

Selected References on the History of Marine Fisheries

An initial goal for this special 50th Anniversary Issue of the *Marine Fisheries Review* was to prepare and, time permitting, annotate, a bibliography on the history of marine fisheries. Presumably, the list would be neither long nor time consuming to construct. Indeed, initial database and index searches produced little of value—a bare handful of citations, many dealing with “life history of . . .” instead of genuine historical material.

Thus, it seemed that either 1) little had been written about marine fisheries history, 2) few such articles or books were being entered in the indexes or databases, 3) items were being entered in the wrong categories, 4) the databases did not go back far enough to include many historical citations, or 5) a combination of items 1-4. Suspiciously, almost none of the more recent books on fisheries history showed up in the first searches.

Soon, though, examination of library shelves and references in the few publications found began to bear fruit. Indeed, a veritable mountain of “fishery history” literature emerged and rapidly grew to fill a 120-page single-spaced manuscript with more than 1,250 citations—far beyond original expectations and much too long to publish here.

Other problems soon became apparent. Like John Muir’s observation that everything in the universe is hitched together, one cannot readily separate strictly marine fisheries history from that of oceanography, limnology, chemistry, or economics, let alone from certain freshwater or anadromous fisheries, aquaculture, etc. After all, the old U.S. Commission on Fish and Fisheries that Spencer F. Baird started was hip-deep in fish culture activities early on, not to mention fisheries technology, disease control, systematics, and more.

The age of the documents poses another interesting problem. Beyond a certain point, many scientific reports have considerable historic interest per se—cases in point being the early publications of the American Fish Cultural Association, various early state and Federal fisheries agency annual and research reports, etc. Indeed, only a few of Baird’s Fish Commission “Reports” are listed here; a lengthy review article could be written on them alone.

Thus, the following list of selected fisheries history materials should be considered as not only very preliminary but somewhat arbitrary. It is only a sampling of the citations that have so far been discovered and which will be published later.

There are, of course, a multitude of other sources of information for those interested in marine fisheries history. These include: State and Federal archives and resource agency libraries, old newspapers or magazines and related files, books on the history of towns connected with the fishing industry or marine science, records of companies involved in fisheries, Congressional documents and records, etc.

And there are other less obvious sources, such as personal diaries or unpublished manuscripts of fisheries pioneers. For example, the late Dewitt Clinton’s book “Fish For Tomorrow,” was only recently published by the University of Washington. Much more is still “out there” waiting to be discovered or waiting to be written. Some of it is very important, some is very personal, but it can provide a wonderful insight into the thoughts and activities of those directly involved with early marine fisheries. Too often, such material (“that old stuff”) gets thrown out in a family or agency housecleaning.

If nothing else, I hope that some of the articles published or cited in this issue will stimulate others to examine the past for the insight and truths it has to offer. I hope it will cause still others to help locate or relocate historical materials, write their own memoirs, compile oral histories, or otherwise document and protect materials relating to the history of America’s marine fisheries. And, perhaps some of these citations will be entered in the various electronic databases so they will be easier to find.

It was none other than Louis Agassiz who commanded “Study nature, not books,” and the dictum still is posted at the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) at Woods Hole, the direct descendant of Alpheus Hyatt’s own Annisquam, Mass., seaside laboratory. Over the years, though, the MBL, the NMFS Woods Hole Laboratory, and related facilities have developed superb libraries. Perhaps now the adage should be amended to read “Study nature and books” lest we miss the lessons of history.

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