

The people of Pictou Island have fished for their supper since the very beginning. Even before settlement in the mid to late 1810s, the aboriginal people's, the French and the English recognized the potential in the waters of Pictou Island. However, as late as the 1881 census, only one person self identified as a fisherman.

The people who came here were farmers in the old country and farmers here. At that time there was little refrigeration (unless you count November to March). The boats were small and powered by possibly by sail, but more likely with oars. A commercial fishery at that time wasn't feasible. They fished to put food on the table, and lobster were so plentiful that they could walk into the waters along the shore and grab them.

With the coming of the can in 1847 there was potential for change. Business men knew of the legendary bounty off Pictou Island, and if they could not bring the fish to the factories on the mainland, the factories would come to them.

The first factory arrived in 1871 and was located at Bob's Hollow near where Kirby Veevers is now. It was opened by Dan and George MacDonald and followed soon after by a factory at the West End opened by William McClure from Pictou.

It is interesting to note that a stone in the Pioneer Cemetery on Pictou Island reads "Sacred to the Memory of Capt. Robt. MacDonald. A native of Pictou Island 1838-1893 Who sailed six years as an officer on the missionary ship Day Spring. Drowned off Pictou Island while in the employ of Wm McClure, who has erected this stone to the memory of a faithful employee."

It is ironic that Robert sailed all over the world and drowned while captaining the smack for William McClure in the waters off Pictou Island.

Over the course of the next 50 years, lots of factories popped up around the shores of Pictou Island. From as far away as Boston came a company, Shedd and Knox Limited, and they built at the East End on land leased from William Hogg. When his land passed to his son James, the younger Mr. Hogg realized the lease hadn't been officially recorded and taking Shedd and Knox to court, he was able to reclaim the land and thus take over the factory. No fool he, he proceeded to go around the island and make recorded agreements with any farm that had a likely spot for a factory to save these rights for himself in the future. He also petitioned the government of the day to issue new factory licenses only if the proposed factory was more than 3 miles from an existing factory. Meanwhile out at John Dan's Cove, known as Factory Cove at that time, Prince Edward Islander, John Dan MacLeod, and a group of Prince Edward Island fishermen opened a factory, soon to be followed by two more.

It's difficult to follow the actual rise and fall of factories on Pictou Island but overtime many passed to James Hogg, and when he left the island, he sold his rights to Fred Magee Ltd. of New Brunswick, who became the major factory owner on the Island. In 1908, there were five factories operating on Pictou Island, three owned by Fred Magee.

As the factories boomed the stock began to fall, and as early as 1871 fishermen were not to catch berried or soft shelled lobster, nor fish in July and August. In 1882 fishermen were to be licensed and there was no season from July 15 to December 31. Berried lobsters could be kept, but the eggs were scraped off and saved at the factory, a job for 13-year-old Jack "Happy" MacDonald. They were then transported to the hatchery at Bayview, which opened in 1892, one of the most prominent on the eastern seaboard. It wasn't, however, hugely successful. They could hatch the eggs, but the larva didn't thrive, and when they tried to improve this, it became prohibitively expensive. The hatcheries were phased out around 1920.

There was no limit on the number of traps to be fished and some fishermen fished 500 or even 1000 traps with a small boat powered by two men with oars. Leaving at first light and back

before noon, they would haul some traps one day and others the next, in the early days for as little as \$.40-\$.50 per hundred lobsters no matter the weight.

In 1906 the first gasoline engines appeared, often with a single cylinder and called the Make and Break engine. Ron MacDonald remembered somebody from Pictou who had one when he was a kid. There was no hiding in the fog for that guy, those engines went along bang bang bang, but by the time Ron was fishing, most of fishermen were using old car engines.

The factories provided work. The obvious of course, a place to sell the catch, and in the early years, the factories provided the traps and gear. As the fishing got less profitable, they sold the gear to the fishermen, often financing the sale. This turned the upkeep over to the fishermen, and of course, they sold them what they needed for that too. The old adage, "sold my soul to the company store".

There was work cooking for the workers, there was work cooking and cleaning lobster, there was work soldering cans closed and after they have been put in the retort machine, a giant pressure cooker, work poking holes in the cans to let off steam (another job for Jack "Happy"). Not to worry, they soldered the holes closed again. There was a saying though, "Green in the water, red in the pot, black in the can.". There was work providing wood to fuel the boilers, there was work taking away the lobster shells which were spread on the land and provided fertilizer. There was work hauling water to the East End factory that had no well.

Many of the workers came from away because, with five factories, Pictou Islanders couldn't provide enough workers. Most came from Prince Edward Island but also from the mainland and from New Brunswick. This raises another benefit, some fresh DNA as people met and married and stayed or moved away.

But after half a century on the Island, things began to change; the gasoline engine meant faster trips to the mainland, commercial ice meant perishables could be transported. There was less demand for canned lobster as the demand for live grew. The stocks were being depleted, and then World War I, which meant a loss of European markets and money owed from over there was not received. Hard times for the Packers, and by the early 1920s, only Magee's factories at the East End and at the end of Factory Road were still running. It would seem the last cans of lobster went off the Island sometime between 1923 and 1926 and the so called New Factory closed. The East End factory continued a bit longer processing herring, knobbed, brined and barrelled, but it was gone by 1930.

And so, these little villages began to disappear. The older people remember the tales of their parents and grandparents and remember seeing traces: a boiler halfway from the beach to the Breakwater at the East End, an old well casing on the west side of John Dan's Cove, bits and pieces sticking out of the sand at the end of Factory Road, and of course the trap houses, some still in use.

In our heyday, after the factories closed, there might be two or three smacks buying at the Wharf and at the East End, but with only two fishermen selling at the Pictou Island wharf, in 2024 the smack became a thing of the past. Hurricane Fiona gave us a temporary glimpse of the past at John Dan's Cove and at the New Factory site, but the sands have taken back what was borrowed. As the Pictou Island Heritage Society celebrates 10 years, we remember the factories that have been gone now for 100 years.