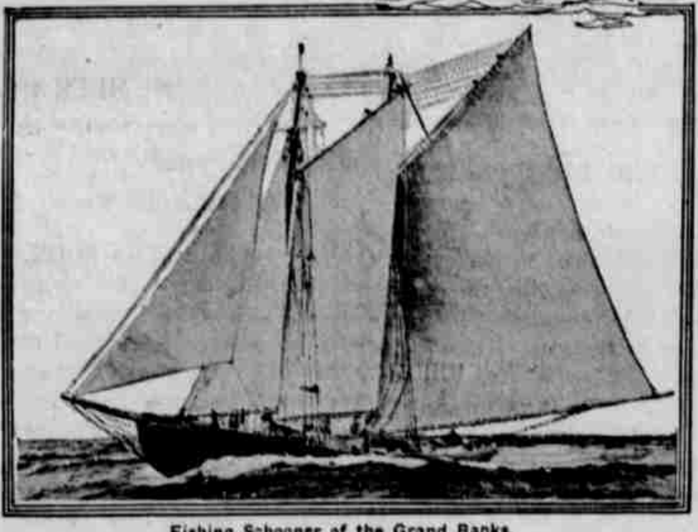
ON THE GRAND BANKS



Fishing Schooner of the Grand Banks.

(Prepared by the National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.)

THE wind and waves of the Newfoundland banks still train real sailors in an age of steel hulls and steam and motor propulsion that has almost seen the handlers of sail cloth disappear from the Atlantic.

These surviving sailors are the crews of the beautiful fishing schooners that sail out of the fishing ports of Newfoundland, the Maritime provinces of Canada and the New England states of America; and the ports which claim most of them are Lunenburg, in Nova Scotia, and Gloucester and Boston, in Massachusetts.

These deep-sea fishermen are a distinctive type peculiar to the North American Atlantic coast. Racially they are from the sturdy pioneer breeds of Highland Scotch, Hanoverian German, West Country English, and West Irish which settled in Newfoundland, eastern Canada, Maine, and Massachusetts when America was young.

Physically, the American deep-sea fishermen are strong-muscled and able to endure hardship. They are not slum or city products, but are mainly raised in sea-coast villages.

Ashore, the Bank fisherman is not conspicuous. He talks, acts, and speaks pretty much as any other class of American worker.

But it is at sea that the Bank fisherman manifests his distinctiveness and the splendid inherited qualities of the type are seen to advantage—daring initiative, skill in seamanship, and ability to endure long hours of heavy labor and the rigors of seafaring in small vessels during the varying conditions of weather on the North Atlantic.

In the North American fisheries the fast-sailing and seaworthy schooner still remains as the prime means of producing fish from the western Atlantic "banks," and the greater part of the fishing is done from small boats known as dories, which are carried by the schooner and launched upon the fishing grounds.

It is this dory fishing which makes the American fisherman, and in that terms is included the Canadian and Newfoundlander, a distinct type from his colleagues in other countries, and adds to his vocation a hazard and labor which calls for certain sterling qualities to surmount.

The modern Bank fishing schooners are undoubtedly the handsomest commercial sailing craft afloat. They are built of wood and range from 100 to 150 feet in length, with a tonnage of from 80 to 175 tons. Their lines are fine and designed for speed, but weatherliness has been so well combined in the model that neither quality has been sacrificed. True, they are terrible craft for jumping about in a breeze and sea, but they seldom ship any heavy water on deck during a blow, unless "knocked down" or "tripped up" by squall or irregular wave.

The orthodox Bank schooner is two-masted—there have been three-masters—and the sails carried are mainsail, foresail, forestaysail, or "jumbo," and jib. These are known as the four "lowers."

Work on Shares.

Every Bank fishing schooner is a sort of seafaring democracy. The crew works the ship on a co-operative basis, with the skipper as sailing and fishing "boss." In some craft the gang are shipped on the share system, their remuneration consisting of an equal share of the proceeds of the catch after the bills for victualing, ice, salt, bait, cook's wages, and other incidentals have been paid.

The schooner takes a quarter or a fifth of the gross stock, and this repays her owner for the hire of the vessel. Out of this share come the cost of insurance and upkeep, but in good seasons, prior to 1914, many schooners paid their cost of construction within twelve months. In those days, however, a Banker could be built for $12,000; nowadays they cost several times as much.

There are voyages where the men draw $70 each for a week's work, and others where they make but $45 in two months. The Goddess of Luck has something to do with the fisherman's remuneration, but the men who fish steadily throughout the year with hard-working skippers usually make a good income, though it is never commensurate with the risks they take.

The passage to the Banks may be a run from 50 to 500 miles and it is usually made in the quickest possible time.

When the vessel has run her distance, the "spot" the skipper has been making for is found by the lead. The sounding lead is a fishing skipper's other eye and he is usually an adept in determining his position by means of it.

While there are many fishing captains who can navigate by solar and stellar observations, yet the majority find their way about by dead-reckoning, using compass, chart, iog, and lead, and their accuracy is often startling.

The sample of the bottom brought up by the soap or tallow on the lead and the depth of water give most skippers an exact position after two casts.

If the gear has been baited and the weather is favorable, the skipper sings out, "Dories over!" The dorymates, who hold the two top dories on the port and starboard "nests," prepare their boats for going overside by shipping the thwarts and jamming the bottom-plugs in.

Oars, pen-boards, bailer, water-jar, bait-knife, gurdy-winch, bucket, gaff, sail and mast, and all other boat and fishing impediments are placed in each little craft, and it is swung up out of the nest and overside by means of tackles depending from the fore and main shrouds.

Two fishermen secure their tubs of baited lines and jump into the dory, which is allowed to drift astern. The painter is made fast to a pin in the schooner's taffrail and the dory is towed along by the schooner. As the other dories are launched, they are dropped astern, made fast to each other, and towed by the schooner.

Setting the Lines.

When all the dories are overside, the skipper, at the wheel of the schooner, determines the direction in which he wants to set his lines, and the dories are let go, one at a time, as the vessel sails along. A schooner "running" ten dories will have them distributed at equal distances along a four or five-mile line and No. 1 dory is often out of sight from the position of No. 10.

When the last dory has been dropped the skipper will either "jog" down the line again o remain hove-to in the vicinity of the weather dory while the .nen are fishing.

In the dories, when the schooner has let them go, one fisherman ships the oars and pulls the boat in the direction given him by the skipper, while the other prepares the gear for "setting."

The end line of the first "tub" of baited long-line is made fast to a light iron anchor to which a stout line and buoy-keg is attached. This is thrown over into the water, and the fisherman, standing up in the stern of the dory with the tub of long-line before him, proceeds to heave the baited gear into the sea.

The picking up of these tiny buoys and flags, scattered over five or six miles of ocean, is quite a knack, and the fishing skippers seem to possess an uncanny sense of location in finding them. Schooners have been forced to leave their gear in the water and run to port for shelter in gales of wind, and have returned two or three days afterward to pick it up again without much trouble.

When the lines have been hauled and the last anchor is up, the fishermen row or sail down to the schooner, which is generally hovering around like a hen keeping guard over her chickens. The dory rounds up alongside the vessel, the painter is caught by some one aboard her, and, after handling up their tubs of long-lines, the two fishermen pitch out their fish upon the schooner's decks.

In summer, fog is the fisherman's worst enemy. Dories may be strung out when it is fine and clear, and before they can be picked up again they are blanketed from view in a wet, sight-defying mist.

The skippers are wonderfully clever at locating the hidden dories, but it often happens that some cannot be found, and their names are listed with the yearly death toll of the Banks.

But there are not many casualties, considering the frequency of the fogs, and on one occasion 56 dories were reported astray from their vessels and all were either picked up by other schooners or else rowed in from the Banks to the land. Some of the distances stray fishermen have rowed in dories seem incredible, but a pull of 150 to 175 miles in rough weather and without food is not an unusual accomplishment.

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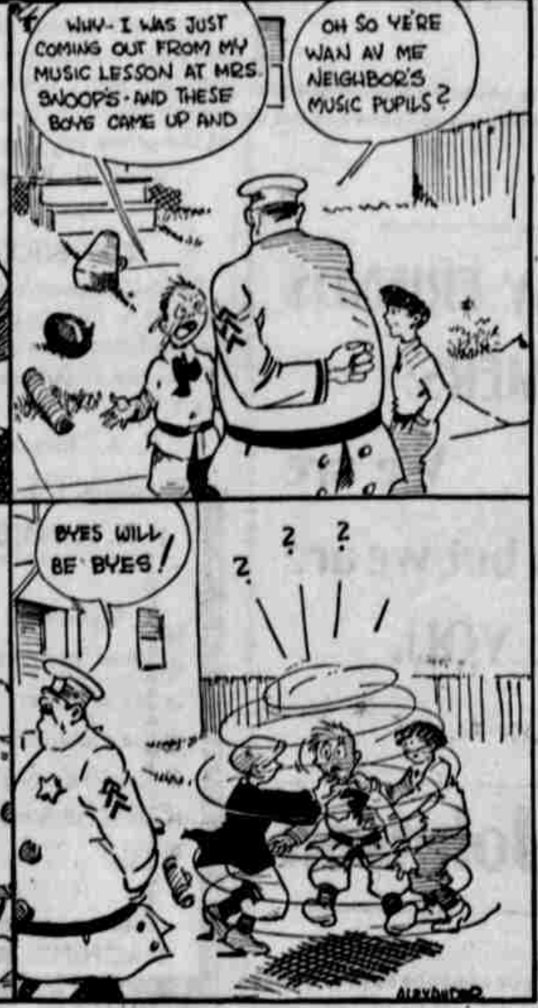

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