

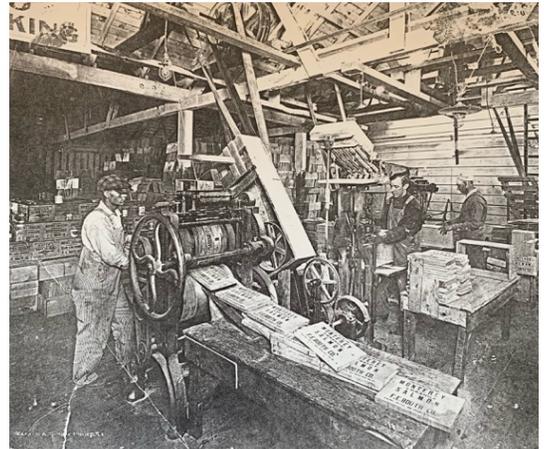
LOCAL FISH CANNING INDUSTRY BEGINNINGS – Part 2

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MONTEREY EARLY SARDINE CANNING HISTORY

While fishing had been ongoing for many years in Monterey, getting the canning industry running to a sufficiently high commercial level to lay the foundation for Monterey's Cannery Row to become known as "The Sardine Capitol of The World" required the efforts of three men.

As early as the 1890's, F.E. Booth, who would become "The Father of the Monterey Sardine Industry", engaged in buying salmon from Monterey fishermen. He decided in 1896 to build a small salmon cannery and packing building in town. J.P. Haller was brought to Monterey from Booth's Black Diamond (Pittsburg) cannery to manage the new enterprise. Because of supply problems from the local fishermen, Booth soon closed the cannery. On one of his frequent visits to the Monterey Peninsula, he became interested in the economic possibilities of large-scale harvesting of the sizeable schools of sardines found in the waters around the local wharf. About 1902, he undertook the first commercial sardine enterprise in the area, building a plant for packing and canning the sardines. This was the beginning of Monterey's famous sardines.



Packaged Salmon Off the Booth Line

Photo courtesy of Pittsburg Museum Archive

The early attempts of catching sardines were primitive and inefficient. The daily catch, being very erratic due to the methods implemented by local fishermen, left the cannery in an on-again-off-again inefficient unproductive rhythm as far as Booth was concerned. It wasn't until 1905 that an effective method to catch these small fish was implemented by Pietro Ferrante. He had been very successfully fishing out of Black Diamond in the Sacramento Delta and in the northwest from about 1888. Due to a chain of events, detailed in a previous issue of this newsletter, Ferrante came to Monterey searching for a new location. Surveying the fishing methods used in Monterey, he concluded that the Lampara net, which he and his fellow countrymen had used in the fertile fishing grounds of the Mediterranean Sea around Sicily, was key to improving the sardine harvest.

A well-used "lampara" net was sent to Monterey with Orazio Crivello put in charge of the net by Ferrante for experimentation and modifications. The lampara net along with Sicilian fishermen from Black Diamond, familiar with its use, proved to be the answer to catch sardines in much larger quantities, offload them with precision and reset the net for another catch. Ferrante also implemented the use of a "lighter" or small barge to hold several loads of catch in addition to his early adoption of the lampara or double ender powered boats, which he had begun to use years earlier in the Sacramento Delta waters. At that time, it was common to see primarily sailing fishing boats plying the Monterey Bay. These Ferrante innovations allowed the expansion of the fishing grounds immensely in addition to increasing the number of catch cycles per day. All told Ferrante and his team were able to deliver five tons of fish a day to Booth's Cannery, a quantity considered quite large then and one allowing an efficient commercial canning operation. Pietro Ferrante's seasoned and experienced team of Sicilian fishermen had surnames that we all know: "Big Tony" and "Small Tony" Aiello, Frank Bruno, Salvatore Cardinale, Orazio Crivello, Orazio Enea, Vincenzo and Arasimo Ferrante. They were soon joined by Erasimo Lucido and Salvatore Rucello. Years later, Ferrante earned the title "The Grand Old Man" of Monterey's sardine industry due to his pioneering innovative fishing practices and decades of experience.

In terms of canning in the early days, Booth settled on an oval can utilized for certain cuts of salmon in his Black Diamond plant. Four to six sardines became the standard. Through his efforts up north, Booth capitalized on byproducts of the fish that eventually made more money than the sardines themselves such as fishmeal for poultry and livestock and for fertilizer. The oil from the processed fish was utilized for vitamins, salad oil, shortening, glycerin and in making soap.

Another key individual to this trifecta was Knut Hovden from Norway. A graduate of the Norwegian National Fisheries, a trained professional in the fish packing business and an inventive genius, he would revolutionize the canning industry. By 1914, he branched out on his own to become the second cannery owner in Monterey. Quickly, he would become known as “The King of Cannery Row”. Hovden first joined Booth in 1905 and began to evaluate the canning operation. He brought a new way of thinking that revolutionized the process. With the question of an appropriate supply of fish answered by Ferrante, Hovden began putting his stamp on the cannery production side of things. A self-emptying purse bottom brailing net was one of his first applied solutions to replace the laborious task of offloading the sardines by hand from the lighters arriving at the cannery. His invention of a mechanical sealer-solderer greatly increased production from the hand soldering of cans. He continued to implement his many innovations throughout and the cannery production increased to a very profitable level laying the foundation for a sardine revolution in Monterey.



A Sunday Walk by the Monterey Booth Cannery
Photo courtesy of SantaCruztrains.com

With the revolutionized fishing and canning methods in place and World War I fast approaching with the forced shutdown of the North Atlantic Fishery, there was great demand for sardines as a wartime ration. By wars end, Booth, Pacific Fish, and Hovden canneries would be joined by California Fisheries Company, a Japanese export firm, Bayside Cannery, Monterey Canning Company, San Xavier Canning Company and Monterey Fish Products. That would only be the early history of things, there would be much more to come as Monterey would become known as “The Sardine Capitol of The World”.

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