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Tuna Fishing in St. Ann's Bay From a Talk with Commander Duncan M. Hodgson
Commander Duncan M. Hodgson took the world's record for tuna with a rod and reel in 1950 in St. Ann's Bay. He held that record for 20 years. The following discussion is an introduction to his Tuna Diary. He kept no other diary, only the events and methods and observations in St. Ann's Bay over 50 years. He kept the tuna diary since 1932, but has been coming to Cape Breton from Montreal since a couple of years before that. (Commander, had you ever fished tuna before you came to Cape Breton Island?) Oh, no, no. Never heard of it. (And what got you started?) Oh, my father-in-law, J. K. L. Ross--that's why he built this camp --tuna camp. And he got the world record here, the first fish. First tuna ever caught with a rod and line was caught right here. He caught it. Jack Ross caught his first fish here in 1911. (So he held the record--for this area? Or for the world?) The world. I married his daughter and started fishing tuna. (That's quite a responsibility to come along with the marriage! Did you fish out of a yacht, or what kind of a boat?) Tuna boat. Double-ender. I guess about 18 feet. I've got one here. It's copied from the first one he had. (Do you just row out and drop a line?) Oh, no, no. (How is it done?) Sighting. You'd see the fish--see the fin on the water. You'd try and guess where they were headed, and you'd get off your towboat, you'd get under oars, ahead of them--intercept them and meet them and, hopefully, hook them. (Would you use bait?) Oh, yes. You'd use what you have, but you generally had mackerel. Mackerel was most common. I got a big fish off a squid once. Squid bait. (Was there any trick to attracting the tuna?) Sometimes you threw out mackerel, and attracted them that way. But they didn't take the bait that way very much. I had one feeding out of my hands. I saw him every day at the same spot, and I'd throw a fish to him and he'd come up and take them. Extraordinary. (And then finally, one day, you'd catch that fish.) An extraordinary sight. Having a zoo where you feed the animals. (We don't think of St. Ann's Bay that way anymore.) No. St. Ann's Bay used to be a very famous bait bay. Ships came in on their way to Newfoundland or anywhere else and loaded up with bait. This was a great place to get bait. Squid used to visit, number one. And mackerel would be the next thing, the common bait. Tons of mackerel. And they had bait boats here then--big flat boats about 30 feet long, 25 feet long--and wide. They used to fill it up with fish. And when they'd get the bait out of that they'd get their commercial fish, as a staple. I've seen one of them once here, was in pieces on the beaches. (And do you think that it was the quantity of bait here that brought the tuna?) Sure. A famous place for fish--this bay here. (And yet today we don't see tuna.) Oh, no. Haven't seen a tuna here for many years. (What do you think made the change?) Oh, I think they exterminated them. They fished them out, commercially. (In St. Ann's Bay or elsewhere?) All the way up the coast they used to get them. I think they fished them all the way from the tropics, right up here. Eventually, they mechanized. Fishing got the best of them. Dragged them. Netted them. Oh, they did the same 63