

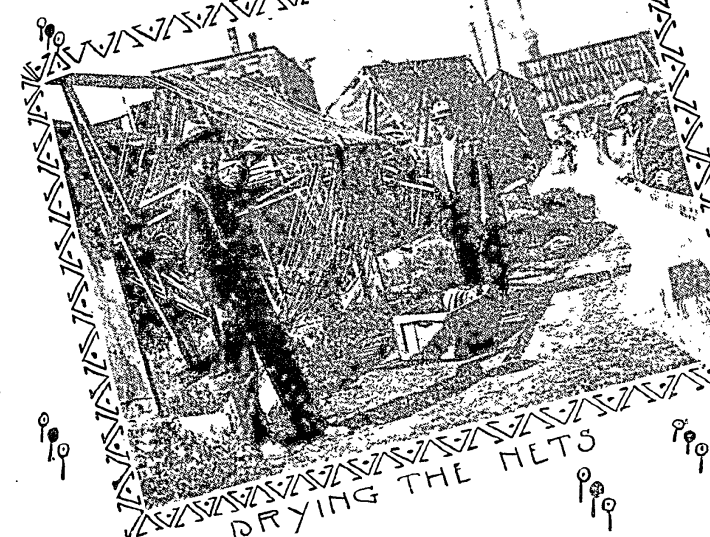
The Last of the

Duluth Fishermen



GOING TO GATHER THE HARVEST

RETURNING WITH THE SPOIL



DRYING THE NETS

LAKE Superior at one time the greatest fish pond in the world, is losing its standing. Noted the world over for the quantity of white fish and lake trout that were taken from its waters, the greatest of all lakes is being depleted of its inhabitants.

There are no fish, in mercantile quantities, in the Duluth district. Twenty years ago, between here and the mouth of the Anemicon river, there were hundreds of fishermen, who made a good living. Tugs were required to haul in the hundreds of tons which were daily taken. Now a few fishermen who have followed the game all their lives and who are not fond to enter into any other occupation, keep the wolf an uncertain distance from the door by selling what few fish they can catch in the Duluth district. There are only a few skiffs engaged in the traffic and some of these return daily with little or no catch.

Old men, residents of Duluth, who fished Lake Superior 20 years ago

and who are as familiar with this great body of water as the average land man is with his home and lawn, say that they can give no reason for the disappearance. There are few white fish and trout left in the lake near Duluth, and it is a great surprise when one of these fish is found in the nets.

Twenty years ago Lake Superior practically supplied the United States with trout and white fish. Regular stations were maintained on Park point, to which tugs were attached. These tugs were kept busy from early in June till the close of navigation and engaged in no other form of traffic. A few years later the white fish and trout began to disappear, and one tug after another was pulled out of the service until now there is not one steamboat operating in this line of trade off the local shores.

The steamer Plover, a ferry boat, owned by the Clow & Nicholson Transportation company engaged in the traffic on the north shore, late last fall and brought to this port about 60 tons of herring but very few white fish and trout. It is said that the venture was not a particularly profitable one and there is some

question as to whether any steamers will enter this field of commerce this fall.

E. Kenner, for years a resident of Duluth, and who still maintains a receiving and distributing station near the foot of St. Croix avenue and Buchanan street, says that he is unable to account for the disappearance of the fish. "No, I do not believe that the lake was fished out, because the going away of the fish was not gradual enough," said Mr. Kenner. "They just seemed to move all at once. It is almost a rarity when we haul up any white fish and trout these days. Even on the north shore where they were so plentiful, few can be found now."

"I realize that this is an old condition, but I know of similar ones. For example, a number of years ago we stocked Lake Superior with a bluefin fish, the spawn being obtained from a lake near Madison, Wis. We planted a large number and trapped a big harvest. When we had established a big market for the bluefin fish and the people had cultivated a taste for it the same as they had for whitefish and trout, the bluefin suddenly disappeared. Although that is years ago few of them have

since been taken from Superior's waters. Now the trout and whitefish are disappearing likewise. Duluth is rapidly losing its prestige as a fishing market."

While many of the men engaged in the fishing traffic have homes in Duluth, most of the fishermen reside in cabins along the north shore where they remain the greater part of the year. Between 500 and 600 men follow the occupation and they realize from \$500 to \$1,000 a year on their labors.

The big tug boats which formerly cruised the north shore are supplanted by flat bottom row "skiffs." These boats which are from 10 to 14 feet in length, are generally pointed at both ends and are made by the fishermen themselves. The herring fishing industry does not require big boats for the reason that it is only in rare cases that the men have to go more than a mile or two from shore to set their nets.

Lake Superior is still well stocked with herring, thousands of tons being caught every year and shipped to various parts of the country. Duluth and Bayfield are the chief points of distribution and at the latter place there are many concerns that deal

exclusively in this kind of fish. Gill nets are used, they being sunk with heavy pieces of lead. When they are in position they resemble a wire net fence. The fish runs blindly into the meshes and when he attempts to back out the cords grip his gills, holding him fast.

The season for herring begins in June and lasts until winter. Most of the big catches are made in October and November when the herring travel in large schools and keep close to shore. As a rule, the fishermen sell their catches to dealers in the city and receive about two and one-half cents a pound. Most of the men following this occupation on the north shore are Scandinavians and Swede Finns. They have an organization which supports a large gasoline boat which hauls the fish into Duluth. Each fisherman weighs and packs his own catch and is paid the prevailing market price after the fish have been delivered in Duluth.

It is reasonable to believe that at the rate the herring are being hauled

from the lake it will be only a matter of a few years until this fish will also be scarce.

"I do not believe that the white fish and trout deliberately disappeared at all," said a gray-haired old fisherman. "They were just netted out. No matter how big a lake you have, it will contain only so many fish. Then again, there are backward years in the fishing industry just the same as there are in others. Sometimes the spawn is not up to the necessary standard. Climatic conditions also have a great deal to do with the proposition of fish."

"When the whitefish and trout were thriving in Lake Superior a large market was supplied from these waters. So great were the catches that the whitefish and trout could not breed fast enough to meet the constantly growing demand. As a result the supply was practically wiped out."

"It is my opinion that the herring will not last a great many years; either. Thousands of tons are be-

ing taken from Lake Superior every summer and fall and I cannot see how the supply is going to hold out.

I can remember in the early days when we could set our nets a mile from shore and catch all the fish our boats could carry. In those times there were large tugs engaged in the traffic, but they have disappeared along with the fish. A few small boats will handle all the fish that can be caught now in the immediate Duluth district.

"There is only one way I know of that the Lake Superior can be replenished and that is for the government to take a hand in the matter. The large trusts that have been hauling out thousands of tons of fish every season will never do anything toward restocking the waters, and the small fishermen have no money, nor the time, to undertake the task. I have lived long enough to know something about the industry of which I am speaking and I firmly believe that I am absolutely right."