A History Of The Louisiana Shrimp Industry, 1867-1961

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A HISTORY OF THE LOUISIANA SHRIMP
INDUSTRY, 1867-1961

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
Thomas Aquinas Becnel
B.S., Louisiana State University, 1956
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MANUSCRIPT THESSES

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ABSTRACT

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the Louisiana shrimp industry began in Barataria Bay when canning and drying operations raised shrimping from a local business venture to a small-scale localized industry. The purpose of this study is to trace the economic development of the industry from 1867 through its various stages of growth to the present. Publications of federal and state conservation agencies and personal interviews provided the principal sources of information for this study.

Eighty-six years after its founding the shrimp industry became the most import United States fishery. This was due largely to technological improvements in the production of shrimp and the corresponding growth of initial processed shrimp forms to utilize the increased catch in expanding markets. Shortly after the trawl replaced the seine and led to larger catches, the marketing of shrimp in headless form created new outlets. When offshore discoveries of shrimp expanded production, frozen shrimp became an important marketing form to supply the growing demand throughout the United States. The key to the industry's future seems to be expansion into new fishing grounds, revitilization of the grounds which have produced sparingly in recent years, and curbing growing imports.
CHAPTER I

THE FOUNDING OF THE SHRIMP INDUSTRY

Shrimping was probably carried on in Louisiana by the Indians before the French came and by the French since 1718, but the industry did not begin until 1867 when the first canning factory began operation. Shortly after fishermen began using the haul seine in 1872, the shrimp-drying industry commenced operations and soon prospered. Until the Fishery Commission took notice of the shrimp industry, little was written from the time duPratz mentioned it in 1718 until Fishery Commission publications appeared in the 1880's.

Apparently shrimpers caught more than enough shrimp to meet the demand when people bought only fresh shrimp. Since shrimp spoiled quickly, the market was local only. Once processed shrimp supplied foreign and domestic markets, Louisiana production increased rapidly and then settled down to a period of stability with slow increase in supply. By the first decade of the twentieth century Louisiana produced about six million pounds annually valued roughly at three hundred thousand dollars.

Though shrimp lived in prehistoric times, and man ate these shell-fish two thousand years ago, few references to the crustacean so important to Louisiana's economy can be found until the 1800's. Recently a marine biologist assigned by the United Nations to Panama found twenty-five
thousand-year-old ossified shrimp remains.\(^1\) Since shrimp appeared on Phoenician and Grecian coins and on Egyptian temple walls, they must have been fairly common in early times.\(^2\) Le Page duPratz, one of the early settlers and writers of Louisiana, who came to New Orleans in 1718, stated that the French caught shrimp in the Mississippi River and in Lake Pontchartrain. These early Louisiana fishermen used nets they brought from France.\(^3\)

Later writers failed to mention shrimping in colonial Louisiana after duPratz, but one noted marine biologist believed that the French learned to catch shrimp from the Indians and that the common Louisiana shellfish was abundant in New Orleans markets throughout the colonial period.\(^4\) One source claims that the Spanish government dug the Carondelet Canal in the 1790's to bring shrimp, lumber, fish, and other products of the Lake Pontchartrain area to New Orleans.\(^5\)

\(^1\) The New Orleans Times Picayune, September 29, 1961.

\(^2\) Lealen E. Martin, Jr., "His Lowly Highness the Shrimp," Natural History, XLVII (December, 1941), 276.


The Baratarians, associated with the Lafittes and their smuggling operations in the early 1800's, fished with seines part of the time and sold their seafood at the French Market in New Orleans. Following the destruction of the privateers' headquarters, Louis Chighizola and the other Baratarians returned to Grand Isle and Cheniere Caminada and once again became shrimp fishermen. Chighizola lived at Grand Isle and maintained a seafood stand at the French Market.

Even at the time of the Civil War writers made few references to shrimp when fishermen apparently continued to catch them in increasing numbers. Within a decade of the end of the Civil War, dealers had established drying and canning plants. The rare Civil War pamphlet, Report of the Committee of the Free Market of New Orleans did not list any transactions with shrimp though the Free Market did use cured fish or fish roe. Then in 1867 a New Orleans Mardi Gras parade entitled

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6 John Smith Kendall, "The Huntsmen of Black Ivory," The Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXIV (January, 1941), 23.


the Feast of the Epicurus had floats honoring shrimp, oysters, and other foods. 10

In the years following the Civil War shrimping in Louisiana took huge strides forward and became an industry. The name Barataria came to include a large area between the Mississippi River and Bayou Lafourche from a point as far north as New Orleans extending south to the Gulf of Mexico. The streams in this area flow into Barataria Bay, which is approximately six miles wide and fifteen miles long. Fishermen in the central Gulf of Mexico learned early that Barataria Bay in Louisiana and Galveston and Matagorda Bays in Texas contained many shrimp. In the Gulf region, especially Barataria, the shrimping season, running from October to April, lasted six months. Shrimping crews established temporary stations at various points in Barataria when the season opened. 11

In about 1872 shrimpers began using the haul seine which became the most important single piece of gear in the early fishery. By 1880 the seine had become standard gear in the shrimp industry. 12 By 1915

10 Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Louisiana. (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1892), I, 204.


shrimpers used 268 seines.  

When boats with engines came into use, the seines increased in size. Two men in a rowboat handled the early seines which had one-half inch mesh and measured one-hundred and twenty by ten feet. Seines grew to a maximum of eighteen hundred feet long with a width of fourteen feet in the center, tapering off to seven feet at the ends. Extremely long seines required crews of up to twenty men. All seines had a lead line on the lower edge and a cork line on the upper.  

Because family seining crews were sometimes too small to handle the larger seines, shrimpers organized seining companies. Each member of the crew had a specific job to perform and shared in the catch of the company. Though all members helped in hauling in the seine, some sailed the lugger, others manned the rowboat, others held the seine down on the bottom, and one iced the shrimp and took it to market, often in a boat used expressly for this purpose. Most seining operations, however, had six or eight-man crews.  


14 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 80-81.  

15 Paul Griffin, personal interview, (Golden Meadow, Louisiana, March 18, 1962). Paul Griffin, who is eighty-four years old seined as a young man and lived through the storms of 1893 and 1915; Pierre Gaspard, personal interview, (Cut Off, Louisiana, April 7, 1962). A Cheniere seiner of the old fishery, Pierre Gaspard recalls the Cheniere storm of 1893.
Fishing with the haul seine in the day of the sailing lugger followed a distinct pattern which was repeated time after time. As the boat sailed through a bay or lagoon, a shrimper, standing near the bow, threw the cast net periodically to locate large schools of shrimp. After finding a concentration of shrimp, the crew halted the lugger and in a rowboat circled away from it plying out the seine as they went. Once they returned to the sailing lugger completing the circle, the fishermen pulled the seine toward the lugger making sure that the lead line was never permitted to lift from the bottom and allow the shrimp to escape. When the shrimp had been forced into the wider "bag" section in the center of the seine, men on the skiff unloaded the shrimp with dip nets while two tall crew members stood on the lead line of the seine ends near the boat. 16

The haul seine had several shortcomings despite its value in making shrimping an industry. First, fishing with the seine was seasonal since the shrimpers could not stand in the water during the colder months. Second, seining operations sometimes required large crews. And finally, fishermen could use the seine only in relatively shallow water. 17

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16 Adam Orgeron, personal interview, (Golden Meadow, Louisiana, January 28, 1962). A seiner in the early fishery, eighty-year-old Adam Orgeron had sons who operate diesel-powered Florida trawlers in the offshore fishery; Angelo Angelette, personal interview, (Golden Meadow, Louisiana, November 12, 1961). Born at Cheniere Caminada, Angelo Angelette moved to Golden Meadow after the 1915 storm destroyed Leeville.

17 Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, The Shrimp and Shrimp
When shrimping was restricted to shallow water only, fishermen, for the most part, used sailboats and rowboats, but many fished the shore with small seines or cast nets and used no boats. The early fishermen of Louisiana did not design their own sailing skiffs but modified the older Mediterranean work boat with local variations. Having little formal education or scientific knowledge, boatbuilders worked with crude plans. 18

Barataria shrimpers called their sailing luggers designed for shallow coastal waters canots. These ranged in length from twenty to thirty-five feet. Because the inland waterways of Barataria were shallow, the canot had a centerboard, or hinged keel, rather than the permanently attached type used on most sailing vessels. With this type keel the fisherman went into the shallow waters without fear of damaging his boat since the centerboard slid up within a casing in the boat when it hit bottom. 19

As the industry progressed, fishermen relied on specialized tradesmen for their boats and fishing gear. Local boatbuilders, who obtained

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18 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 63.
19 Paul Griffin, personal interview; Angelo Angelette, ibid.
their cyprus lumber from sawmills located on Bayou Des Allemands in upper Barataria Bay, built most of the canots used by the shrimpers. The fishermen seldom built large boats, but sometimes constructed the small rowboats themselves. Sailmakers and netmakers established shops in the local fishing villages and supplied the shrimper's needs.  

Shrimp fishermen could buy ice in New Orleans to preserve their catch, but they did not always do so. When they did use ice, they covered it in the hold of the boat with rice hulls to prevent rapid melting. The shrimper often used dampened palmetto leaves instead of ice when delivering shrimp to the drying platforms in the bay. Certain varieties of shrimp never required ice since they were used only in the drying process which could not use iced shrimp because they became discolored when dried in the sun.  

Early Louisiana fishermen caught and sold four different varieties of shrimp. These were river shrimp, lake shrimp (white shrimp), seabob, and brown (Brazilian) shrimp. Throughout the history of the shrimp industry white shrimp have been the most important species. Discovered by the seiners along the beaches of Grand Isle and the mouth of Bayou Lafourche, the seabob, smaller and commercially less valuable than the

20 Pierre Gaspard, ibid.  
21 Ibid.; Paul Griffin, ibid.
other varieties, went primarily to the drying platforms and were shipped to the Orient. The name seabob is a corruption of six barbe, the French expression "six beards", which describes the hairlike barb on the shrimp. Early seiners, not knowing the difference between the white shrimp and the brown, often mistook a run of brown shrimp for a return entry into the inland waters by the white. One shrimper, who knew the difference between the two varieties, reported catching very few brown shrimp.

Little statistical information on the size of the catch and its value was available until the 1880's when the United States Fish Commission recognized the importance of the shrimp industry and began to collect catch data. Early fishery statistics indicated the rapid growth of the Louisiana shrimp industry prior to the turn of the century. From a total Gulf of Mexico catch of 534,000 pounds valued at sixteen million dollars in 1880, Louisiana production increased to 6,810,000 pounds in 1887. From 1887 until 1908 the total Gulf catch remained relatively stable, increasing only moderately from 6,810,000 pounds in 1887 to 8,581,000

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23 Paul Griffin, personal interview.

24 Pierre Gaspard, ibid.
pounds in 1908. By 1913 the catch grew to 10.5 million pounds valued at slightly over one-half million dollars. Landings, increasing steadily for the next six years, in 1919 totaled sixteen million pounds valued at $880,000.

Shrimp dealers processed shrimp by drying and canning early in the development of the industry. Heavy shrimp landings in the central Gulf of Mexico made Louisiana a good place for these industries to develop and prosper. In 1867 the G. W. Dunbar family built a floating shrimp cannery and started operation near Grand Terre Island in Barataria Bay. The Dunbars did not succeed in this venture until 1875 when they devised a bag lining for cans. Following this discovery, the canning industry in Louisiana by 1880 operated on a fairly large scale.


By the 1880's the Dunbars had established a large canning plant in New Orleans. Operating on a seasonal schedule, the plant canned shrimp for about five months during the fall and winter and fruit during the summer. The plant, representing a capital investment of thirty thousand dollars, made the tin boxes and solder, hired 25 men and 140 women, and had a capacity of 1,500 one-and-a-half-pound cans per day. Fresh shrimp appeared in quantity on the New Orleans markets, and the hermetically sealed cans sold to many sections of the United States and England and France. The city markets and canneries gave jobs to approximately 560 men. Shrimp canning experienced a tremendous growth from 1897 to 1908. The 1897 canned pack of twenty-eight thousand standard cases, valued at sixty thousand dollars, rose to 110,000 cases valued at $334,000 in 1908. By 1918 the canned pack totaled 111,000 cases worth $591,000.

The practice of hiring Slavs and Bohemians in the shrimp and oyster factories had been established by 1900. Coming from Maryland in railroad freight cars, these people filled the need for cheap, seasonal

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31 A standard case is the equivalent of forty-eight cans each containing five ounces of shrimp meat.

labor. Many of the migrant laborers eventually settled in Louisiana and made the seafood industry their livelihood. 33

The Chinese came to Louisiana in 1873 and started the shrimp-drying process, a new facet of the Louisiana shrimp industry. 34 Lee Yim, who came to Barataria Bay and established the first drying platform, is called the father of the shrimp-drying industry in Louisiana. The cured shrimp, dried by the sun on platforms built on stilts high above the water, became an item of export to China. 35

By 1908 Louisianians dried and canned more shrimp than they used in a fresh state. 36 Drying and canning increased rapidly after 1915 when bigger boats equipped with gasoline engines extended the shrimping grounds. 37

The shrimper sold most of his catch at the French Market or to the canneries in New Orleans. The rest of his shrimp he sold to the

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33 The New Orleans Times Picayune, December 10, 1939.

34 Johnson and Lindner, Report No. 21, p. 40.

35 Rex Laney, Do You Know Louisiana? (Baton Rouge: State Department of Commerce and Industry, 1938), 285. Hereinafter cited as Laney, Do You Know Louisiana?.


drying platforms in Barataria Bay. Seafood dealers at Lugger's Landing, part of the Picayune Tier situated at Ursuline Avenue, did the buying for the French Market. The Dunbar factory had a capacity of about one hundred barrels of shrimp. When the factory could not take all the shrimp the boats had to offer, the fishermen dumped the unsold portion into the Mississippi River.

In the sailing lugger the trip to New Orleans was often slow and difficult. Before the use of gasoline engines the trip required days rather than hours. If the skiff received no favorable breezes to push it along, the crew used oars, push poles, and towlines to make their way to market. In later years small steamboats or motor luggers hauled some of the shrimp to market.

The Baratarians used several routes to the markets in New Orleans.

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40 A barrel equals 210 pounds of heads-on shrimp or 125 pounds of heads-off shrimp.

41 Paul Griffin, personal interview.

42 Ibid.; Pierre Gaspard, ibid.

One route, which for many years served the Chenière Caminada area led through Bayou Andre, Bay des Ilettes, Grand Bayou, Little Lake, Lake Salvador, Bayou Segnette, the Barataria and Lafourche Canal Company waterway, and the Mississippi River to Lugger's Landing. Fishermen also used the Harvey Canal and the Verret Canal. 44

After 1900 when gasoline engines came into use, the ice boat appeared and gave a boost to the struggling canning industry. The ice boat, or freight boat, roamed the shrimp grounds, bought shrimp from the seining boats, and disposed of the catch. This operation saved the seiner the cost of ice and the trouble of making frequent trips inland to sell his produce. 45

Once the shrimp canneries operated on a large scale, the practice of having factory-owned or affiliated boats started. As early as 1910 the Dunbars had factory boats which were assigned to certain fishermen who had to sell to the factory at the quoted price.

Prices paid to fishermen for their shrimp remained relatively stable in the years prior to the introduction of the trawl. Shrimpers received from $2.50 to $4.00 a barrel for their shrimp in New Orleans. They received only $1.50 a barrel if they sold the shrimp locally. The

44 Paul Griffin, personal interview.

seabob, which could be sold only at the drying platforms, brought $1.50 a barrel while white shrimp sold for $2.00 a barrel at the platforms. By 1917 shrimp and ice factories sprang up in the Barataria region. Golden Meadow established its first factory that year.

Despite the fact that the shrimper was often a trapper, oyster fisherman, hunter, and farmer, shrimping became the most important means of earning a living in the Cheniere Caminada area once the industry progressed. The seiner usually fished only part of the year and supplemented his income during the off season in various other occupations. Even with additional jobs the seiner usually did not earn much money.

The shrimp fisherman, living along the desolate shore of Barataria waterways, lived a hazardous life. Frank Griffin, an early fisherman from Cheniere, claimed that the biggest danger to a fisherman in the sailing lugger was being driven out to sea by a sudden north wind. Tropical hurricanes also posed a threat to the homes of the coastal dwellers. Cheniere fishermen, who suffered the loss of families and homes in the storms of 1893 and 1915, settled in the towns of Leeville, Golden Meadow,

46 The Houma Courier, August 8, 1958; Paul Griffin, personal interview; Pierre Gaspard, ibid.

Galliano, Cut Off, Lafitte, and Westwego and spread the shrimping industry from its early center. 48

When the industry was small and localized, the labor force came from the home port, and the skills and the love of the trade passed from father to son. 49

The predominantly French shrimpers of Barataria lived a rather lonely life. These Roman Catholic people did not know of such gay celebrations as the blessing of the shrimp fleet, for in the lower reaches of Barataria, the priest on his periodic visits hurried to perform baptisms and weddings. 50

Until the introduction of the trawl between 1915-1917, the Louisiana shrimp industry remained relatively small despite its rapid growth since 1880. At this time shrimp dealers had only three forms of their product. Fresh shrimp, which appeared on the markets seasonally, lasted only a short time even when iced and supplied the local markets only. Dried shrimp and canned shrimp, the only processed forms used at this time, required more shrimp than were needed for the fresh market by 1908. Before the Louisiana shrimp industry could blossom and vault ahead to

48 The *Houma Courier*, August 8, 1958; Paul Griffin, personal interview; Pierre Gaspard, *ibid.*

49 *Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry*, I, 112.

50 Paul Griffin, personal interview; Pierre Gaspard, *ibid.*
new heights as it had done after the coming of the haul seine, production had to increase and canning, drying, and fresh shrimp had to enlarge their markets. The next phase of the industry's growth, spurred by technological changes which not only increased production but brought the industry away from its seasonal dependence, accomplished this.
CHAPTER II

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE TRAWL AND LOUISIANA DOMINATION OF THE GROWING INDUSTRY

Widespread use of the trawl led to a second period of rapid growth of the shrimp industry which Louisiana dominated. The shrimp industry came of age in the years following the introduction of the trawl. Production increased greatly, and a new processed form, headless shrimp, competed with canning and drying for sales. The trawl, more than just facilitating greater landings, made shrimping a year-round operation rather than a seasonal one. Requiring greater and more consistent pulling power, the trawl had to await the widespread use of gasoline engines in boats. In the first few decades after the coming of the trawl, fishermen still confined themselves to relatively shallow water in the bays, bayous and waters just off the beaches. In this era prior to the discovery of offshore concentration of shrimp, small boats still predominated.

The trawl, unlike the seine, was dragged along the bottom with lines attached to the stern of the boat. Shaped like a nearly flattened funnel, the trawl used two wooden doors from 3-1/2 to 6 feet long to keep the net spread beneath the water. Fastened to a bridle at the end of the trawl lines, the doors slid along the bottom on their edges. The bridle, fastened like the bridle of a kite, caused the doors to exert a downward and outward pressure as the boat moved forward. A lead line,
attached along the lower opening of the trawl and fastened at the ends to the bottom edge of the trawl boards, kept the lower lip on the bottom; and the cork line, connected to the trawl boards on the upper end, kept the edge of the trawl off the bottom and open. Trawls ranged in length from twenty-two to one hundred feet.

As the boat moved forward, shrimp caught in the trawl were forced to the tapered cod end of the net which was closed by a long rope which ran to the boat. Fishermen attached a buoy to this line so that finding the trawl would be easy if it happened to break away. When the two trawl lines attached to the doors began to draw closer together after trawling for some time, the trawler knew that the net had filled. He then stopped the boat, pulled in the trawl lines, brought the trawl abroad, and released the shrimp onto the deck by untying the rope which held the cod end closed.¹

The Bureau of Fisheries began using a small trawl between 1912 and 1915 at Beaufort, North Carolina, for collecting marine life. Noticing that fisheries personnel caught shrimp in the little trawl, shrimpers adopted it for use in the shrimp fishery in Fernandina, Florida. By 1917 the use of the trawl had spread to the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico and had become standard gear in the shrimp industry.² By 1930

¹ Johnson and Lindner, Report No. 21, pp. 11-12.
² The Shrimp and Shrimp Ind. of Sou. U. S., pp. 6-7.
the trawl had almost completely replaced the haul seine.\(^3\) The haul seine remained in use in Louisiana long after it had disappeared in other places for several important reasons. First, Louisiana had more shallow bays suited to seining. Second, the haul seine worked well on Louisiana's mud bottoms. Third, shrimpers in Louisiana had bigger investments in seines and did not want to or could not afford to dispose of them so quickly. And finally, the trawl spread from New England, to the South Atlantic, and then westward along the Gulf of Mexico.\(^4\)

Because of the tremendous advantages over the haul seine, the trawl revolutionized the shrimp industry. First, the trawl allowed fishermen a wider range of fishing grounds since deeper water did not prevent its effective use. Second, the trawling operation cut the manpower to two or three men. Third, the trawl yielded greater production per man. Fourth, the trawl led to the opening of new grounds. And finally, it halted the seasonal dependence on shrimp in shallow water.\(^5\)

The Louisiana catch and value doubled from sixteen million pounds

\(^3\) \textit{Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry}, I, 80.


\(^5\) \textit{The Shrimp and Shrimp Ind. of the Sou. U.S.}, 7, 19.
valued at $880,000 in 1919 to thirty-two million pounds worth $1,800,000 in 1920. Remaining stable over the next thirteen years, the catch from 1920 to 1933 averaged over thirty million pounds. The value of the catch, however, dropped to $1,500,000 in 1929. Just exceeding the forty million pound mark in 1928, the catch increased until 1931 when production dropped to the thirty million pound level again. Louisiana production in 1934 expanded to a new high of 47.6 million pounds valued at $1,700,000. By 1935 production reached fifty million pounds and by 1936, sixty million pounds valued for the first time above two million dollars. Continuing this growth trend of the late 1930's, the 1937 catch reached 76.2 million pounds worth $2,700,000. Louisiana Conservation authorities could not explain the 1930 decline in production; but working with the Bureau of Fisheries on the problem with scientific studies, they hoped to find the cause and a solution. The decline probably reflects the effect of the depression on the economy as a whole. In the depression years trawlers caught shrimp but reduced fishing effort because of market slumps.

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8 Ludwig Orgeron, personal interview (Golden Meadow, Louisiana, March 28, 1962). The son of Adam Orgeron, Ludwig Orgeron began fishing at about the time the trawl was introduced.
The increase in the number of trawls from 1917 to 1938 parallels the decrease of the seine during the same period. In 1917 fishermen used 300 seines and only 4 trawls. By 1920 the number of seines had decreased to 97 while the number of trawls increased to 499. The seine had a comeback during the next year and increased to 135 while the number of trawls doubled to 983. From 1922 to 1931 the number of seines remained above one hundred while the number of trawls increased to over one thousand. Dropping below the century mark in 1932, seines from that point on gradually declined, while the trawl continued to become more important. By 1937 shrimpers used 2,313 trawls and only 35 seines.9

United States Fish and Wildlife statistics indicate that Louisiana caught 18.5 million pounds of a total Gulf Coast catch of 32.4 million pounds of shrimp in 1918. Louisiana's share of the 1927 catch of 68.9 million pounds totaled 40.3 million pounds, nearly sixty per cent of the catch. The state's 53.8 million pounds in 1928 far exceeded the totals of Texas, Florida, and Mississippi, its nearest competitors for the 82.2 million pounds produced. This pattern continued, and in 1938 Louisiana produced 81.4 of the 112.6 million pounds caught in the Gulf.10 Louisiana caught thirty-six per cent of the total United States catch in 1931 compared to twenty per cent for Florida, eighteen per cent for Mississippi, and


fourteen per cent for Texas. Thus, by 1938 when exploratory fishing found offshore concentrations of shrimp, which ushered in a new era for the shrimp industry, Louisiana had experienced a fourfold growth since 1918.

Boats used by Louisiana shrimpers in the years following the use of the trawl varied little from the design of the sailing lugger. Gradually increasing in size, boats maintained the same general appearance as the canot until Biloxi and Florida-type boats came to Louisiana.

In the years following the introduction of gasoline and distillate-burning engines, the sailing skiff slowly left the scene. The Louisiana lugger, replacing the canot, looked about the same as the sailing lugger with the exception that boatbuilders eliminated the centerboard casing and placed a cabin near the stern for housing the engine and operating controls. Averaging twenty-five or thirty feet in length, the shallow-draft luggers could not take rough water, but sufficed in the 1920's and 30's when shrimpers still fished the shallow waters of the bays, bayous and Gulf near the shore. The lugger, which had a hauling mast situated near the bow and the fishing hold amidship, did not have power facilities for pulling in the trawl until the late 1930's. Since the cabin extended almost to the stern of the vessel, many boatbuilders added a short fantail-like projection to the stern. Fishermen stood on the fantail to pull

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11 Johnson and Lindner, Report No. 21, p. 2.
the trawl near the boat then brought the net alongside and lifted it onto the deck with a block and tackle attached to the hauling mast.  

The night-trawler first appeared in the bayous near Houma in Terrebonne Parish in 1933. Using a different type of rig, the night-trawler had two small trawls attached to two four-by-seven rectangular frames, hinged so they could be raised perpendicularly or lowered horizontally to drop the nets into the water. Rigged on small fast luggers, the night trawl skimmed through the water about three feet below the surface. Operating during the night when the shrimp were near the surface, the night trawl did not have to drag the bottom. The French trawlers likened the two frames with the suspended nets to butterfly wings and called night-trawlers *papillon* boats.

The Biloxi-type trawler, resembling the lugger in basic design, became popular in Louisiana as the shrimp fishery gradually expanded to deeper Gulf waters. Introduced to Louisiana by Mississippi fishermen, the Biloxi-type boat varied from forty-to-fifty feet in length. Larger, stronger, and more seaworthy than the little lugger, the Biloxi-type trawler had a v-type bottom and more freeboard. With its engine and

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14 Angelo Angelette, personal interview.

wheel house located aft, the Biloxi boat had little maintenance problems with the propeller shaft since the engine was situated near the propeller. Aside from having greater freeboard than the lugger, especially at the stern, the Biloxi boat had a more substantial hauling mast with outriggers which swung out over the sides in pulling in the trawl. The rugged forward towing arrangement made the Biloxi-type boat difficult to maneuver.  

Ice boats, continuing the practice of supplying the fishermen with ice and buying their catch, expanded their operations to include supplying water, fuel, and provisions. This system worked in Louisiana since it saved the fisherman the trouble and expense of making frequent trips to port. Charging one dollar a barrel for freight and fifty cents for ice, the ice boat paid $1.50 per barrel less to the fisherman than the going rate. The ice boat operation entailed considerable expense and operated at a profit only when the volume of the catch was great.  

Even in the era of the trawl shrimpers sometimes covered the deck of the boat with an awning and used no ice if delivery went to factories situated near the shrimping grounds.  

16 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 63-64, 69.  
17 Ibid., 67. 18 Padgett, "Marine Shellfisheries of La.,” 158.  
19 Johnson and Lindner, Report No. 21, p. 21.  
20 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 211.
In 1930 the annual United States value of the shrimp catch per net ton of capacity of the boat equalled $446. While the value of the catch per net ton of capacity rose sharply after 1930, the catch per net ton of capacity dropped from 6-1/2 tons for every net ton of capacity to about 2 tons in later years. Remaining constant since 1930, the annual United States catch per fisherman averaged seventeen thousand pounds in 1930 and in recent years. The average price per pound paid to fishermen for shrimp rose from 3.39 cents in 1930 to nearly ten times this amount in modern times, while prices paid for other fish and shellfish merely doubled. The annual value of the United States shrimp catch per fisherman, which in 1930 equalled $612, increased nearly nine times in recent years. 21

In 1930 shrimp fishermen in Louisiana initiated the old custom of blessing the fishing fleet. Dating back almost two thousand years to the days when Christians sent their fleets into the Mediterranean, the blessing ceremony passed through several stages before making its way to Louisiana. Knowledge of the religious ritual, performed in the Middle Ages in Venice and later in Brittany, came to America with French priests. D. J. Theriot of Little Caillou in Terrebonne Parish organized support for the ceremony, and Louisiana held its first blessing of the shrimp fleet at Little Caillou in 1930. Barataria, Morgan City, Golden

21 Ibid., I, 130, 171; II, 115.
Meadow, and Grand Calillou adopted the practice and held their blessings in later years. 22

Canning and drying remained the most important processed form for shrimp in the years immediately after the introduction of the trawl. Faced with the quick-spoilage problem, dealers sold fresh shrimp only on the local markets. By the 1930's new processed forms, which later became more important than drying and canning, opened new markets and greatly increased the demand for shrimp. In 1934 Louisiana shrimp processors began removing the heads from shrimp before shipping them to market. Greatly reducing the chance of spoilage and cutting the shipping rate forty per cent, headless shrimp created a new fresh shrimp market out of the state. With the new demand came higher prices to fishermen for their catch than the three dollars per barrel they received in 1908. 23

Packed in cartons and conveyed under refrigeration, headless shrimp reached distant markets fresh and unspoiled. 24 Headless shrimp accounted for thirty-four per cent of the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast shrimp marketed and ranked second only to canned shrimp in 1931. New York and Chicago received most of the headless shrimp from the Gulf Coast. 25

22 Laney, Do You Know Louisiana?, 283-84.
Frozen shrimp captured a small portion of the processed shrimp market in 1930 and increased greatly in later years, but played only a minor part in the industry for the period between the coming of the trawl and the spread of the shrimp industry to offshore shrimping grounds in 1938. Canning surpassed other processed forms during this period. In 1930 canned shrimp garnered eighty-two per cent of the value of the $6,100,000 United States industry. Frozen shrimp represented only 4.4 per cent of all processed shrimp forms. Canning, however, declined in comparative value to other forms after 1930. Maintaining stable annual production since 1930, the total United States canned pack increased in actual value into recent years, but not at the rapid rate of the other forms. Shoppers paid an average of eighteen cents per pound for frozen shrimp in 1930 and thirty-seven cents for canned shrimp.26

To determine the comparative value for headless shrimp for selected years is difficult since statistical agencies of the state did not always group this information in a single category but combined figures for fresh shrimp for processing with headless shipped out of state. This category utilized 28.7 million pounds in 1935 compared to 11.5 million pounds for drying, and 8.9 million pounds fresh for home consumption.27 Louisiana produced

26 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 243, 244; II, 294-95.

sixty million pounds of headless valued at $2,100,000 in 1936.28

In the 1920's and 30's Louisiana shrimp dealers established factories in many shrimping centers springing up along the coast. In this day of Louisiana leadership in the shrimp industry, the Gulf Coast, especially Louisiana and Mississippi, had most of the canning plants. By 1930 Louisiana and Mississippi had forty of the sixty-nine shrimp canneries in the United States. The concentration of this phase of the industry to these two states became even more pronounced after 1930.29 Louisiana's twenty-eight canneries in 1930 produced more than half of the total United States shrimp pack.30 Louisiana's canned pack of 266,717 standard cases valued at $1,530,072 in 1921 increased to 339,367 cases worth $2,034,364 by 1927. Increasing to 374,713 cases in 1932, the canned pack declined in value to $1,253,100. The number of canning plants increased from fourteen in 1921 to thirty in 1924, and then declined to twenty-six in 1927 and seventeen in 1932.31

Severance tax figures

29 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 295.
31 Johnson and Lindner, Report No. 21, pp. 25-29.
gathered by the Department of Conservation, indicated that Louisiana had thirty shrimp and crab canning and packing establishments and twenty-three drying platforms in 1934 and 1935.  

By 1928 the important Louisiana shrimp centers had already been established. Morgan City had five large seafood plants in 1928. Houma with a population of five thousand depended heavily on its seafood industry. The Pelican Lake Oyster and Packing Company and the Houma Packing Company hired over three hundred people. Jefferson Parish, a shrimp center which utilized the inland salt waters primarily, had several operating shrimp factories. Processing shrimp in seven factories, Lafourche Parish had the largest shrimp industry in the state. Shrimp and oyster canneries, the main Plaquemines Parish industry, gave jobs to many people. The Dunbar-Dukate Packing Company of Myrtle Grove hired 250 workers, while Fosters Packing Company and the Lopez Packing Company each hired around one hundred people. In addition, the parish had several other smaller plants operating.  

Calling itself the world's largest shrimp-cannery, Southern Shellfish Company located at Harvey, Louisiana, across the Mississippi River from New Orleans, received up to fifteen hundred barrels of shrimp per

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33 Department of Agriculture and Immigration, Louisiana, 1927-1928 (Baton Rouge: Ramires-Jones Printing Co., 1928), 131-85, passim.
day from about one hundred factory owned or affiliated boat and other independent fishermen in 1930. To insure a consistent supply the factory maintained several cargo boats, supplied with ice from the factory's own ice plant. One cargo boat, or ice boat, which bought shrimp from trawlers on the shrimping grounds, had a capacity of more than one hundred barrels of shrimp. The plant, founded in 1916 by Charles L. Greiner, operated at a profit even during the depression years. 34

Louisiana produced virtually all of the dried shrimp used in the United States in 1931. 35 Barataria Bay, which contained the largest concentration of drying platforms, had plants at Manilla Village, Leon Rojas, Bayou Cholas, Bayou Defon, Bayou Bruleau, and several other places. 36 Jules Fisher, who represented Jefferson Parish in the Louisiana Legislature, operated Manilla Village for a time. 37

By 1938 some of the earlier shrimping centers had increased in


35 Johnson and Lindner, Report No. 21, p. 23.


37 Angelo Angelette, personal interview.
importance. Houma's chief industry had become oyster and shrimp packing, and the town was the Louisiana center for both with large canneries to meet the needs. Morgan City's shrimping activity grew also, and by 1938, its packing plants had grown economically valuable. Possessing a fleet of three hundred luggers, Golden Meadow supplied shrimp to five canneries in Lafourche Parish. 38

Using methods employed by modern-day shrimp associations, the Southern Canners Association of New Orleans gathered statistics, attempted to increase consumption of canned shrimp through advertising, and in general ways bolstered the canning industry. The association was a cooperative effort by the big packers. 39

Even though the shrimp trawl made shrimping less seasonal, the catch varied throughout the year and canning remained seasonal. Closed seasons during part of the year also restricted canning operations. The labor supply for the canning factories came from migrant workers from Maryland after 1905, when the canning center shifted from there to Louisiana, and from young men and women in the shrimping centers. 40

38 Laney, Do You Know Louisiana?, 134-245, passim.


Peeling shrimp in the factories for a cent per pound, the young laborers earned about $2.50 per day. 41

Because Mississippi canning plants at Biloxi prospered packing shrimp that came primarily from Louisiana waters, the Louisiana Legislature in 1926 passed a law which favored Louisiana canneries. This law, providing that all shrimp and oysters coming from Louisiana waters had to be removed from the shell before being shipped out of the state, would have forced the Mississippi canners to move to Louisiana. The United States Supreme Court temporarily forbade the Department of Conservation from enforcing the law until test cases were tried on their merits. 42 The Foster-Fountain Packing Company, which had a contract for delivery of a carload of raw shrimp per month during specified periods to the Sea Food Company, a Biloxi Cannery, filed suit because the law prevented this shipment. The United States Supreme Court on October 15, 1928 delivered its opinion and held the shrimp act unconstitutional on the ground that the purpose of the act "is not to retain the shrimp for the use of the people of Louisiana; it is to favor the canning of the meat and the manufacture of bran in Louisiana by withholding raw or unshelled shrimp from the Biloxi plants." The decision further stated that since Biloxi got


ninety-five per cent of its shrimp from Louisiana waters, the enforce-
ment of the law would have destroyed the shrimp business at Biloxi.43

Following this action by the court, Senator Jules G. Fisher of
Jefferson Parish in 1930 introduced a law known as the "Port of Entry
Law", which provided for the collection of severance taxes on seafood
and established points in Louisiana where conservation officials could
check fishing boats and collect the taxes before they left the state. Though
Biloxi canners at first opposed the measure, they later worked out agree-
ments with the Louisiana authorities for collecting the taxes in Mississippi
and remitting the money to Louisiana rather than subjecting Mississippi
trawlers to time-consuming and troublesome checking before returning
to the Biloxi canneries.44

Not satisfied with the proposed price for shrimp announced by
the canneries prior to the opening of the 1938 canning season, a committee
representing a large Louisiana union and one from Biloxi announced plans
to boycott the canneries unless they agreed to pay $8.50 per barrel. The
Gulf Coast Fishermen's and Oystermen's Association of Biloxi and
Fishermen's, Oystermen's and Fur Trappers' Producers' Co-operative
of Louisiana, Inc. formed the committee and established the price. Gulf

43 "Louisiana Act Favoring Local Labor and Industry Held Un-
Coast Seafood Producers' and Trappers' Associations, Inc. of Morgan City, of New Orleans at Lafitte, of New Orleans at Empire, and the Trappers' and Fishermen's Protective Association of St. Bernard Parish, Inc. on Delacroix Island all endorsed the $8.50 price recommended by the committee. 45

Canneries in Houma, Morgan City, Golden Meadow, Buras, Westwego, Harvey, Grand Isle, and New Orleans, calling the proposed price unreasonable, refused to open until shrimpers agreed to accept $7.00 per barrel. 46

Union members, realizing that their bargaining depended on cutting the shrimp supply to the canneries, organized into bands which roamed the shrimping areas destroying or dumping overboard the shrimp that non-union shrimpers attempted to sell to the canneries or at the French Market. Often armed with shotguns, the union gangs poured oil or kerosene on shrimp loaded on trucks enroute to market. 47 By August 14, four days after the inside waters opened for shrimping, the five Louisiana unions still maintained their stand. Union shrimpers dumped two hundred barrels of shrimp at the Lafourche Ice and Shrimp Company in Golden Meadow, and twelve fishermen were arrested for destroying several

45 Times Picayune, August 4, 1938.
46 The New Orleans Item, August 12, 1938.
47 Ibid.
truckloads at Barataria and Lafitte. 48

Non-union shrimpers, who wanted to sell to the canneries at seven dollars per barrel, rallied behind two newly organized rebel unions when no solution became evident by August 18. The newly formed East Louisiana Fishermen's and Trappers' Association, with 236 members in St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes announced plans for selling shrimp to the canneries at $7.50 per barrel. 49 Jesty Collins of Golden Meadow, in a fiery French speech in Golden Meadow, announced plans for reviving the Louisiana Shrimp Fishermen's Co-operative Association, chartered in 1932, to oppose the boycotting unions. Claiming that some of the striking union members were on cannery payrolls, Collins accused Charles F. Greiner, manager of Southern Shellfish Company, Inc. of getting the unions to strike so canneries could sell large holdings of canned shrimp left from the 1937 season when prices were high. Asserting that Greiner dictated prices to ninety-five per cent of the cannieries, Collins claimed that Greiner's plant remained closed not because of the strike but to unload his surplus pack. 50

Some canneries agreed to an eight-dollar compromise on August 27. 51 After much threatened violence and one shooting involving the warring

48 Ibid., August 14, 1938.
49 New Orleans Daily States, August 18, 1938.
50 Ibid., August 25, 1938.
51 The New Orleans Item, August 27, 1938.
unions, matters settled down when Southern Shellfish agreed to pay
eight dollars per barrel starting on September 1. The striking unions
agreed to the eight-dollar price on August 31. The five thousand
Louisiana trawlers lost about one million dollars by not shrimping during
August, the best season in the inland waters.

Realizing the need for protecting the shrimp, the Department of
Conservation by 1930 had established closed seasons on shrimp trawling.
Conservation officials did not set up closed seasons on trawling for bait
or on shrimp for local consumption. In inside waters the closed season
extended from June 15 to August 15 and from December 1 to March 15.
Outside water within the three-mile limit remained closed for the same
June to August period and from February 1 to March 15. Outside waters
beyond the three-mile line stayed closed only from June 15 to August 15.

Cooperative shrimp investigations, started in 1931 by the United
States Bureau of Fisheries and the Louisiana Department of Conservation,
showed that harmful practices in Louisiana regarding the catching of small
shrimp needed to be corrected with legislation and fishermen could in-
crease the volume and value of their catch by fishing for larger shrimp.

52 New Orleans Daily States, August 31, 1938.
53 Times Picayune, August 31, 1938.
54 New Orleans Daily States, August 31, 1938.
Because closing the shrimp season during certain parts of the year worked better than placing restrictions on minimum marketable shrimp size, Fisheries Bureau personnel recommended changing the dates for the closed seasons and leaving waters beyond the three-mile limit open the entire year. 56

By the late 1930's shrimp had gained in status among the United States fisheries, but still ranked as a minor fishery by comparison. Comprising less than 4 per cent of the annual United States per capita consumption of fish and shellfish, shrimp represented only 2.9 per cent of the value of the total United States seafood worth and 2.8 per cent of the total seafood catch. 57 In 1930 nine species brought in more money than shrimp. 58 The industry had to await the discovery of offshore concentrations of large shrimp before it could begin to challenge the major United States fisheries.


58 Ibid., I, 168.
CHAPTER III

LOUISIANA DOMINATION OF THE OFFSHORE FISHERY

The Louisiana shrimp industry after 1938 underwent changes as far-reaching as those in earlier years when trawling replaced seining and headless shrimp became a new processed form to reach distant markets. Following the discovery of offshore concentrations of shrimp in waters off the Louisiana coast, a boom occurred which caused a rapid transition of most of the fishing effort to deeper waters. Relying on relatively small boats for inland fishing, Louisiana fishermen could not invade the deep-water beds in luggers or even most of the small Biloxi-type boats. Adopting the boat style used by fishermen in the South Atlantic fishery, Louisianians soon had their own offshore fleet and boatyards prepared for building and maintaining larger boats. Louisiana continued its leadership of the United States shrimp industry from the 1938 discoveries until 1953, a period which saw the production of shrimp rise tremendously and the application of modern marketing, advertising, processing, and packaging of shrimp products for a greatly increased market. During this period appeared a growing threat to the domestic industry—imported shrimp in increasing amounts. But the years 1938-1953 probably could be called the heyday of the shrimp industry.
The ominous threats to the modern growing industry, which appeared
during these years, became more acutely felt in the years after this era.

Cooperative shrimp investigational studies between the Louisiana
Department of Conservation and the United States Bureau of Fisheries
in the late 1930's produced results exceeding expectations. The Pelican,
the Bureau of Fisheries exploratory fishing vessel, trawled off the
Louisiana coast from the shore to the one hundred fathom line. Along
the ten fathom depth the Pelican encountered large concentrations of
white shrimp between Ship and Trinity shoals. Fishermen soon rushed
to Ship and Trinity shoals located in the Gulf of Mexico south of the
Morgan City area ten to twenty miles from shore. The Pelican made
no similar finds in Texas or Mississippi waters.¹

By 1938 wide use of Ship Shoal grounds off the shore from Morgan
City began. Receiving national publicity, the grounds led to increased
markets and the development of a fleet of larger boats until World War
II halted the increase.² Because the twenty-five to forty-foot lugger
could not trawl the open Gulf waters in ten fathoms, many new boats
were added to the Louisiana fleet. By 1940-41 Louisiana had doubled
her shrimp production and the number of shrimp boats in use.³

2 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 19.
All major varieties of shrimp have similar life cycles. Spawning in spring and summer in the open Gulf, shrimp leave their young in the larval stage to float freely on the water to inside waters which serve as nursery grounds. Increasing rapidly in size, the young shrimp in August start to move to open water where they spawn and die after one year. All three major species of shrimp undergo two periods of heightened spawning and produce two definable broods of young shrimp each year.⁴

Geographic factors had a great impact on the United States shrimp industry. Finding shrimp far offshore led to the construction of larger sturdier boats and improved handling, storing, and transportation of shrimp. Utilizing Louisiana's 950 miles of coast lines, counting the bays and bayous, shrimpers caught smaller shrimp than other states which switched almost exclusively to the offshore grounds. Canning remained mostly a Louisiana operation because historically it started in the state and because small shrimp caught in inland waters could be used in the canning process. Texas, located further from markets than Louisiana, became a center for freezing and breading shrimp.

Before 1950 the shrimp-fishing grounds of the Gulf states stayed

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⁵ Werlla, "Fresh and Salt Water Fisheries," loc. cit., 57.
within ten miles of shore except off the Louisiana coast where the continental shelf is much wider than in most other states. Extended by the sediment deposited by the Mississippi River and other streams, the continental shelf near Cameron, Louisiana reaches 120 miles into the Gulf. All four commercial species of shrimp used today are found on the continental shelf. Fishermen found brown shrimp on the mud bottoms of Alabama, Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana and seabob in estuaral waters of Louisiana. They found white shrimp along the shelf closer to shore and pink shrimp on sand or shell bottoms in deeper waters.  

The white shrimp grounds, restricted to shallower water than the shrimping grounds for brown, pink, or royal red shrimp, extend from the mouth of the Mississippi River to Freeport, Texas, in a parallel band. White shrimp beds within the fourteen fathom depth all produce shrimp. Hazards such as soft mud south of Timbalier Bay and the Atchafalaya River and shell collections south of the Sabine River did not pose serious problems to modern fishing gear after the 1950's. By the end of World War II fishermen had discovered and fished all of the white shrimp grounds in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Even after the war Louisiana fishermen did not know of the large concentrations of white shrimp found in the Bay of Campeche in the southwestern Gulf of Mexico

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6 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 4, 18, 43.
near Yucatan by the Japanese in 1936 and 1937. 7

Found in insignificant numbers in the northern Gulf, pink shrimp came into use later than the other varieties. The United States Bureau of Fisheries, continuing exploratory fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, in 1950 sent the vessel Oregon into the Campeche and Dry Tortugas areas where large concentrations of pink shrimp were found. 8 Later in the 1950's fishermen began to catch pink shrimp in large numbers in the Bay of Campeche and in waters off the Dry Tortugas west of the Florida Keys. At first monopolized by Texas trawlers, Campeche grounds since 1951 have become the main fishing grounds for Florida-based boats. 9

Further exploration by the Bureau of Fisheries discovered a new variety of shrimp called royal-red. Trawling in waters from 190 to 270 fathoms deep, the Oregon found the new type shrimp in recent years. Fisheries authorities believe that royal-red shrimp could sustain a fishery even though fishermen would need costly equipment for such deep-water trawling. 10

7 Ibid., 19-26.
9 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 21, 22.
10 Harvey R. Bullis, Jr., "Preliminary Results of Deep-Water
Until about 1950 fishermen depended mainly on white shrimp for their catch. Exploring deeper waters after the 1938 discoveries, the Bureau of Fisheries located two types of shrimp referred to as grooved shrimp because of a furrow, or groove, on the head behind the spine. Both brown and pink shrimp are grooved shrimp. Louisiana fishermen had for years caught small brown shrimp in the inland shrimping grounds and used these for drying or canning. Accustomed to the appearance of white shrimp, shoppers refused to buy brown shrimp on the fresh market before 1947 because of their grayish tint. Shrimp dealers conducted campaigns in 1946 to reduce buyer resistance to grooved shrimp. When fishermen caught few white shrimp in 1947 and 1948, a Texas marketing agency sent a shipment of brown shrimp to California and sold it at cost to develop a market. Realizing that the color did not indicate spoilage, shoppers bought the brown shrimp in increasing numbers. Cities such as Chicago today buy mostly frozen brown shrimp.

Exploration for Shrimp in the Gulf of Mexico by the M/V Oregon (1950-1956), "Commercial Fisheries Review, XXVIII (December, 1956), 1, 12.

11 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 12, 19.
By 1956 brown shrimp accounted for fifty per cent of the Gulf of Mexico catch while pink shrimp accounted for twenty-seven per cent, white shrimp twenty-two per cent, and seabob only one per cent. In increasing in importance in 1957, brown shrimp represented sixty-four per cent of the Gulf catch while pink and white shrimp dropped to twenty-four and eleven per cent, respectively. In 1958 white shrimp accounted for a greater percentage of the Gulf catch than pink shrimp, but by 1959 pink shrimp landings again exceeded white landings.

By 1956 brown shrimp in Louisiana had invaded the foraging grounds of the white shrimp which had suffered a decline. From 1952 to 1957 little fresh water from the rivers flowed into the nursery grounds in the bays in Louisiana. Withstanding high salinity better than the white shrimp, brown shrimp became more numerous while white shrimp declined.


Though the catch may vary drastically over the years, Texas in recent years has produced mostly brown shrimp, Florida mostly pink shrimp, and Louisiana mostly white shrimp. Of the three leading shrimp-producing states in the United States only Louisiana produces two varieties in relatively large amounts. When white shrimp became scarce in recent years, Louisiana fishermen caught more brown shrimp than white for the first time in the history of the Louisiana shrimp industry.

Specializing in pink shrimp, Florida fishermen in 1956 caught over twenty-eight million pounds of this variety and less than a million pounds of either the white or brown varieties. Continuing this specialization but with brown shrimp, Texas that year produced over thirty million pounds of brown shrimp and less than four million pounds of the pink and white combined. Louisiana, on the other hand, caught over twelve million pounds of brown shrimp and over seventeen million pounds of white shrimp.\(^{19}\) In 1938 and 1939 when fishermen first fished the deeper waters, white shrimp composed ninety-five per cent of the total catch for Louisiana.\(^{20}\) Even up to 1945 white shrimp represented ninety-five per cent of the Louisiana total.\(^{21}\) In recent years Texas produced between fifty and

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sixty per cent of the brown shrimp from the Gulf of Mexico and Louisiana from twenty-three to twenty-nine per cent. Florida dominated the pink shrimp catch getting over ninety per cent with Texas getting most of the rest, and Louisiana virtually none. Louisiana produced between fifty-eight and sixty-two per cent of the white shrimp caught in the Gulf with Texas getting from six to twenty-three per cent. Finding markets at the drying platforms and canneries, Louisiana trawlers in recent years produced almost ninety per cent of the seabob caught in the United States. Increasing almost to its former level, white shrimp in Louisiana coastal water in 1958 enjoyed a comeback. The Louisiana white shrimp catch for that year exceeded the brown catch double in value.

The total Gulf of Mexico shrimp catch increased greatly in the period from 1936 to 1953. Rising from more than 84,000,000 pounds in 1936, the catch by 1937 exceeded 113,000,000 pounds. Increasing through World War II, the Gulf Coast shrimp catch by 1945 reached 145,000,000 pounds. In 1950 the total reached 151,000,000 pounds and in 1953, just over 223,000,000 pounds.

In recent years the northern Gulf of Mexico from the Mississippi River to the Texas line accounted for twenty-eight per cent of the total


United States shrimp catch. The Texas coast produced twenty-three per cent, and the Obregon and Campeche areas of Mexico, fourteen per cent. These figures indicate why one fisheries official called the Gulf of Mexico the "shrimp basket" of the nation.

Increasing at a tremendous rate, Louisiana's production rose from 53,000,000 pounds in 1936 to over 68,000,000 pounds in 1937. By 1938 the total reached 81,000,000 pounds, and in 1939, 100,000,000 pounds. The catch by 1945 equaled almost 117,000,000 pounds, a record high for the state. The catch, dropping to 88,000,000 pounds in 1948, averaged over 80,000,000 pounds until 1953.

The value of the Louisiana shrimp catch in 1936, growing at a greater ratio than the volume, increased about eight times in value from 1936 to 1953. Worth slightly over two million dollars in 1936, the Louisiana catch increased to almost four million dollars in 1940. By 1950 the value grew to almost fifteen million dollars, and 1953, over sixteen million dollars.


During the period from 1938 to about 1950 when Texas began to produce shrimp in greatly increased amounts, Louisiana's domination of the United States shrimp catch became even more pronounced than in years just after the introduction of the trawl. Louisiana continued its role as the leading shrimp-producing state from 1950 to 1953, but its share of the total United States catch decreased rapidly. Louisiana produced fifty-three of the eighty-four million pounds landed in 1936. Almost monopolizing the shrimp industry, Louisiana in 1939 produced over one hundred million pounds while all other shrimp-producing states of the Gulf Coast accounted for less than twenty million pounds. By 1945 Louisiana's 116,000,000 pounds accounted for most of the 145,000,000 produced in the Gulf states. Decreasing by comparison, Louisiana in 1950 produced slightly over half of the shrimp produced in the Gulf. The state's 86,000,000 pounds in 1953 represented over one-third of the 224,000,000 pounds the Gulf produced.\textsuperscript{28} In 1944 the Gulf Coast produced eighty-five per cent of the total United States catch and Louisiana sixty-six per cent.\textsuperscript{29}

In 1948 Terrebonne Parish produced more shrimp than any other parish in Louisiana. Lafourche, Jefferson, and St. Mary parishes

\textsuperscript{28} Power, Statistical Digest 43, p. 260.

followed in the order listed. 30 Large landings mostly of shrimp led
several Louisiana ports to rank high nationally as ports in value of catch
in the 1950's. Plaquemines Parish ranked eighth in value of the leading
United States ports, Terrebonne Parish ranked ninth, St. Bernard ranked
eleventh, and Lafourche Parish ranked twelfth in 1953. 31 Terrebonne
ranked twelfth nationally on value of its landings in 1954. 32 Cameron,
Louisiana, a menhaden and shrimp port, ranked fourth nationally in
1959 by volume of landings. 33 In 1960 Empire, Louisiana ranked third
nationally by volume of landings, and Cameron, Louisiana ranked fifth. 34

In the years following 1938 when the shrimp industry of the Gulf
of Mexico shifted to offshore operations and production increased greatly,
the demand for shrimp increased as modern processed forms became


31 A. W. Anderson and E. A. Power, Fishery Statistics of the
Statistical Digest 36.

32 A. W. Anderson and E. A. Power, Fishery Statistics of the
Statistical Digest 39.

33 E. A. Power, Fishery Statistics of the United States, 1959--

34 Power, Fishery Leaflet 93, p. ix.
available to the American public. Though shrimp production increased rapidly after 1936, the United States canned pack remained stable from 1930 into modern times while the value increased greatly. The 1940 canned pack of 993,000,000 standard cases valued at $4,300,000 declined to 793,000,000 cases in 1950 worth $12,900,000.  

Prior to 1944 most of the shrimp catch went into canned shrimp. Since that time the trend has been toward freezing. During World War II canning declined and freezing increased. Some of the immediate reasons for the decline of canning were a shortage of labor, high prices paid for fresh shrimp, and a general feeling among processors that freezing would be the most important postwar form. 

Louisiana, which dried about eighty thousand barrels of shrimp in earlier years, in 1950 dried fifty thousand barrels. The seabob comprised about eighty per cent of the shrimp dried in Louisiana. During World War II almost all the shrimp meal, or bran, produced in Louisiana went to the United States Government for use as food concentrates. Dried shrimp meat sold for $.50 to $1.25 per pound, and the meal for $75 a ton. Increasing the importance, Louisiana fresh headless shrimp by 1940 reached markets all over the United States.

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35 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 294-95.

36 Carson, Bulletin No. 37, pp. 9, 24-25.


Golden Meadow and Morgan City supplied most of Chicago's 6,500,000 pounds of fresh shrimp in 1940. Shipping by refrigerated freight on the Illinois Central Railroad, Louisiana processors paid $1.50 per hundredweight. Since 1943 the fresh shrimp shipped to Chicago declined sharply, and by 1945 frozen shrimp supplied the market. Louisiana shipped little frozen shrimp to Chicago.\(^{39}\) Uncooked breaded shrimp by 1950 sold 6,600,000 pounds worth $4,200,000 in the United States.\(^{40}\) By 1952-53 American shoppers bought 17,000,000 pounds of breaded shrimp.\(^{41}\) In Louisiana from 1946 on headless shrimp always had more processed value than any other form.\(^{42}\)

Frozen shrimp grew in importance in the United States from 1930 into recent years while canned shrimp decreased for the same period. Accounting for only slightly over four per cent of the value of the United States shrimp industry in 1930, frozen shrimp lagged far behind canned shrimp which accounted for eighty-two per cent of the value. By 1940 frozen shrimp had increased in value to over fifty-nine per cent of the value. Surpassing canned shrimp in 1950, frozen shrimp accounted for nearly sixty-four per cent of the value of the United States shrimp industry.

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\(^{40}\) *Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry*, I, 28.


\(^{42}\) Werlla, "Fresh and Salt Water Fisheries," loc. cit., 64.
while canning dropped to twenty-eight per cent of the total value. 43

In 1949 Louisiana had 162 shrimp-processing plants. Drying platforms accounted for twenty-six of the plants, and in addition, Louisi-

anians owned the majority of the thirty-six plants in Mississippi. The twenty-six drying platforms located in the coastal region of Jefferson, Terrebonne, Lafourche, and Vermilion parishes made Louisiana the only state in 1950 to market dried shrimp to any extent. In earlier years Louisiana had as many as forty-two drying platforms in operation. Little change occurred in the drying process except that a new separator came into use in the 1940's. Rather than trampling on the dried shrimp to remove the meat from the shells, driers now had circular wire baskets which turned and accomplished the job more quickly and easily. 44 James Lapeyre of Houma thought of an idea for a shrimp-peeling machine when, stepping on a shrimp while wearing rubber boats, he noticed that the meat squirted from the shell in one motion. 45 Thus, the shrimp peeler came into use in the late 1940's, replaced from fifteen to sixty pickers, and increased the yield of meat from five to ten per cent. The machine, developed by E. M. Lapeyre of Houma, operated with rollers which


gripped the protruding edges of the shell as mechanical fingers exerted pressure on the shrimp.46 Making use of modern processing equipment, Bertoul Cheramie in 1952 was the largest independent shrimp operator in Louisiana with plants at Golden Meadow, Morgan City, and Houma. He believed in letting the shrimpers become independent and loaned them money to buy their own boats.47

An important market center in the days before shrimp reached distant markets in such abundance, the French Market in New Orleans lost its importance as New York and Chicago became pricing centers.48 By 1949 ninety-five per cent of the shrimp produced in Louisiana found its way to markets out of state. Orleans, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard parishes trucked most of their catch to the New Orleans area for processing and distribution. In 1949 Louisiana had ninety-two wholesale dealers who did not process shrimp but purchased the processed products for resale. Two hundred and fifty-four processors and wholesale dealers handled the catch of the 8,500 shrimp fishermen in 1950. Though imports of shrimp into the United States caused shrimp fishermen and dealers some concern, the United States exported dried shrimp from Louisiana to the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippines, the West Indies, Cuba, and Central and South

47 George N. Hebert, "Shrimp Boats is Anettin' Millions," Nation's Business, XL (May, 1952), 54.
America. The Chinese population in the United States consumed most of the dried shrimp sold domestically. 49

In 1938 federal investigations of shrimping grounds discovered shrimp about fifteen miles from the Louisiana shore. Louisiana shrimp boats then in use could not operate in offshore waters so their owners had to import a larger type boat before they could capitalize on the discoveries. Larger and more seaworthy, shrimp trawlers from the South Atlantic and Florida moved to the Gulf and were soon copied by Louisiana boatbuilders. Designed especially for the shrimp fishery, the Florida-type boat soon appeared throughout the northern Gulf of Mexico.

The Florida-type trawler has a round bottom, flared bow, and a broad square transom stern. The deckhouse is located forward and the fishing deck aft. Using booms for pulling the nets, the Florida boat has the engine room under the deckhouse and the fish hold aft. Ranging in length from fifty-five to eighty feet, the Florida boat uses diesel power and cable rigs with drum hoists using main engine power. Situated just behind the deckhouse, the steel mast has outriggers, or booms, which swing out over the sides when hauling the net. 50

49 Werlla, "Fresh and Salt Water Fisheries," loc. cit., 59, 63-64.
50 Padgett, "Marine Shellfisheries of La.," 154-56, 192-94; Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 63-64.
Stathis Klonaris, a Greek boatbuilder, came to Morgan City after 1938 and began to build Florida-type boats. During World War II he continued to produce the larger offshore trawlers in large numbers.  

Fluctuating with the catch usually, boatbuilding increased greatly in the Gulf of Mexico in 1950 after the Campeche and Dry Tortugas shrimp grounds proved profitable. Continuing in the years after 1950, vessel construction reached a high in 1953. Vessel construction decreased in 1954 when the shrimp market took a serious dip causing a sixty-one percent decrease in new boat registration in the United States. By late 1954 the boom in boat building declined as fishermen struggled to pay for the increased fleet.  

Despite the fact that the Florida-type trawler was designed especially for the shrimp fishery, it had several shortcomings. The communication between the pilot house and the working area was bad because of the noise made by the exhaust, and the open winches presented a hazard

to workers. Government officials who made a survey of the Florida trawler suggested that boatbuilders use heavier construction materials and more adequate fastenings, make better deck arrangement, reduce the horsepower, and increase the flare at the bow for better stability. 54

Bigger boats with higher fixed costs made shrimpers more vulnerable to market fluctuations. Higher fixed costs, remaining constant whether the fisherman trawled or not, caused fishermen to work when the catch justified remaining in port. Lower prices caused the break-even point for United States shrimp trawlers to rise from forty-seven thousand pounds in 1953 to sixty-six thousand pounds in 1954. In modern times more vessels are employed in shrimping than any other fishery in the United States. Increasing nearly three times, the average vessel capacity rose from 8.6 net tons in 1930 to 21.7 net tons in 1956. 55

Fixed expenses grew higher as larger boats replaced the inland fleet. Among the fixed costs are repairs and maintenance, depreciation, boat supplies, fishing gear, insurance, interest, and licenses and taxes. Aside from these fixed costs, fishermen have operating, or trip, expenses which vary with the size of the boat, the length of the trip, size of the crew, and the amount of the catch. The operating expenses ranked in

54 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 73; II, 54-55.
55 Ibid., I, 75; II, 150.
order of importance are crew wages, fuel, ice, packing and unloading charges, and groceries. Accounting for thirty to forty-seven cents of every dollar spent for operating, crew wages ranked first in expenses. Fuel costs accounted for from seven to sixteen per cent of total expenses. In a study conducted for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service trip expenses accounted for three-fifths of every dollar spent by shrimpers and boat expenses for two-fifths of every dollar. 56 Louisiana Shrimp fishermen pay an annual state fee of $15 for every trawl sixteen to forty feet wide and $20 for each one over forty feet. The fee on each boat less than forty feet long is $5 and for boats exceeding forty feet, $10. 57

Louisiana shrimpers benefitted from progress in the years after the offshore discoveries. Mechanical winches for pulling in the net and radios for entertainment and weather broadcasts reduced the physical toil and made life a little more pleasant for the trawler. 58 By the 1950's when diesel engines powered large boats in the offshore fishery, Louisiana fishermen used automatic pilots, radio telephones, and depth recorders

56 Ibid., I, 177, 186.


58 Laney, Do You Know Louisiana?, 285.
to aid in navigating their fishing crafts.

In 1940 the annual value of the United States shrimp catch per net ton of vessel capacity totaled $508. Increasing for the next thirteen years, the amount reached $846 in 1950 and $1,344 in 1953 for an all-time high. The figure dropped to $855 in 1954 and remained at that level for succeeding years. The annual United States shrimp catch per net ton of vessel capacity, which in 1930 and 1940 totaled 6-1/2 tons, dropped to 2 tons from 1950 to 1954 because vessel construction outstripped the supply increase from the new Campeche and Tortugas shrimp grounds. 59

The annual United States value of the shrimp catch per fisherman increased from $612 in 1930 to $5,215 in 1953. Declining in the years following the banner 1953 season, the figure equalled $4,367 in 1956. Showing the general increase in boat size in recent years, the net tons of fishing capacity per United States shrimp fisherman increased from 1.4 net tons in 1930 to 5.5 net tons in 1956.

Size and type of shrimp and the price level of the New York and Chicago wholesale markets determine the price paid to fishermen for their catch. United States shrimp fishermen received an average of 3.93 cents per pound for shrimp in 1940 and 22.69 cents per pound in 1950. Prices from 1956 to 1958 remained above 30 cents per pound. 60


60 Ibid., I, 120, 172; II, 116.
In the 1950's a new type trawling craft called the Laffite skiff became popular with Louisiana fishermen in the inland fishery. First used by fishermen in the area of Lafitte, Louisiana, this open skiff, powered by large gasoline engines, replaces the lugger for fishing the inland waters. Laffite skiffs range in length from twenty to thirty feet and in width from six to eight feet. Operated usually by one man, the Laffite skiff, which travels between fifteen and thirty miles per hour, makes short one-day trips in the shallow waters near the coast. Their fast speed makes them versatile and mobile, but expensive to operate. The open skiff usually has a short fantail at the stern where the fisherman stands to pull in the trawl. Following the large catch in 1953 Louisiana fishermen built more Laffite skiffs to replace the older, slower luggers.

By the end of World War II ice boats decreased greatly in number. Larger boats, fishing far from shore, carried their own ice in well-insulated holds and stayed at sea for many days. The small boats, faster and more mobile, made quicker trips to port and no longer required the ice boat. Soon almost all small boats carried ice.

Because Louisiana shrimpers trawl both in the inland and offshore waters, Louisiana boats vary widely in size from six to thirty-six net

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61 Angelo Angelette, personal interview.
63 Ludwig Orgeron, personal interview.
tons, while Texas has boats ranging from twenty to thirty-five net tons since their fishing is almost all in offshore waters. Statistics for the years following 1954 when Texas replaced Louisiana as the leading shrimp-producing state indicate the growth of the offshore fleet by Texas while Louisiana maintained both an inland and an offshore fleet.

In 1954 Louisiana and Texas both had forty-seven hundred shrimp fishermen and almost equal number of shrimp crafts. Texas, however, had 967 vessels with a capacity of 22,636 net tons while Louisiana had 763 vessels with a capacity of 11,173 net tons, nearly half less than Texas. In that year Louisiana shrimpers operated 1,408 boats of less than five net tons and Texas 1,107 boats. By 1958 Texas had 1,632 vessels with a capacity of 44,436 net tons and Louisiana 1,001 vessels with a capacity of 19,446 net tons. Boats of less than five net tons, increasing to 1,488 in Louisiana, decreased to 422 in Texas in 1958. That year Louisiana had 5,586 shrimp fishermen compared to 5,324 in Texas.

This greater shift to offshore water by Texas shrimpers in the 1950s can be shown by comparing the total width of trawls used by Louisiana and Texas. Using larger trawls in deep water, Texas in 1955 used 1,638 trawls with a total width of 34,897 yards at the mouth while Louisiana's 2,322 trawls measured 39,361 total yards at the mouth.

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64 Power, Statistical Digest 39, pp. 210, 213.
65 Power, Statistical Digest 49, pp. 225, 228.
66 Power, Statistical Digest 41, p. 244.
In 1948 Louisiana had 2,344 boats under forty feet in length and 1,064 over forty feet long engaged in trawling for shrimp. The estimated value of the total equalled thirty million dollars. Terrebonne Parish led all others in Louisiana in 1958 in the number of trawlers used in the shrimp industry. Her total included 341 trawlers over forty feet in length and 573 less than forty feet long. Following with 752 trawlers, Jefferson Parish had only 92 more than forty feet long and 660 under forty feet. Orleans Parish ranked third with 378 shrimp trawlers. These figures do not necessarily indicate leadership of the shrimp industry, for St. Mary with 178 trawlers over forty feet in length and Lafourche Parish with 142 rank high in shrimp production despite fewer total boats than Jefferson or Orleans Parish.

The fishing procedure of the modern Florida-type trawler introduced in Louisiana after 1938 followed the same basic principle used prior to this time with only variations being adopted. Before 1955 the Florida boat pulled a single net, or trawling rig. Fishermen in Rockport, Texas in 1955 began using two trawls on the Florida-type. Adding booms which could be lowered on both sides of the boat, Rockport fishermen hauled two nets set out on both sides of the boat, one about twenty-five


fathoms further astern than the other. By 1957 shrimp fishermen in all parts of the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic switched to double-rig trawling. Most large boats built since 1958 have the double-rig trawling equipment. Using the double rig, trawlers caught more shrimp, had less towing resistance and gear repair time, and easier operations. 69

Louisiana shrimpers, experimenting with the double-rig trawling method, discarded the practice of staggering one trawl twenty-five fathoms behind the other. 70

After locating shrimp with the test net, a miniature trawl, the shrimper lowers the booms from the vertical position and swings them over the sides of the boat and hangs the trawls doors at the ends of the boom. Slowing down the boat, the shrimper lowers both nets into the water, secures the cables with a chain near the stern to allow maneuverability, and increases the speed of the boat. Before pulling in the net, the fisherman reduces the speed of the boat to slacken the cables and unhook them from the chains at the stern. Using the winch to pull the trawls cables in until the boards reach the boom ends, the shrimper then uses other lines to swing the trawl above the deck. He then releases


70 Ludwig Orgeron, personal interview.
the rope securing the cod end closed, dumping the catch on the deck for sorting and icing.

One Louisiana fisherman, recalling the days shortly after the introduction of the trawl when skill and knowledge of the shrimping grounds were important, remarked that trawling was no longer an art. Feeling that the increased number of large boats on the offshore beds prevented effective fishing, he referred to the unskilled crews converging on Louisiana water as draggers rather than trawlers. Some boat owners, valuing good deckhands, trawled throughout the 1959 season when they could barely cover expenses in order to keep their crews.

Louisiana shrimp conservation studies, which proved so valuable with the offshore discoveries in 1938, enlarged their scope of operation to include the tagging process to check the migration of shrimp. When fishermen caught shrimp marked with a celluloid disk attached with a nickel wire, they reported when and where the shrimp had been caught and received a small reward. Louisiana gave quarters to the Bureau of Fisheries personnel who performed exploratory fishing in the Gulf in the late 1930's. Acting against their own best interest, Louisiana

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71 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 137-40.
72 Ludwig Orgeron, personal interview. 73 DiMarco, Summary 1959, p.i.
75 Fourteenth Biennial Report, 1938-1939, p. 34-35.
shrimpers sometimes worked to catch small shrimp for which they received eight to ten dollars a barrel and destroyed many tiny shrimp in doing so. By waiting sixty days to catch these shrimp, the trawler would catch about seven barrels worth sixty dollars per barrel. Pointing out that shrimp increased seven times in size and thirty-seven times in value, Louisiana conservation officials justified the small shrimp law. In the summer of 1946 the Louisiana Legislature passed a law which closed all waters to trawling from June 10 to the second Monday in August and inside water again from December 15 to March 15.

Feeling the shortage of manpower during the World War II, Louisiana conservation officials closed their shrimp laboratory at Morgan City, Louisiana.

Viewing with alarm the increasing number of trawlers from Alabama in local waters, the Louisiana Legislature in 1946 passed a law limiting the operation of out-of-state boats in Louisiana waters. The law placed a high non-resident license fee for fishing craft. Mississippi trawlers were exempt from the law since Louisiana and Mississippi had reciprocal fishery agreements. Louisiana fishermen, operating in Texas

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waters in increasing numbers, caused Texas to pass a law in 1947 requiring non-resident fees from boats operating in her waters. Using a different principal from the Louisiana non-resident law which retained the shrimp for the people of the state, a federal court invalidated the 1947 Texas law since its discrimination violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Texas then passed a new law which granted licenses based on the estimated shrimp catch with local residents getting first choice. The Texas Supreme Court, stating that merely limiting the number of fishing boats did not constitute conservation, declared the license quota law unconstitutional in 1950.

During the war years shrimp supplied an unrationed food to replace meat. Boatbuilders got priority materials for building shrimp boats since shrimp added to the nation's short food supply. Fishermen received thirteen cents a pound, the OPA ceiling price, for jumbo size shrimp. By 1943 the United States Government bought fifty-five per


80 The New Orleans Times Picayune, April 8, 1949.

81 The Baton Rouge States Times, October 15, 1950.

cent of all shrimp canned in the country. OPA ceiling prices on canned shrimp in 1944 brought disagreement and purported black market dealings. 83

In August of 1943 an ice shortage in Louisiana tied up most of the shrimp fleet and endangered a large portion of the nation's shrimp supply. Taking matters into their own hands, shrimpers seized the Louisiana Ice Service, Inc. plant in New Orleans and loaded ice into their boats to preserve a large catch. 84 Officials gave wartime bans on electric and gas refrigerators and the labor shortage as reasons for the short supply of ice. Dumping shrimp due to spoilage, shrimpers complained to the OPA about ice ceiling prices. 85 When an ice shortage occurred on August 15, 1943, shrimpers and truckers solved the labor problem at ice plants by performing various jobs for which they were paid. 86

Despite the fact that shrimp prices increased to a new high of $24 a barrel in Morgan City in 1942, 87 shrimpers in that area offered their shrimp boats to the United States Navy for use against submarines

84 The Baton Rouge State Times, August 12, 1943.
85 The New Orleans Times Picayune, August 12, 1943.
86 Ibid., August 15, 1943.
87 Ibid., March 22, 1942.
in the Gulf of Mexico. Requesting depth bombs and machine guns, the Gulf Coast Seafoods Products Association of Morgan City offered its entire fleet of large trawlers for service. 88 Showing efficiency in performing rescue operations in the Gulf, shrimp boats became a part of the Coast Guard fleet at Morgan City in 1942. The shrimp boats with machine guns mounted where trawling gear once stood and living quarters in what was once the shrimp hold, performed valuable rescue missions in the Gulf. 89

Continuing its growth in postwar years, the shrimp industry experienced only minor difficulties to hinder its advancement. Price disputes between fishermen and dealers at Morgan City, Patterson, and Berwick, tied up the fleet in that area from February 12 to March 11, 1948. 90 Shrimp boats operating in the Bay of Campeche area of Mexican waters in 1946 switched to Mexican registration when they learned that foreign vessels were not permitted to trawl in Mexican waters. This switch in boat registration caused greater shrimp imports from Mexico in 1947. 91 Many trawlers, continuing to fish the Campeche grounds without obtaining Mexican registration, ran into difficulty with the Mexican

88 The Baton Rouge State Times, August 3, 1942.
89 The New Orleans Times Picayune, November 14, 1943.
Government. Mexican officials seized seventeen American trawlers in Campeche waters in March of 1953. Four other trawlers, who escaped while Mexican patrol boats guarded the others, asserted they operated well beyond three miles from the Mexican coast. A subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce conducted a hearing in Texas in 1957 to receive evidence showing that fishermen needed more help than they received through Public Law 680 which reimbursed fines paid by fishermen to foreign countries. Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas, who conducted the hearing, mentioned pending legislation in the Congress which would include the paying for gear and the catch as well as fines paid by fishermen. Congress took no action on the legislation, but the part played by an international shrimpers' group, to be discussed later, eased tensions, and Mexico increased her production and ranking as the biggest exporter of shrimp to the United States.

Ranking sixth in volume and fourth in value as a United States

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92 The New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 15, 1953.

fishery prior to World War II, shrimping increased in importance during the late 1940's and early 1950's. Only salmon, tuna, and oysters exceeded the value of shrimp in 1945.

By the early 1950's shrimp production had increased greatly, and new processed shrimp forms appeared on the American market to challenge tuna and salmon as the country's leading fishery. Shrimping now had only to wait for a season of high production to vault into the lead.

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CHAPTER IV

LOUISIANA LOSES LEADERSHIP OF THE LEADING UNITED STATES FISHERY

Louisiana relinquished to Texas its leadership as the greatest shrimp-producing state in the country in 1954 just one year after the shrimp industry became the leading United States fishery. But even in 1953 when Louisiana caught more shrimp than Texas, the value of the latter state's catch exceeded that of the Louisiana catch. Shrimp, growing in popularity as frozen and breaded processed forms became more common, in 1953 became the leading United States fishery by value of the catch. Though landings of shrimp increased in the 1950's, volume of the catch lagged far behind tuna and salmon while the value increased geometrically. A detailed look at the volume and value of shrimp and other important seafoods would show shrimp with high value and small landings by proportion and other seafoods with high volume and less value.

Despite the primary of shrimping by 1953, the industry experienced serious problems which first appeared on the horizon in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Imports increased greatly, and serious market slumps forewarned danger signs to the industry even in years of high production. Then extremely small landings in 1961 caused many to
begin to speak of the shrimp industry in the past tense. The federal government and shrimp associations, stepping up investigation of the cause for the decline, tried to prevent complete collapse in hard-hit areas with loans and distress policies. Signs in 1962 indicate that the shrimp fishermen will have a better year than the 1961 famine. What the industry holds for the future is a speculative point, but many are confident that more scientific knowledge will bring about prosperity and stability.

The Gulf of Mexico maintained its position as the "shrimp basket" of the United States after 1954. Though the Gulf's percentage of the domestic catch declined slightly in the 1950's, the area still averaged over eighty per cent of the United States catch from 1954 to 1959. ¹

The 1953 record catch of 260,000,000 pounds was worth nearly seventy-seven million dollars. Kept in port fifty-two days because of storm warnings, shrimp fishermen still managed to make 1953 the banner year. Some fishermen operating on new grounds suffered the loss of equipment. ²

The shrimp industry was confronted with oversupply problems that caused greater landings in 1954 to bring in less money to fishermen

¹ DiMarco, Summary 1959, p. iii.
than in 1953. Increased operating and labor costs and declining prices because of an oversupply caused severe problems to the industry that had expanded so rapidly after the previous year's success. Shrimp fishermen received sixty-one million dollars for their new record catch of 268,000,000 pounds in 1954, sixteen million dollars less than they received in 1953. Greater landings of smaller size shrimp and consumer resistance to buying shrimp because of high prices which prevailed in 1953 led to the loss in value.  

Shrimp landings in 1955 dropped below the record established in 1954, but prices paid to fishermen rose especially for smaller shrimp. Exploitation of new fishery grounds and utilization of new species of shrimp accounted for catch increases over the previous twenty-five years.  

Recovering completely from the 1954 price slump, the shrimp industry in 1956 reinforced itself as the leading United States fishery by capturing nineteen per cent of the total value of all domestic fisheries. The 224,200,000 pound shrimp catch brought over seventy million dollars to fishermen. Though twenty million pounds short of the previous year's catch, the 1956 value grew fifteen per cent higher because of growing markets and higher prices. 

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3 Power, Statistical Digest 39, pp. 3, 335.
5 Power, Statistical Digest 43, p. 4.
By 1958 shrimp represented only five per cent of the volume of the total United States seafood catch but twenty per cent of the value and maintained its position as the leading United States fishery. The 214,000,000 pounds of shrimp brought seventy-three million dollars to American fishermen.

During 1959 and 1960 shrimp in the United States continued to bring in more money to fishermen than any other species. The 1959 value of fifty-eight million dollars increased to nearly sixty-seven million dollars in 1960 because of slightly higher landings of larger size shrimp. Shrimp accounted for nearly twenty per cent of the value of all the United States fisheries in 1960. The shrimp fishery established high catch records in the early 1950's which still stand. The highest catch, 268,334,000 pounds, came in 1954, and the record value of the catch, $76,641,000, came in 1953.

As shown earlier, Texas took larger portions of the shrimp catch of the Gulf of Mexico than Louisiana in the early 1950's. The Louisiana catch in 1953 represented the state's last season as the largest shrimp-producing state in the United States. Louisiana shrimp landings, which

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6 Power, Statistical Digest 49, p. 4.
7 DiMarco, Summary 1960, p. 1.
8 Power, Fishery Leaflet 93, p. vi.
9 Power, Statistical Digest 51, pp. 24, 25.
decreased slightly in 1954, totaled 83,000,000 pounds while Texas surged into first place with 93,000,000 pounds. In 1955 both states caught over 71,000,000 pounds, and Florida produced 48,000,000 pounds. Louisiana produced 60,000,000 pounds in 1956 while Texas accounted for 65,000,000 pounds and Florida, forty-nine million pounds.  

Because larger shrimp bring higher prices than the small varieties, comparative catch figures do not always give a true indication of the value paid to fishermen. Louisiana's catch, composed of considerable amounts of small shrimp from inland waters, is worth less per pound than the Texas catch. This discrepancy in value can be illustrated with the figures for the years after 1953. Louisiana's catch that year exceeded Texas by almost sixteen million pounds, but the value of the Texas catch was twenty-five million dollars compared to over seventeen million dollars for Louisiana.  

In 1954 the Texas catch, ten million pounds more than Louisiana, was worth twenty-one million dollars, and the Louisiana catch brought sixteen million dollars. The Florida value, coming from a shrimp catch about half the size of the Louisiana catch, reached thirteen million dollars that year.  

In 1955 when Texas and Louisiana produced virtually the same amount of shrimp, the value of the

TABLE I

SHRIMP CATCH FOR VARIOUS YEARS
(in thousands of pounds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Louisiana</th>
<th>Texas</th>
<th>Total-Gulf Coast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>7,238</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>8,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>8,581</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>12,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>40,259</td>
<td>11,832</td>
<td>68,877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>100,612</td>
<td>11,173</td>
<td>120,385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>116,904</td>
<td>15,722</td>
<td>145,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>85,718</td>
<td>64,346</td>
<td>193,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>83,608</td>
<td>93,258</td>
<td>237,153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>60,792</td>
<td>65,134</td>
<td>193,621</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Texas catch exceeded that of Louisiana by over seven million dollars. The Texas catch in 1956, which exceeded the Louisiana catch by five million pounds, brought twenty-three million dollars compared to only sixteen million dollars for Louisiana. Florida, again producing less shrimp than Louisiana, had a catch value of over seventeen million dollars that year.

Louisiana, offsetting its catch of small shrimp with a greater portion of the more valuable white shrimp, suffered a bad season in 1957 when the white shrimp runs failed to materialize. The catch, dropping to thirty-four million pounds, decreased in value to slightly over ten million dollars. Texas that year produced seventy-six million pounds worth thirty-two million dollars. By 1958 the Louisiana shrimp catch increased in value to thirteen million dollars compared to twenty-nine million dollars for Texas and sixteen million dollars for Florida. Louisiana failed to overtake Texas for the lead in shrimp production after 1958, but she increased her catch value to over twelve million dollars in 1959 and over fifteen million dollars in 1960.

Terrebonne Parish remained the leading shrimp-producing area of Louisiana from 1955 until 1960. In 1955 she produced 18,348,400

13 Power, Statistical Digest 41, pp. 245-47.
16 DiMarco, Summary 1960, p. iii.
pounds of shrimp worth $3,520,353. Lafourche Parish with 12,730,900 pounds worth $2,725,431 ranked second, and Jefferson Parish ranked third with a catch worth $2,157,016. \(^\text{17}\) In 1956 Terrebonne accounted for over twenty-two per cent of the State's total shrimp production, Jefferson Parish followed with twenty-one per cent of the total catch, Lafourche Parish accounted for seventeen per cent, and the area from St. Mary Parish to the Texas line, sixteen per cent. In 1957 the state's production areas maintained their same ranking with Terrebonne increasing her production to twenty-six per cent of the state total. \(^\text{18}\)

By 1958 the St. Mary Parish area increased its production to twenty-two per cent of the state's total shrimp catch and ranked second to Terrebonne which produced twenty-four per cent to lead the state. Jefferson Parish with twenty per cent of the catch ranked third, and Lafourche Parish's seventeen per cent ranked fourth. In 1959 Lafourche Parish increased its production to 55,541 barrels, twenty-one per cent of the state's total, and ranked behind Terrebonne and the St. Mary Parish areas. \(^\text{19}\) A smaller breakdown than the parish ranking shows

\(^\text{17}\) Power, \textit{Statistical Digest} 41, pp. 271-73.


that New Orleans and the lower Mississippi River areas of Plaquemines, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes produced 11,856,000 pounds in 1959. The Houma, Chauvin, and Dulac area produced 6,195,000 pounds. The Golden Meadow, Galliano, and Cut Off area produced 3,740,000 pounds. In 1960 the New Orleans and lower Mississippi River area landed over 12,000,000 pounds, the Houma area 7,667,000 pounds, the Golden Meadow area 4,757,000 pounds, and the Morgan City area 2,791,000 pounds. Louisiana's average annual shrimp production from 1950 to 1959 totaled 37,700,000 million pounds of heads-off shrimp.

Since 1953 the supply of shrimp and the utilization of shrimp products in the United States developed into a pattern which seems to indicate a trend in the shrimp industry. The domestic catch decreased since 1954, but the importation of shrimp into the United States for that period doubled, offsetting the decline and making the total United States supply tend to increase in modern times. The value of canned shrimp, the mainstay of the industry in earlier years, remains relatively stable despite its periodic ups and downs. Dried shrimp production declined constantly since 1953 with less than half that year's production being

20 DiMarco, Summary 1959, pp. 8-11.
21 DiMarco, Summary 1960, pp. vi, 8-11.
used for drying in 1958. Fresh shrimp likewise decreased in importance as other processed forms gained. Frozen shrimp since 1953 continues the growth pattern it established after World War II and uses by far more of the United States shrimp supply than all other processed forms combined.  

Utilization of the Louisiana shrimp catch since 1946 indicates a repetition of the national trend toward more frozen shrimp. About half of the total Louisiana production went into frozen shrimp from 1946 to 1955 and about one-fourth went into canned shrimp. By 1957 about two-thirds of Louisiana's catch went into frozen shrimp while the canning industry used about one-seventh of the catch and drying, considerably less.  

In 1930 fifty per cent of the United States shrimp catch went to canning plants, but in 1956 only seven per cent of the catch went to canning. The shrimp catch, however, increased since 1930; and except during World War II when tin became scarce, canned shrimp retained its market. Louisiana's twenty-one canneries produced 692,208 standard cases of shrimp worth $9,756,687 in 1954. In 1956 Louisiana

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had twenty-two canning plants which produced a canned pack worth $10,982,088.  

The state's 1957 canned pack, declining to 340,945 standard cases, brought only $7,072,509. In 1958 twenty-two plants in Louisiana produced 547,986 standard cases valued at $11,991,206, about one-half of the volume and value of the total United States canned shrimp production.

Because of large stocks of canned shrimp left from 1958, Louisiana canneries in 1959 turned down a portion of the large catch of small white and brown shrimp. Louisiana's twenty-one canneries nevertheless produced two-thirds of the shrimp canned in the nation's thirty-seven canneries.

In 1930 frozen shrimp accounted for a small portion of the total United States shrimp catch, but by 1956 freezers took sixty per cent of the total supply. Frozen breaded shrimp alone used twenty per cent of the 1956 catch. The breaded shrimp process is the most recent innovation in the product development of the industry. Dealers in the New York market prefer fresh shrimp which has declined in recent times. Dried shrimp production declined because of the loss of the foreign market.

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26 Power, Statistical Digest 43, p. 43.

27 Power, Statistical Digest 44, p. 45.


29 DiMarco, Summary 1959, pp. viii, 25.

By 1959 dried shrimp production decreased to 321,897 pounds valued at $290,985.

In 1959 Louisiana had 202 wholesaling and manufacturing establishments with an average of 4,704 workers during the processing season. Texas had 143 plants which averaged 5,576 workers per season. Mississippi's 61 plants hired an average of 1,679 workers for the season. 31

In 1953 Louisiana had twenty-two shrimp-canning plants, Mississippi had sixteen, and Alabama had three. 32 By 1960 the Louisiana total had decreased to eighteen, Mississippi to twelve, and Texas to two. 33

Shrimp canning plants are the most mechanized of all plants, but still hand operations account for most of the time required to pack shrimp. By 1953 virtually all Louisiana canneries used automatic peeling machines. The new peelers and deveiners allow use of small shrimp. Processing cost for canned shrimp accounts for about two-fifths of total cost. While canned shrimp production remained stable in recent years, the number of canning plants declined since 1930. Plants in Louisiana close down twice a year when the inland waters are closed to trawling. 34

Shrimp processors use shrimp-peeling machines which are rented

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31 Power, Statistical Digest 51, pp. 214-16.
33 DiMarco, Summary 1960, p. xi.
for a flat annual minimum. The dealers obtain these on a minimum three year basis with the rent figured on the amount of use. 35 In 1961 Ray Skrmetta, president of the Skrmetta Seafood Company, testifying before a Federal Trade Commission examiner in New Orleans, said that the Peelers Company of New Orleans had used unfair and unlawful methods to achieve monopoly in the shrimp processing machinery business and suppressed competition in the shrimp industry. Skrmetta claimed his firm had developed a shrimp peeling and processing machine in the early 1950's, applied for a United States patent, and demonstrated the machine to the Peelers Company, which filed a similar patent and sued Skrmetta for patent infringement. The Federal Trade Commission has not ruled on the outcome of the claims and suits. 36

Shrimp processing plants improved with the coming of peelers, deveiners, and graders. Since 1949 frozen shrimp dealers demanded shrimp of uniform size. Mechanical grading of shrimp was not accomplished successfully until 1955. Prior to this time hand-grading classified shrimp as jumbo, large, and medium. Mechanical graders make more exacting size groupings more quickly. 37

In 1959 there were forty-one shrimp freezing plants in the Gulf area. Texas led all other states with twenty-five freezers, followed by

35 Ibid., I, 297.
37 Albano, Trends in Shrimp Marketing, p. iii.
Louisiana with eight, Alabama with five, and Mississippi with three. In 1960 the number decreased to forty after Mississippi closed one of its freezers.

Frozen shrimp in recent years have one of five basic forms. These forms listed in order of importance are frozen headless, frozen peeled and deveined, frozen cooked and peeled, uncooked frozen breaded, and cooked frozen breaded. Raw shrimp costs represent two-thirds of the total cost of breaded shrimp. In all processed shrimp forms the cost of the raw shrimp constitutes a sizeable portion of the total costs. 38

The marketing of shrimp is characterized by few written agreements among the various segments of the industry. Nor is any single facet of the industry strong enough to set national prices. Various segments of the industry usually compromise on a price. In each area of the industry one dominant segment seems to lead in price setting. In New Orleans the large canneries set the price. The national wholesalers of processed shrimp are probably the most important single price-determining agents since they can gauge consumer demand and supply at the same time. The major price influences in the shrimp industry are supply and demand, geographic location, species, size class, and labor union

38 DiMarco, Summary 1960, p. xiii.

pressure. Shrimp reach national markets through various channels, the most important leading from unloading plant, to processor, to wholesaler, to retail trade. Dealers often use variations of this marketing pattern. Often a wholesaler buys from the unloading fresh plant and sells to the processors. Fresh shrimp sometimes go directly from the fresh plant to wholesalers in the consumer market or to the local retailer in the landing port. Motor trucks replaced the railroad as the major means of getting shrimp products to market in recent years because of cheaper rates, varying routes and changes, better drop-off privileges, and lower minimum loading weight. Since 1958 Chicago became the leading center for frozen brown shrimp from the Gulf of Mexico. Boston is the modern center for frozen white shrimp, and New York the center for fresh iced pink shrimp. New York is gradually shifting to frozen shrimp products also.

The problem cycle in the shrimp industry varies from one extreme to another. Large catches bring in succeeding years overcrowding, reduced catch per boat, and overfishing which may imperil supply. A short supply may cause price inflation which decreases the demand for shrimp, stagnates the wholesale market, and threatens the fishermen

40 Ibid., II, 1, 3-4, 8-9, 73, 101.
41 Albano, Trends in Shrimp Marketing, i.
with ruin. Fishermen with high fixed costs suffer when the supply increases as sales decline and shrimp have to be sold at less than the break-even price. Imports and freezing can stabilize supply. But supply flexibility, controlled largely by nature, is hard to increase when the demand increases. 42

Shrimp conservation studies play an important role in the modern shrimp industry. One marine biologist likens the position of the marine biologist today to that of the county agents in 1915 trying to convince reluctant farmers that the soil would not produce indefinitely without sound conservation practices. Shrimpers today realize that the shrimp supply of the sea is not unlimited and that preservation is necessary. Federal and state conservation agencies today have trained marine biologists on the job studying the habits of shrimp and other sea foods. 43

When the Louisiana shrimp catch declined after 1954 to a new low in 1957, the Louisiana Legislature enacted the 1958 shrimp law which has strong enforcement provisions. 44 The 1958 shrimp law calls for a

42 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 45; II, 143.

43 Lyle St. Amant, address to the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Shrimp Association (Golden Meadow, Louisiana, December 27, 1961). Dr. St. Amant is the chief marine biologist for the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission.

mandatory fine and jail sentence for third violations along with forfeiture of equipment and revoking of the shrimp license.\textsuperscript{45} Passed as Act 53 of the Regular Session of the 1958 Louisiana Legislature, the shrimp law amended the 1950 law which had few enforcement provisions.\textsuperscript{46} The 1958 summer-to-fall open season in Louisiana more than made up for the closed summer season when no fishermen trawled for shrimp. Fishermen caught more shrimp in 1958 partly because of the conservation practices adopted.\textsuperscript{47} Besides closing the season during part of the year, the 1958 law established legal minimum shrimp sizes. The law placed no minimum size restrictions on seabob or on any variety from May 1 to June 30. From the third Monday in August to November 14 no shrimp smaller than sixty-eight to the pound are considered legal. And from November 15 to December 20, the sixty-eight-count limitation applies to all species except brown shrimp.\textsuperscript{48} The law also imposed a state severance tax of fifteen cents per barrel to be paid by the first purchaser. Out of state buyers pay fifty cents per barrel.\textsuperscript{49} The law

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{La. Laws Pertaining to Fisheries, 1948}, p. 125.


\textsuperscript{47} Viosca, "Shrimp Comeback", \textit{loc. cit.}, 4.


\textsuperscript{49} \textit{La. Laws Pertaining to Fisheries, 1958}, 123.
closed inland waters in Louisiana shrimp trawling from July 1 to the third Monday in August and from December 21 to April 30. In 1961 the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission ordered a fifteen day extension to the season scheduled to close on July 1 when the shrimp runs failed to materialize, but closed the season on July 8 when white shrimp began to enter the inland waters.

The Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission conducts studies of shrimp at Barataria Bay, Timbalier Bay, and east of the Mississippi River. Tagging shrimp to trace migrations from the nursery grounds to the offshore spawning grounds is one of the projects carried on by the department. In 1960 the department initiated a study to learn the offshore spawning areas, times of peak spawning, density, and movement to the offshore fishery area, and hydrographic data analysis and correlation to phases of the shrimp life cycle.

As shrimp became an important United States food item imports into the country increased rapidly. Foreign countries developing shrimp

50 DiMarco, Summary 1960, p. 1.
51 The New Orleans States Item, July 8, 1961.
52 "Tagged Shrimp Swims 100 Miles," Louisiana Conservationist; XIII (October, 1960), 19-20.
industries found ready markets in the United States which places no import duty on shrimp. From 1950 to 1960 imported shrimp accounted for an increasing percentage of the total United States supply while domestically produced shrimp made up a smaller percentage. Accounting for only twenty-six per cent of the total supply in 1950, imported shrimp by 1956 represented thirty-four per cent of the available supply. By 1960 imported shrimp accounted for forty-three per cent of the total United States supply.\(^5^4\) Foreign countries imported 68,618,000 pounds of shrimp worth $32,986,000 into the United States in 1956 and 113,418,000 pounds valued at $56,406,000 in 1960.\(^5^5\) Mexico leads all other nations in the amount of shrimp shipped to the United States. Her 39,653,000 pounds in 1950 increased in 1960 to 73,584,000 pounds, more than half of the shrimp imported into the United States. Panama and El Salvador ranked next in the amount of shrimp exported to the United States.

Though some canned and dried shrimp reaches American markets from foreign countries, frozen shrimp account for most of the imported shrimp coming into the country. Headless frozen shrimp represented eighty-two per cent of the shrimp coming into the United States in 1960

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54 Power, Fishery Leaflet 93, p. 44.

compared to less than one per cent for canned or dried shrimp.  
In 1959 forty-nine countries exported shrimp to the United States.  

Japan, operating the shrimp-canning factoryship Eijin Maru in the Pacific, for the first time sent canned shrimp to the United States in 1961. In 1959 the United States ceased importing shrimp from Hong Kong since some of it came from Communist China. When Hong Kong met United States Foreign Assets Control Regulations forbidding imports from Red China, the United States lifted the ban on shrimp from that area. Low shrimp prices in 1959 did not discourage imports, indicating that the importation of shrimp is likely to increase even with low prices. An official of the National Shrimp Congress claimed that during the 1961 season the United States imported more shrimp than she produced domestically.

Criticisms of large-scale importation of shrimp come from many segments of the shrimp industry which point to specific cases where the domestic fishery suffered because of foreign competitors. Some

56 Power, Fishery Leaflet 93, p. 30.
60 DiMarco, Summary 1959, p. ix.
61 Theodore B. Shepard, address to the Fourth Annual Meeting
government officials credit the flood of imports in 1959, coming at a time when heavy American inventories were available, with causing the rapidly declining prices. Because of increasing imports the shrimp-producing segment of the industry petitioned Congress for help. In April of 1960 the National Shrimp Congress asked the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries to make a study of the problem.

Though shrimp fishermen usually view imports as a grave danger to the industry, distributors and processors, seeing no danger as long as imports are in an unprocessed form, believe that imports have become a part of the economics of United States shrimp distribution and are here to stay. When demand is high, imports actually stabilize supply and prevent rapid price fluctuations and halt a big influx of casual fishermen into the industry during market booms. In a declining market, however, cheap foreign shrimp pose a problem for the domestic fisherman. Processors and wholesalers may favor imports if they can buy the foreign shrimp cheaper than domestic shrimp.

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of the Louisiana Shrimp Association (Golden Meadow, Louisiana, December 27, 1961). Theodore Shepard is the Director of the National Shrimp Congress.

64 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 47-48; II, 161.
Shrimpers organized associations in the 1950's to combat the threat of imported shrimp and to have a unified voice in asking federal agencies for research studies or assistance. Shrimp fishermen and dealers formed the Louisiana Shrimp Association in 1958. James H. Summersgill of Golden Meadow, who worked to organize this association, served as its first president. On December 27, 1961, the Louisiana Shrimp Association elected Earl Rome president for 1962. 65

The fact that a shrimp association represents the voice of a large number of fishermen and dealers is important. The association has more importance than an individual in asking for assistance of the Coast Guard, in requesting money from Congress for fisheries research, in advertising shrimp to the public, in getting the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to search for shrimp during poor seasons, in disseminating information to fishermen, in dealing with problems of fishermen in foreign waters, and in liaison with other facets of the shrimp industry. 66 Federal and state conservation officials all emphasized that governmental agencies devoted more time to requests of an association than of an

65 Louisiana Conservationist, XIII (January, 1961), 22.

individual. The Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission expressed its willingness to assist the Louisiana Shrimp Association when the association planned a meeting to discuss low-interest, long-term loans to fishermen after the poor 1961 season. The association is cooperating with the shrimp conservation work conducted by the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission at the Grande Terre laboratory. It hopes that marine biologist will soon be able to predict the shrimp yield and prevent fishermen from traversing the Gulf unnecessarily in search for shrimp.

Leaders of state shrimp associations gain membership in the Shrimp Association of the Americas, an international organization dedicated to furthering the shrimp industry. With representatives in many ports, the Shrimp Association of the Americas renders service to fishermen running into difficulty in Mexican waters by securing legal counsel, posting bonds or bail, and handling law suits. In earlier years Mexican authorities tied up American boats, and fishermen often did not know what to do.

The presidents of the various state and regional shrimp associations serve as vice-presidents of the National Shrimp Congress, a lobbying group for the shrimp interest. A hearing of the National Shrimp

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Congress led to a bill in Congress to stabilize imports. The lobbying group also tries to discourage people from investing money in foreign shrimp-processing plants.

Public Law 66 of 1949 gave any two or more of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi the power to enter into a compact and agreement relating to the better utilization of the fisheries of the Gulf Coast and created the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. The law provided for the promotion and protection of fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and the prevention of the physical waste of the fisheries. Each state appoints three representatives to the commission. The duties of the commission are the following: power to recommend joint police powers of member states to promote preservation of fisheries, power to draft and recommend to the states legislation dealing with conservation, power to consult with and advise state administration agencies in regard to fishery problems and suggest regulations.

In the past years the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission succeeded in getting the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to keep

68 Earl Rome, personal interview.
69 Theodore Shepard address to Louisiana Shrimp Assoc.
70 United States Statutes at Large. LXIII, Pt. I, 70-73 (May 19, 1949).
its research laboratory running at Pensacola, preparing a prospectus of research plans, and in getting a $175,000 appropriation from Congress for marine research in the western Gulf of Mexico. 71

Labor unions in the shrimp industry, in bargaining for wages, directly affect the price of shrimp. Because strikes for higher wages amount to price-fixing, shrimp unions since 1955 have declined in importance. In 1955 the federal government prosecuted members of the Gulf Coast Shrimpers' and Oystermen's Association of Biloxi for price-fixing under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. This action weakened shrimpers' unions along the Gulf Coast. 72

Many facets of the shrimp industry make a tariff desirable on imported shrimp. The Committee of Finance of the United States Senate issued a resolution requesting the United States Tariff Commission to make an investigation of shrimp imports. The Tariff Commission's report issued in March of 1961 stated that the imposition of a tariff to limit the importation of shrimp to the 1960 level would limit United States supply and stop long-range expansion of consumption. If restrictions were put into effect any increase would have to be supplied by domestic production, which shows little signs of increasing enough to


72 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, I, 122.
take care of the need. The report further stated that quotas would aid fishermen by abolishing increasing competition and price-depressing characteristics of large imports. 73 The pending Import Quota Bill, or Shrimp Bill, would operate like the Sugar Act which assigns quotas to various countries for supplying the part of the domestic need not meet by domestic production. The bill would levy a tariff of thirty-five per cent in addition. Louisiana Congressman Edwin E. Willis, advocating passage of the bill, claimed that American foreign aid went to Pakistan and India to build up a shrimp fleet, and that these countries now export shrimp to the United States. 74

In 1961 United States Congressmen introduced many bills dealing with the shrimp industry. Most of the bills dealt with possible tariffs on shrimp, but others called for the establishment of a fishermen's cooperative bank, liberalizing disaster loans for fish boats, giving fishermen the same treatment as farmers on estimated tax returns, and exempting certain charges for railroad transportation of fishery products. Only the shrimp bills on tax treatment for fishermen and import duties on shrimp got as far as committee hearings in the House. 75

73 DiMarco, Summary 1960, p. iv.

74 Edwin E. Willis, address to the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Shrimp Association (Golden Meadow, Louisiana, December 27, 1961).

75 "What's Pending in Congress for the Fishery Industry,"

Imports, however, are likely to increase since Congress probably will not pass the shrimp import bill while it decides what to do about the European Common Market. 76 Another bill the shrimp industry desires, the reestablishment of exemptions for shellfish processing workers from minimum wage requirements, seems to have little chance of passing in Congress in 1962. 77

The United States shrimp industry, enjoying its greatest prosperity in the early 1950's, experienced serious market slumps or decreases in landings after 1954. Shrimp fishermen suffered hardships in 1954, 1957, 1959, and in 1961 when conditions became chaotic. In 1961 Louisiana shrimp landings plunged downward as in 1957. Louisiana's annual production, which ranges from sixty to eighty million pounds and up to one hundred million in peak years, dropped to thirty-five million pounds in 1961. 78 Preliminary reports for the first nine months of 1961 indicate that the monetary loss to fishermen and vessel owners reached six million dollars in Louisiana and four million in Texas. Towns whose lifeblood is the shrimp industry suffered drastically from the decline of the industry. 79

The Fish Boat, VI (November, 1961), 39.


79 George W. Snow, Status of Commercial Shrimp Landings--
Most biologists agree that natural factors caused the decline in the number of shrimp. In 1957 and in 1961 warmer than usual weather in Louisiana in February and March may have caused the shrimp to spawn early and start their way inland to the nursery grounds before the end of winter and die during a cold wave. During 1957 and 1961 heavy rains caused low salinity in Barataria, Timbalier, and other inland nursery grounds, and shrimp from the offshore grounds failed to enter the inland waters in large concentrations. Possible changes in food, water, weather, or things not now known caused the decline.  

The many requests for disaster relief in 1961 attest to the seriousness of the decline of the shrimp industry of the Gulf Coast. In September of 1961 Governor Ross Barnett of Mississippi asked the federal government to declare three coastal counties of Mississippi disaster areas.  

Congressman Edwin Willis claimed that many segments of the shrimp industry of south Louisiana requested disaster relief and low-interest loans from the Small Business Administration. 


80 Lyle St. Amant, address to Louisiana Shrimp Assoc.


The Jefferson Parish Fishermen's Association and the Westwego Board of Aldermen urged Louisiana congressmen to amend the Farm Credit Act of 1933 to extend benefits to commercial fishermen who had experienced "crop" failure due to natural factors over which they have no control. Shrimp fishermen feared losing homes and boats which they mortgaged heavily in 1961. Because some fishermen experienced extreme hardship, the Terrebonne Parish Police Jury asked the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission to postpone collection of state shrimp licenses and trawl fees until some time during the 1962 shrimp season.

What the shrimp industry holds for the future is a debatable question. Many observers, looking back on the difficult seasons in recent years, feel that the shrimp industry will decline into insignificance. Others, more confident of new discoveries of shrimp beds and new types of shrimp, look to scientific research for the solution to shrimping problems and the key to the industry's future. Pessimists in 1945 predicted the doom of the shrimp industry, but new discoveries of shrimp in Campeche and the Dry Tortugas spurred the industry to greater heights in the early 1950's.

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84 The Thibodaux Lafourche Comet, April 5, 1962.
Fisheries personnel predict that domestic consumption of shrimp based on population and consumption trends, in 1978 will reach 830 to 920 million pounds. Imports will supply what domestic production, more than likely, will not be able to produce. Royal-red shrimp, marketable but costly to catch in distant offshore water, might become the mainstay of the shrimp industry of tomorrow. One Bureau of Commercial Fisheries official stated that the shrimp industry must continue the pattern of the past--movement into deeper waters with more advanced gear and larger boats. Fishermen have exploited all the trawlable waters of the Gulf of Mexico; and if the industry is to expand, fishermen must move to new shrimp grounds.

The United States is conducting experiments on the feasibility of raising shrimp on farms as a possible solution to increased production needs for the future. In recent years fishermen from the Gulf Coast under contract with a Colombian seafood firm fished the Pacific Ocean to develop a shrimp industry in that area.

85 Survey of the U.S. Shrimp Industry, II, 111.
86 Francis J. Captiva, address to the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Shrimp Association. (Golden Meadow, Louisiana, December 27, 1961).
87 The New Orleans Times Picayune, April 30, 1962.
Early reports of the Louisiana shrimp catch for 1962 indicate a better year than 1961. Whether the balance of 1962 will prove to be profitable for the country's leading fishery remains to be seen.

The Louisiana shrimp industry began in 1867 when the Dunbar family started to can shrimp at Grand Terre Island. A few years later the Chinese came to Barataria Bay and started the dried-shrimp industry. During this early day of the shrimp industry, fishermen used sailing crafts and caught shrimp with haul seines. By 1900 when canning and drying had been well developed, the industry expanded but remained primarily localized and seasonal.

Louisiana fishermen had to await the coming of the gasoline engine before they could use the trawl, which required greater and more consistent pulling power. Louisiana dominated this era of the industry when the trawl led to increased production and less dependence on seasonal fluctuations. Canning and drying, the only important processed forms during this period, kept pace with production. Louisiana shrimpers altered the sailing lugger and adopted the Biloxi-type trawler from Mississippi fishermen as they moved to deeper waters along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico.

Exploratory fishing conducted by the United States Bureau of Fisheries led to the discovery of large concentrations of shrimp in deep water at Ship and Trinity Shoals off the Louisiana coast in 1938. As shrimpers from the Gulf Coast rushed to the new grounds, Louisiana
shrimpers quickly adopted the larger Florida-type trawler and made Louisiana the main shrimp-producing state in the United States. Headless and frozen shrimp, two new processed forms, now took the increased supply of shrimp to markets all over the country while canned and dried shrimp declined in importance in the early 1950's.

Good runs of shrimp in the known shrimping grounds of the Gulf and increased grooved shrimp catches from the Campeche and Dry Tortugas grounds discovered in the early 1950's made shrimp the leading United States fishery in 1953. At about this time Texas, catching larger, more valuable shrimp than Louisiana, replaced the Pelican State as the leading shrimp-producing state in the country. Frozen shrimp increased in importance in modern times and took a larger percentage of the catch than any other processed form. Market slumps and declining catches after 1954, combined with ever-increasing imports of shrimp, caused severe problems to the domestic shrimp fishery. Shrimp associations, formed to combat the threat of imported shrimp and to promote shrimp as a seafood, worked to obtain scientific studies of shrimp by federal and state conservation agencies and to secure the passage of a tariff on imported shrimp. Extreme hardships in 1961 led many to worry about the future of the shrimp industry. Concern over the European Common Market makes the probability of a tariff on shrimp unlikely, and few are able or willing to make the large capital
investment needed for exploitation of the royal-red shrimp grounds in the deep Gulf waters. The shrimp industry came a long way since 1867—the year 1962 may be a crossroads which will decide whether the industry will recover from the doldrums of 1961 and advance as in the past or decline to the status of a minor United States fishery.
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Date of Examination:

July 27, 1962