

# *EASTHOPE MARINE ENGINES AND THE FISHING INDUSTRY OF STEVESTON, BRITISH COLUMBIA*

A critical analysis of the impact mechanization had on the local fishing industry and  
subsequently the lives of the fishermen

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## ABSTRACT

In collaboration with the Britannia Shipyard National Historic Site, my research examines the impact that marine engines had on the local fishing industry of Steveston, British Columbia and the fishermen involved. Through an analysis of life prior to the engines' introduction, this report will examine how such innovations in fishing technology were considered helpful for the local fishermen in-so-far as they aided in increasing their means of catching fish. It follows that there were shortcomings to such advancements, specifically in light of racial and societal divisions in the region at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1910s-1940s). My findings, however, serve to prove that despite these shortcomings, such development in the industry ultimately served to ease the strain on fishermen at the beginnings of its introduction into the Steveston fishing industry, noting in particular how the means by which they were able to benefit these fishermen weighed heavily on removing some of the strain of an already strenuous occupation.

## INTRODUCTION

The curators at the Britannia Shipyard National Historical site are designing an exhibition showcasing a wide variety of marine engines that were used in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in British Columbia fisheries. The exhibit aims to tell the stories of those fishermen and dock workers that lived to witness and become influenced by the advancements such engines brought to the industry. Specifically, they are interested in gaining a better understanding of how the introduction of marine engines affected the fishing industry and the lives of the fishermen. I have been tasked with considering this idea in light of the Easthope Bros.' contribution to the Steveston fishing industry in the 1910s to the late 1940s as innovative marine engine salesmen. My research considers the contrast in fishing capability and general working conditions before and after the introduction of such engines. As such, this paper will argue that the mechanization of fishing vessels through the introduction of marine engines into the Steveston fishing industry acted as an aiding tool for local fisheries and fishermen during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to increase their efficiency as a result of increased competition and rising demand. Furthermore, it will examine how such developments and progress do not come without their fair share of compromises. Some examples include the increased workload that befell certain industry workers, and how this, in turn, illustrated an ongoing systemic division in the labour force in terms of race, as well as the impact of more efficient means of fishing on the longevity of fishing stock. In what follows, the impact of mechanization will be examined in light of the inevitable development that came with rising demands for, specific to Steveston, canned salmon goods, and how engines became one means by which fishermen were able to alleviate growing strenuous working conditions.

## RACIAL SEGREGATION AND THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Generally, the literature provides an understanding of a broader scope of the fishing industry in British Columbia; its histories, mechanisms, and trends of employment and management as well as common social atmospheres that prevailed. A general impression expressed in the literature was the utilization of a growing sense of internationalism by European migrants to Canada as a means of exploiting cheap labour. The literature recognizes the almost racist nature of European migrants to Canada and their sense of superiority over, specifically but not limited to, Japanese and Chinese migrants, as well as First Nations.<sup>1</sup> Mention of First Nations' connections to the land and water is made with little consideration of how these connections were severed with the arrival of the European migrants, specifically with the formation of fisheries which demanded cheap labour.<sup>2</sup> However, in the case of Steveston, upon European settlement and subsequently the introduction of marine engines, much of First Nations' fishing was moved Northward in BC to avoid the rising competition.<sup>3</sup>

The consideration of racial segregation and subsequently racist policy in the industry becomes a critical aspect of my research given that such segregation ultimately prevailed well after the introduction of marine engines.<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, it is important to distinguish such segregation considering the potential benefits the engines were capable of bringing to fishermen who were already well enveloped in the industry.<sup>5</sup> I argue that, considering segregation was prevalent well before marine engines were established parts in the industry, their possible

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<sup>1</sup> Follansbee, J. The Fisherman Who Nearly Started a War with Japan. *The Mariner's Mirror*, 92(1), 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Bilton, D. H., Northern, Central, Diversified, Specialized: The Archaeology of Fishing Adaptations in the Gulf of Georgia (Salish Sea), British Columbia. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2014)

<sup>3</sup> "Correspondence with Brooke Lees of the Britannia Shipyard National Historic Site", Ayah Farsi, April 3, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Yesaki, M., Steves, H., & Steves, K. *Steveston Cannery Row: An Illustrated History*. Peninsula Publishing Company, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> "Britannia Heritage Shipyard Oral History Project", Steambox, Boardwalks, Belts and Ways: Stories from Britannia, 1992., Print.

utilization to further the racial divide must be seen as a means deployed by those in charge, not as counter to the benefits they brought. An analysis of how Western Europeans established the fishing industry in its official capacity, which in turn created the perception that the industry should remain all “white”, provides insight into what might have been motivations to maintain a segregated industry in Steveston.<sup>6</sup> Considering the dominance of Non-European workers in the canneries, the introduction of marine engines into the Steveston fishing industry is seen in light of these racial divides, examining how Easthope marine engines in specific were cheap and reliable. As such, in what follows, I will explore how such engines were not a means of discrimination.

### BEFORE ENGINES

Both Yesaki’s and Jamieson’s works pay close attention to the personal lives and well-being of fishermen and cannery workers in the British Columbia fishing industry.<sup>7</sup> Yesaki’s book provides a detailed history of the Steveston fishing industry, directly relevant to my research, and notes the treatment of non-European workers.<sup>8</sup> Dealing specifically with Steveston, this book also provides great insight into the introduction of the marine engines in the industry and depicts the general response to these engines in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as mainly being one of relief. As illustrated in an interview with Edward Sparrow Sr., a Musqueam fisherman, life before engines on a fishing boat was rather hectic:

Yeah. They had tug boats for towing them. They had a long rope behind them, they anchored this boat here, on the last boat permanently. He's hanging on to that tow line, and the other guys are zig-zagged along the tow line. When they want a good spot, a good opening or whatever it is, then they let the bow go and then the guy down in the stern would hang on for a while and would just shoot right out of the waves.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Muszynski, A.. Cheap wage labour: Race and gender in the fisheries of British Columbia, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Jamieson, S., & Gladstone, P. Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science/Revue canadienne de economiques et science politique*, 16(01), 1950.

<sup>8</sup> Yesaki, *Steveston Cannery Row: An Illustrated History*, 2005

<sup>9</sup> “Interview with Edward Sparrow Sr.” by Harriet Cook, City of Richmond BC, November 5, 1991, Transcription of Tape. <http://www.richmond.ca/cityhall/archives/search/histories/spar.htm>.

Physical endurance was a requirement; when out in the water, it was up to the fisherman on the boat to tug and pull his catch.

Ramirez makes note of the growing desire for capitalism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how internationalization was one means of achieving this by cheap labour.<sup>10</sup> His work is focused on economic benefits of cheap labour but fails to recognize the impact this has on personal lives. With industrialization taking off in Europe at this time and given my own research in the archives, Ramirez’s work contributes to my own by providing a synthesis of the general impact of internationalization (and arguably, globalization) in establishing a network of information and technology. It is clear the settlement of Europeans would eventually string along influences from Europe, in-so-doing introducing different, arguably more efficient means of meeting demand. Following this mindset, if it is assumed such progression in terms of the fishing industry was taking place regardless, the introduction of engines was an aiding tool for fishermen already involved in the industry at the time. This concept was brought about after analyzing the



Figure 1: Fishermen Outside a Japanese House in the North Pacific Cannery.

Unknown, “North Pacific Cannery [showing a] Japanese house, jacks and rollers,” 1910, Anglo British Columbia Packing Co. Ltd, City of Vancouver Archives. Online. CVA 783-171

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<sup>10</sup> Ramirez, B. *On the move: French-Canadian and Italian migrants in the North Atlantic economy 1860-1914*, 1991. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

inefficiency of pre-existing vessels, mainly used by Japanese fishermen, as depicted in Figure 1, below. Such vessels had limited carrying capacities and therefore could only transport one or two fishermen per trip, subsequently limiting the number of fish fishermen would be able to row back with the force of their own bodies.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the simplicity of the vessels made it difficult to move farther from shore.<sup>12</sup> Such strenuous activity was only made more difficult, as mentioned, with the sudden demand for more canned goods. As such, it became close to impossible to sustain such fishing methods, and engines became an innovation intended to assist fishermen when on the water.

### THE CONTRIBUTION MARINE ENGINES LENT TO THE INDUSTRY

The work of John Lutz delves into the history of British Columbia in terms of its energy consumption and engine evolution.<sup>13</sup> His work provides a rather broad perspective on engine usage, however, I found it to be quite useful in heightening my understanding of engine mechanics. Since I could not find sources directly linking the engine operations to the livelihoods of those involved in the industry, this article offers insight into the efficiency of different kinds of engines as well as their development through time. Below is an example of some of the local marine engines produced in Steveston BC, during their earlier stages. These engines were not as efficient as their successors.

Jim Kishi: ...they had Easthope (engines) in it.  
Marilyn Clayton: Okay, right the ones that went putt, putt. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> White, H. *Raincoast Chronicles First Five: Collector's Edition*, 1976. (Harbour Publishing, Madeira Park, BC), p. 226.

<sup>12</sup> Ref. Rm RL 32, Marlatt, Daphne. *Steveston Recollected*, Richmond Archives, Richmond, BC.

<sup>13</sup> Lutz, J. Losing Steam: The Boiler and Engine Industry as an Index of British Columbia's Deindustrialization, 1880-1915. *Historical Papers/Communications historiques*, 23(1), 1988.

<sup>14</sup> "Interview with Jim Kishi" by Marilyn Clayton, City of Richmond BC, November 1, 1991, Transcription of Tape. <http://www.richmond.ca/cityhall/archives/search/histories/kish.htm>

Above is a segment from an interview with former fisherman, Jim Kishi, who is discussing the first Easthope two cylinder engines. Initially, these engines were inefficient since they exploded upon overheating, subsequently frustrating fishermen.<sup>15</sup> However, these engines progressed to include a four-cylinder, better able to cool down, which in turn enabled trawling. Trawling was key in increasing catch and efficiency of fishing boats. In being able to trawl, fishermen were able to spend more time in the water in an effort to catch more fish.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, such advantages were recognized by the local fisherman, encouraging them to purchase their own; “A gas-powered vessel had greater control over wind and current, was faster and more maneuverable...”.<sup>17</sup> As such, their autonomy was ensured in their ability to man their own ships. Economic hardships due to increased competition fell more heavily on cannery workers, as mechanization created the need for an unskilled labour force, effectively decreasing their numbers and wages. This was not so much of an issue regarding fisherman, considering the technologies had not advanced enough to not require their services.<sup>18</sup> Easthope engines, in specific, were praised for their low prices as well as the easy access to engine parts effectively making it accessible to all kinds of fishermen, no matter the depth of their knowledge regarding engines.<sup>19</sup> Figure 2 depicts one of their machine shops, where workers are assembling one of the engines, circa 1930.

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<sup>15</sup> Easthope, P., “Early Four Cycle Years, 1911-1918, *Easthope*, [www.easthope.ca](http://www.easthope.ca), 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Unknown, *Easthope Brothers* Encyclopedia of BC, [www.knowbc.com](http://www.knowbc.com), Harbour Publishing. 2001-2016.

<sup>17</sup> (Yesaki, *Steveston Cannery Row: An Illustrated History*, 2005, p. 60)

<sup>18</sup> (ibid.)

<sup>19</sup> (ibid.)



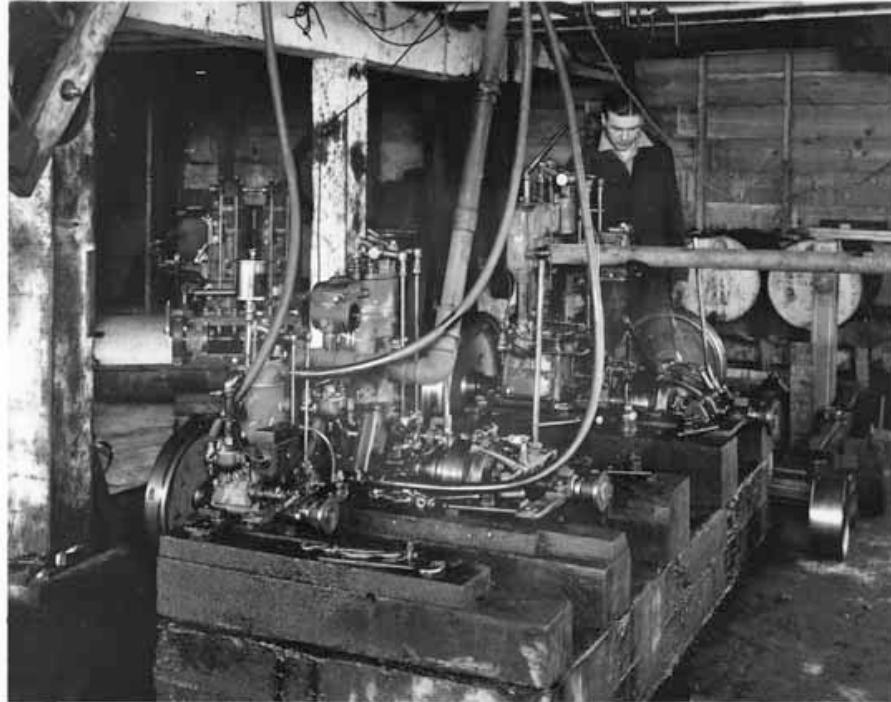


Figure 2 Staff Inside of Easthope Brothers machine shop

Thomson, Stuart. Staff inside of Easthope Brothers machine shop. JPEG. Vancouver: Vancouver Public Library, Copyright 2010. VPL accession number: 8994A. Digital copy.

## SHORTCOMINGS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Carrother's analysis provides an explanation of how predictions of an increased catch were short-lived with the introduction of marine engines, generally. His work follows that advancing technology is beneficial so long as the catches increase each year. Once this does not hold, they become detrimental: the oceans only possess a finite set of resources.<sup>20</sup> As such, his work explores the likely possibility of over exploitation as it is linked to advancements and subsequently mechanization in the fishing industry. His work lends to that of Stuart Nelson who considers the desire to create advanced fishing vessels to meet rising demands. He draws the connection between advancing technology and the availability of fishermen as a consequence of this.<sup>21</sup> He refers to

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<sup>20</sup> Carrothers, W. A. *The British Columbia Fisheries*. University of Toronto Press, 1941.

<sup>21</sup> Nelson, S., & Turriss, B. *The Evolution of Commercial Salmon Fisheries in British Columbia*. Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, 2004.

the simplicity of the fishing industry prior to these rising demands and how such conditions were favourable to fishermen. Rising technologies resulted in an uncertainty among fishermen and industry workers as to whether their jobs were practical anymore. As their jobs became less demanding, the fear resounded that they would eventually become irrelevant. Swartz *et al.*'s piece ties the concept of the industry to the technological advancements involving fishing vessels reflecting on the consequences of World War One and Two in light of industrialization.<sup>22</sup> They attribute these advancements in knowledge of fishing vessels to the boom in the industry as well as one of the main sources of over-fishing. This, I thought, was an important fact to consider; advanced fishing technologies would imply a greater capacity to fish, causing the catch to decrease with time, a shortcoming in the existing literature, and one of my own research to be discussed as well.

Proving this to be true, Frank Millerd writes of the drop in wages as vessels became more efficient since fishermen and cannery workers' jobs were in less demand.<sup>23</sup> His work considers the instability of the industry, specifically where non-European workers were concerned, as new ideas of advancement settled in. Millerd's work allowed for me to recognize the impact of the technical aspects the industry possessed on the livelihoods of those involved. What such work fails to recognize, and what the case of Steveston and my argument aim to clarify is that with such rising demand and competition, development was inevitable. Rising demands induced great stress on workers, and inefficient means of meeting such demands did not help matters.<sup>24</sup> As such, my own research regarding Steveston, British Columbia seemed to yield somewhat contradicting results as

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<sup>22</sup> Swartz, W., Sala, E., Tracey, S., Watson, R., & Pauly, D. The spatial expansion and ecological footprint of fisheries (1950 to present). *PLoS ONE*, 5(12), 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Millerd, F. Early Attempts at Establishing Exclusive Rights in the British Columbia Salmon Fishery. *Land Economics*, 83(1), 2007.

<sup>24</sup> "Britannia Heritage Shipyard Oral History Project", Steambox, Boardwalks, Belts and Ways: Stories from Britannia, 1992., Print. p. 10

those mentioned above. Given the analysis I've provided, the specific case of Steveston and the mechanization brought about by companies such as the Easthope Bros., such advancements helped improve the lives of those directly involved in the fishing industry, using Steveston's current state of being as a prime example (i.e., Steveston remains a fishing town to this day, where fishermen are still able to sell their own catch in the harbour).<sup>25</sup> As Richard Rajala notes the role mechanization played in advancing "a concept of efficiency that eroded the autonomy of loggers"<sup>26</sup> Though he speaks of loggers in BC, the same can be argued in the case of the fishermen in Steveston.

## CONCLUSION

This essay has argued that the mechanization of the fishing industry had favourable effects for fisherman. However, my greatest shortcomings in tackling this issue lay in the paradox that comes with industrialization. Though progress, as I have explained, was inevitable upon European settlement, given their tendency to exploit resources, so too was the increased workload that would eventually befall those workers already partaking in the industry.<sup>27</sup> These conditions would eventually worsen as technologies continued to advance. As discussed, one aspect to consider is how this may have impacted some more than others; there was an obvious, undeniable systemic division in the labour force. This becomes another shortcoming in my research. Though its aim is not to explore this matter in depth, it is nonetheless a crucial part in the narrative that requires further exploration. The benefits brought about by mechanization, which increased the efficiency

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<sup>25</sup> "Fishing Piers & Boating," City of Richmond Online, <http://www.richmond.ca/parks/waterfront2/fishingpiers.htm>, (March 30, 2016)

<sup>26</sup> Rajala, R. *Clearcutting the Pacific rain forest: production, science, and regulation*. Vancouver, UBC Press. 1998. p. 242.

<sup>27</sup> Roy, P. E. Lessons in citizenship, 1945-1949: The delayed return of the Japanese to Canada's Pacific coast. *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 92(2), 2002.

of fishermen's daily trade in its beginnings, cannot go unnoticed. With mechanization came a means by which they were able to retain their autonomy.

Engines symbolized an advancement. This, taken in conjunction with the social dynamics in the region during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, create a better understanding of why the industry mainly favoured the White-European male. Though their daily operations were superficially overlooked by European migrants, Japanese fishermen, in particular, were unable to excel because of this stunt to their development in the industry. There remained a desire to keep the European male at the foreground, retaining much of the wealth that came with the popularity of the Steveston fisheries. As such, though my research has heavily focused on the benefits of the engines, it is equally as important to consider how this eventually led to a new means of acquiring capital, in favour of the European male. This would, in turn, provide a more holistic understanding of the impact of mechanization through time given a longer time frame spanning past the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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