

PREFACE

Where the Fish Hatchery Park now stands off of the Bedford Highway and Shore Drive, there was once a thriving industry of fish breeding which ran from 1876 until 1961, an almost ninety year span. According to Elsie Tolson, the Fish Hatchery employed several individuals from Bedford families, and the salmon it produced were transported to other lakes throughout the Maritime Provinces to replenish their stock.¹ Although the industry survived for nearly ninety years, in later years the Hatchery was faced with flooding, pollution, and removal of the gravel river bed which was necessary for the salmon spawning. These factors all lent a hand in bringing about the end of the Fish Hatchery business in Bedford. However, the land upon which the Hatchery once stood has not been forgotten as it has been turned into a park and, upon relocation of the cenotaph to the park it has become a gathering place for the community each year on Remembrance Day.

In August of 2008, as a part of Scott Manor House's Heritage Week, Lewis Turner gave a presentation about Bedford's Fish Hatchery which was based on his own personal memories of the Hatchery, those of other individuals, and the further research he had conducted. This monograph will provide a history of the Fish Hatchery from its beginnings in the early 1870s. It will draw upon Lew's presentation and other sources.

¹ Elsie Tolson, *The Captain, the Colonel and Me* (Sackville, N.B: The Tribune Press Ltd, 1979), 190-191.

THE START OF THE FISH HATCHERY

The Sackville River flows from its head at Mount Uniacke through various bodies of water and into the Bedford Basin.² During spawning season, salmon entered the Sackville River from the Basin and migrated up the river to their spawning beds. In the late 1800s, the numbers of fish in the river and the Basin began to deplete from overfishing. The Nova Scotia Government passed legislation in 1786 which made it mandatory to have a pass in order to fish, but the lack of enforcement of this regulation throughout the province did not aid in ensuring that this depletion ceased.³ In addition to the commercial and recreational fishing which occurred on the river and the Basin, there were several mills located along the river which were a contributing factor to further depletion. The dams of the mills blocked the fish from their spawning grounds, and the garbage from the mills which ended up in the water harmed the habitat in which the salmon lived.⁴

Samuel Wilmot, a prominent farmer, civil servant, and the superintendent of fish culture in Canada, was placed in charge of establishing and overseeing the operation of fish hatcheries throughout the country.⁵ The Bedford Fish Hatchery began after he received orders to select a location in Nova Scotia where they could establish a place for the artificial propagation of salmon so as to combat the fish depletion.⁶ Upon recommendations by two individuals, Mr.

² Sackville Rivers Association, "Sackville River," http://www.evolutionstechnologies.ca/sraweb/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27&Itemid=45. (accessed 19 July 2010).

³ Unknown, 350.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ A. B. McCullough, "Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online: Wilmot, Samuel," Copyright 2000. http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=6500&&PHPSESSID=yhzfqkvzape. (accessed 9 August 2010).

⁶ Canada, Parliament, Sessional Papers, 1876, Paper no. 5, 230.

Whitcher⁷ and General Sir O'Grady Haly, Samuel Wilmot made inspections of the Sackville River and area and decided that it would be the appropriate location for the Hatchery.⁸ On August 28th, 1875 a piece of land near the mouth of the River was sold to the Crown by William and Anna Maria Harrington, and William and Mercy Tolson⁹ and the Fish Hatchery was constructed.

Several contributing factors led to the decision by Samuel Wilmot to establish a fish hatchery on the Sackville River near the Bedford Basin: the location itself was ideal; the Sackville River had various strong qualities; and, the surrounding community would benefit from a hatchery in this location. Wilmot believed that the hatchery would be well placed here due to its accessibility. The site was located near the railway, a road, a landing for ships, and also the post and telegraph offices which would allow for both easy transportation of the fry to locations throughout the province and also for the easy receiving of salmon egg supplies from other hatcheries.¹⁰ In addition to accessibility, the Sackville River was the ideal river upon which to establish a hatchery because despite depleting stocks, there were still decent numbers of salmon using the Sackville River for spawning.¹¹ Wilmot also wrote that “the supply of water is at times very large – and during the droughts of summer there is a never-failing and abundant flow in it”.¹² Furthermore, the elevation of the river would allow for the water to be easily transported underground in a pipe to the buildings.¹³ Introducing this new industry would have been of no benefit to any community if it were placed in some location which was remote; therefore, Wilmot believed that by placing the hatchery in Bedford, the community would be

⁷ It is unknown what Mr. Whitcher's first name was or what his relation to Bedford was.

⁸ Canada, Parliament, Sessional Papers, 1876, Paper no. 5, 231.

⁹ Tony Edwards, *Images of our Past: Historic Bedford* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Ltd, 2007), 139.

¹⁰ Canada, Sessional Papers, 232.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 231.

¹² *Ibid*.

¹³ *Ibid*.

able to become involved with the operations, and would be able to see the benefits of the hatchery industry.¹⁴

Upon selection of the location and the sale of the land to the Crown, architects Elliot and Bush were instructed to create plans for the construction of the Hatchery.¹⁵ Wilmot reported that there were six tender submissions, but Mr. James Lawlor from Halifax was given the contract to build the Hatchery for three thousand dollars.¹⁶ Mr. Tolson, who had been appointed guardian of the river, was instructed to obtain salmon for the Sackville River.¹⁷ Six-hundred thousand salmon ova were retrieved from River Philip and brought back to the Hatchery and, according to the report provided by Samuel Wilmot, in around half a million of those eggs the formation of the fry was visible.¹⁸

The Fish Hatchery was faced with a few issues during its beginning stages in the 1880s. To begin with, Mr. Tolson requested that there be an examination of the river due to the depleting numbers of salmon. The river was inspected and it was found that there was an obstruction of the river which had altered its course. It was decided that a channel would be dug where the water had already diverted with the labour costing \$10 and the purchase of land from Richard Peverell for \$20.¹⁹ Several mills were found to have dams which blocked the river and they were also found to be in violation of the law due to their disposal of sawdust into the river.²⁰ As such, they were ordered to stop this practice, which resulted in a marked improvement upon inspection the following year. In 1888, it was discovered that the Tolson Woolen Mill was obstructing the salmon from reaching their spawning area and a sum of \$200 from the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 232.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 233.

¹⁹ Fred H. D. Veith, Report upon the Condition of the Rivers in Nova Scotia in Connection with the Fisheries in that Province (Ottawa: 1884), 1).

²⁰ Ibid.

government was requested in order to install a new fish ladder and clean up debris further up the river.²¹

THE FISH HATCHERY

The Fish Hatchery consisted of four buildings, along with a dam and a retaining canal that were located “at a few hundred yards distance above the hatchery”.²² (Appendix A). The hatchery building itself was a two story building with a hatching room and storage space on the first floor, and an office and more storage space on the second floor.²³ In addition to this building, there was also a utility building built in 1950 for feed and storage, a garage with enough room for a single vehicle, and the one and a half storey home for the superintendent of the hatchery.²⁴ The dam on the river had a fishway in order for the fish to get around the barrier and when it was time to collect the fish, there would be a rack placed over the dam so that they could not swim up the river.²⁵ The retaining canal was where the salmon were trapped between September 15th and November 15th of each year²⁶ and it also served as the water supply for the hatchery. Bedford’s Hatchery had the capacity to hold 2,232,000 Atlantic salmon eggs or 4,356,000 Speckled Trout.²⁷

Salmon swim up the river from around the middle of September until the end of October and spawn within the first two weeks of November.²⁸ In order to get the salmon eggs, the workers had to extract them from the fish by pressing on their sides, the male salmon would then be retrieved to fertilize the eggs. (Appendix B). Pacific salmon die after they have spawned,

²¹ Canada, Parliament, *Debates*, 1888, 719.

²² Unknown, Sackville Retaining Pond.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ C. J. Pitcairn, “Bluenose Salmon,” *Rod and Gun in Canada*, March 1950, 29.

²⁷ Unknown, Sackville Retaining Pond.

²⁸ Ibid.

however, Atlantic salmon do not, and therefore they were tagged and put back into the river.²⁹ Following this process, the eggs were placed in troughs within the Hatchery building where water was pumped in from the Sackville River.³⁰ The eggs stayed in the building for the winter and were watched closely. When an egg turned white it indicated that it was dead and therefore needed to be removed. This was done by using long wooden tweezers. The fish eventually developed into fry where the tail and head stuck out on opposite ends with the egg remaining intact on the fish. This egg supplied them with energy and nutrients. Once the eggs fell off, the superintendent of the hatchery began feeding the fish a diet of ground up liver, beef, pork, fish, and wheat.³¹ The fish were then moved to the wooden troughs outside the building where they developed further. Then they were distributed throughout lakes and rivers of the Maritimes. Since the Hatchery's water supply came directly from the Sackville River, the fish could be introduced immediately into other rivers instead of having to go through a hardening period.³²

Several superintendents oversaw this yearly process of fish spawning, including Alfred Ogden who served for 25 years, George Heatley, and Ernest Barrett. According to Lewis Turner, Mr. Heatley had a "heart of gold" and once gave him salmon to bring home to his father. A newspaper article from 1931 stated that not only was the Fish Hatchery an "interesting place to visit" but that "Mr. Heatley the superintendent is never too busy to show you about and tell you of the activities of this plant".³³ (Appendix C).

THE END OF BEDFORD'S FISH HATCHERY

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Pitcairn, "Bluenose Salmon," 29.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, 30.

³³ Marion Christie (compiled by), 1906-1956 Scrapbook, Fort Sackville Foundation Archives.

Despite having originally been a thriving industry, the Fish Hatchery was faced with floods, pollution, and unnatural changes made to the Sackville River. These factors led to a decrease in productivity from the Hatchery and its closure in 1961. Mills along the river posed a continual problem for the Hatchery due to the pollution they expelled into the Sackville River. Garbage, such as sawdust and silt, from the mills would end up in the River and harm the habitat of the salmon, thus making their survival difficult. In addition to the pollution, several of the mills, including Atlantic Sand and Gravel, were responsible for destroying the fish-spawning bed of the river through removal of the gravel base on each side of the river.³⁴ The removal of the gravel resulted in the widening of the river, the formation of a lake, and it left a base which was just earth, not the natural gravel required for spawning.³⁵ The river alteration was increased further with the construction of the highway interchange because the course of the river was shifted from its original path.³⁶ The problems of pollution and destruction of the fish habitat were only compounded by the numerous floods the Fish Hatchery was faced with. Heavy rain falls would often cause the water of the Sackville River to rise to a point where much of the surrounding area would become flooded. One particular flood in 1956 washed away all the salmon at the Hatchery which were in the outside troughs and it also damaged some of the Hatchery's land. (Appendix D).

Due to these factors, the annual report in 1961 was not promising in regards to the numbers of fish in the Sackville River and the quantity of fish being distributed from the Bedford Hatchery to other lakes and rivers in the region. According to reports, in 1959 there were 130 salmon which returned to the river for spawning, but in 1960 there were only six.³⁷ Thus, 100

³⁴ Tolson, *The Captain*, 191.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

Atlantic salmon and 100 Speckled trout eggs were transported to Memorial University for analysis which resulted in the closing of the hatchery.³⁸ The operation of the Fish Hatchery was closed down completely by 1962 and the buildings were used for storage space. In 1970, both the hatchery building and the superintendent's house were demolished. (Appendix E).

FISH HATCHERY PARK

In September of 1978, the Fish Hatchery Park was opened officially by Premier Gerald Regan with a ribbon cutting ceremony and entertainment provided by the Halifax County School Band.³⁹ Construction of the park was completed by students whose labour was paid for by government summer program.⁴⁰ Following its opening, work continued on the park in order to further improve it for recreational use; Don Inglis and Rob Smith worked diligently with a small recreation budget to re-sod some of the park, plant flowerbeds, and install power in the park.⁴¹ In addition to all this work, Mr. Inglis received \$2,500 from the service commission which was put towards the construction of a bandstand for the park.⁴² The bandstand was designed by Mr. Inglis, and constructed by Mr. Smith, Carl Fredericks, and their two sons. (Appendix F).

In 1990, amid much controversy, the Fish Hatchery Park became the new home of Bedford's cenotaph. Due to the deteriorating condition of the cenotaph an \$8000 new monument was planned to replace it and in addition, the Bedford branch of the Royal Canadian Legion requested that the monument be moved to Fish Hatchery Park.⁴³ The decision to move the cenotaph away from its previous location at Cenotaph Park was largely due to its inaccessibility;

³⁸ Edwards, *Images*, 141.

³⁹ Unknown, "New Bedford Park Opens," *Bedford-Sackville News*, September 6, 1978. Located in 1978 Scrapbook, Fort Sackville Foundation Archives.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Unknown, "Bandstand Opening Sunday," 1980. Located in 1980 Scrapbook, Fort Sackville Foundation Archives.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ryan Van Horne, "Protests don't stop Bedford cenotaph move," *The Weekly News*, November 7, 1990. Located in 1990 Scrapbook, Fort Sackville Foundation Archives.

the park was small which made holding Remembrance Day ceremonies difficult, trees covered much of the monument, and several veterans found the area hard to get to.⁴⁴ However, there were many in Bedford who opposed the relocation with the belief that it would be disrespectful to the war dead to move it and more specifically, that the new location of Fish Hatchery Park was a more recreational park and that noise levels would be too high.⁴⁵ Because of this disapproval, a petition of 95 signatures was submitted but it was ultimately unsuccessful in its goal. In the end, the cost of the relocation and new monument was \$8500.⁴⁶ The dedication ceremony for the new cenotaph was held on November 4th, 1990 and the new cenotaph consisted of a granite base with the lion topper faced to look towards the sea, three plaques which were taken from the old cenotaph, and a fourth was added with the names of veterans from Bedford who had perished in the Korean War.⁴⁷ (Appendix G). Despite the controversy, the new cenotaph now rests in an easily accessible and peaceful park. There is ample space each year for Bedford residents to gather on Remembrance Day and reflect and honour the sacrifices of those who served.

RESTORATION & THE SACKVILLE RIVERS ASSOCIATION

The Sackville Rivers Association (SRA), established in 1988, has been a prominent player in the conservation of the Sackville River Watershed. They have been “dedicated to the preservation, restoration and enhancement”⁴⁸ of the Sackville River and through various conservation projects they hope to restore its natural environment. Conservation efforts have

⁴⁴ Steve Proctor, “Bedford cenotaph relocation angers heritage committee,” November 3, 1990. Located in 1990 Scrapbook, Fort Sackville Foundation Archives.

⁴⁵ Van Horne, “Protests don’t stop...” 1990.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Proctor, “Bedford cenotaph relocation...” 1990.

⁴⁸ Sackville Rivers Association, “Sackville Rivers Association,” <http://www.sackvillerrivers.ns.ca/>. (accessed 21 August 2010).

included the installation of digger logs in the water which serve to restore fish habitats and the natural course of the river, the placement of deflectors which narrow the river where it has become too wide, and projects focused on bank stabilization.⁴⁹

Along with these efforts, the SRA has worked in conjunction with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans since the 1980s to stock the river with several species of fish including Atlantic salmon, Speckled Trout, and Sea Run Speckled Trout.⁵⁰ The restocking takes place in two stages: the first in the spring when salmon fry and parr (0-1 years old) are introduced to the river, and the second in the fall when smolts, which are one year old fish prepared to go to sea, are introduced.⁵¹ Furthermore, the SRA oversees clean-up efforts around the river due to the large amounts of debris which are often neglectfully disposed of near this fragile ecosystem. If this garbage were to be left the habitat would be harmed and it is possible that the fish could consume it, likely resulting in their death.

These efforts of the SRA are necessary in order to improve the habitat for the salmon and to bring the Sackville River back to what it once was. There has been a gradual improvement over the years of the river quality and an increase in the number of salmon which are returning to the river to spawn. This improvement is encouraging; however, the river restoration project will be a continual effort that requires commitment not just from the SRA, but also from the surrounding communities.

CONCLUSION

Bedford's Fish Hatchery has undergone many changes throughout the years; from a thriving industry which supplied rivers and lakes around the region with salmon, to one which

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

struggled to stay alive amidst pollution and habitat destruction, to finally, a peaceful park area complete with a bandstand and Bedford's cenotaph. (Appendix H). The community has undoubtedly benefitted from the establishment of the hatchery back in 1876, just as Samuel Wilmot had hoped they would.

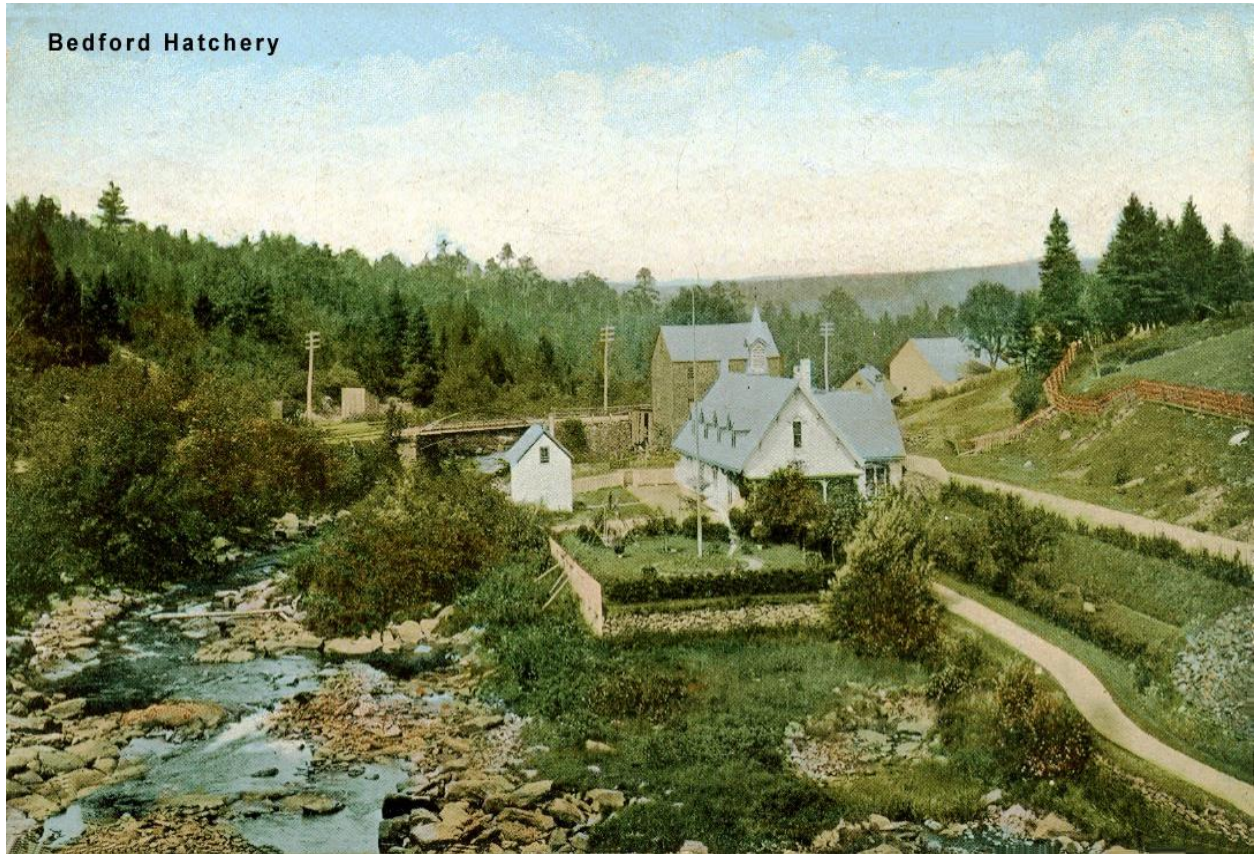
The area is now the gathering place for Bedford residents each year on Remembrance Day to come together and reflect on the sacrifices of those who fought for their country. In addition, recent work by the Sackville Rivers Association has helped to restore the river to its natural condition and restocking of salmon and trout will hopefully ensure that the number of fish in the river will return to their once abundant numbers.

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Appendix A

Photo of the Fish Hatchery and Tolson-Eastwood Woolen Mill c. 1907.



Source: Fort Sackville Foundation Archives, Image #0697

Appendix B (Part 1 of 2)

Top: Photo of a Fish Hatchery worker holding a salmon before the eggs are removed.

Bottom: Photo of workers stripping salmon by the river where the salmon were kept after they had been netted.



Source: Russ Heffler, located in Fort Sackville Foundation Archives, Image #1496 A.



Source: Russ Heffler, located in Fort Sackville Foundation Archives, Image #1496 C.

(Part 2 of 2)

Image of a male salmon being used to fertilize the eggs in the pan.



Source: Russ Heffler, located in Fort Sackville Foundation Archives, Image #1396 D

Appendix C

Photo of Hatchery workers and Superintendent George Heatley (holding the salmon).



Source: Russ Heffler, located in Fort Sackville Foundation Archives, Image #1496 D

Appendix D (Part 1 of 2)

Photo of a flood in 1956 which impacted much of the Fish Hatchery.



Source: Fort Sackville Foundation Archives

(Part 2 of 2)

Image of the Fish Hatchery following the 1956 flood.



Source: Fort Sackville Foundation Archives

Appendix E

The demolition of the Fish Hatchery in 1970.



Source: Russ Heffler, located in Fort Sackville Foundation Archives, Image #0715

Appendix F (Part 1 of 2)

Fish Hatchery Park (June 1956). Visible in the middle of the photo is the construction of the bandstand.



Source: Norm Fenerty, located in Fort Sackville Foundation Archives, Image #0512

(Part 2 of 2)

Photo of the completed bandstand taken in August 2010.



Source: Heather Campbell

Appendix G

The new cenotaph located in Fish Hatchery Park.



Source: Lewis Turner

Appendix H (Part 1 of 2)

View of Fish Hatchery Park from the railroad.



Source: Lewis Turner

(Part 2 of 2)

Top and bottom: Images of Fish Hatchery Park



Source: Lewis Turner