

Open Boats



**A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF
COMMERCIAL FISHING IN
WHEATLEY — ONTARIO**



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PREFACE

The history of commercial fishing on Lake Erie in the Wheatley area, had it's beginning over a century ago. From a few pound nets set out along the shoreline of Lake Erie to present day large modern operations, the industry has undergone vast changes during its development.

The early pioneer fishermen could not foresee the future of their industry as we observe it now. Fishing provided the means for a supplement to their income, since many of the men were farmers as well. Some were born to the water and they knew the fishing game. They worked hard and, as one veteran described it... "It was no place for a weakling." Nonetheless, these men built the industry's foundation and they built it well.

The days of the sturgeon, the whitefish and the herring are gone. The twine fields, the scent of tar and creosote heating in vats over an open fire, the cotton nets, the faithful horses, the open wooden boats, and the ice shanties remain only in memories of a bygone era.

"Open Boats" is an attempt to capture some of the nostalgia, the good and the bad times, of an industry which brought prosperity to a small lake port community and earned for it the title,..... "Fresh Water Fish Capital of the World."

Rita Lobzun

Dedicated to the memory of all the men who worked the pound nets in open boats including my father-in-law, Mike Lobzun, who introduced me to commercial fishing and who gave me the inspiration to write their story.

FOREWORD

Some time ago the Canadian government developed a grant system in order to encourage work projects, which would be created by independent citizens. The Local Initiative Program of Canada Manpower has been very successful in financing beneficial community projects, as well as in providing jobs for many unemployed Canadians. Furthermore, this program has proven as valuable to the government in furnishing the country with information and resources, as it has in providing its citizens with finances and jobs.

A very successful example of the LIP grant can be found in the contents of the following pages. Three Wheatley women, Rita Lobzun, Marguerite Carter and Gail Tofflemire, have worked long and often frustrating hours to complete a project, which will serve to represent and inform their community. These women set about to record the history of commercial fishing in the Wheatley-Port Crewe area, from the years 1860-1960-a task which proved to be more difficult than was anticipated due to the shocking lack of information, in any public library or government archives, on this subject. Thus, it was even more essential that this information be sought out and documented, not only for the records of the Wheatley community itself, but also for those of Canadian public institutions as well.

Therefore, through many hours of researching articles in back issues of the Wheatley Journal, some dating as far back as 1895, and through a number of interviews with local citizens, who were very knowledgeable about the fishing industry, Mrs. Lobzun and her two assistants were able to compile as complete a picture of commercial fishing in Wheatley-Port Crewe as was possible with the information available.

This book, "Open Boats", represents an essential part of the Wheatley area, in dealing with an industry which grew with the village and helped it to prosper. It is amazing that such interesting and impressive historical data has been ignored, for the most part, until the present time.

Finally, what "Open Boats" will mean to the people of the Wheatley-Port Crewe area alone has made this project worthwhile. Those who have laboured for and loved the fishing industry will see their experiences come alive in print. Those who have lived in this area for years, but have not been very familiar with this important local industry, will gain a new insight into the origins of their village. Also, the book will provide a source of historical information for young people who may be interested in learning why Wheatley earned the title of the "Fresh Water Fish Capital of the World".

Karen Adamson-Editor

CHAPTER 1

The port of Wheatley, lying in the lee of Point Pelee on the north shore of Lake Erie, has been the scene of commercial fishing for over one hundred years.

Before the arrival of white settlers, the heavily timbered and swampy land was inhabited by North American Indians, who fished for their own needs using a type of net fashioned from hemp, or an enclosure made up of brush. During spawning seasons the fish were easily caught as they swam in the shallow waters along the shore to lay their eggs.

In his book, *Canada-Past-Present-and Future*, published in 1851, W. H. Smith describes fishing stations of the Western District. These were located on Peche Island, and points on the Detroit and St. Clair rivers. The predominate species found there were the whitefish, taken during October and November. Shipped in barrels, they found a ready market in the U.S. bringing in an average of \$5.00 per barrel.

The Western basin of Lake Erie, its shallow clay bottom covered with sand, was found to have ideal conditions for pound-net fishing. This method developed along the south shore of Lake Erie in and around Presque Ile. Bay, Pennsylvania and spread westward to Ohio and Sandusky Bay in the early 1800's. Canadian fishermen adopted these methods and began setting pound nets along the north shore. There are records of early fisheries at Point Pelee operated by the Girardin, Delaurier, Loop and Grubb families.

The first recorded commercial fishery in the Wheatley area was operated by William McLean, who settled on Lot 3, Concession 1 of Romney township in 1866.

The abundance of fish and an increasing market demand prompted others to engage in the business. Soon the shoreline was dotted with small boats, docks and fish shanties, which were constructed by the owners who used their own timber. Their operations were carried out in the spring and fall, thereby allowing them to engage in farming and clearing the land as well.

The late Moses "Mode" Shaw was one of the early fishermen who worked for the Enoch McLean fishery. In an interview with Henry Fisher of the Windsor Star in 1943, he related how he began his career as a young lad of twelve, and also that he had been fishing for sixty-one years. He described how they would row out to the nets, pull them in by hand and row back to shore. "After a day's work like that you could eat a horse and lay down anywhere and sleep", he recalled.

A few years later the sailing vessels came into use by the fishermen and even though work was still slow at times it was a great improvement over the rowing method. "Mode" recalled having to load thirty-three tons of herring into a boat by himself. The pay was \$18.00 a month, which included board. This was consid-

ered a high wage at that time.

He witnessed the disappearance of the sturgeon and the herring from Lake Erie, and remembered when the sturgeon was a cent a pound. Because many remained unsold, they were left to rot on the beaches. Herring were worth one and a half cents a pound and were often dumped back into the lake because of the poor market.

The Chatham Daily Planet, March 2, 1892, carried an account of the fishing operations along the Kent County shoreline. Thirty-six to forty miles of nets were set from Coatsworth's dock to Morpeth: thirty-three pound nets were in operation, valued at \$230.00 each. The operations also consisted of thirteen sail boats, five scows, ten small boats and the employment of one hundred men. The average distance between each net was a mile and a half.

Whitefish, herring, mullets, suckers, perch, sheephead, catfish, sturgeon and an occasional bass were caught: the greater portion netted were the herring.

Wages for the men ranged from \$18.00 to \$40.00 per month, excluding board.

The H. C. Post Company of Sandusky, Ohio, fish retail and wholesale dealers, were the principal buyers. During the fishing season they sent their Canadian-built steam tug, the "City of Dresden", to the Canadian shore three times weekly to pick up the catches.

As fishing operations prospered, another industry in the area began using Lake Erie as a means of shipping. At that time, lumbering was a major industry in the area. Logs were cut at a mill in the Coatsworth area, taken by steam engine to the lake bank, and then rolled down to the water. Here they were tied into rafts and towed behind tugboats to Sandusky, Ohio. In the process many logs became dislodged and floated free, often finding their way into the fishing nets and causing extensive damage. An item in the Wheatley Journal notes that in June 1897, Henry Healey was rafting logs on this shore for E. Wonnel & Co., Port Clinton, Ohio.

On Feb. 4, 1898, a delegation of North Shore fishermen met with Dominion Government officials to recommend that the license fee be reduced from \$50.00 per pound net to \$25.00, thereby making it equal to the fee set for fishermen west of Point Pelee. The delegates also drew attention to the facts that American fishermen paid no license, had no "closed season", and that the fishing interests were in the hands of wealthy American companies, who followed the schools of fish, operating steam tugs and seines over the entire lake.

They also requested that the government steamer, "the Petrel", winter in a port on Lake Erie, rather than in Owen Sound since the boat was forced to leave Lake Erie a month before fishing ceased in order to avoid icy conditions and reach her winter berth. A similar amount of time was also lost in spring when the vessel returned.

No promises were made by the Hon. Mr. Davis,

although the delegates were pleased with their meeting.

During this period, business was flourishing and due to the action taken by the Sandwich Fish Hatchery in re-stocking the lake with whitefish and herring, there seemed to be an endless supply of these species.

In June 1898 Adam Oper, a well-known Point Pelee fisherman, observed that the entrance to Sturgeon Creek was blocked with lake sand. Upon opening the channel he discovered that the creek waters were thick with young herring anxious to gain entrance to the lake. "While I stood there", he said, "there must have been enough to produce 5000 pounds of herring". The Leamington News further stated that Mr. Oper held the opinion that the pond at the lower end of Sturgeon Creek could be used as a nursery for the young fry, when they were brought in by the Sandwich Fish Hatchery in early spring. He felt that they would have a better chance of surviving, since they would escape the April storms on the lake, which often caused severe losses to the stocks of young fish.

Mr. Oper's opinion is still shared today by some of the men who spawned the whitefish and the herring. They too feel that had the fry been held in stock until they were larger, they would have stood a better chance of survival.

The turn of the century found many area men engaged in commercial fishing. They were, George and Enoch McLean, T. H. Maxwell, Isaac Shaw, Alex Christie, N. Coles, F.D. (Daddy) Smith, W. J. Dawson, Chas. Healey, J. Conway, the Lamarsh Bros., Josh Liddle, Thos. Mills, John and Willis Curtis, H. Long, Sam and Hez Bickford and Moody and Coulson.

At the same time, thousands of miles away, the Boer War was raging in Africa. A Patriotic Fund was established to assist the British and Canadians, who were engaged in the fighting. An area fisherman, Alex Christie, sent the following letter to the editor of the Wheatley Journal in the form of a petition to the Provincial Government, which would allow the fishermen to contribute to this fund in an unusual manner. The letter, as follows, clearly indicates the loyal and patriotic spirit that existed among he and his fellow fishermen:

Dear Sir:

If you will allow me a few minutes of your valuable time, I will make a few suggestions as to how the National Patriotic Fund in Ontario might be greatly increased.

As you are aware, there is a closed season on pickerel in the Province of Ontario from April 15th to May 15th, during which time pickerel fishing is at its best. I would like to suggest that if the government would take off the closed season on pickerel for this year and apply the money derived from the sale of these fish to the Patriotic Fund, and just allow the fishermen who take them enough to pay for the hauling and shipping, that fund could be greatly augmented. The price reserved for pickerel is \$1.50 per cwt. for

blue and \$3.50 per cwt. for yellow, and in some instances, \$5.00 per cwt.

Now I think the money derived from the sale of these fish during the closed season would, at a low estimate, amount to between three and five thousand dollars. I have spoken to several fishermen on this subject and they seem to agree with my views. Some offered to handle the fish free of charge, but some of us are not able to be that liberal. I am writing this letter with purely patriotic intentions, and the fishermen I have conversed with on this subject do not care for any gain for themselves.

I have nothing to complain of with regards to my treatment from the Fishery Department. I have not heard a murmur or complaint from any fisherman, either Conservative or Reform, which is something wonderful.

In regard to collecting the money for these fish, for the Fund, should such a thing come to pass, our local fishery overseer could see to that, or anyone whom the government should see fit to appoint.

Not wishing to take too much of your valuable time I will close with my best wishes to my brethren who went to Africa and the Patriotic Fund. I remain a loyal subject to my Queen and country.

Alex Christie

No evidence was found through further research to indicate whether Mr. Christie's request was carried out.

The fishery overseer at that time was Peter Lamarsh of the South Essex District, which included Wheatley. Increases in catches were reported as follows: herring 65,000 lbs., whitefish 12,000 lbs., perch 21,000 lbs. The total value was \$18,737.00. This report, forwarded to Deputy Minister S. T. Bastedo, was for the year 1899.

Fishermen were reporting good catches and a scarcity of boxes with which to hold them.

Boat races were a popular attraction and many spectators would gather near the mouth of Two Creeks, and along the shore of the lake to cheer on the contestants. Competition was keen, both in racing, as well as in building fishing and pleasure boats. In 1903 Jim Lamarsh, after outfitting his fishing "smack" with a new set of Reliance sails, proudly boasted that he could now "do" any boat along the north shore.

Fishing boats were now being equipped with single or double gasoline engines, enabling the fishermen to save a great deal of time and labour.

Catches of fish were being shipped from the railway station at Wheatley, as well as by steam tugs coming from the south shore.

In 1915, a conference of fish and game wardens and district overseers was called by Hon. Finlay McDiarmid, minister of Public Works. Here it was announced that Lake Erie would be thrown open to the gill net fishermen, and that they would be permitted to fish outside a ten mile limit, in any part of the lake.

The license fee was set at \$250.00 per tug; only

1200 feet of net was allowed, with a future possibility of 2,000 to 3,000 feet. Closed season on fishing of all kinds was from December 15 to March 1.

The four years during the First World War created a great demand for fish products. Lake Erie was providing an abundance of whitefish, but the herring was "king".

Pound net fishermen were paying \$50.00 per pound net for their license, and an additional Royalty fee of ¼¢ per pound was collected for all fish in excess of 16 tons.

The gill netting operations were causing grave concern among the pound net fishermen, who feared that the fish stocks were being depleted.

In December 1919, fifty north shore fishermen met at the Merrill Hotel, Chatham, to protest the placing of nets by gill netters within the ten mile limit, close to the pound nets. They requested that the government begin strict enforcement of the laws, and that the gillnetters be compelled to fish only part of the port they were licensed for. They also asked that the Ontario government send a patrol boat to see that these laws be obeyed.

Among the list of conditions on the fishery license were: that all Whitefish and Salmon Trout less than two pounds in weight and Sturgeon, less than forty-two inches in length (measurement to be from the point of the nose to the centre of the posterior margin of the tail) caught in nets, shall be immediately returned alive and uninjured, to the waters in which they were so taken or captured, and.....

.....that the license shall allow Hatchery Officers, or such persons as may be authorized by the Game and Fisheries Department of Ontario to collect spawn, to take the eggs of any fish taken by him, free of any charge or compensation, and to go on his tug or boat, if any, for such purpose.

The Kingsville Hatchery collected the spawn from the fishermen in the fall and returned the fry the following spring. In 1919, thirty-seven million whitefish and thirty-two million herring fry were put into the lake.

In 1927 the Ontario government allowed fishing to be permitted as long as the weather allowed. A plan to stop on Dec. 1 was strongly opposed by fishing companies, because of the fact that U.S. fishermen were being allowed to fish as long as the weather was suitable.



Fishing tugs tied up at Wheatley's harbour in the 1950's. Twine washing equipment can be seen in the foreground.

The following note appeared in the September 14, 1933 issue of the Wheatley Journal, "Village council, concerned with the rapid depletion of fish in Lake Erie, caused from an open lake to gill-net fishing boats, petitioned to the Department of Fisheries, to enact legislation making it unlawful for any gill-net boat to operate from any but its own port. Since 1916, gill-netters have been allowed to fish anywhere in Canadian waters and this has caused grave concern to the pound-net fishermen, who fear their livelihood is being threatened."

The fishing business continued to flourish and by 1939 it was estimated that half the population of Wheatley was supported by this industry.

McLean Bros. were operating three pound-net fisheries and three gill-net fisheries, and were working with five up-to-date boats powered by gasoline engines. E. Omstead and his sons, Leonard and Duane, were operating three pound-net fisheries, four gill-net fisheries and a fleet of six boats, equipped with the latest marine engines. They also conducted a large wholesale and retail business. Other fisheries included Harvey Getty, Frank Bailey, John Ferris, Cobby and Moody, and Liddles.

The 1940's saw six fisheries operating a total of ninety-six pound nets. A large portion of the catches were sold to New York, Boston and other major centres in the southern and central United States.

Fishing methods had greatly improved with the introduction of automatic ice machines, automatic net pullers, and pressure pumps, which washed the nets.

Wheatley Harbour

Prior to the construction of the present harbour, the means of bringing in catches of fish were limited to small pound-net and gill-net boats. These had to be pulled up onto the beach each night, or raised up on chain falls.

Other ports along the north shore had harbours, making it possible for fisheries located there to carry out their operations with much larger boats, which resulted in greater volumes of fish being handled.

During the late forties, the fisheries of Omstead's Loop's, McLean's and Getty's owned property along the banks of Muddy Creek, where their boats were moored.

Following meetings with the owners of the creek property, Leonard R. Omstead made contacts with Paul Martin and Murray Clark, Essex members of Parliament, and William Colby, an engineer, while seeking government funds for the purpose of constructing a harbour in Muddy Creek.

A delegation consisting of Mr. Omstead, Frank Getty, Jack Dean, and Mape Nelson, journeyed to Ottawa where they received a hearing with the Minister of Public Works - Mr. Fournier.

In response to the delegates' request, an engineer was sent to Wheatley to survey the location.

Following this survey, the committee was informed that the government could not spend funds to build a harbour on privately-owned property.

The solution to this problem was quickly found when the owners all accepted a verbal agreement to turn their property over to the Federal government, with the understanding that upon completion of the harbour, the government would return the property to the owners with a lifetime lease.

Construction began, and in August 1951 the official opening of the harbour was celebrated with a Water Festival, which attracted thousands of spectators.

In 1951 Lake Erie fishermen were being permitted to replace pound nets with trap nets on a one per one basis. The fee remained at \$50.00 per net, and fishing was to be carried out in the pound-net grounds.

The invasion of the smelt brought many changes to the industry. The gill-netters lost many hours sorting and picking, and often it was more feasible to throw the catch and net away.

Sport fishermen had also discovered the smelt, since when the fish were spawning in April they were easily caught with dip or seine nets near the shore. The annual smelt run attracted large crowds of people from as far away as Michigan and Ohio, to the beaches of Point Pelee and Wheatley. Not only were they easily caught, but their taste also proved to be very popular. The commercial fishermen now realizing that there could be a market for this new species, investigated the possibility of using a method similar to the one used in shrimp harvesting in the Gulf of Mexico. Frank Getty, following a study of the shrimp operations in Biloxi, Mississippi, borrowed a trawl, and using a permit, began experimenting on Lake Erie.

The provincial government, also studying the new developments, utilized the Erie 1 to carry out trawling operations with satisfactory results.

In 1966, an official of the Dept. of Transport in Ottawa, a Mr. Seck, arrived in Wheatley to outline regulations regarding the space provisions for the fishing boats. Each fisherman was allotted space for one boat. Any additional boats owned by him would be tied up side by side.

This idea for boat slips, regulated spaces for boats, was promoted by fisherman for the fishermen, thus no pleasure boat would be allowed to use these facilities. Eugene Whelan, M.P. for Essex, was also active in promoting this project.

At the same time, Clarence Little, George Crewe and Harold Ives were appointed as a harbour committee to look after any grievances.

CHAPTER 2

The Fisheries

Wheatley's First Fishery

The McLean fishery records indicate that William McLean set the first pound nets near the site of their present location on Erie St. South. A descendant of early Gosfield Township pioneers, he was possessed with all the qualities needed to survive in an undeveloped land: courage, a strong back and above all, the determination to carve a home out of the wilderness for his young family.

After locating himself, on Lot 3, Concession 1 of Romney Township in 1866, he proceeded to clear his land. The abundance of sturgeon, herring and whitefish in Lake Erie, prompted him to establish a fishery, which was equipped with a small row boat. Methods of marketing his catches were limited to purchases by area residents, and fish peddlars, who with the use of a horse and wagon would transport them to Windsor. Occasionally, William McLean would row across Lake Erie to sell his catch to American buyers located on the south shore.

By the year 1880 William McLean was well-established in farming as well as fishing. As the area gradually developed, he became aware of the need for docking facilities in order to transport grain products, lumber and fish. A large dock was constructed near his fishery and became known as McLean's Dock. Huge storage sheds were also built to hold the grain brought in by area farmers.

William's eldest son, Enoch, returned after two years as a seaman on the Great Lakes to settle in Port Alma and established a fishery there, which he later sold to John Carr. Following his father's death in 1898, Enoch returned to Wheatley to manage his father's fishery. His brother George, the owner of a large farm, also carried out extensive pound net operations. In June, 1898, George recorded shipping 21,917 pounds of fish to Buffalo in one week. This did not include the twenty-six sturgeon caught in his pound net in one day.

Following the close of the fishing season, Enoch McLean held an oyster supper each year for all his hard working employees.

In 1930 Enoch passed away, having spent sixty-two years in the fishing industry. His eldest son, E. Nick, who had worked with his father, took over the family farming and fishing operations, and was assisted by his two brothers, William and George.

George McLean, vividly recalled many scenes of the past. When a young lad one of his tasks was to take hot meat pies, which were made by his mother, out to the men working the nets. After loading the pies into a small dinghy, he would row out alone to the nets and the hungry fishermen.

Being of a mechanical nature, George designed and built a twine washer, but regretted that he did not apply for a patent for the invention.

Richard and Murray McLean, sons of George,

became the fourth generation of McLeans involved in the fishing industry. In the late thirties, Richard "Dick", received the appointment as the Dominion representative for Chrysler Marine motors and established his agency in Wheatley. In October 1941, he lost his life when the McLean fishing tug, the "R & G", sank in Lake Erie, a short distance from the Kingsville harbour. Two passengers, Mrs. Charles Aubrey and her son Laverne, had chartered the boat for a business trip to Pelee Island. Also on board was Thomas I. Epplert of Wheatley, a close friend of Dick. All four perished in the mishap, leaving a community saddened and bewildered by the tragedy. The forty-foot tug was newly-constructed and was considered one of the most powerful and seaworthy fishing crafts on Lake Erie. Both men were experienced navigators, having spent most of their adult lives in the fishing industry. Tom Epplert, a former employee of the James Grubb fisheries at Point Pelee, was a partner in the Epplert family firm, the "Wheatley Journal".

During the Second World War, many area men were called to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. Naturally, Murray McLean chose to don the uniform of the Royal Canadian Navy. Upon his return to civilian life, he resumed the management of the Chrysler Marine Agency, which in his absence had been handled well by his mother, Mrs. Flossie McLean - a woman gifted with many fine capabilities.

In 1950, Murray sold his marine business to the partnership of Peter Anthony and J. D. Keats, and took over the management of the McLean Bros. fishery. The need for more workers to process the large volume of catches prompted him to hire women, for the first time, to fillet and pack the fish. Sixteen women were employed; this plan proved very effective in getting their popular "Mac Pac" brand to market.

In the late fifties the smelt invasion brought about



McLean Bros. Crew with their day's catch of sturgeon in the 1930's. Rear: l. to r. Hez Bickford, Henry Julien, Fred Rodgers, Glen Moody, Jack St. John, Jack Nicholson, George McLean, R. Traudo, Frank Mason, A. Derbyshire, Charles Lamb. Front row: Jack Cobby, Wm. McLean, Nick McLean.

great changes in the industry, hence the McLeans' decided to phase out their pound net operations.

Following the death of Murray McLean in 1976, the firm continued operations under the management of his son Duncan.

On March 20, 1979, a group of seven men pooled their skills and finances to form a new company with Ray Getty as president. The directors of the firm voted in favour of retaining the well-known McLean name and their famous Mac Pac brand label.



Unloading nets from the tug to the stoneboat at McLean's dock. Teamster Fred Rodgers with horses Bill and George.



This photo taken in the early 1950's by the Windsor Star illustrates the use of the broad axe being held by Mike Lobzun while his employer, Nick McLean looks on.



Left to right: "Lefty" Miffiin, Jim Gould, Mike Lobzun and John Nicholson with a giant sturgeon captured in a McLean Bros pound net in the early 1950's.

The Lamarsh Brothers

The five Lamarsh brothers, who owned and operated fisheries at the mouth of Two Creeks and Yellow Creek - a short distance east of Wheatley, were Edward, Oliver, James, Arthur and Peter. They were the sons of John Lamarsh 11, one of the early area settlers.

The Lamarsh brothers' pound net fishing operations were extensive. They also owned a large tract of land in Romney Township, which was cleared and developed by them. The timber cut from the Lamarsh woods was used in the construction of their fishing boats, docks and buildings.

Oliver "Bert" Lamarsh was considered to be an expert in the builders trade. In the spring of 1902 he constructed a boat for the Healy and Carr fishery at Port Alma, which was described as "the best one yet". His business, which was carried out during off season, was located in the back yard of his home in Wheatley. Today it is the residence of his daughter, Mrs. Thelma Stein. The home was also constructed by him, another fine example of his workmanship.

Bert's brother, Edward Lamarsh, operated the Yellow Creek fishery in partnership with J. W. "Josh" Liddle.

In 1901, Peter Lamarsh was appointed to act as fishery inspector for the counties of Essex, Kent and Lambton, a position which he served well. He also served on the Essex County Council. Peter, being a farmer as well, took great pride in his Duroc Jersey swine, which he raised on his farm on the 7th Conc. of Mersea and exhibited at fall fairs.

James Lamarsh owned a fishery east of Wheatley, which was later operated by his son Norman.

Arthur Lamarsh proved to be a very worthy and capable spokesman for the fishermen and often bore business matters to Toronto on their behalf.

Arthur White of Leamington, a nephew of the Lamarsh brothers, was born in 1888 and still has vivid memories of his uncles' fisheries. The fish were plentiful then, and as a boy he used to run along the water's edge trying to spear a sturgeon. Arthur's duties began at an early age. He was hired by the Lamarsh brothers to ride a horse while it pulled their boat along the shoreline toward the Ed Lamarsh fishery at Yellow Creek. It was a challenging job, the young lad had to encourage the horse to swim around the small docks that jutted out into deeper waters.

Mr. White fondly recalled a day in the year 1896, which made local history in the fishing industry. His uncle, Arthur Lamarsh, had the first engine installed in a fishing boat in Wheatley's port. Many people gathered to watch and to have their first ride in an engine-powered craft. While the boat was being rolled out into the lake, young Arthur White accidentally fell into the shallow water and one of the rollers passed over him. The wet boy was quickly rescued and placed on board for a memorable ride.

There seems to be little evidence concerning the Lamarsh fisheries after 1910. At this particular time many partnerships changed hands or dissolved as men chose to leave the fishing industry and seek other means of gaining a livelihood. Some of the Lamarsh families moved to the Canadian west and homesteaded on the prairies of Saskatchewan.

The Liddle Fishery

Joseph "Josh" Liddle, son of Christopher and Bessie Liddle, was born in England and immigrated to Canada with his parents at the age of seven. The family settled in Romney township in the late 1860's, when the area was still largely undeveloped.

Following his marriage to Elizabeth Sample, "Josh" chose to take up the occupation of fishing. In 1887 he formed a partnership with Ed Lamarsh, whose fishery was located at the Erie end of the old Backus side road, now known as Campers Cove Road.

Men employed at the fishery were transported to and from work by horse and buggy.

"Josh" Liddle kept his crew occupied during the winter, building boats, which he designed. Many of

them were wooden pound net boats constructed for other area commercial fishermen.

At that time, a favourite winter pastime was ice-boat racing on Two Creeks, east of Wheatley. "Josh" and another local fisherman, W. Dobbyn, were two enthusiastic contestants, who owned and operated ice-boats, and enjoyed competing against one another.

In 1900 Mr. Liddle and H. Maxwell purchased a fishery at Salem and set pound nets off Lots 193 to 199 in Romney Township. Mr. Maxwell later sold his interest to William Crewe, who after a few years of fishing, left the industry and moved to Wheatley, where he established a Ford car dealership.

In March 1909 T. J. Gibson of Wheatley manufactured fifty rod of chain for the Liddle and Ivison fishery. The chain, composed of 1700 links and weighing 750 pounds, was used to weight the pound nets set in the lake.

On May 26, 1910, "Josh" Liddle launched "The Comet", fittingly named after the fiery Haley's comet, which had been previously sighted in the sky. It was noted in the Wheatley Journal that this boat was a great credit to it's builders, showing excellent seaworthiness and a new record in speed.

In 1913 Mr. Liddle purchased Mr. Ivison's share of the fishery and became the sole owner.

The Liddle fishing boats were moored at Salem. Each morning a horse was used to pull the boat in shallow water along the shoreline for a distance of two miles. Here the crew boarded the boat, rowed out to the location of their pound nets and began the day's work of lifting their catch. In the meantime the horse was tethered to a tree on the beach. When the men returned to shore at the end of the day, the horse pulled the loaded boat back to its mooring place. The fish were taken from the boat, packed in wooden boxes with ice and taken by horse and wagon to the Pere Marquette railway station at Renwick.

The Liddle records show that in 1932 gill net licenses were \$60.00 per net and pound net licenses were \$50.00 each. In 1934 the monthly wage for a fisherman was \$60.00, working six days a week.

"Josh" Liddle passed away in 1937, having spent fifty years in the fishing industry. His two sons, Clarence "Tode" and Harold "Jimmy", who had worked with their father in the fishing and boat-building trade, took over the business.

In 1951, Tode's son, Jack Liddle, along with his crew, Carmen Mellin and Bob Morgan, pulled the remains of their pound nets from the lake. A severe ice storm had caused extensive damage, resulting in heavy losses of equipment. For the Liddles, and for several other area fisheries, it brought an end to the era of pound net fishing.

The Liddles relocated their fishery on the east bank of Muddy Creek and continued their boat-building during "off season". Here in 1968, the industrious Liddle brothers, Jack and Jerry, assisted by Elmer Haikala, built one of the largest fishing tugs on Lake Erie at that time. In 1970 the brothers designed and

built the "Liddle Lady". Two years later the "Linda-Jane", the largest commercial fishing tug on the Great Lakes, was launched. The ninety-two foot tug, designed for the purpose of gill netting as well as trawling, carried the most modern equipment available.

On May 1st, 1978 the "Mi-Mark", another eighty-two foot fishing tug, was launched. Mike and Mark Liddle, sons of Jack, had the honour of christening the vessel, which bears their names. Perhaps the same words can be said today that were spoken over sixty years ago at the launching of their great-grandfather's boat the "Comet"; the new tug is a great credit to it's builders.

The Crewe Brothers

In 1904, four brothers, A. E. Crewe, D. L. Crewe, W. R. Crewe and S. M. Crewe, purchased the Tom Mills fishery and began operating pound nets off lot 199 in Romney Township. In 1907 they acquired the John Carr fishery, and fished off lots 170 to 179. Two years later, they purchased the John Steward fishery thereby including lots 161 to 169. Then, on the boundary between lots 169 and 170, they built a substantial dock.

Their business continued to flourish, fish were plentiful and boats from Ohio came regularly to pick up the catches. Frank Crewe, now retired from fishing, related how Port Crewe got it's name.

He said, "Well, in the good old days, say, back about 1912, we caught a lot of herring in our pound nets. American tugs from Sandusky, Cleveland, and Ashtabula came over and we'd load up maybe, thirteen ton on a tug. They didn't have any mark on their charts to tell them where to come; they just came "by guess and by gosh". So my father, Alex Crewe, wrote to the Hydrographical Chart office in Ottawa to have Port Crewe established on the map and the charts of the lake." Frank's father was also instrumental in forming the Lake Erie Fishermens' Association around the year 1915.

Earlier, in 1914, a group of experienced deep-sea fishermen from Hastings, England had arrived at the Crewe fishery in response to an appeal for more workers. They were given accommodations and immediately set to work for the fishing season was at hand. Later they were joined by their families.

The Crewe brothers continued to expand their operations to meet the needs of a growing business. They built their own boats and manufactured their own fish boxes. Local timber was purchased, cut down and brought to their fishery and sawed in their mill. Their 150-foot dock was located at the bottom of the seventy-eight foot bank. Tracks were installed, enabling railway-like cars to carry equipment, fish and even passengers up and down the bank.

Similarly, a barn consisting of white oak beams, a blacksmith shop, a 60-foot two-storey twine shed, and the installation of gas and water pumps - engineered

and constructed by the Crewes and their employees, kept the men of the small lake port community busy throughout the winter months.

In 1918 a large ice-house, sixty feet long, forty feet wide and eighteen feet high, was constructed from cement blocks. The building, capable of storing up to one thousand tons of ice, was designed in order that no sawdust or hay was necessary to keep the ice from melting. As well as serving the needs of area fisheries, local residents also took advantage of this service. At times when the fishermen were out on the lake, the customer, not finding anyone to record his purchase, would simply write his name in an account book kept at the ice house, the amount of ice taken and settlement would be made in due time.

In 1922 Frank Crewe sailed for England to purchase a net weaving machine. Visiting a factory in Bridgeport, he noted that their machine had to be operated manually. This was not satisfactory for Frank since he was searching for a more efficient method. Eager to return home with one, he travelled to Paris, France where he found what he was looking for in the Charles Zang factory. Here he spent some time studying the operation and the mechanism of this machine. This was most important for Frank knew that it would be shipped to the Crewe fishery "knocked down" and he alone would be responsible for assembling its parts, which numbered over three thousand.

Frank returned home with the machine and soon the Crewe fisheries were busy manufacturing their own nets and supplying them to other fisheries as well. For the next ten years it was the only one of its kind in Canada. The cotton twine was shipped by rail in 500 pound bales from South Carolina. A twine salesman, named McCauley, who travelled by horse and buggy, called on the Crewe firm regularly, taking orders for the John Leckie Co. of Toronto.

A change in the method of catching fish came about in 1952, when the Crewes' converted from pound nets to trap nets. This method continued until 1957



Crewe Bros. fishery showing their large supply of poles used for their pound nets. Piles of bolts 38 feet long are ready to be cut into 1/2 inch lumber for fish boxes.

when the fishery ceased operations after a total of fifty-three years in the commercial fishing industry. These are years to which the retired veteran fisherman, Frank Crewe, looks back with pride, due to the achievements of his family's firm during the bountiful years of Lake Erie's herring and whitefish.



Crewe Bros. fishery: A scene of the ice harvesting operations. The four-wheeled "donkey" is conveying the cakes of ice up the 78 foot bank.

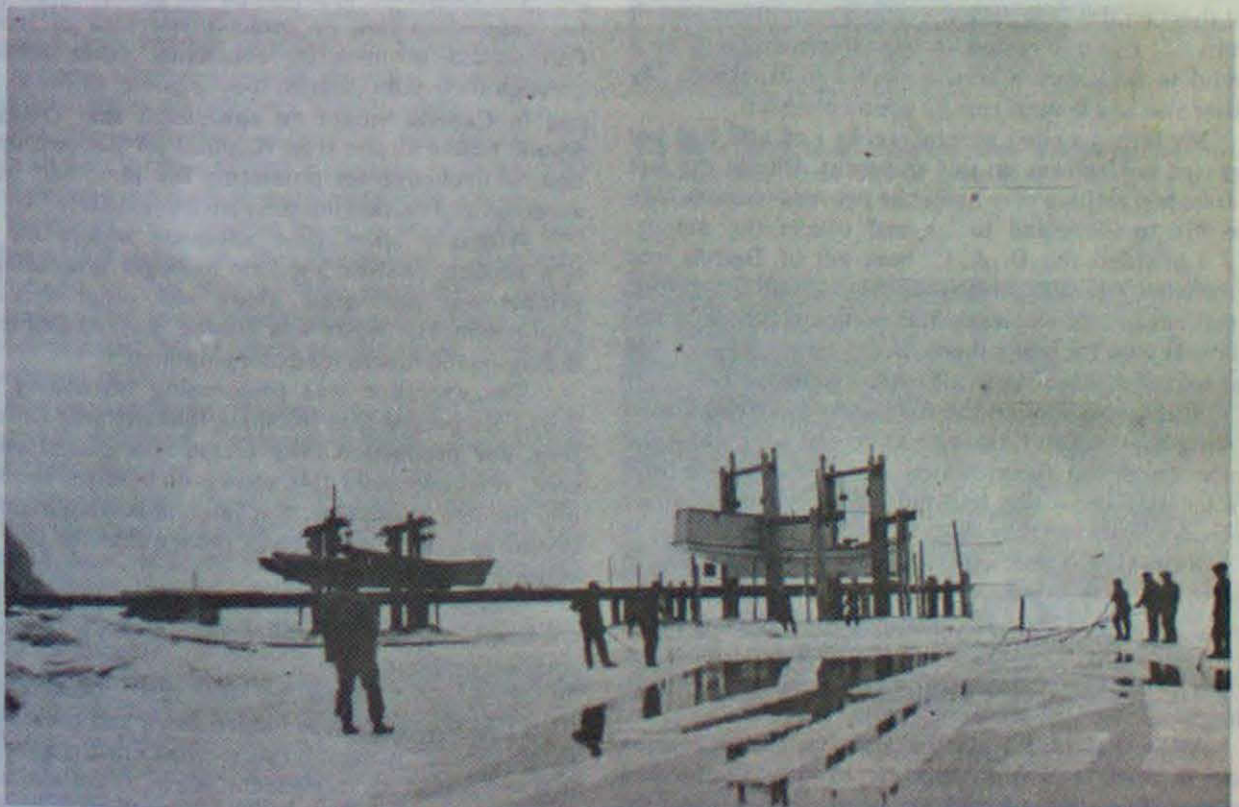
Omstead Fisheries

Everett H. Omstead, a descendant of early settlers in Essex County, was the founder of the firm named Omstead Fisheries, now known as Omstead Foods Ltd. He took possession of a fishery near the mouth of Muddy Creek in Mersea Township in 1911 in partnership with Stewart Anderson; operations were carried out with pound nets and open wooden boats.

Leonard R. Omstead, the eldest of Everett's seven sons, recalls his early fishing years when he worked with his father as follows: "In hearing some of the older fishermen discussing the industry it is my understanding that the herring predominated in Lake Erie until at least 1918. Sometime after that there was a distinct diminishing of the herring, and to take their place, I believe it was the blue pickerel that became the most prominent species available at that time.

In thinking back I can recall very clearly going down to the government dock, I would be about fourteen years of age, and watching two large steam tugs arriving from Sanduskey. One was from the Michler Fish Co., and one from the Ley Fish Co. They would tie up at the Wheatley dock."

He continued, "There were many pound net fishermen at that time. Starting from the end of the Point would be: Jimmy Grubb, McLeans', Manse Campbell,



The Crewe Bros. dock and ice-harvest.

Al Long, Omsteads, Baileys', Smith and Hodgson and the Crewes' further east.

I can recall seeing the pound net boats arriving to unload their catches onto these steam tugs, and it seemed that practically one-hundred per cent were blue pickerel. These boats just picked up the fish for a short period in the summer when ice was scarce, and due to the heavy production, it was the only method of being able to distribute this large volume to the market. Later on the fishermen began selling their fish to Detroit wholesalers."

Leonard went on to relate how the firm became involved in processing the fish.

He explained, "About this time, having spent several summers weeding onions in the marsh for Johnny Campbell, I had accumulated several hundred dollars and decided to go into business. I bought a Model T truck from Bill Crewe for \$55.00. The fishermen built a rack and cut a Model T car in two, using the windshield and seat for my cab.

I started trucking the fish to Detroit, going across the river on the ferry and delivering the fish to the wholesalers, who were situated at the Eastern Market on Hastings St. The trucking business proved to be very successful and I was able to accumulate a reasonable amount of money.

Later, when I would be about eighteen years of age, my father sold some fish to a company in Cleveland. I trucked the fish to Detroit, paid the duty and put them on the Detroit & Cleveland boat at the foot of Third St. I had invested in this shipment, a cent a pound in duty and a cent a pound in trucking. My father also had several cents a pound invested.

My father waited several weeks and still had not received any returns on this shipment. Due to the fact that he had asthma very badly, he persuaded me to take the trip to Cleveland to try and collect the money.

I boarded the D. & C. boat out of Detroit and arrived in Cleveland early in the morning. I took a taxi out to this wholesale fish company and explained my reason for being there. Being busy, they did not pay too much attention to me while I waited.

Wandering around the fish house I noticed a man scaling blue pickerel, taking a knife and separating the bones from the flesh, which we now call filleting. As far as I know this had not become known in our area.

Returning home with a part of the money still owing, my father put the cheques we received in the bank, but before the week was over the company made an assignment. The only thing we recovered from the trip was what I had observed in this company's processing room.

With that idea I started showing the fishermen how to fillet, and from this my brother Duane and several other young men, started processing the fish, mainly blue pickerel. These were distributed to the cottagers in the Pulley subdivision along with the ice delivery service, which Duane had developed to meet their needs.

I recall my father sending the first sixty-pound box of fillets to Martin Trump of Muskegen, Michigan. Other orders began to arrive and this encouraged the development of the processing business in Wheatley".

During the war years, as the young men left to served in the Armed Forces, the Omstead firm was faced with a serious labour shortage. Young women were employed in the filleting room for the first time and very quickly they became adept with a filleting knife as well as in packing the fish for shipment. To this day, processing is still carried out in this manner.

The Fish Meal Plant

Following the development of their processing plant, the Omstead firm was faced with the problem of waste (heads, tails, intestines) disposal. The Darling Company of Chatham agreed to truck the waste to their plant, where it was processed into various products.

At that time the late Ted Miner, a mink breeder from Kingsville, called on the Omstead fishery and asked if he might obtain a quantity of fish waste to feed to his mink. His request was granted with an invitation to "help himself".

As they observed Mr. Miner carefully picking and sorting out the choice portions from the huge waste piles, an idea came to the men of this enterprising firm. Was it possible that there might be a market for this product?

The Omsteads approached the mink breeder with the suggestion that he promote the idea of feeding fish wastes to mink by contacting other breeders through their publications, meetings etc. in the U.S.A. and in Canada, under an agreement that Omsteads would donate all the feed required for his own operation, in exchange for promoting the idea. Mr. Miner accepted and carried out the plan immediately.

Within a short time adequate orders for this new product enabled the firm to begin processing. A grinder was purchased, along with other necessary equipment. The waste was ground, packed and frozen in fifty-pound blocks ready for shipment.

The operation was progressing favourably until it was discovered that the mink industry was suffering from low production. The blame was placed on the feed, thus overnight this source of food for the mink diet became unpopular. Yet later, following extensive testing in laboratories, it was proven that the fish food was not at fault.

Meanwhile, as a result of this development, the Omstead fisheries were once again faced with a waste disposal problem.

Farmland, owned by the firm, became "gut fields" as the waste was hauled there and buried deep in the ground. Although this method enriched the soil, it also created an unpleasant odour at certain times, especially during warm weather. This method of disposal was not satisfactory to the owners either for they too were displeased with the fact that it was an expensive operation due to land costs, labour and

equipment.

The Omsteads, still searching for an improved method, conceived the idea of establishing a fish meal plant, which would process the large volume of fish waste. This plan received the attention of both the Federal and Provincial governments. As a result, an agreement was made to support this venture under the Federal-Provincial cost-shared program for Fisheries Industrial Development.

Before spending any large amount of capital on the necessary equipment, the fish meal was tested to determine if the quality was high enough to be competitive with other products of this type. The results of tests taken at the Fisheries Research Laboratory in London compared favourably with others. At the University of Guelph the fish meal was used in poultry feeding experiments. The rate of weight gain increased when the meal was added to the poultry diet.

Encouraged by the results of the research tests, the Omstead firm established their fish meal plant and began operations in 1967. The equipment installed included a grinder, a steam-injection unit, which was used to cook the ground wastes, a press, which separated the liquids and the solids, a drier, which removed the moisture-yielding dry cake, an oil extractor, and a tank for storing the fish oil.

In 1969, with the plant operating five to six days a week for a period of nine months, the production was 1450 tons - forty-five percent above the expected annual production of 1000 pounds. This was partly due to the unusually large catches of smelt and perch that year. The average amount of waste required to produce a ton of fish meal is slightly over 10,000 pounds.

The fish meal plant is another outstanding example of how a firm solved a serious problem, and developed new products to serve other industries.

Earlier an article written by Allan Weir in the September, 1960 issue of the "Canadian Fisherman" gave credit to the men of this outstanding family enterprise. The article mentioned each of the seven sons of the founder, Everett H. Omstead, who had passed away in 1942.

The management team consisted of: the President, Leonard R. Omstead, Engineering Supt., Duane Omstead, Manager Rae Bell, Supt. of Trap and Pound Nets, Rex Omstead, Supt. of Packaging Operations, Gordon Omstead, Captain of the Erie 1, Norman Omstead, Supt. of Smelt Processing, Robert Omstead, Supt. of Transportation, Arleigh Omstead, Personnel Mgr. Leonard H. Omstead, and the Cold-Storage Supt. Robert Richmond.

Today this firm, with its large complex of buildings and handsome fleet of fishing tugs, equipped with the most modern electronic devices, continues to play a vital role in the harvest of Lake Erie's bounty. Their processing plant is the largest of its kind in the world. Omstead Refrigerated Transports carry their products to major cities in Canada and the United States.

The continued expansion of the firm was necessary

to meet the needs of the agricultural industry and, just as it was in the early days of fishing, the two industries work closely together to harvest and preserve our nation's food products. Countless tons of vegetables are processed in season and stored in Omstead's huge freezer plant.

"The key word to success in business is diversity", said Leonard Omstead in a recent interview. This has been proven by the members of this firm, who saw a great future in the fishing industry and built a successful business. Mr. Omstead, with a deep sense of appreciation, paid tribute to some of the company's employees, who gave many long years of loyal service to Omstead Fisheries.

In 1976 Leonard R. Omstead was honoured by the residents of Wheatley as "Citizen of the Year", in recognition of his service to the community.



An early photo of an Omstead crew unloading their catch. McLean Bros. dock can be seen in the background. Time period of the 1920's.



An Omstead - Furey crew at the dock in the 1920's.



An Omstead crew loading ice in the thirties. Glen Reid is on the right.



Everett Omstead, founder of the family firm.

The Baldwin Fishery

The early part of the century found area farmers, along the Talbot Road, engaged in fishing as well. Two brothers, Adolphus N. Baldwin and H. Nicholas Baldwin secured a license to fish in waters fronting lots 180 to the centre of lot 185 in Romney Township. Later, another brother, Frank, arrived from Vancouver to assist them.

The following article appeared in the *Wheatley Journal* on June 8, 1916.....The Baldwin Bros. of Port Alma, captured a giant sturgeon on Tuesday. It measured seven feet and seven inches long, had a girth of forty-five inches and weighed two hundred and forty pounds. To ensure accuracy, the weight and measurements were taken by Dr. Reid of Merlin and R. H. Shanks. Mrs. Bessie (Shanks) Fletcher, in relating some of the historical information of the Romney area, recalled seeing this huge fish and commented that, "it looked like a pig when dressed and hung". As was the usual custom, friends and neighbours were invited to share the delicious steaks.

The Baldwin operation was located on a high bank; this required the use of a flat car, which ran on a track down to the water. In earlier years, a hand-operated winch was used to bring the car and its load up the bank. Later, a gasoline engine was installed, making the operation much more efficient.

The Baldwins ceased operating their fishery in



Mike Lobzun, right, and a fellow worker, loading smelt on the conveyor at the Omstead dock in 1963.

the early twenties, in order to concentrate on their farming operations.

Erosion of the lake bank caused the fishery buildings to slip into Lake Erie many years ago.

Smith and Hodgson Fishery

George "Daddy" Smith and Burns Hodgson operated a fishery near the mouth of Yellow Creek in Wheatley.

The Bailey Fishery

John W. Bailey, a former butcher from Ridgetown, purchased the Lamarsh fishery near the mouth of Yellow Creek. Here he carried out a busy operation in partnership with Henry Derbyshire. A fishing license issued to them in 1915, indicates his pound nets, (six) were set in front of lots 13 to 17. The fishery was located on lot 10, Romney Township. In addition to the fee of \$50.00 for each net, the licensee was required to pay a royalty of \$5.00 per ton on the part of his catch,

which was in excess of sixteen tons.

Catches of fish were shipped to the U.S. by the steam tug "THE LYCORA", skippered by Capt. Sheet. Later, the fish were taken by horse and wagon to the Pere Marquette railway station at Wheatley.

Hewitt and Frank Bailey, John's two sons, worked with their father from an early age. In 1924, following the death of John, the fishery was sold. The sale was held at the Commercial Hotel, Wheatley, on March 22, 1924, and listed the following items: 1 scow, with 6 h.p. McKeough & Trotter engine, 1 fishing boat with 10 h.p. McKeough & Trotter engine, 1 dinghy, 12 set of twine, 8 set of stakes, 1 cement-block twine house, 1 horse with harness, 1 wagon, together with rope, blocks, pulleys, chains and all other articles used in connection with fishing.

In 1929 Frank purchased the fishery formerly owned by his father and operated it successfully until 1950, when he retired from fishing and opened a small repair shop. For a number of years, he served as Reeve of the village and held a keen interest in community affairs up until his death a few years ago.



J. W. Bailey's daughter, Jean, was often a willing extra hand at her father's fishery.



J. W. Bailey with a shipment of nets and twine at the Pere Marquette railway station, Wheatley.



Frank Bailey and his crew in the late forties. Left, Frank, "Shorty" Nottingham, Jim Thompson, John Seili, and Bob Nottingham.



John Seili proudly shows a sample of his catch as Wilfred "Shorty" Nottingham looks on.

Getty Fisheries

Another well-known and long established fishery was the Harvey Getty operation, formerly Epplett and Long, located west of the Wheatley harbour. Mr. Getty, the son of a Romney Township farmer, operated a dray business in Windsor prior to returning to the area to engage in commercial fishing. His three sons, Darrel, Frank, and Ray all assisted their father as soon as they were old enough to handle the work.

During the 1920's and thirties, whitefish and herring were plentiful. Blue pickerel were also numerous; Darrel recalled when they took in ten ton on a single day. Purchased by Detroit buyers, the payment for this species was only three cents a pound.

A former employee, Don Coulter, spoke of Harvey Getty as being an expert fisherman, who took great pride in his work, particularly in the setting of his pound nets. Mr. Getty always insisted that they be set in an exact position, in a perfectly straight line. A large tree near the shore was used for many years as a guide line.

Although he was not of a superstitious nature, Harvey Getty would never start a new job on a Friday; his men were aware of this and respected his orders.

During the visit of Princess Elizabeth and the Duke



Harvey Getty and a giant sturgeon captured in the early 1940's.



Frank Getty stripping a female whitefish of her eggs. 1946 Windsor Star photo.

of Edinborough to Canada in 1951, the Getty firm shipped 200 pounds of choice blue pickerel to Trenton, Ontario for the Royal reception. Mrs. "Top" Poole, one of their expert filleters was chosen to prepare this special order.

In March 1958, a small number of king-size blue pickerel began showing up in the western end of Lake Erie. Their increased size was compared to the 12 inch blue pickerel, which had appeared a few years before. Harvey Getty held the opinion that the pickerel, now measuring almost two feet in length, and the perch, which had also increased in length and girth, were feeding on the smelt.

The appearance of the smelt began causing serious problems for the fishermen, particularly for the gill netters. Countless hours were lost as they picked the tiny silver creatures from their nets. At times it was a pointless job and the men would have to throw away the net and its contents.

The smelt invasion caused the Getty tug "George H" to become involved in trawling for smelt with an experimental permit. Satisfied with the results, the Getty firm ceased their pound netting operations in favour of gill netting and entered into a new period of development in the fishing industry.

Harvey Getty's sons continued operating the business following their father's death. Darrel served as reeve of Wheatley and, upon retiring from the fishery,



The Getty Fisheries crew: Front row, Don Coulter, Harvey Getty, Darrel Getty with son, Bob, Frank Getty and Spot.
 Centre: Earl Tennant and Effeard Pinch.
 Rear: Milt Sheldon, Roland Pickle, Charles Shaw, Cameron Quick, Tom Brown.



A Getty crew: L. to R. Frank Getty, Cec. Gilbert, Alan Gilbert, Jack McColl and Roddy McLeod.

established a mink raising business.

Frank also left the fishing business to operate his own private enterprise. For Ray, fishing is still a way of life as he carries on his father's trade. His tug, the "Alex B", has been involved in several rescue missions.

Captain Ray and his crew have displayed the same courage and bravery found in the men who fished before them.

McClellan Fishery

Harold "Mac" McClellan began fishing in the 1920's, when employed by James W. Grubb at Point Pelee. One experience, which he related, is still very clear to him and provides further proof that even the most experienced fishermen were often fooled by the weather and Lake Erie's unpredictable nature.

The incident occurred on a Good Friday when the crew set out to drive stakes into the lake bed in preparation for the pound netting season. Jim Grubb had been rather dubious about going out on the lake on that particular day and was perhaps a little superstitious. With only a few stakes left to drive, the east wind suddenly changed into a "northwester". Rough seas made it too difficult to continue their work so the men decided to head for the shore, towing the scow with its men on board behind the boat. Several times the tow line broke, forcing the men to abandon the scow and board the open wooden boat. By continuously bailing water they were able to reach the shore where their anxious wives were waiting.

The abandoned scow was struck by a freighter, but was later salvaged when other fishing tugs towed it in to shore.

"Mac" worked for a number of years at the Grubb fishery and was also a member of the Point Pelee Volunteer Rescue Squad, which saved many lives during its years of service. The dramatic rescue of the victims on the boats, the "N. J. Nessen" and the "Kelly's Island", are but two of the many rescue missions carried out by these brave men.

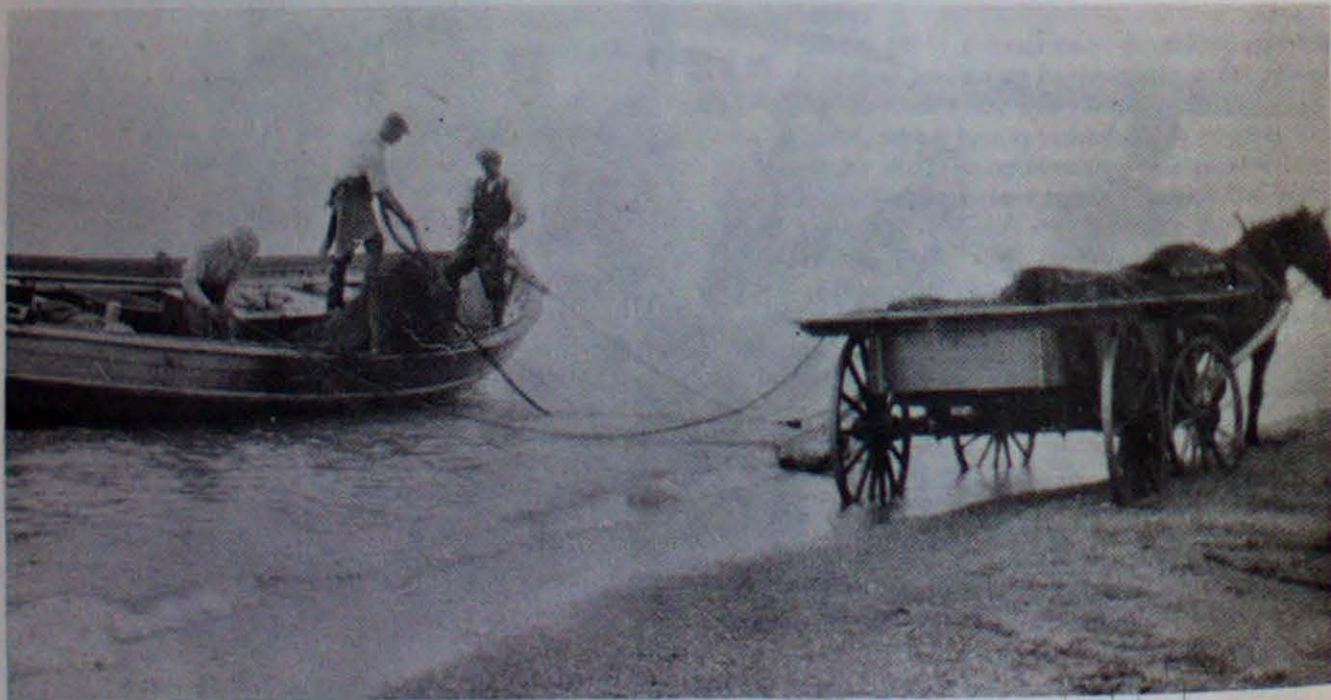
In 1937, "Mac", having operated his own fishery for a number of years, sold his business to William Krause of Point Pelee, and moved to Wheatley to operate a feed mill and coal business.

The Loop Fishery

The Loop name has been well-established in the fishing industry of Wheatley and the Point Pelee area for over a century. The late Warren Loop, son of Amos Loop, was a fisherman like his father and later became captain and co-owner of the well-known tug, the "Stanley Clipper", in partnership with Eric Glover.

Family historical records note that Benjamin Franklin Loop was a resident of New York State during the American Revolution. His desire to remain loyal to the King compelled him to move to Canada and eventually to settle at Point Pelee. His three sons, Henry, Ira, and Joe, engaged in pound net fishing in the Point Pelee and Kingsville areas of Lake Erie. Another son, Benjamin Franklin Loop 11, spent some time as a sailor on the Great Lakes, but later took up farming in Mersea Township. This man was the father of Amos.

Prior to establishing his own fishery, Warren was employed by McLean Bros. fishery and worked the pound nets. Like many others in his trade, he passed the fishing tradition on to his three sons, Royce, who is a crew member of the "Donna F", and Murray and Ken



Washing nets for the McClellan Fishery

who operate their own tug, the "Doretta L.", and to his grandson Todd, who is in charge of their retail fish store.



"Tip" Coll, left, and Warren Loop with Mary Poublon and friend, at centre left, who were treated to a short ride on Lake Erie.

The Daudlin Fishery

Noah Daudlin, a well-known retired fisherman, began his lifetime occupation at the age of thirteen by working for his father in a small wooden boat on Lake St. Clair.

In 1940 he settled on Lot 199 in Romney Township and set up his own fishery. The site was similar to others along the lake bank, as was the method of running flat cars up the bank on tracks. The boats had to be raised up on chain falls to prevent them from being damaged by Lake Erie's storms.

Noah had a thrilling and profitable experience in 1951 when a sturgeon weighing 190 pounds was captured in his pound net. He received the sum of \$125.00 for this prize catch and presented the money to his wife Madge as a surprise gift, since the fish was caught on her birthday.

Like most fishing families, Noah's two sons, Pierre and Jerry, followed their father's profession. Jerry's natural love of the water led him to serve in the Royal Canadian Navy. Pierre "Pete" became skipper of his own gill net tug the "Onward" which he later sold to Al Miller of Wheatley.

When asked what his theory was on the disappearance of the whitefish and other species, Noah commented, "three things: overfishing, pollution, and the smelt". Like other veteran fishermen, he has gained valuable knowledge of Lake Erie, it's bounty and it's problems.



Noah Daudlin and Francis Labute mending nets.

CHAPTER 3

The Men From Hastings

In the year 1913, the Crewe Bros., along with many other fisheries located on the north shore, were faced with a shortage of experienced workers. Through the Department of Fisheries, advertisements were placed in newspapers in England requesting fishermen to seek employment in Canada.

From the English south-eastern coastal town of Hastings came John Cobby Sr., William Philcox, James Adams, Charles Lamb, William Lamb, and their friends, the Smiths, the Mummerys, and the Simmons. With them they brought their fishing and navigational skills. Later they sent for their families, who came to settle in the small Lake Erie shore communities, which were unlike their large English town by the sea. For some it meant never seeing their native land again. To conquer their homesickness the women worked hard to provide a comfortable home for their families. A strong bond of friendship held these English folk together as they kept in touch with their friends and loved ones across the sea.

They came and they stayed, teaching their skills and the knowledge of their trade to others. By their demonstration of hard work, and loyalty to their employers, they made a vital contribution to the commercial fishing industry and set an outstanding example worthy of praise and recognition from the people of this community.

The following is a brief biographical sketch of a number of deep-sea fishermen who settled in the Wheatley and Port Crewe district.



Left to right: James Adams, Jack Cobby Sr., and William Philcox, taken in front of a pub in Hastings, England the day prior to sailing for Canada in 1914.



Two former Hastings fishermen, Charles Lamb and James Adams, who enjoyed a lifetime friendship.

John Cobby Sr.

John Cobby Sr. sailed from England on a steamship "THE VIRGINIAN" in February of 1914. Arriving in Port Crewe, he immediately obtained employment at Milton Crewe's fishery.

In May he was joined by his wife Patty, sons John Jr., Harry, and Fred, and daughter Patty, who had sailed out on the steamship, "THE CORINTHIAN".

The family was well-settled in their new surroundings when the shocking news that England was at war reached them. John, also known as Jack, "was every inch a sailor" and a member of England's Naval Reserve. His staunch loyalty to King and country prompted him to write to his superior officer regarding his orders. The response came quickly; he was to report for duty and so returned to England.

To supplement their meagre income, the older children found work with area families. Harry, who was only ten years of age, fetched the neighbour's cows morning and night and received a small wage. Jack's wife obtained wool from the Red Cross and knit a pair of socks each day for servicemen until the war ceased.

Harry recalled a war-time Christmas when the family larder was quite bare. A knock on the door revealed a young man, neighbour Albert Robinson, with a sleigh loaded with half a pork - a gift from his parents. The Cobbys were deeply touched by the Robinson's generosity and their act of kindness was never forgotten.

Following Armistice in 1918, Jack returned to his family. His wife had very carefully managed to save some of the money from the British Government Dependant's Allowance cheques, enabling them to purchase the former Truskey and Hopper fishery near Port Alma. However, the poor market for fish at that particular time forced them to close their operations and move to Wheatley.

Jack Sr.'s son Harry eventually operated his own business until a severe ice storm destroyed his gear and nets in 1951. This was a crushing blow to the Cobbys, but as Harry's wife Vida explained, "We were thankful that no lives were lost."

Undaunted by the loss, Harry chose to set up a dredging business with his three sons, and commented that, "In one way it was the best thing that ever happened for we got started in another business with what equipment we had left. You can't say it might have or have not been for the best, but you like to think it was."

Today the firm, Cobby Marine of Wheatley, is managed by Harry's son Bob. The eldest son, Fred, an employee of the firm, Great Lakes Dredge and Dock, recently returned to his home in the United States following a period of several years spent in the Middle East. His duties there included the supervision of construction of a harbour at the port of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. The third son, James, is now supervisor of construction and maintainance for the village of Wheatley. Harry speaks with pride of his sons, who at an early age, assisted him in his fishing and dredging operations. Later on, having learned their father's trade, they were able to apply their skills and knowledge to successful careers.

WILLIAM "SANKY" PHILCOX

William Philcox came to Port Crewe in company with John Cobby and James Adams. He too was an experienced fisherman and soon adapted to the fresh water fishing methods. Like his other English companions he was regarded as a good worker. Noted for his fine singing voice, which was often heard as he toiled, he received the nickname "Sanky" after a popular English singer of the same name.

William's sons, Alf and Jack, also took to fishing at an early age. Jobs for young men were scarce and even though the work was strenuous, the opportunity to earn a wage could not be overlooked. One of Alf's first duties was to operate the net weaving machine. Under Frank Crewe's guidance and instructions, he soon became skilled in turning out large quantities of nets, which were sold to other fisheries as well.

Following many years of employment with the Crewe Bros., Omsteads, McLeans, and Juliens' fisheries of Kingsville, Alf Philcox purchased and skippered his own tug, the "P and E", and operated a successful business.

At present his position as fish inspector keeps him in touch with the men and the boats at Wheatley's port. His son-in-law, James "Red" Elsley, with the assistance of his son Todd, operate their own tug, thereby keeping a long tradition of fishing in the family.

John Thomas Adams

James Adams, son of George and Jane (Vaness) Adams, was born on April 23, 1875 in Hastings, county of Sussex, England. **At the age of eleven years he went to sea with his father serving as a cook for the crew of a fishing vessel. The English boats were comparable in size to the Lake Erie pound net boats, but considerably deeper. Their design, round-bottomed and pointed at both ends, made them quite seaworthy but nonetheless provided little in the way of comfort and protection from the cruel stormy seas.**

These deep-sea fishermen experienced hard labour and faced great dangers as they fished the waters of the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean. The men were often at sea for many days causing great anxiety for their families, who were deeply concerned for their safety.

James Adam's marriage to Kate Frances Ford, and the arrival of six children, prompted him to seek a livelihood with more security for his family.

He too responded to the call for workers needed at the Crewe Bros. fishery and sailed for Canada with several of his friends.

Later in the same year, James' wife and children, Frank, Cecil, Edith, Charles (Sonny), Leslie, and Jack sailed from England on "THE CORINTHIAN" with other Hastings families and joined him at Port Crewe.

James Adams was employed by the Crewe Bros. until 1924, at which time he and his family moved to Wheatley. He obtained work at McLean Bros. fishery

and continued there until his retirement at the age of seventy-one, making a total of sixty years of fishing.

James' sons Frank and Cecil, followed their father's occupation and established a well-known fishery on Pelee Island. Two other sons, Charles and Grant, also worked in the industry prior to choosing careers in other fields.

Relating his late father's life history Les Adams also told of visiting his birthplace in Hastings, the church where the family had worshipped and the local museum dedicated to "men of the sea", a fitting monument to the forefathers of some of Wheatley's residents.

Charles "Popeye" Lamb

Charles Lamb, the son of a British Naval seaman, was born in Hastings, England on May 28, 1894. Immigrating to Canada he found employment with the Crewe Bros. Later years found him working with a crew for Everett Omstead. In recalling some of his late father's employees, Leonard Omstead Sr. praised the men from Hastings, Charlie Lamb, Bill "Truggy" Lamb, and Fred Cobby, who taught the skills of navigation and fishing to other employees.

Charles Lamb, like so many of his co-workers, also received a nickname. His jaunty sailor hat and pipe earned him the name of "Popeye", a popular cartoon character. "Popeye" Lamb loved a parade, and along with his wife Sis, could be seen marching on many occasions with the Wheatley Band, down the village streets.

Following nearly a lifetime of fishing, Charlie Lamb retired from the industry and took up the position of steward at the Wheatley Legion branch.

His four sons, Leonard, William, Gerald, and James all found employment in the fishing industry, each learning their father's trade at an early age.

Charles Lamb passed away in 1958, the last of the Hastings men.

George H. Simmons

George H. Simmons, formerly of Port Dover was a descendant of a long line of deep-sea fishermen from Hastings. He immigrated to Canada with his family in the year 1914 and learned his father's trade at an early age, fishing out of Port Dover.

Forty-two years ago his father, Charles Simmons, was a crew member of the well-known tug, "THE WILMA", on a trip across Long Point Bay. Severe ice conditions disabled the tug causing it to sink. During the mishap Charles was seriously injured. Following his rescue he was taken to the nearest hospital in grave condition and died a short time later.

As with most men employed in the fishing industry the dangers and risks involved did not discourage George and he carried on just as his father would expect him to. Later, his only son Robert, joined him in his own operation, fishing out of Port Dover. The smelt invasion in Lake Erie prompted Robert Simmons and Henry Misner to study the shrimp-fishing

operations in the Gulf of Mexico. A shrimp net was purchased there and a new method of harvesting smelt was underway in the Port Dover area.

George Simmons, due to poor health was forced to retire and moved to Wheatley where he continued to follow with keen interest, all the latest developments in the fishing industry until his death in May, 1980.

A large fishing tug based at Wheatley's harbour, and well-equipped with modern electronic devices bears his name. The "G. H. SIMMONS" is owned and skippered by his son Robert, a vessel worthy of its name and a credit to the industry it serves.

CHAPTER 4

Gleanings From The Wheatley Journal

1896

April 9 -- Enoch McLean leaves for Port Alma next Monday where he has a strong crew engaged to fish for him. The fishermen have received notice from the fishery overseer to single out their pound nets, and not put them in line as they formerly have.

April 16 -- The first steamboat of the season passed here on Tues. It was the "Louise" of Sandusky.

Nov. 5 -- The Lamarsh Bros. captured an eel in their pound nets measuring over three feet.

1897

Feb. -- Lamarsh Bros. have put up about 200 tons of ice this week. Lounsbury and Brown have 800 tons for their Wheatley Ice Co.

1898

Jan. 27 -- The Government will place some 95,000,000 whitefish in Lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron, and St. Clair next summer. The eggs are now being hatched in the Sandwich Hatchery.

May 26 -- Large shipments of fish are being made daily from this port to Detroit and Buffalo companies.

June 2 -- Mr. Conway is lifting as high as six tons of fish a day.

June 23 -- George McLean shipped 21,917 pounds of fish to Buffalo last week.

Nov. 3 -- Moody and Coulson suffered heavy losses in their nets during a recent storm.

1899

June 15 -- Local fishermen report good catches and a scarcity of boxes to hold them.

Alex Christie, Jim Toyne and J. Mills travelled to Pelee Island for a load of stone. They returned six days later after a stormy crossing.

1900

June 21 -- Boat Race - The "Shamrock" and the "Columbia" raced from the mouth of Two Creeks before a large crowd of spectators. The Shamrock won.

1901

Feb. 28 -- According to a report from the Dominion Fishery inspector, sturgeon are becoming extinct. It is suggested that the fish be protected for a few years.

1902

May 1 -- The hot chain method of heating tar for tarring fish nets proved costly for James Lamarsh. Last Thursday his chain got too hot, setting the tar on fire and \$150.00 worth of new twine went up in smoke.

1903

March 5 -- Arthur Lamarsh has purchased the fishery business of Simpson and Collard.

March 19 - The fishing business under the name of J. & O. Lamarsh will be conducted by Lamarsh and Tremblay.

John and Willis Coultis are going to fish Tom Mills' pounds this summer.

March 26 -- T. H. Maxwell has purchased the I. Shaw interest in the fishery, conducted last year by Christie and Coles.

E. D. Smith has purchased N. Coles' interest in a fishery at Yellow Creek.

Oct. 8 -- James Lamarsh has outfitted his fishing smack with a new set of sails of the Reliance type which will rush the boat through either placid or turbulent waters of old Erie. Jim informed us that now, he can "do" any boat along the shore.

1905

April 13 -- Jerome Fitzpatrick has been appointed fishery inspector for West Kent. He is eminently qualified for the position, having been a fisherman for many years.

May 25 -- James Lamarsh sold his fishery to Jos. Hopper, Coatsworth for the sum of \$3,500.00.

1905

Dec. 7 -- Licences for gill-net fishing have been issued on Pelee Island to Capt. Al. Henning, Jas. Quick, W. K. Wilson and Jas. White. Licences have been raised to \$150.00.

1906

Jan. 25 -- J. Hopper and Norman Lamarsh were in Alpena, Michigan getting out a carload of pound poles.

March 22 -- Enoch McLean, Wm. Maxwell, J. Fitzpatrick and A. Crewe attended a fishermen's convention in Ridgeway.

May 17 -- Tuesday, fishermen east of Wheatley found a considerable amount of wreckage strewn along the shore. O. and J. Lamarsh picked up nine hatch covers, the top of a pilot house, cabin timbers and a lot of soda biscuits. In their twine, they found a yawl boat with the stern board missing. The wreckage would indicate that a large vessel had broken up.

June 4 -- Maxwell and Smith took from their nets last Thursday, a peculiar specimen of a gar fish. It had a bill like a duck's with the lower jaw hinged like an alligator. The underside of the body resembled that of a rattlesnake. The fish was two feet long.

1907

Jan. 6 -- James Lamarsh has disposed of his fishing interests here to A. B. Lounsbury and has purchased W. Tremblay's fishery at Cedar Springs.

Nov. 14 - James Lamarsh took from his nets three and

a quarter tons of herring. One jumbo herring was 22 inches long and weighed five and three-quarter pounds.

1908

April 2 -- Jas. Lamarsh has purchased a double cylinder McKeough and Trotter gasoline engine for his fishing launch. O. Lamarsh and A. B. Lounsbury are installing a single cylinder of the same make.

April 9 -- The Sandwich Fish Hatchery will turn out 100,000,000 fry shortly. Those interested in visiting there, will be welcomed by Capt. Parker.

Moody and Coulson, and Maxwell and Liddle have each added a new scow to their fishing outfits.

1910

March 17 -- Four new boats have been completed in the Wheatley ship yards this season. Owners are W. E. Dobbyn, Maxwell and Liddle, Smith and Coles, and Derbyshire and Lamarsh. A large scow for Smith and Coles is also under construction.

June 2 -- Derbyshire and Lamarsh are having an engine installed in their new fishing boat.

June 16 -- James Lamarsh has purchased O. R. Taylor's interest in the Taylor-Lamarsh fishery.

Nov. 3 -- On Wednesday 129 boxes of fish were shipped from the station.

1911

Nov. 27 - E. McLean took 6000 pounds of fish from his nets on Saturday and 7,500 pounds on Monday.

N. Coles has sold his interest in the Coles and Smith fishery to W. J. Dawson of Romney.

1912

G. D. Smith and J. W. Liddle are assisting the Crewe Bros. in the building of two new fishing boats.

Nov. 21 -- The catch of whitefish this fall has been one of the best in the history of local fisheries.

1913

April 17 - Due to a recent severe storm, the water level on Lake Erie has risen three feet and much damage is noted. The gravel pit at the end of the Kent-Essex townline where five feet of sand and gravel has stood for years is now a clay bank. E. Omstead's new fish house was undermined and his summer cottage went into the lake.

1913

July 17 -- The Union Gas Co. has purchased land at Port Alma and expect to drill for natural gas in Lake Erie. The Glenwood Oil and Gas Co. have a government lease for the same operation. The fishermen have been trying unsuccessfully for some time to have all the drilling in the lake ceased.

....A sturgeon weighing 216 pounds and measuring seven feet was taken by E. Omstead from his pound nets. This is the largest fish that has been reported taken from the lake.

1914

Jan. 22 - Anderson and Anderson have erected a new ice house. Enoch McLean and Sons are installing a large tarring vat. Campbell and Long have torn down their old buildings and have erected cement block

structures.

1915

Jan. 21 -- Lake Erie is being thrown open to the gill net fishermen according to a decision reached at a conference of fish and game wardens and the district overseers, called by Hon. Finlay G. McDiarmid, minister of public works. They will be permitted to fish outside a ten-mile limit in any part of the lake.

The present license fee is set at \$250.00 per tug and the tugs are to carry only 1200 feet of net. In the future they will be permitted to carry more, probably 2,000 to 3,000 feet. Close season on fishing of all kinds will be from December 15 to March.

1916

March 16 -- A. E. Crewe left for Toronto and Ottawa in the interests of the Lake Erie Fishermen's Association. He was instrumental in the forming of the association and was elected vice-president. Meetings have been arranged with Hon. J. D. Hazen, Minister of Naval Service, Ottawa and with Hon. F. G. MacDiarmid, in Toronto.

May 11 -- While assisting in driving pound stakes, Henry Loop had his arm badly mangled when it was caught in a rope and drawn into the clutch.

1918

July 11 -- Advertisement - FISH - Delivered to your door at government prices. J. P. Crowther -- Canada Food Board License No. 9-4559.

Aug. 15 -- An order in council providing that no cisco or lake herring of less than six ounces, round weight, shall be caught by fishermen has been passed in Ottawa. The new regulation provides that if any person catches a fish of less than the minimum weight, he shall liberate it in the water, alive and uninjured. In order to ensure that the fish caught shall not be injured, it is provided that the sorting of the different sizes shall be done under water and before the fish are removed from the implement in which they have been captured. In the past there has been great waste of these small fish, especially in the fisheries of Lake Erie.

Oct. 18 - With a view to securing the largest possible collection of eggs for the hatcheries on both sides of the Great Lakes, conferences were held recently between the officers of the Naval Department, the Ontario Provincial Department and officers of the U.S. Federal Government hatcheries. Details have been completed for the fullest co-operation in egg collecting work by representatives of the three governments.

1919

May 8 - The Kingsville Hatchery has completed the work of hatching whitefish and herring spawn for the season. Thirty-seven million whitefish fry and thirty-two million herring fry have been put into the lake. A tug carrying forty cans each trip, made forty trips out into the lake to distribute them.

1921

Jan. 6 -- Marvin White has sold his interest in the gill-net fishery of White and Dobbyn to Charles Overholt.

1922

April 20 - A squall which came up suddenly, caught a number of fishermen out in the lake. McLean's motor dinghy got away from them and was swamped. They then had to anchor their scow and come ashore for help. It was quite late at night when, with the assistance of Dobbyn and Overholt's big gill net boat, and Campbell and Long's boat, they got the scow to shore. Some men who were out in small boats had an anxious time before being picked up by the larger boats. At Point Pelee, Jas. Grubb's scow got caught on a sand bar and went to pieces, but the men were rescued.

1923

John H. Loop and Dobbyn and Overholt lost their fishing boats which broke loose from their moorings at the pier during a heavy storm.

1922

Jan. 5 -- Frank E. Crewe sailed Tuesday from St. John to spend the winter in Great Britain and Europe. The purpose of the trip is to purchase a net making machine for the Crewe fishery.

1927

Nov. 17 -- Fishing will be permitted in Lake Erie as long as weather permits. The Ontario government asked for a change in regulations so that fishing would stop Dec. 1st on the grounds that the fish stocks are being depleted. Fishing companies made strong representations that they be allowed to go a little longer, in view of the fact that U.S. fishermen on the south shore will be permitted to fish as long as the weather is suitable.

1932

Feb. 4 -- The new ice house of Campbell and Long is being built to replace one destroyed by fire recently. The new building is of the refrigeration type which will eliminate the use of straw and sawdust.

March 10 -- Fishermen made good hauls with their gill nets in the first haul of the season.

May 19 -- A large goldfish was caught in the nets at Milton Crewe's fishery. The fish was given to Dr. Leader for the pool in his garden.

Nov. 10 -- Four fishermen, George Arnold, Fred McNear, Alfred and Jack Philcox, employed at Crewe's fishery were fishing when the boat caught in a swell and overturned. Two of the men were caught among the fish boxes but managed to escape serious injury.

1933

Feb. 23 -- John Featherstone installed the engine in McLean Bros. new round-bottom boat. The boat, a very fine craft, was built by L. N. Carley of Kingsville.

1937

April 22 -- More than 200 gill nets owned by U.S. fishermen were seized by Ontario government patrol boats, four miles off Port Alma, on Tuesday, after complaints had been made by Kent fishermen to A. Sinclair Gordon, M.L.A.

Dec. -- Norman Lamarsh has sold his interest in the Lamarsh and Hopper fishery near Port Alma to Wickwire and Suskey.

1938

Nov. 10 -- Fish, bearing aluminum tags are being found in the catches. The fishermen are being asked to send the tags to the laboratory at Put-In-Bay, Ohio, telling where and when the fish were caught.

1939

April 6 -- M. C. Nelson delivered two power units to be used for stake driving. A Buick motor was used in Frank Bailey's outfit and a Gray-Dort marine motor was used in E. Omstead's. The index for this type of motor was pioneered by John Ferris and McLean Bros.

Nov. 16 -- Fishermen are enjoying some of the best catches of whitefish in twenty-five years. Catches ranging from 1000 to 4000 pounds in a day have been reported.

1941

June 5 -- J. W. Grubb reports catching over five tons of whitefish last week. In all his experiences as a fisherman, Mr. Grubb says he can't recall getting as large a run of whitefish at this time of year.

Oct. 9 -- Whitefish are showing up early this year. McLean Bros. report catches of more than 400 pounds in one day.

1943

A steel scow was delivered to McLean Bros. Fishery. Steel is fast replacing the old wooden scows and boats.

1944

May 11 -- Omstead Fisheries have installed a new ice-making machine in their plant.

May 25 -- Wm. Keller, Game and Fishery overseer, has been advised by the Department of Fisheries that the open season for black bass and muskellunge in the St. Clair River, the Detroit River and Lake Erie will open June 24th.

Nov. 23 -- One day last week, the Omstead boat in charge of Charles Whittal came across a deer (buck) swimming in the lake about three miles out. Gordon Omstead managed to secure a rope around it's antlers and the deer was lifted into the boat. A short distance from shore the rope was removed, the deer jumped out of the boat, waded ashore, and ran off.

1951

Feb. 8 -- Lake Erie fishermen who hold pound net licenses may now replace the pound nets with trap nets on a one for one basis. The fee will stand at \$50.00 per net, and fishing must be done in their present pound net grounds.

July 19 -- The Dept. of Lands and Forests' patrol boat, Kirkwood 11, has been dispatched to western lake Erie. Capt. L. H. Stewart, an experienced fisherman, will study conditions in this area.

1951

Sept. 20 -- Omstead Fisheries received a call from Toronto requesting 700 pounds of "Wheatley Brand" fresh fillets to be served as a special delicacy for the dinner table of their Royal Highnesses, Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh at the Royal York Hotel.

1952

May 15 -- Artist Saveria Gaeli of Windsor, has painted murals on the walls of the Wheatley Hotel depicting the fishing industry in Wheatley. Scenes in the men's beverage room named the Fisherman's Shanty relate the story from the lifting of the nets to the packing of the fish for shipment. The main mural is an aerial view of the lake front, Muddy Creek and the harbour.

June 12 -- McLean Bros. launched their new boat, a product of Hike's Machine Shop. E. Nick McLean says the boat is perfect in every way and "sits in the water like a duck". It is also equipped with one of Elmer Haikala's patented rudders.

Aug. 14 -- At present 17 fishing tugs are making Wheatley harbour, their home port. The filleting plants of H. Getty and Sons, and Omsteads are providing work for a large number of people.

B. C. Butler, Trade Commissioner of the Canadian Consulate, Detroit, recently visited Omstead Fisheries. He is taking particular interest in their new product, breaded frozen fillets.

Oct. 9 -- Omstead Fisheries Ltd. shipped a truck load of their mink feed to Denver, Colorado. The feed is a product of their fish processing plant.

Aug. 16 -- West Erie fishermen and their families, numbering about 400, enjoyed a picnic at Holiday Harbour. Leonard Omstead, as the master chef, demonstrated the art of cooking. Supplies included 380 steaks, 200 pounds of fish and chips, hot dogs and pop.

1956

September 20 -- Lloyd Crewe, past president of the West Erie Commercial Fishermen's Association acted as chairman for their annual meeting at the Wheatley Hotel.

Among those in attendance were Fisheries Council of Canada President W. Ritchie, Gordon O'Brian, Ottawa and representatives of all the Great Lakes associations.

Murray McLean, Leonard Omstead Sr. and John Crewe met President Ritchie and Mgr. O'Brian at Port Stanley where they toured the fish plants of Wilson and Loder, and Glover.

On their way to Wheatley they stopped at Port Crewe and saw the only privately owned twine making machine in North America.

Arriving in Wheatley the meeting began with a fresh water fish and sea food dinner.

The speakers outlined the importance of quality in the fish production and marketing procedures.

The visitors were impressed with the fresh water operations and it was the feeling of all those present that a closer relationship between the government bodies and the fishermen will have been realized from this meeting.

1960

The Erie 1, a tug operated by the Dominion Fisheries Research Board, in Lake Erie to experiment with a mid-water trawl and other fishing gear, landed 2,000

pounds of smelt here recently. The trawler has a highly sensitive echo sounder which locates schools of fish before it's trawling gear is located in the water.

1961

June 8 -- John Crewe of Port Crewe, is working for a few weeks with the Department of Fisheries in conjunction with the Department of Indian Affairs. He will instruct the Indians on the operation of trap nets, introduced in Lake Winnipeg in 1960 and will spend a few weeks at Birens River, Manitoba.

Omstead's new cook room has been operating very successfully for the past five months. The raw fish start on a continuous belt, pass through a battering process, then breading process, and then, through an infra-red cooker. They are then conveyed to a cooling process to be deposited on a belt freezer. From here they reach a table where they are packaged ready for shipment. Varieties of pre-cooked fish processed are, **haddock, cod, scallops, sole fillets, white bass, shrimp, cod fish cakes and fish sticks.** The cooking plant has a capacity of 100,000 pounds a week. Workers operate in two shifts. Products from Omsteads are sold in major chain stores in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. They also supply six major chain stores in the U.S.

June 22 -- The Erie 1 returned after a three week trip to the Bay of Quinte, Lake Ontario. Capt. Norm Omstead and crew, Mylo and Jerry Reid were conducting experiments for Dr. R. Ferguson of Wheatley.

1962

March 29 -- B. N. Chakavarty, High Commissioner for India in Canada, toured Omstead Fisheries and was later treated to a Lake Erie fish dinner at the Wheatley Hotel.

May -- Ohio biologists visited the fishing operations here and were impressed with the size of them. They watched the amateur smelters netting the fish and commented that the smelt were not found along their shore. The boat they arrived on, was equipped with a special pump for dredging fish eggs from the lake bottom. The group is studying the spawning habits of the walleye.

Omstead Fisheries are making french fries for Libbys' of Chatham. They have installed a new gas-fired infra-red cooker, the first of it's kind in North America and are able to process a ton of potatoes an hour.

Sept. 20 -- A Fisheries Research Station is to be built here with Dr. Robert Ferguson as director.

1963

Feb. 21 -- Omstead Fisheries sponsored a bonspiel at the Sun Parlour Curling Club and served a sea food smorgasbord. Duane Omstead remarked that the lowly smelt of Lake Erie has found it's way abroad to Italy and Guam. Omsteads have developed methods of catching, processing and marketing this product which has proven successful.

July 18 -- Mr. Lewis Pearce Plato of the Cochrane District has been transferred to the Lake Erie District.

Oct. 23 -- Yellow pickerel are being taken in fairly large quantities from the western part of Lake Erie. The fish

average about one pound each and are slightly larger than the required fourteen inches. The price is between 20 and 30 cents a pound.

Nov. 28 -- M. S. Higgins, Fisheries officer at Wheatley flew to Winnipeg and drove the Department of Fisheries Mobile Laboratory back to Wheatley. He was accompanied by J. Neilson who will work in the lab for several weeks assisted by R. Chowsuer of Toronto.

Jan. 28 -- The fishing tug the Nancy R. owned by Roy (Buster) Harris, sank in Getty's slip. Spink's two cranes raised her up.

Feb. 1965 -- North shore fishermen are campaigning to petition Lands and Forests Minister Robarts to reimpose the eight inch limit on perch.

1966

Dec. 8 -- Monday morning the tug "P & E" captained by Alf Philcox, nearly sank about twenty minutes out from the harbour. Capt. Ray Moody was close by and gave the P & E a tow back to port. The crew found a twenty inch split in a seam in the bow, and, in waist high water, battled to caulk the gushing leak with burlap bags. The cause of the damage was the result of another tug breaking loose in a swell on Sunday evening, battering the P & E, and causing the hull to rupture.

1967

April 20 -- Commercial fishermen in the Essex County region of Lake Erie will not be allowed to net catches of yellow pickerel from April 15 to May 15. The restriction which does not apply to anglers, was imposed by the Department of Lands and Forests to protect the fish during its spawning season. Yellow pickerel spawn in shoals around Pelee Island and small islands near it.

Mr. Greenwood, Aylmer district fisheries management officer, said the yellow pickerel population in Lake Erie seems to run in a three year cycle. They are plentiful only in the last year of the cycle.

1969

Omstead Fisheries honoured three of their employees for their many years of service: Roy Furey, 50 years John Moody 45 years, and Charles Whittal, 42 years. They were presented with watches suitably inscribed.

CHAPTER 5

Early Vessels on Lake Erie

The Sam Flint -

In the early years of commercial fishing on Lake Erie, two-masted schooners were a common sight as they plied the waters in the interests of the fishing industry. The most popular type of vessel carried two jib sails, a gaff foresail with a small fishermen's staysail over it, and the mainsail.

In 1873, the "Sam Flint", upbound on Lake Huron, survived a violent storm despite the fact that she had lost her main boom, foregaff, and jib sails.

In October 1913 it was reported that she was still seaworthy and was delivering pound stakes to the

fishermen at Wheatley's port.

The City of Dresden -

The steam ship, the "City of Dresden", was built at Walkerville in 1872. This ninety-three foot vessel carried passengers destined for ports on Lake Erie.

In 1883 she was rebuilt and designed for service as a fishing tug, transporting fish for the Post Fishing Co. of Sandusky Ohio.

Then in 1914, she was sold by the Rondeau Tug Co. of Blenheim to James Henning of Port Burwell and was used to carry out freight service on Lake Erie until 1925.

The Louise -

A well-known wooden steam tug, the "Louise", played an important role in the transporting of fish from the Lake Erie north shore fisheries to various American ports along the south shore.

Built in 1878 by John Merit of Sandusky, Ohio, she was later sold to the Post Fish Co. in 1880.

Old-timer Burns Fagan recalled the "Louise" taking on up to fifty tons of fish, which were picked up from the local fishermen's boats out on the lake, since there were no adequate docking facilities at Wheatley for a tug of her size.

The Lycora -

Another American steam tug, well-known to early Wheatley fishermen, was the "Lycora", which had Captain Sheet in command. This vessel also picked up catches from area fisheries and transported them to ports on the south shore.

The Petrel -

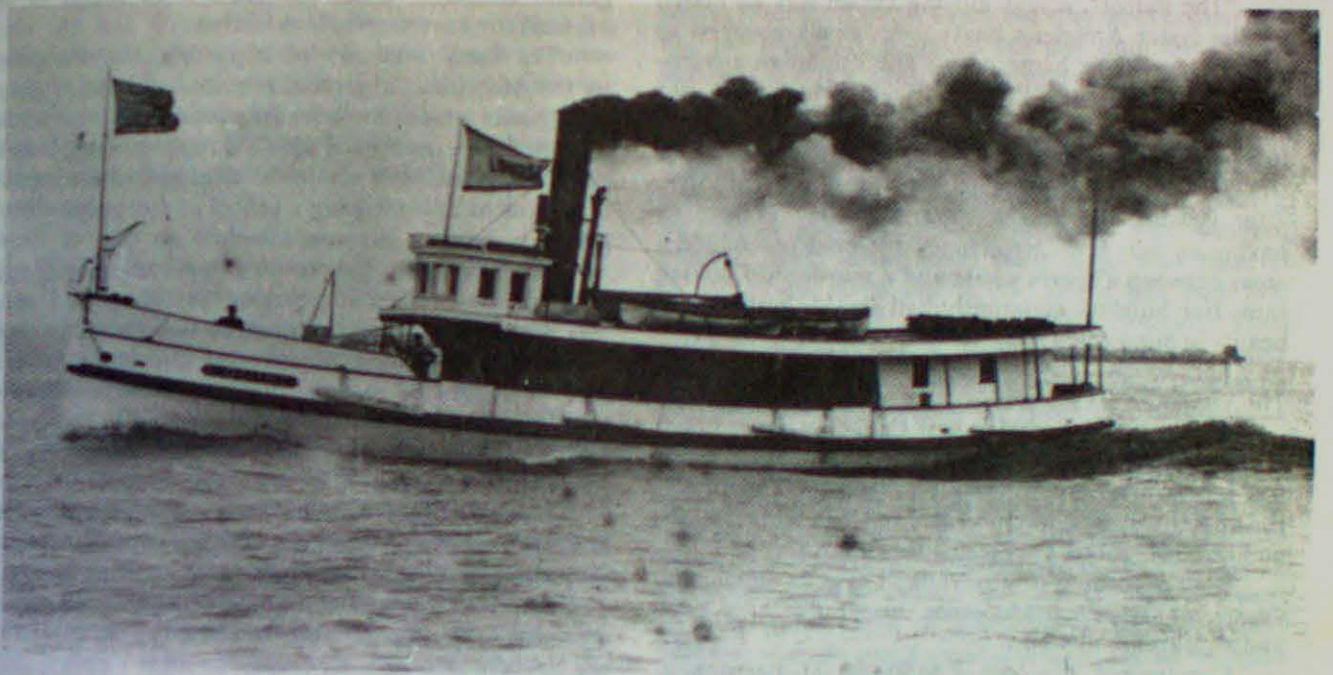
During the 1890's the Dominion government's revenue cutter, the "Petrel", commanded by Captain E. Dunn, was engaged in carrying out extensive patrol operations on Lake Erie, following complaints that American fishermen were placing their nets in Canadian waters.

In 1896, the "Petrel" arrived at Port Stanley with fourteen sturgeon and eight herring nets; the property of U.S. fishermen, which has been found in Canadian waters and seized.

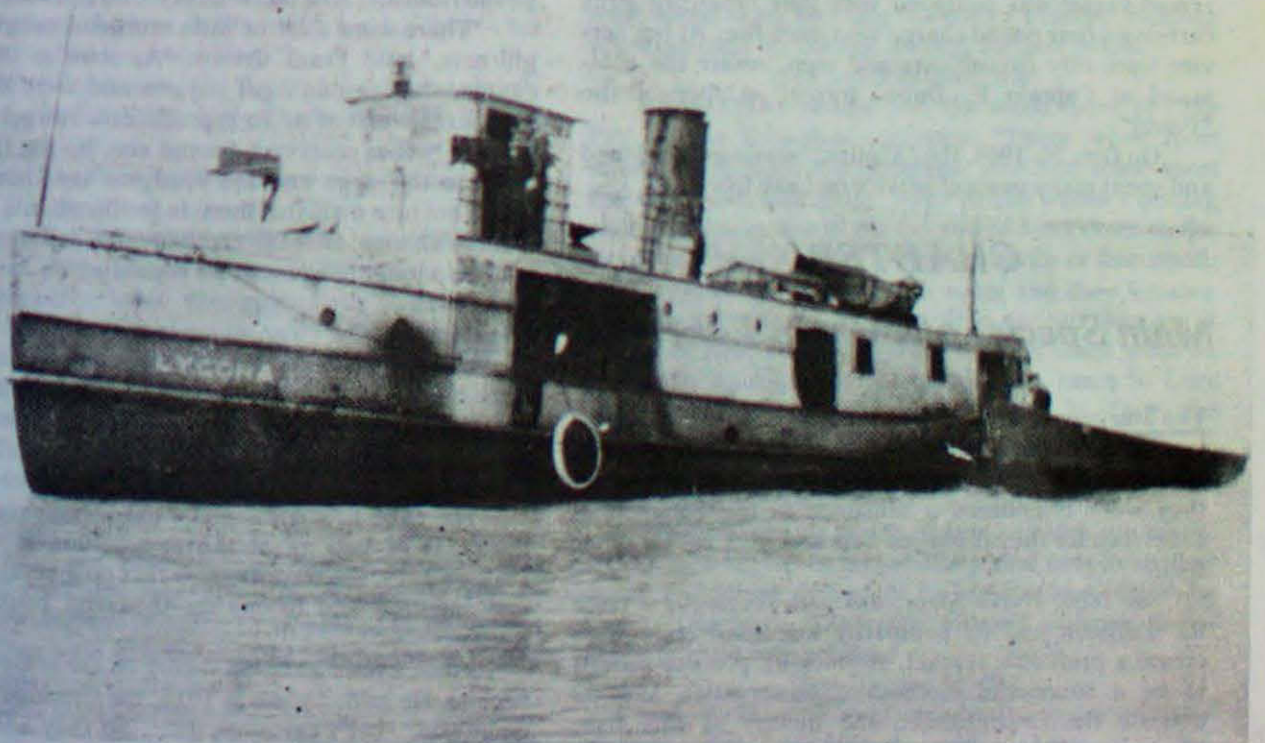
This caused great annoyance to Canadian fishermen for they were not allowed to set gill nets in Lake Erie at that time, due to strict Dominion government regulations.

In June of 1898, it was reported that Capt. Dunn and his "Petrel" crew had seized a total of one hundred gill nets belonging to Americans.

Canadian fishermen continued to protest against the illegal fishing methods carried out by their south shore counterparts. To avoid detection, the Americans sank their nets below the surface using various landmarks on shore to determine the location of the nets. When taking up their nets, the poachers would hook the head ropes with grappling irons and pull them into their boats.



The "Louise" a steam tug which transported the fish to the U.S. markets.



The "Lycora" taking on a cargo of fish from the Bailey Fishery. The Lycora frequently docked at Coatsworth dock for lumber.

"The Petrel", a slow moving vessel was no match for the faster American boats, who easily escaped to the safety of their home ports. The Canadian government, realizing the "Petrel's" inefficiency, took her out of service on Lake Erie. While being transferred to a port in Nova Scotia, the boat made a stop at Montreal's harbour. A reporter for the Montreal Star, after viewing the vessel, described the "Petrel" as having an ugly bow. He claimed the boat resembled a cross between a sperm whale and a murderous looking ram. Her builders apparently had service rather than beauty in mind when she was constructed.

The Vigilant -

In the spring of 1904, a new Canadian government patrol vessel was built in the Toronto shipyards of Polson Iron Works. Appropriately named the "Vigilant", the vessel was designed to carry out patrol operations on Lake Erie, thereby replacing the "Petrel".

Built according to government specifications, the vessel, unlike it's predecessor, was built for service and appearance as well.

Constructed at a cost of \$150,000.00, her dimensions were as follows: keel 176 feet, beam 22 feet, and depth 14 feet. The vessel was equipped with two Scotch boilers, which allowed a steam pressure of 22 pounds capable of sending her through the water at 18 miles per hour—in contrast to the "Petrel's" 12½ m.p.h.

The "Vigilant" received the finest lumber for her furnishings; the main deck being teakwood, while the remaining woodwork consisted of Flemish oak. The armed vessel was equipped with four rapid-fire guns carrying a four pound charge with each fire. At her service were fifty-five officers and men, under the command of Captain E. Dunn, former skipper of the "Petrel".

On Oct. 29, 1904, the "Vigilant" was commissioned and spent many years of service on Lake Erie.

CHAPTER 6

Main Species of Fish In Lake Erie

The Sturgeon -

Prior to 1860, sturgeon were regarded as a useless fish. Noted for their tremendous strength and size, they were considered a nuisance to the commercial fishermen for they damaged nets and gear set for other fish.

By 1880, North Americans had developed a taste for sturgeon and its popularity increased enough to create a profitable market. A smoking process proved to be a successful method of preservation and its delicate flavour enhanced the quality of this fish. The sturgeon eggs were reserved for caviar, a delicacy favoured by the more affluent customers. The bladders of the sturgeon were processed for a product known as

gelatin isinglass. Even the skins were found to be useful; they were tanned into leather.

The early methods of capturing the sturgeon, by the American fishermen, required the use of grappling hooks attached to a lengthy rope. The crew would toss the hooks overboard with the rope securely fastened in the boat. Men would be engaged in rowing the open boat and, overtaking a school of sturgeon, a hook would invariably become attached to one of them.

The Canadian fishermen's method allowed the sturgeon to become impounded in the pound nets. Ray Moody described the manner in which this large fish was caught. Upon discovering one in the nets, a crew member had to inflict a heavy blow to the sturgeon's head to render him unconscious. With the assistance of his fellow workers, he then hauled the prize catch into the boat.

Harry Cobby recalled elderly farmers telling him how they used to go along the beaches with their horses and wagons during the spawning season. Using a pitchfork they loaded the wagons with sturgeon, which were fed to their pigs, and, in some cases, spread on the fields to fertilize their crops.

"People used to go out on the bar when I was a boy," said ninety-three year old Burns "Major" Fagan. "They'd spear them when they was spawning. Some would be six or eight feet long. They'd have a rope with them, put it around his gills and draw him home. I don't suppose we'll ever see that again. My Dad and Nick McLean's father used to get a boat load and take them to Sandusky. Maybe five or six tons in an old flat-bottom boat. Some days they got eight cents a pound from Joe Post in Sandusky", he continued.

"There were a lot of little sturgeon caught in the gill nets," said Frank Crewe. "As soon as they were caught, they couldn't get oxygen and were done for. That's the worst of it. To reproduce, a sturgeon has to be twenty-five years old. So you see, by the time they produce the eggs and are ready to lay them, there might not be a male fish there to fertilize them. There is a mere chance of them reproducing, and twenty-five years is a long time to wait for reproduction."

The Herring -

In 1898, the lake herring, also known as Cisco, were more abundant than ever, in spite of the thousands of tons taken from Lake Erie. It was noted that the nets were so jammed with herring that fishermen feared the market would be "knocked galleywest".

The Lake Erie commercial production records list the catch of herring at thirteen million in the year 1918. In 1919, the records show that only seven million, four hundred and twenty-six thousand pounds were caught.

Frank Crewe gave his theory on the reason for the decline. He said, "Well, in 1918, the Canadian government said, 'Let's eat more fish'. So they allowed the boats to come up from Port Dover to Erieau to catch the herring in the fall. I think there were twenty-six boats came up from Port Dover. They set miles and miles of

nets. At last these fish sold for three-quarters of a cent a pound. After awhile they couldn't sell anymore so they pulled their nets out. I would say, each tug came in with anywhere from two to five tons every day. If the government would have left just the three tugs fishing at Erieau, the herring wouldn't have gone half fast."

The Whitefish -

"I remember when I was eleven years old. I was drawing whitefish and puttin' 'em out on the field with the horses and wagon. They couldn't sell 'em, there was so many", said Burns Fagan.

Harry Cobby explained how they collected the eggs from the whitefish as follows: "I'll say about the twentieth of November, the whitefish came in to spawn in among the rocks. You took the spawn from five females to one male. These were put in a can and taken to Kingsville. Then, in April, they brought them back to you as little fingerlings. You took them out in the lake and that was to be your whitefish for years to come. But, it didn't work out that way, and I figure that the smelt came along and ate them up. Now I've heard them talk and say that it was something else, but I figure that with the smelt we lost our whitefish."

Frank Crewe remarked that it was a cold job spawning the whitefish. "There were about fifty thousand eggs in a quart", he said. "These were put in cans, which held twenty-five quarts. At the hatchery, they were put in quart jars with water running in through a small tube. They kept stirring them so they wouldn't set together. Any eggs that died in transit, and not many of them did, turned black. They were easily spotted and siphoned out."

Veteran fisherman Earl Getty, interviewed shortly before his death in 1977, told of being hired by Everett Omstead in 1939 as a "green man". He said, "I did not know one stake from another, but I was determined to learn." He explained how the Omstead firm built holding tanks near their dock. The whitefish were brought in alive, placed in the tanks and held there until December when the price was higher. This method was abandoned a few years later and the site is now the location of the large modern offices of Omstead Foods Ltd.

Norm Zoller recalled how he processed whitefish eggs as caviar. This delicacy was shipped to U.S. markets for a reasonable profit.

Blue Pickerel -

In 1937 the blue pickerel were abundant, and provided profitable returns for the fishermen. Harold McClellan recalled shipping them packed in 100 pound boxes. They were so large that the tails had to be folded over in order to fit in the boxes.

In 1956 the Lake Erie commercial catch was over twelve million pounds of blue pickerel, and by 1958 had dropped to 824,000 pounds.

Harry Cobby commented on the disappearance of this valuable fish in this way, "Now we didn't take the

spawn from the blue pickerel, but they went completely like the whitefish. It seems like any time the fish go like that the last year is a bumper crop. The lake is full of them and then, that's the end."

Mylo Reid also wonders about the absence of the blues. He stated, "The last pickerel that we got, we got them out of the "canned nets". We were fishing for yellow pickerel, maybe three or four hundred pounds. Well, all at once, these large blue pickerel hit in the big mesh net, a four and a half inch net. We got about nine hundred pounds the first time. Then we went for several days and we were getting better than a ton. Then they just petered out. They were such beautiful fish. That was in the fifties and that was the last large school of blue pickerel we ever saw."

In March 1958, a photograph of Harvey Getty holding a blue pickerel nearly two feet in length appeared in the Windsor Star. The accompanying article told of the fishermen being amazed at the increase in the size, and their theory was that the pickerel were feeding on the smelt. It was reported that the yellow pickerel and the perch were also showing an increase in girth and length.

Yellow Perch -

As the sturgeon, the herring, the whitefish and the blue pickerel continued to disappear from Lake Erie, other species began to dominate the scene.

Commercial landings statistics for Lake Erie report that in 1915 yellow perch catches amounted to one million pounds. By 1958 the total yearly landings were fifteen million pounds.

The yellow perch has gained prominence in the commercial and sporting industry, thereby helping to compensate for the loss of other valued species.

The Smelt in Lake Erie

Frank Crewe related how the smelt came to Lake Erie in the following passages. "There were sport fishermen in Northern Michigan, who had some sport fish in a small lake there. They (trout) weren't getting enough feed, so one of the fishermen went down to the beach and brought back quite a quantity of live smelt. That went on for two or three years and they became climatized to the fresh water. One spring, they got a lot of rain and this lake overflowed. The smelt went on into Lake Michigan, kept reproducing, came to Lake Huron, down the St. Clair River to Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River, and into Lake Erie.

Nobody knew what would happen over these fish reproducing. That would be back in the thirties.

We purchased a bunch of nets to catch the smelt. My nephew set two or three little pound nets in shallow water, and I think, in one lift he had two tons, which he took to Omsteads. The smelt weren't as large then - seven or eight inches long."

Trawling for Smelt

Mylo Reid, a veteran fisherman, compared the present day operations with those of the sixties. He said, "If it hadn't been for the trawling business last summer (1976), it would have been a pretty bleak summer for this end of Lake Erie, and

there'd have been a lot of hungry fishermen. They caught tons of smelt. They caught so many that they had to put them on a quota. They were catching as high as twelve ton a day per boat. They cut 'em down to six ton, then three ton, and finally two ton a day, three days a week. That was all the processors could handle.

They cut the price of smelts, when they got so thick, to six cents a pound, but now they are back up to eight cents. That's pretty good wages, because the fishermen get half and the boat gets half. That's an awful difference from when we first started."

He continued, "One summer, we were on a quota of three ton. 'Tut' Lamb, he ran the 'Evalina', used to leave about one or two hours before the other boats. I've seen us go out at seven o'clock in the morning, and he'd be on his way back with his quota. We only had one spot to unload in, so we had to take turns unloading.

There was no problem, everybody got their quota. Maybe you'd have to run two hours 'til you got to the fishing ground, but once you got there a twenty minute drag and you had your boat load. Most days you couldn't see the bottom on the recorders, there'd be so many smelt."

The following report was presented by Frank Getty at a Lake Erie Fish Management meeting in Erie Pa., on May 18, 1961.

In August of 1958, in company with most of the gill net fleet out of Wheatley, we had our nets badly fouled with large quantities of smelt. This not only caused us to curse the smelt for the trouble they caused and the money we lost in labour, cooking and cleaning our nets, but it led me to believe that we should try to make use of these fish. As it stood, the pound nets and trap nets were the only ones making use of the smelt, and this was only for a short period each spring.

I went to Biloxi, Mississippi in 1959, to learn what I could about trawling. In the summer of that year, I borrowed a trawl and, on an experimental permit, I started out.

By the fall of 1959, three of us had promising results, but we weren't making any money. At this time Bill Gordon from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was also experimenting in Lake Erie and he provided stimulation and advice. The Fisheries Research Board, and later, the Industrial Development Service, brought the "Erie 1" into service in the fall of 1959.

By early 1960, Mr. Wes Johnson had most of us interested in trawling, and had given us many valuable suggestions and gear design tips. With this help, and the example of the results from the "Erie 1", we made fair catches in the summer of 1960. By September 1960 the "Erie 1" had developed a net technique (western-trawl) which was adopted by many fishermen.

Results of the George H. (Getty tug) catches.

In 1959, we caught 72,000 lbs. of smelt, 90% were jumbos at .06¢ per lb. On August 23 we got our new western trawl. The first six days we caught 54,000 lbs. On Sept. 25th we made one drag for ten ton.

INVESTMENT:

Net (Western bottom)	\$900.00
Winch, cable, doors, hardware	600.00
(includes modification and home-made winch)	
	\$1500.00

(Desirable items-Echo sounder K-H \$1500.00)

I simply welded a winch on the stern of my gillnet tug, welded two shields in the gunwales, used a heavy pipe support over the turtle in place of the stanchions. The boom for lifting the cod end is simply an I beam supported by angle irons mounted on the port side of the turtle.

ECONOMICS

We work on a 60-40% for boat and crew wages. We generally use a three man crew, including the skipper. Our net repairs were nil last year. We received 4 cents per lb. until July, then 3 cents per lb. the remainder of the year on a two ton quota.

E.G.: An average good day's fishing -

4 tons at .03 cents/lb. ---		\$240.00
Expenses		
Fuel	\$10.00	
Wages (40%)	96.00 (3 men)	
10% for gear	24.00	
	\$130.00	\$130.00
Profit to boat		\$110.00

PROBLEMS —

1. Maintaining a good price - at least 4 cents per lb.
2. Limited market results in catch quotas when more trawlers operate.
3. Can't catch smelt during spawning season because fish are inshore where net damage occurs.
4. Space problems - can't trawl in gillnet areas.
5. Lands and Forests regulation of 10% daily limit on other species. A 10% weekly limit on other species would be no hardship and would not permit active fishing for these other species, but it would permit marketing of the odd sizeable catch that occurs while you are searching for good smelt concentrations.
6. Belly rot in early summer affects all fish for about two weeks, can't sell catch.

..I do not know whether I shall be a trawler or a gillnetter in the future, but I do know some of the factors that will influence my decision. How these will work out I do not know. These are the questions that will have to be answered.

1. Can the market for smelt be expanded?
2. Can the number of operators be limited so that all participants may make a fair profit at the current market demand?

I do know that trawling for smelt can be profitable during the four to five months when gillnetting either cannot be conducted or is unproductive, that is, January to March and June to August.

Processing The Smelt

Leonard Omstead Sr. explained how his firm first began processing the smelt as follows, "Sometime around 1948 to 1955, the blue pickerel disappeared

from Lake Erie. During this period of time, we had several people working for us in the filleting area. In the winter we did not have any production.

Frank Clatworthy, of the A. and P. Company, was buying smelt from Green Bay, Wisconsin. He made arrangements with us to process smelt, something that had not been done before. They had always been sold in the A. and P. Stores in Detroit, as we would say, "In the round", or, "as they swim". He felt that there were great possibilities that sales would increase if they were processed.

He encouraged us, and we started to process smelt during the winter, due to the fact that we did not have any other work for our employees at this time."

To meet the processing needs, the Omstead firm installed two shrimp grading machines at a cost of \$12,500.00.

During 1960, Lake Erie fishermen landed 10,735,000 pounds of smelt, with trawling operations accounting for 6,710,000 pounds. Sportsmen took some 3,000,000 pounds.

A large portion of the commercial catches were processed at the Omstead plant where additional equipment was installed and more workers were hired to meet the growing needs of this new development in the industry.

Exporting smelt to the United States and overseas markets has been an important factor in the steady growth of the fishing operations of Wheatley's fleet, and a great deal of credit must go to a few leaders in the industry, who faced with what appeared to be a serious problem two decades ago, met the challenge with new ideas and turned them into a profit making venture.

CHAPTER 7

Boats and Fishing Methods

Pound Net Fishing

The method of pound net fishing can be more suitably explained by the men who worked these nets. The term "pound" comes from the expression to impound, meaning to hold within.

Retired fisherman Frank Crewe described the pound netting operation as follows, "The most we ever fished was thirty pound nets. The most stakes we ever drove in a day was once when we drove the number two set, the number three set and six in the number four set. There were twenty-five stakes in a set. Most of the time, if you could get one set in, that was a good day's work."

One fisherman explained that the stakes were driven in to the lake bed in a heartshaped formation, followed by a square crib with five poles. At each corner pole a pulley was attached to the net. The net was anchored to the lake bottom with flat shale stones, which were obtained from Pelee Island. These stones had holes driven into them by a hand-operated drill, through which a rope was passed and knotted to retain

its hold. The door to the crib was constructed of wood and covered with mesh. When it was ready, workers would loosen the pulleys at each corner of the crib and close the door, thereby trapping the fish. Usually, it required three men using dip nets to remove the fish from the enclosure and place them on board the boat.

An important feature of the pound nets was the type of stakes used in their construction. The Crewe Bros. fishery, in their early years of operation, obtained them from Northern Michigan. "The Tamarack stakes were well-suited for this purpose", said Frank Crewe. He continued, "They were very straight, not too big on the butt, maybe six or seven inches, three and a half inches on the top and up to sixty feet long. There was an old fella named Gillingham who used to have a sail boat. He'd take your order, cut these stakes, then load 'em, either on a boat or tow them down from Alpena, Michigan, down through the waterways to here. He'd tell us what time he'd be here so we'd go out to meet him in our boat and take these stakes away from his sail boat."

Frank also explained the method of driving the stakes, a difficult task which required a full crew. He said, "We started out with long stakes because as you were using the hammer, the stakes kept breaking off. As they got shorter, you moved them in. The number one set was in twenty-eight feet of water so you had to have a forty-foot stake. To drive them in you had on the scow, shears standing up there. The hammer went up and down between these two slides and you put a chain that hooked around the stake maybe eight to ten feet from the top. It went up through a pulley then down to an attachment on the scow. You'd point this stake where the chain was hooked on up to your twenty-five feet on top of the shears. When you got it straight up and down you had a chain there that made it so that when you let it go, the rope on the attachment came straight down. The man on the shears would reach out and get his arms around the stake, he'd put this collar on it, throw a hitch and there you were."

"At one time," Frank said, "we had a 330 pound hammer, but at the last we had a 520 pounder. You'd let this hammer down on the stake, and there'd be three or four fellas there with hand spikes. They'd get this spike straight up and down and holler, "Let 'er go". You'd let the hammer down on the stake, which was sharpened at the bottom, and drive it in six feet. The bottom of the lake was clay, and that held it there. The hammer would come down maybe 150 times to get the blame thing in."

Clarence "Tode" Liddle explained the work involved in pulling up the stakes in the fall, at the close of the fishing season. A stump puller was made secure on the scow. The "dogs" on each side were clamped onto the stake and attached to a chain, which ran through a pulley at the top of the shears. Men pulled on the chain or ropes, which were attached to it, and pried the stakes out of the lake bed. The stakes were fastened together in lots of fifteen to form a raft, then were towed to the beach to be used again in the spring.

The wooden scow, sometimes up to thirty feet in length, was a floating platform. An upright frame, approximately twenty feet high, was mounted on it consisting of the pulley on the top and the hammer attached by a rope down to the winch. The early method employed a boiler to provide steam power; later, a more efficient gasoline engine was used.

The nets most commonly used were made of cotton thread and had to be treated with a preservative to maintain a longer life. After being pulled from the pounds, they were washed by the fisherman, who waded in the shallow water along the beach and freed the entangled debris from the mesh. The invention of the twine washer proved to be a most welcome piece of equipment for the men, for it saved a great deal of time and manual labour.

The tarring process required the use of a large cast iron vat, eight feet long, four feet wide and two feet high, mounted on legs. Tar was emptied into the vat with creosote added as a thinning agent. A wood or coal fire beneath it, heated the tar to a boiling point.

A plank was then placed over the tar vat. Two men wearing insulated mitts would stand on it and lower the net into the tar. Charles Shaw was one of the men who "minded" the tar vats; he worked for the McLeans, Gettys and Omsteads at various times. Following the tarring process the nets were taken to a field nearby and spread to dry.

Gill Net Fishing

The introduction of gill net fishing did not commence in the Wheatley area until the early 1920's. Strong protests were raised by the pound net fishermen when the Hon. F. G. MacDiarmid, Minister of Public Works for the Ontario government, announced at a fish and game conference in January 1915 that the gill netting method would be allowed on Lake Erie. In spite of the opposition, several fisheries conducted this new method of fishing with successful results.

In gill netting the nets are set to form a fixed or moving wall of netting, suspended by floats on the top line, and held fast by lead sinkers below the water. The net is anchored on the bottom and held by a surface buoy as well. The fish, while attempting to swim through the wall of net, are held fast by their gills. Nets must be lifted frequently, particularly in warm weather, because the fish deteriorate rapidly.

"We started gill netting about the first of March and went through the spawning season of perch", explained Harry Cobby. "The perch spawned in the spring until about May, then the water got warm. This would cause the fish to go "white gills" meaning they would spoil, so we would quit 'til September, then we'd be out of the lake by the 15th of December. Now you picked all these fish by hand, not with a net-lifter that went around. You just reached down and pulled," he continued.

Later, the introduction of the net-lifter took a great deal of backbreaking work out of commercial

fishing.

In 1949 fishermen began using multifilament nylon twine in their gill nets, gradually replacing the cotton type.

By the late fifties, as the pound netting operations were being phased out, gill netting became the principal method of harvesting fish in Lake Erie.

The Fishing Boats

Early fishing boats, on Lake Erie's north shore, were usually built by their owners during the winter months. They were of simple design and constructed of native lumber. Arthur White, who began his fishing career by working for his uncles on their twin-masted vessels, described their structure as follows: "They were open and constructed of wood. Each boat had two masts. In the middle of the boat was a wide plank extending out into the water, which was called a centre board. This was made secure by bolts, and by lowering or raising this board, they could maintain an even keel."

These boats were considered to be quite safe, and being of flat-bottom design, they could operate with ease in shallow waters.

The introduction of the gasoline engine meant added improvements in the methods of pound net fishing. The men were no longer required to row and did not have to depend on the wind to guide their sails.

In 1896, the enterprising Lamarshes were the first in the Wheatley area to install a gasoline engine as many residents gathered at the shore to witness this latest development and to have their first ride in a gasoline-powered boat.

By the turn of the century, other fisheries were changing over to the more modern and efficient gasoline engines, and the sails soon disappeared from Wheatley's port.

The open boats continued to serve the industry for many years to come. Veteran Mylo Reid related his early experiences as follows, "I began working with my brother Glen, and Effeard Pinch on an Omstead gill net boat when I was sixteen. The first year I fished I was sick every day. When I came home at night I'd say to Glen that I wasn't going back and he'd say, "Oh, yes you are". So I fished with them for about three years until Glen had a heart attack."

Mylo explained how they used to pull the boat up on the beach on rollers, because there were no docking facilities. He started fishing with Leonard Omstead in a small boat with a canvas top. During the summer, the boat was painted and recaulked to get it seaworthy for the fall season. The boats were also "tinned off", meaning that a tinsmith would apply tin to the outside of the hulls. This provided some protection from the ice encountered during the early spring and late fall seasons.

During the thirties, steel boats began to emerge on the fishing scene. This enabled some of the major operations to expand, and by 1952 there were seventeen fishing tugs moored at Wheatley's harbour.

The Ice Harvest

During the months of January and February, when the ice on the lake was frozen to a thickness of five inches or more, the harvest began. Most of the larger fisheries had their own shanties, where an ample supply of ice was stored to meet their needs in the summer. In the winter of 1897 it was reported that the Lamarsh Bros. put up 200 tons of ice in one week.

Extra men were needed to cut and haul the ice, therefore, area farmers often gave assistance to the fishermen.

Early methods of cutting the ice required the services of a well-trained horse and a sharp-pointed plow. The ice was cut into two-foot squares and separated by piked poles called "spuds". Men handling these poles would guide the cakes of ice to shore, where they were picked up by men using hand tongs and placed in the ice shanty.

Arthur White, a nephew of the Lamarshes, recalled that era and the many risks involved when bringing in the ice. On one occasion, he and Bill McLean were guiding the horse-drawn plow through the last rows when the ice gave way, causing the horse to plunge into Erie's icy waters. Young Art, realizing that the horse would drown with the burden of a heavy harness, quickly leaped onto a floating cake of ice, unhitched the frightened horses, and with the aid of his co-workers, led the animal to shore.

In time, improved methods, such as the invention of an ice-cutting machine, operated by a gasoline engine, made the work of harvest a little easier for the men and eliminated the need for horses. Specially designed conveyors also came into use, and transported the cakes of ice up a chute to the storage area. The cakes were placed on the chute in front of a piece of equipment referred to as "the jack-ass" or donkey. This required the services of a brave worker, who rode this apparatus up the chute, guiding the cakes to the open door of the storage shanty. It was customary for the employer to give the rider extra pay because of the dangers and the risk of painful injuries.

On one occasion, in January 1922, Everett Fagan, of Wheatley, was seriously injured when a cake of ice, which was too large for the opening, caused the load on the conveyor to buckle. Fagan, guiding the load of ice, was unable to avoid the mishap and received a crushing impact on his leg. The young man was quickly taken to a Windsor hospital, where he received the best medical attention, but passed away several days later.

Although the ice harvesters were saddened by the loss of a co-worker, the same methods of transporting the ice were carried on until the "thirties" when the advent of electricity and modern refrigeration eliminated the need for natural ice. Thus, another era soon became only a memory in the minds of the ice men of Lake Erie.

CHAPTER 8 *Men of Courage*

Knowledge of the water, the weather and navigational skills proved to be valuable assets to the men of the open boats and, in spite of the many dangerous situations which they encountered, researching failed to reveal drownings of any local fishermen in the course of their work.

None-the-less a tragedy, which took place in June of 1920, served as a grim reminder of the many perils encountered while working the pound nets.

A crew of four men from the Omstead and Getty fishery, namely, Harvey Getty, L. N. "Sing" Dawson, Ernie King and James Voakes, were engaged in pulling up twine. Without warning, a sudden rain-storm descended upon the men in the open boat, followed by a blinding flash of lightning. The impact of the bolt momentarily stunned the crew but, upon recovering, they noticed that "Sing" Dawson was missing. Recalling that he was bending over the side of the boat when the flash came, they quickly searched the pound net and located his lifeless body. The men, realizing that only a miracle had saved them, sadly returned to shore with the body of their friend.

"Tode" Liddle, a veteran fisherman, recalled his father "Josh" instructing his men to always move several rods away from the pound stakes if an electrical storm arose. Many times, following such a storm, the men would find that these stakes had been struck by lightning and splintered beyond repair.

A Dramatic Rescue

Mrs. Jack Moody related an episode experienced by her late husband while he was employed at the Al Long fishery in the early twenties.

It was a beautiful spring morning when the crew left the shore to set their nets. While Charlie Shaw and Elmer Loop were working from their dinghy, securing the lead nets to the stakes, Jack Moody and Al Long returned to shore in the fishing boat to pick up the heads of twine.

A short time later, as they were making preparations to return to the pound nets, a sudden storm arose, causing waves so high that it was impossible to launch their boat.

Al Long, who was determined to save the two men in the small dinghy, finally managed to break through the waves, and as he approached the men, prepared to throw a rope to them in order that they might secure it to his boat. Suddenly, a giant wave tossed the dinghy and its two occupants up and over the pound stakes. The startled men could not believe their eyes. Jack and Al managed to reach the victims and helped them into their boat. A cold wet crew reached the safety of shore, thankful that they had evaded Lake Erie's grasp.

Volunteer Rescue Squad

During the 1920's, a Life-Saving Station was in operation at Point Pelee under the command of James Grubb Sr., a well known fisherman, who always kept a watchful eye for ships in distress. Beyond the Point were the treacherous currents and the dangerous rocky shoals of the Pelee Passage. Here, many ships, crew members and passengers met their fate as they encountered Lake Erie's wrath during storms and high seas.

On October 23, 1929, a steamer, the "N. J. Nessen", ran aground in Lake Erie about 500 feet from shore near Leamington. The ship, carrying a cargo of scrap iron, had a crew of twelve men and women on board.

In spite of a raging storm and a warning that no ship could survive, James Grubb quickly readied the "Flossie G" and, with a crew of seven, set out to rescue the victims. Rowing with extreme difficulty, the crew of the rescue boat managed to reach the "Nessen" and secured a rope on board. One by one, each survivor was lowered into the "Flossie G." Two trips to the shore had to be made by the gallant rescuers in order to bring all the victims to safety.

Newspapers reporting on the dramatic event, paid glowing tributes to the brave volunteers. Among them were the late Rile Grubb, son of James Sr., and two Wheatley residents, Milt Sheldon and Harold "Mac" McClellan.

James Grubb reported that the people rescued were off the "Nessen" not more than an hour when it was "smashed to match sticks".

IceBound on Lake Erie

Retired fisherman Cecil Gilbert of Wheatley, related an unforgettable experience he had while a crew member of the fishing tug, "The Morgan", of Port Stanley.

In March 1938, the "Cecil M", a small gasoline-powered wooden boat owned by the late Bill Martin and his son Cecil, set out from Port Stanley for Port Burwell, twenty miles away. Word was received the following day that the boat had not reached its destination. An airplane, chartered to search the area located the "Cecil M" sitting high and dry on an ice floe.

When the news reached Port Stanley, three steam-powered wooden tugs, the "Finglo", the "Walter Mac" and the "Morgan" along with the "Dover Clipper", a diesel-powered boat with a steel hull, made preparations to go to the rescue. On board the tugs were additional passengers who wanted to witness the rescue operations.

The "Finglo" and the "Walter Mac" travelled east through open water and some ice. The "Morgan" and "Dover Clipper" went south of the harbour to skirt a heavy ice flow, but were forced to turn back to port.

Cecil Gilbert vividly recalled his experience as follows:

...."It was 10 a.m. Sunday when we followed the other two boats out. We worked our way east, through open water and heavy ice fields, yet no sign of the "Cecil M". In the meantime a plane had dropped supplies and fuel, and sighting the rescue boats, circled the stranded vessel to indicate the "Cecil M's" position.

We made slow progress through the ice, then just before darkness the "Dover Clipper" arrived. With the help of this steel boat, better progress was made.

After dark we sighted the "Cecil M." sitting on a windrow of ice. We continued to break ice until well after dark, then had to discontinue until daylight came.

At six o'clock in the morning, we resumed work, breaking ice around the stranded boat until at last she was free. With the "Finglo" towing the "Cecil M." the boats all headed for port only to become ice-bound, two miles off shore, south of the sand hills. Darkness closed in so everyone stayed on the boats overnight.

The next morning we started for shore, walking on the ice; three of the crew and all the passengers. We all held onto a long line and pulled a light skiff, in case we came to open water. We were walking on ice that was only two inches thick. As we neared shore, we came to open water. One man operated the skiff, taking four passengers on each trip to the beach.

People had a hot meal prepared for the passengers at the church nearby, but we had to buy groceries and get back to our boat.

We bought a shoulder of pork, side bacon, four loaves of bread, butter, tea and white beans. When we returned to look out over the lake, we saw that the other three boats had broken loose and were on their way back to Port Stanley. We looked closely to make sure the "Morgan" captained by Tom Morgan was still there.

Our journey back to the boat was very treacherous, as we were walking in windrow ice up to our knees. Carrying our provisions, we managed with luck, to get onto the boat. We had not had anything to eat for two days.

There were no cooking utensils on board. One chap used his lunch pail for the bean pot. To fry the pork and bacon we cleaned off the top of the stove, greased it with a piece of rind, then cooked the meat.

In the meantime the government tug, the "Misford", arrived with a meal prepared in her galley for our crew. It was well after 7 p.m. before we finally docked safely at Port Stanley."

A Near Asphyxiation

In the 1940's the majority of the fishing boats in use were still of the open type, which offered little protection against the harsh elements.

On an early spring morning, an Omstead crew consisting of Mylo Reid, Fred Hodgson, and Johnny Nicholson, set out in their boat for a full day's work.

To alleviate some of the wind and cold, the men had installed several wooden doors on their vessel.

Johnny was steering the boat when Mylo became aware that the craft was not being properly navigated. As they approached a field of ice, Mylo offered his assistance. Johnny replied in the negative, but collapsed in Mylo's arms. By this time Fred was also becoming ill and said, "What can I do?" The answer came quickly, "kick a door out!" Fred carried out the order, then he too collapsed.

Mylo, though much smaller in stature than Johnny managed to carry him to an open area and poured water on him. He then grabbed Fred by the scuff of the neck and pulled him near the open doorway.

When the men recovered, they realized what had happened. They had been near victims of asphyxiation from the exhaust fumes. Only the alertness and quick thinking of Mylo had saved them. Fred and Johnny both made a rapid recovery and were soon back to work. Mylo, unfortunately, spent two weeks in bed with pneumonia.

A Lesson in Navigation

In the spring of 1964, Captain Cecil Balkwill, skipper of the Omstead tug the "Everett H" and his crew, Jim Whitesell, Doug and Don Johnston and Gary Hickson, travelled to a location near Old Hen Island. In the process of setting nets, everyone had a job to do. Don was seated on a stool in the stern of the boat checking the nets, which went over a roller and were then spread out, putting the corks on the high side and the leads on the low side. Every sixth net had to have an anchor attached, which would take one side down into the water. Doug was throwing the cans, which kept the nets afloat, overboard, and Gary and Jim were behind the wheelhouse picking fish from the nets that had just been lifted.

Everyone was intent on their work when Don cried, "man overboard". Doug had just thrown an anchor into the water, and he too went plunging downward. The skipper quickly put the tug in reverse while the crew pulled the nets from the water so they would not get tangled in the propeller. Suddenly Capt. Balkwill sent the tug forward. Don had to be restrained from jumping overboard to help his twin brother who, by this time, had surfaced thirty feet behind the tug. The skipper and his crew quickly rescued the young man from the chilly waters, and restored him to the warmth of the pilot house.

Doug explained that the bridle, a rope formation which connects two nets, had caught under his wedding ring and pulled him overboard. When the anchor hit bottom his hand was freed and he was able to surface. Apart from a cut finger, a bent ring, and a missing boot, he was none the worse for his harrowing experience.

When the skipper was questioned by the crew on why he had put the tug in reverse and then had gone ahead, he quickly explained; had he continued

moving in reverse, the tug would have been on the spot where Doug would have surfaced and he might have been drawn into the propeller. The wise skipper's years of experience taught the youths a lesson in navigation that day.

The Fate of the Heather Lee

In the spring of 1965, the "Heather Lee", an Omstead tug skippered by Cecil Balkwill and her crew, Earl Sells, Clayton Dibley, Bruce Hodgson and James Betts, left Wheatley harbour for a routine day of lifting and setting nets.

The tug's gasoline engine had been recently converted to diesel and the skipper was pleased with its greater efficiency and better performance. The lake was somewhat choppy as they began setting big mesh for bass. Just as the buoy was to be thrown, small flames were discovered in the engine room. After yelling at the captain, the men rushed below. An oil stove, used for heating purposes, appeared to be the source of the problem. The flames were quickly extinguished, the oil was shut off and the men returned to their work.

While the crew was setting the nets, one member checked below and again discovered flames. This time it was more serious. Capt. Balkwill tried to radio the "Alex B" for help, since the boat was only a quarter of a mile away; there was no answer from the Getty tug.

All the frantic efforts of fighting the flames failed. The exertion and excitement proved to be too much for the skipper, causing him to collapse. Bruce and Clayton managed to put the lifeboat into the water, but Capt. Balkwill was reluctant to leave. After much persuasion, he agreed to abandon the "Heather Lee" and joined the crew in the lifeboat.

Eighteen miles from shore, the men were adrift for about fifteen minutes when they sighted the "Alex B" heading towards them. They were quickly picked up — full of gratitude for their rescue. Capt. Ray Getty explained that he and his crew were all down below picking fish when the distress call came and hence did not hear it. When he returned on deck he heard the commotion on his radio and promptly sped to the scene.

Captain Jim Grubb heard the distress call on another Omstead tug, the "Seven O" and he too arrived to lend assistance. As the "Heather Lee" was being towed to port by the "Seven O", the wind fanned the flames, and turned the tug into a roaring inferno.

All the radio equipment, fishing gear and the day's catch were lost. There was extensive damage to the tug as well.

The experience was unforgettable; one which prompted Clayton Dibley to seek a less hazardous occupation on land.

The Sinking of the Sandi-Pat

On December 3, 1969, the forty-seven foot tug, the "Sandi-Pat", having fished out of Port Stanley, prepared to sail for her home port at Wheatley. A strong, cold northwest wind was blowing as the tug headed out on Lake Erie.

Captain Bell, her skipper, spoke by radio to other captains of fishing tugs in the area and remarked that his boat was taking on water, although there was no cause for alarm.

On board the Omstead tug, the "Donna F", Captain James Grubb heard the conversations, and for some unknown reason, decided to head out in the direction of the "Sandi-Pat". Within a matter of minutes, Capt. Bell's tug flooded and was without power.

The crew on the "Donna F" threw a tow line to be secured to the stricken vessel. As the tow-line tightened, the water in the hull surged forward, causing the "Sandi-Pat" to plunge into deep waters.

The next few moments turned into a nightmare for all concerned. Captain Grubb's son, Doug, dove into the icy waters in an attempt to rescue the crew. Despite his heroic efforts, two young crew members of the "Sandi-Pat", Doug Keegan and Peter Wall, lost their lives.

Later an investigation revealed that the packing seal around the propeller shaft had broken loose from the shaft log, allowing the water to rush in faster than the pumps could pump it out. A coroner's report absolved Captain Bell of any blame. This tragedy makes one realize that dangers still exist for the men on the lake, despite modern boats and communication systems.

Veterans of the Fisheries

The following are brief notes on local fishermen, now retired, who were happy to reminisce about their many years in the fishing industry.

Charles Whittal recalled those years and remarked, "I don't know what I'd ever had done if I hadn't fished. I might have made more money but we've always had enough. We worked together, Roy Furey, Bill Labonte and me. We took Roy's fishery and went on shares for a year. When we were done, we each had \$460.00 for twelve months work. We didn't bank much that year; fishing was bad. That was in the thirties, "the dirty thirties". It was tough, a tough life, but I loved it. I was doing what I liked and Omsteads have been awful good to me down through the years. I went to work for Everett Omstead as a "green man". That's what they call a guy who has never fished. I started working for the Furey-Omstead fishery at fifty dollars a month."

Howard Hardy began his fishing career in 1929 and retired in 1972. During this time he worked for the Crewe brothers at Port Crewe and later for the McLean brothers, Nick and George. He spoke highly of the

Crewe brothers, who were well respected by their employees, since they never asked any man to do a job that they would not do themselves.

John "Jack" Seili fished for Harvey Getty for fifteen years, then spent fourteen years at the Frank Bailey fishery. His loyalty and dedication to his work was typical of that special breed of men, who worked the pound nets in open boats.

Dick Munnick, a native of Holland, worked at the McLean Bros. fishery. Noted for his large stature and physical strength, he received the nickname of "Big Dick".

On one occasion, while working on Lake Erie, a severe storm descended on the fishermen. Suddenly, a large wave came over the open boat taking George Ferris with it. Dick reached out and grabbed his fellow crew member by the feet, just as he was being swept overboard, and pulled him to safety. To many, "Big Dick" seemed to stand ten feet tall that day. When poor health forced him to retire, Dick moved to the west coast. However, the memories of his friends and his co-workers in Wheatley made him decide to return and take up residence in the village.

James Gould left his home in Greater Yarmouth, England, at the age of sixteen to come to Canada. His boyhood dream had been that one day he would join his older brother, who had moved to Australia. Jim's father, who worked as a "riding steward", meaning foreman, for a wealthy English landowner, discouraged the young lad from making any plans to immigrate so far from home. Finally, convinced that his son was eager to seek new opportunities, he consented to let Jim answer an advertisement which had appeared in their local newspaper. It read: WANTED -- two hundred boys for farm work in Canada.

Within a short time, the young lad was on his way to begin a new life on a farm near Guelph, Ontario. The job involved a contract under government sponsorship and the regulations were that a three-year period of employment was required.

Following the completion of his term, Jim found new employment as a fisherman, working out of Clearville, Ontario on Lake Erie. Later, he moved to Wheatley and worked at the Bailey, McLean and Omstead fisheries.

Norm Zoller began his fishing career at the age of sixteen, working at McKillopp's fishery, south of West Lorne, Ontario. He can still visualize catches of herring weighing five tons or more, which were enough to fill three railway cars. These were shipped to Sandusky where they were smoke-processed for city markets throughout the U.S.

In time, Norm became a part-owner of a fishery located between Wallacetown and Iona, a choice area on Lake Erie for whitefish. Here he operated pound nets with profitable catches.

Later, moving to Wheatley, he was employed by Omsteads where he worked for many years.

Glenn "Nig" Foster worked for a number of years at the Burns Hodgson and George Smith fishery located near the mouth of Yellow Creek. Among his co-workers were Elgin Thompson, Felix Labonte, Frank Adams and Clarence Hodgson.

Fishing was a way of life for many men in the community, but "Nig's" skills were of a mechanical nature so he changed his occupation to that of a mechanic. Considered an expert by those acquainted with his work he spent many years in the automotive business until his retirement a few years ago.

Ray Moody began fishing in 1946, working for Nick McLean on a pound net boat. He recalled a day's catch, which included fifty-seven sturgeon, with two of them weighing 160 to 170 pounds each.

In 1948 Ray Moody and Lyle Graham purchased the "Jubilee" formerly owned and built by the McLean Bros. They operated this boat until 1951, when they purchased their first steel boat, the "Curtis Clipper", and began gill netting.

In January 1961, fire destroyed the Moody twine shanty and all its contents, resulting in a heavy loss of gear and equipment.

Ray finished out the last years of his operations with the tug, the "Almadart". She has since found a new berth on the north shore of Lake Superior.

Among the many veterans of the fishing industry, who worked out of Wheatley's port, the following men were found to have had the unique experience of pound net fishing from wooden flat-bottom sail boats before the turn of the century.

Burns Fagan, a lifelong resident of Wheatley, is now enjoying his retirement in the Sun Parlour Home, Leamington, Ontario. The veteran fisherman, who is ninety-five years of age, has an amazing recollection of the past. He commented, "It's as clear to me as if I was standing there".

Being the son of a fisherman, it was only natural that Burns would follow his father's trade. He recalled those years so long ago saying, "My father, Joseph Fagan, fished for McLeans one hundred years ago. Their boat had a flat bottom, a mast and sometimes two sails. I remember when they used to have sail boat races on the lake on a clear flat day."

He continued, "My dad and Nick McLean's father, Enoch, used to take a boat load of fish to Sandusky, maybe five or six tons in the old flat-bottomed boat. Old Joe Post bought them. Sometimes they'd take a couple of tons of big pickerel, maybe weighing 12 to 14 pounds each. They just took the biggest ones."

Following his retirement from fishing, Burns developed a new trade; selling fish from door to door throughout Essex and Kent counties, for over thirty years. He recalled how an old friend, Ham Hooper, also a fish peddler, travelled about with a horse and wagon, but he was able to carry out his business with a pick-up truck.

"Major" Fagan had a word of advice for the people of Wheatley as he finished his story. He said, "If you

want people to know about fishin' back then, you should be gathering up the old things used for fishin' and put them someplace for people to see."

Arthur White was born in 1888 and began fishing as a young lad while working for his uncles, the Lam-marsh brothers. Art's keen mind was able to recall a great deal of historical information on the fisheries of the Wheatley area, and without his help, much of the early history would not have been recorded.

Arthur later worked for Stewart Anderson, who owned a fishery at the mouth of Muddy Creek, where the present day Omstead fisheries are located. Some of his experiences, which are written elsewhere in this book, are an example of the courage, determination and dedication, which these men and boys were made of.

Nelson "Cap" Ferriss began working with his father as a very young lad for the Bates Fisheries of Eriau. Their operation was located at Hill's Dock, now Morpeth, Ontario.

The well-known "Cap" earned a fine reputation for his work, and this fact was noted by Captain Joe Post, who hired the young man to operate his two-masted sailing vessel. Cap commented, "If the wind blew, all was fine. If the wind didn't blow, it was "On the oars boys!"

The skipper and fisherman became skilled at the tiller and received well-earned praise from his employer. He stated that once Captain Post paid him his monthly wage of \$35.00 in silver, which he said, "Was a lot of money to carry in the pockets of your pants".

The years of hard work, often under hazardous conditions, long hours, poor markets, are all in the past for these men. The good times, the satisfaction of working to obtain a better life for their families, are the memories which they prefer to recall.

CHAPTER 9

The Women's Role

In the days of the open boats, women played an important role in providing their men with warm clothing and substantial food for the long working day.

During the cold winter months, wearing pure woollen underwear was a necessity. It was a familiar sight to see this article of clothing draped over a chair to dry by the heat of a coal or wood-burning stove. Careful laundering was necessary for there was sure to be a commotion in the household if mother shrunk father's "long-johns".

"There was no time for fancy knitting", remarked one fisherman's wife. All the fishermen's boot length socks and mittens were handknit using a heavy quality yarn. The mitts required long cuffs in order to be pulled up well over the sleeves of the men's smocks. It was not unusual for the men to return home from work on a cold night with their mitts and socks frozen solid.

Although repairing the nets was usually done by the men during off season, some of the wives also assisted in mending the cotton mesh.

Naturally, the most important role for women was the preparation of the meals. The day began very early with luncheons to pack and hearty breakfasts to prepare on a coal or wood-burning stove. Often the wife gave her husband instructions to bring home "a mess of fish". Fishermen and their families never seemed to tire of its taste.

Lake Erie provided a variety of species, and these were cooked in many different ways. Prior to modern refrigeration, whitefish were cleaned, cut into serving pieces, salted, placed in a large crock, covered with a white cloth and kept in a cool place. To prepare for serving, the fish were soaked in water for several hours to remove the salt. They were then fried or baked. Mrs. Howard Hardy, who did not enjoy eating fish of any kind, recalled salting down many crocks of this delicacy. Mrs. Harold McClelland, who also prepared her fish in this manner, called it a welcome winter treat. She remarked that it was a change from the often served fried-down pork.

A few of the widows of veteran fishermen added their views of the early days of fishing on Lake Erie, in the following paragraphs.

Mrs. Lucinda "Cindy" Julien, who was interviewed shortly before her death in 1977, was well-acquainted with the fishing industry. She was a fisherman's daughter, a fisherman's wife, and the mother of fishermen. She recalled her father working for a Mr. Fleming, whose fishery was located at Oxley. Traveling from Kingsville to Oxley each weekend, he would sell fish from a box in the back of the buggy while en-route. The large ones brought 50 cents each, and the small ones 25 cents each. This took place around the year 1900 when sailing vessels were still in use.

In 1918, while living in Wheatley, Cindy's late husband worked on the only gill net boat in the area, which was owned by Mr. Freeman Wright of Kingsville.

Cindy remembered very clearly the Canadian government vessel, "The Vigilant", which patrolled the waters of Lake Erie during the early part of the century.

Memories of early fishing years were also recalled by Mrs. Rosie Crewe Heatherington of Leamington, who married Milton Crewe in 1909 and settled on Lot 199 in Romney township where their fishery was located. At that time fishing was at its peak; herring was being caught in large numbers and shipped to U.S. ports.

Milton Crewe was also a farmer so his wife not only had fifteen men to feed during the ice harvest, but there were also meals to prepare for large threshing gangs during the grain harvest.

Mrs. Heatherington recalled how her sons Harry and George Crewe, as young lads, never missed an opportunity to go out on the scow with the men, thus they learned the fishing trade at an early age.

Mrs. Flossie Grubb, widow of James Grubb Sr., remembered cooking for thirty or more men during their annual ice harvest at Point Pelee. The Grubbs were well-known for their kindness and hospitality and, when visitors came to the Point, they were often treated to one of Flossie's delicious fish dinners.

Miss Ruby Scott, a granddaughter of Enoch McLean, had many fond memories of the family fishery. She related how her mother often told her of the days of the sailing vessels or "fishing smacks", as they were sometimes called.

Enoch McLean was the owner of one of these "smacks" and used it to transport his fish across Lake Erie to buyers in Sandusky, Ohio. At times, if his sails were without wind power, he had to resort to rowing, which meant a journey lasting many hours. If darkness fell and he still hadn't returned, Enoch's wife and children would go to the landing site with lanterns to provide a beacon for the weary fisherman.

Ruby proudly recalled that one of the McLean Bros. boats, the "Bessie M" was named after her mother, Bessie McLean Scott.

Regretfully, Ruby Scott did not live to see her story in print. Her recollections were a joy to hear, and it can be said that Ruby was truly "a daughter of the fisheries".

CHAPTER 10

Salvaged Relics of Shipwrecks on Lake Erie

During the nineteenth century, before the advent of the railway, the waterways of the Great Lakes provided the main means of transportation and commerce. Vessels ranging from small open boats and schooners, to barges and steam ships plied the waters. Although this was a very convenient method of transportation, at times these waters brought danger and destruction to lake vessels. One particularly hazardous area found in Lake Erie was the shoals of the Pelee Passage, where many vessels sank or ran aground.

The Kent

In the year 1961, while conducting trawling operations with the government experimental boat "Erie 1" Captain Norm Omstead and his crew recovered an old anchor, which was later identified as belonging to the sidewheel steamer the "Kent". Launched in 1840 and built at a cost of \$40,000.00, the vessel was designed to carry passengers and freight to and from Detroit and Buffalo.

On August 12, 1845, a collision occurred between the "Kent" and the "London". Both vessels were chartered by the North Shore Steamship Lines, a Canadian company. The eastbound "Kent" was struck in the front of her wheelhouse by the other ship. Captain VanAllen, the skipper of the "London" and his crew, attempted to tow the "Kent" to Point Pelee but after five hours she sank some twenty miles offshore. Ten

passengers were lost, as well as a cargo of gold and silver reported to be worth \$65,000.00.

The sinking led to a court action which took place at Sandwich, Ontario. The owners of the "Kent" won judgement of 2,500 British pounds from the operators of the "London".

The identity of the anchor was made possible through extensive studies and research by Dr. Robert Ferguson, Director of the Wheatley Fisheries Research Station and the late Cecil Stein of Wheatley, a well known authority on lakelore.

The anchor now rests in front of the Research Station, a valuable relic of the early days of transportation and commerce on Lake Erie.

The Fay Eddy Brown

In August of 1961 a fifty-foot spar was towed to shore by the Omstead gillnet tug the "L and D". Eighty year old, James Grubb Sr., identified the spar as belonging to the 250 foot sailing schooner, the "Fay Eddy Brown", which sank in the Pelee Passage on Jan. 4, 1891.

According to Mr. Grubb, the schooner was struck by a steamship ten miles east of the old lighthouse off Point Pelee, while enroute to Buffalo from Lake Superior. Her cargo consisted of redstone to be used for construction purposes, valued at \$30,000.00.

Following the collision, the vessel immediately sank in fifty feet of water, but all those on board were saved.

Mr. Grubb recalled that he had visited the scene of the mishap a year later, and equipped with a diving suit, went down to view the wreckage.

Most of the wreckage was later removed by the Dominion government, because it was creating a hazard to ships travelling through the passage.

CHAPTER 11

Wheatley Fisheries Research Station

Although fisheries research on Lake Erie had been carried out for a number of years, it was not until 1957 that a field base was established at Wheatley. A building, rented from a local fishery, was used for this purpose.

Studies on the smelt began in 1960 at the station, under the direction of Dr. R. G. Ferguson of the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests.

The need for more adequate facilities prompted the Department to build a modern research centre.

Built by Kehl Construction of Harrow, at a cost of \$150,000.00, it featured an aquarium, large laboratories, a cold storage vault, a lecture room and an office area. A fire-proof vault was installed to store valuable information and records.

The work was designed to benefit and assist the fishing operations being conducted in the western end of Lake Erie.

The research vessel named the "Keenosay", a fifty-foot fishing craft, was utilized to collect information and samples of various species of fish for laboratory studies.

One of the main objectives of the research program was to keep a close watch and to observe the population of the fish landed, with studies on the year class structure. Age is determined by carefully noting the rings or circuli present on the scale of the fish. When the age is determined, the size and weight of each age group can be established. This information can then be compared with data gathered in previous years to determine whether any changes in growth have taken place.

The Research Station, now under the direction of Steve Nepszy of the Ministry of Natural Resources, continues to operate in the best interests of the commercial fishing industry.

CHAPTER 12

Industries Associated with Wheatley Fisheries

The growing commercial fishing operations in the area encouraged other businesses to locate in Wheatley with successful results. The following are some of the private enterprises connected with the fishing industry.

Nelson Wood Products -

Maple "Mape" Nelson, a native of Wheatley, was the owner of a small garage and repair shop on Little St. during the 1930's. Here he serviced cars, farm machinery, steel boats and marine engines.

During this period there was an increased demand for fish boxes due to the large volume of fish being marketed. "Mape", whose family owned and operated a lumber mill at Fraserburg in the Muskokas, was a man of vision and saw the opportunity to expand his enterprise. A nailing machine was installed in his shop to assemble the boxes, which were shipped by railway from the northern mill. The machine was capable of nailing 150 to 200 nails a minute.

In 1939 "Mape" designed and built an ice conveyer for Everett Omstead's ice shanty.

The need for larger facilities resulted in the relocation of the Nelson business to Julien St. in 1946.

In 1977 "Mape" was selected as Wheatley's "Citizen of the Year", in recognition of his contributions to the community in recreational activities and through local industrial development.

Anthony-Keats Chrysler Marine Engines -

In the late thirties the Chrysler-Marine distribution agency was granted to Richard McLean, to serve the needs of the fishing industry as well as those of pleasure craft owners.

The business was later managed by Murray McLean and in 1950 was sold to the partnership of Peter Anthony and J. D. Keats.

Today the firm continues to operate successfully under the management of Peter Anthony Jr.. He succeeds his father, Peter Anthony, a naval veteran, who established a fine reputation for reliable service and accepted the challenge of the changing world of marine technology.

Hike's Metal Products -

Upon receiving his discharge from the Armed Forces, at the end of World War II, Elmer "Hike" Haikala decided to settle in Wheatley and establish his own welding business. In 1963 he formed the limited company, Hike Metal Products.

"Hike" soon became noted for his welding skills and his knowledge of boats and engines. The demand for his work continued and this prompted him to engage in designing and building fishing tugs, pleasure craft and sight-seeing cruise boats.

Many vessels plying the lakes and rivers of Ontario were built in his boat yard at the Wheatley harbour. Wheatley residents can look with pride when they see such cruise ships as the "Maid of the Mist", the "Paula D.", the "Chief Shingwauk" and the "Welcome", all examples of fine workmanship by "Hike" and his men.

Franklin Net and Twine -

Although these chronicles deal mainly with the first hundred years of commercial fishing in the Wheatley area, one Wheatley business, which began a few years ago, is worthy of mention in this book.

Douglas Franklin, a young farm lad, spent seventeen years as a fisherman on Lake Erie. First as a deck hand, and later as skipper and owner of a large fishing tug, Doug gained the experience and the valuable knowledge required to establish a net and twine business, which would serve the needs of his fellow fishermen.

Doug, who is well-known in all the north shore ports of Lake Erie, carries a large inventory of nets, twine, fishing gear and clothing, including "T" shirts with his motto, "If it swims, we'll catch it".

At the Franklin Net and Twine office, a Telex is constantly engaged in receiving orders for his products. This method is a vast improvement over the earlier means when salesmen called on the fisheries in a horse-drawn carriage and placed their orders.

Mink Farms -

The processing of fish waste into mink feed by the Omstead firm, resulted in a number of mink breeders choosing to locate in the Wheatley area, in order to be closer to their main source of feed for the animals. From St. Marys, Ontario came the Rutter brothers, Roy Smith and Norman Chesterfield.

These men were responsible for the introduction of mink farming into this area and have all established successful operations in this field.

The Communities Social Events

The fishing industry has been closely linked with the social life of the Wheatley community from its very beginning. The main species of fish caught in Lake Erie were herring, whitefish and sturgeon. On many occasions these were served at banquets and fund raising dinners. At times, a rare feast of eel was enjoyed by those fond of this delicacy.

During the early part of the century, oyster suppers became popular for church functions, farewell parties and fund raising projects. In 1902 the Wheatley Junior Hockey Club held an oyster supper in Gibson Hall to raise funds for their team. The ice on Two Creeks, lying east of the village limits, was the site of their hockey games, and it was noted that this popular team played some very strong matches.

The Wheatley Old Boys' Reunion held in August, 1932 was a memorable occasion, which is still fondly remembered today by many of the residents, who attended the various functions held at the lake shore and in the village.

To celebrate the official opening of the Wheatley Harbour in 1952, the local Kinsmen Club sponsored a Water Festival, which attracted large crowds. Many fishermen participated in the special events such as, tug boat races, tug and horse-pulling matches, - the horses won, a fishing derby, filleting contest and a beauty contest. Barbara Foster was declared the number one filleter, with Lydia Beleutz placing second. Vickie Beleutz was chosen as the Water Festival Beauty Queen.

The Kinsmen, throughout their thirty years of service to the area, have held many fish suppers to raise funds for worthy projects.

In 1974 the first Fish Festival was held in Wheatley — a gala three day event. All local service clubs, churches and organizations joined together in sponsoring events such as: a parade, an art and antique show, bingo, a dance, races, an ecumenical service, a pancake breakfast and a gigantic fish-fry.

The faith of the fishermen and their families has also been an important part of their lives. This is illustrated by the services of worship held in the local churches in honour of the Lake Erie fishermen.

Rev. E. J. Roulston, minister of the Wheatley United Church from 1929 to 1932, was instrumental in organizing the first Fishermen's Service in the village. This special hour of worship became an annual event attended by capacity crowds. It was held at the close of the fishing season in December, when the fishermen, their families and friends gathered together to give thanks to God for the safety of the men and the success of their labours.

Later, the Wheatley Baptist Church began holding similar services, in the early spring, to mark the beginning of the fishing season.

The churches were decorated for the occasion by

the fishermen, who supplied nets, buoys, lanterns, a boat and a miniature lighthouse.

On one occasion, in December 1933, the United Church added a special feature to their service in the form of a presentation by Wilton and Verne Reid, and Richard McLean, who were the young sons of Glen and Aleatha Reid and George and Flossie McLean. Dressed in the garb of the fishermen of Galilee, Zebedee, John and James, the boys sat by the boat discussing Jesus, who was choosing disciples to follow him and become fishers of men. This little skit was

greatly enjoyed by the congregation.

The Baptist Church has continued holding services each spring. In December 1977, the Wheatley United Church revived their tradition and held a service similar to those conducted nearly fifty years ago. Under the direction of Rev. Gordon McAuslan, the program featured solos by George McLean, who has sung in each service held in both churches for forty-three years, and an inspirational composition, "Faith of the Fishermen", which was written and sung by Nick Parent of Wheatley.

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Rita Lobzun

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Flossie Grubb	Nelson Ferris
Don Coulter	Harold McClellan
Aletha Reid	Alf Philcox
Frank Crewe	Eva Liddle

FISHERMEN'S RETURNS

To be made by all Fishermen at the end of the Fishing Season

To

Game and Fishery Overseer.

TUGS				GASOLINE LAUNCHES			ROW OR SAIL BOATS.			GILL-NETS.		SEINES.			POUND NETS.		HOOP NETS.	
No.	Tonnage.	Value. \$	Men.	No.	Value. \$	Men.	No.	Value. \$	Men.	Yards.	Value. \$	No.	Yards.	Value. \$	No.	Value. \$	No.	Value. \$
DIP OR ROLL NETS.				NIGHT LINES.		SPEARS		FREEZERS AND ICE HOUSES.		PIERS AND WHARVES		REMARKS						
No.	Value. \$	No. Hooks.	Value. \$	No.	Value. \$	No.	Value. \$	No.	Value. \$									
HERRING, SALTED.	HERRING, FRESH.	WHITEFISH, SALTED.	WHITEFISH, FRESH.	TROUT, SALTED.	TROUT, FRESH.	PIKE.	PICKEREL, OR DORE.	PICKEREL, BLUE.	STURGEON.	EELS.	PERCH.	TULLIBEE.	CATFISH.	CARP.	MIXED AND COARSE FISH.	CAVLARE.	STURGEON BLADDERS.	
Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	Lbs.	No.
Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price per lb.	Price each

I hereby certify that the above returns are true and correct.

No. of License Baldw. Locality _____ Name of Fisherman _____

N.B.—The Department, upon discovering that the fisherman has not made this return, will refuse to grant renewal of his License. (See back of License).

The above form sent to the Baldwin Fishery illustrates the type of records required by the Fisheries Department in 1921.

READ YOUR LICENSE

**THIS LICENSE CANNOT BE
EITHER ASSIGNED OR TRANSFERRED**

PROVINCE OF ONTARIO

1915



Special Fishery License

ISSUED UNDER THE GAME AND FISHERIES ACT

In consideration of the payment made before the delivery of this License of the sum of
Three Hundred ; _____ Dollars,

and the observance and performance of the conditions hereon endorsed which are hereby incorporated with and
made part and parcel of this license, which license does not become valid until the payment in full of the
aforesaid amount the herein named Henry Derbyshire, and J. W. Bailey,
Wheatley, Post Office is hereby licensed to fish during the year 1915
except during the close seasons, with Six Pound nets each having single head or Pot.

in that part of the public waters of Lake Erie, fronting lots thirteen to seventeen, Township Pennoyer.
When Pound nets are set in lineal order a space clear of twine of at least fifty feet must be left
outside the Pot of one, and the lead of the next of the series. In addition to the fee herein
specified the licensee shall pay a royalty at the rate of \$5 per ton on that part of his catch in
excess of Sixteen Tons.

[Signature]
FOR MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS.

Countersigned and dated at Wheatley R. R. No. 2 this Twenty-fourth day of March 1915

[Signature]

GAME AND FISHERIES OVERSEER

[OVER]

A copy of a commercial fishery license issued to Henry Derbyshire and J. W. Bailey in 1915.

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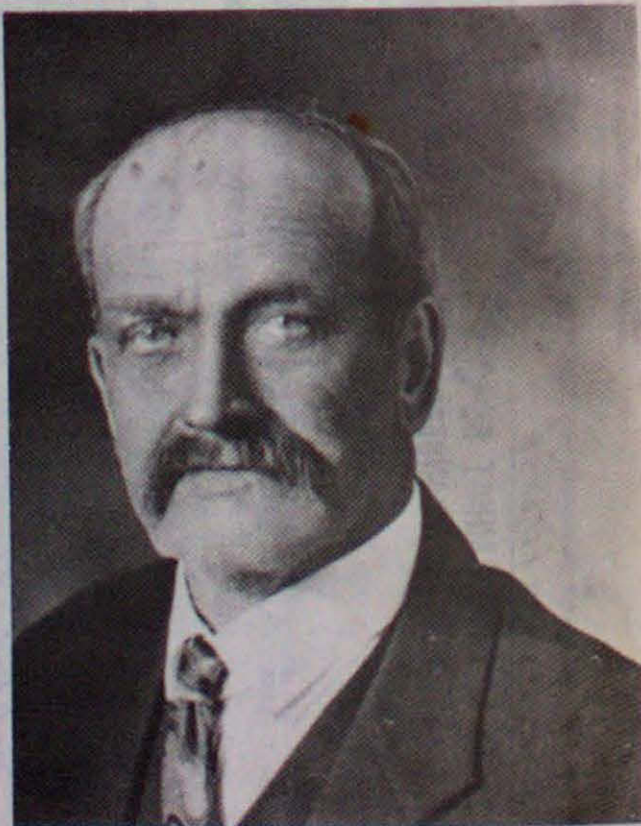
Harvey Getty and his faithful horse "Boney".



Don Coulter drawing whitefish from a Getty pound net Dec. 3, 1946. A Windsor Star Photo.



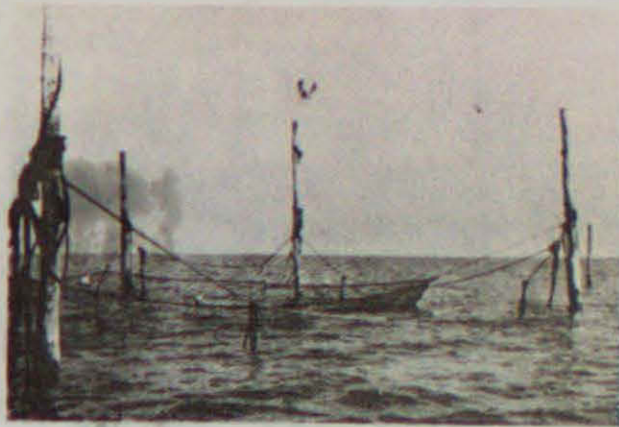
Harvey Getty and his crew.



Joseph W. "Josh" Liddle, founder of the Liddle Bros. Fishery.



Capt. James Grubb Sr. standing on the left in his sail boat the "May E" with Henry Mooney, right and Jack McLeod and Duncan MacDonald. William Grubb Sr. and his crew are in the other boat.



A view of a pound net, once a familiar sight along the shorelines in the Wheatley area.



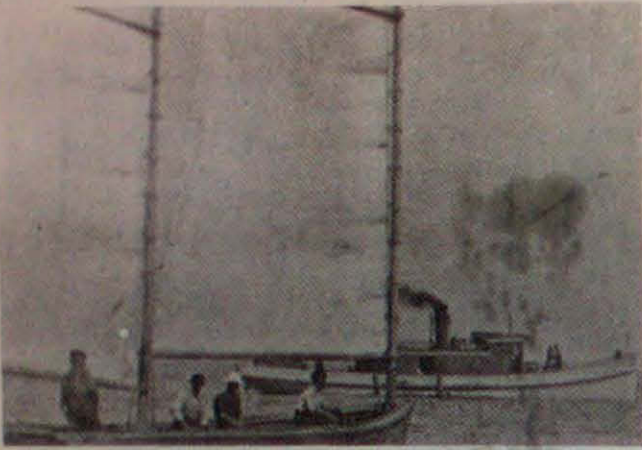
Harry Cobby with his prize sturgeon.



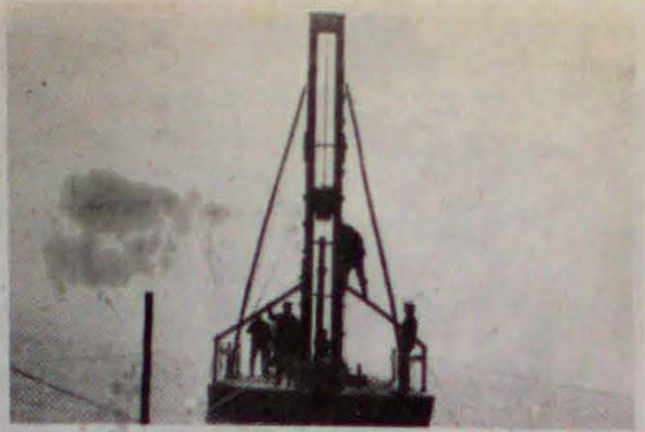
A Grubb fishery crew at Point Pelee in the early part of the century.



The Fishermen's Service held each year at the Wheatley Baptist Church drew large crowds. This scene was taken in the early 40's.



Twin-masted vessel and steam-tug the "Louise" owned by Cpt. Joe Post. Nelson "Cap" Ferris is second from left. Next to him and wearing a white hat is "Hez" Bickford.



A Cobby fishery scow and crew.



Cameron Quick and Frank "Mutt" Mason with the J. Grubb Fishery ice-cutting machine.



The "Flossie G" and her crew being interviewed and photographed. L. to R. - Bob Goyeau, Jim Grubb, Burns Fagan, and Jim Grubb Sr.



A Wheatley based crew engaged in taking a good catch from their pound net.



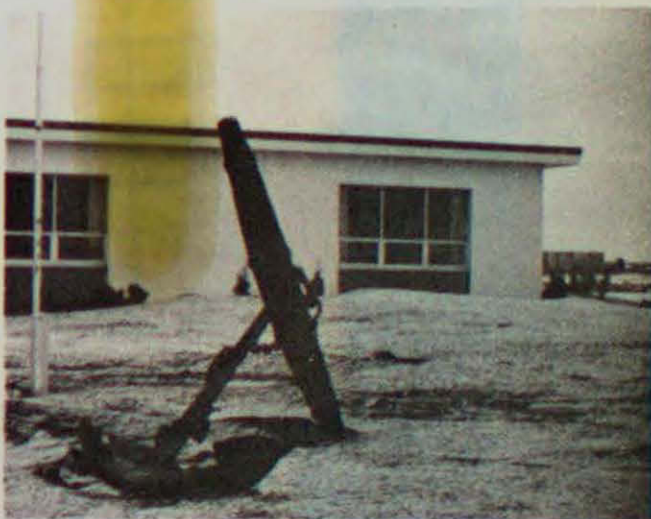
Ice harvesting in Lake Erie at the James Grubb Fishery.



A good day's catch - 2,818 pounds of whitefish on Nov. 27, 1948 at the Harry Cobby Fisheries.



Wheatley harbour and some of the fishing tugs tied up for the winter during the 1950's.



An anchor believed to be from the steamer "Kent" rests in front of the Fisheries Research Station at Wheatley.



George and Nick McLean smile happily over the day's catch of sturgeon taken from their pound nets in the early 1950's.

