



STAFF PHOTO BY MEGAN MOSHIER

The Stinson giant, surrounded by seagulls, seems to be bearing a gift of sardines across the snowy Prospect Harbor landscape.

12-25-08 E.A.  
2003

# Prospect Harbor Cannery Prospers

BY AARON PORTER

**GOULDSBORO** — Herring has been a way of life Downeast for generations. And while the once-booming fishery and attendant sardine industry play a minor role in most Maine communities now, Gouldsboro is an exception to that rule.

One of the two remaining sardine canneries in the state continues to thrive perched on the rocky shore of Prospect Harbor and the giant wooden fisherman carrying an even more gigantic tin of Beach Cliff sardines continues to dominate the village skyline.

The busy plant, on a stretch of

increasingly valuable waterfront property, is an anomaly on today's coast where commercial fishing operations are driven frequently inland or out of existence.

Such plants were scattered liberally along the Maine coast during the late 1800s and first half of the 1900s. Weir fishing, stop seining and eventually purse seining occupied legions of fishermen while the sardine processing occupied even more men and women cooking and packing cans of tiny herring.

Flotillas of graceful sardine carriers kept the plants supplied and financing came from far and wide

as speculators tried to make what they could in the herring trade. With changing times and tastes, the sardine market has contracted.

Today, canned sardines aren't the primary valuable use for herring fishery they once were. Lobster bait now accounts for 60 percent of the New England herring catch, according to William Overholtz, a biologist with the National Marine Fisheries Service in Woods Hole, Mass. With lobster holding steady as the state's most valuable fishery, the dominating demand for herring as bait is unlikely to change.

Keeping a food-quality herring

processing operation working in such an environment is anything but easy.

Al West is director of fish acquisition for the Stinson cannery in Prospect Harbor. Connors Bros. Ltd. of Blacks Harbour, New Brunswick, purchased Stinson Seafood Co. in 2000. West said, since that time the new parent company has been improving the Prospect Harbor processing plant. Connors Bros. closed the Stinson plant in Belfast after purchasing the company, but the Prospect Harbor and Bath plants remain open and busy.

Continued on Page 6

OVER





STAFF PHOTO BY MEGAN MOSHIER

Prospect Harbor has had a good herring processing season.

# Cannery Thrives

Continued from Page 5

With the early November closing of Herring Management Area 1A, which runs up the coast from Cape Cod to Canada, and persistent worry from lobstermen that the bait supply was tight through the summer and fall, it seems that the sardine plants would be caught in a squeeze. Evidently, that's not the case in Prospect Harbor.

"We actually had a very good fall," West said. He noted that the company had been processing in the neighborhood of 2,000 metric tons every month. He said 2,500 metric tons is a very good month. However, he conceded that there are times when "the herring business is very cyclical with very high highs and very low lows. You have to ride the waves, so to speak," West said.

Good communications and solid relationships with fishermen guarantee the plant as steady a flow of herring as the fishery can provide. West plays no small role in keeping the supply of fish steady in spite of any fluctuations in the markets and fishery.

He said the company has a core group of suppliers "who understand the cannery's needs. When the size is right, those fish are offered to us."

He said the company buys herring from 12 to 15 separate vessels in the course of a year. For the most constant of these suppliers, the real benefit is the stability of a 12-month demand for their catch. West contrasted that with the bait industry, which he said is intensive for four or five months at a time.

In spite of a degree of competition for the herring resource, sardine producers and bait dealers work together. West said Connors

Bros. committed to the state that they would sell herring for bait if the need arose. Indeed, most of the cuttings from sardine processing are sold as bait.

At this time of year, West said, the herring are leaving the immediate coastal waters of 1A and heading slightly south. He said the herring for sardines is trucked to the Maine plant through much of the winter. That effort keeps about 10 to 15 independent truckers busy meeting boats at docks in southern New England and delivering them Downeast. It all seems to work smoothly.

However, West is far from disinterested when it comes to looking at the future of the herring fishery. He knows the fish well enough to be aware of the challenges of predicting future performance. He recounted the finding of one herring in Nova Scotia only three weeks after it was tagged in Rhode Island. So he's not surprised that U.S. and Canadian fisheries scientists came out with vastly different stock estimates for herring in the Gulf of Maine last winter.

"Here you have two very strong scientific organizations," West said. "Who's to say who's wrong?"

West said more science is needed and Connors Bros. is working to help with better assessment of herring stocks in the Gulf of Maine. In addition to promoting and funding some research, West said, canneries play a vital role in herring research.

"Most tag recoveries come from the sardine plants," he said in reference to identification tags scientists have placed on wild fish to better understand herring stocks and their mobility.

[aporter@ellsworthamerican.com](mailto:aporter@ellsworthamerican.com)

What I've seen from within the industry is a lack of understanding," he said. The working waterfront's biggest problem, he said, "is having the public understand and accept us."

Education was frequently raised as a first step to protect working waterfronts. From tourists who need to understand the unique contributions the smells, sounds and personalities of a working dock make to their experience of Maine, to educating town administrators and planners about the impacts some simple zoning changes could have in preserving a working pier in town.

Terry Sortwell, a real estate agent from Camden, conceded that it's part of an agent's job to teach potential buyers about the importance of the working harbor to the economy and character of Maine. "And that if that starts to go away it's a pretty bland existence on the coast of Maine."

Kayak guide Paul Travis said his industry, a relative newcomer to the working waterfront, needs to educate more traditional users about the place paddlers play there. He said the guide also is responsible for educating paddlers about the other industries with which they must share the state waters and public access points.

Beyond general public education, there were more specific strategies for saving working waterfronts. From a town planner's perspective, Bill Needleman of the Portland Planning Office gave a brief account of that city's successful zoning efforts to preserve its working piers and marine businesses.

He said the effort started when condominium development threatened to displace much of the commercial piers in the late 1980s. A moratorium on non-marine development put a stop to it. Needleman said the zoning code that followed from the moratorium is complex but effective at keeping the city's working waterfront intact.

"Government intervention is justified and has a role to play," he told the forum.

From a more cooperative perspective, Westport Island lobstermen Dana Faulkingham recounted the creation of a 21-member lobstermen's co-op to preserve a former boatyard as a facility for working lobstermen to

UNION RIVER TIDES			
Date	High	Ht.	Low
Thurs. 25	11:57 am	12.5	5:43 am
	—	—	6:27 pm
Fri. 26	12:42 am	10.8	6:37 am
	12:51 pm	12.1	7:20 pm
Sat. 27	1:37 am	10.6	7:33 am
	1:47 pm	11.5	8:14 pm
Sun. 28	2:32 am	10.3	8:31 am
	2:44 pm	10.9	9:09 pm
Mon. 29	3:28 am	10.1	9:31 am
	3:43 pm	10.3	10:04 pm
Tues. 30	4:24 am	9.9	10:33 am
	4:43 pm	9.8	11:00 pm
Wed. 31	5:20 am	9.8	11:36 am
	5:45 pm	9.4	11:55 pm
Thurs. 1	6:14 am	9.9	—
	6:46 pm	9.1	12:37 pm
Other Local Tides			
Make the following corrections to the Union River tides for these other local tides:			
	High	Ht.	Low
Addison	+ 9 min.	+1.6	+12 min.
Gouldsboro Bay	- 14 min.	+ .5	- 10 min.
Corea	- 16 min.	+ 1	- 12 min.
Winter Harbor	- 14 min.	- .3	- 1 min.
Bar Harbor	- 13 min.	+ .3	- 11 min.
SW Harbor	- 13 min.	- .2	- 4 min.
Bass Harbor	- 9 min.	- .5	- 3 min.
Blue Hill	- 4 min.	- .3	no change
Stonington	- 5 min.	- .3	- 5 min.
Center Harbor	- 4 min.	- .6	+ 1 min.
Castine	+ 2 min.	- .3	no change
Bucksport	- 17 min.	+ .5	no change
Weather Record Last Week			
Date	Temp.		Precip.
	Max.	Min.	
Dec. 15	34°	22°	snow - 10", sleet, freezing rain .05" melt
Dec. 16	36°	22°	sunny .01" melt
Dec. 17	46°	20°	cloudy 1.38" melt
Dec. 18	48°	33°	rain, cloudy, flurries am, sun pm .70"
Dec. 19	33°	20°	sunny 0
Dec. 20	31°	19°	cloudy then sunny 0
Dec. 21	31°	8°	sunny am, cloudy pm 0
Courtesy of Linda Penkalski of Lamoine			
November Degree Days—Ellsworth			
2003	2002	30-Yr. Avg.	Coldest Warmest
774	878	812	'68: 944 '79: 651
Source: Dead River Co., Ellsworth			

Auction Action

PARADIGM