

[Page 12 - Lobster Factories around Cape Breton](#)ISSUE : [Issue 20](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1978/8/1

the wharf, watching the boat going • and all we had was the due bill, the number of pounds on it. And in those days the United States was so far away. One old fellow said, "There goes the lobsters. I wonder will we ever see a cent for them." And the other said, "That's an established firm in the U. S. They wouldn't do anything like that." I believe when we got our returns • I believe we got 15 cents each for the 10-1 inch lobsters • 5 cents more than we were getting here. In the early days here the local merchants weren't buying lobsters. It was American firms that moved in and started buying lobsters. In the beginning they only canned • then about '26, '27 they started to ship the big ones. It was against these outside companies the fishermen decided to organize themselves. Father Coady came here. He made many trips here. He sent his squad in first to organize the kitchen meetings. We'd gather to study the cooperative principles in somebody's home. Probably right in Main-a-Dieu you'd have only 2 or 3? Probably in Bateson you'd have one, and Lorraine and Scataria and so on. More men than women at this particular stage. (What would be a co-op principle they'd study?) Well, one principle was to own your own and control your own business. And do your own marketing. And get the best possible prices for your product. Go as direct and ship as direct as you could. (Weren't those pretty radical thoughts?) No. Everybody agreed mostly. There'd be a lot of questions. The biggest question would be when would they get paid. My philosophy is that pay is important, but controlling yourself, controlling what you sell • that's top. The other will fall in. It has always bothered me till today, that you come to the wharf and you don't say, I Crew at Walker's Cove, Judique South, 1938. 1st Row, 1 to r; Jessie Campbell, Mary Margaret Gillis, Annie Laurie Graham, Margaret Graham, Jessie Flora MacLean, Catherine MacMillan, Marie Chisholm, Tina Graham, Mary Ellen Chisholm. Mamie MacDonald, Annie Laura Graham, Angus MacEachern, Willy MacDonald (a fisherman). 2nd Row; Mary Catherine MacDonald, Tina Chisholm, Freddie MacDonnel. Angus | MacMaster, John MacMaster, Gussy Campbell, John MacDonnel. Allan Chisholm Constable MacDonald, Landry (foreman from N.B.), Roddy Graham (fisherman). 3rd Row; Jimmy MacDonald, Ray Smith. want 15 dollars a hundred for those lobsters • you say, what's the price? When you go up to the store, you don't say, I'm going to give you 75 cents a pound for tea. That's the difference that bothered me. When you go land your fish, you take what they offer; when you go to the store to buy, you pay what they ask. And this is the kind of thing we'd discuss at the kitchen meetings. And then we'd have the annual meeting • you'd bring in the speakers. Coady would come in, Jimmy Tompkins. Coady would tell them about back in the early days, how things were that bad in Canso that the government gave him a grant to see if in the name of God he could do something for the fishermen that were starving to death. And this is what he started • the United Maritime Fishermen. And he'd tell you about that. And he'd tell you what other people were doing, how their co-op was going. Masters of Your Own Destiny • that was one of his books, that was his philosophy. Own your own business. Own and control your own business. Why pay people high prices



to come in and run your business for you? It should be done by yourself. And after kitchen meetings and annual meetings, people would talk about it more among themselves. We started our own co-op cannery here in • '37 or '38. (Oh, the co-op wasn't a union?) No. The co-op worked in conjunction with the U.M.F. The U.M.F. was used as the marketing agent. The co-ops were the collectors and the producers and whatever. The co-op bought Burnham-Morrell's and operated first. And it was in very bad repair. We used that a couple of years and we bought out Simpson-Roberts • the factory was much newer. And so at one time we had 100% S. All the fishermen sold to the co-op. We were the only cannery. The fishermen