



(Crane Photo)

LOBSTER TRAPS—COMMON SIGHT ALONG COAST TODAY

Hake Was First Source Of Income Along Coast

By JONAS CRANE

SOUTH GOULDSBORO—Today lobstering is the main source of income for South Gouldsboro fishermen. But back in 1840, some 20 years before there was an established market for lobsters, Frenchman's Bay fishermen depended on hake for income.

The Maine fishing business was started by the English fishermen who came to the Maine waters to fish for cod. But by 1840 cod catches began to fall off and many markets preferred hake for their salt fish customers. Since the Frenchman's Bay region was a natural hake grounds where big catches were the rule fishermen from all over New England came to Maine to fish in Frenchman's Bay.

In time as many as 100 out-of-state hake vessels made the bay their headquarters. By the

cently discovered that a good quality oil could be obtained from menhaden. She started the business in her kitchen using her iron cooking pot. News of the project spread and before long crude try works began to appear all along the Frenchman's Bay shoreline. In a short time more than a hundred try works were in operation between Lamoine and Gouldsboro. They produced about 50 casks each of oil holding 40 gallons each that sold for a dollar a gallon which added up to the neat little sum of about \$200,000 a year for all of the try houses.

The Civil War brought many changes to the Maine fishing business. One of them was an increased demand for all salt fish to be used in army rations. Since the war shut off the supply of mackerel that had previously come from southern fishermen, the price of this fish jumped sharply and fishermen began to put in more time on

quently, coastal women, young and old, turned to mackerel fishing as a sure way to enlarge their wardrobes. During the school vacation periods, school children got a hook and line and went after the fish as a means of making enough money

to buy clothing and books for the fall term of school.

By 1862 the mackerel fishing business was booming and the catch for all of the country brought in more than \$6,000,000. The business continued to boom in many New England ports for many years but shortly after the Civil War ended lobsters began to replace mackerel in the South Gouldsboro area as a cash crop.

This came about when a lobster cannery was started in Prospect Harbor. At that time all of Frenchman's Bay was teaming with lobsters and a lobsterman who hauled his traps several times a day sometimes got as many as a half ton of lobsters. The factories paid about 65 cents a hundred pounds and a day's wages coming to \$6.50 was big money at a time when most laboring men got only a dollar or a dollar and a half for 10 hours work.

The diary of a South Gouldsboro fisherman named Bunker

pounds. Time we moved to a new location.

"Sept. 20. We got Capt. Allen and his pinky to move us to the north end of the island and we caught 6,400 pounds last week."

In those days most lobstermen used flounders for bait and it was generally believed that the oil from herring would keep lobsters away from the traps.

But Bunker and his brother believed that the oil would attract lobsters and the diary indicated that they were well satisfied with the herring. "We were right about the herring and our catches are running 10 per cent above those of the fishermen who use flounders."

The diary mentions a tragedy that occurred when a man fell overboard from one of the smacks that came to pick up the lobsters. "It was a terrible sight to see a man drown and sink beneath the water when we were only a few feet away in our dory."

There was a revival of cod fishing about 1880 and some South Gouldsboro men gave up lobstering and shipped on the bank fishermen.

But the Bunker Brothers stayed with lobstering although the diary seems to indicate there were times when they doubted the wisdom of their choice. "Herb's wife told me yesterday that the Nevada's last catch of cod sold for \$3,222.79. His share of that will

come to a lot of lobsters at present prices. But winter cod fishing is tough work and I think we will stay with our lobster pots."

Modern refrigerator systems cut down the demand for salt fish and there are very few trawl fishermen in the South Gouldsboro area, at the present time. But any real Down East Yankee will swear that no summer is complete without several corned hake and green pea dinners. For many years this was the accepted Fourth-of-July dinner menu for all coastal Yankees. But time brings changes and today a few renegades serve salmon and green peas for the National Holiday. But any true blue Downeaster who saw

Gouldsboro Historical Society

1260