Labour
Journal of Canadian Labour Studies
Le Travail
Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes

Becoming a Dependent Class
Quoddy Herring Fishermen in the 1920s

Brian Payne

Volume 81, printemps 2018

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1048541ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)
1911-4842 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Payne, B. (2018). Becoming a Dependent Class: Quoddy Herring Fishermen in the 1920s. *Labour / Le Travail*, *81*, 87–117.

ARTICLE

Becoming a Dependent Class: Quoddy Herring Fishermen in the 1920s

Brian Payne

In March of 1921 an unidentified weir fisherman from the Passamaquoddy Bay region, in the Maine–New Brunswick borderlands, felt so desperate concerning the prevailing price of herring that he sent a bomb threat to one of Eastport's leading packers, Andrew Clark. Prices had dropped from an average of $25 a hogshead (a thousand pounds of fish) in 1918 to just $5 a hogshead in 1920.[1] The fisherman warned Clark that if he did not open his factory on 15 April and offer higher prices for herring, he would not only murder Clark but also burn down the entire town of Eastport. The letter warned, "this is not a very fancy looking letter but it isn't the letter that will do the bombarding, it is a lot of us fellows and we will do it and are going to do it, if you and the rest don't pay $25 for herring all summer."[2] Considering its context, just a few years after the infamous Red Scare, one might suspect that the threat was a socialist or anarchist plot against a powerful American capitalist. Yet a closer examination of the economic realities illustrates that the threat was not a violent manifestation of a Luddite's resistance to capitalism, but instead a bold demand for a greater share of the profits from capitalist fisheries. The would-be terrorist did not want to overthrow the system; he just wanted a bigger share of the profits from one of Maine's largest industries – in short, more money. Regardless of its ideological backing, the letter did not have its desired effect. The sardine season did not open on 15 April. By the end of April only one packer was operating, Holmes Corporation, and the firm

1. "Sardines Are Lower in Price. Market Is Easier with End of Season Approaching. Sales Unsatisfactory. Fish Scarcer," *Eastport Sentinel*, 12 October 1920.

2. "Sardine Packer Gets Black Hand Letter. Threatens Destruction to His Property and That of Other Packers," *Eastport Sentinel*, 16 March 1921.

Brian Payne, "Becoming a Dependent Class: Quoddy Herring Fishermen in the 1920s," *Labour/Le Travail* 81 (Spring 2018): 87–117.

purchased herring for the dreadfully low price of only $5 a hogshead. But even that seemed rosy by May, when, according to the *Eastport Sentinel*, "A man couldn't get a dollar a hogshead for herring today."[3]

During the 1920s, weir fishermen from the Maine–New Brunswick border region struggled to hold on to an artisanal independence that had previously given them a good degree of power. Prior to the post–World War I recession, weir fishermen were a working people who had retained control over the means of production, access to the base material of the economy, and an independent status that came with a craftsman's identity. Their power was rooted in their control over the catching and selling of fish in the Passamaquoddy Bay. Throughout the second half of the 19th century, weir fishermen utilized an auctioning system to dictate the market value of their catch. By doing so, they limited the ability of the canneries to integrate downward into the extractive level of the industry, and thus the fishermen preserved their independent producer status. Yet by the 1920s weir fishermen found themselves working within a highly concentrated economy controlled by an increasingly powerful buyers' trust. By consolidating purchasing power, the canneries were able to dictate the terms of the economic relationship between themselves and the weir fishermen and thus erode the latter's independence.

I

The sardine industry was one of North America's first cross-border industries. Although most of the processing was done in the United States, the vast majority of the resource extraction took place in Canadian waters. Furthermore, until the 1930s the majority of its labour force, both on the water and on the shore, were migrant workers from New Brunswick. Any analysis of the industry must take this migrant workforce into consideration. The labour of the industry began with the New Brunswick weir fishermen who utilized several means to secure control over their own work. They formed informal gangs, organized formal unions, petitioned both provincial and national governments, and, most importantly, devised selling mechanisms designed to prevent any usurpation of their control of the resource and its environment by the American-controlled industry. Throughout the 19th century, these strategies had largely worked, but within the new post–World War I economic realities, all of these strategies ultimately failed.

The New Brunswick–based fishermen used weirs constructed of fences and pens made of logs, sticks, and brush to trap migrating schools of juvenile herring as those fish swam inshore with the tides. Success for weir fishermen came only with hard physical labour combined with intimate knowledge of the marine environment: its temperature, water depth, bottoms, and tides.

3. "Nothing Doing in Sardine Factories. Packing Season Opens in Maine But Not a Boat Is Out – Two-Thirds Last Year's Pack Unsold," *Eastport Sentinel*, 25 May 1921.

"The Sardine Industry. Fishing a Herring Weir at Low Tide Near Eastport, Me."
In George Brown Goode, *The Fisheries and Fishing Industry of the United States. Section V: History and Methods of the Fisheries*, *Plates* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1887), 503.

Independent, subcontracted boatmen – many of whom (like the weirmen) were Canadian – then ferried those fish from the weirs to the canneries in Maine. There, cannery workers – predominantly female wage workers – steamed or baked herring fish and then packed individual fish in cottonseed oil, mustard, or tomato sauce. Cases of 25 of these sardine cans were then packed for shipment. The process of canning herring and marketing them as sardines thus began with an individual who had deep working knowledge of the environment from which the resource was extracted; utilized several levels of independent, subcontracted labour; and finished the production with in-house seasonal wage workers.

During the 19th century, New Brunswick weir fishermen used an auctioning system to pit one buyer against another and drive up the price of fish. This market strategy allowed weir fishermen to retain control over both the market value of herring and access to the environment from which they extracted that herring. By 1920, the buyers' trust agreed to use the postwar market glut in food products to drive down prices for herring at the weir. Their consolidated

THE SARDINE INDUSTRY.

Shore herring weir near Eastport, Me.; the common form of brush weir. (Sect. v, vol. i, p. 501.)

From a photograph by T. W. Smillie.

"The Sardine Industry. Shore Herring Weir Near Eastport, Me."
In George Brown Goode, *The Fisheries and Fishing Industry of the United States. Section V: History and Methods of the Fisheries*, *Plates* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1887), 501.

effort forced the weir fishermen into a dependent class with little hope of achieving long-term financial security. With sardine herrings worth just five dollars a hogshead, weir fishermen in Maine and New Brunswick became, in just three years, a class among the working poor.

The process of driving the fishermen into a dependent class occurred over a surprisingly short period – between 1918 and 1920. A review of prices published in the *Eastport Sentinel* indicates that prices at the weir averaged fifteen to eighteen dollars a hogshead throughout the 1900s and 1910s. Although the war generated a spike in prices to over twenty dollars, the wartime price inflation does not appear to have been as drastic in the sardine fisheries as it was in other food industries. Thus, the drop of the average price to just five dollars (well below pre-war averages) in only three years appears to be more than a postwar price adjustment; it came only after the concerted effort of a new sardine cannery trade association to usurp the independent power of weir fishermen and to bring them under the control of a more vertically and horizontally integrated industry, which was by then a widely accepted and celebrated process of improving the efficiency of production by more fully integrating all the levels of production into one corporation.

At the executive level of production, sardine canning became, by the end of the 19th century, an increasingly consolidated industry that, by the 1920s, was dominated by a single "trade association," which utilized consolidated power to undermine the independence of its various subcontracted labourers. Sardine canneries had come a long way since Julius Wolff first pioneered the industry in 1876.[4] Between 1876 and 1879, nine factories were built in Eastport, Lubec, and Robbinston, Maine. Eastport became the centre of operations, and in 1880 alone nine more factories were built there. By 1880 there were fifteen surviving factories in Maine, employing 1,900 people within the canneries and turning 46,000 barrels of herring into 65,000 cases of sardines. The largest of the factories, which belonged to Wolff, alone employed 200 seasonal operatives producing 200 cases of sardines a week, with a weekly payroll of $2,000.[5] Lubec fell a close second to Eastport. Portland's Board of Trade reported that there was at least sixteen sardine canneries in Lubec in 1891, "making money and distributing it freely, right among a class of people where it is doing the most good. This is what is making this town so prosperous. Money is plenty and there is no reason why this business should not continue to increase from year to year."[6] The growth of the sardine industry spread throughout the entire region of Downeast Maine.

In 1882 there were 28 sardine factories in Maine, and by 1899 there were 69. Early investors were immediately concerned with the impact this boom would have on the market. In order to keep the growth of competition under some semblance of control, Wolff financed a larger percentage of the start-ups and became a silent partner and financer of 22 sardine canneries by 1885 – a good example of 19th-century interlocking directorates.[7] The only real check on the spectacular growth seemed to be the continual destruction of the factories by fire. With their oil-soaked timbers and open flames, destructive fires seemed

4. For early history, see Earl Chapin May, *The Canning Clan: A Pageant of Pioneering Americans* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 151–154; "Partnership contract between William G. Davis, James P. Baxter, and Batchelons for the firm Davis Baxter & Co. dated Dec. 11, 1866," *Portland Packing Company Scrapbook*, Collection 656, Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine.

5. For an additional contemporary observation of the promise of growth in Maine's sardine industry, see R. Edward Earll & Hugh M. Smith, "The American Sardine Industry in the United States in 1886," in *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission*, vol. 7 (for 1887) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), 163; "The American Sardine," *Portland Board of Trade* 6 (October 1893): 184.

6. "Lubec's Boom," *Portland Board of Trade* 4 (September 1891): 198.

7. "The Sardine Industry," *Lubec Herald*, December 1900.

inevitable.[8] Nonetheless, nearly every factory destroyed by a fire was quickly rebuilt.[9]

Sardine production in the late 19th century was almost wholly confined to Maine. The 1905 US Census reported that "practically all of the sardines canned in the United States during the census year were packed in the State of Maine." Specifially, 98.8 per cent of American sardines were packed in Maine.[10] For a state on the margins of the nation's industrialization, sardines seemed to be an economic bonanza that all Mainers could cash in on; from Portland financers to Downeast weirmen, there was money to be made.

These Maine sardine factories did take steps to consolidate power in the form of a trust during the final decades of the 19th century. In the early 1890s, William O. Grady and Edward M. Lawrence of Eastport formed a partnership with New York financer John E. Searles in an effort to integrate the canneries. The effort failed when Wolff, the largest cannery owner, refused to join.[11] Wolff then began buying up property in Lubec in 1898, and thus the "sardine war" between Eastport and Lubec began in full force.[12] In 1899, investors from Chicago, led by S. G. Stevens, organized the Continental Sardine Company and began to buy up factories in Eastport. The investors dumped nearly $500,000 into Eastport, offering owners high prices for their facilities, shares of the stock of Continental, and jobs as factory managers in exchange for their cooperation with Continental, which was shortly renamed Seacoast Packing Company.[13] Not surprisingly, a large majority of the independent factories joined up. Only two days after Seacoast had taken over a majority of the canning interests in Eastport, Wolff arrived in Lubec and began to consolidate the remaining factories into the Standard Sardine Company. Wolff was aided in his battle with Seacoast by holding the American patent for machine-made sardine cans and opened the American Can Company in Lubec.[14] Portland's Board of Trade sided with local hero Wolff in his battle with Chicago and warned the people of Eastport that they "will be very soon thereafter a good deal more agitated, when that great business has passed from local control, into the hands and management of a cold blooded trust, having little interest for the people and none for the town." Even though Wolff was from New York, he assured the Board of Trade that "we will make our headquarters at Lubec."

8. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 177.

9. John Toft, "Report of the Sardine Industry in Eastport, Maine," (n.p., 1939); State of Maine, *Report of the Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics* (1900), 78–89.

10. *US Census 1905* quoted in Eva L. Shorey, "Women and Children in Sardine Factories," in State of Maine, *Report of the Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics* (1907), 134.

11. E. M. Lawrence, "A History of Sardine Canning," *The Canning Trade*, January 1914.

12. "At Lubec, Me.," *Portland Board of Trade Journal* 11 (September 1898): 137.

13. "Quoddy Sardine Trust," *Portland Board of Trade Journal* 12 (May 1899): 9.

14. Lawrence, "History of Sardine Canning."

The fact that he too proposed forming a trust, albeit supposedly a local one, seems to have been lost on the Portland Board of Trade.[15]

The two syndicates began a price war, which only furthered the troubles they had formed to deal with, namely, the retail price drop, the poor quality of the canned fish, and the increased cost of production. Lawrence later recollected, in 1914, that "competition between the two large companies proved so ruinous that they consolidated after making one season's pack, the Seacoast Packing Company taking over the Standard."[16] The new unified syndicate of 1900, which retained the name Seacoast Packing Company, came to control over 75 per cent of the factories in Maine.[17] In 1900, Maine's Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics noted that the whole purpose of the syndicate effort was to more fully integrate the industry:

> The great object of combining the Sardine industry under the control of one syndicate was to regulate and systematize the whole business, to raise the grade, limit the production and maintain prices. Part of these objects have been attained. It is certain that more care is taken in packing, and that the quality of sardines has been much improved since the combination. The price paid for fish have, also, been much more uniform.[18]

Although the *St. Croix Courier* also noted some success in this combine, reporting in January 1900 that "there seems to be little doubt that the Maine Coast sardine industry is under the control of The Seacoast Packing Company," there remained some important holdouts.[19] These included the larger firms of George O. Grady Company (Grady had previously failed in forming his own syndicate); the William Underwood Company (Underwood was a pioneer in canning in New England who had a very diverse portfolio in both seafood and agricultural canning); and the Edward T. Russell Company. With powerful independent companies still in the market and new start-ups still appearing, it was not long before the newly consolidated Seacoast began to fail. The primary factor of its failure was its inability to decrease the wholesale price of the juvenile herring fish it paid to weir fishermen. Without full integration, Seacoast could not break the auctioning system of the weir fishermen, nor could it stabilize the retail price of sardines on the market, which was still heavily overstocked.[20]

After just two years, Seacoast began selling off its best facilities to investors in New York headed by Francis H. Leggett. Most of the factory owners who remained within Seacoast felt that the syndicate was selling off property at far too low of a price in order to shore up short-term profits and dividends at

15. "Quoddy Sardine Trust," 9.

16. Lawrence, "History of Sardine Canning."

17. Maine, "The Canning Industry," in *Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics* (1900), 80.

18. Maine, "The Canning Industry," 86.

19. "Syndicate," *St. Croix Courier*, 4 January 1900.

20. "Maine Sardines," *Portland Board of Trade* 13 (April 1901), 370.

the expense of long-term stability in the industry, which had been for them the original purpose of the syndicate. Some investors filed a lawsuit, while others began a shadow operation under the name Lubec Sardine Company.[21] As a result, Lawrence recalled, "most of the original packers resumed business on an independent basis." By 1903 most of the packers who originally sold to Seacoast had repurchased their factories, normally at lower prices then they had sold them for, and resumed operation under their own name. Seacoast remained an important player in the sardine industry – owning six factories in Lubec, two in Eastport, and one in Robbinson in 1913 – but was never able to achieve the integration plan of its original supporters. The Lubec Sardine Company remained a second-place player to Seacoast, owning four factories in Lubec and one in Belfast. Most of the sardine canneries, however, remained independent.[22] In 1923 the New York firm of U. H. Dudley, which was heavily invested in Seacoast, failed, and with its failure the newer Seacoast too began to crumble. A small group of local investors, largely from Lubec, including notable local leaders such as R. J. Peacock, C. M. Pike, C. L. Pike, J. C. Pike, S. M. Stuart, and L. B. McFadden, bought up most of Seacoast and continued its operation until the Depression in the 1930s.[23]

Although the syndicate efforts failed to stabilize retail prices or to break the price control of the weir fishermen, it did successfully reduce the cost of production by providing the capital to introduce new machinery into the production process. Both Seacoast and Standard invested heavily in new plants and wharfs and also in updating older facilities. In 1899, Wolff put $100,000 into new machinery to make the tin cans, and by 1903 almost all the plants were using machine-made cans from Wolff's American Can Company.[24] The result of these changes was the dismissal of the only skilled occupation within the cannery factory: the male-dominated can makers. By 1906, Eva L. Shorey reported on behalf of Maine's Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics that the American Can Company employed "mostly school girls."[25] Local historian Hugh French analyzed one sardine company's records to find that 69 men worked at the factory along with 114 women in 1903, but men earned 76.2 per cent of the payroll and women 23.8 per cent. By 1907 the trend had reversed, with men accounting for only 33.3 per cent of the payroll. French concluded that "the almost total disappearance of hand can making meant the end of nearly all skilled labor in the sardine factories, for can making was men's

21. Toft, "Report of the Sardine Industry."

22. Lawrence, "History of Sardine Canning."

23. Moses Pike, "Short History of the Sardine Business in Lubec, 1875–1976," in Ryerson Johnson, *200 Years of Lubec History* (Lubec: Lubec Historical Society, 1976).

24. "Quoddy Sardine Trust," 9.

25. Shorey, "Women and Children," 133.

work."[26] In 1901 new fish dryers were introduced, and in 1908 new flaking machines were introduced, both of which cut into the traditional roles played by children workers, making sardine factory labour largely unskilled, seasonal women's work by the end of the first decade of the 20th century.

What the sardine syndicate tried to do between 1899 and 1903 was vertical integration. What the famous (or infamous) John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie did to bring order to the oil and steel industries, Grady, Searles, and Wolff hoped to do for the sardine industry. Yet, the sardine syndication movement before World War I failed because there were too many independent holdouts. These holdouts made it difficult for the syndicates to control supply at both ends of the production line. They could control neither the volume of output of finished sardines nor the value of input of juvenile herring. Following the war, sardine managers again tried to concentrate their economic power, and by the 1920s they had largely succeed in breaking the weirmen's control of supply by ending the use of the auction system to sell their fish to the canneries.

II

The rather rich historiography of labour protest in the Anglo-American Atlantic World is strongly rooted in English-based plebian strategies of protest, which included threats of arson and/or vandalism. Linda Little, for example, discusses Newfoundland fishermen's vandalism against merchant houses in the 1830s as an example of "plebeian collective action," understanding these actions not as isolated movements but instead as "series of events in a continuing tradition of resistance." Similarly, Sean Cadigan examines class-based opposition by fishermen "to the commodification and subordination of nature associated with capitalism" during the first half of the 19th century. Both Little's and Cadigan's work falls within a much larger historiography of social action during the first half of the 19th century. Scott See's 1997 historiographical review of violence in North America highlights the central focus by both American and Canadian scholars on the middle decades of the 19th century in their exploration of social violence and social protest in North America.[27]

26. Hugh French, "The Eastport Waterfront, 1898–1913," MF 046 Eastport History, Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History, Maine Folklife Center, University of Maine, Orono, Maine. French was also the founder of the Tides Institute and Museum of Art in Eastport, Maine.

27. Linda Little, "Collective Action in Outport Newfoundland: A Case Study from the 1830s," *Labour/Le Travail* 26 (Fall 1990): 7–35; Sean Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons: Ecology and Equity in Newfoundland Cod Fishery, 1815–1855," *Labour/Le Travail* 43 (Spring 1999): 9–42; Scott See, "Nineteenth-Century Collective Violence: Toward a North American Context," *Labour/Le Travail* 39 (Spring 1997): 13–38. See also Ian McKay, "Class Struggle and Mercantile Capitalism: Craftsmen and Labourers on the Halifax Waterfront, 1850–1902," in Rosemary Ommer & Gerald Panting, eds., *Working Men Who Got Wet: Proceedings on*

Although both Little and Cadigan present strong arguments for an artisan proletarian-based movement, and in Cadigan's case one with an environmental consciousness, neither proves to be an ideal historiographical base upon which to understand weir fishermen's protest to price collapses in post–World War I Canada. Nineteenth-century Newfoundland is a long way from 20th-century Passamaquoddy. Instead, work by Suzanne Morton, James Conley, Robert Babock, and John Manley on early 20th-century labour protest has explored the influence of socialism, communism, labourism, and liberalism on collective action in Canada during the interwar period. More recent work by Peter Campbell and John Manley also suggests that crowd protest in the early 20th century might have had a deeper connection to international communism or continental socialism than to the English-based moral economy that has dominated historiographical investigation into social protest.[28] More importantly, given this historiographical literature, early 20th-century labour protest – and certainly any labourer's threat of arson – would probably have conjured up images of communists, not plebeians, within the minds of readers of the *Eastport Sentinal*. As such, the Passamaquoddy Bay weir fishermen who struggled to achieve economic stability, if not equity, worked within a very different historical context and faced much different public perceptions of crowd action than their 19th-century predecessors.

An investigation into the history of fishermen's action needs to take into account both labour historiography and the work done by environmental historians who explore resource economics, which, of course, must address the workers within those economies. The joining of these two historiographical fields has yielded a rich and rewarding body of literature. The foundational works of Arthur McEvoy, Joseph Taylor, and Wayne O'Leary set the benchmarks in understanding the relationship between fish, fishermen, and state power.[29] In Atlantic Canada the exceptional histories by Rosemary Ommer

the Fourth Conference of the Atlantic Shipping Project (St. John's: Maritime History Group, Memorial University, 1980), 309–310.

28. Suzanne Morton, "Labourism and Economic Action: The Halifax Shipyards Strike of 1920," *Labour/Le Travail* 22 (Fall 1988): 67–98; James Conley, "Frontier Labourers, Crafts in Crisis and the Wester Labour Revolt: The Case of Vancouver, 1900–1919," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989): 9–27; Robert Babcock, "Saint John Longshoremen during the Rise of Canada's Winter Port, 1895–1922," *Labour/Le Travail* 25 (Spring 1990): 15–46; John Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff: J. B. McLachlan, Communism, and the Cape Breton Miners, 1922–1935," *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992): 65–114; Peter Campbell, "Understanding the Dictatorship of the Proletariat: The Canadian Left and the Moment of Socialist Possibilities in 1919," *Labour/Le Travail* 64 (Fall 2009): 51–73; John Manley, "Moscow Rules? 'Red' Unionism and 'Class against Class' in Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1928–1935," *Labour/Le Travail* 56 (Fall 2005): 9–49.

29. Arthur McCovey, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850–1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Joseph Taylor, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Wayne O'Leary, *The Maine Sea Fisheries: The Rise and Fall of a Native Industry,*

and Sean Cadigan outline the essential issue of economic power between management and producer.[30] Along with the work of Peter Pope and Daniel Vickers on colonial-era fisheries in Atlantic Canada and New England, this literature clearly developed the theme of labour's dependency on outside capital during the early industrialization of the fisheries.[31]

Few historians have ventured into the story of the sardine industry of either New England or Atlantic Canada. Carol Toner's work on women's labour in Maine includes a small section on the sardine canneries, and Jane Ratcliffe looks specifically at child labour in the canneries. Although these studies are excellent in their intended purposes, neither of them deals with the central role played by the weir fishermen in providing the base material for the industry.[32]

1830–1890 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996).

30. Sean Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay: Merchant-Settler Relations in Newfoundland, 1785–1855* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Sean Cadigan, "Failed Proposals for Fisheries Management and Conservation in Newfoundland, 1855–1880," in Danne Newell & Rosemary Ommer, eds., *Fishing Places, Fishing People: Issues in Small-Scale Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Cadigan, "Moral Economy of the Commons"; Rosemary Ommer, "The Truck System in Gaspé, 1822–77," *Acadiensis* 19 (Autumn 1988): 91–155; Rosemary Ommer, *Merchant Credit and Labour Strategies in Historical Perspective* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990); Rosemary Ommer, *From Outpost to Outpost: A Structural Analysis of the Jersey-Gaspé Cod Fishery, 1767–1886* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Rosemary Ommer, "One Hundred Years of Fishery Crisis in Newfoundland," *Acadiensis* 23 (Spring 1994): 5–20. Other good works on Atlantic Canada's fisheries include James Candow & Carol Corbin, eds., *How Deep Is the Ocean? Historical Essays on Canada's Atlantic Fisheries* (Sydney, NS: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1997); Gene Barrett, "Underdevelopment and Social Movements in the Nova Scotia Fishing Industry to 1938," in Robert J. Brym & R. James Sacouman, eds., *Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada* (Toronto: Hogtown Press, 1976); John E. Crowley, "Empire versus Truck: The Official Interpretation of Debt and Labour in the Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland Fishery," *Canadian Historical Review* 70 (September 1989): 311–336; David A. MacDonald, "They Cannot Pay Us in Money: Newman and Company and the Supplying System in the Newfoundland Fishery, 1850–1884," *Acadiensis* 19 (Fall 1989): 142–156; Shannon Ryan, "Fishery to Colony: A Newfoundland Watershed, 1793–1815," in P. A. Buckner, Gail G. Campbell & David Frank, eds., *The Acadiensis Reader*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1998); Roch Samson, *Fishermen and Merchants in 19th Century Gaspé: The Fishermen-Dealers of William Hyman and Sons* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Site Branch, Parks Canada, 1984); Kennedy Wells, *The Fisheries of Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1986).

31. Peter Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630–1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). See also Matthew McKenzie, *Clearing the Coastline: The Nineteenth-Century Ecological and Cultural Transformation of Cape Cod* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2010). I have more fully developed this historiographical argument on the combined influences of labour and environmental historiography on fisheries history in Payne, "Local Stewards: The Historiography of Fishermen's Role in Resource Conservation," *Environmental History* 18 (January 2013): 29–43.

32. Carol Toner, "'Hard Work to Make Ends Meet': Voices of Maine's Working-Class Women

Richard Judd's 1988 article in *Environmental Review* stands alone in the investigation of Maine's sardine weir fishermen.[33] Judd argues that weir fishermen used petitions and lobbyists in the state legislature to prevent the introduction of new and more highly extractive catching technology and thereby adopted a conservationist attitude toward the herring fishery. He focuses on the post-1901 anti-seining debate and tells a story that was largely political by demonstrating that the collective efforts of weir fishermen had real political power, enabling them to push for conservation measures during a period when such ideas found favourable attention in many legislative halls.[34] Judd reasons that the weir fishermen wanted to maintain sustainable levels of production in opposition to the canneries' desire to increase production by introducing innovative seining technology. Seining utilized large nets to encircle entire schools of fish, holding them hostage until they could be processed by crews on board larger fishing vessels. Seining greatly increased the volume of fish caught but did so only with the infusion of a large capital investment and often at the expense of more selective fishing.

Judd presents a dichotomy between the interests of weir fishermen and those of the canneries, the former wanting limited production of herring, and the latter wanting an increased supply of herring. However, a more complete economic history of the industry calls this observation into question. During the first three decades of operation, a limited supply of herring was not a major concern for the canneries. Nearly every report on the industry in Portland's Board of Trade journal between 1888 and 1901 clearly indicates that the cannery owners were most concerned with the cost of tin and solder. In 1892, for example, eleven sardine-packing firms in Maine consumed 334,000 pounds of tin and 500,000 pounds of lead solder, both of which had become increasingly expensive.[35] In 1890, for example, the US Fish Commission, the principal federal investigator of the nation's fisheries resources, reported that "one of the principal items of expense in sardine canning is solder, large quantities

---

in the Late Nineteenth Century" *Maine History* 42 (August 2004): 23–45; Jane E. Radcliffe, "Perspective on Children in Maine's Canning Industry, 1901–1911," *Maine Society Quarterly* 24 (Summer 1984): 362–391.

33. Richard W. Judd, "Grassroots Conservation in Eastern Coastal Maine: Monopoly and the Moral Economy of Weir Fishing, 1893–1911," *Environmental Review* 12 (Summer 1988): 80–103. Since 2000 there have been two self-published studies by non-academic historians. These studies can be found in a few libraries in Maine: John Gilman, *Canned: A History of the Sardine Industry, Part I* & 2 (St. Stephen, NB: printed by Parson Printing, 2001); James. L. Warren, comp., *The Maine Sardine Industry History, 1875–2000* (n.p.: printed by author, 2000). Although not well documented, Gilman's piece does provide a fair narrative of the sardine industry in both the United States and Canada, while Warren's piece is more a collection of lists and some primary source documents and does not include any kind of narrative.

34. Judd, "Grassroots Conservation," 99–100.

35. "Sardine Packing in Maine," *Portland Board of Trade* 4 (March 1892): 329.

of which are required in making and sealing the cans."[36] The canneries' other concerns included the inferior quality of Maine sardines when compared with French imports, the mislabelling of cans in an effort to deceive consumers, and the collapse of retail value due to a glutted marketplace.[37]

Based on both government and industry reports during the 1890s and 1900s, it would seem that herring remained plentiful and no cannery expressed fears that the weir fishermen would not meet their herring requirements. In 1898, Portland's Board of Trade reported that "fish were very plenty and the sardine business seemed to be prospering and increasing, one steamer taking 20,000 cases at Lubec for Boston."[38] In 1900, the Board of Trade reported promisingly that "the waters of Passamaquoddy and West Quoddy Bays were said to be teeming with sardine herring … and the factories with full supplies."[39] Hugh Smith of the US Fish Commission agreed, reporting in 1887 that "most of those who have given any attention to the matter agree that small herring are very abundant along nearly all portions of the coast of Maine east of the Penobscot and in certain localities farther west."[40] Even when some of the larger factories closed down in 1901, Portland's Board of Trade noted that the supply of herring was not the problem: "The factories have been obtaining plenty of herring at low prices, but the other materials used, particularly tin plate, have been very expensive. As the market price of sardines is low there is no profit in the business at present, so the factories are closed down."[41]

Furthermore, many other documents suggest that interested parties other than the weir fishermen pushed to limit herring catches. As early as 1883, New York buyers of sardines supported efforts in Maine to close down the canneries in the winter months in order to decrease the retail supply of sardines and thus drive the price back up to the 1880 level. In an 1883 letter to US Fish Commissioner Spencer Baird, one such buyer, Henry S. Menann, claimed that "the demand for canned fish is very light in winter, and as there is usually an overstock on the market in December the attempts of greedy packers to pack the fish in the winter months keeps the markets in a feverish state." In addition to market goals, Menann suggested that closing down the canneries would be the only way to encourage weir fishermen, who were the

36. "Fisheries of the New England States: The Shore Industries," *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission,* vol. 10 (for 1890) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891), 116–118.

37. "Lubec's Boom," 198; "American Sardine" 184; "At Lubec, Me.," 137; "Portland's Trade," *Portland Board of Trade Journal* 12 (June 1899): 46–50; "Fish Galore," *Portland Board of Trade Journal* 13 (December 1900): 244; "Maine Sardines," 370; Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 179. See also Maine, "Canning Industry," 87–88.

38. "At Lubec, Me.," 137.

39. "Fish Galore," 244.

40. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 170.

41. "Sardine Factories Shut Down," *Portland Board of Trade Journal* 14 (December 1901): 238.

sole catchers of herring for the sardine industry before 1900, to decrease their catches. The letter concluded that winter herring are "too poor for canning purposes," that the "fish are mostly brought in in bad condition," and that the packing of herring in the winter months by "greedy packers" of "poor quality fish badly hurts the industry."[42] US Fish Commission agent R. E. Earll agreed, concluding his 1886 report as follows:

> The principal point in favor of the proposed law is, I think, found in the fact that the small herring are very poor during the winter months, and those canned at that time, being of inferior quality, seriously injure the reputation of American sardines. If the Maine canners would buy only good fish and pack them in better oil the prejudices against "herring sardines" would soon wholly disappear, and the demand for them would be greatly increased.[43]

Their efforts were successful and Maine state legislation forced the seasonal closure of the canneries from 15 December to 15 April.[44] For sellers of sardines, as well as many of the scientists at the US Fish Commission, market goals, not resource conservation, seemed to have been an important factor in efforts to limit the packing of sardines and thus inevitably reduced the pressure on the herring stock, while their observations suggest that the weir fishermen were still eager to increase production levels.[45]

If the supply of herring was not a concern for the sardine canneries, then their efforts to introduce seining must have stemmed from some other motivation. Their goal was to eliminate the weir fishermen's control over the price of herring by eliminating the fishermen's control over the supply of herring, not to increase the supply of herring. From this perspective, the emerging debate between weir fishermen and the cannery managers was over market value, not resource conservation or sustainability. Thus, historians should question whether these fishermen were in fact resource conservationists, as Judd suggests. Instead, a more plausiable explanation is that the struggle over market value was an issue of economic survival. Weir fishermen, even if they collectivized their financing, could not afford seines. If seining was introduced, then they would be pushed out of the business by sheer economic force and thus lose one of the key components of what Judd calls their "occupational pluralism."[46] A labour analysis of the work patterns of Maine's weir fishermen shows that they were more than willing to pull from the water as many

42. Henry Menann's letter is included in R. E. Earll, "Proposed Limitation of the Herring Fishery in Maine and Its Effects upon Bait and Canning Interests," in *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission*, vol. 3 (for 1883) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 445.

43. Earll, "Proposed Limitation," 445.

44. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 170.

45. For contemporary observations of the low cost of herring and resulting infeasibility of successfully using expensive seines, see J. W. Collins, "Notes on the Herring Fishery of Massachusetts Bay in the Autumn of 1882" in *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission*, vol. 2 (for 1882) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 290.

46. Judd, "Grassroots Conservation," 91.

herring as they could if the price was right, and they were the ones in control of the extraction stage of the fishery. The weir fishermen's opposition to seining, then, was about protecting small, independent producers from large corporate entities, or about harmonizing their efforts with capitalists, not about the protection of fish from the exploitive potential of a capitalist market.

Judd's conclusion that the weir fishermen sought to prevent the introduction of seines comes from the rhetoric of newspapers and petitions celebrating the yeoman-like image of fishermen and their opposition to the emerging power of industrial capitalism. Historian Matthew McKenzie has recently placed this imagery in a fuller context. In his work, McKenzie clearly illustrates how popular writers and artists as well as politicians deployed a romantic image of "artisanal fisheries" as the "last bastion of Anglo-Saxon purity and free-market labor principles."[47] This imagery, constructed and popularized by artists and writers such as Winslow Homer, John Z. Rogers, J. W. Collins, Rudyard Kipling, James B. Connolly, and Augustus P. Gardner, depicted the New England fisherman as "universally white, Protestant, and Anglo-Saxon who profited from individualistic, independent free-market competition and who eschewed any form of labor organization."[48] McKenzie shows how closely tied this imagery was to larger social forces at work in late 19th-century America and how middle- and upper-class elites used the iconic yeoman fisherman as one of many elements of their hegemonic ideology of antimodernism that at once embraced individualistic capitalism while rejecting collective responses to capitalism. As such, McKenzie forces marine environmental historians to take a cue from other cultural histories of environmental use and explore the cultural resource.[49] By doing so, he greatly broadens the critical appraisal of fisheries use beyond the usual cast of characters.

Despite all of its contributions to the literature, McKenzie's article misses one key element: there are no fishermen in his history. We do not know the extent to which the fishermen themselves embraced, or were even aware of, this iconographic image of the artisanal fishermen. The imagery that McKenzie so successfully displays was one created wholly by outsiders who were, at the most, casual observers of fisheries labour. An examination of the weir fishermen's resistance to the efforts by the sardine syndicate to control the extraction of fish from the Passamaquoddy Bay illustrates that they too identified themselves as yeoman fishermen. Their identity revolved largely around their control of the actual catching of fish.

When the price of herring at the weir dropped substantially between 1918 and 1920 the weir fishermen of the Passamaquoddy Bay identified themselves increasingly as the ideal yeoman fishermen. As independent, household

47. Matthew McKenzie, "Iconic Fishermen and the Fates of New England Fisheries Regulations, 1883–1912," *Environmental History* 17 (January 2012): 15.

48. McKenzie, "Iconic Fishermen," 5.

49. McKenzie, "Iconic Fishermen," 5.

producers with decades of economic growth behind them, few weirmen were eager to enter collective unionism but instead sought to re-establish their tradition of independent control of market prices via the auctioning system – the system that historian Richard Judd so successfully recorded as the source of their power throughout the late 19th century. In short, the weirmen bought into the same idealization that McKenzie argued politicians and publicists held during the same period. In the case of Quoddy weirmen the timing was inauspicious. Fishermen's archaic self-image was a chimera and obfuscated their understanding of the new realities of the fishery economies of the 20th century. While looking backward, they ran headlong into unforeseen challenges. The new trade association that the canneries formed in 1920 easily divided and conquered the independent weirmen and transformed them in short order into a dependent class.

III

The sardine industry of Maine was one of many rapidly growing sectors within the food industries of North America during the late 19th century. Julius Wolff, a New York food merchant with experience in the canned and processed foods industry, pioneered the business in 1876 and sold 600 cases for $12 a case in the profitable New York market.[50] The boom began immediately. Between 1875 and 1879, investors built nine factories in Eastport, Lubec, and Robbinston, Maine. Eastport became the centre of operations and in 1880 alone nine more factories were built there. By 1899, 68 plants in Maine produced 1,170,568 cases of sardines valued at $3,352,076. During the war years, between 1914 and 1918, Maine's sardine industry averaged around 2,000,000 cases a year.

The very base of the industry and all of its growth was the weir fishermen of the Passamaquoddy "frontier" that bordered Maine and New Brunswick. Many contemporary observers noted that the entire industry depended upon the availability of "the catch."[51] During the boom years, the factories were in such fierce competition with one another to acquire the juvenile herring fish

50. There had been early efforts to produce sardines from Maine's herring fish, but all were unsuccessful. Wolff built upon those efforts and the successful canning of other seafood, notably lobster, earlier in the 19th century. See "Partnership contract," Maine Historical Society; George B. Goode, "The First Decade of the United States Fish Commission: Its Plan of Qork and Accomplished Results, Scientific and Economic," in *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission*, vol. 2 (for 1882), 169; Hon. B. M. Fernald, of West Poland, "Maine Canning Industry," in *Three Able Addresses Delivered before the State Board of Trade at Bangor, Maine, March 25th, 1902* (Portland, Maine: Marks Printing House, 1902), 8; May, *Canning Clan*, 151–154; Richard W. Judd, "Saving Fishermen as Well as Fish: Conservation and Commercial Rivalry in Maine's Lobster Industry, 1877–1933," *Business History Review* 62 (Winter 1988): 596–625.

51. State of Maine, *Report* (1907), 121, 127.

Arthur Griffin, "Christmas Cove, Maine, Sardine Fishing Brining in the Sardines," 1944. Griffin Museum of Photography. Digital Commonwealth, Massachusetts Collection Online. https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org.

from the local weir fishermen, who wholly controlled the supply, that they were forced to pay the fishermen, according to US Fish Commissioner Hugh Smith, "a very much larger figure for their fish than the business will warrant."[52]

The New Brunswick weir fishermen had this market control because they dominated access to herring fish, which was nearly all in Canadian waters. Fearing the possibility of new duties on fish imported from Canada, one 1883 petition from sardine factory owners in Eastport and Lubec informed the US secretary of the Treasury that "the provincial waters in the vicinity of these said towns abound in them [herring] and furnish an inexhaustible supply of the kind required in the sardine business, while, owing to local conditions, but a small proportion is obtained from American waters."[53] Smith reported in 1887 that between 90 and 95 percent of the fish packed in Eastport were caught in Canadian waters. Yet, in August 1886 the New Brunswick

52. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 165.

53. N. H. Kemp et al., "The Sardine Canning Industry of Eastport, Me.," in *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission*, vol. 5 (for 1885) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), 241.

government passed legislation prohibiting the use of seines and, to prove its resolve in enforcing an anti-seining law, the provincial government seized an American vessel seining for herring in Cobscook Bay. Thus, all herring fish coming from Canada, which constituted the vast majority of fish processed by Maine canneries, had to come from weirs.[54]

The 1900 report of Maine's Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics reported, "it is a well known fact that herring are mostly caught in weirs, and the best location for these weirs are at the mouth of the rivers, in the small bays and coves, and along the shore of the islands (in the border waters between Maine and New Brunswick)." Weirs were set in waters ranging from 25 to 30 fathoms deep, or in channels as deep as 60 fathoms, where the tide ranged from 20 to 22 feet. Stacks, typically made of birch wood, six to seven inches in diameter and 18 to 35 feet long were driven into the mud about three feet apart. Spruce, cedar, and alder brush was then woven in and out of the stacks. This labour-intensive construction normally took place in the spring, between 1 April and 1 June, and certainly consumed a large percentage of the fishermen's time during that period. Prior to 1880, weirs averaged an initial construction cost of $300 to $400, but following 1880, the cost increased to an average of $600 with some costing $800 or even $3,000.[55]

Weirs required additional annual maintenance that could range between $40 and $1,000, most averaging between $200 and $400, of additional investment. According to the Maine State Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics, the financial cost of a weir was such that "sometimes a number of men own a weir in common, and sometimes the proprietors of factories are part owners."[56] Other contemporary accounts make note of the increasing profitability of the weir fisheries on account of the sardine industry. Smith reported that "the prices paid for herring is such that the majority of their weir fishermen are rapidly improving their financial condition, as shown by both the interior and exterior of their dwellings, and by the character of their boats." Some weirs had such a positive reputation that they were rented out annually for up to $2,000 plus $3 for each hogshead of fish taken. Even at this high rental cost, the weir still made good for its lessees.[57]

Weir fishermen most often auctioned off their catch to competing boatmen, who were subcontracted by the sardine canneries.[58] In 1888, the collecting boat fleet numbered 125 vessels and about 200 crewmen, with most owned and worked by Canadians. It was during this auctioning system that the weir

54. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 173, 176.

55. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 165.

56. State of Maine, *Report* (1900), 84.

57. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 167.

58. Shorey, "Women and Children," 122–123; "Fish Galore," 244.

fishermen best demonstrated their ability to work within the capitalist market economy. As Smith wrote in 1888:

> The boatmen act as agents for the canneries, with instructions to purchase the fish as cheaply as possible. When the boats from several canneries meet at a weir, the fishermen find it advantageous to put up their fish at auction and sell them to the highest bidder; and rivalry between the boatmen usually leads them to bid until they have reached the extreme limit named by the factory, and the one who can afford to pay the highest price takes the fish.[59]

The elevation of market value for juvenile herring was also affected by the compensation due to the boatmen. Smith noted that "from personal motives they are also interested in securing as large a quantity of fish as possible, regardless of price which they are required to pay."[60] Previously, cannery managers had paid boatmen a monthly salary, but in order to encourage the boatmen to be readily on the job when the weirs were full of fish, and thus to get the fish to the factory in the freshest state possible, the factories added compensation of 50 cents per hogshead of fish brought in, thereby providing the boatmen with real market incentive to bring in more fish. Most factories eventually dispensed with monthly wages and paid boatmen exclusively by the quantity of fish they brought in.[61]

One 1887 report for the Bangor *Industrial Journal* described the scene: "On the one side are the factory boatmen, loud, blustering, important, and always rampant 'bears' of the market. On the other, the quiet, canny fishers, who have a way of knowing just what the 'catches' have been from Machiasport to St. Andrews, and they are always stubborn 'bulls.'"[62] It was this market knowledge that allowed weir fishermen to charge between $30 and $50 a hogshead.

While New Brunswick weir fishermen profited from this control, the American canneries were obviously eager to more fully integrate the business in an effort to liberate themselves from the weir fishermen's control of prices. They thus began to challenge the level of control held by the weir fishermen. Through the end of the 19th century, weirmen were able to resist several efforts on the part of the canneries to break the fishermen's control over access to herring fish. In 1885 and again in 1899 a group of cannery executives attempted to form a buyers' trust and establish a fixed price in order to break the weirmen's use of the auction system.[63] The 1899 integration effort was more successful than the 1885 effort, and by 1901 several large firms had joined to form the Seacoast Packing Company, also known simply

59. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 174.

60. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 174.

61. Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 174–175.

62. *Industrial Journal* (Bangor), 2 December 1887, quoted in Judd, "Grassroots Conservation," 93; Earll & Smith, "American Sardine Industry," 175.

63. "Quoddy Sardine Trust," 9.

as the "syndicate." Despite the power Seacoast gained via horizontal integration and its acquisition of 75 percent of the canneries in Maine, the company failed to integrate vertically. By 1901, Seacoast succeeded in convincing only 25 percent of the New Brunswick weir fishermen to sign contacts that would eliminate the auction.[64] In addition to their resistance to an integrated industry, weirmen rejected new fishing methods that could have challenged their collective control of the supply of herring and access to the environment.[65]

Despite these successful efforts to preserve their independence and control over herring fish and the marine environment between 1875 and 1911, the weirmen did eventually lose control over the market value of juvenile herring and thereby the economic rationale and control over fishing and the fishing environment. While the collapse came in 1919, their fall from power was initiated by the more general economic woes of the 1920–21 recession and the growing power of the cannery association.

Throughout the war years the price of herring fish remained extremely high. The St. John and Charlotte Counties Weirmen's Association, a union of New Brunswick weir fishermen, reported prices in 1917 averaged $30 a hogshead and sometimes went as high as $83.[66] The following year was also a good one for weirmen. Sardine herring sold for $25 and many weirmen sought to secure their control by creating an international union of American and Canadian weirmen.[67] In Maine and New Brunswick, Passamaquoddy Bay weirmen eagerly expanded their operations for the 1919 season, expecting another year of high prices for the fish they caught.[68] But 1919 was a different year, and the sardine industry, like the rest of the United States and Canada, saw a dramatic economic downturn as the two countries came out of the artificial wartime boom and entered what would become the recession of 1920–21.

Throughout the winter and spring of 1919, reports circulated that the wholesale market of sardines was overstocked. In February, despite the US government's purchase of over 100,000 cases, wholesale prices collapsed to only five dollars a case in the New York market.[69] For the 1919 season the

64. Maine, "Canning Industry," 80; "Maine Sardines," 370.

65. Richard Judd has already shown how the weir fishermen broke efforts to introduce seining operations between 1893 and 1911. See Judd, "Grassroots Conservation," 80–103. For my review of this interpretative debate, see Payne, "Local Stewards."

66. "Urges Cooperation among the Weirmen of Maine and N.B.," *Eastport Sentinel*, 29 January 1919, 1.

67. "Maine and N.B., Weirmen to Meet. Far Reaching Plans Made at Annual Meeting of Weirmen's Association of St. John and Charlotte Counties at St. George Last Thursday," *Eastport Sentinel*, 5 February 1919, 1.

68. "Weir, O, Weir? No Weir, Any Where. Hearing in Weir Cases Monday Night Results in Withdrawal of All Applications for Submission in New Form," *Eastport Sentinel*, 15 January 1919.

69. "Sardine Drop," *Eastport Sentinel*, 3 February 1919.

canneries needed to dump overstock, reduce production, and cut costs. Cost-cutting measures focused on the price of herring. However, the new international union of weirmen issued an ultimatum that they would never accept less than twenty dollars a hogshead from the canneries.[70] The battle was on. In February, packers came together to meet in Bangor, Maine, and circulated a rumour that they would not open the factories until 1 July (the season could legally begin on 15 April). Although leading packers in Eastport quickly denied the rumour, the scare had its effect. By delaying their opening until July, the canneries put pressure on the weirmen to drop their prices by threatening to forego the spring herring run (April to May), which was widely considered far superior to the fall run (September to October) and the main source of the weirmen's annual income.[71]

By March and April, fear of a late opening of the canneries was rampant. On 2 April the *Eastport Sentinel* warned its readers, "never in the history of the sardine business has there been so much uncertainty as to whether or not the factories would take fish in the opening day."[72] That same day, the paper reported that the wholesale price for sardines had dropped to $4.75 per case in New York.[73] Major canneries such as those of Ransdell, Paine, and Clark warned that they would not open until July or even August. The *Sentinel* seemed to write the industry's eulogy when it reported:

> In the meantime, prospects for fishermen, laborers, and business in general hereabouts are not encouraging. Many weirs will not be built that were planned for, some laborers will move away, and some fishermen will go into other lines of business. And, if after the spring school of fish is passed up, the fall school fails to put in an appearance, - good night. It will be worse for Eastport and Lubec than another war.[74]

The newspaper then claimed that the fishermen both refused to lower their price to ten dollars and insisted that such a low price would deny them a "living wage." These fishermen claimed that the reason for any late opening of the canneries was due to the 1918 overstock, not high prices for fish at the weirs.[75]

70. "$20.00 for Herring Both Sides of Border. Maine and New Brunswick Weirmen Get Together on Price, at Meeting at St. Stephen Thursday," *Eastport Sentinel*, 19 February 1919.

71. "To Shorten Sardine Season. Meeting of Packers Held at Bangor Tuesday to Discuss Plan," *Eastport Sentinel*, 19 February 1919, 7; "Sardine Season Not to Be Shortened. Packers Deny That Subject Was Given Much Consideration at Bangor Conference," *Eastport Sentinel*, 26 February 1919.

72. "Sardine Factories Not to Open April 15th. Prospect for Usual Spring Pack Looks Doubtful. All Indications Point to Late Opening," *Eastport Sentinel*, 2 April 1919.

73. "Sardines Drop to $4.75 Per Case. New Quotations Announced in Circular Issues from New York Last Week," *Eastport Sentinel*, 2 April 1919.

74. "Sardines Drop to $4.75."

75. "Present Conditions Must Be Changed. Before Prospects of a Successful Sardine Season Improves," *Eastport Sentinel*, 26 March 1919, 10; "Weirmen Insist on $20.00. Adopt That Price as Irreducible Minimum at St. George Meeting on Friday Last," *Eastport Sentinel*, 2 April 1919;

Through March and into April the price for Maine sardines in the wholesale market remained low because of the heavy overstock. The canneries united to send representatives to Washington in a failed effort to get the Food Administration to purchase sardines for the European relief effort. Their agents also failed in Paris, where they tried to get sardines on the "preferred list" for food relief to Germany.[76] As such, most of Maine's canneries remained closed.[77] By the end of April, things had become desperate for many weirmen and they began to sell "more or less openly, for $10.00 per hogshead."[78] On 14 June, George Frauley, the president of the St. John and Charlotte Counties Weirmen's Association, made the new price official by issuing an open letter authorizing the members to sell herring to the canneries for ten dollars a hogshead in an effort to "to help the factories open, thus improving the labor situation."[79]

It does not appear that the American canneries were content with cutting the cost of herring fish in half. Reports circulated on 2 July that one of Maine's largest canneries, the Clark Corporation, tried to purchase fish at five dollars a hogshead. The *Eastport Sentinel*, which often advocated for the interests of both the weirmen and the factory workers, denied the rumours: "Deception of this sort does not get very far with Quoddy fishermen. … [T]he attempt to stampede and demoralize the weirmen has not met with any considerable success so far."[80] Despite the newspaper's appraisal of the resolve of Passamaquoddy weirmen, prices dropped to five dollars a hogshead. Close cooperation, or, "something like a concerted action," according to the *Sentinel*, between the canneries was the primary reason for the successful assault on the weirmen's control of prices. The canneries were acting in unison with their instructions to their boatmen not to offer more than five dollars, and this cooperation remained in effect for the rest of the 1919 season.[81]

"Maine Weirmen Stick for $20," *Eastport Sentinel*, 23 April 1919.

76. "To Urge Hoover to Buy Sardines," *Eastport Sentinel*, 9 April 1919; "To Sell Sardines to Germans?," *Eastport Sentinel*, 30 April 1919.

77. "A New York Sardine Summary," *Eastport Sentinel*, 30 April 1919; "Sardines Move More Easily. Sales Improve. More Factories to Open. Fish Are in Fairly Good Supply," *Eastport Sentinel*, 11 June 1919.

78. "Sardine Situation Remains Doubtful," *Eastport Sentinel*, 30 April 1919.

79. "Weir Owners Union Drops Price to $10. Follows Example Set by Independents in Making Concessions to Packers. Decision Announced by Pres. Frauley," *Eastport Sentinel*, 15 June 1919.

80. "Refuse to Sell Sardines for Five Dollars. Sardine Packers Who Tries to Crowd Weirmen Gets Turned Down," *Eastport Sentinel*, 2 July 1919.

81. "Five Dollar Fish Demanded of Packers. Many Packers Send Out Boats With Instructions to Cut Price in Half. Weirmen Say Attempt Proves Need of Union. More Factories Open," *Eastport Sentinel*, 16 July 1919; "Five Dollar Price Sticks. With Many Weirmen Refusing to Sell, Factories Get Plentiful Supply at Five Dollars. Booth Factories Open. Others to Open Soon," *Eastport Sentinel*, 23 July 1919; "More Sardine Factories Open. Seacoast Plants Open Monday.

New Brunswick weirmen responded to the attack on three fronts. First, they sought negotiation with the canneries, but their letters went unanswered.[82] Then they sought government regulation, but this too proved unsuccessful.[83] Finally, they sought union activism, which likewise failed because, in the short term at least, canneries could buy from the non-union American fishermen. No more news came from the St. John and Charlotte Counties Weirmen's Association during the 1919 season, and the 1920 season opened with reports that the union had collapsed.[84]

Meanwhile, the American canneries continued to pull back on production. In July 1919, the price of a case of sardines in New York dropped to $4.27, and by October they had fallen to only $4 a case. In September the *Eastport Sentinel* reported that the rumour of an early closing of the canneries was faulty, proclaiming that the factories would certainly remain open, buying fish and employing canners.[85] Once again, the *Sentinel*'s optimism and dedication to the cause of weirmen and factory workers proved erroneous when the factories did close on 1 October.[86] Although no hard evidence exists that the canneries had formed a combine of some sort, circumstantial evidence points to collaborative efforts to control the price of herring at the weirs and to close the factories early.

By January 1920 hard evidence of a trust of canneries appeared with the formation of the Maine Sardine Packers Association. The association included the majority of the largest operations, but many smaller "independents" were still in operation.[87] When the sardine season opened on time, on 15 April 1920, most observers expected a healthy season for canneries and fishermen alike. The 1919 stock had all but sold out and with fish coming inshore as expected, weirmen anticipated a high demand for, and a healthy supply of, herring fish. Despite these high expectations, prices for herring remained low. The first purchases came in at the 1919 rate of ten dollars a hogshead. The always-optimistic *Eastport Sentinel* assured its readers that the prices would surely go up. Even without a weirmen's union, and thus "no attempt on their

---

Price of Herring Still Unsettled," *Eastport Sentinel*, 30 July 1919.

82. "Advocate Close Cooperation between Weirmen and Packers. Officials of Charolotte Co. Weir Owners Ass'n Asks Cooperation in Letter to R.C. Emery," *Eastport Sentinel*, 16 July 1919.

83. "Government to Set Sardine Price. Dominion Authorities Investigating Cost of Living among Fishermen. May Set Export Price for Sardine Herring," *Eastport Sentinel*, 23 July 1919.

84. "Sardine Season Opens Favorably," *Eastport Sentinel*, 21 April 1920.

85. "Attempting to Close Factories Oct. 1? Well-Founded Rumor Says Attempt to Close All Shops on October First Has Failed," *Eastport Sentinel*, 16 September 1919.

86. "Several Factories Close – Others Soon? Seacoast Factories Two and Nine Close on Saturday Night," *Eastport Sentinel*, 1 October 1919.

87. "New Association of Sardine Packers Formed at Bangor Last Week," *Eastport Sentinel*, 20 January 1920.

[the fishermen's] part to control prices," the newspaper believed that "unless the packers have some quiet understanding, it is likely that, with ten dollars as the basis, prices will be sold by the old 'auction' plan, – the highest bidder taking the fish." As it turned out, there was in fact a "quiet understanding" among the cannery operators.[88]

The purchase of herring fish and the production of sardines remained low throughout the 1920 season. Sales in the principal wholesale market at New York remained low, and sardines sold for between $4 and $4.75 a case. A strike at the American Can Company in Lubec, Maine, which provided the cans to the sardine factories delayed supplies and many canneries were short of this basic packing material. Finally, with the troubles caused by the 1918 overstock, cannery owners were not energetic about putting up a lot of stock for the winter months. All of these factors combined to limit herring purchases. Prices hovered at the ten-dollar mark throughout the spring and summer of 1920.[89] Canneries in Eastport, Lubec, and Robbinston cut employment and ran operations only one day per week. The wholesale price for sardines dropped to $3.50 per case by October. Back at the weirs, prices dropped to only $5 per hogshead, with the occasional auction pushing the price up as high as $11.[90] The 1920 season closed early, on 13 November, with Maine packing only 1.5 million cases – about 75 per cent of its production capacity.[91]

Yet despite the low "pack" during the 1920 season, when 1921 arrived there was a high volume in storage. As such, packers remained closed on opening day in 1921. The *Sentinel* seemed positively dreary when it warned that a July to August opening made the season "far too short to enable the working man to earn enough money to keep his family housed, fed and clothed until the next sardine season."[92] In April, wholesale prices dropped to $2.50 for a case of sardines in New York and held there through July. In August a few canneries opened, but with little production as cans remained expensive and fish grew scarcer after the industry's decision to forego the spring fish runs. Even when the fall runs arrived in September and October, canneries remained hesitant to put up much stock with prices for sardines so low. One weir fisherman received $17.50 per hogshead, but the typical price ranged between $5 and

88. "Sardine Season Opens Favorably."

89. "Sardine Packers Marking Time. Little Progress Being Made. Fish Scarce. No Tin, and Supply of Cans. 500,000 Cases behind Demand," *Eastport Sentinel*, 12 May 1920; "Can Shortage Forces Sardine Factories to Close. Many Shut-Downs Take Place, to Last For Period of Several Weeks. Others to Follow. Meeting of Packers to Discuss Inspections," *Eastport Sentinel*, 21 July 1920.

90. "Sardines Are Lower in Price."

91. "Sardine Season Makes Poor Close. Ends Early after Unsatisfactory Season Marked by Small Pack and Low Prices," *Eastport Sentinel*, 24 November 1920.

92. "Sardine Situation Not Promising. Prospects for Early Opening Not Bright," *Eastport Sentinel*, 16 March 1921.

$7.50. When the factories began closing their doors in November, the Maine sardine industry had produced fewer than a million cases.[93]

The low pack of 1921 did have a positive effect on the industry, as most of the overstock was cleared out by the end of the winter in 1922. On 8 February 1922 the *Sentinel* predicted a boom year: "The position of the packers is stronger than it has been since the Armistice was signed. Every indication therefore, points to a rising market and this in itself is a business builder of great power."[94] The market trends seemed promising for weirmen. The overstock was low, the demand for and prices of sardines was rising in the wholesale market, and fish were relatively scarce. With high demand for herring and low supply, prices per hogshead should have gone up considerably. In the days leading up to 15 April, lobster fishermen were paying herring weir fishermen $13.75 per hogshead for baitfish.[95] Surely the canneries would pay more. But when the season opened, the weirmen were shocked to find a combined effort among the canneries to force them to accept $5. Many Canadian fishermen struck against the price but the movement had little traction.[96] By May, weirmen were accepting $5 throughout Passamaquoddy Bay.[97] Prices increased briefly in July to about $10 a hogshead, but by August they were back to the $5 base.[98]

By August the Maine sardine industry was in full production, with all factories working full time to store up stock for the winter. But despite the high production rate and the relative scarcity of herring fish, prices remained at $5 per hogshead. Again, the *Eastport Sentinel* reassured its fishermen-readers that the price per hogshead could not possibly go any lower:

> The price of herring has apparently settled at $5.00 per hogshead, which is about the lowest figure that fishermen will handle them at even when they are plentiful. One packer is said to have ordered his boat to buy at not more than $3.00, but while some sales have undoubtedly

93. "Sardine Season Nearing Close. Rumors of Early Closing – Small Total Pack – Prices Drop to $2.40 Basis," *Eastport Sentinel*, 26 October 1921; "Sardine Factories Begin to Close. Seacoast Lead in Putting on Shutters. Independents Still Holding Out. Catch Improves," *Eastport Sentinel*, 16 November 1921; "Three Factories Remain Open," *Eastport Sentinel*, 23 November 1921.

94. "January 1922 Breaks Sales Record of Eight Years. More Sardines Sold in January 1922 than in Any January since 1914. Small Carry Over Prices to Rule Higher," *Eastport Sentinel*, 8 February 1922.

95. "Sardine Season to Open Monday. No Fish in Sight But Some Factories Will Open and Nearly All are in Readiness," *Eastport Sentinel*, 2 April 1922.

96. "Sardine Season Opens Saturday. Only One Factory Gets Fish – Others Have Boats Out," *Eastport Sentinel*, 19 April 1922.

97. "Sardine Season Gets Busier. Fishermen Forced to Accept Five Dollar Price for Herring," *Eastport Sentinel*, 10 May 1922.

98. "Herring Go to Ten Dollars. Sardines Also Jump a Little in Price. Supply Continues Scant," *Eastport Sentinel*, July 6, 1922; "Price of Sardines Is Going Down. With Improved Supply Price Drops," *Eastport Sentinel*, 23 August 1922.

been made at this figure, the price is practically standardized at $5.00. The packers in general do not want it to drop below that figure.[99]

But then it did, to just $3 in September. The *Sentinel* explained the cut in price was not the fault of the canneries, but the result of a "price war" launched by smaller independent operations.[100]

The *Eastport Sentinel* hoped that such a combination of large factories would "eliminate a concern whose operations have not been healthy for itself or for anybody else, and the change would be viewed with complacency by most people who want the sardine industry to prosper." Very much in the fashion of the pro-big-business attitude of the 1920s, the newspaper praised the effort to horizontally integrate the industry via "interlocking directorates." "The business is in bad shape," the newspaper warned, "and cooperation having failed to set it right, perhaps the only possible or logical way out is the forcible elimination of those who would not, or could not, play the game according to the new rules, in which quality, for the first time was emphasized more than quantity." Although the *Sentinel* did not appear to abandon the fishermen or factory workers completely in its new dedication to quality over quantity, it certainly gave up on the small independent producers.[101]

Although not often correct in its analysis of the market trends, the *Sentinel* did appear to get this one right. In the end, the canneries did not benefit from the price cuts on sardines in the wholesale market. Few canneries made much money during the 1920–21 recession. The real culprit was limited consumer desire. People simply did not want to eat sardines, and if they did they wanted California or Norwegian sardines, not Maine sardines, which still had a reputation of poor quality due to their canneries' utilization of cottonseed oil rather than olive oil.[102] Maine sardines sold predominantly to the rural poor of the American South and in urban bars and taverns – a market that Prohibition eliminated.

In December 1922 most expected an early opening to the next season. The overstock had all but been sold and the higher-grade products were completely sold out. The conditions renewed the *Sentinel*'s faith in a labour-business cooperation between factory and weirmen, and the paper noted that, should

99. "Sardines in Good Supply. LePreau & Machias Bay Main Sources of Supply. Price Drops Slightly," *Eastport Sentinel*, 30 August 1922.

100. By the end of the 1922 season, the *Sentinel* appears to have made a shift in its moral tone. It had always been a supporter of the factory workers and weirmen, but it now emerged as a champion of the larger cannery operations and the trust they were actively creating. Although this stance appears contradictory, the *Sentinel* explained that the trust would stabilize all aspects of the market, including wages for factory workers and prices paid to weirmen.

101. "Sardines Quoted Down to $2.65. More Sales Confirmed at Higher Figure. Big Deals Pending," *Eastport Sentinel*, 27 September 1922.

102. "American Sardine Owners Must Be Up and Doing," *Eastport Sentinel*, 27 September 1922.

small fish arrive in the spring, then surely the factories would be ready to buy. "The fishermen may have something to say about that," proclaimed the newspaper. "Packers are already arguing for $5 herring and few weirs in Quoddy are successful enough to do business at that figure. It is accordingly certain that unless prices are promised for fish, a good many weirs are not going to be put in fishing condition this year."[103]

Weather proved to be an important factor in the weirmen's place within the market in 1923. A cold winter followed by particularly bad storms in the spring left many weirs either badly damaged or completely destroyed. After several years of low prices, few weir fishermen were in a position to invest time and money into the needed repairs. As a result, fewer fishermen entered the selling market in 1923 than in previous years.[104] Not a single American weir was operational on opening day, 15 April, and it was another four to six weeks before any weir was ready to catch herring.[105]

While New Brunswick weirmen busied themselves with the repair and construction of weirs, American cannery operators gathered at their now annual meeting to discuss their options; cultivating a better consumer market and fixing labour costs were among the topics. The group set ten dollars per hogshead as the firm price for herring at the weir and declared that "no higher price was entertained as possible."[106] New Brunswick weir fishermen turned to their government. Representatives of the resurrected Charlotte and St. John Counties Weirmen's Association sent a petition to the provincial government requesting that the Canadian government impose a duty of ten dollars on every hogshead of herring exported to the United States that was purchased for less than ten dollars from the weirmen. Although the union insisted that the average price of six dollars paid over the past few years was "insufficient to keep the fishermen and their families alive," the petition went nowhere.

When the season got underway, signs indicated that weirmen might regain their upper hand in price control. With the 1922 overstock sold out, the wholesale price for Maine sardine increased slightly, to $3.45 a case. Furthermore, the spring run of herring fish was rather poor and few weirs were operational.[107] As a result, high demand and low supply pointed to high prices at the

103. "Sardines are in Demand. Stock Being Diminished. Prices Firm Carryover May Be Cleaned Up by Springtime," *Eastport Sentinel*, 20 December 1922.

104. "Prospects Poor for Early Pack. Present Conditions Indicate Scarcity of Herring When Season Opens in April," *Eastport Sentinel*, 21 February 1923.

105. "Sardine Season Opens April 16. Or Rather That Is When It Doesn't Open – This Season," *Eastport Sentinel*, 11 April 1923.

106. "Sardine Men Meet Friday. Discuss Possibility of Co-operation with Federal Authorities," *Eastport Sentinel*, 4 April 1923.

107. "No Fish in Sight Yet. Prospects for Spring Pack Slim. Seacoast Installing Retorts. Other Sardine News," *Eastport Sentinel*, 2 May 1923.

weir. In late May, factories began paying $12 to $15 a hogshead.[108] Despite positive signs in the wholesale market (New York prices increased to $4 a case), the industry limped along. Unlike the period between 1919 and 1922 the problem for 1923 was not overstock, but a lack of fish. The spring run failed to materialize and summer catches proved low through early August. By the first week of August, the Maine canneries had packed barely 100,000 cases. Despite this, the weirmen failed to push up the price beyond the $12 mark.[109]

When the August "darks" did arrive, a moment of furious activity of fish, fishermen, and fish buyers erupted.[110] In late August the Seacoast plant in Eastport bought herring for $15 a hogshead and the Blanchard plant bought 30 hogshead of herring from the Pottie weirs in Perry for $17 a hogshead. The rush was on. In September, canneries were paying an average of $40, and even $42.50 at one weir in North Shore. Yet the price was not always uniform. The same day that one independent cannery paid $41 per hogshead in St. Andrew another paid only $20 in Quoddy Bay. The *Eastport Sentinel* concluded that "the difference result[ed] from the fact that at one weir there were boats from several concerns (factories), while at the other only one boat." It appears from this quick observation that the old auctioning system had come back in September of 1923 and New Brunswick weirmen were once again in control of market value.[111]

The American cannery trust responded immediately. Cannery owners met in Eastport to put an end to the auctioning system and re-establish a $12 price per hogshead. "No more will the festive 'auction,' with its bidding of one packer against the other, hold sway at the weirs about Quoddy," the *Sentinel* wrote, "and no more will the gladsome weir owners rake in with guileless cheer prices for herring ranging as high as $41.50 per hogshead." In place of the auctioning, the canneries agreed that the first boat to arrive at the weir would take the fish for $12 a hogshead and that no bidding, no free-market trade, would be allowed. Interestingly enough, the *Sentinel* did not come to the aid of the weirmen but remained allied to its new faith in the trust. The paper concluded that the price fixing would have a positive impact on the industry by

108. "Sardine Season Now Open Here. Several Factories Take Fish. Supply Mainly from across the Tide," *Eastport Sentinel*, 30 May 1923.

109. "Sardines Coming in Slowly. Catch Small to Date. Price Remains at $12.00," *Eastport Sentinel*, 13 June 1923; "Sardines Take Jump. Basis Price Goes to $3.60 Per Case. Supply Still Remains Light," *Eastport Sentinel*, 8 August 1923; "Herring Catch Is Still Small. Some Fish at Wolves and Perry. Price of Sardines May Rise beyond $3.50," *Eastport Sentinel*, 18 July 1923.

110. The term "darks" was often used to refer to the late summer runs. The biggest herring runs occurred in spring and fall; these August runs tended to interrupt an otherwise "dark" season of limited fish.

111. "Price Breaks to $17 per Hogshead. Scarcity of Herring Brings Days of 'Auction' Back Again," *Eastport Sentinel*, 22 August 1923; "Price of Fish Are Skyrocketing. Touch Highest Level since 1916," *Eastport Sentinel*, 5 September 1923.

discouraging more fishermen from entering the business, thus preventing the oversupply of the market and the predictable drop in prices.[112]

The agreement had immediate effects. Prices dropped even more quickly than they had increased, to only $10 or $12 a hogshead.[113] Meanwhile, wholesale prices for sardines had increased to $5 a case in New York by October. Then, in late October, a gale hit the Passamaquoddy Bay area and destroyed a large number of weirs. Because of this, prices rose sharply for a brief moment. In early November, as canneries rushed to store up stock, and with few weirs in operation, some purchases reached $55 a hogshead, with $42.50 to $47.50 being the average around the region. In one case, an unidentified weir fisherman earned $17,000 in just two weeks.[114] This moment of price inflation, however, was atypical. Few weirmen were prepared to benefit from the two-week flurry in purchasing and it had limited impact on the overall market. The general trend of the 1923 season clearly shows that the canneries remained in control of the price, even though all the pieces were in place for a weirmen's effort to reclaim a degree of power. Limited overstock from 1922 drove up the wholesale price of sardines to $5 a case. Canneries were again eager to make a large pack and thus demand for herring fish remained high throughout the season. Bad winter weather damaged or destroyed a large number of weirs. Poor spring runs further reduced the supply of herring. High demand and low supply should have resulted in high prices for herring fishermen, yet those prices did not materialize until the very end of the season, and even then, only for two weeks. The canneries clearly demonstrated their power by keeping prices low even during this promising season.

IV

The second half of the 1920s was more of the same story. American canneries continued to formalize their association, which by the middle of the decade was an industry norm throughout the United States. New Brunswick weirmen responded by again trying to unionize and, for a brief two years, winning some government regulation in Canada.[115] Yet their control over the

112. "Cut in Price in Herring. And Grant Small Wage Increase to Laborers," *Eastport Sentinel*, 12 September 1923.

113. Herring Drop to Ten Dollars. Price Slides a Trifle Here, But Holds on West Coast," *Eastport Sentinel*, 3 October 1923.

114. "Sardine Herring Higher in Price. Touch Highest Level since 1916. Industry Threatened by Tariff Policy," *Eastport Sentinel*, 14 November 1923.

115. "Herring Reaching Eastern Maine Waters; Advance 'Schools' Swim into St. Croix and Cobscook River near Eastport. – Spring Catches Satisfactory," *Eastport Sentinel*, 4 June 1924; "Canadian Fishermen Slap Back: Test Will Come Thursday, June 12th – Drastic Cut to $6 a Hogshead in Herring Prices by Eastern Maine Sardine Canners Calls for Indignation Meeting and Passing of New Canadian Fish-Law," *Eastport Sentinel*, 11 June 1924; "Sardine Combine Is Approved: Federal Authorities Believe Elimination of Competition Means Better Sardines,"

market value and environment of the herring fishery had collapsed. Canneries coordinated to reduce overall production from an average of two million cases per year during the first decade of the 20th century to just one million cases by the end of the 1920s. Canneries also focused on quality over quantity and refused to buy low-grade fish that they had previously marketed to the rural poor. The general decline in production and their focus on higher-grade product meant fewer purchases from weirmen. With a few exceptions, most of which occurred during the final two-week period of each season, weirmen throughout the second half of the 1920s received between six and ten dollars a hogshead for juvenile herring.[116]

Although Maine sardine managers had attempted to consolidate their operations into some kind of a trust, syndicate, or cooperative during the final decades of the 19th century, it was not until after World War I that they were successful in doing so. Their earlier failure was the result, in part, of their inability to force weir fishermen to abandon their auctioning system, which gave the fishermen control over the supply and price of herring, as well as access to the environment from which that herring came. The managers' consolidation efforts succeeded following World War I largely because the new glut in sardines, as well as more general food supply trends during the 1920s, allowed them to hold out longer and eventually break the weirmen's resistence. By the early 1920s, canneries sent out the buying boats with specific instructions not to buy herring at auction and instead to offer fixed prices – prices most likely established by the cannery managers.

One result of the fuller integration of Maine's sardine canneries was the collapse of independence among fishermen. Weir fishermen remained subcontractors to the large canneries in eastern Maine, but they lost their status as independent labourers setting their own work patterns. Although they could still make their own choices about where, when, and how often to fish,

---

Eastport Sentinel, 7 January 1925; "Canners Accept Fishermen's Minimum Price – $10: Went into Effect June 12th – Harmony Restored along Frontier Maine Waters – Same Prices Being Paid Maine Weirowners and Fishermen – Quick Solution of Important Herring-Price Problem after One Day Idle," *Eastport Sentinel*, 18 June 1924; "Many Factories Are Open: Sardine Season Starts in Real Earnest Monday," *Eastport Sentinel*, 6 May 1925; "To Continue Ten Dollar Price: Sentiment Strong for Maintaining Minimum Price for Sardines – Wand Standard Hogshead," *Eastport Sentinel*, 20 January 1926; "Price of Fish Goes Down: Drops to Five, Six, and Eight on American Side – Ten in Canada?," *Eastport Sentinel*, 8 September 1926; "There Goes the Ten Dollar Price: Canadian Minimum Abandoned Last Week," *Eastport Sentinel*, 22 September 1926.

116. For some examples of price fluctuations, see "Flurry in the Price of Fish: Price Skyrockets Monday, Down Again Now," *Eastport Sentinel*, 9 November 1927; "Sardine Season Poor Thus Far: Few Fish Being Taken; Prices Low; Inspectors' Names," *Eastport Sentinel*, 10 July 1929; "Sardine Catch Extremely Light: Practically No Fish Taken to Quoddy during Past Week," *Eastport Sentinel*, 31 July 1929; "Sardine Packing Much More Active: Fish More Plentiful – All Factories Now Open except That of M.C. Holmes Canning Co.," *Eastport Sentinel*, 27 August 1930.

the value of that labour was now clearly set by external forces. Canneries blamed high overstock from previous years' packs, low consumer demand, competition from foreign imports, unfair freight rates, and the rise of western Maine and California canneries as justifiable reasons to lower the price of herring at the weir in Passamaquoddy Bay. This integration effort had a profound ripple effect on the livelihood of Maine and New Brunswick fishermen. Weir fishermen in the Passamaquoddy Bay most certainly practised a form of occupational pluralism, drawing a living from multiple forms of work. Yet, selling herring was their chief source of actual income. In order to make living wages from less than ten dollars a hogshead, the weir fishermen of the Passamaquoddy Bay "frontier" turned to their own form of concentration and investment. By the end of the 1920s, fewer, more expensive weirs dominated the working seascape. In July 1929, the *Eastport Sentinel* observed that "under present conditions the passing of the small weir that fishes only occasionally, is becoming a certainty, for the fishermen can afford to operate only those that fish regularly and make large catches."[117] Integrated capitalism, which had begun at the executive level of the canneries, had worked its way down to the workspace of the herring fishery.

I would like to thank the editorial team at Labour/Le Travail *for their hard work in seeing this manuscript come to print. I would also like to thank Dr. Andrew Holman at Bridgewater State University for reading, editing, and commenting on early drafts of this article. Finally, I would like to thank the participants of the 2013 Northeast-Atlantic Regional Environmental History Workshop for providing excellent commentary on an early draft of this article.*

117. "Sardine Season Poor Thus Far," *Eastport Sentinel*, 10 July 1929.