

A HISTORY OF COMMERCIAL FISHING ON THE SHUBENACADIE RIVER

(Researched by Alfred Wallace, member of the East Hants Historical Society 2015)

First, we note Item 4 from the 1752 PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP TREATY between HIS MAJESTY THE KING and the JEAN BAPTISTE COPE; (chief of a Micmac tribe of Shubenacadie) the treaty reads:

4.

“It is agreed that the said Tribe of Indians shall not be hindered from, but have free liberty of Hunting & Fishing as usual: and that if they shall think a Truckhouse needful at the River Chibenaccadie or any other place of their resort, they shall have the same built and proper Merchandize lodged there in, to be Exchanged for what the Indians shall have to dispose of, and that in the mean time the said Indians shall have free liberty to bring for Sale to Halifax or any other Settlement within this Province, Skins, feathers, fowl, fish or any other thing they shall have to sell, where they shall have liberty to dispose thereof to the best Advantage.”

Therefore, it is safe to assume that First Nations persons have been fishing in the Shubenacadie River long before 1752.

In 1846, we have a petition: To the Honourable the Members of the House of Assembly, now in session in Halifax; The petition of the within subscribers & freeholders of Douglas, in the county of Hants;

“Most Humbly Sheweth,

Whereas your Petitioners from year to year have to labour under many great and grievous inconveniences respecting the fishery in Shubenacadie river; some individuals having six or eight nets in the river at one time wires, brush, stakes, and garttis, taking and stopping an innumerable quantity of fish for sale, when your petitioners or many of them, cannot set in one net to procure a few fish for there family use; which is a loss and public grievance; Beside the unlawful manner of stopping the fish, to the manifest injury of the river fishing. We your Honours petitioners do most humbly pray, that you of your wanted goodness, may and will, put a stop to such unlawful procedure; and not allow any man to set more then two nets in the river at one time, two thirds of the distance across for Gasperaux nets; nor more then two nets of either Salmon or Shad; and there shall not be allowed any person to sweep or take any spent fish on their way to the sea; & we do further pray, that you will appoint honest faithful men, as overseers of the fishery, from year to year, and make them do their duty, for the general benefit of all.

And your Honours petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.”

Jan. 16, 1846 (signed by 23 petitioners)

In 1857 by the Statutes of the Province of Canada we have The Fishery Act, which is the earliest I was able to obtain.

It is interesting to observe section IV:

“The Governor may, as occasion shall require, appoint two Superintendents of Fisheries one for Upper and one for Lower Canada, whose powers and duties shall be defined by this Act and the Regulations made under it.”

And in Section XVIII:

“Whoever shall obstruct the main channel or course of any river, either by placing therein nets or fishing apparatus of any kind, or any obstacle of any kind whatever for the purpose of taking salmon or any other species of fish, shall thereby incur for each offence, a fine not exceeding Five Pounds, and the forfeiture of his fishing apparatus; and in no case shall the said channel or course so left open be less than one third of the whole breadth of such river.”

And in Section XXVII:

“It shall not be lawful to catch salmon in any way whatever except with a rod and line or line, between the first of August and the first of March in Lower Canada and the first of September and the tenth of March in Upper Canada.”

Also, it is interesting to note Schedule A in the Act:

“ Form of Complaint

Upper (or Lower) Canada,
County (or District) of

This day of 18

To J.S. Superintendent of Fisheries
(or Justice of the Peace for the said Country or District)

A.B. of----- complains that C.D. of----- hath (state the offence briefly in any intelligible terms with the time and place at which it was committed,) in contravention of the Fisheries Act; wherefore the complainant prays that judgement may be given against the said C.D. As by the said Act provided.

(signature A.B.)”

I'm sure it's safe to assume that these additions to the Statutes were made because of the East Hants petitioners.

In 1866 we have another petition:

“The humble petitioners of the inhabitants of upper Shubenacadie to the Hon. The house of Assembly, Sheweth,

That the fishery in the Shubenacadie River is much injured by the practice of drifting nets which are constantly kept in the river coming up with high water & flowing back with tide, materially obstructing the passage of the fish up the river & thereby injuring the fishery thereof.

Therefore we the undersigned inhabitants of said district do humbly implore your Honourable House that a clause may be inserted in the act for regulating the fisheries to be put in force from the 1st of May

1866 prohibiting this very injurious practice and your petitioners shall ever pray,

Shubenacadie,

26 Jan. 1866”

Signed by 33 petitioners one of whom was my great-grandfather P. Woodworth, this petition was signed by Peter Tullock who had also signed the petition of 1846.

The Fisheries Act, 1914, together with the Fisheries Act of other years up to the present Fisheries Act current to Nov. 26, 2013, and the Regulations made thereunder contain many sections that affect the fishermen in East Hants; the main ones being:

The Fishery Act of 1914

“Sec. 5. The Governor in Council may appoint fishery officers whose powers and duties shall be as defined by this Act and the regulations made under it, and by instructions from the Minister,

2. Every fishery officer who is authorized by the Governor in Council to exercise the powers of a justice of the peace shall for the purposes of this Act and the regulations made thereunder be *ex officio* a Justice of the peace within the district for which he is appointed to act as fishery officer.

3. The Minister may appoint fit and proper persons to act as fishery guardians who shall hold office during the pleasure of the Minister and who shall have for the purposes of this Act and Regulations made under it the powers of a police constable.

Sec. 7. The Minister may wherever the exclusive right of fishing does not already exist by law, issue or authorize to be issued fishery leases and licenses for fisheries and fishing wheresoever situate or carried on: but leases or licenses for any term exceeding nine years shall be issued only under authority of the Governor in Council.

Sec. 13. The use of nets, weirs or other apparatus of a like nature for the capture of salmon shall be confined to tidal waters, and any fishery officer may determine the length and place of each net or other apparatus used in any of the waters of Canada

Sec. 14. All nets, or other lawful appliances for the capture of salmon shall be placed at distances of not less than two hundred and fifty yards apart, without intermediate fishing nets or appliances of any kind being set or used in and about any other part of the stream.,

Sec. 41. No one shall erect, use or maintain in any of the waters of Canada whether subject to any exclusive right of fishery or not, any net, weir, fascine fishery or other device which unduly obstructs the passage of fish; and the Minister or any fishery officer may order the removal of or remove any net, weir, fascine fishery or other device which in the opinion of the Minister or any fishery officer unduly obstructs the passage of fish.

Sec. 46. Any fishery officer or justice of the peace may, on view, convict any person committing any of the offences punishable under the provisions of this Act, or under any regulations made hereunder, and may remove and detain any fish unlawfully caught and any boat, vessel, fishing apparatus or other materials used in committing any offence or in connection therewith, or which such fishery officer or justice of the peace has reason to believe was so used.

Sec. 82. Except as herein otherwise provided everyone who violates any provisions of this Act, or any regulations made thereunder, shall be liable to a penalty of not more than one thousand dollars and costs, and in default of payment. to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months, or to both.”

And from the Nova Scotia Fishery Regulations, Chapter 848 (in place prior to 1978):

“Sec. 9 (1) No person shall fish with a net of any kind in the Shubenacadie River or the Stewiacke River above the bridges by which highway 102 crosses those rivers.

(2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), in the waters referred to in that subsection, a person may engage in fishing with dip nets for gaspereau or smelt.”

A few other items from the regulations:

- “drift net means” a gill net that drifts in the water whether or not it is attached to a vessel, and includes a gill net that is not anchored at both ends;
- “gill net means” a net by which fish are caught by being enmeshed and that does not enclose an area of water;
- “dip stand means” a location specified in a commercial fishing licence where the licence holder is permitted to take gaspereau with a dip net.

(Excerpts taken from an undated report on “The Fauna of Minas Channel, Minas Basin and the Shubenacadie River” by A. E. Leim.)

During the summer months of 1919, 1920, and 1921, the writer (Leim) spent a considerable amount of time studying the life history of the shad as it occurs in Scotsman Bay, Minas Basin, Cobequid Bay, and the Shubenacadie River.

Although several writers have referred to the shad and salmon of these waters, very few have given any account of the methods of fishing which were employed. Perley (1852) seems to have given about the only information that is available. The following account is derived mainly from that source and from the evidence given before the Dominion Shad Commission (Prince, 1908).

“The most important fishery of the area from early times seems to have been the shad. Two main methods have been employed. First, weirs either of brush or of twine ('seines') were used. These were often of great length and captured large numbers of shad and some salmon. On the north shore of Minas Basin, there was an average of one weir for every mile of shore, and between Graham's Head and Economy Point, the flats for four miles were observed to have almost unbroken continuance of these weirs, crescent shaped, the ends of the weirs touching each other. (Perley).

“Drift nets were also used in the shad and salmon fisheries. Using this method, the boats put out several hundred yards of gill net in the upper part of the basin and drifted down with the ebb tide and back to the starting point with the flood. It is stated that the use of drift nets began about 1840 on the Windsor (Avon) River.

“The drift nets gave rise to another method of fishing known as a stake-net or set-net. Instead of the nets being allowed to drift freely, they were attached to stakes driven in the mud of the intertidal zone. These were unlike the “seine” weirs in that they were set in a straight line. One is recorded at Burntcoat Head as being three miles long, and the fish were caught in the meshes. Shad fishing was carried on in Scotsman Bay, Minas Basin, and Cobequid Bay, but not in Minas Channel.

“The salmon fishery was the next most important and was carried on in the same way as the shad, that is, by means of brush weirs and drift nets. Salmon were caught in the largest quantities in the Avon River, Cobequid Bay, and Economy River.

“The other fisheries were minor ones. Many gaspereau were obtained in weirs, but there does not seem to have been any demand for this fish, although it was abundant.

“Some of the weirs in Minas Channel obtained fat, spawning herring, and this was apparently

an important fishery in a localized area. It was stated that “they deposit such quantities of spawn that it can be shovelled up upon the beach.

“There was fishing for cod in Minas Channel on the north shore, at Parrsboro on up as far as Cobequid Bay and at the mouth of the Avon. This fishery was a primitive one. Poles were driven into the flats at low tide and baited hooks attached. On the following low tide, the fish were collected.

“Good pollock and some haddock fishing is reported on the north shore of Minas Channel as far as Cape Sharp. Some halibut were obtained in the same locality and large quantities of flounders were said to have been smoked at West Bay, just east of Cape Sharp.

“In addition, “tons of eels,” many smelts, and some large sturgeon were taken to the south of Cape Blomidon.

“Some bass were obtained farther up the basin, but even in 1850 this fishery had become an unimportant one owing to the small quantities available.

“The methods of fishing described by Perley are being employed today with scarcely any change. Owing to the decline of the shad and salmon, however, there has been a very great reduction in the number of weirs and drift-net boats, and it is doubtful if stake nets have been set except in a few instances where herring nets were set in this manner on the south shore opposite Isle Haute. Cod, with the exception of those taken in the weirs, are still fished by means of lines set out on the flats attached to stakes. The cod and herring do not seem to have been included in the decline that occurred in most of the other fisheries.”

Excerpts from a progress report--- Shubenacadie/Stewiacke survey (1968) by T.G. Carey

“Commercial Salmon Fisheries--- Shubenacadie River and Minas Basin

“Commercial salmon catches in the Shubenacadie River and Minas Basin could be expected to affect salmon populations in the Stewiacke River since the Stewiacke appears to have the highest population level of rivers flowing in the Minas Basin.

“The commercial fishery in the Shubenacadie River takes place just below the Stewiacke River confluence to Black Rock. Driftnets are set from small rowing boats generally in the outgoing tide, and are also fished for shorter periods on the incoming tide. One boat can only operate one driftnet. Nets are set across the river in an S shape, with the boat tied to one end. The net is manoeuvred by rowing the boat while attached to either end of the net. The net has to be removed at several places because of rock barriers across the estuary and at no time does the net stretch across the width of the estuary. Salmon apparently move at high tide levels, and settle into deeper pockets at low tide. These pockets are known to the fishermen, who manoeuvre nets to fish them.”

“There were 29 licensed drift nets in 1968, and forms were distributed to licensees to record the catch. Eleven fishermen submitted completed forms for July and August. Their surnames are Harrison, Parnham, Watson, Gass, Dickie, W. Stone, MacDonald, O'Neill, L. Stone, Meadows and Turple. Driftnets averaged 35 fathoms in length and 4-6 feet in depth, with mesh size from 5-5.75 inches stretched mesh. There was a significant increase in the weight of fish caught from July (878 lbs.) to August (5561 lbs.), and the total catch for 11 fishermen was 6439 lbs. The average weight for salmon caught in the Shubenacadie Estuary was 9.72 lbs.”

Also, Excerpts from a report by J.R. Semple 1970:

“The commercial fishery for Atlantic salmon in the Shubenacadie River estuary is not large.

Only 23 drift nets were licensed in the Shubenacadie River estuary in 1969. In this district, 498 lbs. of salmon were taken in 1969.

“Under existing policies no new salmon drift net licenses are permitted on the Shubenacadie-Stewiacke River system. The commercial fishery takes approximately 1200 lbs. or 131 salmon in this system annually. Commercial fishing for Atlantic salmon in Stewiacke River (the principal spawning and angling river on the Shubenacadie River system) was abolished in 1962. (I believe it was also abolished on this date in the Shubenacadie River above the 102 highway.)

“The value of the commercial fishery in the Shubenacadie-Stewiacke River basin is approximately \$10,500 annually. American shad, gaspereau, striped bass, Atlantic salmon and American eels are taken in this fishery (Dept. of Fisheries, 1968).”

Excerpts from a 1978 report titled “The Fisheries of the Shubenacadie-Stewiacke River Basin” prepared by David L. Morantz

“The status of the fisheries on the Shubenacadie-Stewiacke River Basin was assessed from information gathered during a literature search and field work conducted in 1977.

“Salmon production in this system is dependent on relatively few adequate spawning and rearing locations in the Nine Mile, St. Andrews, and Shubenacadie Rivers. Juvenile salmon densities were generally low in most sites sampled. This condition results from natural characteristics which favour the production of non-gamefish. Deforestation in the Basin is likely the main human threat to existing salmon (and other fish) populations.

“Shad, gaspereau, and striped bass are produced in this system, particularly in the St. Andrews, Nine Mile, and Gays Rivers. These species are commercially important when caught in the Shubenacadie River each spring.

“The watershed drained by the Shubenacadie and Stewiacke Rivers is the largest in Nova Scotia, encompassing 2500 square kilometres of Halifax, Hants, Colchester, and Pictou Counties. The northern two-thirds of the Shubenacadie River is heavily influenced by tidal waters from the Minas Basin and is therefore not a production area for game fish. This estuary is critical for all anadromous (return from the sea to spawn) and catadromous (return from fresh water to spawn at sea) species since it provides the necessary link with the sea. It therefore serves as a migratory channel for such commercially important species as Atlantic salmon, gaspereau, shad, striped bass, and smelt. In spring, large numbers of smelt, gaspereau, shad, and striped bass migrate to the lower reaches of the Stewiacke River to spawn.

“In 1977, eleven fishermen were issued commercial salmon drift net licenses in the Shubenacadie-Stewiacke River estuary. Ten of these men were contacted, in person or by mail. Five fishermen reported no salmon caught in 1977 while the other five caught a total of 37; six fish were caught in July and 31 in August. The average weight of these fish was 2.7 kg., and they sold for about \$4.40 per kg. Total worth of the catch was about \$440.00.

“The 1977 commercial salmon catch is low when compared to the 1257 kg. landed in 1976 and is among the lowest values reported in the last decade. The number of salmon drift net licenses in the Shubenacadie-Stewiacke estuary has steadily dwindled in the last 10 years.

Year	Kilograms of salmon	# of licenses
1968	6131	27

1969	2264	26
1970	898	27
1971	432	26
1972	366	20
1973	105	18
1974	552	17
1975	65	16
1976	1257	15
1977	100	11

“The catches of salmon, striped bass, gaspereau, and shad in 1977 can be compared with past landings. The fishery officer estimated a total catch of 42 salmon in 1977, five more than were reported by 10 fishermen contacted during the present study. The 1977 catch of gaspereau is among the highest reported since 1946.

Year	salmon kg	bass kg	shad kg	gaspereau kg
1946	1000	----	11000	41000
1948	600	1900	18000	12000
1949	1000	8100	34000	30000
1950	600	5000	34000	29000
1954	1000	4100	30000	223000
1956	600	2800	39000	220000
1958	4100	5000	22000	330000
1960	1000	-----	31000	154000
1963	1900	-----	47000	88000
1965	600	-----	21000	43000
1967	2000	-----	2000	-----
1968	6100	6900	10000	55000
1970	1000	3200	32000	50000
1973	200	1000	54000	145000
1974	600	2800	50000	95000
1975	100	-----	10000	177000
1976	1000	-----	1000	315000
1977	100	1000	10000	310000

(data taken from graphs prepared by Morantz)

“On average, the return of adult salmon to the Shubenacadie River likely ranges between 500 and 1000 fish.

“Commercial salmon fishing in the Shubenacadie-Stewiacke River estuary was very poor in 1977 and will likely continue this way in the foreseeable future. In 1977, there were only 11 licensed salmon driftnet fishermen in the estuary. No new licenses will be issued in this region. This is part of a policy by the Federal Department of Fisheries and the Environment to reduce commercial fishing in the river and emphasize the recreational aspect of the salmon fishery. At the present rate of decline,

commercial salmon in the Shubenacadie-Stewiacke estuary will likely disappear in about 10 years.

“The commercial gaspereau, shad and striped bass fisheries in the Shubenacadie-Stewiacke River Basin are presently in good condition. These species are all drift netted in the estuary, and in addition, gaspereau are dip netted above the head of tide. Striped bass are caught only as an incidental species. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate actual catches of this fish.

“The gaspereau commercial fishery is the most productive within the basin. In 1977, over 340 thousand kgs. of this species were netted in the Shubenacadie River. Large annual harvests and acid drainage-related mortalities of gaspereau have not apparently depressed the annual return of this species, numbered in the millions. Commercially caught gaspereau are mainly used as lobster bait and in the pet food industry. Valued in 1977 at approximately \$30,000.00. (end of 1978 report)

“The estimated weights given for the fish caught in the river most likely apply to the catches by the drift net fishermen in the lower portion of the river and most likely do not include the fish caught by the gill net fishermen on the upper tidal waters of the Shubenacadie River. This gill net fishery was abolished for salmon, shad, bass, and gaspereau in the early 1960s.

“Some of the families that had licenses for gill net fishing in the upper tidal waters of the Shubenacadie River during the 1950s are listed with the location of their fishing berth shown in kilometres measured upstream from the bridge crossing the river at the 102 Highway.

At Shubenacadie:

The railway bridge	3.6 km.
Singer	3.9 km.
Crowell	4.3 km.
Blake, J.	4.6 km.
Higgins	7.2 km.
Schwartz	13.0 km.

At Milford:

Wardrope	15.8 km.
The Milford bridge	16.5 km.
Wallace	16.6 km.
West	17.0 km
Woodworth, A.	17.4 km,
Spares	18.5 km.
Woodworth	20.2 km.”

The above names and locations are those that I could obtain; I expect there were others.

A story from the Woodworth fishing berth from the writings of Annie Wallace:

“Paul Woolworth, born Sept. 22, 1850, lived with his brother James Henry Woodworth in Milford. Paul enjoyed fishing in season for gaspereau, shad, salmon, and bass in the Shubenacadie River. He had a shanty beside the river with a bunk bed and a small iron stove to keep himself comfortable. Above his bed was a bell which was attached by wire to his net. This bell rang whenever a salmon got in the net. This awakened Paul, who would then go and take the fish out before the eels had a chance to eat it. Paul's canoe was a dug-out, sturdy and safe. It lasted for years. Paul provided fish for his brother's family's needs and also had plenty to sell for his own benefit. In those days, there was an

abundance of fish.” (Paul was Annie's uncle and Annie was this writer’s mother.)

“Down river from the Woodworth berth, just above the Milford bridge, J. David Wallace acquired a fishing berth from George Pooley in 1954. He bought a boat from Priest's in Shubenacadie for \$5.00 and acquired licenses to fish shad and salmon. He fished shad for approximately one month in the spring and salmon for about ten days in the summer. During shad season the average daily catch would be about a dozen fish with a catch of 35 on a good run. David says he would look and clean the net twice a day. During his fishing years of 1954 and 1955, shad sold for \$0.50 at the beginning of the season but soon dropped to \$0.25 each. During the short 10-day salmon season, David says he might catch 15 to 20 salmon. In the fall of 1955, David went to university, and his younger brother (the writer of this report) took over the Wallace berth.

“Also at Milford during the 1950s, locals and natives from Suubenacadie would spear eels through the ice during the winter months. A group of natives would come by train in the morning and return by train in the evening with sacks of eels weighing a total of approximately 100 lbs.”

On November 19, 2015, I met with William (Bill) Stone of Stewiacke. Bill has licenses to fish in the Shubenacadie River for eels, gaspereau, and shad. He has been a drift net fisherman for 61 years. He informed me of the following facts:

On a good year, with only 4 or 5 traps set, he would harvest approximately 2000 lbs. of eels. (His license permits 30 traps.)

In the early 1960s, gill net fishing for salmon, gaspereau, and shad was abolished in the upper tidal waters of the Shubenacadie River.

Drift net fishing for salmon was abolished in 1983.

Bass fishing was never a licensed right, but bass were kept as a by-product of salmon or shad fishing; however, this was abolished in 2005, now allowing fishermen to keep one fish only per day, and that fish must be at least 26.8 inches long.

During the last two fishing seasons (2014 and 2015), the driftnet fishermen have landed more gaspereau than in previous years, in Mr. Stone’s memory.

The present abundance of striped bass in the river is now a hindrance to shad fishermen because of the time it takes to release them from the net.

On November 23, I met with William Courtney and Jerry Blake, both driftnet fisherman in the Shubenacadie River. Mr. Courtney informed me that during the 2014 gaspereau season the driftnet fishermen caught and marketed 165,000 gaspereau, and in 2015 the count was 160,000.

The gaspereau season begins on March 15 and ends on July 10 (5 days /week).

The shad season begins on April 1 and ends on June 15 (5 days /week).

The following names were provided by Marjorie Mailman of former drift net fishermen:

Jotham Woodel, Hal & Embro Dart, Cop Harrison, Murray & Glen MacDonald, Al Gass, Bob Miller Sr., Heber “Junior” Hall, Lincoln & Leroy Dingle, Glen Miller, Ms. Glenda O'Neil, Bob Ainslie, Johnny Morris & Stanley Tuffs, Dempster Barbrick, Jimmy & Glenn O'Neil, Lloyd & Billy Stone, Buster, Dickie & Tommy Watson, Jackie Watson, Gerry, John, Timmy, & Jackie Blake, Ralph Meadows, Bobby Jr. & Garry Miller, Jimmy Simon (MicMac), Kenny, Donald & Vince Parnum, Rennie, Ervin, Scott, Johnny & Graham Matthews, Burton Mathews, Ron Bowen, John Harnish Sr. (drowned while fishing), Donnie & John Harnish Jr., Ralph, Danny & Murray Mailman, Bucky MacDowell, Art Currie, Dr. Jim Shive, Junior Rennison, John Denny, Clarence Collins, Donnie Dixon, Willie Courtney,

Leo & Jim Turple, Moyle Whidden, Brian MacPhee, Blair Laffin, Jimmy Hall, George MacDonald, Nick & Evan Densmore, Glen Young, Wayne O'Neil, and Harry Dickie.

Current (2015) Drift Net Fishermen

Leroy Dingle (set net eddy), Brian MacRae, Ervin Matthews (60 years), Donnie Dixon, Willy Courtney, Billy Ettinger, Jimmy Hall, Billy Stone (50 years), Randy Blake, Bob Miller Jr., George MacDonald, Nick & Evan Densmore (the schooner builders), Greg Carter, Greg Sutherland, John Denny, Blair Laffin, and John Harnish Jr.

Until recently shad has been the main catch for the drift net fishermen; however, now it is gaspereau for two main reasons:

Firstly, during the early 1980s, lobster fishermen had been purchasing gaspereau for bait, and the demand has continually grown.

Secondly, the shad market has declined, not because of lack of fish, but because the younger generation doesn't appreciate a great shad dinner as their parents did. Another factor in the decline of the shad is the abundance of striped bass in the river, which the fishermen must release when caught. This becomes a time-consuming task getting the bass out of the net, which are caught by the gills. It is not as great a problem when fishing gaspereau with a smaller mesh net. To illustrate this problem, Mr. Blake told me that when fishing shad, he has on a 20-minute drift caught 10 shad and 40 bass. The time it takes to release these bass with as little injury as possible causes the fishermen to be discouraged from shad fishing.

The following information on the SRCFA was provided by Mr. Courtney.

THE SHUBENACADIE RIVER COMMERCIAL FISHERMANS ASSOCIATION

BACKGROUND:

The Shubenacadie and Stewiacke River systems have supported a Commercial Fishery for over 75 years. Prior to the regulated fishery, it was fished by the Native population as a very important source of their diet. It was also fished by the early European settlers. The Commercial Fishery Licenses included Atlantic salmon, American shad, American eel, gaspereau, and sturgeon. Striped bass was allowed as a by catch. The salmon fishery has since closed and the striped bass catch is limited to one keeper-size fish per day that cannot be sold, bartered, or traded. Sturgeon is subject to a Bay of Fundy quota. With the exception of the eel fishery, which are fished with pots, the fishery is carried out with twelve-foot wooden boats, most with two square ends. The fishing is done with the use of gill nets. The nets are drifted with the current or set in a good hole depending on where the fishing is carried out. Today's commercial fishing is carried out primarily during the daylight hours of the regulated seasons, five continuous days per week. The duration of the daily fishing is dependent for the most part on the tide cycles with the boats returning on the incoming tides. The fishing is a single person operation, although many boats utilize a helper including wives and girlfriends. To my knowledge, there has been at least one female license holder. I do know that there is a desire, and if a license was available at least a couple of those that have fished the boats would be interested.

In the early days, the fisherman would land their catch on the river shore close to their homes. They would then sell their catch to a fish peddler or friends and neighbors. In the early '70s it was

obvious that a more effective means of managing the fish sales was required. Ralph Meadows, a farmer and fisherman, with the help from other fishermen built a fish shack on his land on Wharf Road within the town limits. It remains today on Main St. West along the river just downhill from Tim Horton's. The Shubenacadie River Fisherman's Association was formed. Most of the fish sales were managed from the "Fishshack" as it is commonly known by Ralph and his helpers. Ralph operated the shack until 2012. During our fishing season in May 2012, he underwent a significant heart operation and unfortunately never survived.

Thanks to Ralph's wishes and the kindness of the Meadows family, the Fishermen were given the opportunity to acquire the Fishshack and the corner of land where it stands. The land and building was a gift. Our costs were the survey, migration fees, and other acquisition expenses required to make this happen. A number of the fishermen provided the funds required. As the shack was given to, and to be owned by a group (the fishermen), a new registered association was required in order to allow a number of individuals to own the property. The Shubenacadie River Commercial Fishermans Association (SRCFA) was incorporated as a non-profit association in August of 2012.

Any association, in order to be registered, is required to identify the Objectives of its Association. The SRCFA has two objectives:

- 1) To provide a venue for the sale of the members' fish catch.
- 2) To provide a legacy to Ralph Meadows for his many contributions to his friends and family and the Community of Stewiacke.

The SRCFA currently has around twenty-five members with approximately twenty active Licenses. We have completed three very successful seasons. We have also done many upgrades to Ralph's Fish Shack and property. Meadows Two Rivers Trail, complete with a gazebo, offering a beautiful view of the confluence of the Stewiacke and Shubenacadie Rivers, is nearing completion.

All of the above would not have been possible without the gracious gift from the Meadows family. Many community volunteers have assisted with our achievements and the Town of Stewiacke has been there for us since the start.

Our membership looks forward to many more years of successful fishing seasons and completing more improvements to our property. To the memory of Ralph Meadows and the enjoyment of all.

Short History of the Shubie /Stewiacke River Fishery

Willie Courtney, Pres. SRCFA

In addition to the drifters and the stationary gill net fishery on the Shubenacadie River, we have the dip net fishery for gaspereau above the tidal waters. Marjorie Mailman adds a history of that fishery:

Shubie River Fishing at Enfield and Area

Through the years from the 1930s to the present day, there have been approximately 20 wharf

locations between the Locks at Grand Lake and the Gordon Isenor interval in Lantz, Hants County. These locations were each notable by the presence of a wooden “wharf” structure. With the fishermen using dip nets to catch the gaspereau, also called kiaks (kayaks) or alewife, a member of the mackerel family.

Gaspereau fishing by dip net is seasonal, usually beginning in March, or as late as April, and continuing until the run is over in mid June. This is due to the annual migration of adult gaspereau who leave the salt water of the Cobequid Bay to travel up river to spawn in the fresh water of Grand Lake. The return migration takes place in autumn and includes the newly spawned tiny gaspereau who winter in the ocean.

The first wharf was built at the Enfield river bridge by Ralph Mailman in 1949. As a fourteen-year-old, he skipped school in order to catch fish to sell for a dollar a dozen. He was often accompanied by Wilfred Dillman, Bobby Thompson, and/or John Malay. That wharf consisted of a large plank reaching out over the water and held in place by rocks. That location has been consistently fished every year since that. The Mailman family has held a licence since licences were first issued. Other wharves in the area were fished by Orrie Logan, Alan Preeper, Creighton Ferguson, Wilfred Dillman, and many others on the river from Lantz through to Enfield.

Ralph Mailman also had a drift net licence for salmon, shad, and bass in season, fishing on the muddy Shubenacadie River below the villages of Shubenacadie and Stewiacke.

Neilly Horne was an eel fisherman with a wharf and weir at the locks on Grand Lake at Horne Settlement.

In the 1960s, the gaspereau season was in peril due to the construction of the Halifax airport, which disturbed the shale formation in the area, releasing arsenic into the brooks and rivers locally. It took several years to recover (until 1968). This period of poor fishing spelled the end of all but a few locations. Licences of many were not renewed. Ralph Mailman, Allan Preeper, and Orrie Logan had a wharf every year, however, and today there are two remaining locations, first the Mailman wharf, and second the Logan wharf. The Logan license was sold to David MacDonald and Native Council. A third wharf was awarded to Indian Brook Band after the Donald Marshall decision; this one is not being fished.

Through the years, the fish were often sold to salt fish producers for export to Caribbean Islands. Local buyers from Jeddore, Marie Joseph, Cape Bauld, Blandford, and Pugwash praised the gaspereau for excellent lobster bait. That market is most prevalent today as lobster fisherman consider gaspereau the best bait.

The eel fishery in this area is in decline, as it is around the world for reasons not understood by scientists. At the present time bass, shad, and gaspereau stocks are healthy. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans works closely with the local fishermen in both driftnet and dip net locations to ensure a viable industry.

Marjorie Mailman

(Note the following indicating fisherman, type of fishing, years fished, and location between Lantz and Grand Lake.)

Neilly Horne & Lou Parker- eel weir-1958-1964-at the Grand Lake Locks

Neilly Horne-dip net-years not given-at the Grand Lake Locks

Ralph Mailman & Louie Warnell-eel weir- years not given-CNR crossing at Enfield

Bobby & Johnny Thompson-dip net-1960s-CNR crossing at Enfield

Ralph Mailman-dip net-1950-1992- No. 2 Highway at Enfield

Murray Mailman-dip net-1992-2015-No.2 Highway at Enfield

Dan Mailman-dip net-current-No. 2 Highway at Enfield
 Wilfred Dillman-dip net-1950-1959-1st wharf downstream from Highway No.2 at Enfield
 Charlie Schoolcraft-dip net-1950s-2nd wharf downstream from Highway No. 2 at Enfield
 Vernon Turple-1955-1957-dip net-3rd wharf downstream from highway no. 2 at Enfield
 Buddy MacDowell-1961-1963-dip net-4th wharf downstream from highway No. 2 at Enfield
 Earl Frausel-1950-dip net-5th wharf downstream from Highway No. 2 at Enfield
 Creighton Ferguson & Jack Dillman-1955-1961-dip net -5th wharf downstream from Highway No. 2 at Enfield
 Bucky MacDowell & Clyde Horne-1962-1969-dip net-5th wharf downstream from Highway No. 2 at Enfield
 David MacDonald-current native license-dip net-5th wharf downstream from Highway No. 2 at Enfield
 Ralph & Danny Mailman-eel weir-1972-1979-6th wharf downstream from Highway No. 2 at Enfield
 Wilfred Dillman-dip net-1960-1963-7th wharf downstream from Highway No. 2 at Enfield
 Allie MacDonell-dip net-1959-1964- 8th wharf downstream from Highway No. 2 at Enfield
 Albert Aulenback & Bordie Oakley-dip net-1962-1964-9th wharf downstream from Highway No.2 at Enfield
 Hall Dorey-dip net-1964-10th wharf downstream from Highway No. 2 at Enfield
 Herbie Preeper-dip net-1960s-a bit upstream from Nine Mile River
 Wilfred Dillman & Laurie Thompson-dip net- 1960s 1st wharf downstream from Nine Mile River
 Oscar Ashley & Donnie Gillis-dip net-1960s-2nd wharf downstream from Nine Mile River
 Bruce Geldart-dip net-1980s 2nd wharf downstream from Nine Mile River
 Bob Pearl-dip net-1950s-3rd wharf downstream from Nine Mile River
 Ross Welner & Freddie Carroll=dip net-1960s-4th wharf downstream from Nine Mile River
 Oran Ashley-dip net-1970s-4th wharf downstream from Nine Mile River
 Alton "Alley" Preeper-dip net-1960-1970-upstream a bit from bridge at Lantz
 Ken MacPhee-dip net-1960s-1st downstream from bridge at Lantz
 Orie Jake Logan-dip net-1970-2014-1st downstream from bridge at Lantz
 David MacDonald-dip net-2014-2015-1st downstream from bridge at Lantz
 Ralph Mailman & Ross Welner-dip net-1961-1962-2nd downstream from bridge at Lantz

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