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By EDWARD G. LOWRY

Author "Washington Close-Ups," "Banks and Financial Systems," etc. Contributor Political and Economic Articles to Leading Periodicals and a Writer of Recognized Authority on the National Government's Business Methods.

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XX.

**HAPHAZARD EXTENSION**

The Department of Agriculture is one instance of how governmental establishments grow and spread and extend their activities, once they get started. The bureau of fisheries, in the Department of Commerce, is another. It had a modest beginning, and not so very long ago. Prior to 1871 there was no branch of the federal government especially charged with the consideration of fishery affairs.

Several of the states had established fish commissions and these state authorities, supported by private interests, began to agitate for a national bureau devoted to fishery interests.

So it came about that by 1871 congress was ready to yield and begin to make appropriations. The first one was for \$5,000 and provided for a commissioner of fish and fisheries to prosecute investigations and inquiries "with the view of ascertaining whether any and what diminution in the number of food fishes of the coast and in the lakes of the United States has taken place; and also whether any and what protective, prohibitory or precautionary measures should be adopted in the premises; and shall report upon the same to congress."

The commissioner was to draw no pay, for it was provided by congress in the same joint resolution that he should be a civil officer of the government, of proved scientific and practical acquaintance with the fishes of the coast, who should serve without additional compensation. The then assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, by name Spencer Fullerton Baird, was chosen as the best man for the job, and so he proved to be. He made the little acorn grow. He was industrious and competent and knew how to get along with congress. He was diligent and he stood before kings. See what happened!

Remember, he started out with \$5,000 to discover whether there had been any diminution of the supply of food fishes along the coasts or in the lakes. He was at the head of an independent investigation and reported directly to congress. The thing was kept alive by annual appropriations as an independent institution until 1903, when it was incorporated into the newly formed Department of Commerce and Labor as the bureau of fisheries.

By 1906 the annual appropriation had grown to \$803,920, and the bureau had a permanent personnel of 325. At that time the land owned and occupied by the bureau at its fish cultural and biological stations had an aggregate area of over 12,000 acres, with a value of \$230,000. The improvements and equipment at these stations represented an investment of more than \$1,000,000. Other property of the bureau at that time included four seagoing steam and sail vessels, 20 steam launches and 150 small sail, power and rowboats, which with equipment had a value of \$300,000. Its six fish-transportation cars were valued at \$45,000. Indeed, the total investment of the government in fishery-service property ran to about \$1,585,000. That was back in 1906.

Well, it hasn't stopped growing; bigger and busier than ever, as the advertisements say. The appropriation by congress for the fiscal year 1919 was \$1,183,140, and for 1921, \$1,297,110. Besides what congress gave, the President allotted in 1918 and 1919, out of his private fund "for the national security and defense," \$100,000. With the years of its growth and increasing funds the bureau had taken on many new functions and activities.

Until recently the bureau was administering to the best of its ability the laws relating to the terrestrial and arboreal fur bearers of Alaska, but the duty was incongruous to its legitimate functions. Congress finally conceded that the pursuit of foxes does not constitute a fishery. The cultivation of milks cannot be successfully conducted in a fish hatchery.

Apparently, as so many other establishments under the executive branch have, the fisheries service had become all cluttered up with duties and jobs it is not fitted or equipped to handle.

All of which is a long, long way from an investigation of the possible diminution of food fish along the coast.

I don't pretend to say of the fisheries bureau that it has performed inefficiently either its proper work or the added activities that have been imposed upon it. For all I know it may be and is a great national blessing, and managed with maximum skill, intelligence and real economy. I hope it is.

I cite it here only as an example of a branch of governmental activity that has grown up haphazard from a small beginning to be a great, costly, far-spreading enterprise that by its own confession is overlaid with duties, functions and activities unrelated to its legitimate and essential business—the care, propagation and study of all manner of food fish.

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