and they're thousand ton boats. That's a lot of capacity, and that makes it feasible for them to bring the fish in and import it.

C.T.: On a big business basis.

T.T.: On a big business basis, yes.

C.T.: How large was your operation in---was it nineteen thirty-five?

T.T.: Well, I came here in nineteen thirty-six, but nineteen thirty-seven was when I stayed here permanently. Oh, we had a small operation. Well, we would have to wait

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[4]According to the California Information Almanac, 1969, p. 324, the volume of fish landed at California ports has dropped to about one-third of the 1936 record catch of almost 1,765,000,000 pounds. Imports of raw tuna, began in the 1920's and declined during World War II, but have since become an important source for the canneries.

[5]New canneries have been built by California concerns in Samoa and Puerto Rico, as mentioned in the California Information Almanac, 1969, p. 329. This procedure reduces production costs, and, unlike foreign canned tuna, this product is not subject to tariff.

for our partyboats.[6] We didn't have too many commercial boats in those days. The partyboats would quit carrying passengers Labor Day. And a week after Labor Day, we'd start operations in our plant. Normally, we ran from the second week in September, to the first of January, and we had to get our pack in by that time to be able to supply our customers. Our average run, throughout the years, was about three thousand tons of mackerel.[7] And the three thousand tons of mackerel produced seventy-five thousand cases. We would hire our labor this first week in September and then we would lay them off after our production was completed.

C.T.: In the following Spring?

T.T.: In the following Spring we'd lay them all off because of the lack of fish, we couldn't maintain them. In those days we carried ninety girls and forty men on the payroll. Today, with the same operation, we could use fifty people and do the same production because of automation. The labor costs are too high for what we call "hand packing."

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[6] The California Information Almanac, 1969, pp. 324-326, also mentions the importance of partyboats. Most deep sea angling in earlier days took place from private vessels. Active deep sea fishing enthusiasts were therefore limited to those having access to large, seaworthy vessels. Shortly after the introduction of partyboats, over 100 of them were to be found in the waters off Southern California. In 1936, 173 partyboats sailed toward the open ocean, carrying thousands of enthusiastic anglers.

[7] Mackerel fishery dates from 1928 when large scale canning methods were perfected, according to the California Information Almanac, 1969, p. 330. Until 1947, Pacific mackerel predominated the catch, reaching an all-time high of 146,000,000 pounds in 1935. Since that time, landings of Pacific mackerel have fallen to less than 1,000,000 pounds in 1967.

But our people were lucky, or we were lucky, put it any way you want to put it; most of our girls, in the spring of the year, went to work in the orange packing houses. So that kept them busy all summer. And our men either went to work as tradesmen, most of them were carpenters, plasterers, and cement workers or even foundry workers. In the winter months they couldn't work in their trades on account of the rain. And then they went fishing, so that gave them a year 'round operation.

C.T.: You were lucky as far as your labor supply was concerned.

T.T.: Very, very lucky.

C.T.: Very well situated, being this close to the other industries in Orange County.

T.T.: That's right, and our help was good help---because these people worked all year 'round. Especially the girls who were packing oranges by hand in those days in the wrappers and then put them in the cartons, then their hands were adept to packing fish, because it was all done by hand. So we were very fortunate that we got the same labor every year. For many years whenever we started operations, there would be the same faces applying for jobs. So it was easy for us as far as supervision went---or training---we had very little training to do with the same help coming back all the time.

This sounds good, but then our commodities were cheap in those days too, so we didn't make very much money in those days Automation might have enabled us to make

enough money to be able to carry from year to year.

C.T.: Is that where you began to see the biggest difference in the cost and labor problems, the cost and your finished product? Did you begin to see the biggest difference when automation did come in?

T.T.: Yes, very, very definitely because the bigger plants were able to put the product on the shelves cheaper than we could pack it.

So then we got to looking at it very, very closely because when we're all paying the same price to the fisherman per ton of fish, and the carton cost and the label cost and everything---supervision cost was identical, then we found out that automation was going to put us out of business.

C.T.: What were some of these bigger companies that you mentioned?

T.T.: Well, back in the older days we had "Breast O'Chicken," we had "Sun Harbor," Van Camp's," and "Starkist," and "Cal Pack."

C.T.: Most of these were out of the San Pedro area?

T.T.: Yes, all the canneries were in San Pedro and Monterey. Here in Newport we only had three little plants.

C.T.: You were limited right from the start, then, weren't you, say maybe by location?

T.T.: Yes, very definitely, because I would say that most of our fish was caught above San Pedro, and the boats had to bypass San Pedro to come here to Newport. At times, our

fish ran down off the coast from Dana Point down as far as Oceanside (see (1) and (2), Fig. 5), and there's where we got the break in the hauling, the distance involved in hauling this fish, but most of our fish was caught in Catalina and Santa Cruz, and Santa Monica Bay. (See (3), (4) and (5), Fig. 5.) The bigger plants had bigger boats. We depended strictly on what we called scoop boats, not on net boats. The bigger plants all had net boats called purse seiners.[8] But down here in Newport we depended on a scoop boat.

C.T.: What's the difference between a purse seiner and a scoop boat?

T.T.: The purse seiner is a type of net that they haul around the fish, and when they have the fish in the net, then they circle it. They drop the skiff off the boat, the net is tied onto the skiff, and then the boat makes a complete circle around the fish, and comes back to the skiff and picks up the net. If the fish are still in the net, then they pull what we call the "zipper," or the "purse," and lock the fish in there.

C.T.: That's how it got its name.

T.T.: And that's what they call a purse net, in other words, you might say it is just like a hand purse that you carry, that you have to lock to retain the contents.

But our operations were a little bit different. Most of our boats were small boats; thirty, forty-foot class---two men fished them.

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[8]The purse seine fleet based at San Pedro, formerly the state's largest, declined from 114 vessels in 1940, to about 40 in 1968, according to the California Information Almanac, 1969, p. 327.

C.T.: Using this scoop process?

T.T.: Using the scoop process. What we call a scoop was a ring that was about thirty inches in diameter, with a webbing in it about two feet deep, with a ten to twelve foot handle on it. The fishermen would take ground anchovies from us as bait. They would go out to the areas where the fish were usually feeding. And then they would throw this "chum" on the surface of the water, and when the fish came up to get the bait, then they would run their scoop through it and pick up eight, ten or twelve fish at a time

C.T.: One man would hold this scoop?

T.T.: One man, that's right. One man would be in the scoop rack while the other one was resting, 'cause that was kind of hard work all night; eight, nine or ten hours with their feet wet, and their bodies wet. It's cold out there in the wintertime, so they took turns at doing this. On an average boat, a one-man boat, the average for the season was approximately fifty to sixty tons. For a two-man boat, it used to run a hundred twenty-five to a hundred and eightytons.

C.T.: Now, you're talking about the tonnage for the boat?

T.T.: Tonnage for the season. In those days, in the early forties. In the latter forties, the average price for fish was forty dollars a ton. So, a one-man boat going out and getting sixty tons of fish; his gross would average around twenty-four or twenty-five hundred dollars, which wasn't too bad a salary to make for four

months, when you figure it's just four months in month's work, but actual day's work would only represent about sixty days. We didn't operate on Saturdays and Sundays or holidays, or when it stormed, and usually our storms here on the coast are in the wintertime.

The larger boats carried anywhere from eight to fifteen men on these net boats, so they had to catch a lot of fish so that they could give the fishermen a living wage. Back in the old days, they did all right when it came to fishing, but you have to have a lot of fish for that amount of men. Now, on our scoop boat operations, that actually disappeared when we went into the pet food business in nineteen fifty-five.

C.T.: Mr. Thomas, how many men, on an average, would be on a scoop boat?

T.T.: Well, the smaller boats had one man, and that was dtermined by the amount of fish that a boat could haul. The boats would haul anywhere from three to ten tons, and the boats that only hauled three tons only had one man on them, but the ten-ton boats, or larger boats, had two men, because it took men to get their load. They usually stayed out fishing on deck about an hour at a time; it was on account of the cold weather and being wet, the men would trade off. On the one-man boats, if they went out and caught one ton of fish, that was sufficient for them and they came back in. Our plant capacity here was about sixty tons a day, and we had

fifty boats that we maintained here in the plant to get us that sixty tons of fish, and out of the fifty boats that we had, there wouldn't be over thirty a night that went out every night.

And out of that thirty boats, I would say the average per night for the season would be about two and a half tons per boat. So that gave us our capacity for the day. We had no regular running hours here in our plant. The girls came to work at seven o'clock in the morning, and they didn't go home until we finished all the fish that we had in the tanks.

C.T.: Which had been delivered the previous night?

T.T.: Previous night, yes, and we had no refrigeration in those days, so we couldn't keep the fish over. Many and many and many days our girls worked seventeen, eighteen, or nineteen hours a day, which was a hardship for them and also for the plant. The efficiency in the plant fell down. You can't expect human beings to work that many hours and do a good job. We had a lot of waste fish, and the slow-down of operations, but we had to do it that way.

But our average working day was about seven hours a day, with the exception of these big days. Now, every boat wouldn't deliver us their full capacity for more than one reason. Lack of incentive, or sometimes if a fisherman went out by himself and he caught two tons of fish, that meant that he made eighty dollars and he would

stay in for a couple of days until he made up his mind to go back out again. If there was a little slowdown in the fish, then they would sit back and wait until this fleet found the fish again, and then they would go out so that they could harvest the good fishing days. But some of our boats would work in maybe two or three or four boats and go out and scout fish and then when the fellows that stayed in and didn't want to work so hard would try to follow them, they would lead them off in the direction opposite to where the fish was being caught, so that they wouldn't get a clean-out in one night.

C.T.: Sounds like a chase. /Laughter/

T.T.: That's right. Now, we're talking about fifty boats that we had here in the Western Canners' plant, but there were two other plants in here, in Newport Harbor, and they both had fifty boats apiece. So, if you took an average of thirty boats out per plant, that meant ninety to a hundred boats out fishing and that's a lot of boats and they can pick up a lot of fish. And the fish always moved. I can't really tell you why they moved, whether it was the lack of feed that forced them to move up to better feeding grounds, but our fish would go up and down the coast. Maybe they'd be two weeks in San Onofre or Oceanside, then move up to Laguna Beach (see (2), (6) and (7), Fig. 5), maybe a week or ten days there,

then move off to Newport Pier. Then off to what we call the Huntington Flats, and even move over to Catalina.

C.T.: Where are the Huntington Flats?

T.T.: Well, we call the Huntington Flats anything from the Newport jetty up to San Pedro, and close in, because it's all shallow waters. (See (8), Fig. 5).

But why our fish moved, whether for lack of feed, or currents created this movement, I can't really tell you, for sure.

C.T.: Were these independent fishermen, they all owned their own boats?

T.T.: Yes, they were all independent fishermen, and although we never owned any boats ourselves, we were invested in these boats, such as helping fishermen to build their boats, replace their engines and so forth, which obligated them to fish for us.

We didn't have any contracts with them, only verbally. And in those days the fishermen were pretty good, if we did them a favor, then they would stay and fish for us.

C.T.: You had to have a lot of faith and mutual trust, then didn't you?

T.T.: That's right, that's right, very much so, and these fishermen, most of them, had other jobs.

C.T.: Well, getting back to the help that you had here in your cannery, Mr. Thomas, what kind of help was predominant?

T.T.: Well, I would say that our help here was about fifty

per cent white Americans, and fifty per cent Mexican-Americans.

C.T.: These are mostly women, now, in the cannery?

T.T.: I'm talking about the women, yes, our manpower in the plant ran about seventy-five per cent Americans and twenty-five per cent Mexican-Americans. The reason for the difference in help in the plant was due to the amount of women that were available for the three plant operations. After all, they're not too many people that like to work in fish canneries.

C.T.: There are a few objections, I imagine---smell---/laughter/.

T.T.: Odor, type of operations; after all, the girls were wearing boots and aprons and rubber gloves.

C.T.: It's not too pretty, is it?

T.T.: It's not too pretty, no, so we had to rely on the type of help we could get, and they were all good help. Regardless of what their nationalities were, they did a good job for the company, and they did a good job for themselves; they made money, jobs weren't too available in those days, especially for the type of help we had, you might say, people who hadn't gone to school. There weren't too many jobs available for them, although we had good help, especially some of our girls who went back to the packing houses and worked, because they were good workers.

C.T.: Would they live in Newport Beach?

T.T.: No, none of our help lived in Newport Beach. Most of our

help came from Costa Mesa and Santa Ana, (see (9) and (10), Fig. 5) which was the reason why we got the type of help we got, because they were close.

A lot of times, we didn't know whether we were going to get fish the next day, and if the wind was blowing, we'd put our girls on call, and they would call us in the morning at seven o'clock; then we could tell them if they were going to work that day or not. Any time that you had a call on the board where the employees came to the plant, we had to pay them a minimum of two hours, in the early days; and then later days, it became a four-hour minimum that we had to pay them, whether they worked or not.

C.T.: If the name were just on the call---

T.T.: That's right.

C.T.: Call board.

T.T.: So then, the girls were all handy and the men were handy, in Costa Mesa and Santa Ana, which meant only a twenty minute drive at the longest to get to work.

C.T.: I think you'd mentioned one time---that these frequently were families, the man of the household would be the fisherman, frequently, out on the boat?

T.T.: Yes, very, very definitely. I'd say that about fifty per cent of the fishermen's wives or daughters worked in the plants. And it made it kind of a family situation where the amount of money that they took home for that four month's operation was a big help to them.

C.T.: It came from many different members of the same family?

T.T.: That's right. Oh yes, I know of one case I remember very well. I had a Mexican lady and four daughters who worked and they worked all the time and they were all good workers. Two of the daughters and the mother worked on the cutting machines, and two of the daughters were packers. And it's very, very seldom that we used---other than Americans---white Americans on the packing table because they had been here so many years that the only way we got a replacement was from the other girls we had in the plant. So consequently, that's how some of the Mexican-American girls became packers.

C.T.: This was a job they would aspire to, or wait for; this was considered a pretty good job?

T.T.: Yes, because the cutting machine girls and the inspection girls were hourly workers, but the packers were on piece work. And when we started operations here back in the old days, a cutter would be making thirty-five cents an hour, and a good packer that really wanted to work would make a dollar and a quarter an hour, and as the years went by, we were paying the girls a dollar sixty-five cents an hour on the cutting machines. The girls packing were making four dollars an hour.

C.T.: It really made quite a difference---

T.T.: Made quite a difference.

C.T.: As to what they were doing in the plant.

T.T.: That's right, a lot of girls can't make packers, anyway.

C.T.: Does this require a little more skill?

T.T.: I don't know whether you call it skill, or incentive, or common sense, but you can take a girl off a cutting machine and take her over to the packing table, and within an hour you'll know whether she's going to make a packer or not.

C.T.: This was just something you had to know.

T.T.: You had to know, in other words a good packer for instance, as the fish came in on the table on these belts, would never look at the can where she is putting the fish. What she's looking at is the size of the fish that she's going to pick up to put in that can. And it's just a natural instinct or something, but we had a lot of girls that we tried on the packing tables. We paid them a minimum wage and gave them three days to make the average, and if she couldn't make it in three days, we moved her back on the cutting machines, because as I said before, our floor ladies would know within the first hour whether they're going to make a packer or not.

C.T.: I see. Could you tell me a little bit of the difference between cutting and packing? Cutting, I would imagine would be the first operation?

T.T.: Well, in cutting---all it meant is that we had two belts that had "V" cleats in them and all the girls did was to drag the fish off the center belt and bring the fish across these "V" belts---lay them in there so that the knives would cut them and size the fish. (See Fig. 8).

Fig. 8. Cutting, cleaning and sizing operation. Fish are placed belly down by workers. Fish being flumed in by water may be seen in foreground. Photo taken approximately 1941.

And it took a little bit of experience to do that, because either you make too big a cut and you ruin the fish, or you make too short a cut and the fish is not cleaned. As I tried to explain to you, one knife was above the head, or just behind the gill, and it went through the backbone, and the other two knives sized the fish for the size of can we were going to use. If we used a one pound tall can, then the middle section of the fish was cut four inches, because we were using a four o seven can.

Then the fish was cleaned, automatically, by a device that we called a "lawnmower," which was a wheel with five blades on it and it knocked the head off, and at the same time pulled the entrail out of the fish.

C.T.: Sounds like a pretty modern machine.

T.T.: Well, it was made many, many years ago and I saw those same machines when they were built in nineteen twenty-one and twenty-two and twenty-three when I worked in the summertime at those plants and they had those machines at that time. Today, they've gone into modern machinery where they use agitating belts, and the fish are dumped on these belts and these belts are vibrated with a vibrator and the fish all come down head first. That's the easiest way for a fish to slide, head first, because the fins run toward the tail of the fish and these fish go automatically into these cutting cups, and no ladies feeding the machines.

C.T.: No manual labor at all.

T.T.: No labor at all. Only the labor of getting them onto these vibrating belts, but now that the fish have disappeared, they don't need those machines now, anywhere.

C.T.: Oh---/laughter/.

T.T.: But then, after the fish are cleaned, and we had inspectors on the table, these inspectors checked them to see whether or not the entrails were completely out of the fish, or if the sizes were right. (See Fig. 9). From there, they went into a brine solution to draw the excess blood that was in the fish, to more or less whiten the fish, and then they went onto the packing table. (See Fig. 10). And on these packing tables, the girls took the fish off the lower belt, and on the center shelf was a squared place where they put the full cans. Every time a girl packed forty-eight cans, which represented a case, a checker would then go over and clean that shelf off by pushing them onto another belt, and then she punched a card which this girl had on her neck. That gave her a full case on the piece work.

C.T.: Forty-eight cans apiece.

T.T.: Forty-eight cans. And then from there, they went on down and we had another girl who would spot check the cans for weight, to see that the proper weight was put in the cans. Our labels called for fifteen ounces in a can, but we tried to pack an average of sixteen ounces in a can, because of a certain amount of shrinkage that came after

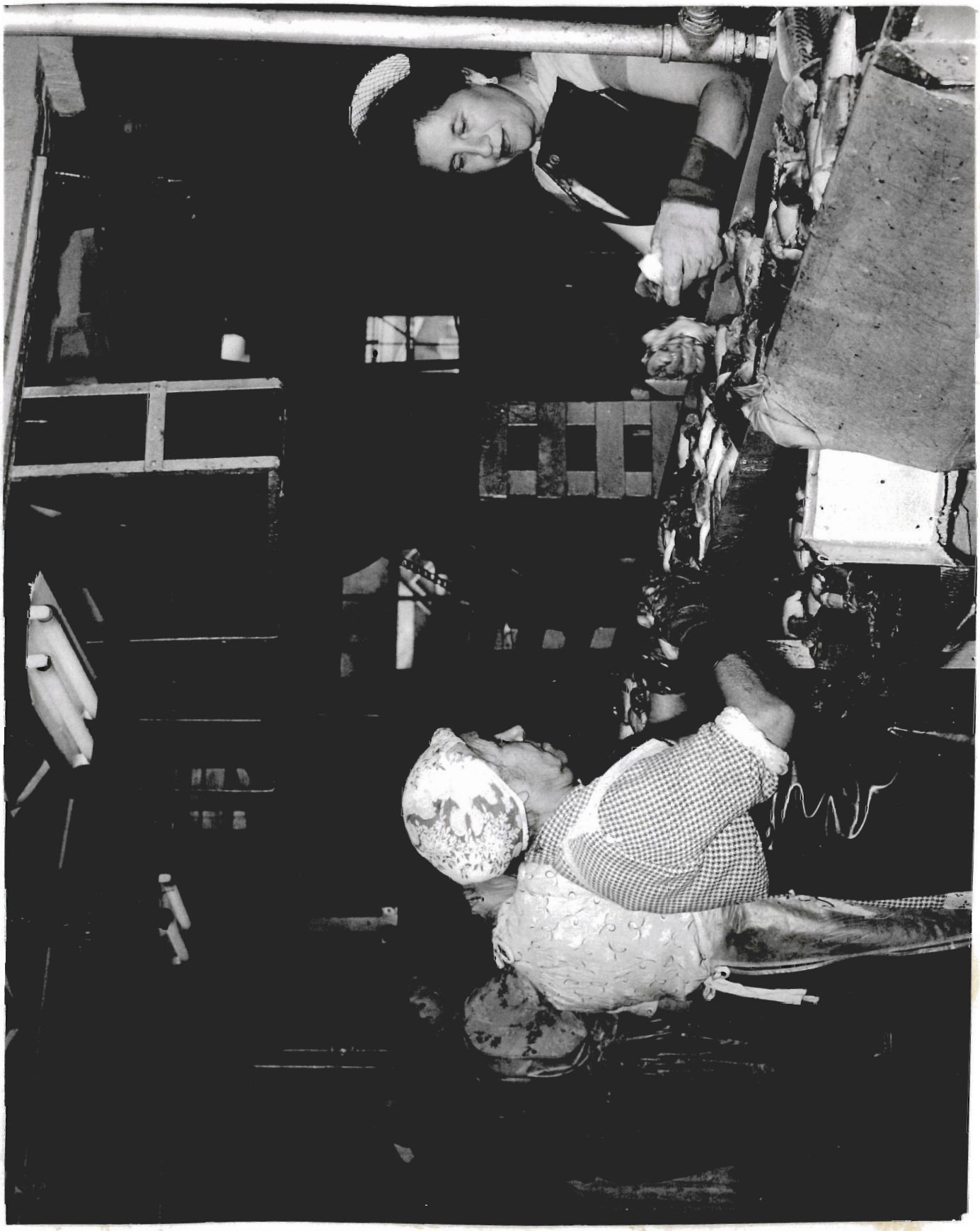

Fig. 9. Inspecting fish to be sure entrails are completely removed.

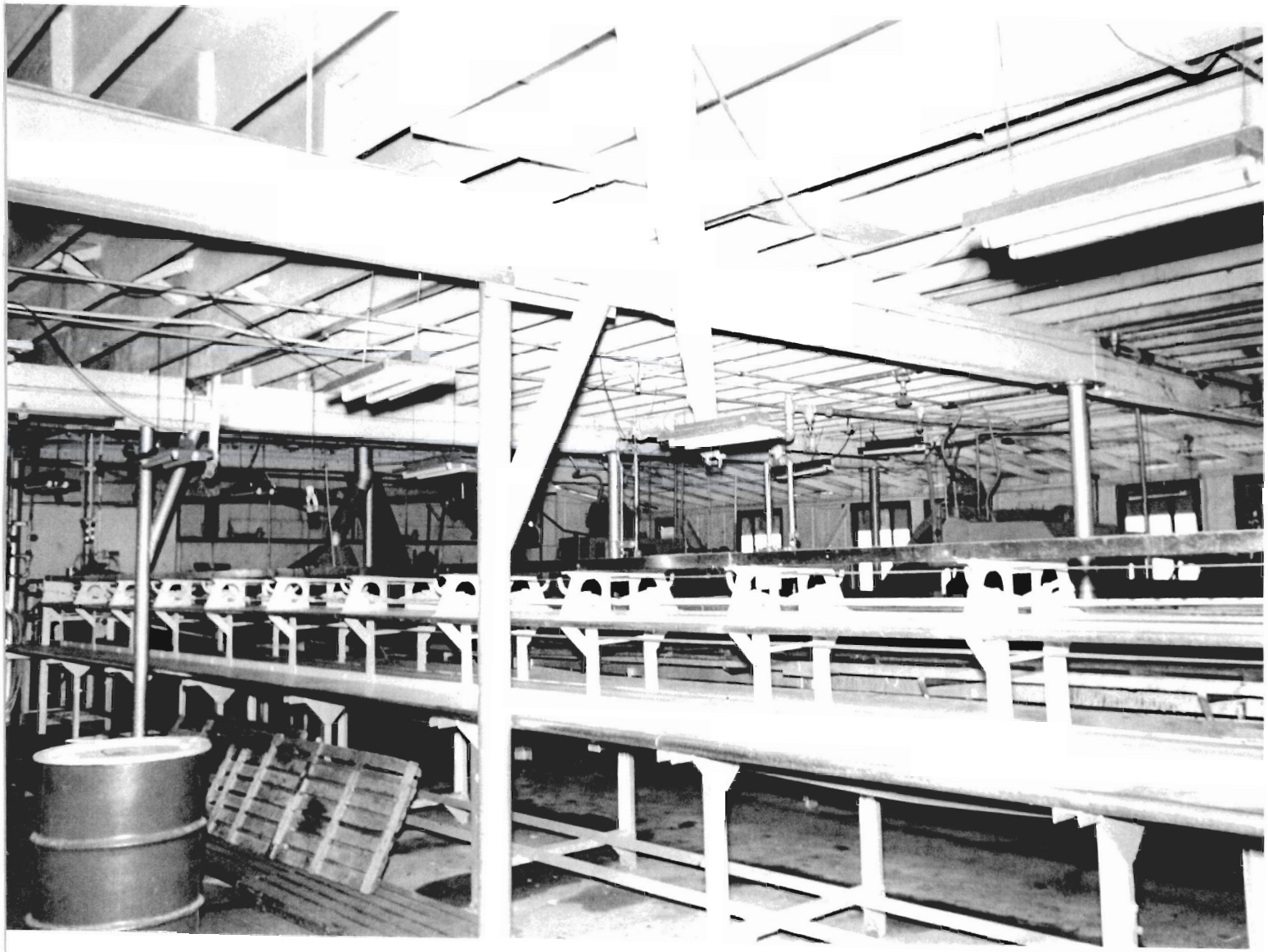

Fig. 10. Packing tables. Now using a conveyor belt instead of a flume. Photo taken approximately 1945.

we put the salt in them. Then they went through an exhaust box, and this exhaust box pre-cooked the fish, and it took twenty-three to twenty-eight minutes to go through this exhaust box. (See Fig. 11.) The reason that we put them through the exhaust box is that we're packing at sea level. We had to create a vacuum in that can, because when we shipped to our territories, to the Middle West, over the mountains, we did not want the can to collapse, so we had to maintain a minimum of seven inches of vacuum in these cans. When they came out of the exhaust box, then, they were sealed, and the fish coming out of the exhaust box would average a minimum of a hundred and twenty degrees, or as high as a hundred and sixty degrees, so that we were sure that when the lid was put on the can, and the can sealed, that the seven inches or more of vacuum was in that can. Heat expels any coldness in the can that made the vacuum.

Now, with the "wet" product, that's how you operated, but in other operations, such as tuna---

C.T.: Now, "wet" product, again means---

T.T.: "Wet" product includes mackerel, sardines, anchovies, and squid. That's what we call "wet" fish.

C.T.: Does that have anything to do with the way it's packed?

T.T.: No, it's all packed the same style, in other words, we put it in the can, add salt to it, the condensate in the exhaust box fills it full of water and then it's sealed.

But in tuna operations, they use vacuum machines, because tuna does not go through an exhaust box. Hot oil

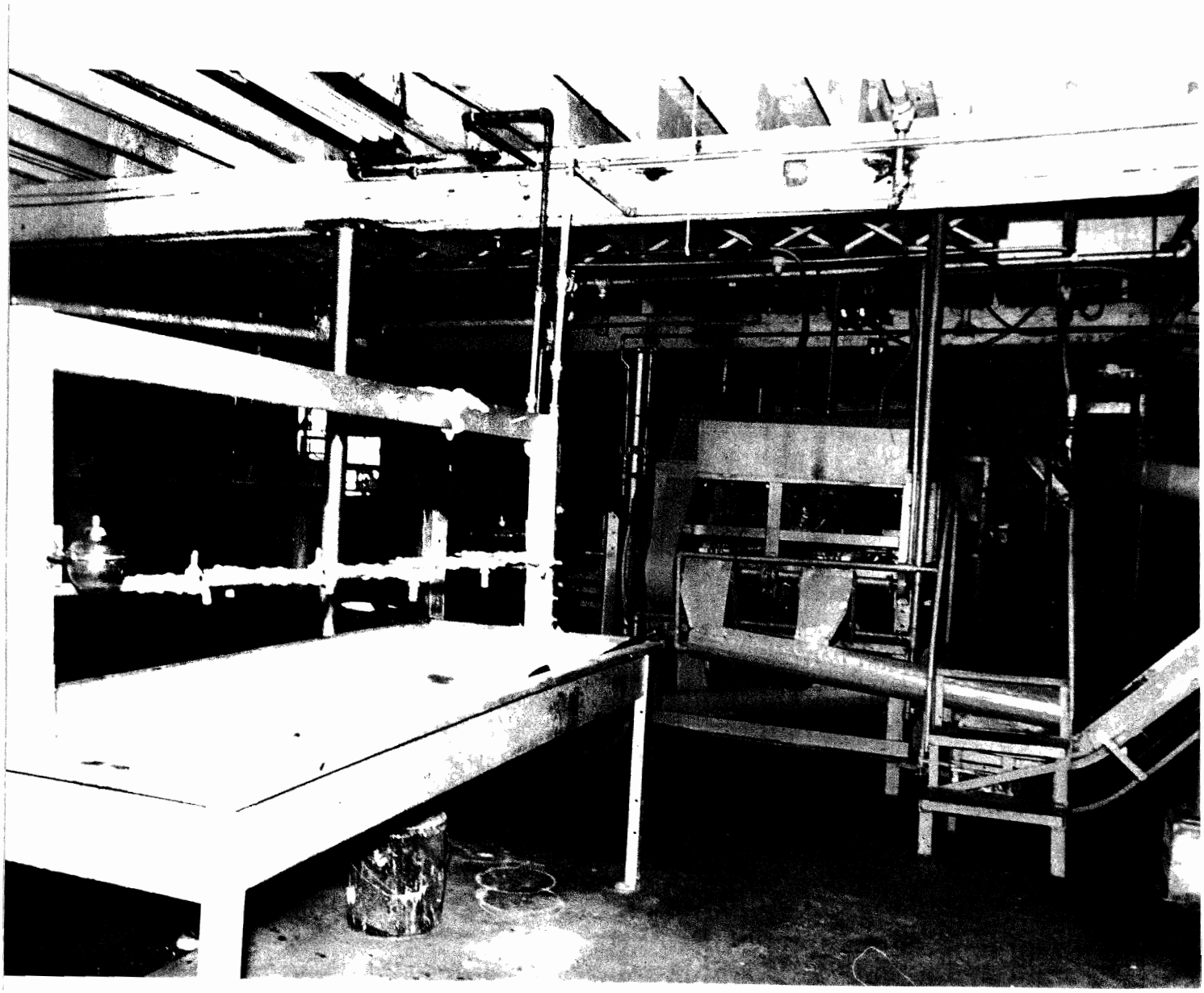

Fig. 11. Exhaust box (right hand side of photo). Fish came out of the exhaust box at 160° temperature. When the can was sealed, a minimum of six inches of vacuum was produced.

is put on it, anywhere from a hundred and eighty to a hundred and ninety degrees, and then the salt is added, just previous to the oil, and then it goes through a vacuum machine which draws the cold out of the can and it's then hermetically sealed. (See Fig. 12).

Then it's put into the retorts, or pressure cookers, for seventy-seven minutes, two hundred and fifty-two degrees at sixteen pounds pressure, to be sterilized. (See Fig. 13). All products are sterilized, whether it be for human consumption or for pet foods. All your standards for cooking processes are set by the State of California and by the Department of Agriculture. By the state for the federal government, and that is the guarantee that all products put into cans are sterilized. So that nobody has to be afraid to eat anything out of a can unless the can has been leaking, or if it's what we call "swells", because then there's a bacteria in that can or it wouldn't react like that. As long as that can is sealed, and it looks visually good to you, well then it's edible.

C.T.: So I can see the standards are pretty high then.

T.T.: That's right, very high. They worked on these standards for many, many years, because 'way back in the beginning of the canning industry when they didn't have the proper machines to make these things, there were a lot of people who died from contaminated cans.

C.T.: Well, I think people used to be pretty suspicious too, of canned food.

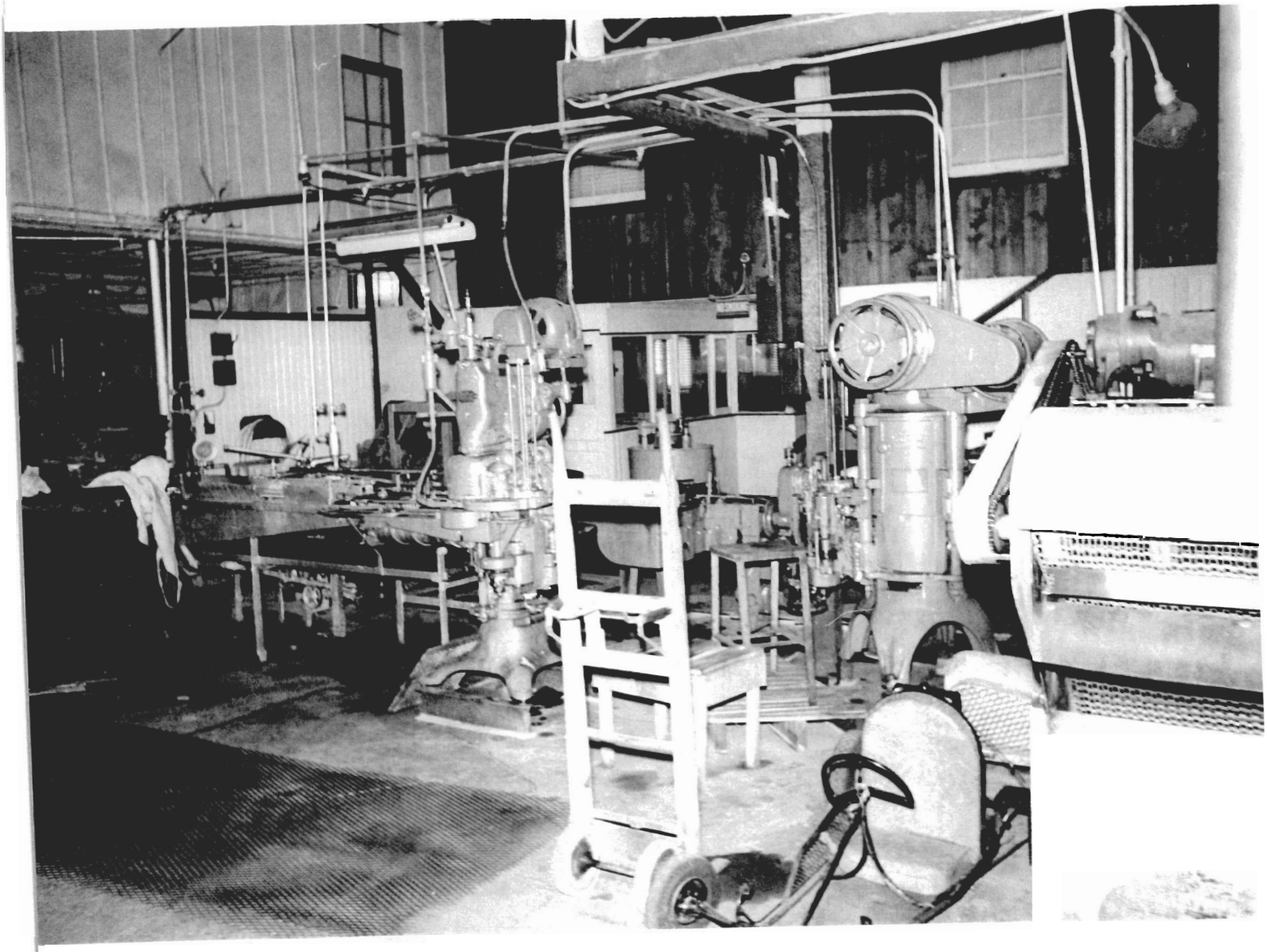

Fig. 12. Seaming machines. Machine on left of photo used for sealing cans of tuna; the one on the right was used for mackerel.

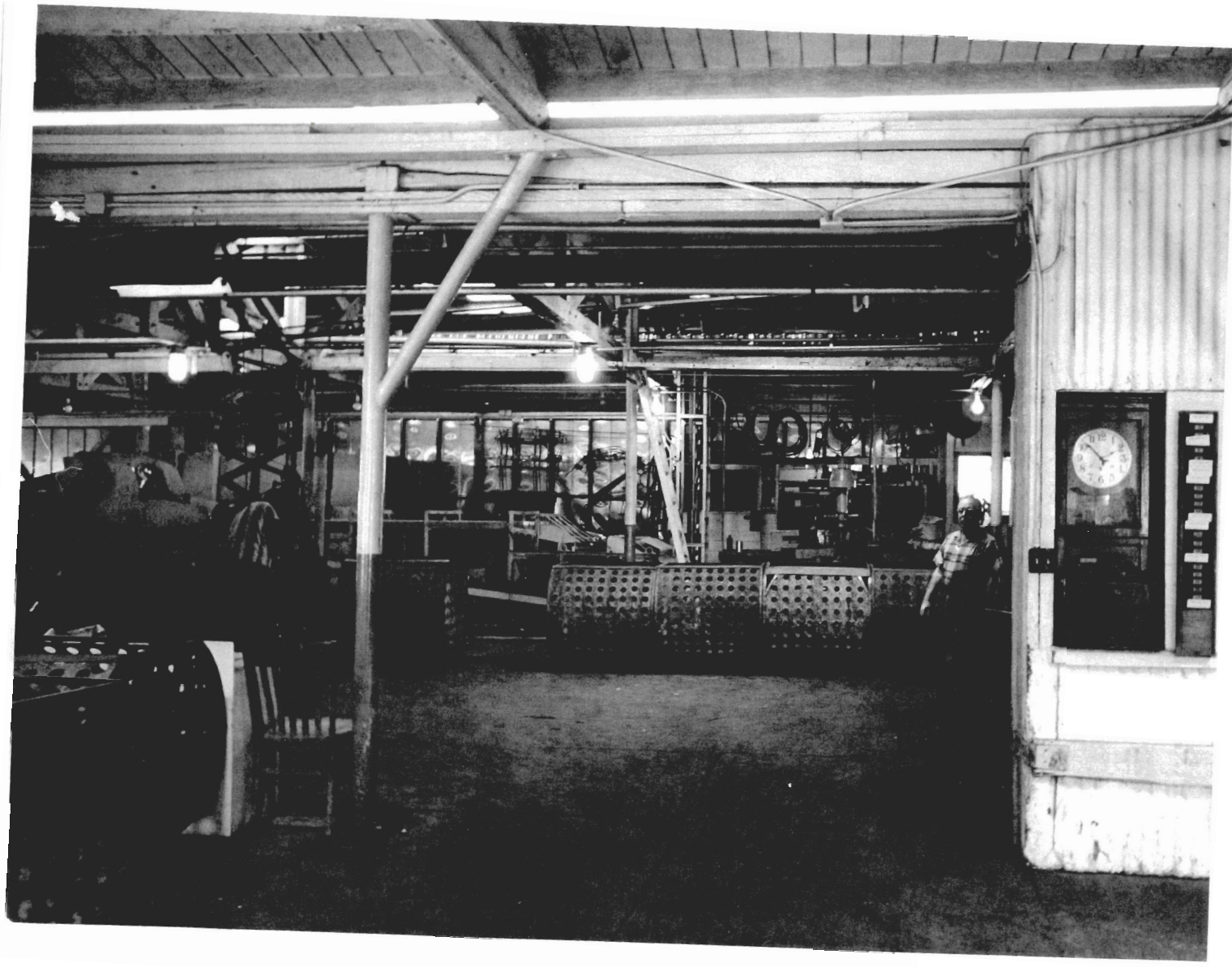

Fig. 13. Retort boxes. Mr. Thomas may be seen immediately to the left of the time clock.

T.T.: That's right, they were suspicious, especially if somebody in their town died from something being canned.

C.T.: That'd increase your suspicions /laughter/.

T.T.: That's right. Now we---don't have that anymore; once in a while we've had an outbreak of botulism, but it's very, very rare today with the standards that have been set up, with tuna and all that.

C.T.: I don't know whether I've asked you where most of this mackerel was shipped?

T.T.: All our mackerel went down the Mississippi Valley. We made our shipments to Cleveland and Cincinnati (Ohio) and then down to Springfield, Missouri; from there to Memphis and New Orleans and all through the Southern states. And the reason why our sales were there; it was a very, very cheap commodity and for all the people who worked down there in the cotton fields and the different places, mackerel was the only fish product that they could get. People couldn't afford to eat salmon down there on account of price, but ours was a cheap commodity---in other words it sold for ten cents a can, where back in those days salmon was thirty, thirty-five cents a can.

C.T.: Quite a difference.

T.T.: Yes, today there's a little mackerel that's being imported in here from Africa, and it sells for about thirty-five cents a can, where salmon is a dollar five, dollar fifteen cents a can.

C.T.: That difference has held, then---hasn't it---

T.T.: That's right---

C.T.: Through the years?

T.T.: That's right, there's not too much being brought in here. A few years ago we wanted one of our brokers to check to see why the sales had dropped off in those territories, because they had, we were still packing mackerel, but our sales were falling off. Our broker said he'd make a survey for us--- find out why there was a drop in mackerel sales. So he came back with an answer, and said, "Well, people are making too much money, they're driving Cadillacs and eating beefsteak."

C.T.: So the economics of it, /laughter/ kind of drove you out.

T.T.: That's right.

C.T.: What was your next market then for mackerel, large market?

T.T.: Well then, we had no more market. Then came the depletion of fish. So it started to drop off, and started to drop off--- but there is still a big market for export. If something should happen now, if all of a sudden we got our mackerel back, I don't think our domestic trade would be too great. But the export market is open. The Philippines would take a lot of it, Korea would take a lot of it, all through the Middle East---they would take a lot of fish products, today.

C.T.: Is this a problem that's just all up and down the Pacific Coast right now---the mackerel have gone, perhaps into deeper water?

T.T.: Well, we don't know. I've always said that pollution has created this lack of mackerel---because they're off the beach. They may be out in deep water, but we can't catch

that fish in deep water. So it'll be there until new methods are found to catch fish. When we talked about the purse net and how they caught the fish by purse net---(see page 8) that was used in shallow waters. Because when the net was pursed, the instinct of a fish, when he's in trouble is to sound---to go down---to get away from the surface. But in shallow waters, the fish went down, and then he saw he had hit bottom, or was going to hit bottom, so he'd turn around and come back up to the surface, because in the meantime, the net had been pursed---not pursed, but had circled the fish, so the fish are still in there and they're balling and they're swirling in the net, so they pull the purse till they have trapped the fish. But if you get out in water over two hundred feet, because the net is only maybe sixty feet or seventy feet deep, or maybe up to a hundred feet deep, well then, the fish has a place to escape so the fish goes down and underneath the net and away he goes.

C.T.: He's gone.

T.T.: He's gone, so then if they did find fish in deep water, our present methods of catching them are no good. They'd have to develop another <u>way</u> of catching them. You might say, "Well, why can't you go out and scoop them, because you were catching fish at the surface?"

C.T.: That's back to the one-man operation.

T.T.: Yes, the one-man operation, but our boats are too small, they couldn't go out and fish in deep water, it gets too

stormy and all that, so they've dropped that completely. But I notice here lately---one of the airplane pilots who flies for some of the existing purse seiners looking for mackerel, is going to tie his airplane up and go out and get a job, because he can't make a living spotting fish any more, because he said there are no fish.

C.T.: He just doesn't see them, either.

T.T.: So then, pollution has driven us out of here, the amount of boats agitating the water, too many people.

C.T.: When would you say that spotting the mackerel by airplane first started as a method?

T.T.: Well, airplane spotting started after the war; about nineteen forty-five or nineteen forty-six. Some of these fellows who had been pilots in the army came back and thought that maybe they could do the spotting of fish, because when they were in the navy they spotted fish from the airplanes that they were flying.

And it was very successful, and that prevented the boats from having to leave the harbor to go out and look for fish, and they could only go into one area. For instance, a boat leaving the harbor, he'd decide that maybe if he went south, he might find some fish, and another boat may go east, or another boat may go out to to sea, south or something like that. Well then, the airplane would leave and the pilot could circle all this area in one hour's time or maybe two hour's time, and if he spotted any fish, then he would radio to the boats, and say, "There are fish off Catalina Island," or

"There are fish off San Clemente Island," or Santa Barbara Island, (See (11) and (12), Fig. 5) and the boats would leave here directly and go right there. In the meantime, he'd circle and watch the fish, and when the boat came there, he'd even help them set the net on.

C.T.: My goodness /laughter/ the fish didn't have a chance.

T.T.: No. No. The fish didn't have a chance. A lot of people have said to me, "Well, maybe the airplanes have depleted the fish." Well, no.

C.T.: You don't think it's a problem of over-fishing?

T.T.: No, I can't believe that, because this is a big ocean out here. and besides, the season didn't last long enough to over-fish the area. Now, with mackerel, we fished all year 'round. You might say that that might have done that to mackerel---over-fished them---but when we get back to sardines, and sardines only had a five-month season, the rest was closed season, why did they disappear?

C.T.: You would certainly think that there would be a chance for repletion during that time.

C.T.: That's right, because they had a chance to spawn and work. But another thing we'll go back to; I keep saying pollution is our big problem. Why do they have fish in Mexico? They have both mackerel and sardines in Mexico and the canners there are canning them. But when you come up above the border, San Diego and from here up, (see (13), Fig. 5) there are no more fish, so I still think it's pollution.

C.T.: It certainly points toward that, I think, and pollution has a lot to do with the kelp beds dying out, doesn't it?

T.T.: Yes, yes, our kelp beds have disappeared, our abalones and our lobsters[9] have disappeared because the bottom is not a clean bottom.

C.T.: They need the kelp to hide, don't they?

T.T.: Well, I think certain types of fish spawn and the eggs are in the kelp, that's what holds them there, otherwise the surge would take them away. Then a few years ago, we didn't receive the agar weed here, but there were fishermen that were fishing agar weed here; this is is used for dental plates.[10] And years ago, a lot of agar weed was harvested between here and San Diego[11] and there are no more agar beds left---absolutely disappeared.

Now this would be another thing that you can't say was over-fished, or over-harvested---a lot of people blame the kelp disappearance on kelp cutters. Well, that's not right, because where the kelp cutters are working today---anywhere above Santa Barbara, the kelp beds are awfully thick up there, and the kelp cutters are working there every day.

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[9]Richard G. Lillard makes the following comments regarding the importance of kelp in his book Eden in Jeopardy, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1966, p. 133: "California's largest sea plant, the giant kelp . . . once created a saline jungle that provided food and refuge alike for the whole chain of being, but notably for lobsters, abalone, and commercial and sport fish."

[10]Lillard, ibid., states that the first commercial use of kelp was for potash and iodine, during World War I. Licensed corporations have since harvested kelp to be used for industrial chemicals, face lotions and salves, sizing cloth and to give bulk to ice cream and bakery goods.

[11]Lillard, ibid., gives this description of kelp harvesters: "Machines on bargelike self-propelled hulls, 'harvesters' cut the top four feet of kelp under water."

C.T.: It just seems to grow back and replenish.

T.T.: That's right, it is just like you do your lawn. If you cut your lawn faithfully once a week, it'll grow fast---you have to cut it once a week. But if you leave that lawn for a month, it'll only grow so high. You know, it gets kind of weedy, like your lawn. But the (California) Fish and Game Commission has proved that harvesting kelp is good for the kelp.

So I still say that pollution is our big problem for fish along the coast here, and there's no way of stopping pollution.

C.T.: Well, you've certainly watched the effects of it.

T.T.: That's right. We've watched that for many years. Back in the old days, we had sewage plants, but we didn't have detergents. So it's the detergent that's polluting our water, not the sewage, because the sewage is treated with chemicals in the plants before it's pumped into the ocean. But your detergents are not soluble in salt water, so that's what's making the ocean bottom foul, where nothing will grow in it.[12]

Years ago, our fishing, shark fishing, halibut fishing, and our sword fishing was all along the coast here, but we just don't have anything here anymore. Albacore had big seasons here in the sport fishing fleet; we used to catch albacore half hour off the breakwater here, off the jetties. We don't have that any more.

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[12]The California Fish and Game Commission has been aware for some time of the effects of salt water pollution. They found, in their Biennial Report, 1954-56, p. 25, that a major portion of San Diego Bay was seriously affected by sewage discharges. "Sludge deposits have covered a large portion of the bay and aquatic life in these areas is missing."

Now, if you want to catch albacore you've got to go outside of San Clemente Island. Now why aren't albacore coming in here close to the beach like they used to?

C.T.: It all points toward pollution.

T.T.: Pollution. Well, currents have something to do with it, too. We are always watching the Japanese current, because that's our warm current, it brings in the feed. So the Japanese current is still coming in here, but the fish are not following---they're following the outside of the Japanese current, not the inside passage. They would come in here to what we call the different banks where there was feed, and the bigger fish would feed on the bait and other food in the harbor. Maybe some day they'll find out how they can purify this water, but the amount of boats that are out here now present another problem.

Just take this Newport Harbor alone; we have around seven thousand boats in the harbor, and when these boats go out fishing on week ends, the boats create agitation and pollution, because they're pumping oil and fumes and gasoline in the water. On the coast from San Diego to Santa Barbara (see (14), Fig.5), there must be fifty thousand boats running up and down the beach and out and in; this creates a problem, too. (See Fig. 14).

C.T.: Well, that's another problem that our affluence has brought to us, hasn't it? /Laughter/

Deep sea fishing catches out of Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, Balboa, San Clemente and Oceanside numbered 1,016,929 in 1966 according to figures compiled by the Resources Agency of California, Department of Fish and Game.

Newport Bay is one of the most popular yachting and sport fishing centers along the California coast. Boat traffic in and out of Newport Harbor for the month of August in 1966 included 18,514 outboards, 22,802 power boats, 26,670 sailboats totaling 67,986.

The 8,000 boat slips, moorings, and dry storage units in Newport Harbor are not adequate to serve the ever increasing number of small craft in Orange County. Some residents must store their boats in Los Angeles County until slips become available here. The Harbor District is also developing, or has plans to develop, new harbors at Sunset Bay, Upper Newport Bay and Dana Point. All three sites will provide additional slips, dry storage units and launching ramps.

BOATING

REGISTERED SMALL CRAFT IN ORANGE COUNTY	
Number berthed in Newport Beach Harbor	8,091
Number berthed in Huntington Beach-Sunset Beach	917
Number trailer carried boats	16,390
Total registered small craft	25,390
PUBLIC LAUNCHING RAMPS	
Upper Newport Bay	3
Lower Newport Bay	

From: Recreation, '67, Orange County Planning Department p. 14.

T.T.: That's right, so we can't have prosperity and a lot of people coming into our area and it's getting bigger and bigger and where it stops we don't know. Whether they take these treatment plants and do something else about it; maybe that might bring our fish back, I don't know. We know this, that if you make an artificial reef, man-made, and you put it in a clean area, it'll grow kelp right away.[13] And they find little rock fish around them, and certain things, but pretty soon, that kelp dies too, if it's in the wrong area.

C.T.: If the same kind of pollutants are put into that water?

T.T.: Put into that water, that pollutes the water. Fish are a funny thing, you know with fish, they always have to have clean water, because they breathe through their gills. They bring oxygen in their mouth and expel it through their gills, and they have to have clean water.

I'm getting back to our mackerel operations a few years back. Whenever we had rain and muddy water and sandy water was coming in from the different rivers along here; the waters were polluted maybe for a mile, or a mile and a half off the beach, there were no mackerel here. Our mackerel boats had to go to Catalina and catch the mackerel. But the minute this water

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[13] Mention was also made of this phenomenon in Lillard's Eden in Jeopardy, pp. 134-5. California Fish and Game experts reported that by properly littering the floor of the sea with things to hide among or attach to, fishes and kelp can be attracted once again. Artificial reefs were built off Redondo, Santa Monica, Malibu and Torrey Pines Park. Such unlikely objects as exiled streetcars, junked autos and quarry rock were used. State divers reported later that thousands of fish, algae and other forms of sea life were thriving.

cleared up, maybe in three or four days after a good heavy rain, and the currents would clean up the water, then the mackerel would move back down here on the coast again. So that's a pollution that the fish didn't like, and that was muddy water.

C.T.: Well, you've certainly been able to see a lot of different aspects that would lead to the disappearance of the fish, the mackerel, and it all seems to fit together.

T.T.: Well, we've tried to analyze this thing because it was very important for us.

C.T.: Yes.

T.T.: And we, as little operators here, couldn't come out and tell somebody. We're too small---what was happening, nobody would believe us. But today, now, everybody says, "Well, you people were right." We've complained about this, not only us, but I mean the little plants, we were all troubled with this stuff, but nobody would listen. But today, now everybody listens and it's too late.

C.T.: Do they have the same problem with the larger canneries in San Pedro?

T.T.: Well, they're not getting any mackerel either. No sardines, no mackerel.

C.T.: Did it hit them at the same time it hit you?

T.T.: Yes, very, very definitely, because this downgrade of fish has been coming for the last five years. Every year the catch dropped. Today, it's maintained about a twenty thousand ton average per year, and twenty

thousand tons is nothing, when we used to get a hundred and fifty thousand tons for the industry.

C.T.: I see what you mean.

T.T.: So, there's a little mackerel caught out here, but it's not helping anybody. And I would say, that of the mackerel being caught today, ninety per cent of it's going into cat food, not for human consumption.

C.T.: Well, Mr. Thomas, this has been very, very interesting and very informative today---and I think we can continue this then, at some later date, thank you.

T.T.: Thank you.

California State College at Fullerton O.H. #75

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW BETWEEN: DATE: December 3, 1968

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. T. A. (Tommy) Thomas

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Charmaine Tichenor

SUBJECT: Fishing in Newport Beach

C.T.: This is the second interview by Charmaine Tichenor with Mr. Thomas. Again, we are at his offices at Western Canners in Newport Beach, and the date is December third, 1968. Well, Mr. Thomas, I certainly enjoyed the last interview. It was very informative; however, I got home and I discovered there were many more questions that I would like to ask you. So if you don't mind, I'll go back to the fishing operation and ask you first of all, why fishing was carried on at night?

T.T.: The reason for this night-time operation is because fish, when they're in schools and traveling, create a phosphorous fire, and their make-up and their swimming habits identify the fish to the fishermen; such as anchovies, or sardines and the mackerel. Now, very few boats fish for anchovies, because the mesh size in the nets are so small that the fish would "gill" in them, which means that they would lose a day or two to clean out their nets, but if they were mackerel or sardines, then they would go over and wrap them. In the daytime, with the glare of the sun on the surface of the water, it is very, very hard to detect any fish movements,

unless the fish are surfacing. So that's why all fishing was done at night. Now, that was for the purse seiners, specifically.

For the scoop boats, their best fishing was at sundown and sunrise, because the fish have a tendency to want to feed at that hour, then they're ready to travel to a fishing area where they could get something to eat. But the moon's phase is what controlled the scoop fishermen. During the light of the moon, the best fishing was in the daytime, because when it's full moon, you can't see the florescence in the water, so they normally fished in the daytime. In the dark of the moon, they fished at night, where they could see the phosphorous.

They used artificial lights to make the fish come closer to the boat when they were feeding them. They either used a Coleman lantern, which was a bright, white light, or they would use thousand watt globes, with a generating plant. And if anybody's ever fished at night, you know that an artificial light will draw the fish closer to the boat. So that's why most of our fishing was done at night.

C.T.: I see. It was something I didn't understand at all, and that explains it very well.

Why would the fishing operation, you say, start usually right after Labor Day? Were you limited by a state regulation as to when you could catch the mackerel?

T.T.: No, there were no state regulations on mackerel. Mackerel was an all year operation. The reason we started a week after Labor Day was because the majority of our boats were party boats; they were hauling passengers for sport fishing, and they always closed their season on Labor Day. Then it took them about a week to take off their bait tanks and to set up their bin boards for holding the mackerel on the boats. We had learned then that we'd have to start about a week after Labor Day.

C.T.: I see. There was full use of these boats, in other words.

T.T.: Yes, these boats normally started on their sport fishing operations around the first of May. They fished all summer, carrying parties and sport fishermen, and then fished mackerel for canning operations until the first of the year, or until bad weather set in.

C.T.: There were the same scoop boats that you mentioned?

T.T.: That's right, they were the same scoop boats. I'm going back in the early years, but in the latter years, we started using straight commercial boats because there were more commercial fishermen in the harbor, and they had different types of boats. And that was their livelihood; they only fished mackerel in the winter months. In the spring months, and the summer, they fished shark for us, fresh fish, and albacore. We couldn't depend on the party boats to bring us fresh fish or albacore, because that was their season for hauling passengers.

C.T.: Do you remember what kind of engines were on the early boats? Scoop boats?

T.T.: Yes, that goes way, way back. I've seen Model "A" Ford engines in them, and then they started putting in Dodge engines. They'd have to, naturally, change them for their pumps, and so forth. It wasn't really until about nineteen forty, or forty-one, when the Chrysler engine company put out a small marine engine. Then the boats used Chrysler marine engines, which were gas engines in those days. Then later on, as the boats got a little bit bigger in size and the price of gasoline went so high, everybody decided to go to diesel. Not only was the operating cost cheaper, and the price of the fuel cheaper, but it was really an engine that didn't catch fire, because that was one of our great hazards on boats.

C.T.: The gasoline engines.

T.T.: No, the diesel engine was safer. It uses non-explosive fuel; where, in gasoline engines, if they had a leak and there was gasoline in the bilge, a spark from the generator, or from the starter would create fire. We had a lot of fires back in the early years from gasoline engines. But today, we don't have a gas engine on a boat. In fact, on the party boats, the Coast Guard won't clear a gas engine boat. You have to have diesels today for the protection of the passengers and the boats.

C.T.: So then there's been just about a complete change-over.

T.T.: Yes, very definitely.

C.T.: Well, I thought you might know something about that and what approximate time it came about.

You had mentioned a fish "clean-out" when you were talking about the men going out to scout for fish, and that frequently there would be a couple of the fellows who had not fished for three or four days, and they might follow them, /laughter/ and the ones who were leading would take them in an entirely different direction from where the fish would be found so there wouldn't be a "clean-out". What would that term mean?

C.T.: Well, what I meant by "clean-out"---fish run in schools, and in certain areas. There may be in this school of fish, maybe fifty or a hundred tons, maybe a hundred and fifty tons. As in any other type of business or work, you might have sixty-five per cent of your men who are good workers, and then the other thirty-five per cent are just fellows who sit back and wait for the good, heavy days of fishing and hope, when they get ready to go out, that they would follow a boat that was producing, maybe for two or three days. These boats had codes that they used on the radio, and if the fish were down the coast, then the boat going out, if he found two or three boats following him, would go over to Catalina Island, and mislead these boats. This fellow might lose a night's fishing by going to Catalina, but his friends that he protected would offset that by giving him so many tons of fish for leading these other fellows astray /laughter/.

That happened many and many a time, because, as I said, there are certain people who want to work and a lot of them don't want to work.

C.T.: I think that's true.

T.T.: So they weren't going to capitalize on the good workers.

C.T.: You have mentioned canning albacore, and I believe you mentioned that you did that in the summer. Was albacore canning something you did only in the summer? It was on a much smaller basis, I believe.

T.T.: That's right, yes. With our mackerel operations for human consumption, we averaged about eight tons an hour in our operations. For a ten hour day, this meant eighty tons of fish that we had in the plant. But there's a little different process in albacore. We had to pre-cook the albacore, and after pre-cooking it, then we had to cool it for approximately twenty-four hours before the girls could clean this fish and then pack it. And our average run on albacore was about five to six tons per day.

C.T.: Were the albacore at this time caught in fairly close waters?

T.T.: Yes, all our albacore came from between here and San Diego and Catalina. The albacore season never started till July the fourth, on an average, and ran from July to Labor Day, so in that time we packed albacore with a smaller crew. And then when the mackerel started, we used a full crew.

C.T.: I see, so this tied in very nicely with your entire yearly operation, then didn't it?

T.T.: Yes, it did, and then we first started in nineteen forty-eight to pack the Sportsman's Pack. The sport fishermen, previous to that time, when they went out and caught two or three albacore, didn't know what to do with them. They may have taken one albacore home, or given an albacore to a neighbor, but after their second trip, they didn't know what to do with them.

C.T.: What's the size of an albacore?

T.T.: They'll average about twenty pounds. So then we decided that we would offer something for the sport fisherman; that if he brought us the fish, we would can it for him, and then we would charge him a service charge for the canning operations. This made it a fine deal for the sport fisherman and a good deal for us too, because it gave us more work to do in the summer months. We weren't big enough as commercial canners to can commercial albacore, because it takes money and it takes volume to supply the stores. Our brand was never sold in the stores. It was all gift packaged.

So then, it gave the sport fisherman an outlet for his fish; instead of taking a messy fish home for his wife, he took it back as canned goods, and the whole family enjoyed the canned albacore.

C.T.: Well, that worked out well for everyone.

Were any of the fishermen of Mexican-American extraction? You had mentioned that some of the wives, some of the women in the plant were.

T.T.: No.

C.T.: They weren't.

T.T.: No. Mexicans in our country don't fish. That's one type of fisherman who never went to sea, here in the United States, that I know of. You might catch one stray one now and then. They are good fishermen in Mexico. Most of the shrimp fishermen, and other types of fishermen are all Mexicans in Mexico, but not in the United States. All of our fishermen here in Newport Harbor were Americans. In the other harbors, in San Diego, they were mostly Portuguese. In San Pedro, the Los Angeles Harbor area, there were Japanese, Italians, and Slavonian fishermen,[14] but very, very few Americans fished out of the harbor in the early days. All of our fishermen were Americans here in Newport.

C.T.: I see. When we talking about the canning operation, the packers, I believe, were on a piece work basis, and this was something that was pretty desirable as far as the women were concerned, that kind of a job. Was anything else done on a piece work basis, any other operation?

T.T.: No other operation, no. That was the only operation, because the other work was all unskilled. You might say, "Well, there's not too much skill to packing." But there is. It was not only important to be a fast

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[14]According to the California Information Almanac, 1969, p.324, development of our ocean fisheries was enhanced greatly by the experiences which people of many different nationalities brought to California from their homeland. Early arrivals were Italians, Chinese, Portuguese and Greeks. Later Japanese, Yugoslavian and Scandinavian fishermen arrived in large numbers.

packer, but it was also important to be a good packer. And I don't remember whether I told you before, but we could take a girl off a cutting machine or any other part of the operations and put her on the packing table, and within one hour, we could tell whether she'd become a packer or not.

C.T.: I think you'd mentioned it, and it was interesting. Was there any danger involved in this cutting operation?

T.T.: No. Going back to the pictures, if you happened to see the pictures. When these "V" cups traveled down the line, the girls put the fish on these cups. The girls wore rubber gloves, and then on top of the rubber gloves they work canvas gloves. (See Fig. 8). And the reason they wore the canvas gloves was to protect the rubber gloves. The rubber gloves cost us more money, and the canvas gloves were cheaper, so if they wore out a pair of canvas gloves, we'd always give them another pair, but the rubber gloves lasted sometimes for the whole season, because the canvas gloves protected them. Now, if that girl's canvas glove got caught between two of these "V" cups, and the chain was traveling toward the knife; just ahead of the knife there was a bar that came down, and her hand would hit the bar and would automatically stop the machine. It was a protective device because these knives traveled at about six thousand revolutions per minute, they moved rapidly.

C.T.: You took a lot of precautions then; you had a lot of safety devices.

T.T.: That's right. Not only did we have this safety bar ahead of the knife, but right above the cutting machines, you'll see a chain dangling. (See Fig. 8, chain may be seen in the left portion of the photo, directly above left forearm of woman wearing white scarf). And that chain was also a safeguard. You'll notice that in the picture. There's a chain right down the center. Any girl could reach over and pull it, at any time that she felt that there was something wrong.

C.T.: Well, you probably did have a very safe operation, then---

T.T.: Well, we had to have that, not only because we naturally wanted to protect as many people as possible, but because in our compensation insurance policies, the more injuries we had, the higher our cost was, so we tried to keep it down to a minimum of injuries. We undoubtedly had a lot of them anyway, because we had slippery floors, the girls wore boots, they had to be very careful how they walked, so we had to protect them. Also, the state had their inspectors that came around to inspect all the different means of protection that we had to maintain.

C.T.: I don't know whether this next question is too significant at all, but it aroused my curiosity when you said that the girls wore tags around their necks, and these tags were punched when they completed a case, I believe, forty-eight cans. Was this just to keep the tag out of the water, perhaps?

T.T.: That's right, because everything in the plant was in

flowing water, from the flumes, the cutting machines, and even the fish that was coming down on the packing table, because we were fluming all the time. So the girls wore boots, and they wore these aprons, and the rubber gloves. The tags were around their necks and on their backs and the girl would push the forty-eight cans off and then turn around and punch the tag. There were numbers on these tags, from one to five hundred, and they were all dated with that girl's name on them, so that at the end of the day, if that girl had run two hundred cases, or two hundred and fifty cases, there would be a record of it. These records were all kept indefinitely, and then sent to the timekeeper, and the timekeeper figured out their net for the day, what they made on piece work, and then issued them a clean card, because these cards were kind of dirty; the girls who were checking had wet hands, messy hands, so we made a duplicate card out for every girl and we still have them on file today, in boxes that we have kept for so many years.

C.T.: This was just the best way of keeping that record, then, at that time?

T.T.: That's right. We tried putting slots on the packing table, and putting the cards in the slots, but every time the girl would pull it out and put it back in, she'd get it wet. Then they would fall off and the girls would lose them, so that was the best way to keep them.

C.T.: The best solution.

T.T.: Yes.

C.T.: Could you estimate how long a can of fish is good? This is something I've wondered about, personally. How long, if you kept a can on your pantry shelf, how long would this fish be edible?

T.T.: Indefinitely. As long as it didn't get rusted, or a little pin hole in it, which would let air into it. Now, all can life, if it's kept in an average temperature, is indefinite. We have cans here in the plant today, sample cans, which I've opened and then eaten the contents; fish that we packed in nineteen thirty-seven, nineteen thirty-eight, thirty-nine. There's no difference, absolutely no difference.

Here in the plant we have average temperatures, and the cans were in good shape, they weren't rusted or anything. But I don't say that people should go get an old can and eat it, but should check it, and if it's not swollen, it's still good. "Swells" are the danger point in a can. If you go to a shelf on a grocery store, or in your cupboard at your home and you can feel a little pressure on the can, throw it away.

C.T.: A little click?

T.T.: Yes, that's right.

C.T.: I think I've only run across one.

T.T.: It doesn't happen very often. Today, our cooking

processes and everything are so good, that very seldom would it happen; but if a can gets bad in the plant, coming through the seaming machine, if it's got a hole in it, it won't get any further than the warehouse. They'll pick it out in the warehouse, or when it gets to the shelf on the grocery store and throw it away.

C.T.: I see. I got the general impression that you had no problem at all with labor, but I didn't know whether you had union help. Was there a union for your workers--- cannery workers?

T.T.: Well, when we first started here, we didn't have a union. but around in the 'forties, union agents came here and they started to unionize the plants. But then they weren't successful in forming a union among the help because we were <u>seasonal</u>; the people weren't justified in having to pay dues all year 'round when they only worked three or four or five months out of the year. The unions then decided that it didn't pay them to have an agent here in Newport to control the workers, so they dropped the union for the workers, but had the canneries to sign up as union, which didn't mean anything, only that they had control of the plants. The fishermen were all union; at all times.

C.T.: Right from the start?

T.T.: Right from the start. And they still are today. They have unions and they have associations, today, yes.

C.T.: What is the name of the major union for the fishermen?

T.T.: Well, they have three or four different unions. They have the Purse Seine and Net Fishermen, and they have the Line, what they call the Seine and Line Fishermen; up in Alaska, they have the Alaska Fishermen, and the Northwest has its union.

The boats though, one-man boats or two-man boats, belong to associations, which are controlled within themselves. They don't belong to any big union where they have to pay dues to the central union. But the canneries are still union. We have to sign up with the union every year, that the cannery will maintain union operations. Now, we followed the larger canner's union in San Pedro, as far as the wage scale went. Whatever the scale was in the other canneries, we paid. And the same way with the fishermen. Whatever the San Pedro unions paid their fishermen, we paid <u>our</u> fishermen.

C.T.: This is sort of a general law of business, though, isn't it, to protect and keep your employees?

T.T.: That's right. But our wage scale was always higher in Orange County than any other industry.

C.T.: One other question, Mr. Thomas, in regard to the chumming, when you were attracting the fish with the chum, did any other fish, other than mackerel ever follow the bait?

T.T.: Oh yes, we've had a lot of trouble. While the chum attracted the smaller fish, this would also bring in the sharks, and the sharks would then scare the mackerel away, and bring in seals, too. Seals were one of the biggest problems, along with sharks, to the mackerel fishermen.

C.T.: Why? Why would that be?

T.T.: Because they scared the fish away. Fish are all cannibals, you know, the big ones eat the little ones---so the fish would all leave, and then all the fisherman would have around his chum and his lights were sharks and seals. So what he would have to do then would be to get his shotgun and shoot the seals and shoot the sharks, or spear the sharks. That would drive them away, but then the fisherman had to look for a school of fish again, which meant that maybe he lost an hour's fishing time, or a lot of times he wouldn't ever pick up another school. And he'd be out there all night looking and looking, and maybe the next morning he would come in with five hundred pounds of fish because the seals and the sharks bothered him.

C.T.: I'll bet they were unhappy on those mornings.

T.T.: Well, that's right. Not only were they unhappy about no payday, but they had stayed up all night, and they were wet and cold---it had a double reaction there.

C.T.: Right. Was this a fairly rare occurrence? Would it be something that would happen every night, or every other night?

T.T.: No, what would happen---normally, the boats fished pretty close together, the boats were just like the schools of fish. If there was a school of fish, at times, there might be anywhere from fifteen to twenty boats. And if the sharks should happen to move in

kind of thick, or the seals, then all the fishermen would start shooting, and then the seals or sharks would disappear and the fish wouldn't exactly get away from them. There'd always be enough boats so that they would attract the schools from boat to boat, then they would pick up the school again and work it. Certain areas were noted for seals; one was near Catalina Island. There were a lot of seals over there, but along the coast here we didn't have too much trouble with seals. The trouble along here was due to sharks, so if they didn't shoot them, they would spear them. In other words, they used this spear to spear them in the head, and then the sharks would leave, naturally, because they were hurt, and then that way they wouldn't lose the school too quickly.

C.T.: Would they take the shark on board after he was speared? Would there be any use for that shark to the fisherman?

T.T.: No, no, they wouldn't---because they didn't use a barbed spear. All they used was a straight rod spear. After they threw it at him, the spear just came right out of him. If it had been a regular spear with barbs on it, then they would have pulled it in. But they didn't want the shark, because the shark was no good to them. They couldn't get any money from it. There were blue sharks or mackerel sharks that bothered them. The other types of sharks didn't come near the boats. It all depended on the depth of the water that they were fishing in, too.

C.T.: What depth would bring more sharks?

T.T.: Well, I would say that the deeper waters brought the sharks. The average shark doesn't come into shallow waters so much. We've heard of man-eating sharks coming in close to the beach, and biting a swimmer---

C.T.: Recently, yes.

T.T.: But that's a very rare situation. A lot of people think that sharks attacked them, but I don't know if that's true or not. I think that they're excited when they attack somebody.

C.T.: What would they keep the mackerel in, on the scoop boats, after they got them on the boat? Did they have tanks?

T.T.: No, they had what we call "bin boards". They would make a kind of a box formation on the deck, and they used "bin boards" about twelve inches high; each box might be, according to the size of the boat, maybe four by four feet. (See Fig. 15). But they were open on the top, and the reason they did that, is that as they filled these bins, on the deck, it kept the boat balanced, and then if they got into a heavy swell, or the boat got to bouncing, the fish wouldn't all go to one side of the boat and maybe capsize the boat, so they were stationary, in these bins that they had built on the boats.

C.T.: They were all on deck---none in the hold?

T.T.: None in the hold, no, these were all deck boats.

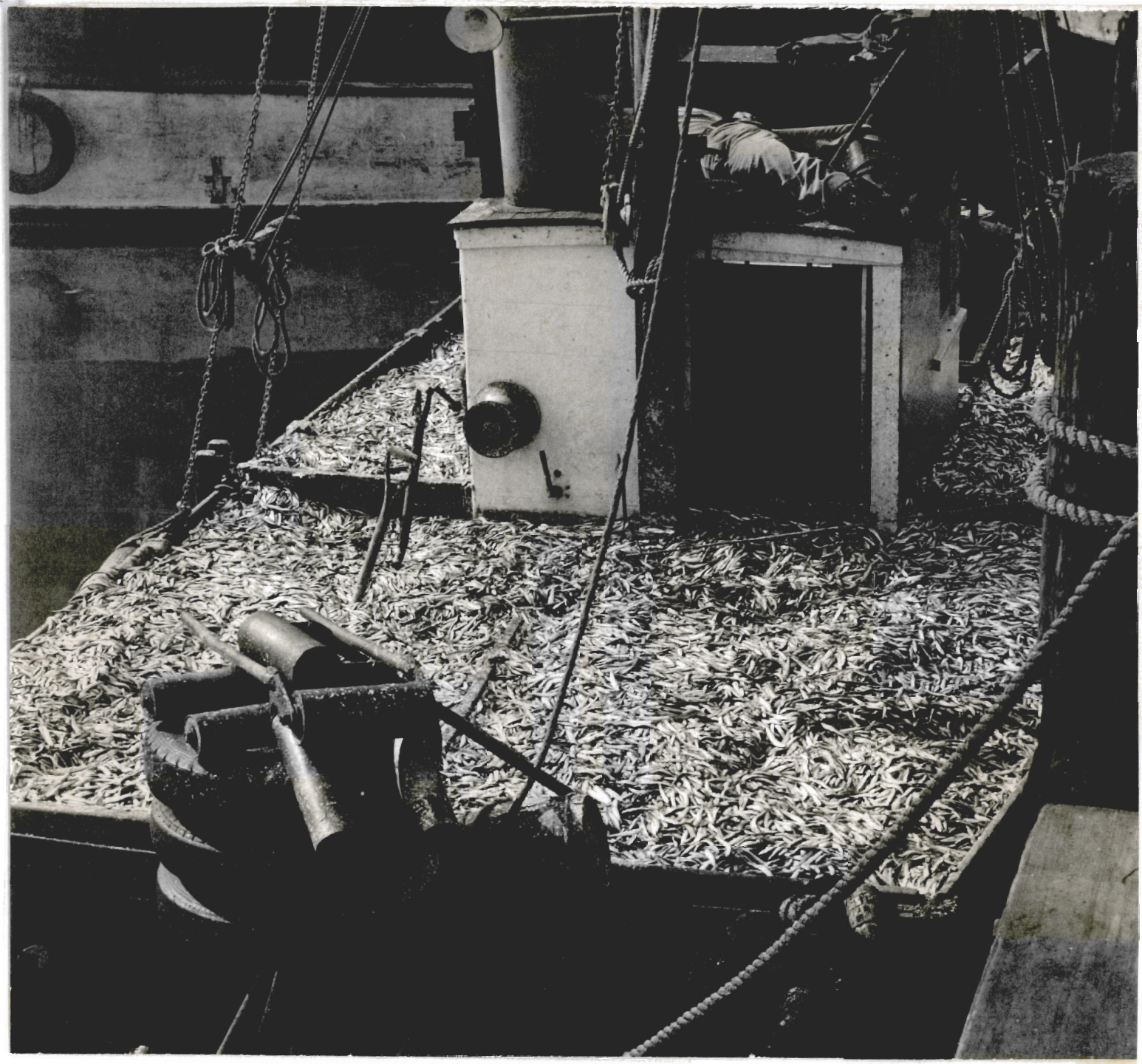

Fig. 15. Bait boat, showing use of "bin boards" on deck to keep anchovies or sardines from slipping off the boat. Exhausted fisherman unidentified.

We had two or three boats that could have put them in the hold, but we'd unload these boats by hand, not by machine or by pumps. When we talk about the pet food operation, you'll see that we then started to use a vacuum pump to bring the fish into the plant. But using four men to unload them with scoops, they had to be carried on deck, we couldn't get them out of the hold.

C.T.: I don't believe I've asked you what the chum was made of and the process that was involved there.

T.T.: For the chum boat fishing, it was necessary for us to service the boats with the chum. We had two boats, and all they did for the season was to fish for either anchovies or sardines; then they would bring them to us, and we, in turn, would salt them and grind them. (See Figs. 16 and 17). We used a half-inch plate in the grinder, then we put them into these fifty gallon drums, and each drum weighed five hundred pounds. This chum, then, was given to the scoopers, so that they could lure the fish close to the boat, so that they could net them, and bring them into the boat.

Now, we charged these fishermen for this chum, at the price of what it cost us to pay the bait boats, and it would average about fifteen dollars a barrel. And we always figured that one drum of bait should catch five tons of mackerel. So then we had to maintain an average of twenty-five tons of ground chum at our dock at all times, because these bait boats couldn't get bait

Fig. 16. Salting the bait before it was ground up into "chum".

Fig. 17. Salted bait being ground into "chum". Ground "chum" then stored in five hundred pound drums. Four drums were carried on each scoop boat; fisherman would normally use two barrels each night he fished.

every day. The weather had to be perfect, and the bait had to be available, whether it be anchovies or sardines. There would be many days when we ran out of bait, and the scoopers didn't have any bait, then operations stopped.

So that's why we tried to maintain an average of twenty-five tons of ground chum on the dock. We could keep it in our warehouse, on the dock, indefinitely, when it was well salted, especially when it was under cover from the rain, because fresh water would spoil our chum.

C.T.: Mr. Thomas, I believe you mentioned in our first interview that scoop boats weren't used any more after nineteen fifty-five, I believe. Was there a special reason for this?

T.T.: Yes, a very, very definite reason why. When we went into the pet food operations in nineteen fifty-five, we were using both net boats and scoop boats. The scoop boats were used for the human consumption operation; we had one net boat, and it was used for the pet food operation. As the pet food business increased in volume, and the processing for human consumption declined, we went all out on the pet food operation.

C.T.: You were canning both kinds at the same time, for a while?

T.T.: Yes, both kinds. But then, as I said, the pet food

business got so big that we had to concentrate on it, and we needed the floor space for pet food operations, so we discontinued the human consumption packing of mackerel and albacore. We used the scoop boats in our pet food operations for about a week, until we discovered that the fish had an off odor in the can--- the pet food. By trial and error we discovered that in our pet food operations, we were using the whole mackerel, and it was full of chum, and also full of salt from the chum; the chum was giving the canned product an off flavor. The pet food industry packs everything salt free.

C.T.: I didn't know that.

T.T.: So we had to discontinue, then, the scoop boats, and go for straight net fish. And then it got bigger and bigger to the point where we had four net boats, and we were then producing a hundred tons of pet food a day. When we first started in nineteen fifty-five, with the pet food industry, we packed a hundred thousand cases our first year, and during our last year, we packed a million and a half cases a year.

C.T.: That really grew.

T.T.: It sure did.

C.T.: What was this last year you mentioned?

T.T.: Nineteen sixty-six It was our last year of operation, and this was caused by the lack of fish.

C.T.: And this was a pretty sudden decline?

T.T.: No, it was a decline that came in about five years. In nineteen sixty, it started to decline, but the reason for the increase in production in cases, was that we had gone from a one-pound can to a six-ounce can. Also, we were packing straight fish in the six-ounce can, and then we came up with a product of fish and chicken. Then we produced other products with turkey, kidneys, livers and eggs; so then we didn't use too much fish. In other words, we couldn't have depended on a straight fish pack in the last six years of operation, so we included other products.

We made seventeen different products, all under the "Friskies" label which we had developed in this plant for the Carnation Company. But then, after installing high speed machinery and modernizing the plant, we discovered we had packed too many of the other products, and we needed fish again. And we couldn't get fish.

C.T.: By this time the fish---

T.T.: Had disappeared. Our fish production, by now, was running close to twenty thousand tons a year, which would be only enough fish for one plant.

C.T.: You mean for the entire area?

T.T.: For the entire operations, only about twenty thousand tons a year, where the industry would be able to pack, without any problem---two hundred and fifty thousand tons a year. That includes fish for both human consumption and pet foods.

So the lack of mackerel has not only forced us to close down, but many, many other plants have closed down for the lack of this raw fish or sardines or mackerel.

C.T.: Do you predict that there will be more in the future, too, that will have to cut down production or close?

T.T.: No, not any more, because, actually, we don't have any more "wet" food plants left. The big canners, in San Diego and Los Angeles Harbor, have tuna as their biggest operation. So they have their "wet" fish plants intact there, if they do get any, they pack it. Now, they pack squid for the foreign countries, so they do have purse seiners still operating. And they are involved in the reduction of anchovies, where they make fish meal. So when a purse seiner goes out, and he's looking for mackerel and he doesn't find any mackerel, there's a chance he might find squid or anchovies. So then, that purse seiner has, you might say, a three-way operation.

But getting back to our plant operation, if I had a boat fishing for me, all I would take from him would be straight mackerel, and he couldn't afford to fish for me. So, with this little amount of fish that's coming in on the coast now, why it's impossible for us to operate any more.

C.T.: I can see that. You adjusted what you were canning, then, when you were canning pet food, to the supply of fish coming in, I would gather, when you added the

chicken and liver and turkey?

T.T.: That's right. And then, the pet food companies, naturally, wanted a balanced diet for the animals. They came up with the different formulas; that their laboratories had developed---the chicken, the livers, the kidneys, which are all good products. Their pet foods are all U.S.D.A. (United States Department of Agriculture) inspected meats, and the fish is U.S.D.A. inspected; their quality control is the same that we use on human consumption.

C.T.: Did you find any difference in canning for human consumption and pet food---in what you had to do here in your canning process?

T.T.: Well, yes. Back in the old days when we were packing for human consumption, even with our modern mechanisms, we were still using about eighty people, and we were only producing two thousand cases a day. But then when we canned pet foods, we only used twenty-<u>five</u> people, and we produced <u>seven</u> thousand cases a day. So, yes, it made a big difference.

C.T.: Did this have anything to do with using the whole fish? In other words, mechanization now---could just take the fish through the entire process without anyone attending to it, so to speak?

T.T.: That's right, in other words, by grinding the whole fish, that eliminated all the cleaners, the girls who

were operating the machines for cleaning the fish, and all the inspectors. And then when we canned pet food, we used filling machines; in other words, we were averaging around seven hundred cases an hour with the filling machine and the seamer, where in packing for human consumption, we had to use girls to can the fish. So really, there's no comparison of the pet food operations to human consumption operations

Now, I don't know if they'll ever find a way to clean fish completely automatically, and pack it automatically, maybe that day might come sometime; but with the present lack of fish, I don't know anybody who's going to invent anything that can do that. Our fish are getting scarcer and scarcer and scarcer. Our tuna boats are going long range, they're going to Africa, they're going off the coast of Peru and Chile, and they're even going over to Samoa and fishing, and that's all long range fishing. And so to maintain these operations, the bigger plants have canneries in Samoa, in Puerto Rico, in Peru, in Africa, and they have them here in California, too. Wherever the fish are the closest, that's where the boats deliver.

C.T.: You're talking about United States canneries.

T.T.: That's right.

C.T.: All over the world.

T.T.: All over the world, now.

C.T.: I think you'd mentioned the other day, that even if we were to get the local supply of fish, by some miracle, if the fish would appear again, there wouldn't be much of a market, domestic market; but you could can it and sell it in different parts of the world. What would this mean about our fish eating habits---as compared to people in other parts of the world?

T.T.: Well, people in the other parts of the world, I think, are fish eaters. In Asia and even Northern Europe, those people are real fish eaters, that's their diet. Where, we as Americans are meat eaters, more than we are fish eaters. I know people here who don't even like to cook fish in their houses. We may eat lobsters and oysters, but they're the high priced fish. And now, with the new methods of pre-preparing foods and fish, where they're breaded and pre-heated---or cooked in these different plants, and all you do is bring home the fish and heat and eat it, well then, maybe some people might eat fish, but not too many, because as I said before, people don't like the fish odors in their homes. And our economy now is so far ahead of a few years back that they don't want to eat mackerel and sardines---that isn't the picture anymore.

C.T.: Mackerel was much more popular several years ago than it is now?

T.T.: Yes, because it was a cheap commodity. In the older days,

the price of mackerel, in the grocery store, was two cans for nineteen cents, which is just a little less than a dime a can. Today, people are making so much money, they'll go out and spend ninety cents or a dollar for a can of salmon, and they wouldn't spend, say, thirty cents a can for mackerel.

C.T.: Or ninety cents will probably buy enough hamburger for a meal, too.

T.T.: That's right. But we're not fish eaters in this country. We'll eat lobsters and oysters and the more expensive sea food. Shrimp and lobster tails are all coming in here from foreign countries.

Australia produces a lot of lobsters for us--- lobster tails. Africa does too; I would say that the biggest part of the shrimp comes from Mexico. In those countries, their people can't afford to eat this kind of sea food, because they don't make that kind of money, so they're all exported into our country. And of all of our fish that we produce in this country for the table, the biggest majority of it comes from Canada, from Iceland, and from Norway, because they're fish-producing nations and we're not.

C.T.: Would you say that the methods of fishing have gone ahead in these other countries, as compared to the United States, right now?

T.T.: I would say that. Very, very definitely. Russia and Japan and Norway and Sweden are so far ahead of us that

there's no comparison, because as I said a few minutes ago, they're fish eaters. I don't know what the per capita consumption is in Russia and Norway and Sweden, but they had to build factory ships, and big fleets that will cruise all over the world. In our country, off the Grand Banks on the East Coast there are more Russian and Japanese and Norwegian trawlers there than there are American boats. And the same thing is true of our West Coast. The Russians and the Japanese are within twelve miles of our coast, fishing every day.

C.T.: As a regular thing?

T.T.: As a regular thing, because they have to go out to get this fish. They have factory ships; they have the small boats that catch it, they bring it to the factory ship, and process that fish right on the boat, whether it be frozen fish or canned fish.

C.T.: Then I would say they are considerably ahead of us in fishing methods.

T.T.: Yes, very, very much so. I mean they have electronic equipment that we don't have. In other words, in those countries, the government is behind them, where our government is not behind our fisheries here in this country.

The fishermen have tried to get this support, the different states have tried it, but it just doesn't seem to work out for our country. Oh, our country

here lately has been doing a little bit of construction work in helping the fisherman to get bigger boats, but not in too many cases.

So, I think we're way behind the other countries, and they're going to go out and get this fish wherever they can get it. And they can get it right off our twelve mile beaches here---they'll get it. They'll eventually clean it up, too.

C.T.: Are the waters free beyond that point, twelve miles off the coast? Is there a limit?

T.T.: Yes. In the United States, it's twelve miles, some countries have extended it a little bit---but the average is about twelve miles.

C.T.: Beyond that, it's considered international waters?

T.T.: That's right.

C.T.: For fishing?

T.T.: That's international waters---for anything, fishing, or free, it's a free ocean. Getting back to the Pueblo,[15] they were supposed to have been caught within the twelve-mile limit. So then I know that Korea has a twelve-mile limit too, but some of our Central American countries are going a hundred miles out and seizing our tuna

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[15] A summary of this incident can be found in Keesing's Contemporary Archives, London, Keesing's Publications, Ltd., 1967-1968, Vol. XVI, p. 22585. A serious international incident occurred in the Far East during the night of January 22-23, 1968, when four North Korean patrol boats captured the 906-ton intelligence ship Pueblo, of the U.S. Navy, with a crew of 83 officers and men. According to the U.S. Defense Dep't., the Pueblo was in international waters at the time of seizure and outside the twelve-mile limit claimed by North Korea. The Pueblo was the first American naval vessel to be captured at sea since the 1812 war with Britain.

clippers; this has been in the papers lately.[16] Every so often they'll seize a tuna clipper, and yet they're a hundred miles off shore. They made their boundary a hundred miles, but for years, I always thought that twelve miles was the normal international water boundary. I think each country puts whatever they want on there.

C.T.: More or less setting their own limits, in some cases.

T.T.: That's right, that's right.

C.T.: Well, Mr. Thomas, getting back to the scoop boats, when you discontinued those and went into your net boat operation for the canning of the pet food, what was the average capacity of those boats, were they larger than the scoop boats?

T.T.: Yes, they were much larger. Our scoop boats averaged about six tons per boat, which they put on deck. But our net boats---we had four net boats---and the capacities of the four net boats ran from the smallest one of fifty-five tons, to the largest one we had, which was one hundred and forty tons. But we did not ever want these boats to come in with their full capacities, we had them on a limit of forty tons per boat.

C.T.: Why would that be?

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[16] Seizure of U.S. Fishing vessels off the coast of Peru continued to occur in 1969. The following brief account appeared in Facts on File, 1969, New York, Facts on File, Inc., p. 171: "The Peruvian navy, March 19, 1969, captured two more American-owned tuna boats, which were fishing about 23 and 40 miles, respectively, off the coast of Peru. The boats, the San Juan and the Cape Anne, were released after being taken to the port of Talara and forced to pay fines of $17,000 and $8,000 on charges of illegal fishing. Peru claimed 200 miles of territorial waters; the U.S. recognized only a twelve-mile fishing limit."

T.T.: Well, because we couldn't handle over a hundred tons a day, and by putting them on a forty-ton limit, that meant that all four boats could fish every night.

C.T.: I see.

T.T.: Now, these four boats kept in close contact with each other at all times, and if one of the boats didn't catch any fish, then maybe the one that was around a lot of fish would bring in that man's forty tons, or to keep the average up to what we wanted. And a lot of times, all four boats would go out, and only one boat would catch fish, and so we wouldn't want to limit him to forty tons, when we had a forty-ton limit for the four boats. So then if he knew that the other boats had missed completely, he would maybe bring in a hundred tons of fish.

C.T.: And then divide it?

T.T.: No, no, no, no, no, to each his own. But what he would do was to be sure that they didn't have any, because if the other boats would catch fish, then he would lose everything above forty tons. We wouldn't accept it, because that was the limit for his boat.

A lot of times, when you have four boats, there'd be one boat that would be laid up or have engine trouble. This boat may not go out for two or three days, then we would increase that tonnage per boat for the limit, when they came in.

C.T.: This was a pretty flexible thing.

T.T.: Yes, it was flexible. Every night the skippers of the boats would come here and they would say to me, "Well, what does it look like tonight? How much can we bring in.?" And then I would say, "Well, the Virginia can't go out tonight, so go ahead and add another fifteen tons to your limit." Or maybe two boats couldn't go out, might be engine trouble or something like that. As I said, these boats would all go to different places looking for the fish. Then, sometimes you have better fishermen on one boat as compared to the others. Fishing involves a lot of experience.

C.T.: Were these fishermen still independent fishermen? Did they own their own boats?

T.T.: Yes, they were all independent. We dealt individually with each boat. We always tried to give them a fair amount of their catch.

C.T.: You mentioned earlier that other methods of unloading had to be used when these boats began bringing in more fish.

T.T.: That's right, because one of our boats could put a hundred and twenty-five tons in the hatch. So then we had to go out and get a machine---called a vacuum pump. It is similar to your vacuum cleaner in your house. We would flood the holds with water, drop these hoses in there, then the vacuum just sucked the fish right up into the tube and into the elevator, and then

they were weighed. With this pump, and it was a small pump, we could unload forty tons an hour from a boat. Then we would put them into the brine tanks; we had capacity for eighty tons of brine, and we would fill up our brine tanks and work out of either the brine tanks or the fresh fish coming in daily. But there was a period of about five days out of the month when the purse seiners did not go out. During full moon period, they couldn't catch any fish, so it was two days before the full moon, the day of the full moon, and then after the full moon. Then, we would brine as much as we could to carry us over those five days, or maybe we might have one or two days of overhauling to do, when we didn't care whether they got any fish or not.

C.T.: When you kept the fish in the brine solution, was that quite similar, or the same method that you'd used with mackerel when you were canning earlier?

T.T.: Same thing. Yes, very same thing. In other words, we kept that brine water at about fourteen degrees to keep the fish fresh. We could run fish into the tanks, and run them for seven days with the brine. We didn't want to freeze the fish, naturally.

C.T.: When did you get refrigeration?

T.T.: We got our first small refrigeration plant during the war, which was around 'forty-two or 'forty-three. And then we built a new unit, a big unit with a hundred ton capacity, in 'fifty-five.

C.T.: When you had made all these changes in the canning process, did this involve just throwing out an old machine and getting a new one? Or were a lot of them reworked---the original machines reworked?

T.T.: No, they were all new equipment. All new equipment. You can't modify old equipment because everything is high speed, you're going into higher speed, which meant bigger pieces of equipment.

C.T.: So you've had a lot of capital investment, then?

T.T.: Our capital investment in the plant was about three hundred and ninety thousand dollars in equipment alone, not buildings.

C.T.: Over the years, that is?

T.T.: No, we carried that all the time.

C.T.: I see.

T.T.: About a three hundred ninety thousand dollar---

Unknown voice: Hellooo.[17]

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[17] A prospective buyer of the Western Canners property had just arrived on the premises. This terminated this interview.

California State College at Fullerton O.H. #75

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW BETWEEN: DATE: December 10, 1968

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. T. A. (Tommy) Thomas

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Charmaine Tichenor

SUBJECT: Fishing in Newport Beach

C.T.: We're continuing today in the series of interviews with Mr. Thomas. This is the third interview, it is December tenth, nineteen sixty-eight. The interviewer is Charmaine Tichenor, and once again we're in Mr. Thomas' office at Western Canners in Newport Beach.

Mr. Thomas, going back to the early days of Western Canners, did Mr. Longmoor build the cannery?

T.T.: No, this cannery was in existence at the time he came down here. But Mr. Longmoor went into the canning business in nineteen sixteen with the Curtis Corporation in Long Beach.

The Curtis Corporation was originally in Bloomington, near Riverside. When Mr. Curtis, who came out to California for health reasons, arrived in Bloomington and saw all those olive trees, and saw that nothing was being done with the fruit on them, decided maybe that he should can those olives. He talked to the different ranchers in the area and obtained some research from the University of California about the canning procedures for olives, and he then started the Curtis Corporation. Then in nineteen sixteen they

moved to Long Beach.

In the meantime, Alexander B. Stewart purchased the Curtis labels and the Curtis plant in Long Beach. Mr. Longmoor was general manager of the Curtis Corporation in Long Beach until nineteen thirty-four. He was also a broker. He purchased the labels when the Curtis Corporation went out of business and then he had other canners can the olives in Lindsay, California[18] by the Lindsay Ripe Olive Company; the chiles and pimientoes were canned in Oxnard (see (14), Fig. 5), and the fish was canned in Terminal Island (see Fig. 6). Then he continued serving the customers that he had serviced since nineteen sixteen.

Then in nineteen thirty-five, Mr. Longmoor came to Newport Beach, and this little cannery here called "Balboa Packing Company" was in financial troubles and Mr. Longmoor purchased the cannery from these people and started packing on our own label, which was the Curtis label. We originally only canned mackerel, but as the years went by, we then started to pack sardines, anchovies, squid, and later on, we packed albacore tuna, for not only the sport fishermen, but for our gift package that we operated all these years.

C.T.: Do you happen to remember Mr. Curtis' first name?

T.T.: No, I don't. That goes back too many years. I don't even think that Mr. Longmoor knew Curtis or anything

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[18] Lindsay, California is approximately fifty miles southeast of Fresno, California.

or anything about him, outside of the story that I'm telling you---

C.T.: Surely.

T.T.: That he came along and started the Curtis Corporation.

C.T.: That's a very interesting story, and the Lindsay Olive Corporation, of course, is still active, isn't it?

T.T.: Yes. Today the Lindsay Ripe Olive Company is the largest olive canning company in the world. They have merged with two or three smaller companies in the valley (San Joaquin), and today they're the largest.

C.T.: Was there any kind of a building program after this started up, under Mr. Longmoor's direction, did he expand the facilities after he took over the Balboa Packing Company?

T.T.: Yes, he did. The plant was a real small plant, their production shcedule was about twelve to fifteen tons per day, and with Mr. Longmoor's background and because he had the different territories which knew the Curtis brand, then he had to expand, so he added on to the building in nineteen thirty-eight to give us more room for packing facilities, for boiler space and for warehousing. And then we expanded twice more. And in nineteen fifty-five, we purchased an adjoining plant.

C.T.: What was the name of that plant?

T.T.: That was the West Coast Corporation, and it belonged to Van Camp. They went out of business here in Newport

Beach and we purchased the plant, which then gave us all the capacity we needed.

C.T.: You added more equipment at that time, too?

T.T.: No, we later added much more equipment, because in nineteen fifty-five we also went into the pet food production. We used the original plant for human consumption, and the new plant that we purchased for pet food.

C.T.: You kept the two operations separate then, for a while?

T.T.: That's right, because the law said that you cannot pack pet food in the same plant where you pack for human consumption, so we had to keep the two plants apart. But then as the business increased in the pet food division, and the fish were on a decline, we decided to cease operations in the human consumption plant and go all pet food. But we continued having the other canners in the area can for us under our label.

C.T.: What was your label?

T.T.: Curtis.

C.T.: Curtis---under the pet food operations?

T.T.: No, the pet food operations was Friskies.

C.T.: Friskies.

T.T.: For Carnation Company. But for human consumption, everything was under the Curtis brand. (See Fig. 18).

C.T.: What influenced your decision to go into pet food canning? Was this something you'd been thinking about for quite a while?

Labels used on Western Canners products.

T.T.: No, I wouldn't exactly say we were thinking of pet food. We were thinking about expanding our tuna operations, especially our Sportsman's Pack. There were more sports fishermen going out, and we had been thinking about going into San Diego and San Pedro and having receiving stations there to get more albacore to extend our season in the summertime, and also our winter pack of mackerel.

But when the Carnation people came along and they offered us the deal of producing for them, we accepted it, and it was a very, very fine situation---until we ran out of fish, and then they left us and went to their plant in Oregon.

C.T.: How did you develop the formula for the pet food canning? Was this something you worked out here?

T.T.: No. We had nothing to do with the formulas. The formulas were all fixed up at their Van Nuys laboratory by the Carnation people. And then the formulas were brought to us and we developed the formulas, because when you develop something in a laboratory, it isn't like in-line production; and we had to make a lot of changes to fit our production schedules. Not that we changed the formula, methods of mixing the formulas had to be changed. But the cereals, the fish, the water, the vitamins that we added, all remained the way the laboratory had worked it out.

C.T.: Friskies, I know, is still being canned. Do you know where they're doing their canning now, and whether they put any fish products into it?

T.T.: Yes, they have a plant in Hillsboro, Oregon, in Jefferson, Wisconsin, and in St. Joseph, Missouri, and those are the canned operations. The dry pet food is packed in Oakland, California, and also in Jefferson, Wisconsin.

C.T.: Do they include fish products in their process now?

T.T.: Yes. In Hillsboro, Oregon, they use what we call the bottom fish that comes from the draggers, because the fish up there are plentiful and cheap enough for the pet food operations. In Jefferson, Wisconsin, they use whiting fish from Lake Michigan. The whiting fish, a fresh water fish, in Jefferson, and the bottom fish that they use in Oregon, don't have the same quality that our mackerel had. Mackerel contains more protein and more value for the cats, but now that there is no more mackerel, the cats don't know any difference, I guess---

C.T.: /Laughter/

T.T.: They're still eating the bottom fish and the whiting fish.

C.T.: You mentioned the term "dragging" in connection with getting the bottom fish in Oregon. Could you explain that to me, I don't know what that means.

T.T.: Well---we did explain the methods of purse seining earlier. Now the drag operation uses a scoop net that is dragged behind the boat, and it's just, you might say, like a sack, built like a sack, and it's towed from the boat that's dragging. And they drag along the sandy bottom, so that they don't get caught in the rocks

down below, and the net is kept open by---you might say---doors, maybe a four by six by four door-like arrangement that keeps the net from collapsing, and it's fixed onto the drag so that the board is planing in the water and it keeps the sack open. The boards are just like this, you see, with the sack behind it, and they drag---maybe for an hour and then stop and haul the net in, and whatever they have in it, they bring it out. They use these drag boats in the north for market fishing, such as the dover sole, and the halibut, and the different species of fish that we use on the table, but they also get a lot of scrap fish and the fishermen deliver these to the cannery for pet food.

C.T.: So "dragging" refers to the method of netting; it's another word for seining, then.

T.T.: Yes, very definitely.

C.T.: Yes, that's interesting. When you first started canning albacore here, this was as a service to the sport fishermen in Newport Beach, as I understood it. Did you do this on a regular basis, or would you wait until you got a certain number of albacore on hand?

T.T.: Yes, we usually started right after the Fourth of July, and we had boxes here that we kept the fish in. When we accumulated approximately five tons, then we'd start our operations, but the n we recieved fish every day, so our operation was continuous from the Fourth of July until Labor Day. Then when the albacore moved out, that was the end of the season for us. It was a short season,

approximately sixty days.

C.T.: How many albacore would you say would be in a ton?

T.T.: Well, yes, that's an easy figure; if the fish averaged around twenty pounds, one hundred fish would be one ton. It's that simple.

C.T.: Yes, it is. Did you have any arrangement with the sport fishermen in the area at that time to can the albacore?

T.T.: Well, the only arrangement that we had, was advertising this job that we were going to do for the sport fishermen; we put bulletins on the sport fishing boats and at the sport fishing landings that we were ready to accept their fish at any time they brought it in. We were open here twenty-four hours a day, because some of the boats came in real late, and we had men here to receive the fish.

The fishermen brought the fish to us "in the round," with the heads on, and the entrails in them, because we had our own method of taking the eviscera out of these fish. We didn't want the fishermen to cut the whole stomach cavity out, because it was too much waste. We were trying to recover all the white meat possible. Then we would give them one can per pound of fish delivered to us in the round, and charge them a service charge per can, which amounted to twenty-two cents per can.

That made a good deal for the sport fishermen, because they didn't have to take these fish home and we canned them for them and all they took home was the cans. We started this operation in nineteen forty-eight,

and we were alone in this operation until about nineteen sixty. But now there are four or five sport fishing canneries, that just can fish for sport fishermen.

C.T.: This is an idea that's taken hold then, and proved pretty popular.

T.T.: Yes it did; it was a very, very, good idea, and now some of the other plants, the little plants that are dealing strictly with sport fishermen, are canning other species of fish, such as bonito, skipjack, and yellowfin tuna, and some of them are even canning a little barracuda, and it makes it a real nice deal for the fishermen, as well as for the little canneries that are operating.

C.T.: Yes, I can see where it would. You would say then, you were one of the first to come up with this arrangement?

T.T.: We were the first. In nineteen forty-eight, when we produced our first pack for the sport fishermen, we used to can on an average, two hundred tons per season for the sport fishermen. But lately, the last three or four years, it's dropped down to around fifty tons per year, because the other four or five plants that have started are all getting their share now, too.

C.T.: I see. And your label on that again was---

T.T.: That was the "Sportsman's" label. We had it copyrighted and a special label made strictly for the sports fisherman. (See Fig.18). On this label we had "Not to be Sold," imprinted on it, because we found out that a lot of these sports fishermen, especially when they had

a lot of fish to take home, would take it out and sell it in the stores at a cut-rate price and we found it on the shelves. Then we put "Not to be Sold," on the labels so they couldn't go on the shelf anymore.

C.T.: Well, that changed it from a sporting sort of idea /laughter/ to one for profit and they were in effect in competition with you, weren't they?

T.T.: That's right, they were, and I wouldn't say that all the sportsmen did that, but we did find some of it on the shelves. Then on the Sportsman's label, we have an area or a space where you could put the date in and any remarks that you care to add, and a place to sign your name, and then you can give it to your friends for Christmas. We pack it in what we call a "six-can pack" and a "twelve-can pack" and it makes a very nice present.

C.T.: I think you had mentioned that your shut-down date was in August of nineteen sixty-six. Is this correct?

T.T.: Yes.

C.T.: What sort of a procedure would you go through to close a large canning factory such as this? What was your first operation?

T.T.: Well, we knew we were going to close in August of sixty-six; we knew that in January, and all we did then was to produce for inventories and keep our inventories in balance. We had to pack twelve hours a day to have enough inventory on hand so that when we shut down in August, and moved

all the equipment from here to the Hillsboro plant in Oregon, that would give Hillsboro six months to reassemble all the equipment and start operations. We had enough inventory on hand to take care of sales; sales people in the head office in Los Angeles had all this programmed out. They knew just exactly how many cases they needed for the trade, and it worked out well. We started moving here in August and then Hillsboro was ready to go the following January, so they didn't lose business or lose any customers for lack of product.

C.T.: It was a pretty efficient change-over, then.

T.T.: That's right, now we had thirty-five men working here in the plant and all thirty-five men immediately started to dismantle the plant, and it didn't take very long. Everything was shipped by our own trucks from here to Hillsboro.

C.T.: You mean your own Western Canners trucks?

T.T.: No, the Carnation trucks. They have a lot of trucks, and so we just loaded them on and shipped them up there and they had their crews up there to immediately set up the plant. The building was started a year before we shut down, so all it meant was to take the equipment and reassemble all the equipment that we had here. I even went to Hillsboro and spent two weeks up there when they started the plant, to show the Hillsboro people how the operations were. We had everything moving right along and it was just a matter of moving and starting again.

C.T.: I see. Now were they in the process of canning at Hillsboro or was this a new operation for them?

T.T.: No, Hillsboro was the original dog food operation branch of the Carnation Company, but they only canned dog food, and it started---oh, I can't tell you the exact date, but I think it was in the 'thirties. They had that plant there. Then they started their plant in Jefferson, Wisconsin. Nothing but dog food. But when we came into the picture with Carnation Company, that was when they started experimenting with cat foods, and using a fish base.

After we had started---got the operation started---then Hillsboro started packing fish and so did Jefferson. With the same formulas, the only difference was in the kind of fish used.

C.T.: I see. Well, you now have your property for sale, and it looks like it represents quite a bit of water-front here in Newport Beach. Could you tell me what the footage is?

T.T.: Yes, we have two hundred and five feet of water frontage, and we have two hundred and twenty-one feet on our front street, and then on the two side streets, we have a hundred and seven feet. The plant is approximately twenty-five thousand square feet. We are semi-two stories, both plants had offices upstairs, the women's rest rooms were upstairs and the plant operations were

all on the ground floor, so now that we have the plant up for sale, we're just waiting.

C.T.: Any speculation as to what might happen to this property, what might be done with it?

T.T.: Well, I think it will be a restaurant. We've had more restaurant people contact us for a real nice waterfront restaurant; we've had about five or six inquiries regarding restaurants. And then we've had two or three inquiries concerning high rise apartment buildings, but the people are still looking at it, and we think that as of this date, we may sell out before the end of the year. If it doesn't, we'll just wait and see what happens.[19]

C.T.: Wait for the right buyer, as the expression goes.

T.T.: That's right.

C.T.: You do have a fairly large high rise right across the street. That's the---

T.T.: The Vista del Lido.

C.T.: When did that go up?

T.T.: That has been up about five years now. It's an eight story building, or the heighth limit here in Newport Beach, and has forty-two units in it. That's an own-your-own apartment building, and they were all sold within the first year.

C.T.: Having a fish cannery right across the street, then,

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[19] The Western Canners property was sold to Unger Pacific, Inc.; escrow closed September, 1969. It will be rebuilt, with the exterior to appear much as it does today (see Fig. 4). The interior, however, will be transformed into restaurants, shops, an art gallery, etc., according to a telephone conversation with Mr. Thomas on June 15, 1970.

didn't keep them from getting full occupancy at all?

T.T.: No, it didn't, in other words, they started five years ago and we've been here for thirty years. The people who came in there to buy all knew that the cannery was here or that they were in an M-1 zone and they couldn't stop the operations. We did have one or two fussy people over there who would come over and want to know when we were going to cease operations.

C.T.: /Laughter/

T.T.: But the rest of the people all liked it because I know almost every tenant over there. They used to come over and watch our operations here and watch our unloading facilities, and it's something different; you don't get a situation like that every place you move.

But I think most of the tenants were happy about it. Now, we still have tenants coming over here since we've been shut down, wondering if we really were going to sell the place for a high rise or maybe resume operations, so I told them, "Well, if the fish don't come back we're going to sell out and there will be a high-rise here." The property's too valuable for anything but a high-rise.

C.T.: I would think so, just looking around.

T.T.: Someday, this whole area's going to be high-rise, because there are only just so many water-front lots here and it will eventually all go to high-rise. Maybe the next five years, maybe the next ten years---we don't know.

C.T.: Well, you've had quite a unique opportunity to watch

Newport Beach grow, I would imagine, haven't you?

T.T.: Yes.

C.T.: What are some of the biggest changes you've noticed in the town?

T.T.: Oh, I would say people and traffic and just everything in general. It was just a little sleeping operation--- I mean the town was real small. You can't imagine. We only had one little shopping area which was down on the beach front. We only had two little grocery stores here, a little variety store, one drug store, and one or two tackle stores here on the beach.

Balboa had a drug store and a couple of restaurants, but their big operation was in the summer months. Here in Newport proper, in the summertime we had the vacationers, and in the wintertime we had the activity of the fishermen and the canners and the shipyards, wo it was kind of an all year operation for the Newport businessmen.

But there were very, very few houses in Newport at that time. I don't know what the population was when I first came down here, but it was mighty small.[20] There were fifteen houses on Lido Isle (See (2), Fig. 7) when I came.

C.T.: My goodness. Were they the large, rather luxurious homes? Were they of that style that you have today?

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[20]Samuel A. Meyer's Fifty Golden Years, Newport Beach, Newport Harbor Publishing Company, 1957, p. 59. "In 1936 there was an estimated population in the whole town of 3600 people. . ."

T.T.: No, they weren't really large homes. They were the smaller homes, but very nice homes.

No, Lido Isle was first built from a mud flat.[21] All utilities were underground and the streets were wide and very nice, and then they had a limitation on the type of building that you could build, more of a Spanish style with tile roofs.

C.T.: A building regulation for all the homes going up?

T.T.: That's right, in other words, the Griffith people, who owned Lido Isle, put the restrictions on, that you had to build Spanish style, with tile roofs. But then when the war (World War II) came along and when the influx of people came in here, they couldn't buy tile in those days. Now the roofs are of composition and shingles and so forth. The whole picture changed; the houses are more modern than the Spanish-style homes.

C.T.: Did the early homes have the private docks that I think almost every house there on the waterfront seems to have?

T.T.: Well, on the waterfront lots, yes, very definitely. They were all people who owned boats. They had little piers out in front. When I came down here, most of the

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[21] Orange County: Indians to Industry, by C. E. and Marilyn Parker, Santa Ana, Orange County Title Company, 1963, p. 78, contains the following information regarding Lido Isle's origin: First called Parkinson's Island, Lido Isle had been the property of the Pacific Electric, which sold the "mud flat" to W. K. Parkinson, an oil millionaire, for $45,000. In 1923, by use of dredged earth-fill, Parkinson had the level of the island raised 11 feet. The land passed to the Griffith Company after Parkinson's death, and this concern developed it into one of the finest residential sections in southern California.

homes were waterfront homes. There were maybe one or two or three in the center. They were cheaper lots, naturally, the inside lots, and the north side of the island was more expensive than the south side of the island, because the south side got the afternoon winds and the sun all day, which made them kind of warm. But what we call the northside homes were the most expensive lots and homes.

C.T.: Do you happen to remember any figure on the price of lots when Lido was being developed?

T.T.: Well, when it first was developed, the lots were pretty expensive, but those people who originally built the island went bankrupt, and the Griffith Corporation, which built the island, took it over and sold all the lots.[22] Oh, the lots were cheap. You could have bought lots over there for five hundred dollars a lot.

And here across from the plant, these lots could be bought for taxes; for seventy-five dollars, eighty dollars or a hundred dollars. Now, the value of these lots would be about twenty-five thousand dollars per lot.

C.T.: My goodness. During World War II, when meat was

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[22] Paul Palmer, who was in charge of the sales agency for the Griffith Company in 1935, has this to say about early prices for Lido Isle lots, Meyers' Fifty Golden Years, pp. 55-58: "Thirty-foot, off-the-water lots were priced at $700. . . We used to advertise a 45' lot, which was really a lot and a half, at $1,195, $100 cash and $10 a month . . . a home to be built at about $2.75 a square foot. . . loan payments with 100% financing as low as $39.48 a month, for a $5,000 residence!"

rationed, Mr. Thomas, did this affect your production, did people start eating more fish then?

T.T.: Well, they might have eaten a lot of fish if we had it for them, but when the war broke out, the first thing that happened was that they closed the harbor for about four weeks. The fishermen couldn't get out, because they came through and checked every fisherman, as far as his activities were concerned. They checked to see whether they were foreign agents or whatever they might be, and it took about four weeks to go through and scan all these fishermen.

Then when operations started again, the government took fifty-five per cent of our pack. Not only our pack, but the whole industry pack. That went to the armed services, and to the allied countries.

Now, here in the case of Newport Beach and the three canneries that were operating here, all our pack went to Russia. We shipped from Newport Beach to Montreal by rail, and then the ships took it from there and went to Russia, to the North Sea, for delivery there. I've heard this many times before, that very, very little of our mackerel ever got to Russia. The U-boats sank all the freighters in the North Sea on that run up there.

But we were curtailed in our domestic shipments, with only forty-five per cent of the pack, plus the shut-down of four weeks, this cut our production way down.

I think if there'd been a lot of fish available,

maybe people would have eaten more fish, because with the rationing of meat /telephone ring/ more people would---[23]

C.T.: Mr. Thomas, how did you hear about the possibility of the shipments not reaching Russia at that time?

T.T.: Well, here in the plant during the war, a Major was stationed here who watched our production, to see that the proper markings were put on the cases, and that the cases were properly sealed and strapped with metal bands, so that in case they had to throw them in the water, before they hit the beach, they wouldn't sink. They were waterproof cases.

Well, these Army men would always tell us, "Well, the last shipment that we made to Russia hadn't reached Russia because the ship was sunk," and it just seemed like after every shipment that we made, the officer here in charge would say, "Well, it never reached Russia."

So then I had two or three boys here from Newport Beach who were fishermen before they went into the Army. They were in Russia at that time, and they said that they had never seen any of the mackerel from here in Russia. But over in the South Pacific islands, some of our mackerel was shipped there, too, and we got letters from the boys, and they even sent the label

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[23] The tape recorder was turned off at this point to allow Mr. Thomas to answer the telephone.

back with their names on it, saying that they had liked our mackerel and wished they could get some more.

C.T.: My goodness. How long did this government supervision of your canning last?

T.T.: I would say that it lasted about three seasons. But they kept changing the amounts. In other words, it started off with fifty-five per cent of our pack, and then dropped to forty-five per cent of our pack, and then the last season that we were packing, it was about twenty-five per cent of our pack.

C.T.: Would you estimate that this was before the war was over, before V.J. Day?[24]

T.T.: Well, that's something I can't remember. Was V.J. Day in 'forty-five?

C.T.: I believe so.

T.T.: Well then, it was before. Because we started packing in nineteen forty-two. 'Forty-two, 'forty-three, 'forty-four.

C.T.: I see.

T.T.: Those were the three seasons that they were here. And then from then on, we were released. But we had a lull in mackerel in 'forty-five and 'forty-six, too, that kind of kept our production down. Then we had to go back and rebuild our domestic market. People had pretty well forgotten about our mackerel.

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[24] "V.J." Day; initials stood for "Victory in Japan". On September 2, 1945, the formal Japanese surrender was made to General of the Army Douglas MacArthur on board the battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay. World War II was over. Encyclopedia Americana, 1969, New York, Americana Corporation, Vol. 29, p. 520.

C.T.: I could see how that would happen. /Laughter/

T.T.: We got it built up again to where we were going back to normal, and then came another lull in 'fifty-six and 'fifty-seven which kind of hurt us and it kept going downhill; and that's when we made the changeover from packing for human consumption to straight pet food production.

It took very little fish for pet food, where in human consumption packing, it took the whole fish.

C.T.: At this time you probably decided that you couldn't trust the intake of the fish, and you decided to change your operations a little bit to fit this?

T.T.: Yes, very definitely. We saw the trend coming. Every so often you have cycles, whether it be in fishing or farming or citrus. Nature takes care of those things. So we would expect peak years and slow years. But then when it became a steady, gradual loss of fish, right down till they actually disappeared, then we knew that we were out of business.

C.T.: That was unmistakable, as compared to the cycles?

T.T.: That's right, but as I said, your farmers are the harvesters of the land, and the fishermen are the harvesters of the sea.

C.T.: I first had my attention drawn to your canning plant through a newspaper article that ran in the Los Angeles Times, in August of nineteen sixty-eight.

Have there ever been any other newspaper stories, or television stories?

T.T.: Well, in nineteen sixty-three, Bob Wright, on television, Channel four, made a picture here in the plant, called "Survey Sixty-Three." At that time we were producing for both pet foods and human consumption. And he went through the process of our producing the sportsmen's albacore, and the history of the canning of the Sportsman's Pack, and showed the results in it. It was a very nice picture, it ran for a half hour on Channel four.

C.T.: Was that N.B.C.? (National Broadcasting Corporation).

T.T.: N.B.C., yes. Then along came the "Happy Wanderers," "Slim" and Henrietta Barnard, and I know that many people have watched that program. And they came through the plant and picked up the story of the canning industry here in Newport Beach; it was about a fifteen minute program. But then our real swan song was presented by Ralph Story, when we were shut down.

It was just a nostalgic era of Newport Beach and they went around showing all the rust that had accumulated in our shut-down period, and Ralph Story does such a fine job of commenting.

Then a young girl by the name of Claire Strauch came in and wanted to feature us in the local paper, concerning the phase-out of the fish---you have a copy

which you can follow up on.[25] Then as you mentioned before, you saw the story in the Los Angeles Times on the ceasing of operations in the plant, too.

C.T.: Yes. Well, Western Canners has been of interest, as a cannery, and as a place of color and activity in Newport Beach; it's been of interest to other people, too, I can see.

I've heard something of the dory fishermen who sell their fish near Newport Pier. Could you tell me a little bit about them?

T.T.: Well, the dory fishermen here in Newport are the oldest fishermen. The dories were running even before the harbor was made here. There was no harbor at all, and they used to come in on the beach and unload their daily catches there, and what fish they didn't sell to the local people, the wholesalers would buy.

But today, the dory fishermen are still operating and they will always operate, because the city has set that area aside, so if the younger generation will pick up the fishing from their families, then the dory fishermen will continue.

C.T.: Is this how it's been carried on so far, handed down from father to son?

T.T.: Well, I would say yes, about fifty per cent of it

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[25] Mr. Thomas was referring to the "Weekender," the magazine section of The Daily Pilot, Friday, July 28, 1967, Article is entitled, "Western Canners Stands Idle Since the Fish Went Thataway," and is included with the envelope of supporting documents to this project.

has been, because when I first came here to Newport, the fathers of some of these fishermen who are fishing today were actually doing the fishing. Then some of the sons would pick it up. I think back in the old days, there were around fifteen or sixteen dories, and I think today there are only about six or seven that are real dory fishermen, who go out daily to bring in their catches.

And I would say that all the fish that they bring in today is sold to people who go down on the beach. And it's very interesting to go there, even when they come in, to see how each fisherman helps each other, yet they're competitors when it comes to selling the the fish.

C.T.: /Laughter/ I see.

T.T.: But they'll help each other when it's time to bring their boats in.

These dories come right up on the beach and then they're hauled up on the sand on rollers, and their dory becomes their little sales table. They sell right out of the dory.

C.T.: I think they turn some of the dories upside down, too?

T.T.: Yes, they'll do that and they even have little boards where they trim the fish, and a lot of the wives will go down and help their husbands sell the fish. This

gives them a rest, because they fish all night and then they can't stay on the beach selling their fish all morning, so the wives will come down and help, and even the kids will come down and help. Especially on week-ends when there are so many tourists down here. And I think it's a wonderful place for people to see this activity, because I don't think we have any other dory fishermen on the coast.

C.T.: It would seem to be unique. What time do you think they go out fishing?

T.T.: Well, they'll leave around midnight. It all depends on what type of fish they're going after. If they're going for bottom fish, then they have to go to the banks, and normally, they'll go to the Fourteen Mile Bank[26] for that type of fish. If they're going to go for bonito, well, then they have to go either up the coast or down the coast.

They don't use nets on those boats, they're all hook and line boats, and they run what we call "gangs" of lines, where they have maybe anywhere from fifty to a hundred hooks on each "gang," and they're all baited. As they catch the fish, they pull in these "gangs," take off the fish, re-bait them, send them

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[26] The Fourteen Mile Bank is found by following a compass setting from Newport Harbor of 192°. It is approximately thirteen nautical miles from the mouth of Newport Harbor.

back out again.

C.T.: How many men will be in a dory?

T.T.: One man.

C.T.: One man dory.

T.T.: One man per boat, yes.

C.T.: Sounds like hard work, too.

T.T.: Well, I think all types of fishing is hard work. Not only that you have to work hard, but you have to fight the elements, the cold weather, the being wet, it's just a hard job. You have to be a born fisherman, you don't make fishermen.

C.T.: Right. In our first interview, I believe you mentioned that you had wanted to go to sea yourself, when you were younger. Have you ever regretted this at any time, that you weren't a sailor?

T.T.: Well, yes and no. I've enjoyed my work here in the cannery, because the cannery work has been a challenge. In other words, you never could predict what tomorrow would bring, in the fishing business. And that, I think, was a challenge, to try every day to second guess nature or the fishermen's operations.

Now, you might ask, "Have I regretted not going to sea?" In a way. I think that the sea has something to it that makes a man want to go---the adventure part about it, the world-wide traveling. Yes, I kind of miss it at times. But really, I don't regret the days that I put in the canning business, and, if I had my

life to live over, I wouldn't want to omit a day that I've had in the past.

C.T.: Well, you haven't been so far away from the sea, either, at that, have you? /Laughter/

T.T.: No, I've lived here all my life on the coast. Before I came to Newport, I lived in San Pedro, which was on the coast, and I used to go down and sit on the pier and fish a little bit and go swimming every day, and the same thing here in Newport, so I've been on the ocean, but I miss it. If I get up on the bluff and look out on the ocean, /laughter/ why, there's a little feeling comes that maybe it's too bad that I couldn't have gone to sea, maybe not on the big boats, but perhaps I might have been a fisherman, too.

I had opportunities. Back in the old days, there were quite a few foreigners who were building boats. But to be able to fly the American flag, and to fish the deep waters, they had to carry an American citizen on that boat and he was signed on as a captain. I had three or four opportunities when these foreigners came to me and said, "Well now, we'd like to have you come on, we'll make you a part owner on the boat, if you'll come on," as what they called a "citizen captain".

C.T.: Do you remember what countries these people were from?

T.T.: Well, the first people who appraoched me were Greeks, in San Pedro, and they wanted me to go to an engine school where they were building the engine for the boat,

and I would have become the engineer on the boat, as well as the "citizen captain".

And then the next boat belonged to Portuguese people. It was a tuna clipper out of San Diego. They were all immigrants in this country, none of them had been citizens as yet. I had that opportunity, and then the other ones concerned two or three American people who were involved in the boat, but the crews were Portuguese, too, and they wanted a "citizen captain". And that might have been the turning point in my life---in other words, if I had been able to go to sea, I would have accepted them, because it was before I came to this cannery, and I was looking for a job and the fishermen made good money; the only trouble was that you were away so many days from home.

It was hard to get men to go, and that's why the foreign people were better fishermen than the Americans were. The Americans didn't want to go out and stay at sea for ninety days or a hundred days. They'd rather stay on the beach and have a job here where they could be home on weekends with their families, but the foreign people didn't figure it that way; they figured that they could go out there and if they worked for ten or fifteen years, they could make enough money so they could go home and stay the rest of their lives and retire.

C.T.: Would this be a family tradition, as far as you know,

with some of the---oh, for instance, the Portuguese and the Greek fishermen?

T.T.: Very definitely. The sons today all have the biggest tuna clippers. They're more modern than their father's were. Their fathers, say, ran boats that were a hundred-ton capacity boats, smaller boats. But today, the younger generation, whether they be Portuguese, or Slovanians or Greeks or whatever, are now building boats that are thousand-ton capacity boats, and they go all over the world now.

If the fish are in Africa, they go to Africa from here, and they deliver in Africa, or they deliver in Puerto Rico. And if there are fish down off Peru, they go to Peru, and then they either bring them back to San Diego or to San Pedro, or else they'll go in through the Canal and deliver to Puerto Rico. And if they're over in the South Pacific, they'll deliver to Samoa, because your bigger plants today have plants all over the world. The young generation now is going to those places. Where there's fish, they are going.

C.T.: Would these fish be frozen, then?

T.T.: Yes, they're all frozen in brine. That way they can keep them indefinitely. The minute that they're caught they're put in the brine holds; I would say that those fish are frozen solid within two or three hours, so that when they're delivered to the canneries, they're a top-grade fish.

C.T.: I think that you had mentioned earlier that there are countries, and Russia, I believe is among them, which process the fish on the high seas, they have factory ships. As far as you know, does the United States have this sort of procedure?

T.T.: No. Here in the United States we don't have factory ships. They're talking about it, just like I mentioned before. I don't think we could get crews for those ships. You're not going to get any Americans to go out on a factory ship for six, seven, eight months at a time without going back to port. That doesn't happen to us, our economy is too big for that, or too different; where your Russian ships, and your Japanese, and your Swedish ships, being from fish-eating countries, where they have more poverty, they get crews and they go out and work on the factory ships. But here in the United States, we don't have <u>any</u> factory ships, that I know of.

C.T.: So there are a lot of economic factors that would prevent us from developing in that direction, then?

T.T.: That's right. Although they're talking about it. It keeps coming up all the time---that the United States is lagging in the fisheries, in research, in scouting or in the types of ships we have. Some Congressmen, especially from Washington and Oregon are fighting for subsidies, you know, to build bigger ships, so that the government would help the fishermen out, and they <u>have</u> helped them a little bit in the last five or six

years. Not big boats, but medium-sized boats. Like salmon boats in Alaska, and there are a few boats here in Southern California which have been built with the government's help. But when it comes to factory ships and so forth, we're way behind, yes.

C.T.: How does the government extend this help? Would it be just an individual owner making an application to the government? Or is it based on the kind of fish that they bring in? You mentioned salmon in Alaska; is that a more protected industry?

T.T.: Salmon and halibut are two industries that are <u>really</u> protected, closely watched, because they can control the amount of fish that are produced every year. The salmon have to go up the river to spawn, and they count them when they go up. As for halibut, there are certain areas where they only let them fish for five or six days, then close the area, and then open up a new area so that the breeding grounds are not disturbed.

Regarding the way applications are filed with the government, if a known fisherman who has a good reputation and who perhaps has lost his boat, or he wants to build a bigger boat, the government usually will help these fellows on half the cost of the boat.

Now, we have two boats right out here at our dock that are sixty-seven foot steel boats. Both boys who own those boats are very good fishermen; one boy lost his boat in a storm, the other one sold his boat

because it was too small, and the government helped both of them. They had to put up half of the money--- which is approximately fifty thousand dollars apiece, and then the government put up the other fifty thousand. And they give them a good interest rate; if they do happen to have a bad season, the government men connected with the program here on the coast can go ahead and help them, if they make a default on a payment, then they'll be helped.

C.T.: I see. So the individual circumstances have a lot to do with it?

T.T.: Yes. It's definitely an individual who gets the money. But you have to be a producer, and known, and then, they figure that if they can put up half the cost, they must be pretty good men, at that.

C.T.: Well, Mr. Thomas, this has been another very fine interview session. It has been very interesting. Thank you very much.

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