

MR. S. H. CASE, ALPENA, MICHIGAN.

INTERVIEWED BY

WM. WAKEHAM AND RICHARD RATHBUN,

AUGUST 25, 1894.

(Mr. Case is now in the employ of the Wood Pulp Mill at Alpena, and we came across him while inquiring respecting the pulp mill. He was connected with the early pound net fishing of this region, but gave up fishing altogether about 8 years ago.--Rathbun).

*Experience*

*P.  
Lake Erie  
history*

*a. sen*

I have been here about 30 years. I helped put in the first pound net that was ever put in on Lake Erie. That was about half way between Huron and Vermillion on Lake Erie, at a place called Ruggles Grove. That was the first pound net that was put in on the lakes and was put in by my uncle, whose name was Ruggles. He has been dead 8 or 10 years. It is about 30 years since

*History  
Thunder Bay*

I began to fish here. I gave up fishing 8 years ago, since the pulp mill started. The last fishing I was interested in was on Lake Michigan.

*P.*

*q.*

We brought the first pound nets here in the bay and fished them at a place called Whitefish Point. The gill netters had been here a long time then. At one time there were about 40 gill net boats on Thunder Bay Island. That is about 40 years ago. There were 5 or 6 tugs fishing here since I can remember. There were tugs fishing here about 8 or 9 years ago. Davis had 3 or 4 tugs here at that time and they caught a large amount of fish. I saw one of those tugs come in with 7 tons of whitefish from one trip.

*tugs*

*W. f.  
abundance*

*trout  
w.f.  
abundance*

*History*

When I first came here the trout were not near as plenty, but there were more whitefish, but now it is right the other way;

about all they catch is trout. Of course in the fall and early in the spring they get whitefish. In those days there were not so many nets here. They fished for trout, but there was not near the amount of nets used. Where they fish here now they did not use to fish in those days, that is out on "big Reef", about 40 miles, where the sail boats could not go, but they were fishing in the same character of places. There was one place between Thunder Bay and Middle Island that was a spawning ground and in the fall they got their fish there. During the spawning season is the only time they caught them there, and years ago the nets would float with the amount of fish.

Increase of nets

Fishing area increased

Spawning & fishing ground

P. History

The first pound nets were put in here about 1860. We came here from Sandusky and put in the first net about 3 1-2 miles north of the river. At that time there were no

P.

P.  
history

nets between here and North Point, which is 9 miles up. We fished in the lake one year before we came here, but had only small shallow nets. We used to fish in about 30 feet of water then. We fished at Whitefish Point (Thunder Bay) and could not catch anything. At the time we were there we could not get any fish, and had good nets, and after we came away they began to come in there. They kept increasing the pound nets here for 6 or 8 years, and then it got into the hands of a few. A man from Sandusky had 3 men over at North Point, and a man named McDonald was on the other side and had what they called Scare Crow Island, which is a splendid point, and at that time I was fishing at Sulphur Island; so that 4 or 5 parties controlled the trap net fishing. There was only one year that they had any trouble and then S.H. Davis pulled a man's

P.  
history

stakes off Sulphur Island.

(This has reference to the riparian rights; whether by the nets getting under control of a few persons there was any encroachment on riparian rights).

Riparian rights

Davis leased the ground and this other man drove stakes there and he broke the stakes off, but he had to pay for them because they claimed the man was inside the mile limit. It always held here until late years that a man owning or leasing the land held the ground for a mile out. Of course there has always been trouble about the points of land.

Fish decrease

We were fishing <sup>(trout)</sup> 6 or 7 years before there was any decrease. They began to decrease within 10 years. They were fishing pretty extensively up to 10 years ago with the pound nets. A great many thought the cause of the decrease was from the refuse of mills.

P.  
history

Cause of decrease

but I think it is more the fishing in the spawning season. They fish too much and catch them on the spawning ground.

The pound nets used to get the heaviest fishing in November. The fish came in on the north side (of Thunder Bay) and then they would work in on this shore and then cross to Seare Crow Island on the south side, which would be the last place, and there would be 2 weeks' difference between those two places. I caught 124 lbs. one day in 3 nets during the spawning season. We had about 7 men then, but of late years of course 3 men would run 3 or 4 nets. We would do more then with 3 or 4 nets than we would with 15 now. I do not think in 5 years they have caught enough to pay their men.

We had some mesh 1 1-4 or 1 1-2 inch bar, and then we got down to 1 inch, which is the

P.  
Season  
Fish movements

No. of men  
found.

Fish  
decrease

Pound  
mesh

P.  
mesh  
herring

smallest we ever used here; but some had larger than that; generally about 1 1-4 bar was used. We used it to get the herring. Herring were a good price then, and would pay if we caught a large amount of them.

young W. f.  
(Caused decrease)

We always used to catch a good many young whitefish in the pounds and that had a good deal to do with the decrease. The small ones, unless they were very small, were used.

Throwing back

Of course the small whitefish would not stand much handling and they were never thrown back. They could put them back if they would be careful about handling them, and a fisherman can do it if he is a mind to. They can throw them right out of the net when they are lifting, by turning the net over. But the average fisherman would not be likely to be careful in this way.

Lake Mich.  
Catch more  
small w. f.  
uses

They catch more small fish on Lake Michigan than any place I know of, and used to

smoke them. That would be at South Haven and along that shore, and also along the north shore. Lake Michigan is a great deal better feeding ground than this lake, and the fish are fatter and softer, more like Lake Erie fish. They used to ship car loads of them into Chicago, and would not get 100 lbs. out of them but what were soft.

*L. Mich. fish better*

We set our pots mostly in strings. We had 3 with 80 rods of lead each. The fish would lead readily that distance. We had 3 in one string, 2 in another and 2 separate. The outside deep water pot would fish best except in the spawning time when the inner ones nearer the reef would fish better.

*P. strings leading*

*inner & outer pots.*

It was about 3 or 4 years before anyone went up to Hammond's Bay after the good fishing here, and we put in one net close to the shore and took out 100 barrels. That was about 3 years after we had begun fishing

*Hammond's Bay*

*P. large catches*

*Good loc.*

here. We had so many in this one net that there were about 20 barrels of smothered fish in the bottom of the net. Hammond's Bay has been a good ground ever since. They are getting good fishing there every year. There is a mill above there quite a ways. They are rafting now out of the river there and the fishing is about 2 miles from that. Of course they do not get the amount of fish they used to, but they can sell them fresh and get a better price than they did.

Sawmill  
logs.  
  
decrease

We used to start in fishing pounds about the first of September. Had no summer fishing. We would fish as long as we could stay in for the ice. In fact we have had to leave our twine in sometimes and could not get it out. That used to be anywheres from the 15th to the 25th of November. We could get an abundance of whitefish and occasionally trout, and in September we got a

P.  
season

w.f.  
trout  
herring,  
walleye

P.

good many pickerel, and would get herring later, after the whitefish, in November. We got a few earlier, but got the most of them later.

Sturgeon

We used to get lots of sturgeon. <sup>with the net</sup> I had a net down here about 2 miles on the shore that I have taken out as high as 80 sturgeon in a day, and thrown them out on the beach to get rid of them. I have seen them in one place where you could go in and kill them with an axe. They have not caught very many sturgeon here for the last 10 years, but they speared considerable many this last spring. They used to run up the river here I do not know where they used to spawn, but they were all around the shallow water here. They would come into a foot of water. That would be in the spring. And we used to catch them in our nets in deep water in September.

Spearing

P.  
descrip

There has been no change in the manner of setting the pound nets and the way they are made except in the tunnel. When we first started we had nothing but short tunnels. The first we used was what they call the gap. There were no tunnels at all. They were set in the shape of the heart somewhat, but were more round. And they would have 2 long poles fastened to the bottom of the pot, and when they went to lift they would raise these poles right up, and, of course, that way probably half the fish would get out, but they used to get any amount of them. After that used short tunnels, and then they got to using long tunnels, and of late years there is nothing but the long tunnel used. In deep water they have to use the long tunnels.

P.  
trout

The pound nets never took many trout at any time of the season. In some places

they might have taken more if they had been fished in the spring, but we did not pay much attention to trout.

*u. g.*

Before I came here they used seines right out here in the river, and used to catch a good many fish, mostly whitefish, good big fish. And they used to spear any amount of them near the shore here. The bay here used to be a rich fishing ground, and I do not know of a place on the lakes any where where there has been more fish taken out than in this bay, in the same length of time. The tugs used to do big fishing here. It was nothing unless a tug got 100 tons in a season. The seining was a small business. There was no other extensive fishing here except pound and gill nets. There was no hook and line fishing for commercial purposes here. They used to do a good deal of that on Lake Michigan at South

*Seines.*

*w. b.*

*Speariny.*

*Thunder Bay  
formerly good  
ground*

*Extent of  
fishing  
tugs.*

*Seines*

*Chiefly P. & G.*

*Hook*

Haven, and used to set hooks for sturgeon. They would bite the hooks, but they never did a great deal with them I do not think.

The whitefish first began to show a marked decrease about 12 years ago. At one time I know we had 3 or 4 bad fishing years, hardly paid expenses, and then one year after that we got big fishing, and since then it must be 11 or 12 years ago that they had the last fishing in the bay of any account. I know one summer we took over 100 tons out of 4 nets. We never got anything of any account after that. It dropped off suddenly. I suppose these mills and the refuse out of the river, etc., was the cause of it. There were lots of mills here when we got the last fishing, but preceding that one year there was no fishing of any account

We also used to fish at Manistique. We had all kinds of fish there. At one place they caught the largest whitefish I ever saw

*W.F.  
decrease*

*Cause  
mills,  
refuse.*

*Manistique*

*W.F.  
larger*

*v. b.*

We got any amount of the 18 lbs. and they seemed to be very old fish. We got them in the spring. This was with big meshed gill nets. We got them off on the reefs. It was the middle of April when we left here and we got them in 2 or 3 weeks after we got there, but there was only one place where we got these large ones. They had a hump on their back and they were very thick through. We tried every way to cure them, but salt would not cure them at all. We threw away a ton a day for several days. In fact we had too many nets in. We also caught very large trout there.

Whitefish are not half as abundant now as they used to be. Of course there is an increase in the price now. If these tugs got the same price they did formerly they could not pay their men. But wages are as low now as they were then, but it is only with-

Season  
 4.  
 Loc.

*humpback*

*M. f.  
 decrease*

*Price  
 wages, etc.*

in a year or two that they cut the wages.  
 We used to pay a man \$75 to run a tug.  
 During the war whitefish sold for \$20 a bbl.  
 I know I paid \$18 upon the north shore and  
 we got \$20 for them in Sandusky.

The whitefish have been caught off and  
 driven off their spawning grounds. This  
 Duck Island fishery on the other side, they  
 used to do an immense amount of business  
 through Canada. Gauthier used to fish  
 there. And this place up between Middle  
 Island and Thunder Bay Island, there was no  
 place on the lakes that there has been as  
 many fish caught as there. But if we get  
 a blow off the lake we are liable to lose a  
 whole gang of nets. It is this honey comb  
 rock.

I used to use gill nets. They used to  
 use smaller rigs than they do now; probably  
 would not run half the nets they do now in

*W. J.  
 Caught &  
 driven off  
 Impt. fishing  
 places*

*a. gun*

*q.  
 history  
 quantity*

the sail boats, and there were no tugs.  
 Capt. Persons had the first tug, but I could not tell you what year that was. The greatest number of tugs they had here at any one time was 6 or 7. That must be 15 or 16 years ago. The trap nets were fishing here a long time before tugs came here; but the tugs fish the whole season through so I dare say that there would not be much difference between the two, and I think the tugs have taken fully as many fish as the pound nets. We would use 4 5-8 inch mesh in the gill nets and it has not changed much. But up on Lake Michigan they had some 6 inch. They used to take mostly whitefish with the gill nets when they first commenced. Mackinaw trout used to be rather a rare thing. Now it is right the other way and you will hardly see half a dozen whitefish in a lift. In the spring they will have a few and then

tugs

P. before  
tugs

G. & P. have  
taken as many  
fish

G.  
mesh

wf.  
trout

again in the fall. The trout have not decreased to the same extent as the whitefish, although they have decreased some.

*Trout decrease*

To protect the whitefish and trout I think there should be a close season, and the size of the mesh should be regulated undoubtedly. I believe the more trout that were caught off the more whitefish we would have. I have found a good many young whitefish in the stomachs of trout. One year, I think it was the last year we had good fishing, we had over 40 barrels of these small whitefish.

*Reg*

*Close season*

*Regulate mesh*

*Trout food*

*J. G. W.*

*Small w/f.*

One time here they had a bill in for the appointment of an inspector of fisheries, but it failed, and now they have a game warden, but he does not have much to do with the lake, and it does not amount to anything. They appoint a deputy in each county, but he does not amount to much.

*Reg*

*Warden's*

P.

They had a bill through regulating the size of the mesh, but it was not enforced. I do not think they should fish anything under 1 3-4 mesh bar, or 3 1-2 inch mesh. You get down to 1 inch bar and you would catch everything. Still in lots of places the objection would be that you would not catch the herring in that large mesh. In some localities you could catch the herring separately because the herring run does not come on until after the whitefish, and in some places they both come on together. Here we used to get the whitefish in the fore part of the season, and get the herring late. There is no spring fishing in this particular locality. The herring are principally taken in the fall, but they get a good many in the spring. When the herring were taken here in pound nets it would be late in the fall after the whitefish run was over.

P. mesh

herring

herring run  
run sometimes  
different  
sometimes  
together

Season

Regulating  
size of fish  
mesh

It would be a pretty hard matter to regulate the size of the fish, but I think the size of the mesh would regulate that. I would regulate it by having a large enough mesh to allow the small fish to escape.

Close season

I do not think the fish ought to be caught during the spawning time at all. I have seen the spawn in whitefish weighing only 1 lb. round, but not many of them.

Smallest w/f  
Spawner

There is an inland lake 24 miles southwest of here called Hubbard Lake, and there are any amount of whitefish in it. I was up there examining the lake and a man told me he would spear a barrel in a night during the spawning season. But the curious part of it was, there were these long weeds that would grow up probably within 4 feet of the surface and they would spear those fish right on the top of the weeds. They would set their nets right on top of these weeds,

Hubbard Lake  
w/f

so that the corks would rest on top of them. They put whitefish in at Long Lake and they spear quite a lot of them. They did first rate there. The fish in Hubbard Lake were poor and they undoubtedly went up the river before the dam was in.

When pound nets was first put in on Lake Erie they did not catch but a few herring. The herring have increased as they caught the other fish off.

The white bass will eat small herring 1 or 2 inches long. I never saw but 4 or 5 white bass caught here in the bay. I have caught 4 or 5, and I also caught a few catfish. Never saw any sauger here. There are any amount of yellow perch here. They have been increasing in abundance if anything. Years ago we never used to think of catching them, and now they catch all they want of them. Up here at South Haven we

P.  
Lake Erie  
herring.

W. bass.

Cat  
Sauger  
perch

used to catch so many we could not get rid of them. Black bass have decreased. There used to be any amount of them here. In a place called Squaw Bay they got them all winter. I hardly think they are worth saving for the sportsmen in the open lake, but may be in the inland lakes. I have seen them so we would go out trolling and get 30 or 40 in a couple of hours. There are no calico bass here. There is once in a while a rock bass here. There used to be lots of sheepshead, but do not catch many of late years. They would catch them in the trap (pound) nets and take them ashore and throw them away. We have the lawyer here and the gar-pike or pilot fish. Also get what we call dog fish, and what we call buffalo shad. They are a big reddish fish with large scales and big eyes, something the shape of a sheepshead. We get the

*Caro*

*Calico bass*

*Rock "*

*Sheepshead*

*ling  
Garpike*

*amia  
buffalo shad*

*Essex*  
*Maskinonge*

grass pike here also. Get the maskinonge. They caught a good many maskinonge in the river here last spring by spearing them. They never were taken commercially, however. The grass pike were taken commercially and they speared a good many of them in the winter. Up at Presque Isle they got a good many of them.

*Spearing*

*Walleye*

Before we commenced selling fish fresh here we could not do anything with the pickerel. I know I had 15 barrels of pickerel one day and took them and put them out on the land. They began to take pickerel I think about 12 years ago for market. On Lake Erie they used to sell them when I was there. They do not catch but a very few of them here. Sometimes in September they will get quite a little run of them, but they soon drop off.

*Suckers*

We get a great many suckers, but they do

not catch near as many as they did and do not care to. We call the suckers the buffalo fish. We used to get a few moon-eyes, but not very often. I never saw any calico bass here, but have seen them in the southern part of the state. I never saw any of them in Lake Erie. They catch them at South Haven in Lake Michigan. In some places they were so thick that they would stop the water wheels and prevent the mills from running.

Brook trout have increased all over here, as they have stocked the streams with them. In some places, on crossing a bridge, they would not stop the train to plant brook trout, but would dump them right out of the car.

We call the menominee whitefish pilot fish here. They are not worth paying any attention to, however. We do not get the

moon-eyes

Calico bass

B. trout

menominee

*long jaw*

*blue fin*

long jaw here, and they are another fish that are not good for much. They are very fat. The blue fin is a very fat fish also. There are very few of them here. Once in a while might get them in deep water, but not to speak of.

*w. of trout abundance*

*g. tug*

*Time out*

*Too much g.*

*Figure*

The whitefish and the trout were very abundant and the whitefish have almost entirely gone, and the trout have decreased very much. These tugs here probably lift 5 or 8 miles of nets. During the hot weather they will probably not lift over 3 or 4 gangs, and they will get anywhere from 800 to 1200 lbs. of fish. There is certainly too much gill net fishing. If they had run the same amount of twine years ago that large tug of Alpern's would not have brought the fish in. We had one tug like Lincoln's, and he was running it, and brought in 7 tons of fish.

Hatcheries  
effect

I do not think that the amount of fish they put in this region from the hatcheries will amount to a great deal, although undoubtedly it helps Lake Erie, because a great many go down there. There are a great many put in on the Canada side and I think 2-3 of the fish put in go down the river.

