

The Port of Granville and the North American Fisheries in the 18th Century

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RESEARCH NOTE

The Port of Granville and the North American Fisheries in the 18th Century

THE PORT OF GRANVILLE, on the western coast of the Cotentin in lower Normandy, is little known by historians. Maritime historiography of Ancien Regime France has concentrated mainly on the study of major ports involved in the circuit of tropical commerce: Saint-Malo, Nantes, Le Havre, La Rochelle, Bordeaux, Marseilles, etc. Researchers have shown little interest in less important ports, especially when — as was the case for Granville — their main activity was fishing off Newfoundland. In addition research on Granville involved another handicap: the civil archives of the département de la Manche were destroyed during the Battle of Normandy in 1944. As a result, it has become rather difficult to carry out detailed research on the history of Granville. Luckily, there is one major exception to the general lack of information: Granville's ships' outfitting rolls (roles d'armement) have been preserved intact in the local Marine archives.¹ With these sources, recorded by the marine administration, a serial analysis of sea trade for the port of Granville can be carried out. A close study of these records reveals that Granville was one of the most dynamic French ports in the 18th century while being almost completely specialized in high seas fishing.²

Granville's outfitting for cod fishing in North America goes back at least to the mid-16th century, when it is mentioned in a charter dated 1564.³ Data is sparse for the 17th century. A study by Nicolas Langlois shows that 20 ships were outfitted for Newfoundland in 1627. 24 ships were listed in the 1664 inventory of the French fleet and Montmort's survey in 1687 indicates that there were

1 These documents are kept at the Archives Municipales in Granville.

2 The following studies have been published on Granville in the 18th century: J. Darsel, "Le Port de Granville au XVIIIe siècle: trafic maritime, pêche, guerre de course", *Revue de l'Avranchin et du Pays de Granville*, a. 85, t. 44, no. 250 (1967), pp. 1-19; R. Kaninda, "Les Relations commerciales entre Granville et Marseille au XVIIIe siècle (1709-1792)", M.A. thesis, Aix-en-Provence, 1969; C. de la Morandière, "Les Déboires d'un capitaine morutier de Granville à Terre-Neuve, 1769", *Revue du Département de la Manche*, t. 14, fasc. 53 (1972), pp. 62-71; C. de la Morandière, "Le Port de Granville des origines à nos jours", *Etudes Normandes*, no. 50 (1955), pp. 245-64; C. de la Morandière, *Histoire de Granville* (Paris, 1966). On the trade out of St. Malo, see Jean-Francois Brière, "Le trafic terre-neuvier malouin dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle, 1713-1755", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, No. 22 (Novembre 1978), pp. 356-74". On the market for cod in 18th century France, see Laurier Turgeon, "Les structures de la consommation de la morue en France au XVIIIe siècle", *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* (1984), pp. 21-41.

3 J. Darsel, "Le Port de Granville au XVIIIe siècle", p. 3.

25.⁴ Saint-Malo was then by far the leading French port outfitting for the Newfoundland fisheries: by the end of the 17th century, it was sending close to 100 ships a year to this destination.

In 1722, the first year for which outfitting rolls are available, Granville sent only 32 ships with 922 men aboard to the North American fisheries. By the end of the century, however, it was sending every year close to 100 ships carrying between 3,000 and 4,000 men: more than a threefold increase in 75 years. During those years, the port became far too small to accommodate all of its ships and a new jetty had to be constructed starting in 1750. An examination of the outfitting rolls (Table One) shows that from 1722 to 1792, the port of Granville outfitted 4,027 ships totalling 389,822 tons for the North American fishing grounds.⁵ The figures for the period 1713 to 1721 are not known. The number of ships for the years 1760 and 1762 — war years with no or very few ships outfitted — are also not available.

From 1722 to the War of the Austrian Succession, the number of ships outfitted each year increased nearly threefold, from 32 to 91 in 1743. Post-war recovery was rapid with outfitting soon reaching a high yearly ceiling of 90-95 ships between 1751 and 1755. But recovery was only partial after 1763 with fishing expeditions levelling off at approximately 80 ships per year between 1766 and 1772. Outfitting did not return to levels common in the 1750s until 1774-1776. Recovery was speedy but shortlived after the American Revolutionary War, since the number of expeditions began to drop again from 99 ships in 1787 to 74 in 1792. Remarkably high levels were reached in 1743 and 1776 (a record for the century: 106 ships), both years which immediately preceded the outbreak of war.

The variations of the average tonnage per ship are sizable. After a sharp drop from 1722 to 1726 (65 tons), the average tonnage nearly doubled to 124 tons in 1754. In 1755, a long downward trend began and continued until the American Revolutionary War (86 tons in 1777). After the war, the average tonnage increased again, but not as much as in the first half of the century; it did, however, exhibit a tendency to move downwards after 1787.

From 1722 to 1792, Granville sent a total of 135,212 men to the Newfoundland fisheries.⁶ This averages out to a little over five men per day over a period of 71 years. Between 1722 and 1730, the figures remained at about 1,000 men per year. Then numbers began to climb drastically between 1731 and 1754: the Newfoundland-bound fishermen quadrupled to nearly 4,000 men per year. Numbers levelled off at this high point (between 3,000 and 4,000 men), dropping

4 Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscrits français 18596, fo. 17; C. de la Morandière, *Histoire de la pêche française de la morue dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (Paris, 1962), t. 1, p. 289.

5 The destination of one ship is missing in 1754. This ship therefore does not appear in regional shipping figures.

6 The destination of a 41-man crew (a number excluding green cod fishing) is missing in 1754. Therefore it does not appear in regional figures.

exceptionally in 1768 and 1771, up to 1786 which had the highest level for the century (4,076 men). Lastly, a sharp drop of about one-third occurred from 1787 to 1792. These figures are enormous when compared to the number of inhabitants in Granville: they mean that in the best of times, Granville was able to send across the Atlantic each year a number of men equal to nearly half its total population of 8 or 9,000. The explanation lies in the fact that a significant percentage of the crews actually came from rural areas of western Cotentin, not from Granville.

In order to understand the overall development of the trends outlined above, it is necessary to grasp the internal workings of the fishing industry. This industry was divided into several geographic zones, each carrying on activities having different technical characteristics. As is well known, two major types of fishing were practiced at Newfoundland in the 18th century. The first type, green cod fishing or mobile fishing (*pêche errante*) was carried out with small ships called bankers (*banquais*) in the fishing banks off the Newfoundland coast at a distance of 30 to 150 miles from shore. The fish was simply salted on board the ships which had left France in March or April. They would return in September or October without ever having landed or sometimes without even seeing land, a very unique situation in transatlantic sailing. The second type, dry cod fishing, also called sedentary fishing (*pêche sédentaire*) was carried out in land-based long-boats along the coasts of Newfoundland and North America. Cod was salted and dried on shore; thus ships were not used for fishing but rather to transport crews which could be quite sizable (more than 150 men) since they worked partly on land.

From 1722 to 1792, 2,344 Granville ships were engaged in mobile fishing at the Banks (58 per cent of all ships bound for the Newfoundland fisheries). Unlike Saint-Malo, Granville had traditionally been engaged in green cod fishing. The number of bankers rose from 24 in 1722 to 52 in 1739 and remained stable at a high level until 1755. Recovery seems to have been very difficult after the Seven Years' War; pre-war levels were not matched until 1775. The record level for the century was set in 1776 with 63 bankers. After that year, outfitting declined, particularly after 1787.

From 1722 to 1792, 35,559 men or 26 per cent of Granville's crews sent to the North American fisheries were engaged in mobile fishing. Though the majority of the ships involved in transatlantic fishing were bankers, the vast majority of men (74 per cent) worked in sedentary fishing. The number of men sent to the Banks doubled between 1722 and 1750-53 (from 437 to 930 per year) and then showed a definite decrease linked to a decline in crew density on board.

Granville outfitted 1,114 ships (28 per cent of all ships sent to the North American fisheries) for the coast of Newfoundland between 1722 and 1792. Until 1736, sedentary fishing remained relatively unimportant and concentrated almost exclusively on the Gaspé peninsula and Labrador. Only four sedentary fishing ships out of 152 reached Newfoundland during this period. Granville

Table One

Granville Outfitting to the North American Fishing Grounds
(all destinations)

years	number of ships	average tonnage/ship	number of men
1722	32	97.5	922
1723	40	85.7	967
1724	53	75.9	1,106
1725	54	75.3	1,170
1726	43	65.3	818
1727	46	71.8	1,034
1728	48	74	1,121
1729	47	70.1	1,053
1730	46	71.4	1,022
1731	51	72.1	1,132
1732	59	73.1	1,368
1733	61	75	1,301
1734	50	75	1,137
1735	63	73.9	1,412
1736	66	78.9	1,611
1737	71	79.2	1,969
1738	67	79.2	1,700
1739	77	80.8	2,068
1740	70	83.2	2,054
1741	74	86.7	2,352
1742	76	88.5	2,665
1743	91	92	3,295
1744	67	82.9	2,020
1745	4	121.2	277
1746	2	90	45
1747	3	120	112
1748	11	90	217
1749	66	105.9	2,449
1750	85	108.3	3,083
1751	95	119	3,416
1752	93	120.7	3,676
1753	91	116.2	3,476
1754	93	124.2	3,987
1755	94	118	3,593
1756	1	60	12
1757	1	200	91

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1758	1	80	37
1759	0	-	0
1760	?	?	?
1761	0	-	0
1762	?	?	?
1763	36	109.8	1,206
1764	57	116.9	2,367
1765	65	110.7	2,880
1766	79	112.5	3,452
1767	82	106.5	3,376
1768	79	98.8	3,030
1769	79	100	3,151
1770	82	96.6	3,284
1771	69	92.9	2,463
1772	83	98.5	3,344
1773	87	99.5	3,256
1774	89	99.1	3,527
1775	96	93.9	3,461
1776	106	94.3	3,617
1777	86	85.8	2,448
1778	2	166	24
1779	0	-	0
1780	0	-	0
1781	0	-	0
1782	0	-	0
1783	61	104.2	2,185
1784	86	106.5	2,948
1785	91	108.2	3,319
1786	97	112.6	4,076
1787	99	111.6	3,669
1788	95	104.9	3,440
1789	89	102.4	2,880
1790	84	104.9	2,844
1791	82	101.4	2,767
1792	74	101.1	2,466

Source: Archives Municipales Granville, série C 6, 141 to 178 (armements 1722-1759), C 6, 179 to 212 and 12 P, 1 to 23 (désarmements 1726 to 1793).

fishermen were not to come to the island's shores until 1737. The number of ships increased rapidly from three in 1737 to 19 in 1743 and 43 in 1769. Outfitting then reached a plateau approaching 40 vessels per year until the end of the century. This represents a steady increase which after 1763 was due essentially to the closing of the Canadian coast to French fishing. The sedentary fishing

fleet as a whole did not grow between the 1750s and the 1760s.

The portion of the tonnage outfitted for the coast of Newfoundland was 41 per cent for the century, a much higher figure than the number of ships outfitted for that destination would suggest. This is because the average tonnage per ship (144 tons) was twice that of bankers. But the average tonnage per man on board was very low: only two tons between 1722 and 1792 whereas it was close to 5 tons on bankers. Thus the average space per man on a ship engaged in sedentary fishing was twice as small as that available on a banker. Contrary to what one might have expected, men were most crowded on the larger ships, not on the smaller ones. This apparent anomaly is, of course, due to differences in fishing techniques. The banker was an actual fishing vessel whose crew could not exceed the number of men able to fish from a single side of the ship; the sedentary fishing vessel, however, serving only to transport manpower, could take on board virtually as many men as the ship could hold.

From 1722 to 1758, Granville also sent 202 sedentary fishing vessels to Labrador (10 per cent of the ships outfitted for the North American fisheries during that period). Until 1733, outfitting for Labrador was quite insignificant: five ships or less per year. Then, from 1734 to 1755, it increased to the range of five to 14 ships, apparently because bad fishing and clashes with local settlers had provoked a retreat of expeditions at Gaspé. Granville sent 12,718 men to Labrador between 1722 and 1758 (22 per cent of the total number of men sent to the fisheries during the same period). The number of men sent to Labrador climbed to a record 901 men in 1743. Of all the fisheries-bound vessels, those outfitted for Labrador had by far the highest crew density on board: less than two tons per man between 1729 and 1744. Such extremely low figures point to an exceptionally high crowding on these ships, similar to what was common practice on privateers.

Granville sent 231 fishing ships to Gaspé from 1722 to 1755 (11.6 per cent of the vessels sent to the North American fisheries during that period). After a few poor years, the pace of outfitting for Gaspé suddenly picked up in 1725 with an increase from two to nine vessels. Activity then levelled off at this point until 1733. This was followed by a drop which apparently benefitted Labrador, but this was only temporary and shipping returned to pre-crisis levels in 1740 (11 ships) and 1741 (12 ships). Shipping began to drop again in 1742 and there were only two ships in 1744. After the War of the Austrian Succession, outfitting for Gaspé returned to the levels of its best pre-war years (12 vessels in 1749) and, despite a temporary drop, reached a record level of 14 ships in 1754 and 1755. Granville sent 10,349 men to Gaspé between 1722 and 1755 (17.3 per cent of the total number of men sent to the fisheries during the same period). Fluctuations follow the number of ships outfitted: there was a sharp rise in 1725 (from 122 to 377 men); the level held steady through 1732 (more than 300 men per year), dropped in 1733-1734 (147 men), rose again between 1735 and 1743 (470 men) and then declined sharply just before the war. There was a considerable increase

in 1749 (725 men), followed by a drop (300-400 men) and then by a further increase in 1754 (a record 756 men) and 1755.

Granville sent 48 vessels to Ile Royale between 1722 and 1755, and 87 to Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon from 1763 to 1792 (a total of only 3.3 per cent of ships outfitted for the North American fisheries). For various reasons, Granville was unable to sustain a full scale commodity trade with the colonies, thus its armateurs were not interested in this particular area. Strangely enough, the average number of men per ton on ships outfitted for Ile Royale was much higher than on those bound for Sainte-Pierre-et-Miquelon. In all likelihood, fishing, which still played an important role in outfitting for Ile Royale, declined at Saint-Pierre because the inhabitants had monopolized drying space on shore and trading cod with them eliminated the need for large crews.

The system of remuneration of Newfoundland-bound crews in use at Granville in the 18th century was the "engagement au cinquième", which was codified by the statutes of 25 May 1743.⁷ In such a system, each man signed on received a sum of money called the "pot de vin" several weeks before departure. The amount of the "pot de vin" fluctuated according to the availability of labour, each man's qualifications and the outfitters' financial situation. Around 1750, a captain was paid from 250 to 400 livres as "pot de vin", a sailor from 80 to 200 livres and a ship's boy from 20 to 40 livres. Men who were particularly sought after for their expertise were paid an additional sum called the "denier à Dieu". These sums became irrevocably the crewmen's property as soon as the ship set out to sea.

At the end of the expedition, the crew received one-fifth of the net proceeds from the sale of the cargo. This figure was obtained by subtracting from the gross amount of the sale, expenses jointly incurred by outfitter and crew (Admiralty fees, damage losses, warehousing costs, broker's fees, etc.), return expenses for those men returning by sackships, as well as the amount of the "pratiques" (bonuses) paid to the officers and the captain's "chapeau" (special bonus)⁸. If the ship unloaded in a Mediterranean port, the captain received an extra bonus called the "chapeau du Détroit" when he passed Gibraltar. Unlike the "pratiques", the amounts of the "chapeaux", set beforehand, were paid in

7 Archives Nationales Colonies, C 11 F 5, fo. 140, "Règlement pour la pêche à Terre-Neuve", Granville, 25 mai 1743. For a general description of the "engagement au cinquième", see Archives Nationales Marine, C 5, 59, "Mémoire sur les différentes formes d'engagements en usage dans les ports de Granville et de Saint-Malo pour les équipages qui font la pêche de la morue à la cote de l'isle de Terre-Neuve", by Maudit, Granville, 8 janvier 1788; Archives de la Marine, Brest, PB 2, 9e, "Engagemens des équipages des vaisseaux armés à Saint-Malo pour la pesche de la morue", anonymous note, 1773; see also Archives Municipales Granville, C 6, 202 to 212 and 12 P, 1 to 23 (roles désarmement Granville).

8 Sack-ships (saques) were ships which came back directly from Newfoundland to their home port in France and took on board part of the crews of ships going to the Mediterranean. The role of English sack-ships was quite different: they traded foodstuffs and manufactured goods with Newfoundland's settlers.

their entirety without regard to the outcome of the expedition. The "pratiques" paid to the captain in the case of a maximum catch ("pêche entière") were the basic unit from which all the other "pratiques" had to be calculated. At Granville an expedition was considered to have brought its maximum return when the total catch averaged 1,200 green cod or 40 quintals of dry cod per man (200 quintals per longboat). In this case, the captain's "pratiques" amounted to 26 handfuls ("poignées") of green cod (52 cod) or five quintals of dry cod, plus a barrel of cod-oil. Using this as a base, the "pratiques" paid out varied both according to rank and to the outcome of the expedition. The first officer and the surgeon generally received "pratiques entières" (full bonuses) as did the captain. The lieutenant and midshipmen received only one-half or one-third of the "pratiques". But if the expedition had resulted in one-half, one-third, or one-quarter catch, the outfitter decreased the "pratiques" accordingly to one-half, one-third or one-quarter of what was normally due. Outfitters were free to offer higher "pratiques" than those specified in the 1743 statutes, but in this case the extra amount was not taken from the gross product but from the outfitter's four-fifths.

The amount obtained after deductions, the net product, was divided by five; the result (the "cinquième") was then divided into a certain number of equal shares. To calculate the value of a share, the "cinquième" was divided by the number of men on board plus one, since the captain always counted for two. The formula used was as follows:

$$\frac{\text{gross product} - (\text{expenses} + \text{"pratiques"} + \text{"chapeaux"})}{5}$$

5

(number of men + 1)

Once the value of a share had been established, there were further complications. Only seamen able to serve in the navy ("matelots classés") received a full share. Ships' green men ("novices") and ships' boys ("mousses") were paid only a fraction of the share (one-half, one-third, one-fourth), sometimes receiving nothing at all on their first trip. On the other hand, most of the officers were paid more than one share. Because of this uneven distribution, the entire number of shares allotted to the crew was not always paid out. This situation arose whenever there were enough ships' green men and boys on board to bring the total fractions of shares deducted from their pay above the total fraction of shares added to the officers' remuneration. In such a case, the extra shares or parts of shares not allotted, called "lots-bons", were kept by the outfitter. The outfitter could thus recover 12 or 15 shares from a large crew. One-fifth of the price of the return freight taken after the unloading of cod was also distributed

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to members of the crew: the captain received a fixed sum called the “chapeau du fret” taken from the gross figure of the amount. One-fifth of the remaining sum was divided into shares as had been done for the catch.

By reversing the procedure used by the outfitters to calculate the shares, the total net value of the cargo can be found. One need only know the value of the share and the number of men in each crew. Once these two figures have been determined for each ship, the net annual value of Granville cod fishing can be calculated by using the following formula:

$$\begin{array}{rclcl}
 \text{average share} & \times & \text{average number of} & \times 5 = & \text{average net} & \times & \text{number of} & = & \text{total} \\
 \text{per ship} & & \text{men per ship} & + 1 & \text{value per} & & \text{ships} & & \text{net} \\
 & & & & \text{cargo} & & & & \text{annual} \\
 & & & & & & & & \text{value of} \\
 & & & & & & & & \text{Granville} \\
 & & & & & & & & \text{fishing}
 \end{array}$$

The results obtained are shown in Table Two. From 1722 to 1792, the total net value of Granville fishing in North America rose to at least 86 million livres. Given the lack of data for 15 years and the missing expenses and bonuses for all years, it can be reasonably estimated that the gross value of Granville cod-fishing in North America during the period must have reached 100 million livres.

Table Two

Net Value of Granville Fishing in North America

year	average net value per cargo (livres)	total net value of Granville fishing (livres)
1726	8,300	356,900
1727	9,243	425,178
1728	11,178	536,544
1729	11,466	538,902
1730	12,876	592,296
1731	14,206	724,506
1732	12,893	760,687
1733	10,592	646,112
1734	14,575	728,750
1735	12,870	810,810
1736	12,573	829,818
1737	14,637	1,039,227
1738	14,202	951,534

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1739	15,846	1,220,142
1740	18,483	1,293,810
1741	22,726	1,681,724
1742	19,620	1,491,120
1743	18,786	1,709,526
1744	-	-
1745	-	-
1746	-	-
1747	-	-
1748	-	-
1749	27,241	1,797,906
1750	21,204	1,802,340
1751	20,110	1,910,450
1752	23,085	2,146,905
1753	20,723	1,885,793
1754	21,485	1,998,105
1755	21,168	1,989,792
1756	-	-
1757	100,740	100,740
1758	-	-
1759	-	-
1760	-	-
1761	-	-
1762	-	-
1763	23,287	838,332
1764	26,987	1,538,259
1765	27,859	1,810,835
1766	20,293	1,603,147
1767	21,260	1,743,320
1768	21,615	1,707,585
1769	27,132	2,143,428
1770	31,262	2,563,484
1771	24,522	1,692,018
1772	24,720	2,051,760
1773	23,232	2,021,184
1774	30,450	2,710,050
1775	29,415	2,823,840
1776	24,570	2,604,420
1777	25,725	2,212,350
1778	-	-
1779	-	-
1780	-	-
1781	-	-

1782	-	-
1783	40,480	2,469,280
1784	34,496	2,966,656
1785	33,099	3,012,009
1786	33,110	3,211,670
1787	26,790	2,652,210
1788	24,180	2,297,100
1789	21,811	1,941,179
1790	24,186	2,031,624
1791	27,933	2,290,506
1792	39,959	2,956,966
	total :	85,862,829

Source: Archives Municipales Granville, série C 6, 141 to 178 (armements 1722-1759), C 6, 179 to 212 and 12 P, 1 to 23 (désarmements 1726 to 1793).

Table Three

Average net value of cargoes by destination
(livres)

Destin- ation:	Newfoundland			Ile Royale	
	Banks	coast	Labrador	Gaspé	St Pierre-M
1726-1755	10,458	27,032	30,278	20,156	11,225 (IR)
1763-1792	11,678	42,901	-	-	9,131 (SPM)

In summary, the development of Granville's North American fishing-trade during the 18th century can be broken down chronologically into five very distinct periods:

(1) *Up to 1750*: a long period of expansion suddenly gaining momentum after 1737, in conjunction with a boom in sedentary fishing, especially along the coast of Newfoundland. This move towards Newfoundland followed a general trend of the French fishing fleet in the 1730s. Lack of adequate drying space and competition from local settlers appear to have caused such a geographical shift.⁹

(2) *From 1751 to 1768*: a period of levelling off, followed by stagnation and re-

9 J.F. Brière, "Pêche et politique à Terre-Neuve au XVIIIe siècle: la France véritable gagnante du traité d'Utrecht?", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXIV, 2 (juin 1983), p. 173.

cession. Granville's fishing-industry seems to have reached its maximum limits between 1751 and 1755. A specific type of expansion, relying upon material factors such as larger ships and crews, had reached its peak. Following 1763, the after-effects of the war, which had been quite disastrous for Granville, generated a recession, ushering in a period of diminished activity. It is interesting to note at this point that most of the clashes between British and French fishermen at Newfoundland in the 1760s were actually clashes between the British and the Granvillais. The Granvillais were trying to gain ground in the eastern part of the French Shore where the French had never been before and where thousands of British fishermen had settled.

(3) *From 1769 to 1786*: a second period of expansion, not as steady or linked to physical growth and more distinctly commercial than that of the 1740s. The size of ships and crews was decreased in order to lower costs. Outfitters limited their expenditures, trying to increase profit through higher prices rather than higher quantities. The extraordinarily good years following the American Revolutionary War triggered feverish activity which culminated in 1786.

(4) *From 1787 to 1789*: a short but brutal crisis occurred. This slump hit the French cod-fishing industry as a whole, not just Granville's trade. The booming of the cod market after the war generated overinvestment in the fishing industry, creating an oversupply, while demand fell as a consequence of the economic crisis of the pre-Revolution years.

(5) *From 1790 to 1792*: signs of recovery were noted, but soon faded as prospects of a new war arose.

Above and beyond these fluctuations, one essential fact of major importance remains: the extraordinary rise of the Granville fishing industry was unique among ports outfitting for the fisheries. What made Granville able to challenge Saint-Malo as the top French port outfitting for the North American fisheries? Four key factors seem to have played a decisive role in allowing such a remarkable expansion.

The Gabelles ordinance of 1689 required that Granville's ships bound for the North American fisheries load their salt at Brouage (Vendée) just before crossing the Atlantic.¹⁰ Although salt for the fisheries was exempted from taxation, the Fermiers Généraux had always been opposed to their collecting salt in nearby Brittany (a province exempted from the royal salt tax) for fear that they might smuggle this salt into Normandy. Such an obligation prevented the Granvillais from outfitting for dry cod fishing since the delay caused by loading salt at Brouage or nearby Ré island made them reach (and leave) the coast of Newfoundland much later than their competitors from Brittany. The few vessels

10 Ordonnance des Gabelles, title XV, art. 1 and 2.

which took their dry cod to the Mediterranean used to return to Granville in February or March and had to leave for Newfoundland again no later than April; not having enough time to sail to Brouage, their captains sometimes illegally loaded their salt at Saint-Malo. Granville's armateurs succeeded in obtaining a decisive loosening of these restrictions in January 1739: sedentary fishing vessels of more than 80 tons (less likely to be used for smuggling than smaller ships) were authorized to load their salt in Brittany.¹¹ At this very moment, the Anglo-Spanish war (1739) sharply reduced the supply of English dry cod in Spain, inviting the Granvillais and the Malouins to fill the deficit. Thus stimulated and freed from any hindrance, Granville outfitting for dry cod fishing took off rapidly. Cargoes of cod brought to Marseilles (the major French market for dry cod) by Granville's vessels fluctuated between 5,000 and 15,000 quintals per year until 1735; they reached a total of 60,000 quintals in 1752 and 95,000 quintals in 1786.¹²

Although the link from cause to effect is less clear, it appears that the "engagement au cinquième" may also have played a role in the expansion of Granville's fishing-industry. Of the many systems used by French outfitters to remunerate crews engaged in cod-fishing, the "engagement au cinquième" was the one which, by far, offered the best apportionment between the "pot de vin" and the shares. By avoiding to give crew members either very large "pots de vin" and very small shares (as in Saint-Malo) or no "pot de vin" at all and only shares (as in the Basque ports), the "au cinquième" struck a balance between two conflicting needs: attracting men by offering guaranteed remuneration and stimulating productivity. A greater efficiency resulted since the "pot de vin" prevented men from being too easily discouraged from enlisting after a series of bad fishing seasons had threatened their income. The share, which was based on the commercial value of the catch (not the case in Saint-Malo) was sizable enough to discourage a lowering of the productive effort.

There is also little doubt that Granville gained from the decline of the cod fishing-industry in many French ports where it had been active and prosperous in the 16th and 17th centuries. Some of these ports lost ground during the 18th century (Dieppe, Saint-Valéry-en-Caux, Honfleur, Le Croisic, Les Sables d'Olonne, La Rochelle, Bayonne, Saint-Jean-de-Luz). Others, on the contrary (Le Havre, Nantes, Bordeaux), developed enormously, but the profits from tropical colonial trade induced their outfitters to give up cod fishing. Such a phenomenon caused outfitting for the fisheries to be increasingly concentrated in three specialized ports on the English Channel (Saint-Malo, Granville, Saint-Brieuc) which eventually formed a sort of cod fishing oligopoly outfitting about 70 per cent of the French fishing fleet bound for North America in the 1780s.

11 Archives Départementales Loire-Atlantique, C 744, 8, decree in Council, 13 January 1739.

12 R. Kaninda, "Les Relations commerciales entre Granville et Marseille au XVIIIe siècle", M.A. thesis, Aix-en-Provence, 1969, annexes.

Table Four

Ships Outfitted for the North American Fisheries

Ports	ships (1683)	ships (1786)
France (total)	(372)*	386
Le Havre	(70)*	1
Les Sables	77	18
Honfleur	34	26
Pornic	22	0
Saint-Brieuc	?	36
Saint-Malo	79	120
Granville	20	105

*Numbers with brackets are estimates given by R. Richard.

Source: R. Richard, "Comptes et profits de navires terre-neuviens au Havre au XVIIe siècle", *Revue d'Histoire Economique et Sociale*, vol. 54, no. 4 (1976), pp. 476-524.

The expansion of Granville's cod fishing industry was also, paradoxically, the consequence of a failure, that of a colonial ambition. In order to develop a commodity trade with the West Indies, Granville's outfitters attempted in 1737 to have their city added to the list of ports (Saint-Malo was one of them) which enjoyed the right to trade with French colonies. Controller General Orry, who was unwilling to pay for the creation of a Bureau des Fermes in Granville and feared that he would create a precedent that might be used by other fishing ports, flatly denied their request: "Cod fishing being the peaceful activity of Granville's outfitters they can lock themselves in it and enjoy the privileges attached to the French cod fishing-industry...without it being necessary to grant them the privileges of colonial trade".¹³

Much later, after the Seven Years War, the Granvillais were given the right to trade with the colonies, but their colonial trade always remained extremely limited. The Granville harbour was too small, unsafe and unfit for accomodating all the loading and warehousing facilities required for extensive trade with the colonies. Until the end of the century, it did not even have a quay. The very few Granville armateurs who turned to colonial trade simply moved their business to nearby Saint-Malo.

13 Archives Nationales Marine, B3, 383, fo. 52, Orry to Maurepas, 24 May 1737.

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This “locking up” in cod fishing was a most important factor in the striking expansion of Granville’s fishing industry. It prevented outfitters (and investors) from dispersing their efforts and forced them to funnel their financial, technical and human resources into one single area of sea trade. The reinvestment of profits from cod fishing into cod fishing was thus promoted, maintaining in this narrow sector a process of cumulative development which did not exist to the same degree in other ports outfitting for the North American fisheries.

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