

Fishing—80 Years Ago

(Continued From Page One)
feet long, eight to ten feet wide, and carrying from ten to twelve oars each. The larger boat is called the sea-boat and the smaller the land-boat. On the stern of each is a platform, which carries the seine, while the rope is coiled in the bottom of the boat from stem to stern.

The preparation of the seine is the next thing in importance. This consists of cotton-twine made of the best material, tied into square meshes from three-fourths to two inches in size; the smaller size forming the breast or bunt of the seine, in which the fish are landed, the larger mesh extending to the staves or ends of the seine. The depth is from twenty-four to forty feet, according to the depth of water, and when hung on lines fishes two-thirds its depth. These seines are tied in Baltimore and Boston, principally in the latter place, and by machinery imported from France. Before hanging the seine it is run through a large kettle of boiling tar and water, and then hung out in the sun for several days to dry, which process renders it impervious to water. A good seine lasts about three years. The ropes on which the seine is hung are made of the best Russia hemp, and is 2 1/2 inches in circumference. This rope is dragged about three miles, until the twist is taken out. Two coils of the rope measuring about 250 yards each, are secured at one end of trees or posts, and tightly stretched by means of a block and fall attached to the other end. Upon one of these lines are fastened the corks or floats, it requiring about 6,000 corks to float a seine 2,000 yards long, and the other rope forms the bottom or lead line. The edge or selvage of the seine is tied or marled to these ropes with heavy twine, taking up three meshes of seine and tying them to the space of two, which shortens the length of the seine one-third and makes the meshes hang diamond shape after the seine is marled.

A third rope, which is fashioned to the lead or bottom line by tails and thimbles at intervals of from twenty to forty yards, is run to whole length of the seine except about 100 yards in the center, this forms the torgle or dead line. The hauling rope or warp is then attached to the staves and is about three-and-a-half inches in circumference.

The length of the sea-warp, or lower end is usually the length of the seine, that of the land, or upper end, about one-half as long.

The seine is then ready for boating and is placed on the platforms of the two boats. The hauling rope is then coiled in the bottom of the boats; twelve oarsmen on the sea-boat and ten on the land-boat, with oars from twenty-four to thirty-two feet long, a captain and seine-mender form the crew of the boat, with a chief manager going on the sea-boat.

The boats now, with seine, rope and hands all on board, proceed to the centre-bush, which is from one to one-and-a-quarter miles from the shore, where they separate; the sea-boat going down the sound—throwing that end of the seine open to admit the fish, coming from the sea. The land, or upper end, on the contrary is curved very soon after parting, and the end brought much nearer the

shore, forming a hedge to the fish supposed to be coming up the stream. The boats after getting clear of the seine turn directly for the shore, and come to the extreme windlasses at either end, paying out their warp as they approach.

On their arrival four horses hitched to the windlasses at the extreme ends, when the winding in of the seine commences. When one windlass is filled with rope they move to another nearer the centre, and when that is being filled the rope from the first is coiled in the boat; this is continued until all the hauling rope is wound in and the ends of the seine reach the shore. The boats then commence taking in the seine again, and the torgle line, which now serves to wind it in is detached from the bottom or lead line and wound on the windlass, while the seine goes on the platforms of the boats. When they have wound in all the torgle line this brings them to the bunt of the seine, leaving 100 yards in the water.

Preparations are then made for landing the haul, and all the hands from the shelter and boats except the ropers, assist in landing. The seine is then drawn in by hand, the bottom line being carefully kept down to prevent the escape of fish, when sufficiently near the landing the bottom line is fastened on the edge of the wharf by means of iron-pins, the cork or top line is then drawn over wharf until the fish are securely landed.

The fish are then turned out, the seine gathered up and thrown by a given signal into the water, the boats now being again ready for laying out the seine.

The operation of saving the fish now begins. The Herring when saved whole or gross are shoveled into half barrel tubs, holding about 200, then emptied into slatted hard-barrows and thoroughly washed, when they are ready for the salting tray. About a peck of salt is thrown in, and after being well stirred they are put into hogheads or vats until they are thoroughly saved; from these they are thrown into long dripping troughs where they drain for one or two days and are then packed in barrels or kegs, one-half bushel of salt being required for packing a barrel. They are then pressed with lever power, the barrels filled, headed and branded. A barrel will hold about five hundred gross, 1000 cut, 600 roe, and a good hand will pack about 25 barrels a day. The cut Herring are saved in the same way, except that the head and belly are taken off. The Roe, or female herring being the greatest luxury, are selected with great care, they have only the head taken off and are packed in pickle tight barrels. We have been in the habit until recently of salting most of our shad, which is done in two ways: one by splitting them open and taking off the head, backbone and tail—this is the mess shad. The

shad split open and the head simply taken off makes the Prime.

For the last few years we have been shipping our shad in ice as soon as caught, in boxes made on the beach, 3 1/2 feet long, 2 1/2 wide and 12 inches deep, holding from sixty to ninety shad, according to their size. We have our ice houses on the beach and ice delivered to us at \$5.00 per ton, using from 50 to 100 tons. The ice is crushed by a machine into small pieces, and a layer of ice put between each layer of shad. They are shipped by steamer to northern cities.

Shad and Herring from the staple product of our fisheries. In addition we catch a great variety of other fish, among which are the Rock, Perch, Catfish, Jack, Sturgeon, and Mullet. The Rock and Perch are also shipped in ice; the Sturgeon are sent off to Norfolk and nearer points; they are caught in most abundance late in the season, thirty large ones being sometimes taken in one haul, measuring from five to eight feet.

I dislike to tempt the credulity of some of our friends by stating the size of some of our hauls; they vary from one shad to 4,000, and from a few hundred herring to 150,000. The fishing commences about the 1st or 10th of March, and closes about the 1st or 10th of May.

The Shad commence running in

February and are most abundant from the middle of March to the middle of April; the Herring make their principal run between the 10th of April and the 1st of May. Rock and Perch generally precede and follow a run of Herring.

The operations continue day and night, seldom stopping except from high winds or scarcity of fish. Our seines are sometimes swept out of the fishing grounds by strong tides, and taken up badly torn, losing several hundred yards of seine frequently, and requiring several days to put it in order again. In order to lay out our seines at night, two lanterns are placed on the shore, one above and fifty feet in rear of the other and directly in range with the centre-bush. In going out these lights are kept directly in range, which carries the boats to the centre-bush. Large lights are also placed at each end of the beach, as a guide for the boats to reach the shore after the seine is put out. In dense fogs a compass is used in each boat. It usually requires about 60 to 80 minutes to lay out the seine and 4 1/2 hours to wind it in, making about six hours to make a haul.

The most exciting part of it is, of course the landing of the fish. When the seine gets within 100 to 200 yards of the shore with a good haul, the fish are seen dashing about in very direc-

tion, showing their fins on the surface of the water, various speculations being indulged in on the shore as to the number inclosed. Appearances however are very deceptive, as a large Sturgeon or Rock in the seine frightens the smaller fish and drives them ashore.

In landing very large hauls the seine is stopped near the shore and a small hand seine is used to land a portion at a time. The fish are all cut by women, and it is a matter of curiosity to see how dexteriously some of them use the knife, a good hand cutting from 25 to 30 a minute. The usual number of hands employed on a beach is from 40 to 50 men and from 20 to 30 women. I have known 60 men and 50 women employed at

one fishery.

The number of fish taken during the season varies from 500,000 to 250,000,000 Herring and from 20,000 to 50,000 Shad. I have known 4,000,000 Herring taken at one fishery, and at another fishery 110,000 shad in one season.

There were formerly thirty large fisheries in operation on the Albemarle Sound and Chowan River; giving employment to over 2,000 hands, and using 20,000 or more barrels in one season. The quantity of salt used at a large fishery is from 2,000 to 7,000 bushels, and the number of barrels and kegs from 1,000 to 5,000. The cost of equipping and operating a large fishery is from \$10,000 to

(Continued on Page Four)

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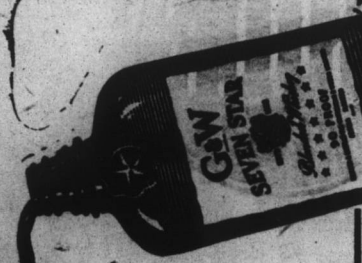
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