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VI NEWFOUNDLAND

The whaling activities off Newfoundland have never been dominated by Norwegians to the same extent as has been, for instance, the whaling off Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Shetland. The operations there have, nevertheless, in many ways exerted some influence over the development of our domestic whaling industry and our comprehensive survey of Norwegian whaling would not be complete should we fail to make mention of it here. We therefore also include a fairly short review of the whaling on these catching grounds. Those interested in additional information are referred to the "Annual Report of the New-Foundland Department of Fisheries", where detailed statistics on the yearly catches of each company may be found.

The waters off Newfoundland are in many ways historical catching grounds. To this very day the world's most important seal hunt takes place here, as it has done for many years. In the earlier days considerable catches were also made of the Greenland right whale and the North Atlantic right whale, but these whaling activities ceased long ago.

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In this early period of whaling - briefly mentioned in another part of this book - it was well known that there were considerable stocks of various types of fin whales in the offshore waters. However, here, as everywhere else, there was a lack of proper equipment and technique and the fin whales were therefore left alone. A few were apparently caught by the shore whalers, but the technique used was the one described by Captain Atwood as quoted by A. Howard Clark:

"Early in March 1880 huge quantities of herring and "shrimps" ran into the bay by Provincetown (Northern coast of North America). They were followed by a large number of fin whales, which, most of the time, remained in the bay till the middle of May, when they all left the offshore waters. In this period many of the whales were killed with the bomb lance. They sank as soon as they had been killed and lay on the bottom for two to three days and then they floated to the surface again. However, as quite a few of them floated up during the night or in rough weather, when the whalers could not be present to watch them, many drifted out to sea and were either lost or were taken by fishing vessels from Gloucester and towed to this port."

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This inefficient whaling technique, however, was not generally used in Newfoundland. The right whales were hunted there until 1850, when the last one of this species was brought ashore. The whaling industry then broke down completely and was not reestablished till the Norwegian whaling technique was introduced here.

The first company to be formed here for modern whaling operations, using the Norwegian technique, was "The Cabot Whaling Company", which began its activities in 1898 at Snooks Arm at the same time that "Balaena" started whale hunting from Hermitage Bay.

Whaler N. Davidsen has told the author that the first company was backed partly by Norwegian and partly by U.S. capital. The first years of operations did not produce particularly good results, but as conditions improved, one company after another was established.

In spite of the fact that Norwegian whale catchers, Norwegian equipment, Norwegian whalers, etc., were predominant in the operations off Newfoundland, Norwegian capital was only to a limited extent interested in participating in this later expansion. Most of the companies could financially be classified as pure U.S. undertakings.

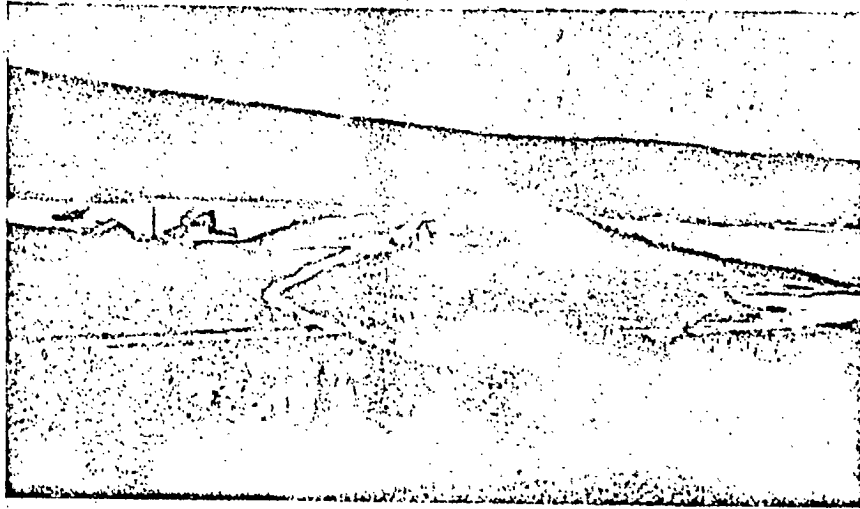
One Norwegian company was established here, however, by whaler Anders Ellefsen from Stokke, Norway. Together with his father, above-mentioned Andr. Ellefsen, proprietor R. Berg, Stokke, and others, he had purchased the whaler "Humber" and obtained an operating permit, with base in Aquaforte, from the Newfoundland authorities.

The company began its whaling activities on June 17, 1902.

The results of this company, over the years, depict at a glance how the promising whaling off Newfoundland would develop.

Initially, the stocks of whales were very good, but they decreased very rapidly. 269

From June 17, 1902 the total catch was 108 whales - 2,223 barrels of oil. In 1903 the catch was 219 whales - 4,313 barrels of oil. In 1904 the catch was 198 whales - 3,928 barrels of oil. In 1905 the catch was 65 whales - 1,571 barrels of oil. In 1906 the catch was 18 whales - 310 barrels of oil.



Aquaforte. Newfoundland

The whale catcher was now sold, while the shore station was taken over by some of the shareholders, who hoped that the whale should once more return to the coast. The whaling continued in 1907 by means of an older whale catcher purchased from Iceland, but as the catch totalled only three whales, the company discontinued its operations.

In 1903 the whale stocks must have been considerable. That year "Cabot", between the middle of March and December 6, brought ashore 211 whales, and another whale catcher brought in 256 whales, out of which 116 were blue whales. Such catches were unprecedented at that time.

Generally the companies met with considerable luck during this period. The stocks of whales along the coast must be classified as significant and comprised blue whales, fin whales and humpbacks. Smaller catches were also made of sperm whales. Moreover, as the whales were

caught relatively close to shore, the long tows, delaying the catch on many catching grounds, were avoided.

As a result of these favourable prospects, one station after another was established, especially along the southeastern coast. There was, however, an even higher demand for catching permits. Between December 6, 1902, and November 27, 1903, no fewer than 45 applications for concessions were received, but this was admittedly exceptional.

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To begin with the raw material was not fully utilized, and people became quite displeased with this new industry. Many believed that the whaling activities would have a negative effect on the cod fisheries and sometimes the local authorities would oppose the founding of whaling stations because complaints were received against the unpleasant and nauseating stench stemming from putrefying whale carcasses.

However, in 1902 guano plants were introduced and here, where large amounts were spent on refining experiments, the technique used at the Norwegian stations was even improved upon.

Soon guano plants were erected at all Newfoundland whaling stations, as part of generally heavy investments in the whaling industry.

In 1902 a new whaling law was enacted, bringing under strict control stations and catching vessels. The annual report states that, in the true interest of this industry and in order to prevent too rapid an extinction of the valuable whales running to the shore of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Fisheries Board strongly recommend that a limit be set to the number of catching concessions to be granted by "The Governor in Council". It is further stated that the considerable decline in the stock of whales off the Norwegian coast, resulting from reckless and uncontrolled operations, ought to make Newfoundland choose the road of wisdom, before it was too late.

The provisions of this law were thus directly aimed at a conservation of the existing stocks, or, as it may be put, to preserve the whale for the sake of the whale itself. Operations with more than one whale catcher per station was now prohibited, as was the usage of a tow-boat. In order to limit the number of stations and avoid over-exploitation of the stock of whales, a provision was made to the effect that there should be at least 50 miles between each station and, finally, every station had to pay \$1,500 per year for its concession.

The following figures show the growth of the industry during the first years of operations: 271

	Barrels of oil	Value \$
1898	162	1,340.—
1899	1,266	14,439.—
1900	2,580	34,604.—
1901	3,798	54,221.—
1902	7,650	112,859.—
1903	15,984	256,372.—

To this should be added the value of the whalebone, which, during these years, went up from \$241 to \$13,550.

"The annual report" for 1904 states that the whaling industry has developed considerably that year. 14 stations were operating during the year and total industry investment reached an impressive \$750,000.

49 applications for concessions had been received and, at the end of the year, 19 companies had received catching permits, which did not leave much room for expansion, according to the report. At this point in time the grounds were as heavily exploited as the provisions of the whaling law

would allow. There were stations all over the island, especially the southeastern part. There was also a station on the coast of Labrador.

It appears evident that the very same authorities, who, through the whaling law, had wished to demonstrate their will to protect the stocks from too rapid a decline, to surprisingly high degree also had over-estimated the size of the stocks. It should now have been clear that the exploitation of the stocks exceeded their reproductive powers.

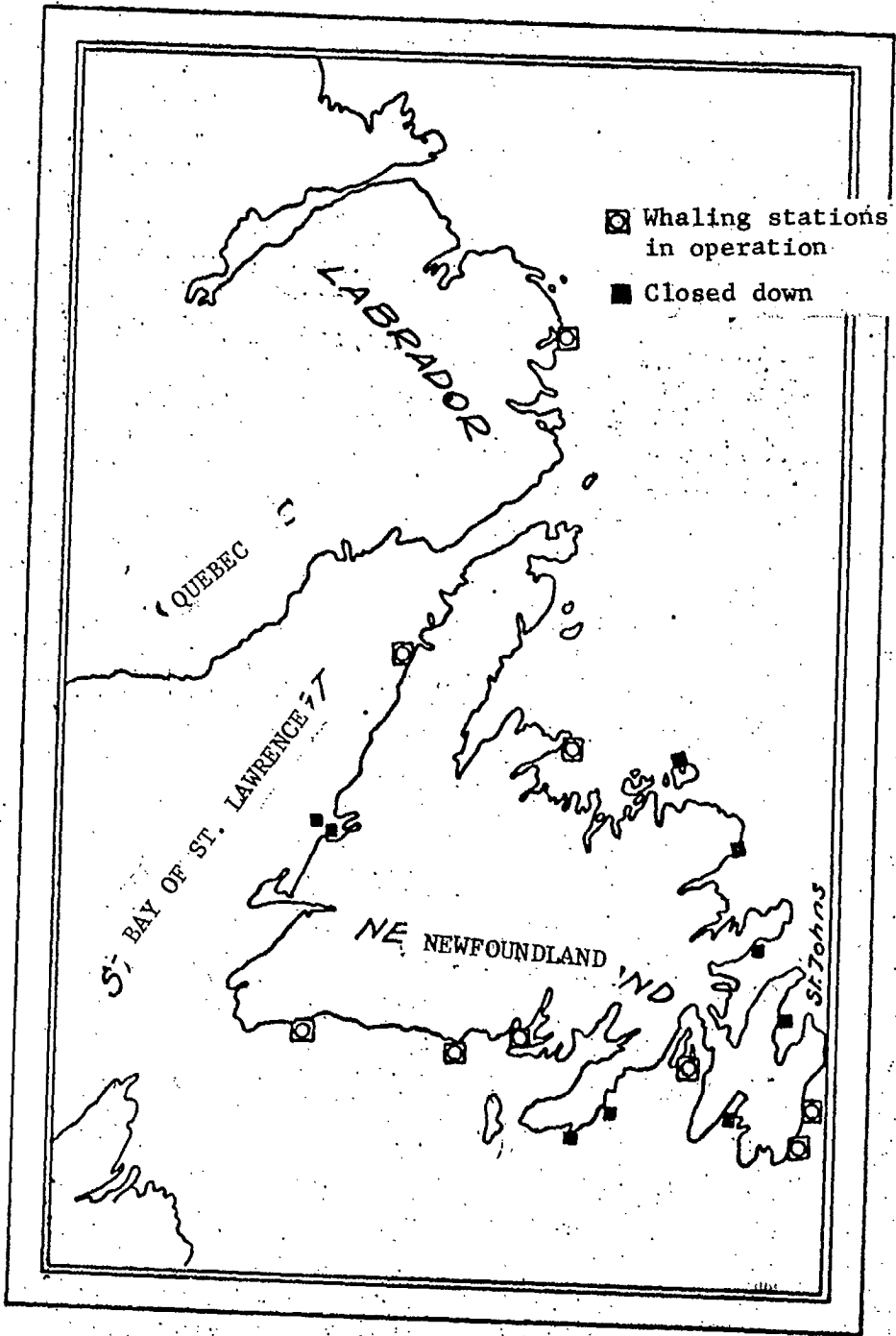
The catch, which in 1903 totalled 225 blue whales, 345 fin whales, 287 humpbacks and one sperm whale, in all 858 whales, reached a record high in 1904.

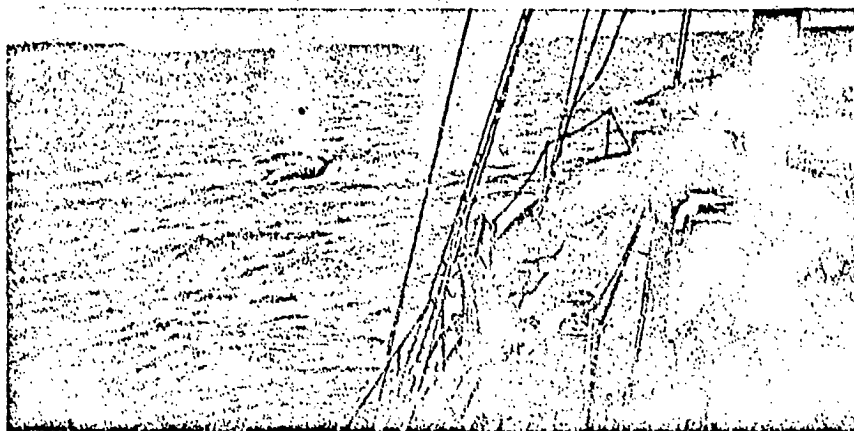
That year 14 companies caught 264 blue whales, 690 fin whales, 281 humpbacks and 40 units not specified, in all 1,276 whales.

The number of companies participating reached on all-time high of 18 in 1905, but the catches were now already declining strongly, totalling only 263 blue whales, 460 fin whales, 161 humpbacks and 8 sperm whales, in all 892 whales.

Observers noted during the season that the bait, which made up the staple food for the whales, was now much less abundant than before. This was generally the case all along the Newfoundland coast and it was held that this was the reason for the significant reduction in the whale stocks compared to earlier years.

Total catch that year thus signified a substantial decrease in the profitability of the whaling industry, as a much reduced total catch was shared between a higher number of companies. As also prices were lower, several companies now experienced heavy losses.





All set to fire. Henrik Ellefsen at the gun.

During the three year period 1906-08 one company after another closed down, so that only nine companies remained in 1908. The decrease of the catch may be seen from the figures below:

In 1906 the catch was 439 whales, in 1907 481 whales and in 1908 396 whales.

More specifically the 1908 catch consisted of 26 blue whales, 345 fin whales, 25 humpbacks and one sperm whale.

The annual report states that the whaling industry is in complete decline following considerable losses on the part of the various companies trying to maintain operations. Whale catchers, which had been taken out of operations, were now sold to Japan, whose whaling activities were developing at this time and were about to get a markedly national character.

Otherwise, 1909 was a year of improvements. Bait was more abundant offshore and, consequently, there were more whales, particularly the blue whale showed up strongly. This year's report on catches shows that seven companies had made a total catch of 80 blue whales, 403 fin whales, 33 humpbacks and two sperm whales, in all 518 whales. Following this, people started hoping for a boom period, which, however, did not take place. Actually, 1910 saw a very poor catch and throughout the years there is now a steady decline — the 1910 catch totalled only 384 whales, followed by 335 whales in 1911.

Several companies struggled for their existence for years with admirable tenacity. The fact was that the catches would vary so much that, while certain vessels caught hardly anything, others would make relatively substantial catches.

The final period of steady decline is clearly shown in the table taken from "Annual report".

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of vessels</u>	<u>No. of blue whales</u>	<u>No. of fin whales</u>	<u>No. of humpbacks</u>	<u>No. of sperm whales</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Notes</u>	
1912	10	60	202	22	5	289		
1913	8	19	185	8	10	222		
1914	7	5	142	13	1	161		
1915	3	0	115	5	19	139		
1916 & 1917			No data in annual report					
1918	2	?	?	?	?	101	2,000 barrels of oil	
1919	"The Labrador Whaling Co." re-established whaling activities./No. company Catches not known.						from Nfld.	

In addition to the above-mentioned Norwegian participation in the whaling activities in these areas, there was another Norwegian company which operated in these waters.

Actually, "The Norwegian Canadian Whaling Co. Ltd." was founded in 1911 in Kristiania (now Oslo) by shipowner Willy Gørrissen with S. Th. Sverre as managing director. The company purchased a plant which had been erected by a Canadian company on Seven Islands in the Bay of St. Lawrence on the eastern coast of Canada. The plant was modernized and Norwegian equipment for meat boiling and guano manufacturing was installed. Full utilization of the raw material was thus planned and operations were started with two whale caters.

The results of the operations did not meet the expectations. First year catches resulted in 2,000 barrels. 1912 saw some improvement 275 with 3,330 barrels of oil and 3,300 bags of guano. 3,500 barrels of oil were reported in 1913. In 1917, 78 whales were caught, resulting in 3,390 barrels of oil. In these waters the season usually began at the end of May and lasted out September. The June-August period produced the best catches as only a small part of the catch was made outside this period. The stocks consisted of bluewhales and fin whales while there was little hunting after other whales. In 1915 the company also engaged in seal hunting, but with a very unsatisfactory outcome as the catch, employing two seal hunters, only reached 500 seals. That year the whaling activities produced 28 blue whales and 56 fin whales, 84 whales in all, which were processed into 3,422 barrels of oil and 3,486 bags of guano.

The whaling activities on these catching grounds have thus, both directly and indirectly, had an impact on our whaling industry as a whole. The direct impact is not so conspicuous, as little net profit has been brought home, but the indirect impact deserves some mention. The fact is that an important market has been created for Norwegian whale catchers and Norwegian equipment, as also a fairly significant number of Norwegian whalers have been given favourable employment opportunities.