

FISHY BUSINESS: FISH IN THE *UNITED STATES SERIAL SET*

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Abstract

The *United States Congressional Serial Set* contains a wide variety of historical documents relating to natural resources and their history in the United States. It is an excellent resource for those researching historical data concerning fisheries, from extant species and ecology to economic issues. Information on resources outside the United States is also available due to the U.S. history of explorations and expansions. Charts, maps and tables are found within many of the papers and reports. There are also numerous scientific illustrations.

Keywords: Fisheries, Fisheries data, Historical account, United States government data, *United States Serial Set*

As a new marine science librarian, I'm learning and re-learning about information resources all the time. While exploring the contents of my file cabinets, I found some random fish lithographs labelled U.S. Japan Expedition and Natural History Collections in Alaska – Nelson. When my government documents expert friend, Andrea Sevetson, visited, she immediately identified them as being from the *United States Serial Set*, a resource that I had not used or even thought of in many years. The *U.S. Serial Set* is a bound series of over 15,000 volumes and contains within it nearly all of the hundreds of thousands of numbered documents and congressional reports published since 1817. While most people use it as a primary source for American history and Congressional reports, its contents range from agricultural yearbooks (aquaculture!), foreign relations (treaties!), geological surveys, and a treasure trove of historical data about the United States' fisheries. You can also find historical reports from explorations in the United States and around the world. From the Annual Reports of the Fish Commission to Commodore Perry's Expedition to the China Sea and Japan, there are lists of species, temperatures, hatcheries, maps and beautiful artwork capturing the animals, people and landscapes of the region. There is a companion set called the *American State Papers* that contains documents published prior to 1817. Both of these sets are available commercially as searchable online texts with indexes. Many individually scanned volumes are found in Google Books, the Hathi Trust and other locations (Sevetson, 2013, p. 3). The print version of the *Serial Set* is found in almost every state in the United States thanks to the Federal Depository Library Program.

The variety of documents contained in the *Serial Set* is immense. It contains Executive Branch publications such as the *Agricultural Yearbook* (1894-1975), geological surveys (1832-1945), *Reports on Rivers and Harbors* (1817-1982), and annual reports from a variety of federal agencies (1817-1976) including the Fish Commission. Historical reports from explorations in the United States and around the world are also included along with their accompanying illustrations and maps. Maps are included from other publications as well and total more than 70,000. Besides government reports and documents, the *Serial Set* contains reports from a variety of non-governmental organizations such as the annual reports from the Boy and Girl Scouts, the Smithsonian Institution and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Searching for information about fish and fisheries should not be limited to obvious agencies such as the Fish Commission or NOAA. Over the years, a number of agencies have published information and data that can be of interest. The fact that federal agencies have merged and split apart along with the accompanying name changes can complicate your searching. You need to consider agencies as diverse as the Departments of Treasury or State along with the more obvious ones like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Some of the richest resources are the reports from the agencies that eventually became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Department of the Interior and NOAA in the Department of Commerce. The Fish Commission, established in 1871, eventually morphed some of itself into the National Marine Fisheries Service, established in 1970, as part of NOAA. When using one of the online indexes look for terms like Fish and Fishing Industry, Aquaculture, or the individual names of fish and fisheries in combination with a location such as Atlantic Coast or Alaska Territory.

Many of the older reports from the Fish Commission and the exploration teams are invaluable data sources showing the extant species and their locations. Population counts and climate records are found along with reports of the fisheries showing catch by date and season. An excellent example is the report from the United State Commission of Fish and Fisheries, *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United State* from 1882 (U.S. Senate, 1882, S.Misc.Doc 124 pt. 1 & 2). It discusses where they were finding halibut on the Pacific coast (p. 190) and the mean date of arrival and departure of cod in Newfoundland and Labrador (p. 208). Some reports are less scientific in nature but still of importance. Theodore Gill authored *On the Fishes of New York* where he reported on his twice-a-week walks through the New York City markets in 1856 (U.S. Senate, 1857, p. 253-269). To see changes over time, you could refer to the 1945 publication, *Fishery Resources of the United States*, which reports on the fishery resources along both coasts of the United States along with its territories and possessions (U.S. Senate, 1945). In the 1888 annual report from the United States Commission on Fish and Fisheries, the explorations of the ship *Albatross* along the West Coast are detailed. You can learn about the character and value of resources found on Heceta Bank in Oregon or the trials and tribulations of oyster aquaculture in California (U.S. House, 1892). Discussions also include the importation of new species for potential commercial use and distribution. Fortunately, establishing lobsters from the East Coast was a failure in the Pacific Northwest (U.S. Senate, 1887, pt. 6, p. 741-743). Some of the original coastal maps are included in these reports. The 1888 Annual Report contains a chart of the Columbia River from the ocean to Portland showing the conditions of the salmon fishing season, and the locations of pound-nets, gill-nets, seine-hauls and canneries (U.S. House, 1892, Plate 198). It also has a map of the Fisheries of

Yaquina River Entrance in Oregon. This shows the locations of oyster beds and canneries along with geographical names (Hoxie's Cove) and settlements such as Newport and Oysterville (U.S. House, 1892, Plate 192). This map has proven very useful to the researchers at the Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport, Oregon, as they study oyster aquaculture in the Yaquina River today.

The Survey of the Coasts began in 1816 using the best scientific methods of the time. By 1850, they were working on the West Coast. In 1878, the U.S. Fish Commissioner on Fish and Fisheries, Spencer Baird, asked the Coast Survey to collaborate with the Fish Commission on fisheries research (Cumberpatch, p. 170). The *Annual Reports* of the Coast Survey are located in the *Serial Set* along with the House and Senate reports involving the surveys. Eventually this coastal survey work became part of NOAA and continues today. The NOAA Central Library web site has a bibliography of *The Coast and Geodetic Survey Annual Reports 1844-1910* including a separate bibliography just for the appendices ("NOAA Central Library: The Coast and Geodetic Survey Annual Reports 1844 - 1910 Bibliography of Appendices: Contents of Appendices Indexed by Chronological Entries," n.d.). NOAA's Office of the Coast Survey maintains an online collection of the historical maps and charts at <https://www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/csdl/ctp/abstract.htm>.

Other unexpected agencies should not be forgotten during the research process. The Secretary of War has a series of letters reporting on the coastline from the point of view of engineers, including one on the *Preliminary Examination of Yaquina Bay, Oregon* with a bathymetric map of the entrance (U.S. House, 1896). The Secretary of War also reported on the *Pollution Affecting Navigation or Commerce on Navigable Waters* in 1926 (U.S. House, 1926). Aquaculture reports are found in documents from the Department of Commerce and Labor such as the 1908 *Bulletin of the Bureau of Fisheries* (U.S. House, 1908). The output of Pacific salmon by state, species, eggs, fry and fingerlings is documented (p. 725). The 1934 House of Representatives heard a report on the *Relief of Shipwrecked Seamen from Fishing and Whaling Vessels* given by the Committee on Merchant Marine, Radio and Fisheries (U.S. House, 1934). This details how the United States worked with other countries to bring home citizens stranded in other countries after their vessels were disabled. In the days before regular travel via airplanes, it was not an insignificant task to return to the United States. More modern history can be seen in reports such as the *North Pacific Fisheries Convention Implementation Act of 2014* (U.S. Senate, 2014) and the 1970 National Estuarine Pollution study (U.S. Senate, 1970).

While most documents issued prior to 1817 are found in the *American State Papers*, if they were ordered to be printed after 1817, you can find them in the *Serial Set*. An example is a report from Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State on the cod and whale fisheries (U.S. House, 1872). One item of note is the state of the whale fishery on Nantucket where he gives the population of Nantucket, the number of vessels in the harbor and the number of men and boys employed in the whale fishery (p. 8). He also provides economic data for the annual income from the sale of whale byproducts (p. 1).

Expeditions of discovery provide another frame of reference for discovering unique information about the flora and fauna of the United States and around the world. Beginning with Thomas Jefferson's Lewis and Clark expedition, the U.S. government sponsored many expeditions to explore the new territories in the Western United States along with expeditions to areas of commercial importance. Originally the reports were published privately but after 1817, many can be found in the *Serial Set* (Tyler, 2013, p. 144). These expeditions collected natural history information regardless of whether or not naturalists were

included on the team. This information was returned to the Smithsonian Institution and formed the nucleus of their collection (Tyler, 2013, p145). In the Notes of a Military Reconnaissance from Fort Leavenworth in Missouri, to San Diego in California, plants and animals are discussed with some illustrations (U.S. Senate, 1848). A military expedition to Alaska described the Native Alaskan fishing practices and gear including illustrations (U.S. Senate, 1885). The source of the beautiful fish lithographs found in my office was Commodore Perry's expedition to the China Seas and Japan in 1852-1854 (U.S. House, Brevoort, 1856). An introductory note to the report states that "in the equipment of the Japan Expedition, scientific researches were to be considered of secondary importance, and consequently no special appropriations were made or any steps taken at the outset to employ civilians, as in other expeditions, for purposes purely scientific" (U.S. Senate, 1855, follows p. 210). Nevertheless, his report and others contain beautifully detailed illustrations of native animals and plants. After Commodore Perry's return, naturalist John Cassin of Philadelphia described the birds (U.S. House, 1856, p. 219-250), and the fish and shells were classified and described by J. Cason Brevoort (U.S. House, 1856, p. 255-290) and J.C. Jay, friends of Perry (U.S. House, 1856, p. 291-298).

Spencer Baird, the Smithsonian's first curator, also became head of the newly formed U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries in 1871. In this dual role, and as head of the Smithsonian from 1878 to 1887, he provided expedition teams with scientific equipment and supplies along with instructions for collecting specimens. He also recruited naturalists to join the expeditions. Some of the leading ichthyologists of the time worked at the Smithsonian ("Spencer Baird and Ichthyology at the Smithsonian: Ichthyologists," n.d., "Spencer Fullerton Baird," n.d.). Frederic Girard, noted ichthyologist, wrote several of the expedition reports including the United States and Mexico Boundary Survey which included an ichthyology section with 77 pages and 40 plates (U.S. Senate, 1856). He also wrote a 24-page report on ichthyology with 11 plates for the Explorations of a Railway Route from the Sacramento Valley to the Columbia River (U.S. House, 1865). There is a much more detailed history of the Smithsonian's ichthyology collection and the expeditions of the discovery on their website ("Expeditions, Ichthyology at the Smithsonian, 1850-1900," n.d.).

This is just a brief overview of the materials available in the *Serial Set*. Hopefully, now that you are aware of, or reminded of, the resource, you will be able to use it when searching for those historical bits of information that you are sure must be somewhere but are unsure where to start. The *Serial Set* is always a good place to start – or finish – your search.

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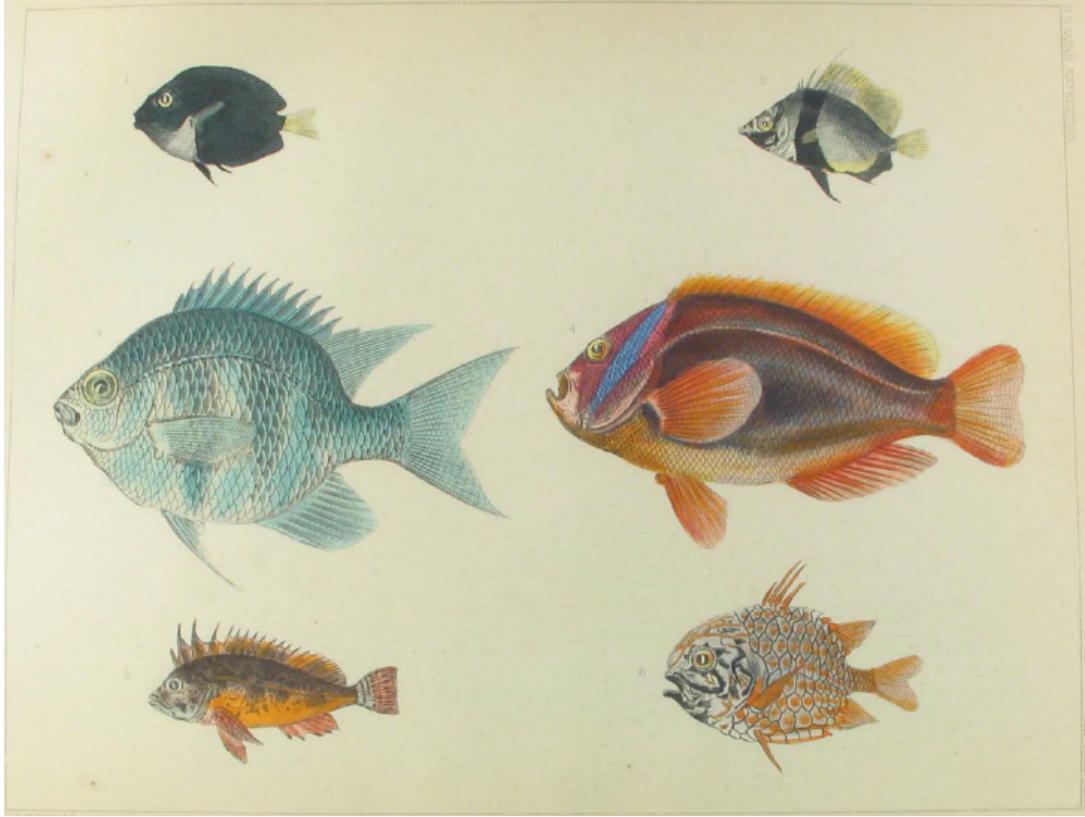


Figure 1. U.S. House, 33rd Congress, 2nd Session. Brevort, James Carson. Notes on some figures of Japanese fish in Narrative of the expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, performed in the years 1852, 1853, and 1854, under the command of Commodore M.C. Perry, United States Navy, by order of the government of the United States. Volume II – with illustrations. (H.Exec.Doc97 pt. 2) Plate VI.



Figure 2. U.S. House, 33rd Congress, 2nd Session. Brevort, James Carson. Notes on some figures of Japanese fish in Narrative of the expedition of an American squadron to the China seas and Japan, performed in the years 1852, 1853, and 1854, under the command of commodore M.C. Perry, United States Navy, by order of the Government of the United States. Volume II – with illustrations. (H.Exec.Doc97 pt. 2.) Plate 3.

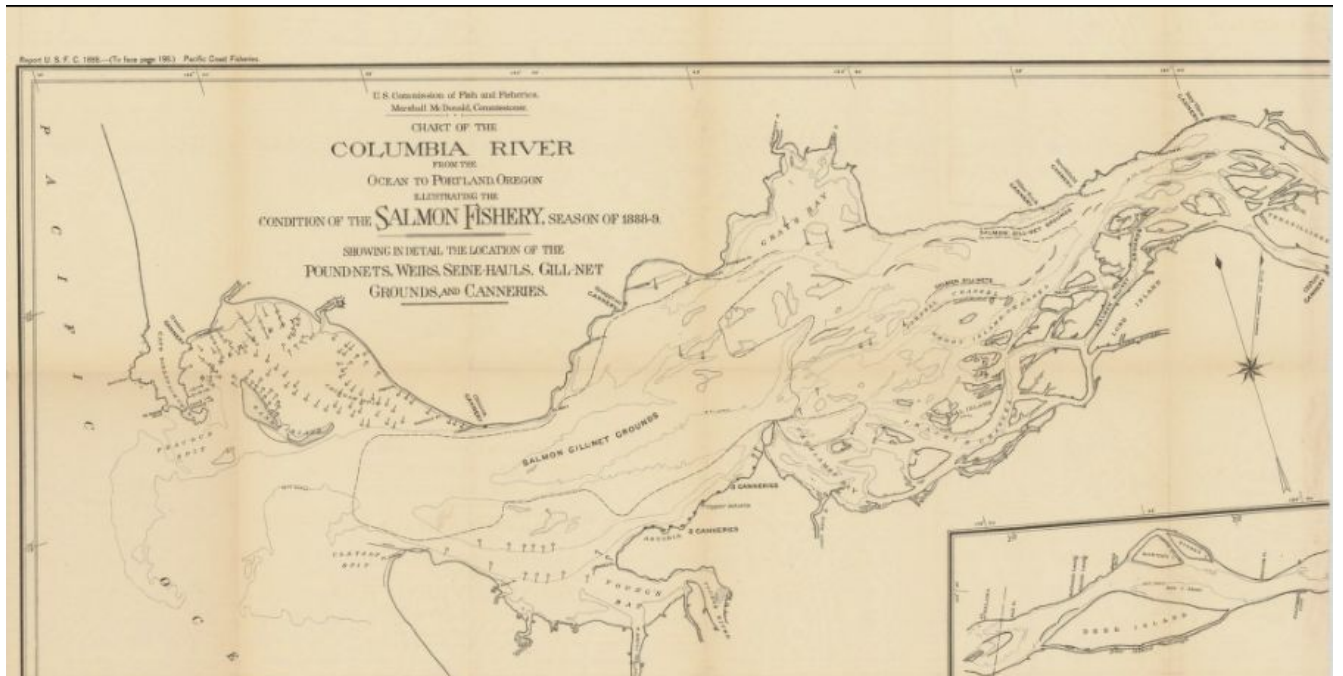


Figure 3. Chart of the Columbia River from the ocean to Portland, Oregon. Showing the condition of the salmon fishing, season of 1888-9. Showing in detail the location of the pound-nets, seine hauls, gill-net grounds, and canneries. U.S. House, 51st Congress, 1st Session. United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries. Part XVI. Report of the Commissioner for 1888 (July 1, 1886 to June 30, 1889) (H.Misc.Doc. 274)

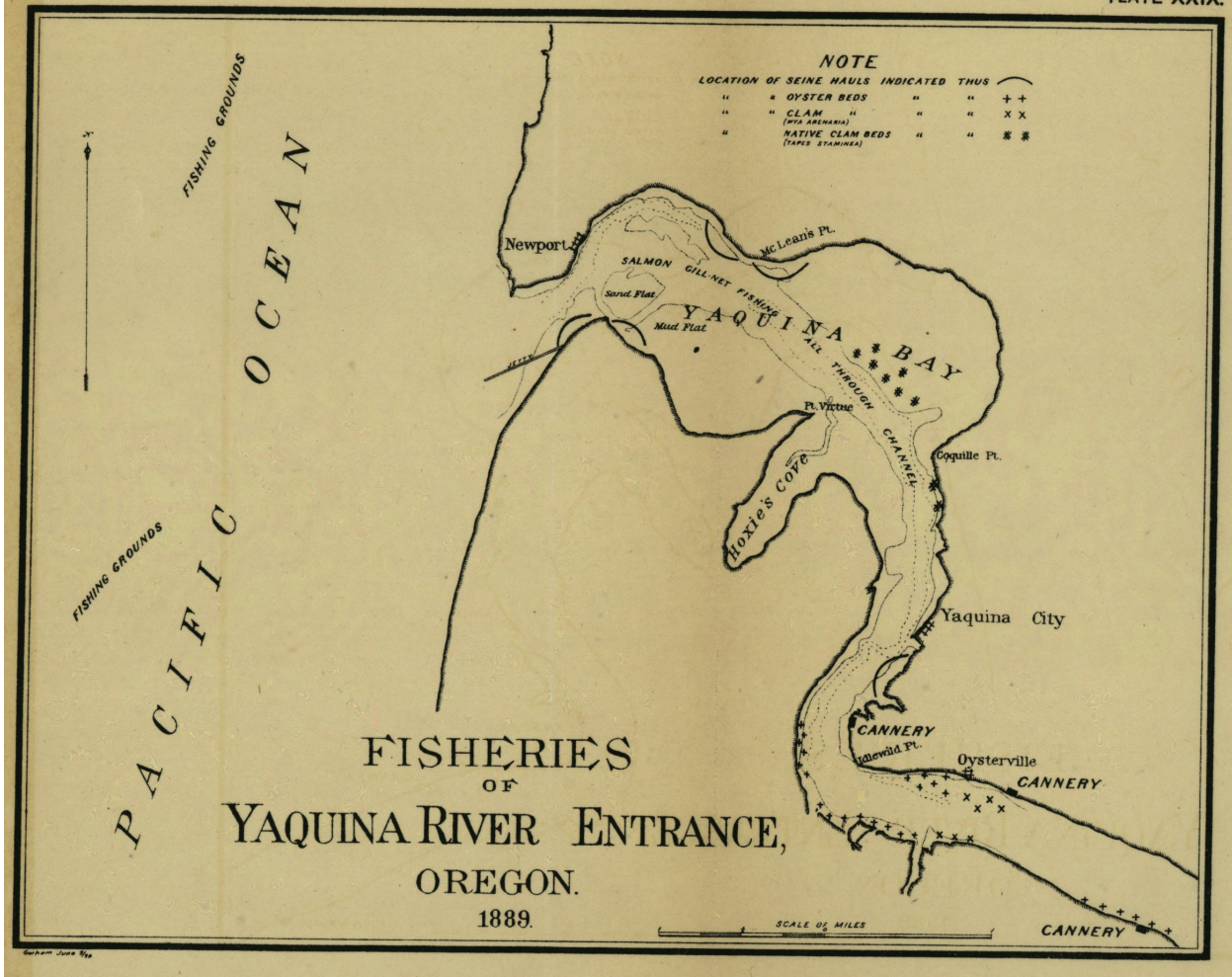


Figure 4. Chart of Fisheries of Yaquina River Entrance, Oregon, 1889. U.S. House, 51st Congress, 1st Session. United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries. Part SVI. Report of the Commissioner for 1888 (July 1, 1886, to June 30, 1889) (H.Misc.Doc. 274).