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A Port with a Fishing Past

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A port with a fishing past

Fishing was important to the native Wabanaki people and early European settlers of the Penobscot River and Bay region.

Local residents trapped migrating fishes such as salmon, smelt, and sturgeon with nets and weirs, fencelike enclosures of sticks and brush.



“In those days, there was a large quantity of fish taken on the Penobscot River, and a big variety of fish that we don’t see here now: lobsters and sturgeon and salmon...”

—Roy Homer, age 93, in a 1973 interview.



Fishing vessels traveling as far as the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and as near as Penobscot Bay landed millions of pounds of Atlantic cod, mackerel, and herring at wharves along the waterfront. Premier among them was Captain Thomas Nicholson, the son of a Scottish immigrant fisherman, who transformed Bucksport into one of the largest fishing ports on the Atlantic coast. Nicholson’s schooners, loaded with fish, came up through Penobscot Narrows to admiring and cheering crowds. At his wharves on Leach’s Point (about a mile to the southeast) fishermen split, salted and cleaned the fish and stretched them to dry in the summer sun before shipping them to Boston and beyond.



Ongoing restoration efforts in the Penobscot River watershed hold promise to bring back migratory fish, such as river herring and smelt, and the cod and other groundfish that eat them.

DOWNEAST FISHERIES TRAIL | TOWN OF BUCKSPORT
WWW.DOWNEASTFISHERIESTRAIL.ORG

Produced by the Maine Sea Grant College Program at the University of Maine in partnership with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Bucksport photo: Kathlyn Tenga-González; weir: courtesy NOAA; postcard: courtesy Fogler Library at UMaine; drying cod: courtesy Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery; Atlantic cod from FishBase