

CHAPTER XIV.—FISHERIES AND FURS

CONSPECTUS

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The interpretation of the symbols used in the tables throughout the Year Book will be found on p. viii of this volume.

PART I.—FISHERIES*

Section 1.—The Development of Canada's Sea Fisheries

The vast prolific fishing grounds off Canada's Atlantic Coast have been of great economic value since the early days of settlement of the North American Continent. The heaviest landings by Canadian fishermen today are taken from these waters which first attracted Europeans in the late fifteenth century. Codfish so plentiful they could be lifted out of the ocean by the basketful were reported by navigator John Cabot when he returned from his 1497 voyage in quest of new lands for Henry VII of England. In those days, salt cod was something of a luxury food in England, its value being reckoned as high as 50 shillings a hundredweight as compared with four shillings and eightpence for meat. Markets for dried cod were also assured in the warm countries of the Mediterranean where there was a scarcity of storable protein foods and, as a consequence, it was profitable to send fishing vessels 2,000 miles over the sea to harvest the rich cod stocks off Newfoundland.

From the beginning, competition was keen among fleets of England, France, Spain and Portugal but the English eventually succeeded in dominating the fisheries, particularly in inshore areas. French operations were diverted to the offshore banks and the more remote areas of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, while Spain and Portugal were gradually eliminated from the fishery as a result of aggressive activity by the English.

Valuable fishery bases were first established by settlers in New England, and Nova Scotia assumed importance as a base of fishing operations after the movement of population from New England in the mid-eighteenth century. However, efforts to establish shore settlements in Newfoundland as operating bases were discouraged by English interests and expeditions of fishing fleets from that country continued until settlement in the island was finally sanctioned in the early nineteenth century and a resident population began to make its influence felt in the industry.

* Sections 1, 2 and Subsection 1 of Section 3 were prepared by the Information and Consumer Service, Department of Fisheries, Ottawa.