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# Fishing the Borderlands: Government Policy and Fishermen on the North Atlantic

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**FISHING THE BORDERLANDS: GOVERNMENT POLICY  
AND FISHERMEN ON THE NORTH ATLANTIC  
1818-1854**

By

Brian J. Payne

B.A. St. John Fisher College, 1998

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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(in History)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

December, 2001

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The North Atlantic's nineteenth-century fishing industry covered a vast geographic and socioeconomic unit. It extended from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Atlantic Ocean, around the Grand Banks off Newfoundland, and south to the George's Banks off the coast of Massachusetts. Those who participated in the industry, both merchants and workers, operated within a global economy. Markets for fish products were not always domestic; in fact the majority of fish caught was shipped to foreign markets in the Mediterranean and the West Indies. The capital that was invested in the industry came from London, Halifax, Boston, and other economic centers throughout the world. Fishermen harvested their products from international waters and often found themselves encroaching upon protected waters of foreign nations. Therefore, this thesis examines the industry not from a regional perspective, as is the case of many prior histories, but from an international approach that recognizes the borderlands of the North Atlantic. Within these borderlands, fishermen and merchants carried out their business with the understanding that the industry did in fact exist within an international community. Fishermen in Nova Scotia recognized their ability to abandon their domestic

arrangements with local merchants in favor of new relationships with American vessels, merchants, and capital. Meanwhile, merchants in Nova Scotia, recognizing the ability of the fishermen to transfer their business to American firms, sought to prevent the existence of close cooperation between Nova Scotia's and New England's fishing laborers in order to maintain their economic, political, and social control over the fishermen. This was perpetuated through the use of a debt-credit bond, commonly known as the truck system.

In 1818 the United States and Britain signed a treaty that, for the most part, restricted fishermen to domestic waters and merchants to home markets. By 1854 the economy of the North Atlantic fishery had undergone dramatic transformation. No longer did the merchants of Nova Scotia and their protected markets within the British Empire dominate this industry. New England firms had gradually gained control of the profits yielded from this trade through the deconstruction of mercantilism throughout the Empire, the expansion of the American domestic market, and the accumulation of capital and labor within the Northeastern of the United States. As a result, the majority of fishing labor in the North Atlantic transferred themselves to large New England firms, leaving those firms in Nova Scotia with a diminished labor force and eventually destroying their hopes of regaining control of the industry.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
Chapter 1. Regionalism and Borderlands: The Historiography of the North Atlantic Fishery.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Regionalism and Borderlands.....	6
Chapter 2. National Policies in the North Atlantic Fishery: Mercantilism and Industrial Capitalism.....	22
Chapter 3. Investment and Work in the North Atlantic Fishery: New England Firms and British North American Labor.....	63
Conclusion.....	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	91
BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR .....	109

# **Chapter 1**

## **Regionalism and Borderlands: The Historiography of the North Atlantic Fishery**

### Introduction

In 1837 the chair of the House of the Assembly committee dedicated to the fisheries of Nova Scotia, James Boyle Uniacke, reported the following:

The Youth of the Province are daily quitting the Fishing Stations and seeking employment on board United States Vessels, conducting them to the best Fishing Grounds, carrying on trade and traffic for their new employers with the Inhabitants, and injuring their Native Country by defrauding its Revenue diminishing the operative class, and leaving the aged and infirm to burthen the Community they have foresaken and deserted.<sup>1</sup>

Uniacke's statement illustrates a number of important issues that have been neglected by historians of New England and Atlantic Canada. His report indicates that Nova Scotian and American fishermen were actively interacting with one another through trade, navigation, and employment in opposition to the desires of the merchants and politicians of Nova Scotia, a group that James Uniacke represents. Given such a transnational perspective among those participating in the North Atlantic fishery, it becomes clear that a history of the industry must account for the borderland dynamic of the North Atlantic.

The North Atlantic fishing industry of the nineteenth century covered a vast geographic and socioeconomic unit. It extended from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Atlantic Ocean, around the Grand Banks off Newfoundland, and south to the George's Banks off the coast of Massachusetts. This industry touched virtually everyone who lived and worked in this region. It was conducted by colonial merchants, European migratory

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<sup>1</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Report of the Committee of the Fisheries, April 10, 1837," by James Uniacke. Appendix 75. p. 4.

fishermen, and American capitalists. While this industry has been the subject of substantial historical literature, few historians have discussed the international economic and political dynamics as they existed in a borderlands region. The policies adopted by the provincial government of Nova Scotia and the federal government of the United States represent the close proximity - both geographically and economically - between the New England and Nova Scotian fishing industries. During the first half of the nineteenth century the socioeconomic borderlands of the North Atlantic fishing industry provided the underlying themes in policy formation.

Regional identity is a difficult aspect to establish when dealing with individuals who work at sea. As will be discussed below, there are many cases in which the fishermen of a nation defined the border in a different fashion than did their political leaders. For example, in more than one case the fishermen of Grand Manan Island saw the ships from Saint John, New Brunswick, as foreign and those from Eastport, Maine, as their neighbors. Therefore, in order to understand the trends of the fishing industry, one must include international economic and political trends and not isolate this transnational industry within the confines of a current nation, province, or state. To do this the current research and writing of borderlands theory in North American history must be considered.

Garth Stevenson defines a borderland region as “a territorial entity having some natural and organic unity or community of interest that is independent of political administrative boundaries...a ‘natural’ regionalism that contrasts with their own



artificiality.”<sup>2</sup> This statement leads one to seek an understanding of regionalism with little to no reference to international border making. Similarly, American historian C. Vann Woodward states: “to limit the subject of historical study within national boundaries is always to invite the charge of narrow perspective and historical nationalism.”<sup>3</sup>

A borderland is an area in which a politically constructed border divides a geographic region that would have otherwise shared a communal sense of identity. This unity is often the result of similar geographic, social, religious, and/or economic structures. In studying Canadian regionalism, Garth Stevenson states that “an analysis of Canadian regionalism that fails to view it in its North American context is incomplete and seriously misleading.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the North Atlantic fishing industries of British North America and New England cannot be properly examined without an understanding of the borderlands aspect of this specific region. An industry that was so heavily dominated by international trends requires the incorporation of the borderland philosophy that has been developed by geographers such as Victor Konrad, who argued,

The borderlands of the United States and Canada are distinctive regions of mitigating landscape fading from the common edge of the boundary. Borderlands evolve from border regions, or contiguous zones in which exchange between nation-states take place. Between Canada and the United States, borderlands regions have emerged, more or less, among peoples with common characteristics, in spite of political boundary delineated between them. In an extreme sense, borderlands exist when shared characteristics set a region apart from the countries that contain it, and residents share more with each other than with members of their respective national cultures. In the Canada-United

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<sup>2</sup> Garth Stevenson, “Canadian Regionalism in Continental Perspective,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 15 No. 2 (Summer 1980): 17.

<sup>3</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Stevenson, “Canadian Regionalism in Continental Perspective,” p. 18.

States context particularly, borderlands are regions that have a tempering effect on the central tendencies of each society, and these regions reveal the ways in which the nation-states blend into each other.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis will show how the fishing communities of the North Atlantic, in both capital and labor migration strategies, transcended political boundaries in order to achieve what they believed would be economic and social security. The New England and Nova Scotian fishing classes often shared more with one another than they did with their respective national or colonial centers, and therefore they often saw each other as closer allies than did their own political leaders. Thus, the North Atlantic fishing industry constituted a border region in which labor and capital moved as freely from nation to nation as from town to town. The contemporary state of the North Atlantic fisheries would not suggest such a trend would be possible. Environmental depletion and the formation of a second independent nation in North America during the second half of the nineteenth century may very well have changed these borderlands philosophies. During the first half of the nineteenth century, however, Massachusetts-based firms solidified their control over the North Atlantic fishing trade. Few of the histories of the fisheries incorporate an understanding of how the borderland themes shaped that industry.

Since the publication of Harold Innis's monumental work on the staple theory in 1940, most histories of Atlantic Canada have carefully considered the North Atlantic fisheries.<sup>6</sup> However, even the works that focus on this industry normally do so from a

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<sup>5</sup> Victor Konrad, *Borderlands: Essays in Canadian-American Relations* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1991), p. viii.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Innis, *The Cod Fisheries: The History of An International Economy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940)

regional perspective that often neglects the inter-regional connections of both the managerial and the labor classes. This thesis will explore the investment strategies of Massachusetts firms and the labor patterns of Nova Scotian and New Brunswick fishermen in order to demonstrate that a borderlands industry existed in the North Atlantic prior to the signing of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854; a treaty that has often been considered the first North American free trade agreement.

Although the fishing industry of the North Atlantic existed within an international framework, most histories of this industry approach the subject from a regional perspective. Understanding the reasons and methods for these regional approaches is the first step to expanding the study to include the borderlands theory. The first part of this thesis will explore the theories advanced by historians such as Harold Innis, Rosemary Ommer, Daniel Vickers, Sean Cadigan, and other maritime scholars. Building upon these theories in order to include the global perspective of the industry, the thesis then assesses the government policies and investment strategies used by the various nations and colonies involved in the fishery. By reviewing these policies it becomes clear that those who shaped the industry were aware of its international dimension and sought to address this trend in a variety of ways to improve their own status in the global economy. Similar to those in economic and political power, the working force also regarded the industry as a global economy and sought to improve their lives by moving about the borderlands community. The review of these trends clearly illustrates that the fishing industry of the North Atlantic existed in a borderlands community, and in order to properly understand its influence the history of this industry should not be limited to a strictly regional perspective.

### Regionalism and Borderlands

The histories that discuss the North Atlantic fisheries fall into two broadly defined schools of thought. One focuses on the international economy, while another discusses localized socio-economic developments. The work by Harold Innis, *The Cod Fisheries: The History of An International Economy*, assessed the industry from a purely economic standpoint. His work and data focused on the global connections that were developed by merchants and politicians. Social historians of later generations sought to incorporate the people involved in the industry into Innis's staples theory. Rosemary Ommer and Sean Cadigan thoroughly discussed the relationship between labor and capital in the fisheries of Gaspé and Newfoundland, while Daniel Vickers and Wayne O'Leary examined the changing nature of work in the fisheries based in Massachusetts and Maine. While all of these studies are compelling examples of regional histories, they include few references to the international connections among the working classes.

Innis's work concentrates on staple production, in which an undeveloped colony exports raw material to more highly industrialized centers.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, imperial connections play a key role in the development, or underdevelopment, of this industry. For this reason the issues revolving around tariffs, bounties, embargoes, and exclusion are the primary focus of Innis's work. While these issues did affect the nature of work in the industry, Innis's research does not directly deal with the fishermen. Instead they are subordinated to imperial and national diplomats.

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<sup>7</sup> Harold Innis, *The Cod Fisheries: The History of An International Economy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), p. ix.

At first it appears that Innis aspires to create a history in which the workers are included. For example, he states in his introduction: “No other industry has engaged the activities of any people in North America over such a long period of time and in such restricted areas.”<sup>8</sup> One could assume, therefore, that the people in these restricted areas would play an important role in communal life and local economy. Numbers, graphs, and charts, however, dominate Innis’s work. Seldom are names mentioned, and when they are included they belong to elite political or economic leaders. In short, there are no working people in his study.

Innis created an image of colonial unity opposed to imperial policies of free trade and the encroachment of American capital and ships. Innis stated that nationalism and British free trade went hand in hand. “The growth of nationalism in the colonies was the inevitable accompaniment of the British policy of free trade,” he argued, especially as it pertained to the North Atlantic fisheries.<sup>9</sup> The nationalistic conclusions that Innis found could only be derived if one limits his or her interpretation to elite perspective. Contrary to this idea, this thesis will show the emigration of sea labor and the support of American smugglers by the inhabitants of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. This thesis questions the solidarity among British subjects in North America that Innis presented.

Imperial ties between the home market and the distant producer are central to Rosemary Ommer. Her major synthesis, *From Outpost to Outpost: A Structural Analysis of the Jersey-Gaspé Cod Fishery, 1767-1886*, relied on the understanding of a colonial

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<sup>8</sup> Innis, *The Cod Fisheries*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Innis, *The Cod Fisheries*, p. 489.

staple product and its production and distribution in an Atlantic economy. Ommer believed that a complete study of a complex staple economy can only be understood through the use of a case study method. By narrowing the geographic field, she addressed the four major issues of colonial economic history - the empire, the colony, the community, and the commodity - more successfully than did Innis. For Ommer, the focus is not on the entire North Atlantic fishery, as was the case with Innis, but upon a distinct segment of it, the Jersey-Gaspé link, particularly the firm of Charles Robbins and Company.<sup>10</sup>

By using this tactic, Ommer delved deeply into capital relationships in an attempt to explore the current and historical underdevelopment of the region. At the end of her major work, Ommer suggested that this underdevelopment was not necessarily the result of the depletive nature of the staple, but "was in large part a consequence of the manner in which metropolitan merchants operated a colonial staple trade using strategies which secured their business but, in the process, warped regional development."<sup>11</sup> This concept of merchant tactics has since become a major source of controversy in both the history, and current management, of the North Atlantic fisheries.

Ommer closely examined debit-credit relationships between merchants and fishing families.<sup>12</sup> The system of truck credit dependence has become a central theme in the history of the North Atlantic fisheries. The producers of a commodity in this system, in this case the fishermen, purchased the equipment that they required for the season on

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<sup>10</sup> Rosemary E. Ommer, *From Outpost to Outpost: A Structural Analysis of the Jersey-Gaspé Cod Fishery, 1767-1886* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ommer, *From Outpost to Outpost*, p. 199.

<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Ommer, "The Truck System in Gaspé, 1822-77," *Acadiensis* 19 (Fall 1988): 91-115.

credit from the same merchant year after year. At the end of the season the producers returned with the raw goods, in this case the codfish, and exchanged them for a reduction in their credit balance. Such a system developed in communities where labor and capital were in short supply while natural resources were relatively abundant. Since the product that has been produced by the end of the season did not often equal the amount owed, this system is often interpreted as a means of labor control because it tied the producers to one merchant by means of indebtedness. In these social relationships, the merchants were able to maintain social and economic dominance through the control of capital and trade of commodities.<sup>13</sup>

The lack of economic diversity in Gaspé prevented the fishing families from exploring options other than their debt-credit relationship with the local merchants. This notion of underdevelopment and class paternalism continues to be debated by historians. The question that seems to be paramount is to what extent is the underdevelopment of Atlantic Canada the result of shrewd business tactics and economic control by the merchants or the result of environmental limitations that led to a single staple economy? Ommer argued that the Charles Robbins Company operated a debit-led truck system to maintain control. In addition, this truck system resulted in a non-diversified region that “undoubtedly contributed significantly to the economic retardation and underdevelopment of the region.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> George W. Hilton, *The Truck System including a History of the British Truck Acts, 1465-1960* (Westport, CT: W. Heffer, 1960), pp. 6-8, 119-42. See also John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Ommer, “The Truck System in Gaspé, 1822-77,” pp. 101, 115.

In a later article Ommer examined the environmental causes that led to the development of the truck system. She addressed the “mythology” that has been developed surrounding the use of the truck system by the merchant class. Instead of seeing these merchants as individualistic capitalists who sought to destroy other means of operations to maintain their control of the labor force, Ommer suggested that we might understand their tactics in the context of their own time. In a society that was economically deprived by nature with limited natural sources of wealth and therefore limited amounts of currency, a system of credit-debt economy was necessary. As Ommer argued, the “truck system seems to have been in part a technique adopted by small business with restricted access to liquid capital which allowed them to continue in business or even expand production without the restraint that capital scarcity might otherwise have imposed upon them, particularly during times of deflation, depression, or shortage of coinage.”<sup>15</sup> Although Ommer examined the economic relationship from the perspective of the merchants, her conclusion states that the truck system that was supported by the merchant elite prevented economic diversification, limited the fishermen’s independence, and eventually led to regional underdevelopment.<sup>16</sup>

A former student of Ommer’s and resident of Newfoundland, Sean Cadigan, argued that the natural environment - and not the paternalistic control of the merchant class - led to underdevelopment. Cadigan maintained that “if people depended on merchants and the fishery, it was because there was little else they could do for

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<sup>15</sup> Rosemary Ommer, *Merchant Credit and Labour Strategies in Historical Perspective* (Fredericton, NB: Acadiensis Press, 1990), p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> Rosemary Ommer, “One Hundred Years of Fishery Crisis in Newfoundland,” *Acadiensis* 23 (2) (Spring 1994): 5-20.



themselves.”<sup>17</sup> According to Cadigan, the picture of class dependency presented by Ommer is the result of relying too heavily upon staple theories of production. Cadigan’s work is one of class struggle that incorporates the natural limitations of the environment. In his history, Cadigan presented a community that included a variety of working relationships. By incorporating women, servants, and household economies into the story, Cadigan has shown that, although the fishery families’ economy was centered on the merchant credit system, it was not the exclusive means of production. In addition, this merchant credit system provided badly needed products and economic stability in a single-staple economy. Although Cadigan’s method can better illustrate the relationship between the classes of the colony, his domestic perspective ultimately fails to include international trends of production that influenced the staple trade.

Cadigan attacked the “chimera fable” that had been produced by nineteenth-century liberal reformers and twentieth-century historians. He maintained that the theory of intentional underdevelopment and the manipulation of the law in favor of merchant interest is simply “untrue.”<sup>18</sup> Cadigan argued that liberal reformers were able to use the economic depression of Newfoundland to incite hostility towards the merchants, and thus blame them and their truck system for the continual underdevelopment of the region. This popular opinion was used as a strong political force to undermine merchant and imperial control of the island that would eventually lead to the formation of responsible government in Newfoundland. The success of this campaign resulted in the continual

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<sup>17</sup> Sean Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay: Merchant-Settler Relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. viii.

<sup>18</sup> Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay*, pp. viii, 162.

effort by various governments to diversify the economic base of Newfoundland instead of trying to improve and protect their sole source of real wealth, the fisheries. Such political policy ignored Newfoundland's natural disadvantages for diversification. By ignoring the issues surrounding the fisheries, the self-proclaimed reformers opened the area to exploitation and eventual depletion. According to Cadigan, this is the true cause of Newfoundland's underdevelopment, not the truck system's supposed prevention of diversification.<sup>19</sup>

Cadigan thus rejected Ommer's assertion that the merchant class was responsible for the underdevelopment of the region, and the "ahistoricity of expecting that the merchants should have developed the fishery philanthropically, for the benefits of Newfoundland rather than themselves."<sup>20</sup> Such diversification was impossible on an island of rock. As Cadigan argued:

Newfoundland merchants may well have been beasts, but they were no special ones. Their relations with the fishery families unfolded in an environment with particularly limited resources, which did little to encourage local interest in the political and legal infrastructure of a region and a fishing industry often marked by antagonistic capitalist, colonial, and imperial interests. Merchants did not take any special steps to economic differentiation, because local commodity producers could find no resource base from which to begin such activity successfully.<sup>21</sup>

Not surprisingly, Cadigan has continued to emphasize environmental factors that decisively shaped the economic and social development of Atlantic Canada.

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<sup>19</sup> Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay*, pp. 166-170.

<sup>20</sup> Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay*, p. viii.

<sup>21</sup> Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay*, p. x.

His most recent article, "The Moral Economy of the Commons" could very easily be considered environmental history.<sup>22</sup> In this study, Cadigan attacked the notion of the "tragedy of commons" within the marine resources of the North Atlantic.<sup>23</sup> This theory states that any property - land or water - that is left to public ownership will indefinitely be destroyed because no one community or individual claims responsibility for the protection of the resource. Cadigan interpreted the local protest to the introduction of capital intensive technology as a unifier between the merchant and fishing classes:

All the protests represented attempts to regulate access to marine resources to forestall their depletion by further capitalization of the fishery. For these fishers, the desire to preserve a customary and equitable right to access to fish for all implied a need to conserve that marine resource for future generations. The preservation of equitable access may be seen as an ecological norm of a moral economy that ran counter to the individualistic and accumulative value of a nascent local capitalist political economy.<sup>24</sup>

According to Cadigan, the merchants who have been attacked for the destructive use of the truck system actually encouraged the limitation of resources and discouraged the introduction of new technologies and industrial capital-based exploitation. The popular regulation of marine resources presents the image that the fishermen were in favor of a limitative use of the resources, and thus a continual preference for the truck system, rather than the "subordination of nature associated with capitalism."<sup>25</sup> Such statements bring into light a wider range of issues that pertain to the North Atlantic in the

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<sup>22</sup> Sean Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons," *Labour* 43 (Spring 1999): 9-42.

<sup>23</sup> Garrett Harden was the first to introduce the notion of the tragedy of the commons. For further information, see Bonnie McCay, "The Culture of the Commons: Historical Observations in Old World and New World Fisheries" in Bonnie McVay and Hames Acheson, eds., *The Question of the Commons: The Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons," pp. 11-12.

<sup>25</sup> Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons," p. 10.

form of economic relationships between man and nature.

Both Ommer and Cadigan discussed the system of truck within the confines of limited natural resources. Both provide compelling interpretations of this system as it pertains to their regions of underdevelopment and natural limitations. As Cadigan convincingly points out, the environment of Newfoundland prevented diversification in economic development and thus a continual use of the truck system. Likewise, Ommer refers to the truck system as a means of labor control and the concentration of capital into the hands of a few elites that dominated the region's economic transitions. A very different assessment arises when one examines and incorporates the richer resources and more diversified economies of New England.

Daniel Vickers extended the discussion of the truck system to New England. For Vickers, the logic of the truck system is based upon

an economic response to the difficulties of organizing production on the periphery of the European world-system. It did not alter the imbalance of power between capitalist and producer, but it did shift the agency through which much of that power was exercised away from the impersonal market that had worked in the Old World and towards the truck system and personal fiat that made sense in the New.<sup>26</sup>

The truck system depended on a society that maintained a peripheral status, that continually exported a staple product to more industrialized regions, and depended upon these industrial regions for both capital and a marketplace. In his study of Massachusetts, Vickers demonstrated how this colony ceased to be a peripheral society by developing a large domestic residency and advancing other means of economic

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Vickers, "Merchant and Labour Strategies in the Cod Fisheries of Colonial Massachusetts" in Rosemary Ommer, ed., *Merchant Credit and Labour Strategies in Historical Perspective* (Fredericton, NB: Acadiensis Press, 1990), p. 43.

survival. In this more advanced society, Vickers stated, there was no need for a system of indebtedness and the society could thus develop a wage-based economy of free enterprise.<sup>27</sup>

Vickers continued the exploration of labor systems in his book, *Farmers and Fishermen*, wherein he “investigates the process by which farmers and fishing merchants constructed labor systems adequate to their needs.”<sup>28</sup> Vickers examined the use of capital in societies as they developed. In a peripheral society the general consensus was to invest the limited capital into the control of the labor supply and not in the development of additional resources. As the society matured, however, it underwent a transition to commercial and industrial capitalism:

[O]n this frontier. . .the lure of unexplored resources caused economic growth to proceed at first along extensive lines, with rapid settlement but little interest in further improvement. What is striking about New England and the American northeast generally, however, is that the classic colonial pattern was outgrown. First in the maritime economy and later in the countryside, regional markets in capital and labor surfaced and the older extensive brand of growth gave way to more intensive development involving real gains in productivity and paving the way to industrialization.<sup>29</sup>

By comparing Vickers's analysis of Massachusetts, Cadigan's research on Newfoundland, and Ommer's study of Gaspé, one may come to the conclusion that the continual use of the truck system in Newfoundland and Gaspé was based on their status as peripheral colonies. The abandonment of the system in Massachusetts was the result of economic growth and diversification. This thesis will demonstrate how laborers and managers in Nova Scotia's truck system reacted to the introduction of capital from the foreign investors in Massachusetts. In a maritime industry, such as the fisheries, it

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<sup>27</sup> Vickers, “Merchant and Labour Strategies in the Cod Fisheries of Colonial Massachusetts,” p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 4-6.

<sup>29</sup> Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, p. 9.

becomes increasingly important to recognize international factors.

Maritime history has become an increasingly popular field of research. The extent of this field is far too broad to discuss here. Nonetheless, the social histories of maritime topics can provide some theoretical and methodological foundations to understand how workers and managers interacted in an international business. Maritime history has persistently carried a romantic image of seafaring life that only recently has been challenged. The classic history of maritime life characterized that society as separate from the rest of the world and thus unaffected by transitions in economic forces and class movements. Maritime culture, according to these historians, instead held onto traditional notions of elitism and hierarchical supervision.<sup>30</sup>

These notions have come under the scrutiny of social historians who argue that the maritime world went through processes of industrialization and class division, similar to and in advance of their land-based counterparts.<sup>31</sup> Marcus Rediker, for example, stated that “the romantic image of seafaring has distorted the reality of life at sea by concentrating on the struggle of man and nature to the exclusion of other aspects of maritime life, notably the jarring confrontation of man against man.”<sup>32</sup> For Rediker, the key to understanding the maritime world lies in the mobility of the seamen and their confrontation with those in command:

The seamen’s dilemma went beyond the menacing, seemingly boundless forces

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<sup>30</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts Bay, 1783-1860* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> David Alexander, “Literacy among Canadian and Foreign Seamen,” in Rosemary Ommer and Gerald Panting eds., *Working Men Who Got Wet* (St. John’s, Newfoundland: Maritime History Group, 1980), p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 4.

of nature he confronted. The tar was caught between the devil and the deep blue sea: on the one side stood his captain, who was backed by the merchant and royal officials and who held near-dictatorial powers that served a capitalist system rapidly covering the globe; on the other side stood the relentlessly dangerous natural world. Many important ideas and practices emerged in the social zone between man-made and natural dangers that governed the seamen's life.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, Eric Sager provided an analysis of the merchant marine of Atlantic Canada. However, he differed slightly from Rediker's claims of strict social authority. Instead of seeing the fleet as an undemocratic traditional society, Sager suggested that "the structure of authority in a ship was part of the social relations of production in an industry. These relationships were social artifacts created by man and not by ship." Moreover, as social artifacts these relationships were affected by fluctuations in larger social issues. As Sager pointed out, "in the nineteenth century the process of production at sea was changing as never before. The sailor was part of the transition to industrial capitalism, as capital transformed work and production on land and at sea."<sup>34</sup>

The issues of mobility and international connections are important to the study of any maritime trade. Here there have been some recent disagreements. Both Rediker and Sager argued that the extreme mobility of the seafaring workers enabled them not only to see a variety of political, economic, and social relationships, but also to bring back new ideologies to their home base. Thus they often served as the communicators of a "plebeian" culture.<sup>35</sup> Many maritime historians, both public and academic, have come to the conclusion that "the mariner was a man of the world, who had more in common with

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<sup>33</sup> Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Eric Sager, *Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), pp. 7-10.

<sup>35</sup> Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, pp. 294-298.

his fellow seafarers from other nations than with many of his fellow countrymen.”<sup>36</sup>

The lack of a national affiliation to any one country among mariners that Sager and others have promoted has been recently criticized by Daniel Vickers. Vickers argued that seaman had a close connection to their homeport. They were often recruited in their own neighborhood with and by their childhood friends. Many masters married and had a home and family to return to after the voyage. Even in retirement, most mariners returned to their homeport and took up residency and a small plot of land for subsistence agriculture. For these reasons, Vickers stated, “throughout their seafaring careers most retained important social ties to the town of their birth.”<sup>37</sup>

Although Vickers claimed to include fishermen in this analysis, his data does not suggest that similar trends existed in the deep-sea fisheries.<sup>38</sup> Some maritime historians have claimed that fishermen and merchant mariners were in the same class.<sup>39</sup> But none has provided sufficient data to support such claims. The yearly cycles of the fisheries and the merchant trade would not make it very easy for a sailor to participate in both industries. Although a tremendous amount of evidence regarding the social makeup of the mariners is available, little can be found for the fishermen.<sup>40</sup> This information on the merchant marine cannot be easily transferred to the deep-sea fishermen. They made up

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<sup>36</sup> Sager, *Seafaring Labour*, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh, “Young men and the sea: The sociology of seafaring in eighteenth century Salem, Massachusetts.” *Social History* 24 No. 1 (Jan. 1999): 19-22.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Vickers, “Salem and Massachusetts’ North Shore, 1645-1760.” Unpublished manuscript presented at the University of Maine, Fall 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

<sup>40</sup> The customs offices required merchant ships to record the names, age, height, weight, nationality, origins of birth, and race for all mariners heading to foreign ports. Since fishermen did not land at any foreign ports (legally), such requirements did not exist. The most that can be drawn from custom records and merchant ledgers regarding the fishermen is often just their initials.



two distinct sectors in society and would have developed different interpretations of class relations and national affiliation. Before any further research on the deep-sea fisheries can be conducted, maritime historians must recognize that the men who labored in this industry were not always in collaboration with the mariners of the merchant fleet.

This thesis explores the interaction between American and Nova Scotian fishermen in the North Atlantic fishing industry between 1818 and 1854. These dates were chosen because they reflect international treaties. The Convention of 1818 intended to prevent American fishing interests from invading the domestic waters of Nova Scotia, thereby separating the two industries into isolated regions of production. One of the many clauses of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854, on the other hand, opened these domestic waters to the American fleet in exchange for access to American market for Nova Scotia's fish products. The latter of these treaties has often been considered by historians to be the first free trade agreement in North America. For this reason many historians have viewed the opening of the region's waters and domestic markets as a tremendous achievement of politicians and diplomats.<sup>41</sup> This thesis will argue that the establishment of an official free trade policy within North America had more to do with the fishing industry itself, most importantly its laborers, than it did with diplomats who

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<sup>41</sup> Harry Cranbrook Allen, *Great Britain and the United States, A History of Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1952* (NY: St. Martin Press, 1955); R.E. Ankli, "Canadian-American Reciprocity: A Comment" *Journal of Economic History* 28 (June 1970): 274-81; R.E. Ankli, "The Reciprocity Treaty of 1854" *Canadian Journal of Economic History* 4 (1971): 1-20; John B. Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle: The Interplay of Canada, The United States, and Great Britain* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1964); Irene Hecht, "Isreal D. Andrews and the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854: A Reappraisal" *Canadian Historical Review* 44 (Dec. 1963): pp. 313-26; D.C. Masters, *Reciprocity, 1846-1911* (Canadian Historical Association, Booklet #12, 1961); L. Officer & L. Smith, "The Canadian American Reciprocity Treaty of 1855 to 1868" *Journal of Economic History* 28 (1968): 598-623; S.A. Saunders, "The Maritime Provinces and the Reciprocity Treaty" *Dalhousie Review* 14 (Oct. 1934); Vernon G. Setser, *The Commercial Reciprocity Policy of the United States, 1774-1829* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1937).

appeared on the scene prior to the signing of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854.

This study will clarify links between the laborers and both the large-scale economic trends and the political agendas of the United States, Nova Scotia, and the British Empire. The primary focus, therefore, is not on one particular group within a society but on the interaction between multiple groups within an economic superstructure. In the North Atlantic fishing industry this included multiple nations and empires and therefore cannot be fully examined on a local or even regional scale. The sources used to examine this interaction are principally political. They include the debates in the United States Congress and the Assembly of Nova Scotia, published reports by government officials, scientific and social studies of fishing communities authorized by the governments, petitions and reports submitted by merchants, merchant record books and journals, legal cases, and intergovernmental addresses. Instead of concentrating on the frustrations voiced by Nova Scotia's political and economic leaders towards the actions of their workers as a foundation of nationalism among the elite class, this thesis argues that the actions of the working class, the very activity that frustrated the merchants, was a form of economic independence. Workers thus held their own view of internationalism in the nineteenth century apart from political and merchant elites.

Between 1818 and 1854 the merchants and politicians of Nova Scotia aggressively sought the protection of their domestic waters and their local labor force from American influence. Their attempts ultimately failed because of changes in the global marketplace and the aggressive investment strategies of firms based in Massachusetts. By the late 1820s the British Empire had developed a free market environment that opened their markets in the West Indies to American fleets, thereby

threatening Nova Scotia's last protected markets. Shifts in industrial development, population growth, and urbanization gave the Massachusetts fleet a healthy market, which in turn encouraged further investment.

The growing wealth of Northeast industries in the first half of the nineteenth century initiated the industrialization of the fishing fleet and the development of a payment method that reduced the overall indebtedness of the fishermen. In contrast to this, Nova Scotia's industry lagged and their laborers remained indebted and tied to local merchants. The expansionist policies of the Massachusetts firms pushed the American fleet into Nova Scotia's waters, thereby encouraging a closer interaction between American and Nova Scotian fishermen. This interaction threatened the bond between Nova Scotia's fishermen and merchants. In time, the fishermen would abandon their ties to local merchants and seek new relations with the American fleet, first in the form of illicit trade and eventually in the direct out-migration of a significant portion of Nova Scotia's labor force.

By the late nineteenth century, Nova Scotia's merchant interests were crippled by the more powerful industrial capitalists of southern New England. Through shifts in global markets, the infusion of government aid, and aggressive investment strategies, Massachusetts-based fishing merchants came not only to control the waters in and around the Atlantic provinces, but also the domestic labor force of that region. This transition allowed Massachusetts to dominate the North Atlantic fishing industry.

## **Chapter 2**

### **National Policies in the North Atlantic Fishery: Mercantilism and Industrial Capitalism**

Throughout its history the North Atlantic fishery was part of a much larger international economic sphere. It attracted capital from a host of nations, particularly from Britain, France, and the United States. It employed citizens and immigrants from Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Denmark, France, Britain, British North America, and the United States. Its product could be found in the markets of most European nations, throughout the Mediterranean, in the ports of the West Indies, and along the eastern coastline of the United States. Since a significant part of this staple product was harvested in an international region - the Grand Banks - the industry was greatly affected by international transitions in economy, politics, and society. Both the merchants and laborers were well aware of this fact and continued to monitor the shifts in international marketplaces. Following the Napoleonic wars, the British Empire began to experiment with the philosophies of free trade and gradually opened several of its ports in the West Indies, by far the largest market for Nova Scotia's fish merchants, to American-based fishing firms. Meanwhile, rapid population growth and the beginnings of an industrial age in the United States created an even larger market for fish and fish products for a growing urban working force in that country. By the 1830s and 1840s the international advantages in the fishing industries favored the firms in the United States over those in British North America.

Historians have typically considered the shift to responsible government in British North America and the dismantling of the British imperial mercantile system as two

interrelated issues that played a central role in the transition in colonial government.<sup>1</sup> In his review of the historiography on the British Commonwealth, historian Phillip Buckner stated that historians have equated free trade with responsible government:

The mercantilist system, which dictated that the metropolitan authority must retain a tight control over the executive branch of the government in the colonies in order to ensure that the Imperial commercial regulations were enforced, was dismantled after the victory of the free traders in Britain. This removed the only important barrier which might have prevented the Whigs, who returned to power in July 1846, from allowing the Assemblies in British North America to establish control of the local executive through the device of responsible government. Thus in rapid succession both the economic and political foundations of the old Imperial system were replaced by structures more appropriate for the future commonwealth of self-serving nations.<sup>2</sup>

Buckner claimed that this relationship between free trade and responsible government was derived from the historians' attempt to foreshadow the development of the British commonwealth system, and that contemporary policy makers seldom viewed the two issues as intertwined. Buckner argued that:

The pressure for free trade came from within Britain and met with little enthusiasm in the colonies. The pressure for responsible government came from within the colonies and met with little enthusiasm in London. Either could have developed without the other. Most free traders in Britain were by no means opposed to restricting colonial trade in interest of the mother country and most proponents of responsible government in the colonies wished to preserve the Imperial preferential system.<sup>3</sup>

Although free trade and responsible government compose two separate issues, they nonetheless called into question the role that locally elected colonial representatives

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<sup>1</sup> Responsible government was a form of home rule which allowed the colony to control internal government activities such as taxation, education, health, transportation improvements and elections. At the same time, the imperial authorities maintained control over international and trans-colonial legislation and agreements such as the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Phillip Buckner, *The Transition to Responsible Government: British Policy in British North America, 1815-1850* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> Buckner, *The Transition to Responsible Government*, p. 293.

played in the formation of inter-imperial trade, a paramount topic when considering the colonial fishing industry. The policy makers in Nova Scotia were at once calling for more localized control of their internal affairs and the depression of imperial influence in the local government, and calling for the continuation of an aggressively protective commercial system between the British colonies.

Neither the road to responsible government nor the development of free trade within the British Imperial system suggested a desire in London to reduce its global influence. As Buckner stated, "Responsible government was, after all, a device for retaining Imperial control over the colonies, a means of securing the collaboration of the colonial elites in the perpetuation of Imperial rule." Equally so, colonial officials were willing to accept limited restrictions upon their self-government because of other advantages to remaining within the Empire. In short, responsible government in Nova Scotia meant continued loyalty to the Empire with a restructuring of administrative responsibilities.<sup>4</sup>

The traditional representative government that characterized the first British Empire began to lose favor as the colonies in British North America modernized into sophisticated nation-states.<sup>5</sup> The duties of the government quickly expanded beyond simple administrative tasks to include education, religious freedom, road construction, and law.<sup>6</sup> With this modernization the elected assembly believed that since they

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<sup>4</sup> Buckner, *The Transition to Responsible Government*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Buckner, *The Transition to Responsible Government*, p. 18; J. Murray Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia: Volume 1, 1710-1896* (Tantallon, NS: Four East Publications, 1985), p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> Buckner, *The Transition to Responsible Government*, p. 9.

represented the voice of the people, they should have more initiative in legislation.<sup>7</sup>

Through patronage the executive councils of British North America controlled the majority of government activity. Governmental appointments in Nova Scotia were limited and therefore the council had much less power than those in the Canadas, where government patronage was much more extensive. Reformers such as Joseph Howe questioned the imperial appointment of council members who had no responsibility to the popularly-elected Assembly.<sup>8</sup>

The colonial governors in Nova Scotia, as in all the British colonies in North America, initially opposed the growing influence of a reform-minded group within the political system. In 1833 the British Parliament offered to reduce its financial dealings within Nova Scotia by giving up quit-rents and casual and territorial revenues of the crown provided that the Assembly would compensate those who would lose their posts. However, the new colonial governor, Sir Colin Campbell, reported to the colonial office that the reform movements in Nova Scotia were the actions of a small, self-interested group that did not represent the majority of the population. This line of defense collapsed in the election of 1836 when the reformers took a majority of seats in the Assembly and consolidated their force into a working Reform Party. In 1838 Lord Glenelg, the colonial secretary, ordered Sir Colin Campbell to appoint reformers to his council. Although he continued to resist, the reformers again won the election of 1840 and Campbell was forced to concede.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Buckner, *The Transition to Responsible Government*, pp. 65, 333.

<sup>8</sup> Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, pp. 108-111.

Once the reformers gained complete control of the Council after the election of 1849, they were able to transform the Executive Council into a cabinet of ministers collectively responsible to the Assembly for all the major decisions of the government and composed wholly of members of the party that controlled the Assembly. Thus, after 1849 the locally elected body of politicians would control local government activities with little interference from London.<sup>10</sup> This transition in local government in no way reflected the changing attitude in regard to the position that Nova Scotia should play within imperial commerce. Throughout the debates concerning responsible government, the colonial elites in Nova Scotia maintained their allegiance to mercantilism. Since there was no rebellion in Nova Scotia, as in the Canadas, the loyalty of the reformers never became an issue. Nova Scotia's fish merchants were dependent upon Britain's protected markets more than ever and the shift to free trade within the empire challenged their economic security.<sup>11</sup>

The introduction of a free trade philosophy in the Western Hemisphere by no means marked the declining influence of the British Empire. Instead it ushered in a new phase of imperial dominance, one controlled by the economics of capitalism instead of the military might of an aristocracy. With industrialization gaining momentum and with complete control of maritime commerce, the leaders of Britain's government and economy became increasingly comfortable with the economic theories of Adam Smith and

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<sup>10</sup> Buckner, *The Transition to Responsible Government*, p. 306.

<sup>11</sup> Buckner, *The Transition to Responsible Government*, pp. 295-305.



thus became believers in England's ability to control commerce under the guidance of the invisible hand.<sup>12</sup>

The loss of the American colonies after the American Revolution presented a new challenge to the architects of British policy. The old system of protective mercantilism would no longer benefit England with its chief source of raw materials and its primary market now falling outside of the empire. By incorporating the ideas of Adam Smith and free trade, the British government would be able to continue its domination over the American market. As one scholar notes, "Britain's success in retaining its economic hold on the United States suggested that the old system of commercial regulation was superfluous to an industrializing economy, where goods could presumably now gain access to any market on grounds of quality and cheapness alone."<sup>13</sup> England's leaders thus began to create an informal empire based on the economic dependence of other nations on English-finished goods.<sup>14</sup> This informal empire depended upon the successful completion of Britain's industrialization.

Industrialization introduced to the British empire the power of a new merchant class. With the advantages of capital accumulation, this class began to dominate the political structure of British commerce, and thus forced the empire to accept the policies of free trade.<sup>15</sup> This free trade would allow British merchants to control international

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume III - The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1999), p. 1; Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> P.J. Marshall, "Britain Without America-A Second Empire?" in P.J. Mitchell, ed. *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume II - The Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1998), pp. 576-577.

<sup>14</sup> Marshall, "Britain Without America-A Second Empire?" pp. 585-587.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald Graham, *A Concise History of the British Empire* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), p. 156; P.J.

commerce by exporting quality English goods and importing a quantity of foreign raw materials. British imperial historian P.J. Cain states, "industrialization and population increase meant Britain could no longer remain self-sufficient...Freer trade was necessary to encourage imports which would come largely from Europe and the United States and not the Empire."<sup>16</sup>

Imperial historian Martin Lynn has addressed the issues surrounding the development of Britain's informal empire at great length. His most recent article discusses how liberals in the British government encouraged the government to begin deconstructing its colonial possessions in the Western Hemisphere. For many liberal thinkers in England, the colonies were expensive to maintain and had, historically, led the country into costly wars against foreign nations. The emergence of English industrial power made colonies unnecessary because England could simply control the market through the quality and quantity of her products, and not through military dominance.<sup>17</sup>

English maritime superiority played a crucial role in the establishment of an informal empire. Without the strength of the English navy and merchant fleet, English merchants could not guarantee the domination of "free markets." Lord Palmerston, who acted as the Foreign Secretary for most of the period from 1830-1851, led the fight to secure English maritime superiority in the free global market. Martin Lynn has pointed out that through either economic or military means the superior navy and merchant fleet

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Cain, "Economics and Empire: The Metropolitan Context" in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume III - The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Cain, "Economics and Empire: The Metropolitan Context," p. 40.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Lynn, "British Policy, Trade, and Informal Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume III*, pp. 102-106.

of England could successfully open markets to the country's influence, thus securing its domination. He noted,

Given the favourable international situation and that Britain's industrial and financial lead was so great, opening an area to outside influence by treaty was often sufficient to ensure that British trade and finances, rather than any rival's, were paramount in that region. Opening economies to outside commerce by promoting free trade was *de facto* a policy of extending British influence.<sup>18</sup>

British North America and the North Atlantic fisheries were greatly affected by this change in British imperial philosophies. Nova Scotian fishing firms had depended upon the closed ports of the British West Indies for their fish products. The introduction of a free trade philosophy in the Western Hemisphere resulted in the opening of the British West Indies to American products. Nova Scotian protests went unheard and the added competition from the Americans proved to be destructive to Nova Scotia's fish merchants.

The slave plantations in the British West Indies served as a principal market for the fish firms of British North America. Inferior quality products, such as mackerel and pickled haddock, which were unacceptable in the finer ports of the Mediterranean, were chief nutritional commodities for the West Indies' slave population. As the United States began to dominate the trade of the higher quality products of the North Atlantic following the American Revolution, Nova Scotia was essentially left with this trade to the West Indies plantation owners. When that began to dissolve in the 1820s, Nova

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<sup>18</sup> Lynn, "British Policy, Trade, and Informal Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," p. 106.

Scotia's economic and political leaders began to attack the Empire's new found faith in global free trade.<sup>19</sup>

It was not until the 1820s that Britain succeeded in opening the ports in the West Indies. Immediately following the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812, British authorities sought to reestablish the protective mercantile system in the West Indies. After British authorities began to enforce the traditional Navigation Acts, English merchant ships controlled three-quarters of all tonnage involved in the West Indies-American trade routes, and the total number of American ships that legally entered the British West Indies dropped from well over one hundred in 1814 to forty-four by 1816, all of which entered due to special weather-related circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

Under the leadership of John Quincy Adams, the American government began to seek an agreement with British representatives on the subject of Atlantic free trade.<sup>21</sup> Although both American and English liberals shared similar philosophies concerning free trade, the details of the treaty delayed the signing until 1830. Few of these details are pertinent to this study, however it is important to understand the conflict that emerged between the British West Indies and British North America over the question of who would be allowed to supply the West Indies' plantation owners with their fish and fish products.

For most of the period from the American Revolution to the free port acts of the early 1820s, British North America continually failed to provide the West Indies with its

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<sup>19</sup> Lee F. Bennis, *The American Struggle For the British West Indies Carrying Trade, 1815-1830* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1923), pp. 2, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Bennis, *The American Struggle For the British West Indies Carrying Trade, 1815-1830*, pp. 32-34.

<sup>21</sup> Kinley J. Brauer, "The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815-1860," *Diplomatic History* (1) (Spring 1988): 36.

agricultural and marine needs. As a result, the colonies in the West Indies turned to the expanding United States to supplement their supplies.<sup>22</sup> After the enforcement of England's navigation laws, the United States and the West Indies developed an indirect trade with one another. The Americans would ship supplies to islands under the control of other European nations which would then ship those same supplies to the British islands.<sup>23</sup> Although the British plantation owners received the necessary goods, they were forced to pay an elevated price due to the complicated nature of this trade. During this period of American exclusion property value in the British West Indies dropped by sixty-five percent, and by the late 1820s a depression in the British West Indies developed.<sup>24</sup>

Plantation owners and governmental leaders in the West Indies believed that this poverty was the result of an unjust system of mercantilism, and petitioned the authorities in England to dismantle the protective system of closed ports. The assembly of Jamaica became the most active body seeking what they called a "new system of introduction upon the mutual benefits" of all nations involved in foreign trade.<sup>25</sup> Their objection to the mercantile system followed many of the same theories that liberals used in England to voice their support for free trade between the United States and the British Empire.

The colonials in the British West Indies were certainly not alone in petitioning English authorities in London. Nova Scotia sent several petitions and letters to King

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<sup>22</sup> Armytage, *The Free Port System in the British West Indies, A Study in Commercial Policy, 1766-1822*, p. 130.

<sup>23</sup> From 1818 to 1819 American exports to the British West Indies dropped from \$3,488,653 to \$843,312; At the same time American exports to Swedish and Dutch islands rose from \$1,262,429 to \$4,159,852. Bennis, *The American Struggle For the British West Indies Carrying Trade, 1815-1830*, pp. 67-68, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Bennis, *The American Struggle For the British West Indies Carrying Trade*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>25</sup> The Assembly of Jamaica, as quoted in *St. Christopher Advertiser*, April 2, 1822.

George IV and the members of Parliament pressing for the continuation of the protective markets upon which they so heavily depended. The economic and political leaders of Nova Scotia were quick to address the “great evils which would result to this Province, from the Ports in the West Indies being opened to the Vessels of the United States.”<sup>26</sup>

Nova Scotians attacked the opening of the ports from every possible angle. Their continual belief in the benefits of traditional mercantilism became the basis of their objections. In letters to King George, the Assembly of Nova Scotia attacked plantation farmers in the West Indies for threatening the destruction of the mercantile system. One letter pointed out,

some of your Majesty’s Subjects are united with Foreigners, in endeavouring to change a system which Your Majesty’s Government has pursued for some years, with so much advantage to all Your People who are interested in the permanent welfare and prosperity of Your Dominions in North America, and the West Indies.<sup>27</sup>

Under this mercantile system, it was not just the Atlantic provinces that benefited, but all of the British holdings in North America. According to the politicians of Nova Scotia, the triangular trade of Atlantic fish, West Indies sugar, and British North American agriculture resulted in the benefits of all British subjects throughout the world. One petition succinctly stated: “Your Majesty’s Loyal Subjects in North America have no desire to advance their local interests at the expense of those of the Empire in general, but humbly conceiving that in the present case, the general interest is identified with theirs.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Proceedings,” March 22, 1822.

<sup>27</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *The Journal of the Assembly*, “A Message To Our Sovereign Lord George the Fourth,” April 4, 1822. p. 206.

<sup>28</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *The Journal of the Assembly*, “A Message to the King’s Most

In addition, the Nova Scotians suggested that the mercantile trade also benefited England's own industrial power by making the British subjects in the Western Hemisphere "better customers every year to the British Manufacturers."<sup>29</sup> If the United States grew to dominate the staple trade in the West Indies, politicians argued, they would surely also dominate the trade of goods throughout the Atlantic world, thus threatening the whole of the Empire. If London officials allowed the Americans into this market, "Great Britain would provide a Country, which appears destined to become her Rival, with the means of procuring Freight upon their several Voyages, and thus add to their commercial wealth and their maritime power at the expense of her own."<sup>30</sup>

Nova Scotia's political leaders thus endeavored to preserve their "Commercial Privileges" that they believed were equivalent to the privileges of their status as British subjects. The letters to London were accompanied by charts and data that tried to prove that the North American colonies had always been, and will always be, able to supply the British West Indies. While the West Indies claimed they were being deprived of basic necessity, the Nova Scotians attacked both the West Indies and the United States for falsely manufacturing these shortages. In a letter to King George the Assembly of Nova Scotia accused those in the West Indies of attempting to,

comply Your Majesty's Government to abandon the wise regulations which excluded the People of that Country from participating in a Trade, which it has been always the policy of the Mother Country to reserve for British Subjects.<sup>31</sup>

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Excellent Majesty," February 23, 1830, p. 597.

<sup>29</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *The Journal of the Assembly*, "A Message to the King's Most Excellent Majesty," February 23, 1830, p. 598.

<sup>30</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *The Journal of the Assembly*, "A Message to the King's Most Excellent Majesty," February 23, 1830, p. 598.

<sup>31</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *The Journal of the Assembly*, "A Message To Our Sovereign Lord

This illustrates a growing sense of sectionalism in the British Empire as both the British West Indies and British North America attempted to strengthen their position in the imperial hierarchy. The West Indies claimed they had become a “sacrifice to the prosperity of the North American Provinces.”<sup>32</sup> The imperial government eventually agreed with these ideas and opened the British West Indies to American commerce in a series of acts from 1828-1830. The resulting depression in British North American fish trade was directly linked to the loss of its last guaranteed marketplace, thereby opening the industry to the direct influence of the American fleet.

In addition to the new markets for American products, the American market itself went through an extensive period of expansion throughout the nineteenth century. The economic historian, Stuart Bruchey, defines economic growth “as a sustained increase in real output per capita—an increase that results from rising inputs of the productive factors of land, labor, and capital, and of growth in the efficiency with which they are used.”<sup>33</sup> Few American economic historians would argue that the United States did not experience sustained economic growth from 1810 to 1860. Most American historians who focus on this period of economic development concentrate on the developments in agriculture and western expansion. This expansion also had profound effects upon the North Atlantic fishing industry. First, the general population increase, and the specific growth in the urban population of the Northeast, created within the borders of the United States one of

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George the Fourth,” April 4, 1822, p. 206.

<sup>32</sup> *St. Christopher Gazette*; and *Caribbean Courier*, as cited in the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *The Journal of the Assembly*, “General Reports,” April 5, 1822.

<sup>33</sup> Stuart Bruchey, *Growth of the Modern American Economy* (NY: Dodd Mead, 1975), p. xi.



the world's largest markets for cheap food supplies, primarily fish. Second, the commercialization of American society and industry resulted in the concentration of capital and power in the Northeast, thereby giving the business leaders of the fishing industry the capital to invest in the fishing industry and to influence the government in favor of their agenda.

The urbanization of American society created a large working population that depended on other industries for food. From 1790 to 1860 the total population of the United States increased from just under 4 million to 31 million.<sup>34</sup> While a large portion of this population growth occurred due to the development of western agriculture, a significant percentage was the result of the developing urban communities. Cities that boasted a population of eight thousand or more rose from six in 1800 to forty-four in 1840. In 1790 fewer than 2,500 people lived in the urban areas, constituting only five percent of the total population. This percentage rose to 10.8 percent in 1840 and to 19.8 percent by 1860.<sup>35</sup>

Similar trends can be seen in the comparison between the agricultural and non-agricultural labor forces. In 1800 over 86 percent of the American population was engaged in agriculture, while the absolute agricultural population continued to rise - from five million to fifteen million - its percentage of the total fell to 63.4 percent in 1840. By 1860 it had dropped to 53.2 percent.<sup>36</sup> While total percentages of the agricultural labor declined, the service industry grew from 16 percent in 1810 to 28 percent in 1840 and the

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<sup>34</sup> Bruchey, *Growth of the Modern American Economy*, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Richard DuBuff, *Accumulation & Power: A Economic History of the United States* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 1989), p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Bruchey, *Growth of the Modern American Economy*, pp. 3, 9, 12, 46.

manufacturing labor force tripled from 3 to 9 percent.<sup>37</sup> The majority of the factory development occurred in the Northeast. In 1816 factories employed 5,000 workers, or approximately one percent of the region's employable labor. By 1840 the number had increased to 100,000. They now accounted for one-seventh of the region's labor force.<sup>38</sup>

Urbanization in the Northeast, the development of western territories through the use of railways, and the development of municipal infrastructure and transportation improvement, all resulted in the concentration of America's capital and power into the hands of a minority of businessmen in the Northeast. They dominated the rail business; over sixty percent of the railroad additions took place in New York or New England. Between 1849 and 1858 the railroad business constituted an average of fifteen percent of the total gross investment, peaking in 1854 with 25 percent.<sup>39</sup>

The New England fishing industries benefited a great deal from these economic developments. The increase in population provided them with a domestic market that was larger than that of any foreign market. American fishing firms no longer need to compete with international duties or tariffs. In addition, the United States Navigation Act of 1817 restricted coastal trade between American ports to American owned and manned vessels. The New England fish merchants now had a protected domestic marketplace with the expansion of a thriving American ports. In the years just after the American Revolution, the West Indies consumed sixty percent of the American-caught fish, but by the 1840s the United States used seventy-five percent of its own catch from

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<sup>37</sup> DuBuff, *Accumulation & Power: A Economic History of the United States*, pp. 14, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Bruchey, *Growth of the Modern American Economy*, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> DuBuff, *Accumulation & Power: A Economic History of the United States*, pp. 19-20.

the North Atlantic.<sup>40</sup> Nova Scotian firms were all well aware of the wealth to be had in the American market but were unable to enter this market at the same advantages as the domestic fleet of the United States.<sup>41</sup>

The concentration of capital in the northeastern states enabled the fishing firms to invest a large amount of capital into their business. This investment often came in the form of new ship designs that could meet the needs of the growing industry. The evolution of ship design has been extensively examined by maritime architectural historian Howard Chapelle.<sup>42</sup> By using his professional experience as a ship designer, Chapelle created hundreds of line drawings of virtually every fishing vessel launched in New England and Atlantic Canada between 1790 and 1935. Through his research, Chapelle shows the gradual increase in ship size from 1790 to 1814. During this period ships rose from an average of twenty-two to twenty-five tons, measuring thirty-six to thirty-eight feet on deck, to well over thirty tons and measuring over forty feet on deck.<sup>43</sup>

This evolution pales in comparison with the dramatic developments that occurred in the Essex's shipbuilding industry after 1830. The expansion of the American fishing industry required larger vessels that could sail to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence or the Grand Banks off of Newfoundland, carrying more fish to meet the growing demands in the United States.<sup>44</sup> These larger ships, known as clipper pinkies, measured over forty-eight

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<sup>40</sup> Roger F. Duncan, *Coastal Maine: A Maritime History* (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 1992), pp. 410-413.

<sup>41</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia *The Journal of the Assembly*, 1848, "Appendix 89," p. 70, and 1850, "Appendix 77," p. 230.

<sup>42</sup> Howard I. Chapelle, *The American Fishing Schooners, 1825-1935* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973).

<sup>43</sup> Chapelle, *The American Fishing Schooners*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>44</sup> Chapelle, *The American Fishing Schooners*, p. 28.

feet on deck and had holds of six to seven feet in depth.<sup>45</sup> Ship size continue to rise with the introduction of “smacks” or “well-boats” that were designed to maintain the freshness of the fish. These vessels often measured well over fifty feet in length and were fitted with better equipment.<sup>46</sup>

The introduction of ice into the trade after the 1830s brought about another phase in sailing fishing vessels design. The new sharpshooters, a schooner with a clipped bow very similar to the famous clipper ships, grew in length and carrying capacity. The overall length and hull depth - over sixty feet long and seven to eight feet deep - gave the vessels increased carrying space, while their sleek design - with an average width from seventeen to eighteen feet - made them stable and fast. Vessel construction increased in speed with the concentration of capital and supplies; in some cases a vessel could be completed within a month. Some shipyards could maintain this pace for over two years.<sup>47</sup> Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, fishing vessels continued to increase in size. The wider vessels of this later period, often over twenty feet in beam width, gave the ships the ability to carry larger canvas and stay at full sail even in rough weather conditions.<sup>48</sup>

As a result of extensive capital investment, vessel architecture in Massachusetts developed extensively in only a few short years. Contrary to this trend, Atlantic Canadian vessel construction fell well behind. Chapelle’s research has shown that Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Maine continued to use the smaller and

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<sup>45</sup> Chapelle, *The American Fishing Schooners*, pp. 37-51.

<sup>46</sup> Chapelle, *The American Fishing Schooners*, pp. 58-63, 74.

<sup>47</sup> Chapelle, *The American Fishing Schooners*, p. 78.

<sup>48</sup> Chapelle, *The American Fishing Schooners*, pp. 64-75, 97.

slower pinkies well into the 1850s.<sup>49</sup> The vast superiority of vessel design and outfitting in Massachusetts was remarked upon by many contemporary observers. A reliable source would be the Royal Navy officers who patrolled the fishing waters off the Atlantic provinces. These men were well versed in naval architecture and showed no bias towards local design and construction abilities. After spending several seasons on the fishing grounds these officers had close access to a wide variety of vessels by the continual boarding and inspection of those crafts. One such officer, Captain James Daley, observed the following:

The American fishermen deserve a great deal of praise. Their vessels are of the very best description, beautifully rigged, and sail remarkably fast; well found in every particular, and carry large crews, a great many of whom are men from the provinces. The difference between the American and English vessels is very great, for all the English vessels in the Gulf of St. Lawrence the past fall, there were only four or five could in any way compete with the American. In fact I was surprised to see vessels of such an inferior description remain in the Gulf so late in the season; it is generally a very boisterous place in the months of October and November, usually so the past fall, and I am surprised that more fatal results have not been the consequence. I can scarcely convey to you a description of most of the English vessels; they are of the worst models, badly masted, poorly rigged, wretchedly found in sail and rigging, and about half manned.<sup>50</sup>

Improved ship design was the result of increased profits, but it also facilitated the further development of this industry. It was thus both a cause and result of intensive capital investment and improved market orientation. The concentration of wealth in the Northeast also gave southern New England merchants increased power in governmental

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<sup>49</sup> Chapelle, *The American Fishing Schooners*, pp. 27, 51

<sup>50</sup> House of the Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Report of Captain James Daley," January 14, 1853. Appendix 4, p. 118.

affairs. This power ensured that the federal government would continue to support the fisheries through the use of bounties on both fish and ships.

The philosophy of free trade and limited governmental intervention that developed in the British Empire had dramatic effects on Nova Scotia's fishing industry. Not only did the Nova Scotians lose a protected market in the West Indies, but the lack of British governmental support from the Crown limited the investment potential of Nova Scotia's fishing fleet. The British administrators were not prepared to offer Nova Scotia or her fishing merchants bounties or bonds to encourage the industry. Similarly, following the theories of free trade to its logical conclusion, the British government refused to support a large naval fleet in order to protect the domestic waters of the British North American colonies. Between 1830 and 1854, the American fleet took advantage of this opening and thoroughly exploited Nova Scotia's inland waters and bays.

Meanwhile, the American government set out an aggressive plan to encourage the expansion of the fishing industry. Along with several industries in the United States, such as agriculture, the fur trade, and railroad construction, the New England fishing firms received handsome bounties based upon their total catch and the size of their vessel. In southern New England, business leaders took advantage of this bounty system and began to construct several large fishing vessels. The result was a concentration of capital and power into a few large corporations within the fishing industry. These corporations were able to invest large sums of money in the industry and further their

domination of the fishing grounds at the expense of the more modest firms of northern New England and the Atlantic colonies.<sup>51</sup>

On July 4, 1789, the first of several dozen acts by the American government passed which created a duty on the importation of salt and a bounty of the exportation of fish. Several acts followed, adjusting the amounts to be awarded and the requirements to be met. The Tonnage Act of February 18, 1792, replaced the bounty on exported fish with a bounty based on the tonnage of the vessel used. This act redirected the financial award from the hands of the exporter or merchant into the hands of the vessel owner or fishermen. These salt and fishing bounties were repealed on March 7, 1803, under the direction of then President Thomas Jefferson. With the outbreak of war, the duty on salt and the fishing bounties were reestablished on July 29, 1813. In order to assist in the paying of war debts the salt bounty stayed on the books as a result of the Bounty Act of February 9, 1816. The last major adjustment to the legislation was the Bounty Act of March 3, 1819. This legislation required that any vessel that received government subsidies maintain a three-quarters American crew. After this legislative activity the fishing bounties and the salt duty remained unchanged and unchallenged until the tariff debates of the late 1830s and 1840s.<sup>52</sup>

These debates took place in the context of a larger controversy regarding the role of the national government in economic development. Those who supported the national government's active role in maritime commerce in order to preserve national trade - and

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<sup>51</sup> Wayne O'Leary, *Maine Sea Fisheries: The Rise and Fall of a Native Industry* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1996), pp. 41-71.

<sup>52</sup> Select Committee on the Origins of Fishing Bounties and Allowances, *Majority Report*. 26th Congress, 1st Session, 1840. Senate Document 368, pp. 4-25. See also O'Leary, *Maine Sea Fisheries: The Rise and Fall of a Native Industry*, pp. 41-77.

therefore national power - often also supported the fishing bounties. Those who believed America's economic destiny was in agriculture and not foreign trade opposed national subsidies to any maritime industry including the fisheries. Not surprising, Northern politicians typically fell into the former camp, while Southern delegates favored the latter philosophy.<sup>53</sup>

The opponents of the bounty directly linked this government grant to the duties imposed upon the importation of salt. In referring to the Act of July 8, 1792, the majority of the Committee on the Origins and Character of the Fishing Bounties and Allowances stated the following:

This act is as explicit as human language can make it, in showing the allowances to the fishing vessels, as well as, the bounties to pickled fish and exported beef and port, to be founded upon the salt duty; rising with it as a matter of course, without any recommendation to that effect. Its limited duration to two years shows that encouragement to training of mariners was not even thought of. Two years would hardly supply a nation of mariners.<sup>54</sup>

The majority of the committee continued to show that the fishing bounty was not related in any way to a desire to support the fishermen exclusively nor was it an attempt to raise a trained body of seamen for the naval defense of the nation. In examining the earlier attempts to repeal the duty on salt, and with it the bounties awarded to the fishing industry, the committee noted that the failure to repeal the legislation was not based on the encouragement of the fisheries but upon the fiscal needs of the government:

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<sup>53</sup> For further information on regional economic interests see Benjamin W. LaBaree, *America and the Sea: A Maritime History* (Mystic, CT: Mystic Seaport Publications, 1998), pp. 387, 536, 541; Robert G. Albion, *The Rise of the New York Port*; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secession at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>54</sup> Select Committee on the Origins of Fishing Bounties and Allowances, *Majority Report* 26th Congress 1st Session, 1840. Senate Document 368, p. 14.



the repeal (of the salt duty) was considered, purely and simply, as a question of revenue; not a word being discussed by which any human being dissented from the repeal on account of keeping up the fishing bounties and allowances, or took them into consideration of the question in any shape or way whatsoever.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, as the salt duty declined, and would shortly be repealed, so should the fishing bounties be repealed.

In addition, the opponents argued that the fish bounties and vessel allowances went against the nature of American industry, and that this legislation interfered with the self-promotion and individual will that was necessary for an industry to succeed in a capitalistic society that endorsed free enterprise. The legislation, opponents argued, resulted in “a depression of energy, induced by the protection of government.” They maintained the following:

if our fishermen desire to obtain control of the home market, they must do it by increased skill and by making a better use of all natural advantages than they ever made before-not by appeals to Congress for legislative aid...Let the bounty be repealed; let these Fishermen be compelled to depend upon their own energies like other people, and their pursuit will be successful enough, and probably realize some of the advantages which they claim for it. But experience of every nation shows that the tendency of legislation protection is to depress individual exertion, and render unprofitable that which otherwise might be profitable...The friends of free trade can no longer in good faith sustain the bounty system.<sup>56</sup>

The authors, however, made no such similar statement in regards to the land bounties offered to large railroad firms throughout the West.

Other opponents of the fishing bounties attacked the system based upon accusations of fraud and misuse. J. Ross Browne, from the Department of the Treasury,

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<sup>55</sup> *Majority Report 26th Congress 1st Session*, 1840, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> US Department of the Treasury, *Report on the Bounty Allowances to Fishing Vessels*. By J. Ross Browne, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, Nov. 25, 1853. Senate Document 3, pp. 96-99.

accused fishing boat captains from Eastport to New Bedford of dishonesty in their record keepings, which were the basis for the government bonds: “It is well known to officers of the customs that but little importance is attached to an oath by this class of men...such frauds are of frequent occurrence.” Nor was this fraud limited to the captains or even the crew of the vessels. Browne continued,

The shores are settled chiefly by fishermen; and the community is bound together by a common interest. It is alleged that during the season when halibut and other fresh fish are in demand, vessels, under cod fishery licenses, run in and dispose of their fish, or anchor about the shore and carry on mackerel fishing, without danger of discovery. The crews are usually interested in the results, or ignorant of the law; and the community, to whom such practices are familiar, consider it fair and proper to take advantage of the government, and dishonorable to become informers.<sup>57</sup>

Supporters of the fishing bounties argued that the bounties and allowances were not strictly related to the duties on salt. Instead, John Davis, the author of the committee’s *Minority Report*, argued that it was more important to understand the spirit of the law and not just the letter of the law. The intent was to aid and encourage the development of the fisheries. That, Davis argued, was precisely why the fishing bounties had always been intended to be larger than the duties the fishermen paid on salt. The extra funds assisted the fishing community in the purchasing of other necessary commodities, such as shipbuilding materials, that, in 1840 still required the payment of duties. To repeal the bounties simply based on the reduction of salt duties would thus violate the spirit of the legislation.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> US Department of the Treasury, *Report on the Bounty Allowances to Fishing Vessels*. By J. Ross Browne, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, Nov. 25, 1853. Senate Document 3, pp. 88-89.

<sup>58</sup> Select Committee on the Origins of Fishing Bounties and Allowances, *Minority Report*. By John Davis. 26th Congress, 1st Session, 1840, Senate Document 368. p. 61.

In addition, the *Minority Report* drew reference to the Act of February 18, 1792, which based the bounty on the size and condition of the vessel used. As John Davis argued, this had no reference to the salt used and instead rewarded individuals for maintaining larger and more efficient vessels which could become useful in times of war.<sup>59</sup> The fishing industry's ability to provide for the defense of the nation - in either the construction and maintenance of larger vessels or in the training of the next generation of seamen - played a major role in the defense of the fishing bounties. Davis used the Bounty Act of March 3, 1819, which required a majority American crew, to argue the point that authors of the legislation had intended the act to support a nursery of American seamen, and therefore should not be repealed simply based on a reduction of a salt duty.<sup>60</sup>

Those supporting the bounty also noted the democratic nature of the legislation. According to their interpretation, by providing five-eighths of the bounty to the crew and only three-eighths to the owners, the bounty was designed to support fishermen and not the owners or merchants who were most directly affected by the reduction of the salt duties. Davis claimed,

This, obviously is designed to allure fishermen into the business, and to make them exert themselves in it, as the share of each depends on his own success; and this interest in the voyage is one of the greatest elements of prosperity in the fisheries. If the bounty was a drawback (for the salt duties) and nothing more, its amount would be ascertained and paid to the owners like other exporters; and would be allowed only on fish exported, or, at most, upon the salt used.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Minority Report*. By John Davis. 26th Congress, 1st Session, 1840, p. 61.

<sup>60</sup> *Minority Report*. By John Davis. 26th Congress, 1st Session, 1840, p. 63.

<sup>61</sup> *Minority Report*. By John Davis. 26th Congress, 1st Session, 1840, p. 63.

Relying heavily on the democratic nature of the fishing bounty system, these supporters believed that the repeal of the bounties would have tremendous ill effects upon the equality of the fisheries and the success of free enterprise throughout the entire economy. John Williams of Kittery, Maine wrote:

The bounty now paid is the sole means which many have to procure their outfits for the voyage; and that, if it be taken away, all such persons will have to abandon the business, which will thereby fall into fewer hands, and will, in fact, be monopolized by capitalists; the inevitable result of which will be a vast reduction in the quantity of fish taken, and a corresponding augmentation in the price, which will thereby drive our fish from foreign markets, when they can now barely sustain a competition with the British exporters of the same.<sup>62</sup>

Unlike other industries, the supporters of the fishing bounties argued, the fishery of the North Atlantic was such an unstable industry that only the wealthiest corporations in the business could sustain continual years of depressed results without the government bounties. Therefore the bounty was necessary to keep the industry democratic and open to those with large savings of capital. Congressman John Anderson from Massachusetts would later argue that, “The profits from the business are so uncertain, both from the scarcity of the fish and low prices, that unless they had the bounty to rely upon, it would, as a business, be abandoned.”<sup>63</sup>

Regionalism played a key role during these debates in the Senate. When Senator Thomas Benton of Missouri proposed a bill for the repeal of the salt duty and with it the repeal of the fishing bounties, Senator Robert Williams of Maine quickly responded. Williams was not opposed to the repeal of the salt duty; in fact he sought a complete

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<sup>62</sup> Petition from John Williams and 87 Others from Kittery, February 14, 1839, as quoted in Select Committee on the Origins of Fishing Bounties and Allowances, *Minority Report*. By John Davis. 26th Congress, 1st Session, 1840. Senate Document 368, p. 64.

<sup>63</sup> Committee on Finance, *Documents in Relation To the Bounties Allowed to Vessels Employed in the Fisheries*. By John Anderson, 26th Congress, 2nd Session. Senate Document 148.

renovation of the government's tariff policy and taxes on other articles that were, as he pointed out, "more oppressive and more unequal in its operation upon the different portions of the Union, than is the tax proposed to be repealed by this bill."<sup>64</sup> Senator Williams was, however, very concerned as to the reason why the salt duty should be examined independent of the other duties. It was Williams's opinion that the true motivation behind Senator Benton's proposal was not the fishing duty, but the repeal of the entire fishing bounty system.

Senator Williams drew upon Benton's obvious regional interest when he confronted the proposal, arguing that Benton had no real reason to request the repeal of the salt duty because, as a Westerner, he and his constituents received domestically manufactured salt at a reduced price. Benton's bill, claimed Williams, "provides simply for the repeal of the salt duty and fishing bounty, for the benefit of his constituents, and thereby taking from mine the only item in your whole legislation which goes, in any degree, to compensate my section of the country for the most grievous and unequal operation of the present tariff."<sup>65</sup>

As a Maine representative, and a spokesman for the entire North Atlantic fishing industry, Williams claimed to be representing the laborers and working poor of the East who did not have the luxuries of the wealthy West. Williams claimed that Benton's voting record, which favored huge land grants to railroads, clearly placed Benton in favor of the rich corporate elite of American society. Williams stated:

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<sup>64</sup> Speech of Hon. R. Williams of Maine, In Senate, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, January 29, 1839. *The Congressional Globe*, p. 73.

<sup>65</sup> Speech of Hon. R. Williams of Maine, In Senate, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, January 29, 1839. *The Congressional Globe*, p. 73.

But to test this objection by the acts of the honorable Senator, I would ask how he can contend that the bounty to fishing vessels is unconstitutional when he advocates and votes for bills to grant lands in aid of the construction of canals and railroads; to authorize States and incorporated companies to import railroad iron free of duty; and to authorize a drawback of duties upon such iron upon proof that it has been used in construction of railroads? Is there any principle upon which such gratuities to State and incorporated companies can be defended, which would not apply with more justice and propriety to the bounty to poor fishermen? The Senator surely will not be willing to be resented as advocating and voting gratuities to incorporated companies which he would deny poor individuals.<sup>66</sup>

Thus Williams presented himself as the representative of the humble fishermen. He characterized them as “a hardy, industrious, and adventurous population” who “resort to the grand banks which never stop payment” to provide food for the masses.<sup>67</sup>

By the late 1850s, large-scale merchants in Boston controlled the vast majority of the capital invested in the North Atlantic. The Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 ensured that foreign exports were routed to Boston. This perpetuated New England’s control of the industry. These large-scale firms did not require the government bounty system and no longer actively lobbied for their continuation. By 1857 the salt duty and the fishing bounty came under re-evaluation and were finally repealed in 1866. By 1866 the bounty no longer received support from the politicians of southern New England.

The bounty had its most dramatic effect on the newly emerged fishing firms by providing them with the badly needed initial capital. The bounty could thus be used to revamp an old vessel or as a down payment for a new and larger schooner. The larger firms had no real need for the bounty because they had the capital to sustain temporary

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<sup>66</sup> Speech of Hon. R. Williams of Maine, In Senate, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, January 29, 1839. *The Congressional Globe*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>67</sup> Speech of Hon. R. Williams of Maine, In Senate, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, January 29, 1839. *The Congressional Globe*, pp. 73-74.

depressions in production. These large firms would just as soon see these bounties eliminated because the money would be divided among the crew and not be placed directly into the merchants account. Thus, as historian Wayne O'Leary has stated, "when the large fishing capitalist turned against the bounty, the last hope of retaining it disappeared. The hard reality for small entrepreneurs and working fishermen was that by 1866 the fish merchants of Boston, Gloucester, Newburyport, and even Portland had a vested interest in not opposing repeal."<sup>68</sup> Thus industrial capitalism successfully captured the New England fishing industry by preventing the development of any small business competition.

Fishing bounties and vessel tonnage allowances also played a role in the governmental debates in Nova Scotia. However, unlike the debates in the United States, those in favor of the bounties struggled to have them introduced for extended periods of time. The debates regarding the size, type, and method of allotting bounties to the fishing community cannot be viewed as isolated political discourse. Instead, these bounties were part of a larger constitutional debate between the elected assembly and the appointed executive council. The fishing bounties were only one aspect of a changing political system in Nova Scotia during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

With the arrival of the New England Loyalists after the American Revolutionary War a new era in Nova Scotian politics began. Constitutional debate between the executive council and the elected assembly dominated political dialogue for much of the

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<sup>68</sup> O'Leary, *The Maine Sea Fisheries, The Rise and fall of a Native Industry*, pp. 75-77. See also Speech of Hon. Timothy Davis of Massachusetts, In the House of Representatives, 34th Congress, 3rd Session, February 10, 1857, *The Congressional Globe*, pp. 218-222, and Speech of Hon. N. Abbott of Maine, in the House of Representatives, 35th Congress, 2nd Session, February 10, 1859, *The Congressional Globe*, pp. 102-104.

nineteenth century. The road to responsible government began with these Loyalists, and the fishery's issues became mixed in with a host of seemingly unrelated issues including education, religion, and road construction. At the heart of these and other debates was the issue of fund allotment and which branch of government would control the treasury: the appointed councilmen or the elected assembly.<sup>69</sup>

Although the first general assembly formed in Nova Scotia in 1758 it did not wield much influence until it increased its representative body.<sup>70</sup> The first massive migration from New England to Nova Scotia began with the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which closed the regions west of the Appalachian Mountain range to European settlement.<sup>71</sup> During the course of the American Revolution it has been estimated that 30,000 Loyalists arrived in Nova Scotia, most of whom had left New England.<sup>72</sup> With their arrival a host of conflicts and affairs developed in Nova Scotia's political system. Along with the appointment of judges, the construction of colleges, and the control of money bills, the allotment of bounties for the fishing industry became a major debate between the traditional seat of power in the executive council and the growing size and influence of an elected assembly.

Although the debates regarding the fishing bounties began in 1806-1807, the profitable war years quieted the political unrest only to be reawakened with the post-war depression in 1817.<sup>73</sup> The drop in trade with the British West Indies in 1820 heightened the demand for governmental support. Both the council and the assembly agreed that the

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<sup>69</sup> Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, pp. 19-67.

<sup>70</sup> Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, p. 23.

<sup>71</sup> Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, p. 43.

<sup>73</sup> Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, p. 83.



fishing industry needed assistance. The question was in what manner would the assistance be given. The assembly called for a bounty to be allotted directly to the fishermen upon landing, based on the size of their catch. The council, fearful of a poor quality of fish and the need to strengthen international competition, argued for a bounty to be awarded to merchants for the export of quality fish to profitable markets in the West Indies, South America, Europe, and the Mediterranean markets.<sup>74</sup> Neither the council nor the assembly were willing to pass the other's proposals for fear of losing influence in the administration of the government and the control of the financing. In the end, no successful bounty would be awarded. The fishing bounties of Nova Scotia became a casualty of political debate. With the introduction of Responsible Government in 1848, the assembly gained control of the government and the bounty system was brought into effect.<sup>75</sup>

The Committee on the Subject of the Fisheries of the Province initiated much of the dialogue concerning the bounties that were designed to encourage the industry. In 1821, Representative Graffe declared that the committee was "satisfied that this valuable branch of Trade requires some additional encouragement and protection."<sup>76</sup> This protection was not intended for the fishermen but instead for the merchants who, due to the heavy duties on fishermen's salt, were losing their clients to the ports of New Brunswick where no such duty existed. As Graffe observed, the relatively inexpensive

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<sup>74</sup> Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, pp. 90, 93.

<sup>75</sup> Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, p. 131.

<sup>76</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *The Journal of the Assembly*, "Report of the Committee on the Subject of the Fisheries of the Province," February 24, 1824, p. 106.

provisions in New Brunswick “induced a large portion of the Fishermen in the Western part of this Province (Nova Scotia) to go to the Port of St. John.”<sup>77</sup>

In this way, similar to the American debate, the request for a fishing bounty had a direct relationship with the price of salt. In the opinion of the committee, such a bounty “would induce the Fishermen, in the Western part of the Province to procure their supplies from hence, and in return bring their Fish to the Port of Halifax, instead of shipping them to New Brunswick.”<sup>78</sup> This would not lessen the burdens on the fishermen, or otherwise improve their status, because they still had to purchase salt at the same price that they had been offered in New Brunswick. It would only redirect their purchases and other economic ties from merchants in New Brunswick to Nova Scotia. This policy, therefore, should not be interpreted as an aid to the fishermen, but as a supportive measure to the merchants of Nova Scotia.

Although nothing came of these recommendations immediately, a bill narrowly passed on March 17, 1823. It issued a bounty based on vessel tonnage and the exportation of marketable codfish from the province, provided it was carried in vessels of British ownership.<sup>79</sup> Subsequently, on March 10, 1824, Brenton Haliburton and the committee recommended a bounty based on the use of salt. It passed by a slim majority

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<sup>77</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *The Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee on the Subject of the Fisheries of the Province,” February 24, 1824, p. 107.

<sup>78</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *The Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee on the Subject of the Fisheries of the Province,” February 24, 1824, p. 107.

<sup>79</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Proceedings,” March 17, 182, pp. 261-262.

of fifteen to thirteen. These bounties were only designed to satisfy the immediate needs of the industry and therefore did not last long.<sup>80</sup>

Within a year the bounty on vessel tonnage had lapsed and New Brunswick had authorized a similar bounty which, according the Lawrence Harthshore, had the “effect of inducing very many of our fishermen to resort thither for their supplies, and will withdraw from this country a large portion of its staple export.”<sup>81</sup> While the recommendation presented by Harthshore was debated for some time, it failed on March 8, 1826. This left the fishing industry with no governmental support.<sup>82</sup>

A year later a similar vessel allowance was passed with the accompaniment of a one shilling bounty for every quintal of exported codfish to European and South American markets, provided they were carried from ports in Nova Scotia and aboard Nova Scotian vessels.<sup>83</sup> The new committee chair, James Boyle Uniacke, who had recently converted to the reform movement, believed that although the design to increase the exportation of “Merchantable Fish” had “been fully realized,” the restrictions as to the means and whereabouts of this exportation would, in the end, ruin any progress made in that industry. The restrictions were, therefore, in “direct opposition to the Spirit of the Law.” The committee recommended opening this trade to ports otherwise not mentioned in the previous bill, and allowing the trade to be carried out by

Vessels of all Nations and Markets, because, so far from giving to the Fisherman an extensive market and an increased demand for the Article of

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<sup>80</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Proceedings,” March 10, 1824, p. 406.

<sup>81</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee on the subject of the Fisheries of the Province, presented by Mr. Harthshore, Proceedings,” April 2, 1825, p. 512.

<sup>82</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Proceedings,” March 8, 1826, p. 594

<sup>83</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee on the subject of the Fisheries of the Province, presented by Mr. Fairbanks, Proceedings,” March 16, 1827, pp. 210-211.

his Industry, it (the current bill) confines him within a narrow limit, to the enterprise of a few British Vessels engaged in a specific Trade.”<sup>84</sup>

This action appears to be the first legislative attempt made by the House of Assembly to give more advantage to the fishermen rather than the merchants. Since few fishermen actually owned vessels large enough for foreign trade, the act allowed the fishermen to export their products in vessels of other nations or provinces. However, the Executive Council opposed the bill and it did not pass leaving the restrictions in place. Other attempts were made to encourage the fisheries through the use of bounties, but few were able to transcend the debates between the Assembly and the Council. Those that did were rather limited in nature.<sup>85</sup>

The increase of American vessels along the shoreline of Nova Scotia after 1830 further encouraged individuals to seek governmental aid for the fisheries. According to one petition, a bounty was necessary to compete with the Americans who caught mackerel on “the Coast of the Province and Gulf of St. Lawrence.” Without governmental aid the merchants faced a “competition that the fisheries of Nova Scotia cannot withstand.”<sup>86</sup> Armed with such petitions, the committee requested a renewal of the bounties. It reasoned that a

great benefit would result by inducing many of those engaged in the Coasting Trade to return to the occupation they have been trained to, and therefore recommend that a tonnage duty should be allowed on all vessels employed in the catching of Mackerel in deep water, thus offering competition

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<sup>84</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee on the subject of the Fisheries of the Province, presented by Mr. Uniacke, Proceedings,” February 24, 1829, p. 393.

<sup>85</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Proceedings,” April 6, 1833, p. 463; April 1, 1834, p. 647, April 11-12, 1834, p. 648.

<sup>86</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Petition from John Taylor and Others,” Appendix No. 34. 1835; and “Petition No. 22 from Samuel Reynolds and Others.” Appendix No. 31. 1834.

to the Americans in the fishery, and producing a force to aid in checking their lawless practices on our shores.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to supporting the merchants and fishermen of this industry through financial encouragement, several members of the Assembly believed the government was also responsible for supporting the industry by protecting domestic waters from illegal encroachment of foreign fishing vessels, principally those of the United States. Several petitions were sent to the House of Assembly in the 1830s in an attempt to make their political leaders aware that “great losses are annually sustained, in consequence of lawless persons resorting to the fishing stations.”<sup>88</sup> These “persons” were quickly identified as “American Fishermen.”<sup>89</sup> The petitioners called for an immediate response to the “unjustifiable interference of foreigners on Harbours belonging to His Majesty.”<sup>90</sup> This practice, they pointed out, was in direct violation of the Convention of 1818 which outlawed American vessels from engaging in commercial practices or fishing within three miles of the coastline of the province of Nova Scotia.

Local inhabitants and investigators soon recognized that such encroachment depressed the annual catch of the domestic fishing industry. They believed that this “deprive[d] the Inhabitants of a legitimate source of wealth, and transfer to Foreign productions which exclusively belongs to this Country.”<sup>91</sup> The petitioners recognized the

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<sup>87</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee of the Fisheries,” Appendix 62, p. 103.

<sup>88</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Letter to Sir Peregrine Maitland, March 12, 1832, Proceedings,” pp. 306-307.

<sup>89</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Petition of John Taylor and Others, January 12, 1835, Appendix 34.”

<sup>90</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Petition of George Bell and Others, Proceedings, February 18, 1837,” p. 59.

<sup>91</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Proceedings,” March 7, 1837, p. 29.

“serious loss and injuries suffered by British Subjects engaged in our Coast Fisheries by the constant encroachment of American Fishermen”<sup>92</sup> A few years later they would call for the “sending an armed Vessel, for the protection of the Fisheries.”<sup>93</sup>

More was at stake to these merchants than the mere loss of a local staple product. They also feared losing their control over the local marketplace. The initial side-effect of American encroachment was the development of an illegal trade between the local inhabitants of the Atlantic provinces and the American fleet. Nova Scotian fishermen would be able to trade their bait catch - typically herring - to American vessels in exchange for American finished goods, thereby breaking away from the control of the Nova Scotian merchants.

In 1837, in an attempt to develop a working knowledge of the situation, the committee of the fisheries sent out several surveys to prominent merchants with twenty-two questions, most of which dealt with the recent arrival of American vessels to their shores. These surveys provide an insight to the development of governmental policy from the distinct perspective of major Nova Scotian merchants. Judging from the return, it is clear that that these questions were sent to a specific group: the merchant class. No attempt seems to have been made to contact or otherwise consider the opinion of those who violated the laws of trade and commerce. All those questioned were those whose business was threatened by the growing trade with the Americans. In addition, the questions themselves suggest an anti-American stance.

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<sup>92</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Petition of Fishermen of St. Margaret’s Bay, Dover, and Prospect, Proceedings,” February 21, 1837, p. 32.

<sup>93</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Petition of Clement Hubert and Others, Proceedings,” February 27, 1832.

The focus of most of the merchants' responses pertained to the smuggling of American goods for Nova Scotian bait. As Gilbert Tucker stated, "The Americans catch bait, and purchase from the inhabitants on the Shores of the Province; the consequence is, they pursue their Fisheries more successfully in our waters, by getting plenty of fresh bait, without loss of time; the effects are injurious to our Fisheries, the Americans purchasing bait from the Inhabitants many times."<sup>94</sup> Not only did the American fleet prosper from such an arrangement, by receiving fresh bait from locals without losing precious time having to catch it themselves, but Nova Scotia's fleet was hindered because the best local bait was saved for the American fleet.<sup>95</sup> Philip Carten of Liverpool, Nova Scotia recounted many experiences where he witnessed American schooners arriving in harbors, "having onboard, Gin, Boots, and Shoes, Apples, Soap and other articles and opened a regular Trade with the Fishermen and sold the above Goods, taking in return Mackerel." Thus, "until the foreigners were supplied," Carten was unable to barter for the bait for his own voyages. From port to port throughout western Nova Scotia he received the same reply: he "could not get any Mackerel until the Americans were supplied, feeling indignant at the preference given to Foreigners told them they had no business there...stated to the people that they were injuring themselves and robbing the Country of its living."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Letter from Gilbert Tucker, Montegan Clare, March 11, 1837," Appendix No. 75, 1837.

<sup>95</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Letter from Thomas Small," "Letter From James H. F. Randolph," "Letter From John Bass, Liverpool, March 11, 1837," "Letter From D & E Starr & Co., Halifax, Feb. 23, 1837," "Letter From Joseph Allison & Co., New Glasgow, March 11, 1837," "Letter From William McLean, Pictou, March 14, 1837," "Letter From Thomas Tobin, Prospect, March 15, 1837," "Letter From Locke & Churchill, Rugged Island, March 13, 1837," Appendix No. 75, 1837.

<sup>96</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Letter from Philip Carten, Bryer's Island,

In exchange for this bait the American fleet provided the inhabitants with American goods. This practice was also recognized by a Royal Navy officer. One such officer, Captain Miline, stated that, "This illegal trade consists of provisions brought from the United States, in a greater quantity than is sufficient for their own consumption during the season, and therewith secretly carrying on an illicit trade in every port and river."<sup>97</sup> While the friendly relationship that developed between the American fishermen and the local inhabitants fulfilled their mutual needs, it also threatened the standing of the merchant class in Nova Scotia because their economy depended upon supplying the fishermen. They feared that their service would be usurped by the Americans. As one pointed out, "The American Fishermen occasionally bring quantities of Dry Goods and Groceries to the injury of our Commerce and Revenue."<sup>98</sup>

The protection of the honest trader and the provincial revenues was of key concern to these merchants.<sup>99</sup> The development of this illicit trade threatened the "mutual confidence which always to exist between the Merchant and Fishermen of a Country, inducing the former to supply and the latter to make payments." In other words, the arrival of the American fleet threatened to destroy the debt-credit relationship that ensured the merchants' control over the local labor population. The developing system

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March 13, 1837," Appendix No. 75, 1837.

<sup>97</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Report of Captain Alexander Miline, of the HMS Crocodile to Vice Admiral Sir Thomas Harvey, KCB, Commander in Chief, & c.," Appendix No. 62. p. 173.

<sup>98</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Letter from Thomas Small," Appendix No. 75, 1837.

<sup>99</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Letter From Joseph Allison & Co., New Glasgow, March 11, 1837," Appendix No. 75, 1837.



provided the fishermen another viable option to secure individual property and capital.<sup>100</sup>

Thomas Small and other merchants were fearful of the “utter destruction” of their fisheries due to the encroachment of the American fleet, so they pushed for the development of a protective fleet to patrol the waters around the Atlantic provinces.<sup>101</sup>

After continuous requests from Nova Scotia, the British government determined to supply to the province of Nova Scotia with the vessels for this protection and “to enforce a more strict observance of the provisions of the Treaty by American Citizens; and Her Majesty’s Minister in Washington has been instructed to invite the friendly co-operation of the American Government for that purpose.”<sup>102</sup> The number of vessels operating out of Halifax fluctuated from year-to-year as funding and expenses were adjusted.

However, the ships normally numbered between one and three and were seldom effective in catching the swift Gloucester schooners.

The Report of the Committee of the Fisheries appeared in 1841, released a full two years after the initial development of this protective fleet, stated that the limited number of vessels and insufficient funds provided to this policing force had made the whole endeavor a failure. The daunting coast lines of the Atlantic provinces, including thousands of bays, inlets, and harbors, made it impossible for only one or two vessels to cover the area. The committee pushed for added funds and the cooperation with the

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<sup>100</sup> The nature of debt-credit economic relationships, also known as the “truck” system will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>101</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*. “Letter From Thomas Small,” “Letter From Joseph Allison & Co., New Glasgow, March 11, 1837,” “Letter From Gilbert Tucker, Montegan. Clare, March 11, 1837,” “Letter From Locke & Churchill, Rugged Island, March 13, 1837,” “Letter From C. McAlpine,” “Letter From William Crichton, March 20, 1837,” Appendix No. 75, 1837.

<sup>102</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Letter From Lieutenant-General Sir Colin Campbell, November 5, 1838,” Appendix 9, 1838.

authorities in New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island with little results.<sup>103</sup>

Six years later the committee members reported that they had been “impressed with the beneficial results that have arisen from the protection afforded to the Fisheries by the presence of the Revenue Cutters during the past year.” They were also eager to recommend added support and continual funding in order to realize the full potential of their domestic fisheries.<sup>104</sup> Although some success had been awarded to the fleet, the committee continued to push for the “employment of an additional armed vessel to aid the present Government better in protecting this valuable staple of our country.”<sup>105</sup> The new protective fleet was extremely successful in checking the encroachment of the American fleet. Between 1839 and 1851 twenty-seven American schooners were apprehended in the waters around Nova Scotia and confined to the Admiralty Court at Halifax.<sup>106</sup>

By 1852, the British authorities in London began to push the American government to sign a free trade agreement that would include the colonies in British North America. In an attempt to persuade the American officials to set up discussions of the matter, the council in London began to strongly enforce the rules of the Convention of 1818 that prevented American fishermen from operating within three miles of the

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<sup>103</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee on the Fisheries,” Appendix 62, 1841, p. 161. See also “Report of the Committee on the Fisheries,” Appendix 74, 1842, p. 184.

<sup>104</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee on the Fisheries,” Appendix 75, 1847, p. 283. See also “Report of the Committee on the Fisheries” Appendix 89, 1848, p. 70.

<sup>105</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee on the Fisheries,” Appendix 73, 1851, p. 247.

<sup>106</sup> House of the Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Appendix 4,” 1853, pp. 109-110.

coast. This enforcement included a number of Royal Navy warships to patrol the waters.

The sudden appearance of this small fleet in 1852 flushed virtually all of the American fishing schooners from the inlets, bays, and harbors of Nova Scotia. British sailors boarded hundreds of them in search of violations, thereby leaving Nova Scotians free to prosper in a protected market. Many Royal Navy officers informed the Admiralty of their success. As one stated, "The protection this year afforded by the imperial and provincial governments has been, to a great extent, ruinous to the interest of those Americans who have visited our coast."<sup>107</sup>

After the arrival of stronger imperial forces, few naval officers reported many violations. All of the reports from these officers stressed the success of their endeavor and that their mere presence had scattered the American fleet.<sup>108</sup> The Nova Scotian fishing industry experienced some mild growth throughout the years of protection. For example, in 1839 Nova Scotia exported 19,127 barrels of pickled mackerel; in 1846 the colony shipped 82,645 barrels out of their ports.<sup>109</sup>

In 1854 the Reciprocity Treaty introduced free trade in North America. Included in this treaty was a clause allowing American fishing schooners to freely enter the waters that were previously outlawed by the Convention of 1818. The protection of domestic waters had come to an end in 1854 in British North America. With the opening of these

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<sup>107</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Letter of James Laybold, Halifax, November 30, 1852," Appendix No. 4, 1853, p. 122.

<sup>108</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Reports of F. Egerton, Commander of HMS *Basiluk*, November 11, 1853," "Report of A.F. DeHorsey HMSS *Devestation*, October 28, 1853," "Report of Lt. J. Jenkins HMS *Cumberland*, November 8, 1853," "Report of Lt. M.R. Perchell HM Armed Tender *Alice Rogers*, October 23, 1853," "Report of Lt. C.G. Linday HM Armed Tender *Bonito*, August 8, 1853," and "Report of Lt. W.W. Bridges HM Armed Tender *Bonito*, October 23, 1853," Appendix 2, 1854, pp. 20-29.

<sup>109</sup> Innis, *The Cod Fisheries*, pp. 334-342.

waters, American merchants were able to complete their domination of the North Atlantic fishing industry. During this period the Nova Scotian exports of fish products grew, but this export was dominated by American ships. Therefore, Nova Scotia's marine industry became a mere provider and little investment was made in the fishing fleet. Nova Scotians provided labor and commodity, while the real economic growth was restricted to New England fishing firms that provided capital and supplies and usurped the bulk of the region's wealth.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Investment and Work in the North Atlantic Fishery: New England Firms and British North American Labor**

The North Atlantic fishing industries experienced dramatic economic transitions during the early nineteenth century. The shift to free trade in British imperial policy opened Nova Scotia's protected markets in the British West Indies to American influence. The growth in population and the development of urban centers in the northeastern region of the United States provided a new market for New England fishermen; in addition, the concentration of capital in the Northeast gave New England merchants the ability to reinvest large sums of money in the development of a more sophisticated fleet. Nova Scotian fish merchants struggled to convince their political representatives, in both the province and the empire, to financially support the fisheries with a bounty and allowance policy. Meanwhile, the American fish merchants had the advantage of traditional government aid that ensured the continual development and reinvestment potential that propelled their fleet far ahead of that of Nova Scotia. By the 1830s the New England fishery industry had outpaced Nova Scotia's productive capabilities.

The American industry leaders responded to the changing Atlantic market by expanding their production through technological development and the exploitation of new waters and markets in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotian industry leaders responded to these shifts by calling upon their government to protect their interest through the isolation of their work force and commodity, secured markets, and an armed fleet. All of these were intended to preserve the traditional system of mercantilism and colonial preferential

treatment. National policy and economic investment opportunities were not the only avenues affected by the transition in global commerce. These trends also affected the way people worked and how they were rewarded for their work in the North Atlantic fishing industry.

Merchants used two very different methods to pay their laborers in the North Atlantic fisheries during the nineteenth century. The first was a system based on a debt-credit relationship that tied merchants and fishermen together, often referred to by historians and economists as either truck or clientage. The second was the use of currency or wage labor based on time or production. The latter relied on the existence of a large amount of cash and a substantial local labor force, and therefore could only be utilized by those industries that existed in a major metropole, such as Massachusetts. Conversely, the truck system was most successfully used in a peripheral society with limited capital and a small labor force, such as Nova Scotia. The arrival of an American fleet that practiced wage labor presented significant problems to the merchants of Nova Scotia because it threatened the economic bond between the employers and the workers, and therefore their socio-economic control over the labor force by presenting the fishermen with another viable option. For this reason the merchants of Nova Scotia continued to rely on the truck system in opposition to the introduction of American wages.

The truck system had been utilized by virtually every participant in the North Atlantic fisheries at some point in time. When a resident fishery was first established in North America it had neither the capital nor the labor force to compete with migratory European-based firms. In addition the immediate presence of a large amount of cheap

land made it difficult for early American fish merchants to retain their labor force. In order to prevent a larger migration to the agrarian section these merchants needed to develop a system whereby their laborers would be tied to them in some way. In addition, they needed to reduce the risk of fishing voyages and limit their capital investment in that industry because of the shortage of currency available in the colonies. The answer to these needs was the truck system.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of extending capital to be invested in the industry, merchants extended credit to fishermen. The fishermen could use this credit to purchase the food and tools necessary for the voyage. This not only limited the amount of raw capital that each merchant needed for the industry, but it also answered the need of the fishermen who had no capital to invest. The fishermen was also guaranteed a continual supply of necessities throughout the winter. In return the fishermen would supply the merchant with their catch, which would be posted to the credit at an inflated rate. As a result, the merchant could be guaranteed that he would receive something for his investment and not fear that a competitor would take the product, thereby reducing the financial risk of the voyage. Finally, the fishermen would be tied to the merchant by debt. Annual catches would seldom be enough to repay a fisherman's total credit. This prevented most fishermen from migrating to another industry. Many historians, such as Daniel Vickers, consider this system to be the building blocks upon which the resident fisheries of the North Atlantic would develop. As Vickers argues:

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<sup>1</sup> Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 86-100.

The fishery succeeded in New England only because merchants and fishermen were able to minimize the extraordinary risks of doing business in a frontier world. The vast geographic network of the fishing trade, the scarcity of capital and labor in the new colony, and the powerful competition from Newfoundland in the open markets of Europe and the West Indies created unusual problems, which in the first decade of settlement New England had failed to resolve. By combining in tighter relations of clientage during the 1640s and 1650s, local New England merchants and immigrants West County fishermen managed to strike a productive if unequal compromise.<sup>2</sup>

This form of labor discipline depended on the peripheral status of the region in which it operated. If there was a presence of capital, competition among fish merchants, or other options for employment, then the system would deconstruct. As Daniel Vickers has shown through his research, all of these factors would occur in New England by the later years of the eighteenth century. Thus the fishing industry abandoned this form of securing a captive labor force and replaced it with a wage incentive workforce.

According to Vickers,

as capital and labor accumulated in the colonial seaport, merchants discovered that they could recruit fishing hands without the expense of financing them on liberal credit terms; fishermen found that they could obtain provisioning without pledging their catch in advance; and the patron-client relations that had first organized the industry withered.<sup>3</sup>

Industrial capitalism emerged in the New England fisheries. Vessel owners no longer sailed on the voyages; a gulf developed between workers and managers, and payment came in the form of currency rather than credit. These trends can be detected by examining the records of nineteenth-century New England fish merchants.

Between 1815 and 1829 Benjamin Knight recorded 130 separate entries in his account book for the fishing schooner *Madison*. Some important revelations can be

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<sup>2</sup> Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, p. 144.



made when a statistical analysis is made of these accounts. First, although Benjamin Knight's son, William Knight, received credit for voyages to the fishing banks, nowhere in the log does Benjamin Knight's own name appear as a participant of any voyage. This suggests that the owner of the schooner and manager of this firm did not go to sea, and thereby endorses the idea of a separation of the labor and managerial classes that was common in industrial organizations.<sup>4</sup>

An analysis of the records also suggest that those working for Knight's firm maintained a positive balance on their accounts. Among the 130 entries, the average pay per voyage was \$103.87. Throughout the year the firm extended credit to a majority of fishermen who accrued on average \$83.43 worth of debt in the course of one fishing season. This left on average \$18.99 in cash to be collected at the end of the season. At first glance, this might be seen as a debit-credit based relationship similar to that of a truck system. This, however, is a false assumption. A truck system works if, and only if, the company is able to keep the clients in debt year after year, thereby preventing them from moving to another firm or industry. Of the total accounts only eighteen, or 13.8% of the total, were left unbalanced. In addition, four accounts had negative balances that were paid in cash by the fishermen, at an average of \$11.28. These figures mean that over 83% of the accounts had positive balances; moreover, nearly 87% were balanced at the end of only one season.

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<sup>4</sup> *William and Benjamin Knight, Account Books, 1767-1781, 1788-1833*, 3 Vols. Essex Institute, Salem, MA. Volume 3, pp. 130-240. Reel 6 of Daniel Vickers, ed., *Primary Sources in the History of the North Atlantic Codfishery, 1658-1833* (Salem, Mass.: Essex Institute in Cooperation with the Maritime Archives, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland, 1975).

Therefore, only 18 of the 130 accounts were left dependent upon the firm, at least 2 of which were identified as belonging to shoremen and not fishermen. In addition, the majority of these unbalanced accounts were in groups. This suggests that if three or more individuals from one cruise had unbalanced accounts than it was the result of a poor trip, and not a conscious intent by the merchant to leave these men indebted and therefore tied to the firm.

In the traditional truck systems, fishermen and their families were also dependent upon the merchants for food and supplies. Out of the average debt of \$83.43, approximately \$26.69 of it was received in cash advances throughout the season. Typically these advances came in five, ten, or fifteen dollar increments. This indicates that the average fishermen only received \$56.74 of merchandise on their credit. In fact, twenty-one fishermen had received more cash throughout the year than they did merchandise, and in the 1826-1827 season alone, six of the twenty-one fishermen received no merchandise at all. These figures would suggest that neither the fishermen nor his family depended upon the firm for which he worked for their daily supplies.

These accounts indicate that Benjamin Knight's firm did not operate on a truck system. The vast majority of fishermen had positive balances at the end of the season, and only a few carried any debt over to the following year. These fishermen were debt free and economically independent; thus they had the ability to seek other employment opportunities. In all, only eighteen fishermen appear in the ledger for more than one season; two were members of the Knight family. This indicates a certain amount of mobility among these fishermen. In the British colonies of Atlantic North

America the workers exchanged this freedom of movement for a secure source of supplies and market for fish.

Many historians, including Rosemary Ommer and Sean Cadigan, have successfully shown that the fishing firms in Atlantic Canada still relied heavily on the debt-credit bond between the merchants and laborers. Similar to what Ommer has discovered on the Gaspé Peninsula, Nova Scotian merchants used the truck system as a tool, “whereby merchant capital delegated the power of production.”<sup>5</sup> According to Gilbert Tucker, this method restricted the region’s development;

our fishing Vessels are owned by poor men, they get their out-fits on credit, at the highest possible rate-their hands are generally hired, his own spirits are dulled from the knowledge of the disadvantageous circumstances under which he has to labour, his hands have the same feelings, in some measure, with the additional one, of the uncertainty of being paid, thence their want of energy and the unprofitableness of our fishing.<sup>6</sup>

The truck system would only remain in operation as long as the labor force was tied to the managerial class through debt. The arrival of new competitors who offered the laborers better products and better prices threatened the merchants’ control over their fishermen. Not surprisingly, many merchants, like those at the D&E Starr Company, wanted to stop this practice;

Such a traffic deprived the Revenue of a large amount of Duty, the Province of a valuable export, and the Merchant, who has supplied those people with their out-fits, of his payment-the earnings of the Fishermen are squandered in useless traffic, his credit destroyed, and his time completely lost to the Country; whereas if a stop was put to their trade in our Harbours, a much greater source

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<sup>5</sup> Rosemary Ommer, ed., *Merchant Credit and Labour Strategies in Historical Perspective* (Fredericton, NB: Acadiensis Press, 1990), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Letter from Gilbert Tucker, Montegan. Clare, March 11, 1837,” Appendix No. 75, 1837.

of valuable export would be brought to the Capital, and the credit and means of our Fishermen would annually increase.<sup>7</sup>

The American option soon became a very popular one. This illicit trade was not wholly excluded to fish bait caught in the harbors of Nova Scotia, but also included the agricultural products of Prince Edward Island, which became a favorite stop for many American fishermen during the season. This practice brought American finished goods into Prince Edward Island and other Atlantic provinces, thereby reducing the sales of English manufacturers. As Commander F. Egerton of HMS *Basilisk* reported, American suppliers soon became the preferred choice: "Their popularity with the people may perhaps in part arise from the introduction by them of contraband goods, or more legitimately of hard cash, of which there is a great scarcity on these shores."<sup>8</sup>

It was not long before the inhabitants of Nova Scotia turned this illicit trade into a even more direct relationship. In a final blow to Nova Scotia's truck system, fishermen not only abandoned their credit but also their employment by seeking out better paying jobs aboard American vessels. Elisha Payson, a merchant and exporter from Bryer's Island, reported that the fishermen of his region repeatedly "go to the United States during the Fishing Season for employ because they can get more wages."<sup>9</sup>

For many fishermen, the annual migration to the United States via a fishing schooner answered the needs for product, capital, and economic independence from local

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<sup>7</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Letter from D & E Starr & Co., Halifax, February 23, 1837," Appendix No. 75, 1837.

<sup>8</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Report of Commander F. Egerton, of the HMS *Basilisk*," Appendix 2, 1854, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Letter from Elisha Payson, Bryer's Island, March 13, 1837," Appendix No. 75, 1837.

merchants, a benefit that merchantmen Paul Crowell recognized in his defense of the activities of the fishing class in his report of 1852:

When arriving in the United States they generally procure good wages or should they ship on shares, their fish is taken to a market in the United States, free of duty or expense. As these vessels are generally bound to some port in Nova Scotia, those who are Nova Scotia men can take their little supplies for their families, and have them landed at their door, nearly as low as they can be purchased in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

By offering fishermen higher wages, payment based on cash and not credit, and a chance to enter the profitable American market duty free, many American schooner captains were able to recruit the local labor population of Nova Scotia. These fishermen served an essential role in the American industry; they brought with them the skills needed to perform the task and an extensive knowledge of the coast. Many officials in the province recognized these important skills, including Lieutenant M.R. Perchell of the armed tender *Alice Roger*, who reported to his commander that the crews of the American schooners “are large, and part of whom are natives of this province, who are generally discharged before the vessel returns to the United States. The Americans prefer these men for their knowledge of the coast, and being better fishermen.”<sup>11</sup>

Many merchants of Nova Scotia saw this emigration as a severe threat to their own prosperity and the development of the colony. James Uniacke, a local merchant and the chair on the Committee of the Fisheries for most of the period under discussion, reported these fears in 1837:

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<sup>10</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Letter from Paul Crowell to James B. Uniacke, February 10, 1852,” Appendix 25, 1852, pp. 171-172.

<sup>11</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of M.R. Perchell, HMS *Alice Rogers*, October 23, 1853,” Appendix 2, 1854, p. 27. See also “Report of A.F. DeHorsey, HMSS *Devastation*, October 23, 1853.” DeHorsey reported that “three-fourths, or at least one-half of the crews of vessels under American colors are our own countrymen.”

The Youth of the Province are daily quitting the Fishing Stations and seeking employment on boards United States Vessels, conducting them to the best Fishing Grounds, carrying on trade and traffic for their new employers with the Inhabitants, and injuring their Native Country by defrauding its Revenue diminishing the operative class, and leaving the aged and infirm to burthen the Community they have forsaken and deserted.<sup>12</sup>

Reports from Royal Navy officers offer, perhaps, a less biased opinion than those of the merchants, who were directly and negatively affected by this emigration of their labor force. One officer reported that the “English and American Fishermen appear to be on very good terms and no disagreements of any kind came to my knowledge.”<sup>13</sup> The services of the highly skilled Nova Scotian fishermen were as important to the success of the American fleet as they had been to the merchants of Halifax, as reported to the House of Assembly:

The inhabitants of Pubnico chiefly consist of fishermen, many of whom embark in American fishing vessels, and, no doubt, as pilots, in many instances, for the fishing rounds around their neighbor coasts; and were it not for the better acquaintance with the pilotage, the Americans would be unable effectually, to carry on their employment, being a very intricate coast for navigation. The advantages offered to the Nova Scotians to embark in American Vessels, in the way of bounty, and of getting their shares of the fish into the American Market, clear of heavy duty, are very great; and numbers are constantly mixed up with their interests, and receiving their principal support from them...At Barrington, a large number of American Vessels call on their round to eastward for the greater part of their crew.<sup>14</sup>

With this emigration of their skilled laborers, many Nova Scotian merchants were forced to seek out other employees. However, most of the newcomers were not as productive as the Nova Scotians. Many of these new men came from Europe or

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<sup>12</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of the Committee of the Fisheries, April 10, 1837,” by James Uniacke. Appendix 75, 1837. p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of M.R. Perchell, HMS *Alice Rogers*, October 23, 1853,” Appendix 2, 1854, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> House of Assembly, Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of Lt. W.W. Bridges, Armed tender *Bonito*, October 20, 1853,” Appendix 2, 1854, p. 29.

Newfoundland; they too, however, would not become committed to the merchants. As

Thomas Tobin reported, many eventually departed to the American fleet:

Planters-in general the men that compose their crews are from Newfoundland an elsewhere-they, after serving a year or two, and realising (sic) a little money, proceed on to the United States, consequently two thirds of our crews are entirely strangers every year-as respect the Natives, as soon as they become of age they procure a Whaler and commence business on their own account.<sup>15</sup>

While many merchants saw the flight of the fishermen as an act of treason and an abandonment of their native homes and domestic interests, others saw the problem with the system used by the merchants and government of Nova Scotia. These individuals attacked the government for not supporting the fishing industry. Some reformers, such as William Crichton, criticized the lack of support for the fishermen:

So little encouragement is there given to our Fishermen, that they are even anxious to hire on board of American Vessels bound into the Gulf, and those being very often our best Fishermen...our hired Fishermen, particularly if he is a young man...concludes to proceed with the (American) Vessel, and a winter's residence in the States generally terminates in his becoming an American Citizen, and paves the way for others of his family and former companions to follow.<sup>16</sup>

By the 1830s, the merchant control over the fishing labor through the use of the truck system had begun to collapse. The “fish hawks” of the United States had swept in and taken control of Nova Scotia’s most productive industry. Nova Scotian merchants grew ever more fearful of their neighbor, a “Nation of *Capitalists*” that took every commercial advantage in exploiting the waters and laborers of Nova Scotia for their own

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<sup>15</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Letter from Thomas Tobin, March 15, 1837,” Appendix 75, 1837.

<sup>16</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Letter from William Crichton, March 20, 1837,” Appendix 75, 1837.

advantages.<sup>17</sup> Nova Scotian merchants continued to press the British for political and military protection. They argued that the authorities should not stand by, “for it cannot be desired that so many young men be should be employed on United States Vessels, and if they are, it cannot be supposed that their loyalty will not be shaken when they constantly hear republicanism loudly applied.”<sup>18</sup>

The influences of American industrial capitalism were not easy to ignore. Following the 1830s, the North Atlantic fisheries entered a phase of rapid expansion. By incorporating new technologies such as the dory and the trawl line, the North Atlantic fleets began to bring in larger catches every year. Between 1804 and 1819 the custom officials in Massachusetts inspected on average 20,923 barrels of mackerel per year. During the 1820s the average rose to 191,090; and by the 1830s the number had jumped to an average of 224,173 barrels of mackerel every season.<sup>19</sup> The North Atlantic fishing grounds were fast becoming crowded with both large schooners and open boats. This extensive exploitation brought both hostility and cooperation among the fishermen.

Competition became increasingly fierce on the open waters of the North Atlantic. One of the many side effects of this increase in aggressiveness was a general depletion of stock and the increased pollution of the fishing grounds. Although the pollution of the waters from the discharge of the byproducts of the catch directly into the waters appeared to be an issue for the House of the Assembly as early as the late 1830s, it did not come to

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<sup>17</sup> House of Assembly, Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Letter from A.D. Gordon, Pictou, March 14, 1837,” Appendix 75, 1837 (italics in original text).

<sup>18</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, “Report of Colin York Campbell, HMSS *Devastation*, November 10, 1852,” Appendix 4, 1853, p. 115.

<sup>19</sup> US Department of the Treasury, *Report on the Principal Fisheries of the American Seas*. By Lorenzo Sabine, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, 1853. Sen. Exec. Doc. 22. Vol. 6, Serial 662, p. 365.



the forefront of the fisheries debate until Moses Henry Perley published his *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy* in 1851.<sup>20</sup> Serving as an immigration officer for New Brunswick, Perley's responsibilities increased when he was hired by that provincial government to investigate the status of the fisheries. Both this report in 1851, and one the following year, shed light upon the industry and the side effects of the exploitation.

Local fishermen had the advantage of a nearby onshore cleaning station to prepare their fish for shipment and sale. The Convention of 1818 prevented foreigners from landing their catch to be cleaned. Even if they were allowed to do so, it would cost the crew additional time and delay their return to market. Therefore, visitors to the fishing grounds, New Englanders in particular, were forced to clean and preserve their catch while at sea. The byproducts, or offal, of the fish were disposed of by simply casting the garbage overboard. The result was to pollute the bottoms and destroy the fishes' habitat. Although local residents tried to delegate specific areas for the cleaning of the fish, few Americans participated in this arrangement and it never had the intended effect.<sup>21</sup>

Some locals believed that the foreigners damaged their local waters and many called for the regulation of the disposal of the byproducts by an act of legislation.<sup>22</sup> Many local farmers and fishermen, especially in the border region of Passamaquoddy

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<sup>20</sup> House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, *Journal of the Assembly*, "Report of the Committee on the Subject of the Fisheries of the Province," Appendix No. 75, 1837. References to the pollution of the waters as a result of the throwing of offal overboard can be found in virtually every letter submitted to the report. M.H. Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*. Laid Before the House of the Assembly by command of His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, March 15, 1851. (Fredericton, NB: J. Simpson, Printer to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, 1851).

<sup>21</sup> M.H. Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, 1851, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> M.H. Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, "Appendix No. 3: Letter From Cochran Craig, J.P., of Grand Harbour, Grand Manan, 10th December, 1850," p. 164.

Bay, allowed American fishermen to land on their property to clean their catch and retrieve wood and water. In addition to preserving their local waters from the waste, they were also able to establish trade links with the foreigners and use the offal left by the Americans as fertilizer for their fields.<sup>23</sup> One independent farmer, fisherman, and merchant, Andrew Wilson of northern New Brunswick's Miscou Island, agreed with this policy. As Moses Perley reported,

Mr. Wilson is clearly of opinion that it would be far better for the resident Fishermen if the American fishers were allowed to land on these shores, for the purpose of cleaning and curing their Fish, than to compel them, as at present, to clean their Fish on the Fishing Grounds, where the bones and offal seriously injure the Fisheries-he says, they should either be excluded altogether from the Gulf, or else allowed to land upon its shores.<sup>24</sup>

Their byproducts also damaged the nets and weirs of the local fishermen and hindered their ability to catch the inshore fish. The use of nets and weirs became a controversial tactic as productivity dropped. These nets increased the catch of small fish, such as herring, which in turn decreased the food available for larger fish such as cod and pollack. The disproportional catch of small and large fish resulted in a diminishment of the overall fish ecosystem. Those who fished for the large haddock and cod were hostile to the use of the nets and weirs because they interrupted the feeding cycle of their commodity.<sup>25</sup>

The general overproduction of the fisheries drew criticism. Many local residents were hostile to the policies of the large American schooners of discarding less profitable

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<sup>23</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> M.H. Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*. Laid Before the House of the Assembly by command of His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor (Fredericton, NB: J. Simpson, Printer to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, 1852), pp. 19-21.

<sup>25</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, pp. 8, 41-42.

fish to make room for the more lucrative codfish.<sup>26</sup> The overproduction of the fisheries was not limited to American schooners, and many local areas complained of all “foreigners,” including citizens of their own province. Residents of Grand Manan complained to Perley about fishermen from Saint John, who brought in more vessels, men, and capital than the locals could muster. Perley registered their complaints to the House of Assembly: “The fishery, they said, was continually falling off, and would eventually be destroyed; from the reckless manner in which it was prosecuted, and the place being over-fished.”<sup>27</sup>

Fishermen began to recognize the importance of understanding the life cycle and ecosystem of the fish in the North Atlantic. They criticized those who fished beyond their capacity and those who fished during spawning season.<sup>28</sup> River fishermen demanded fish wells to be inserted in all dams and even trapped and re-released river fish upstream, past the dams.<sup>29</sup> Inshore fishers complained of water pollution caused by the industrial development of large cities such as Saint John. Mill run-off and saw dust were recognized as harmful to the fisheries, and the New Brunswick lumber industry received criticism from the fishing community for its practices. Perley recorded the following complaints by John Sandell in 1851:

The fishermen of Saint John exclaim loudly, and not without cause, against mills, mill-dams, and other obstacles to the free passage of the fish up to their spawning beds...they depreciate in unmeasured terms, the casting of saw dust and mill rubbish, into streams frequented by spawning fish, which is undoubtedly productive of serious injury to the fisheries.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, p. 113.

<sup>29</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, pp. 64, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, “Letter from John Sandell,” pp. 53-56.

Although American fishing schooners were seen as contributing to the ecological damage done to the fisheries, they were not exclusively held responsible for the depletion of the stock.

In addition to the practice of over-exploitation, both the American and the British inspectors sharply criticized the techniques used to prepare the fish for market. In both his 1851 and 1852 reports, Moses Perley discussed the methods used by New Brunswickers to prepare fish for exportation.<sup>31</sup> Although many of the local fishermen argued that the American markets, especially those in the slave states, willingly accepted the fish as they were, Perley believed that they would never be able to gain a foothold in the more lucrative markets of Europe and northern and western United States. In a meeting with the fishermen of Grand Manan, he stated the following:

They were told that they could not expect to obtain remunerating prices, or find steady markets for fish so badly cured as scarcely to be fit for exportation, and which certainly would not be allowed to be exported if a proper system of inspection were established....The fishermen were told, that besides Foreign markets which might be opened under a better system of cure and inspection, there was in Canada an extensive demand for well cured fish, as also in the Western States bordering on the Great Lakes.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to achieving new markets, Perley saw this practice as a waste of natural resources. As he observed, "At present, from the entire absence of both skill and cure, one of the most prolific and most valuable fisheries of the Gulf is rendered of the least value, and there is a complete waste of the bounties of Providence."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, pp. 3-5, 18-19, 100, 171. M.H. Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*, pp. 31, 111, 113.

<sup>32</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>33</sup> Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*, p. 111.

Improving the curing technique was one facet of a general attempt to increase the productivity of the local fishery. Perley believed that this industry could be extremely profitable to the province and its residents:

The fish of the Bay of Fundy when drawn from the water, are most excellent; they can scarcely be equaled and certainly not surpassed elsewhere. Yet these admirable fish, either from ignorance, neglect, or laziness or all combined, are so wretchedly cured, as only to be fit for the poorest markets.<sup>34</sup>

The question that these critics and reformers struggled with was why the fisheries were so profitable for the Americans and not for the local residents. In his conclusion, Perley stated the following: "With such valuable and unlimited Fisheries in close proximity to these Colonies, and as it may be said at the very doors of the inhabitants, it is no less strange than true, that they are prosecuted to the greatest extent, and with the most profit by citizens of France, and of the United States."<sup>35</sup>

For many, the solution to this problem was not just the improvement of preparation practices, but also an increase in capital investment. John Doran of Shippegan, New Brunswick observed in a letter to the Assembly that "a small business will not answer...The sea around us is a mine of wealth, but from want of enterprise and capital we are just wasting our lifetime in useless drudgery."<sup>36</sup> Another merchant, John E. Fairbanks of Woodside, Nova Scotia, agreed that the increase in capital investment would in turn bring into effect improved technology which would aid in the growth of the colony's industries. In a letter he stated, "I have often thought, that when men of capital and enterprise turn their attention to this branch of industry, as they no doubt will do

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<sup>34</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*, p. 107.

<sup>36</sup> Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*, "Appendix No. 4: Copy of Letter from John Doran, esquire, J.P., of Shippegan, respecting the Sea Fisheries," p. 94.

hereafter, many improved modes of conducting it will be introduced.” Unlike the fishermen, the merchants did not view the shortcomings of the industry as the results of natural limitations. Woodside continued: “the supply can never be exhausted;” instead the problem was in idle and unskilled workers who did not bring in enough profit to make the fisheries worthy of additional capital investment.<sup>37</sup>

Americans were not immune to the up and down strokes of the industry. Lorenzo Sabine, an American inspector of the fisheries, sharply attacked the idea that the Americans had any advantages over the British in the fisheries and instead argued that any advantages were with the British who lived in close proximity to the richest waters:

Of the fisheries, particularly, it is entirely true to say that they never have afforded, and never will afford, constant and continuous rewards, for, aside from the losses consequent upon overstock and glutted markets, the most unwearied industry and the highest degree of skill are often insufficient to insure good fares. Our colonial neighbors should take these matters into the account, and while lamenting their calamities, remember that the American fishermen, whose conditions they consider so much preferable to their own, are subject to the same reverses, and would gladly surrender many of the privileges they are supposed to enjoy, for the liberty of living near to, and of freely using, the inner or shore fishing-grounds, of which they are now deprived, and which are reserved exclusively for British subjects.<sup>38</sup>

Sabine believed that the British colonists were letting the fisheries go to waste for want of energy and discipline. “The fisheries of New Brunswick are prosecuted with neither skill nor vigor,” he pointed out, and their poverty was neither the result of market trends nor of American encroachment but from “their own want of industry, thrift,

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<sup>37</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, “Appendix No. 6: Letter on the Deep Sea Fisheries from the Honorable John E. Fairbanks, of Halifax, Nova Scotia,” pp. 171-172.

<sup>38</sup> US Department of the Treasury, *Report on the Principal Fisheries of the American Seas*. By Lorenzo Sabine, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, 1853. Sen. Exec. Doc. 22. Vol. 6, Serial 662, p. 231.

cleanliness, and honesty.”<sup>39</sup> His attack was not limited to the small-scale fisheries of New Brunswick. Even the large fishing firms of Nova Scotia received harsh words of condemnation: “No American visits Nova Scotia without being amazed at the apathy which prevails among the people, and without ‘calculating’ the advantages which they enjoy, but will not improve... Yet the colonists look on and complain of us. They will neither fish themselves nor allow us to do so.”<sup>40</sup>

While Sabine’s comments were harsh, and his negative portrayal of the colonial fishermen were clearly biased in favor of American interests, his conclusion regarding the colonial workers’ lack of capital and industrious development mirrored that of the provinces’ own policy makers and investigators. As has been shown through the writings of Moses Perley, petitions submitted to the House of Assembly, letter and surveys collected by investigators, and reports compiled by committees on the subject of the fisheries, the British North American fishermen and merchants of the North Atlantic did not invest the same amount of time, energy, and capital into their own domestic fleets.

This want of active engagement was the result of the traditional system of a debt-credit relationship between manager and laborer. Although this system had the flexibility to preserve a mutual dependence between the classes in a peripheral society, its reliance upon traditional values and economic systems prevented it from expanding and competing with the industrial capitalist system that operated in the more profitable arena of southern New England. While sharply attacked by many historians, the nineteenth-century version of industrial capitalism provided the labor discipline and the desire for

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<sup>39</sup> US Department of the Treasury, *Report on the Principal Fisheries of the American Seas*, pp. 255, 258.

<sup>40</sup> US Department of the Treasury, *Report on the Principal Fisheries of the American Seas*, p. 239.

mass exploitation of natural resources that became necessary to successfully compete in the fishing industry.<sup>41</sup> Overproduction led to a glutted market and falling prices, which in turn encouraged increased productivity to achieve a higher profit margin. Labor discipline became essential for economic success and severe punishments were handed out for “broken voyages.”<sup>42</sup> The result was added competition on the waters and extensive overproduction that led to extreme short-term profit making and long-term economic and ecological ruin. By the 1850s, the methods of ecological management had become a heated debate in the North Atlantic fishing industry.

Local residents looked to the waters in their bays and on the outskirts of their ports as areas to be managed by themselves. In regions where depletion became an issue, local fishermen took it upon themselves to police the area, and refused to allow outside governmental officials to dictate the terms of use. The waters were considered to be the property of the public and not of any individual or government agency.<sup>43</sup> This local control of the common property was not placed as an exclusionary measure for citizens of a foreign country. While political officials sought to exclude Americans and other foreigners from the local fisheries, local workers sought the protection of the resource from people they considered to be outsiders. Their own definition of “outsider” was not structured by political borders, but by social ties.

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<sup>41</sup> Rosemary Ommer, “The Trunk System in Gaspé, 1822-77,” pp. 91-115. George W. Hilton, *The Truck System Including a History of the British Truck Acts, 1465-1960*, (Westport, CT: W. Heffer, 1960), pp. 6-8, 119-42. See also John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

<sup>42</sup> “Broken Voyage” was a common phrase in the nineteenth century to those fishing trips that did not cover the cost of outfitting the vessel and crew. US Department of the Treasury, *Report on the Principal Fisheries of the American Seas*. By Lorenzo Sabine, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, 1853. Sen. Exec. Doc. 22. Vol. 6, Serial 662, pp. 346-348.

<sup>43</sup> Bonnie J. McCay, & James Acheson, ed., *The Question of the Commons: The Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), pp. xiii, xiv, 3-34.



In defense of their own resources the residents of Grand Manan, New Brunswick, sought to prevent the encroachment upon their waters by “outsiders” from Saint John. As Moses Perley stated, these residents “complained of the number of vessels which came upon the fishing ground, considering them as encroaching upon, and usurping a privilege which ought to belong to the settlers in that vicinity exclusively.”<sup>44</sup> These vessels did not come from New England’s Gloucester or Portland, but from nearby Saint John. As British North American fishermen of Passamoquoddy Bay complained of the actions of their own countrymen, they eagerly sought a mutual cooperation with the American fishermen of the same bay. As Perley pointed out, “the fishing boats from Eastport, and other places within the limits of the United States, fish equally, and mingle freely, with the British boats on their fishing grounds, near West Isles, where the fish are most numerous.”<sup>45</sup>

The American inspector, Lorenzo Sabine, shared Moses Perley’s views of the close cooperation between these fishermen. In his lengthy report he discussed how the fishermen of both counties conversed freely with one another and inquired about their women. During the hours at sea, separated by only a few yards, the fishermen discussed topics regarding from political trends to fishing techniques and market prices. The close cooperation was so pervasive that few Royal Navy officers were able to tell one from another.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> US Department of the Treasury, *Report on the Principal Fisheries of the American Seas*, by Lorenzo Sabine, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, 1853, Sen. Exec. Doc. 22. Vol. 5, Serial 662, pp. 356-357.

Trade was an essential part of this mutual dependency. Although such trade was deemed unlawful by the politicians of Saint John, Halifax, and Washington, these fishermen, distant from political centers, determined their own trading relationship at any given time. As a result, Moses Perley reported in 1851 that “the people of Grand Manan enjoy perfect free trade” with the American markets in Maine.<sup>47</sup> British North American fishermen found capital and a market in the United States, and the American fishermen of Lubec and Eastport received additional fish to feed the growing American market. Perley reported that Eastport became the chief market for British fishermen in the borderlands region: “it must be borne in mind that the fish are chiefly caught by British fishermen, and carried over to Eastport, either quite fresh, or pickle-salted.”<sup>48</sup>

The American market offered for British North America fishermen an alternative to their domestic firms. The lack of merchant competition in New Brunswick, and elsewhere, created for the local fish buyers a virtually monopoly. As Perley reported, “the Cod, and other deep sea Fisheries, of the Gulf coast, are almost wholly in the hands of the Jersey merchants, who conduct their business very admirably, but solely with a view to their own profit, without regard to the interests of New Brunswick. They expend their earnings in Jersey, or elsewhere; they make no investments in the Province - and they do not aid in its advancement.”<sup>49</sup>

American capital investors in the fisheries surely had similar interest as the Jersey merchants. They certainly were not interested in local development or equalitarian

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<sup>47</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, p. 40.

<sup>49</sup> Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*, p. 83.

distribution of wealth, but Moses Perley and others believed that the added competition would stimulate development and assist the local population who “complained bitterly of their poverty, and state of bondage.”<sup>50</sup> Perley described this truck-based bondage as an “absolute state of serfdom of the fishermen...who are even in worse positions than southern slaves, and whose moral, physical, and spiritual wants, less care has been taken.”<sup>51</sup>

Education and training became additional motives for closer interaction amongst the American and British North American fishermen. Many inspectors from the Atlantic provinces believed that the fishing industry would never succeed unless the local laborers received proper training in fish production. Many of those who reported to Moses Perley stated that this training could be found in the American fleet. Perley observed that, “Mr. Harvey was very anxious that the Americans should be allowed to land on the coast, and prosecute the Fisheries, as they would teach the young men the latest and most approved modes of fishing, from ignorance of which they could not at present follow fishing profitably-and he desired that his wishes should be made known.”<sup>52</sup> Such educational need was not limited to technical training; it included basic and classical studies. In his closing remarks on the Grand Manan fisheries, Moses Perley stated that even with government aid,

the greatest difficulty will be untouched-and this is, the low state of education in the Island. The Schools of Grand Manan are very inefficient; and the people are not sufficiently taught, even in the first rudiments of learning, to compete with their American neighbours, who are more acute and intelligent, simply from

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<sup>50</sup> Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*, p. 25.

<sup>51</sup> Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*, p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> Perley, *Report on the Seas and River Fisheries of New Brunswick*, p. 34.

being better educated. The lack of learning is one of the greatest evils of Grand Manan; if the people there were better taught, and possessed greater knowledge of the world, they would readily perceive the numerous advantages of their position, and quickly avail themselves of the profits to be derived from it.<sup>53</sup>

For Moses Perley, the benefits of American interaction with British fishermen extended well behind the waters of the North Atlantic.

### Conclusion

British North American fishermen in the borderlands region had a unique understanding of the world around them. Merchants from Saint John and Halifax were considered to be outsiders, while American fishermen from Eastport and Lubec were local residents and friends of the family. The changing nature of manager-laborer relationships in the American fishing industry spilled over to challenge the traditional values of the mutual dependency of a debt-credit relationship in the Atlantic provinces. The American market provided a more profitable return, cheaper products, secure employment, higher wages, advanced training, and government-sponsored bonds. For these reasons the fishermen of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia turned away from their domestic industry and sought an active relationship with the American competitor. Fishermen challenged the political lines that had been drawn on the maps. American fishermen were not foreigners, but partners in a challenging working environment and allies in a growing international labor group.

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<sup>53</sup> Perley, *Report Upon the Fisheries of the Bay of Fundy*, p. 22.

The North Atlantic fishing industry constitutes an extensive socioeconomic unit. The vast majority of historical scholarship that discusses the nineteenth-century fishing industry approaches the subject from a local or national perspective. Most scholars neglect the Atlantic aspects of the industry. Although governments attempted to regulate where and when a fisherman could work, the fishermen of the North Atlantic often had their own opinions regarding local identity. As their behavior suggested, they were not restricted to their own domestic waters. Markets for their products extended throughout the Atlantic world. The transnational attributes of the industry not only produced harsh competition but also close cooperation between the fishermen and merchants of various nationalities.

Although the Convention of 1818 limited the access that American fishermen traditionally enjoyed around the Atlantic colonies of British North America, it did permit fishing in certain inlets and land on unoccupied shores. These stipulations ensured that New England fishermen would continue their cooperation with the local population. As the need arose, New England fishermen quickly expanded their involvement outside the limits of international law. Smuggling goods, buying bait, fishing, and employing local workers in the fish trade represent some of the activities that superseded regional affiliations. While federal and provincial policies were often constructed in an attempt to limit or prevent this international cooperation among the fishing laborers, these legislative acts only further represent the global continuity of the industry.

Studying the fishing trades of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries presents a number of methodological obstacles. Fishermen seldom wrote letters or journals. Fishing logs almost exclusively discuss wind and water currents, ocean depths, and

quantity of catch. Seldom, if ever, do they provide an insight to the social world of the fishermen. Fishermen's magazines and books mainly discuss gear and "fish-stories." Merchants' logs can provide extensive information on the economic makeup of a fishing community, but the scarcity of these sources could lead to generalizations based on limited information.

The largest cache of information for the nineteenth-century fishing industry falls into the category of government reports. While many modern scholars may feel that political history does not truly inform us about a community and certainly limits our interpretation of the laborers of a given society, a revisionist reading of these sources may in fact shed a great deal of light upon a variety of subjects. Political leaders may not have acted in favor of the fishermen, but they certainly responded to the maritime laborers' behavior. The fact that merchants complained about the emigration of their fishing laborers supports the claim that fishermen were leaving Nova Scotia. However, instead of accepting the opinion of the merchants that this exodus represented the disloyalty and the ignorance of the fishing class, historians can explore other possible causes, such as self-interest. When presented with a viable alternative to the debt-credit relationship between fishermen and merchants, the fishermen eagerly accepted those alternatives and thus challenged the economic control of the merchants.

Likewise, American political debates concerning the fishing trade can be viewed in a new perspective. These interpretations can suggest other conclusions based upon the facts presented by political leaders. The challenges to a federal fishing bounty may have been presented in order to limit government investment in private industry, but the language of the defense supports the thesis that New England's fish trade fluctuated

based on international trends, and that the industry depended upon foreign markets and sources of production. In this way, evaluating the claims of the upper class within a borderland perspective can initiate new ideas regarding the international nature of the North Atlantic that do not come into sharp focus through regional and local assessments of historical sources.

Citizenship stipulations in the American bounty system represented an attempt made by the government officials to deal with the growing problems in international competition. Closed markets and protective tariffs responded to an increase in imports. Nova Scotia's response to the British policy of free trade corresponds to the merchants' and politicians' real fears of American domination in the North Atlantic fishing trade. As a response to the globalization of commerce in the fishing industry, these policies argued for a closed protective market. Those in power in Nova Scotia sought to retain their control through protective markets and a protected labor force. When the workers themselves initiated closer cooperation with foreign competitors through trade, employment, and the acceptance of American capital and wage labor, they consciously challenged the debit-credit system that perpetuated their economic subordination.

The challenge to traditional means of operation and the development of closer international ties can better be understood through the use of a borderlands methodology. The regional approach adopted by such historians as Rosemary Ommer, Daniel Vickers, and Sean Cadigan limits the interpretation of an emerging global economy. If one takes a view of the fishing industry with an eye on the larger dynamic of the global marketplace, the industry comes into sharp perspective and one is better able to understand the nature of investment and work within the fisheries.

The North Atlantic was a borderlands community, an arena in which economic transitions and policies greatly affected people on either side of the borders. Capital was invested beyond domestic grounds, goods were transported and traded between nations without the consent of the governments, laborers migrated outside their local community to find work, and national policies reflected an attempt to deal with the developing nature of free commerce and public resources. Grand Manan fishermen in New Brunswick welcomed their neighbors from Eastport, Maine; Halifax merchants competed with Boston firms in the West Indies markets; fishermen on Bryer's Island, Nova Scotia waited patiently for employment aboard Gloucester fishing schooners; and Newfoundland fishermen moved from Conception Bay to Essex County in search of better jobs. These activities are lost in regional histories. Mobility across political borders, both in work and in capital investment, was the cornerstone of the nineteenth-century North Atlantic fishing trade. Borders often had little meaning to those who toiled in the borderlands economy of the North Atlantic fishery.



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