

Joseph Robineau de Villebon. "Memoir on the Coast fisheries of Acadia and the Method of Conducting Them, 27 Oct. 1699" in John Clarence Webster, ed. *Acadia at the end of the seventeenth century; letters, journals and memoirs of Joseph Robineau de Villebon, commandant in Acadia, 1690-1700, and other contemporary documents* (Saint John N.B., 1934), p. 138-140.

Cod-fishing on these coasts is conducted in a manner different from that at Placentia, where the only boats used are *biscayans* and *charrois*, and where fishing lasts only four months, May, June, July, August ; whereas in Acadia , more especially in the eastern portion, the fish begin to run in March and continue until Christmas in the same abundance. The grounds about Cape Sable are where they first appear, and, in the month of May, they distribute themselves all along the coast in an easterly direction. At the beginning of July a change takes place, and the fish seldom bite after eight or nine in the morning. The fishermen take up their lines at that time and rest till four or five in the evening when they resume work till the next morning at the same hour, and there are fish on every line. As the fishing is not done at great depth, there are two hooks to each line and often two cod are caught at once. The fish caught with - in sight of land are of medium size and good for salting ; those taken on the banks out at sea are large, and are good green.

*Biscayans* and *charrois* are not practical in this region, because the delay in going from the harbors to the fishing grounds and returning at night take up half a fisherman's time, nor can they go out at all if the wind is against them. Moreover, they could not take advantage of the season when the fish run at night, for they would not dare to expose themselves in the open sea . The smallest fishing craft suitable for this country must be at least 15 to 18 tons up to 30, similar to those used by the English on their coasts. With such boats, they could remain on the fishing grounds and there would be no need to return to their curing stations before they were laden. If they took salt with them for dressing the fish and used enough, when they reach land it would only be necessary to wash them and heap them up, to be spread later on the beach or on the frames.

When the Sr. de Villebon went to Cape Sable at the end of May last, he found there some English fisherman with 40-ton ketches, who had already taken back one load of fish and were ready to return with a second. From this may be estimated what our fishermen could do, living near these places and having opportunities and facilities which the English do not enjoy.

A vessel from 20 to 30 tons requires a crew of five men only, including the beach-master, and a boat well-employed can be certain of obtaining 900 to 1000 quintals 4 of fish in a summer. This the settlers will not do because they are not sufficiently industrious, and because the work is arduous.

To encourage them and to accustom them to it, a few English fishermen, who would like nothing better, should be distributed among them. It would be very advantageous if, at the outset, one or two experienced Englishmen were to be assigned to each vessel. because they could instruct the settlers and point out the good fishing grounds, and tell them the seasons when the cod are most abundant in each region . Moreover, they would be only too glad to sell their

catches if we wished them.

The people of Boston realize quite clearly, from the orders they have received to withdraw from our shores, that their fishermen will not, in future, be permitted to seek shelter in our ports ; the most they can hope for is the deep-sea fishing off the banks of Acadia, if, indeed, that privilege is granted them; they have, therefore, offered to pay the same toll for each vessel as formerly, that is 50 francs for the privilege of getting wood and water. If they were granted permission to establish curing stations they would pay a larger amount, without any rights to trade either with the Indians or with His Majesty's subjects ; they would also, by agreement, give us a portion of their fish.

It appears to the Sr. de Villebon that the first proposition would not be disadvantageous ; we would derive from these rights a sum which might amount to four or five thousand livres each year, which could be expended on the fortifications now projected. Moreover, he believes the English should not be excluded completely from the country until His Majesty has had forts built and in condition to withstand all attacks, because, he is convinced ; that, although they are at present under a strict government, all New England is concerned in the fishing industry, and there is danger that they might secretly instigate some freebooter, as they have done in the past, to harry our young settlements, without appearing to have had anything to do with the matter. If these dues had been paid since the declaration of peace, they would have amounted to at least ten or twelve thousand livres, which might have been used for fortifications.

Although it has nothing to do with fishing, another thing which appears indispensable is our need to obtain from them mares and stallions for breeding purposes and for trade in the Islands, and cattle, so that the stock may be changed entirely. The Acadian cows do not yield a third of the amount of milk which the cows of Boston give, and even that with difficulty. If we were abruptly to put a stop to their fishing industry, they would refuse to let us have them.

Should Mgr. de Maurepas consider these views favorably and be pleased to order the Sr. de Villebon to make such a proposal, the latter would hope for permission to have an interview with the Governor of Boston so that he might carry out his instructions in the matter with absolute certainty.

There are now in this country twelve boats of 10 to 30 tons suitable for fishing, and several men are preparing to set out in the spring; if Englishmen could be obtained, as suggested by the Sr. de Villebon, all these boats would engage in fishing. Besides these, there are six *biscayans* but they are only fit for the settlers to use in going from one place to another to attend to their personal requirements.

Villebon