

Ludington Harbor Winter Home of Big Fishing Fleet

7 Brothers of Famous Family Made Port Headquarters for Past Months

LUDINGTON, May 1—This Lake Michigan port, open the year around, has had more commercial fishing boats plying from here during the winter now ending than in several years past. Several owners from other harbors sought the Ludington area because their home ports were ice-blocked. Most of the winter 19 master fishermen were working from here, among them sons of the famous Cross family of Charlevoix whose activities are outstanding in modern Great Lakes annals.

Hauls have been mostly trout and chubs, according to Charles Peterson, local dealer who handles the products of the majority of the boats, and takes have been erratic.

"Sometimes a boat may get as high as 1,800 pounds and the next day only 10 pounds," he said. "One day the total haul runs from five to six tons and another day only one ton. You never can tell how it will go."

A bystander remarked that fishing must be fascinating work.

"More cold fingers than fascination for the man that's in it," Charles replied.

Including crews, some 30 men have been employed here in commercial fishing. This last winter, they say, has seen the best fishing in years but lifts have been fewer because of unfavorable weather.

Many Changes in Boats

Fishing as a business lasts about 10 months of each year. Runs vary from a half hour to three hours from port, or from 5 to 27 miles as the average boat will make eight or nine miles per hour in most weathers.

All fishermen use gill or set nets and in addition a few employ traps and pond nets. Fishing is greatly changed since the old sailing days. Then float and stone nets were used; they were cumbersome and only small quantities of fish could be handled. Cedar floats brought much improvement, and while cedar is still being used it is being rapidly replaced by aluminum.

And there have been many changes in the boats since the veteran Andrew Borg, now retired, brought the first gasoline-sail fish boat to Ludington many years ago. Boats are now built for speed as well as utility and have the best in marine engines for their size. Nets are made of the finest materials; there is a tidy bit of money tied up in today's equipment.

Shanties on Island

Most of the fish shanties are on what is known as the Island, a point of land on the south side of the harbor between Lake Michigan and Pere Marquette lake. Both there and on the north waterfront may be seen a veritable forest of reels with drying nets. In the shanties, between trips and in too stormy weather, the expensive nets are carefully inspected and mended.

All but one of the eight Cross brothers have made Ludington

their headquarters the past winter, Archie being the only absentee, and four are still here. These are Raymond, who lives here permanently; Willis, Clyde and Ralph. John, Donald and Marcus have returned to Charlevoix where lives their father, Charles Cross. He is one of the sturdiest and most colorful figures the lakes have known and is still active and alert at 85. Charles Cross sailed the lakes for years, from before the mast to master, later commanded his own schooner and 37 years ago turned to commercial fishing. His wife, who died four years ago, accompanied him on his voyages in their first years together and their son, Raymond, was born aboard ship.

Mr. and Mrs. Cross had 16 children. Four of six daughters are living and eight of 10 sons, and all eight boys in this remarkable family are fishermen. They started sailing very young and are perfectly at home in or on the water.

"Dad just put a life-preserver on us and let us go," says Willis Cross.

The sons started fishing out of Pentwater on the Oceana, their first boat. Most of them have had their own boats for 15 years or longer. Bonds of affection between father and sons are strong. Charles Cross helped practically all the boys to get their equipment and a start.

When they repaid him from time to time he accepted, then used the money to buy a piece of needed equipment and made them a present of it.

In addition to the Cross brothers, other well-known fishermen working from here, all living in Ludington, are Axel Holmstrom, Fred Lindquist, Oscar and Ernest Holmstrom, Eric Englan, Charles Johnson, Eric Lindquist, Charles Peterson, Norman Lawrence, the Bortell brothers, and Ernest McClatchy.

Several of the fishing boats are speedier than the average; some are specially designed for long runs, have sleeping quarters and galleys, and to see this peace-time fleet in action is an unforgettable experience.



Last week CLYDE CROSS of Pentwater (middle, bottom row) went out and rescued 17 men from the broken Novadoc in Lake Michigan south of Pentwater in his fishing tug, Three Brothers. Actually there are eight brothers, all fishermen. Their father also is a fisherman. The family follows: Top, left to right: CHARLES CROSS of Charlevoix, the father; JOHN of Charlevoix, WILLIS of Charlevoix, ARTHUR of Charlevoix, RAY of Ludington and MARK of Charlevoix. Bottom row: RALPH of Charlevoix, Clyde and DONALD of Charlevoix.