

[Page 4 - Fishing Gaspereaux on the SW Margaree](#)ISSUE : [Issue 14](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1976/8/1

Fishing Gaspereaux on the SW Margaree Gerard Chiasson: I fished gaspereaux with my dad, down at Margaree Forks, from the time I was 15. We moved up here 11 years ago and I've been fishing fairly steadily since then. We never did real well down at the Forks because we never had what you'd call a good berth • land that boarded on the river that would suit for a good trap • but some of the land that I pursued here had a fairly good berth. We have been fishing 11 years now and there's only one year that was a failure • so you wouldn't consider that too bad, (How far back has your family fished gaspereaux?) My great grandfather, Captain Mose, had a schooner and he used to haul them from Margaree Harbour up to Halifax back in 1885 • the market of salt fish to the West Indies has been going a long time, is still going on, (How did he prepare them?) Same as we do now. There's no change. They're salted as they come from the river • salted round • 100 pounds of salt to 200 pounds of fish. They're allowed to sit in that for 14 days • then they're cured. Then they're re-packed to 200 pounds to each barrel, and they're headed with 100 percent brine, (How are they used in the West Indies?) It's used for human consumption there. They tell us that one person may go in and buy only one gaspereaux--they're that poor that all they could afford to buy would be one fish at a time. It's a fish that'll hold well • it can stand two years in a brine pickle • and it won't get rank like mackerel or herring because there's no fat in gaspereaux. That's why it'll hold up. In that warm climate mackerel or herring for that period of time would get rank, would get rusty on top. (Did your great grandfather fish there the same way?) Same kind of a trap, on the river. But in the late 1800s, early 1900s, each trap would only get 15-20 barrels. My dad tells me each fisherman that was going to fish, he would have the lumber on hand in the winter time and the cooper would come around and would rake the barrels right at the man's place. We order the barrels from outside now, made by a factory, I ordered 400 this year. In those days 15-20. Probably the big fellows would be getting 50 or 100 barrels a year • that's all the fish they would get. But there was no market for there for lobster bait in those days. And now they're filleting gaspereaux to replace some of the shortage of herring. They're filleted at big plants here and they're shipped over to Europe in 6-pound blocks frozen • replacing the herring they're not getting there off the coasts. (Were there less gaspereaux back then?) Yes, my dad would say that. Then there were periods when there were no markets and the fish would get abundance. And then there were periods when they went slack again. And then in the '30s and early '40s they got abundance because of the war and no market in the West Indies, In 1942 there was no market • and the high water in the spring flooded the meadows and when the water dropped, all the holes, fish got trapped in there and then they died. Couldn't go near the river to swim all summer • the smell was unbelievable. They were that abundant. Every little brook. And then they slackened off in the '50s. And in the late '60s and early '70s we've had a high run again. But this could be that they run in cycles, because the rivers in New Brunswick which fish more than we do have had the same cycles.



In the late '60s and early '70s they've had very, very high catches. In 1974 and '75 we had a couple of days, probably for an hour, hour and a half in the evening • you'd only have the lower gate up 6 inches off the bottom and you could keep continuously dipping for an hour without closing the gate • they were coming in that heavy. In '73 we lost the trap and we fished off the bank for 10 days. High water. Lost