

# Preaching “the Gospel of Clean Fish”: Rational Consumption at the Canadian National Exhibition, 1913–1919

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*At Toronto’s Canadian National Exhibition in 1913, Canada’s fisheries department launched a campaign to promote fish consumption. The campaign included a model retail fish shop, a cookbook, and a fish restaurant, and assumed women were irrational consumers who required training in fish purchasing and preparation. The campaign is an example of “rational consumption,” a term coined by Carolyn Goldstein to describe the shift from production to consumption in home-economics education in the early twentieth century. The Canadian fish-consumption campaign, which embodies “rational consumption,” was important because it marked the Canadian state’s first recognition of consumers in calculations about fisheries policy.*

*À la Canadian National Exhibition de Toronto en 1913, le ministère des Pêcheries du Canada lança une campagne pour promouvoir la consommation de poisson. Comprenant une poissonnerie modèle, un livre de recettes et un restaurant de poisson, celle-ci partait du principe que les femmes étaient des consommatrices irrationnelles qui avaient besoin d’être formées à l’achat et à la préparation du poisson. Cette campagne est un exemple de « consommation rationnelle », terme inventé par Carolyn Goldstein pour décrire le passage de la production à la consommation dans l’enseignement de l’économie domestique au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Reflet de la « consommation rationnelle », la campagne canadienne de consommation de poisson est importante, car c’était la première fois que l’État canadien tenait compte des consommateurs dans ses calculs concernant sa politique en matière de pêches.*

IN 1915, CANADA’S FISHERIES DEPARTMENT made Canadian publishing history when it released *Fish and How to Cook It*. The “cookbooklet,” printed in an edition of 250,000 copies, was the first cookbook ever issued by the federal

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government.<sup>1</sup> Similar to those published by food manufacturers to promote branded, packaged ingredients like Five Roses Flour and Egg-O Baking Powder to Canadian consumers, *Fish and How to Cook It* was part of a larger campaign to convince Canadians to buy and eat more fresh fish. The campaign began in 1913 with a fish-retailing exhibit at Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition (CNE); it expanded to include the cookbook and a fish restaurant that demonstrated to CNE visitors how fish should be sold, served, and consumed. Together these efforts constituted what fisheries and industry officials called "the gospel of clean fish," a program to reform Canadian fisheries from the consumption side of the commodity chain. Focusing on female consumers and fish retailers, the Canadian government hoped the fish-consumption campaign would increase demand for fresh fish and force Atlantic Canada's "non-progressing" fisheries to modernize. In 1917, the Canadian government integrated the fish-consumption campaign into Canada's wartime food-control efforts. Functioning as a ready-made component, the campaign extended its gendered approach to fish consumption by linking it to citizenship and the patriotic duty to save meat and other foodstuffs for soldiers fighting overseas.

Canadian fisheries historians have tended to dismiss the department's fish-consumption campaign, characterizing it as a distraction from more important work.<sup>2</sup> But the campaign marked a significant change in Canadian fisheries policy. Using cookbooks, exhibits, and demonstration restaurants—methods of education used by the home-economics movement—the Canadian government expanded its singular attention on problems of production in fisheries to include questions of consumption.<sup>3</sup> While the fisheries department continued to address such production challenges as preservation and transportation, its interest in consumption demonstrated a new awareness about the consumer—one assumed to be a White female of the middle class—as a visible, tangible factor in the Canadian state's calculations about fisheries.

Carolyn Goldstein has documented similar changes in North American home-economics training, which shifted attention from issues of "efficient production" to what Goldstein calls "rational consumption."<sup>4</sup> In the context of changes to food

1 Canada, *Fish and How to Cook It* (Ottawa: Department of Naval Service, 1915); Elizabeth Driver, *Culinary Landmarks: A Bibliography of Canadian Cookbooks 1835–1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) p. xxxiv. Nathalie Cooke describes cookbooklets as "ubiquitous and oft-overlooked small cookbooks produced for promotional purposes and published irregularly." Food companies used these ephemeral publications to advertise their products and establish their brands. Nathalie Cook, "Cookbooklets and Canadian Kitchens," *Material Culture Review* 70 (6 June 2009), pp. 25.

2 Jennifer Hubbard, *A Science on the Scales: The Rise of Canadian Atlantic Fisheries Biology, 1898–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 129; Ruth Fulton Grant, *The Canadian Atlantic Fishery* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1934), p. 91.

3 For more on gendered ideas of production and consumption in food, see Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, and Marlene Epp, "Introduction" in Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, and Marlene Epp, eds., *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 15; Warren Belasco, "Food Matters: Perspectives on an Emerging Field," in Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton, eds., *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 7; Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 85–86; Dorothy Duncan, *Canadians at Table: A Culinary History of Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006), p. 162.

4 Carolyn M. Goldstein, *Creating Consumers: Home Economists in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 3.

production, domestic technologies, and gender roles, home economists sought to equip middle-class women for their new roles and responsibilities in consumer society. “Rational consumption” focused on training women to overcome their impulsive natures and become intelligent buyers of goods and services; home economists passed along this gendered technical knowledge through booklets, cooking demonstrations, and lectures at a variety of venues, including exhibitions.<sup>5</sup> The Canadian fish-consumption campaign took a “rational consumption” approach to consumer relations to fish, but in this case male fisheries officials assumed the educator’s role as women home economists only began occupying professional roles in the fisheries department after the war.<sup>6</sup> Working through the fisheries department, the Canadian government assumed new responsibilities for promoting fish consumption through a campaign, mediating between citizens and the exigencies of consumer capitalism in the early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

Historians of consumption describe the late nineteenth century as the formative moment in the emergence of consumerism and consumer society in North America. Industrialization, urbanization, democratization, and immigration have all been implicated as factors in the increasing consumption of manufactured goods across all classes of society. Growth in waged work and the industrial output of everyday items from food to clothes, along with the expansion of transportation networks, “led businesses to coordinate methods of distribution and sales,” Kathy Peiss has argued, “and to forge the infrastructure of our consumer culture.”<sup>8</sup> Innovations in advertising, retailing, store architecture and design, lighting, packaging, bookkeeping and other areas of business changed the terrain of selling and buying. For consumers—the nexus of this ramifying order—an increasing variety of standardized products were available to satisfy new needs and desires.<sup>9</sup>

North American fisheries were also undergoing significant change. Through the latter half of the nineteenth century, fisheries intensified and expanded, becoming more technology and capital intensive. Markets grew as urban populations and immigration increased, changing consumption. In the waters, fish populations

5 For how women were considered “irrational” consumers, see Goldstein, *Creating Consumers*, p. 39; for how that nature was constructed in class and racialized terms in Canada, see Donica Belisle, “Conservative Consumerism: Consumer Advocacy in Woman’s Century Magazine During and After World War I,” *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 47, no. 93 (2014), p. 116; Amy Sue Bix “Equipped for Life: Gendered Technical Training and Consumerism in Home Economics, 1920–1980,” *Technology and Culture*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2002), pp. 729–754.

6 The fisheries department created the Publicity and Transportation Division in 1920 and began using home economists to demonstrate fish recipes in demonstration kitchens at regional fairs and exhibitions. Canada, *Fifty-Third Annual Report of the Fisheries Branch* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1920), p. 11; “Fish Exhibits in Montreal Show,” *Canadian Fisherman*, February 1934.

7 Goldstein, *Creating Consumers*, p. 40.

8 Kathy L. Peiss, “American Women and the Making of Modern Consumer Culture,” *Journal for MultiMedia History*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1998), <http://www.albany.edu/jmmh/vol1no1/peiss-text.html>.

9 Donica Belisle, “Toward a Canadian Consumer History,” *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 52 (2003), p. 181; Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); David Monod, *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing, 1890–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 84–85.

endured environmental stresses resulting from overfishing, habitat change, and exotic-species introductions.<sup>10</sup> While all Canadian fisheries experienced change, Atlantic fisheries confronted particular challenges. In the early twentieth century, the regional saltfish industry—the basis for trans-Atlantic trade since the sixteenth century—was in decline. The West Indian market, a historical mainstay, was eroding at the same time that Canadian saltfish producers were losing market share to Scandinavian producers who produced better saltfish.<sup>11</sup> Prices for Canadian saltfish stagnated with middle-class consumers turning away from it to increase their consumption of fresh fish.<sup>12</sup> The federal government sought to modernize the Atlantic fisheries and develop new markets and products; it supported the growing fresh-fish trade through railway subsidies, cold storage and processing facilities, and education and technical advice to fishermen.<sup>13</sup>

### John Cowie and “Non-progressing Fisheries”

In this context of change and crisis, the arrival of fish-processing expert John Cowie from Scotland in 1903 was a signal moment. The Canadian fisheries department had invited Cowie to demonstrate to Atlantic Canada’s fish processors how to produce herring products with consumer appeal. The fisheries department was particularly interested in improving the poor quality of Canadian pickled herring, which was not accorded, it reported, “a very high place in the markets of the world.”<sup>14</sup> Cowie arrived with the latest in fishing technology from Scotland: a steam-powered herring drifter along with a male crew to operate the vessel and six “girls” to process the catch.<sup>15</sup> Cowie’s goal was to showcase both the technology and expertise that could produce more attractive consumer products; the focus, however, was primarily on changing production to bring about increased consumption rather than on changing consumer behaviour.<sup>16</sup>

- 10 Brian Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting and the Discovery of the New World* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), p. 35; Harold Innis, *The Cod Fisheries: The History of An International Economy* (1940; repr., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); Hubbard, *A Science on the Scales*; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Joseph E. Taylor III, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Margaret Beattie Bogue, *Fishing the Great Lakes: An Environmental History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).
- 11 Innis, *Cod Fisheries*, pp. 418–432; Bolster, *Mortal Sea*, pp. 165–166; B. A. Balcom, “Technology Rejected: Steam Trawlers and Nova Scotia, 1897–1933,” in James E. Candow and Carol Corbin, eds., *How Deep Is the Ocean? Historical Essays on Canada’s Atlantic Fishery* (Sydney, NS: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1997), pp. 185–187; Gene Barrett, “Mercantile and Industrial Development to 1945,” in Richard Apostle and Gene Barrett, eds., *Emptying Their Nets: Small Capital and Rural Industrialization in the Nova Scotia Fishing Industry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 53–57.
- 12 In 1881, fresh fish represented 17% of the total value of Canadian fisheries; by 1900 that figure had grown to 33% and was growing faster than the trade in dried fish. “Market Value of Fisheries Products by Major Process Forms, Canada 1870–1960,” series M69-78, in M. C. Urquhart and K. A. H. Buckley, eds., *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1965), p. 398.
- 13 Balcom, “Technology Rejected,” pp. 187–188; Barrett, “Mercantile and Industrial Development,” pp. 56–57.
- 14 Canada, *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries 1904* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1905), pp. xii–xiii; Hubbard, *Science on the Scales*, pp. 96–97.
- 15 Canada, *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report*, pp. xii–xiii.
- 16 Newfoundland took a similar approach several years later in 1909 when it invited a Danish fisheries expert to advise on building new markets for fresh fish, including new techniques for preserving fresh fish. See

It is unclear if Cowie succeeded in transforming Atlantic herring fisheries, but he did change his career, remaining in Canada to join the fisheries department as an inspector of cured fish. He also became a vocal critic of Canada’s Atlantic fisheries. In 1908, Cowie offered a blunt analysis that contrasted inland and Pacific fisheries, which yearly increased in value, to Atlantic fisheries that had only marginally increased their value over the preceding two decades. Cowie ascribed this “lack of progression” to the failure of Canadian fishers to adopt modern technology and produce modern fish products. This failure alienated urban consumers, who were enjoying access to a wider variety of food products, including branded packaged foods.<sup>17</sup> Cowie’s critique was perhaps also a sign that his 1903 demonstration project with herring had failed to influence Canadian fishers.

Cowie focused his attention on the staple of Atlantic Canadian fisheries, salt cod, a traditional product with a long history.<sup>18</sup> To Cowie, salt cod represented the “lack of progression” in material form. By the twentieth century, it was losing favour with consumers. Not only did Canadian fishermen make cod that was “too salty for the average consumer,”<sup>19</sup> it was also a raw commodity that appeared at a disadvantage beside packaged foods in retail settings.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, however, Cowie blamed low fish consumption on consumers and fish retailers. Canadians, he claimed, were “non-fish eaters” and while fish products were moving more quickly to markets because of improved railway links and government subsidies, these improvements were lost without changes to Canadian fish-consumption habits.<sup>21</sup>

Retailers, particularly those inland, deserved blame because of their shoddy handling of fish and their unappetizing displays:

A dealer, usually a butcher, on a Friday morning places a large tin tray in his shop window on which are laid out, generally in an inch or more of their own blood, a few sickly-looking “fresh” haddock, trout, &c., by means of which he expects to entice the custom of those, and there are many, who would eat real fresh sea fish. The exhibition is enough to make most fish eaters vow never more to indulge their appetite.<sup>22</sup>

Cowie faulted women in particular, arguing that housewives lacked “a proper knowledge of the art of cooking fish.”<sup>23</sup> Drawing on cultural constructions of food preparation and consumption as female responsibilities—and the breadwinner ideology prevailing in Canadian fisheries—Cowie shifted blame from the masculine sphere of production to the feminine realm of consumption. In this view, women

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Robert G. Hong, “An Agency for the Common Weal: The Newfoundland Board of Trade, 1909–1915” (MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1998), pp. 47–54.

17 John J. Cowie, “The Non-Progression of the Atlantic Fisheries of Canada,” in Canada, *Forty-Third Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, 1909–10* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1910), p. lxxii.

18 Innis, *Cod Fisheries*.

19 Grant, *Canadian Atlantic Fishery*, p. 32.

20 A. E. Howard, “The Selling End of the Fish Game,” *Canadian Fisherman*, July 1914, pp. 202–203.

21 “Transportation of Fresh Fish” in Canada, *Forty-Third Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries 1909–10*, pp. 14–18.

22 Cowie, “Non-Progression,” p. lxxvii.

23 Cowie, “Non-Progression,” p. lxxx.

were conceived as being significant in fisheries only because their consumption habits could make or break Canadian fisheries.<sup>24</sup>

Cowie recommended a plan to reform fish retailing and consumption. Starting at the production end of the commodity chain, Cowie suggested that fishing companies follow the example of the Scotch Fishery Board and gather intelligence about consumer preferences. At the retail end, Cowie urged food retailers to hire “expert fish cleaners” and establish “clean, up to date fish shops.” Cowie also urged the fisheries department to participate in exhibitions, “especially inland fairs,” and present displays in the form of a model fish shop. Experts could staff exhibits and demonstrate how retailers should clean, prepare, and display fish in shop windows.<sup>25</sup>

Cowie finally proposed to train women through consumer education and recommended that Canada follow the example of similar campaigns in Europe. Cowie pointed to the “Fish for Food Campaign” launched by Britain’s National Fisheries Protection Association, which used newspaper articles, posters, and advertising to promote fish consumption. The British campaign had also created and distributed a cookbook to “the consuming public”; Germany undertook a similar campaign, but instead of cookbooks offered women fish-cooking classes.<sup>26</sup>

In identifying women as the chief focus of a consumption campaign, Cowie was following the lead of advertisers, manufacturers, and home economists who had identified middle-class women as the chief purchasing agents of familial consumption. This gendering of consumption entailed normative assumptions of femininity that justified training in what Carolyn Goldstein calls “rational consumption,” the animating idea of the home-economics movement in the early twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> This women-led educational movement sought to define new roles for middle-class White women (the movement’s key constituency) in the context of urbanization, mass production, and changes in technologies, advertising, retail, and industrial organization. Home economics offered a path through this new consumer society, offering to produce women who were savvy consumers. As Kathy Peiss notes, “The woman consumer was considered emotional and impulsive, driven by ‘inarticulate longings’ and ‘dormant desires.’”<sup>28</sup> She was thus vulnerable to making poor decisions, but was also easily educated into making the right ones. Teaching the principles of rational consumption, home economists working with governments could train women to be smarter consumers—and, in the case of fisheries, improve national economic production.

24 Suzanne Morton, “‘The End Man Is a Woman’: Women, Fisheries, and the Canadian State in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” in Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., *Making Up the State: Women in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 2010), p. 151; Donica Belisle, “Toward a Canadian Consumer History,” *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 52 (2003), p. 188; Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek and Marlene Epp, “Introduction” in Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, and Marlene Epp, eds., *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 15.

25 Cowie, “Non-Progression,” p. lxxvii.

26 Cowie, “Non-Progression,” p. lxxvii.

27 Goldstein, *Creating Consumers*, p. 3.

28 Peiss, “American Women.”

A fish-consumption campaign could thus curb irrational consumption and promote more rational behaviour.<sup>29</sup> Cowie’s proposal for a fish-consumption campaign, however, was not immediately acted upon. It only began to take shape in 1913 when the fisheries department launched a fisheries exhibit at the CNE in Toronto. At this popular seasonal fair, the Canadian fisheries department began to directly address consumers with exhibits, cookbooks, and restaurants.

### The CNE Fisheries Exhibit

The CNE was an excellent venue for this project. As Keith Walden has shown, the CNE acclimatized fair-goers to modern urban life, accustoming them to new products, ideas, and experiences, including rapid technological change and the growing anonymity of urban existence.<sup>30</sup> Increasing scale, complexity, and anonymity also characterized the North American food system. Food production had increasingly shifted from the home to the factory, entailing separation between sites of production and sites of consumption. Food also changed form as manufacturers produced more processed and packaged foodstuffs that moved over longer distances on interconnected railway and shipping lines. At the same time, scandals in food processing revealed lax standards and inspection, creating anxiety about food safety. North American governments increased surveillance and regulation of food in response, although fish came under less official scrutiny than other food products.<sup>31</sup> Moreover fish, especially fresh fish, posed unique retailing challenges that created anxiety and discomfort.

The increasing use of refrigerated railway cars in the last half of the nineteenth century brought more fresh fish to consumers living far from fishing ports. Fish, however, did not always arrive in peak condition despite innovations in packaging and transport.<sup>32</sup> Retailers receiving fish from distant sources had to confront challenges of distribution and storage. Both pushcart pedlars and grocers—two channels for fish sales—existed as “isolated and autonomous units” in a system that, outside of fishing ports, could neither ensure timely supplies nor deliver consistently high quality.<sup>33</sup> Many grocers avoided fresh fish altogether because the product was difficult to handle and store, especially in the summer. These retailers left fish sales to specialized grocers.<sup>34</sup>

29 Goldstein, *Creating Consumers*, p. 3.

30 Walden, *Becoming Modern*, p. 127.

31 Barry E. C. Boothman, “‘A More Definite System’: The Emergence of Retail Food Chains in Canada, 1919–1945,” *Journal of Macromarketing*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2009), p. 24; Belisle, *Retail Nation*, p. 14; Ann Vileisis, *Kitchen Literacy: How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes From and Why We Need To Get It Back* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2008), p. 6; Aleck Samuel Ostry, *Nutrition Policy in Canada, 1870–1939* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), pp. 15–19. For European responses to food safety, see Carolyn Cobbold, *A Rainbow Palate: How Chemical Dyes Changed the West’s Relationship with Food* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

32 Oscar E. Anderson, *Refrigeration in America: A History of a New Technology and Its Impact* (Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati Press, 1953), pp. 61–63. Cars used natural ice and salt to cool insulated cars.

33 Daniel M. Bluestone, “‘The Pushcart Evil’: Peddlers, Merchants, and New York City’s Streets, 1890–1940,” *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1991), pp. 68–92.

34 “Fish,” *Canadian Grocer & General Storekeeper*, July 3, 1891, p. 14; “Fish,” *Canadian Grocer*, March 21, 1913, p. 27; “How Successful Tradersmen Choose Their Shops,” *Canadian Grocer*, October 25, 1901, p. 84; “Handling Fresh Fish During Hot Weather,” *Canadian Grocer* July 31, 1914, p. 26; Douglas McCalla,

Fish markets were perhaps the most trustworthy source for fish as municipal governments that oversaw fishing ports, and fish processors, imposed some quality control. Modern facilities like the Boston Fish Dock were held up as a model of “absolute cleanliness” to cities such as Vancouver, where the city’s Health Committee recommended creating a fish market to curtail fish sales among “Oriental” retail stores, “house-to-house hawkers, and proprietors of the cheaper restaurants.”<sup>35</sup> Underlying these concerns were racial attitudes to non-White communities in Canada: fish and their odours could be quickly conflated with racial unease and disgust.<sup>36</sup> In this context of changing food systems, the CNE provided an ideal site for the fisheries department to address anxieties about consuming fish and to model its rational consumption.

The fisheries department first proposed a joint exhibit to fish wholesalers in the spring of 1913. Three accepted: Toronto fish dealer F. T. James, Montréal-based Maritime Fish Corporation, and Halifax’s North Atlantic Fisheries Limited.<sup>37</sup> By August, the exhibit was ready in the CNE’s Government Building. Its central display was its most theatrical: a free-standing island that measured 62-feet long and 18-feet wide and which was modelled as a brightly appointed retail store. This display included space for F. T. James and the Maritime Fish Corporation, as well as exhibits from the Canadian Fisheries Museum in Ottawa and British Columbia’s provincial government. Standing opposite and apart from the central stand was a separate booth for the North Atlantic Fisheries Ltd. Beyond it stood an 80-foot display of freezers and coolers, filled with fish, running along the exhibit hall’s interior wall.

Differing styles of retail display were present. F. T. James presented whole freshwater fish arranged on pyramidal heaps of crushed ice. Decorated with posters urging people to “EAT FISH,” the F. T. James display integrated the company’s Beacon Brand into the stand’s layout with model lighthouses equipped with electric lights. At the opposite end stood the Maritime Fish Corporation exhibit, which displayed packaged fish neatly arranged on a tiered display case. The display also incorporated branding elements, such as life preservers, the company’s trademark, which hung from the stand’s columns. Other objects, including a small dory and mounted swordfish heads, added visual interest.<sup>38</sup>

These exhibits reflected the latest trends in retail display and demonstrated to retailers how to improve their handling of fish to build consumer confidence. The “prejudice against this article of food” was due, F. J. Hayward argued in the

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“A World without Chocolate: Grocery Purchases at Some Upper Canadian Country Stores, 1808–1861,” *Agricultural History*, vol. 79, no. 2 (2005), p. 157. On fish retailers, see Andrew Halkett, “Note on the European Carp,” *Ottawa Naturalist*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1907), p. 71. He notes Lapointe’s, a fish retailer in Ottawa still in existence.

35 Kathryn Graddy, “Markets: The Fulton Fish Market,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2006), p. 208; Frederick Roche, “The Boston Fish Dock,” *Canadian Fisherman*, May 1914, p. 133; “Central wholesale fish market for Vancouver, B.C.,” *Canadian Fisherman*, January 1914, p. 34; McEvoy, *Fisherman’s Problem*, pp. 168–169.

36 Connie Y. Chiang, “Monterey-by-the-Smell: Odors and Social Conflict on the California Coastline,” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 73, no. 2 (2004), pp. 183–214.

37 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 23, vol. 232, file 1353, reel T-3151, A. H. Brittain to W. A. Found, March 19, 1913.

38 “The Fisheries Exhibit Canadian National Exhibition,” *Canadian Fisherman*, October 1914, pp. 264–267.





**Figure 1.** The Maritime Fish Corporation display at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, 1913.

Source: “Appendices,” *Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, 1913–14, Fisheries* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1915), p. 2.

*Canadian Fisherman*, “to the manner in which the goods were displayed.” The fisheries exhibit, by then in its second year, provided retailers “a little education in the care of the goods” and consumers a modicum of confidence that “messy fish” were a thing of the past.<sup>39</sup> Within this model retail environment, fish products were presented in more modest aggregations, a hallmark of the transition in late-nineteenth-century retailing from bulk containers and a profusion of goods to “well-ordered shelves of canned goods, glass show cases, and a ‘waxy neatness,’” as food historian Richard Cummings put it.<sup>40</sup>

Another commentator, A. E. Howard, observed this transition in fish retailing and argued that both retailers and consumers preferred packaged fish products to raw bulk goods like salt cod. Salt cod, Howard wrote, had “an appearance which is out of keeping with modern retailing.”<sup>41</sup> Packaged goods were neater and easier to store and display, and they saved wear-and-tear on store fixtures, Howard advised. The presence of branded goods and branding also promised to deliver standardized high-quality products. Other food processors had already invested considerable effort in branding and advertising their products as “sanitary.” Fruit

39 F. J. Hayward, “Care of the Fish in the Store,” *Canadian Fisherman*, November 1914, p. 317.

40 Richard Osborn Cummings, *The American and His Food: A History of Food Habits in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), p. 107.

41 Howard, “Selling End,” pp. 202–203.

and vegetable canners, milk companies, and meat packers—industries that had been earlier tainted with scandal—“all dilate upon the cleanliness and sanitation of their establishments where their particular class of foodstuff is prepared.”<sup>42</sup> The fishing industry, however, generally lagged in adopting modern marketing methods.

Fresh fish nonetheless posed display challenges in an exhibit just as they did in real stores, especially during the late summer when the CNE was held. Warm weather played “havoc with perishable exhibits,” and stale-looking smelly fish undermined the confidence that a bright clean stall was supposed to instill. Exhibitors thus worked hard to maintain the exhibit’s fresh appearance. “To keep the show in A-1 order and condition and to avoid any smell likely to prejudice the public,” reported the *Canadian Fisherman*, “fresh fish were received daily and stale fish immediately replaced and removed.”<sup>43</sup> This turnover was made possible by the exhibit’s enormous freezers and coolers, which was itself a display of modern technology related to fish handling.<sup>44</sup> A vapour-compression freezer, supplied by a Montréal refrigeration company, was a 20-ton unit equipped with a large plate-glass window that allowed fairgoers to peer inside. The next year, a “chiller” was added to the display. It was built to allow people to view fish from both sides of the display as if they were browsing goods in a retail store. The display showed “to retailers the ideal method of handling such fish” and also ensured that fresh-looking fish were available for the displays in the central stand.<sup>45</sup>

### “The Gospel of Clean Fish”

In the second year of the CNE fish exhibit in 1914, the fisheries department gained a valuable ally in its fish-consumption campaign when the *Canadian Fisherman* began publication. The monthly trade magazine, launched in January 1914, devoted itself to “boosting the fish business of Canada” and while it claimed to represent all fisheries interests, it primarily focused on commercial aspects with articles on markets, merchants, and prices. The *Canadian Fisherman* paid special attention to marketing and advertising and took up a role in convincing consumers that fish was a safe and wholesome food. In 1915, the magazine played a key role in organizing the Canadian Fisheries Association (CFA), which represented the interests of fishing companies, fish wholesalers, and fish dealers.<sup>46</sup> The CFA was part of a broader movement by food producers to form associations that promoted grading and standardization; such organizations sought to shape demand through advertising and merchandizing, including the use of brand names and trademarks that emphasized the purity of their products.<sup>47</sup>

42 Howard, “Selling End,” pp. 202–203.

43 “The Fisheries Exhibit,” p. 264.

44 Anderson, *Refrigeration in America*, p. 90. Mechanical refrigeration based on ammonia-compression methods became common in the 1890s.

45 “Fisheries Exhibit at the Canadian National Exhibition at Toronto,” in Canada, *Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries 1914–15* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1915), p. xvi.

46 LAC, RG 23, vol. 643, file 711-1-3 (1), Frederick William Wallace to W. A. Found, January 22, 1915.

47 “Success to the Fisheries,” *Canadian Fisherman*, January 1914, pp. 5–6; Innis, *Cod Fisheries*, p. 438; Cummings, *The American and His Food*, pp. 147–149.

The *Canadian Fisherman* supported the fish-consumption campaign in various ways, including running profiles of fisheries department officers and reprinting departmental reports and ministerial speeches verbatim. Such was the case when the *Canadian Fisherman* reprinted Cowie’s 1908 screed on “non-progression” in its inaugural edition. The magazine further elaborated Cowie’s ideas in a commentary entitled “The Gospel of Clean Fish.” Consumers, the magazine claimed, perceived fish to be a “dirty” food: “In the popular imagination, the fish business is regarded as being messy, scaly and smelly, and such ideas do an immense amount of harm by keeping down the sale of fresh fish.”<sup>48</sup> One retail-grocery observer in the magazine unfavourably compared North American fish retailers to those in England, “where the fish-monger handles poultry, and also cut flowers. His shop or store is easily the most hygienic and best patronized in any community.”<sup>49</sup> To counter these perceptions and practices, and to increase fish consumption, the *Canadian Fisherman* invited its wholesale and retail readers to follow “the gospel of clean fish,” a trinity of “Cleanliness, Freshness, and Display.”<sup>50</sup>

The gospel amplified Cowie’s earlier proposals. While producers needed to maintain sanitary fish wharves and carefully handle fish, most improvement could be made in education and training at the consumption end of the food chain. Retailers needed to prepare better displays of fish: instead of dumping fish in a box or barrel, the *Canadian Fisherman* suggested exhibiting fish “cleaned and laid out upon a marble slab with running water or chopped ice upon it, and tastefully decorated with parsley, red peppers and lemons.”<sup>51</sup> The magazine also reproduced Cowie’s view of women consumers, identifying them as the weak link in the fish-commodity chain because they were ignorant “of the art of cooking fish.”<sup>52</sup>

### **Fish and How to Cook It**

In 1915, the fisheries department addressed this perceived weak link and extended the fish-consumption campaign when it issued the first-ever cookbook published by a Canadian government, *Fish and How to Cook It*.<sup>53</sup> Cowie had first proposed one in 1908 and indeed it was to Cowie that the department turned to compile and write the cookbook. Cowie modelled the publication on one used in an earlier British fish-consumption campaign, borrowing recipes and information from it as well as from another issued by Boston’s New England Fish Exchange. The department distributed the cookbook at the CNE in succeeding years, as well as outside the fair, widening its fish-consumption campaign beyond the fair’s Toronto location.

For the Canadian fisheries department, Cowie’s cookbook offered an opportunity to train women consumers about fish and change their behaviours. Cookbooks, as Natalie Cooke has noted, were “highly prescriptive and presumed a reader who

48 “The Gospel of Clean Fish,” *Canadian Fisherman*, February 1914, p. 4.

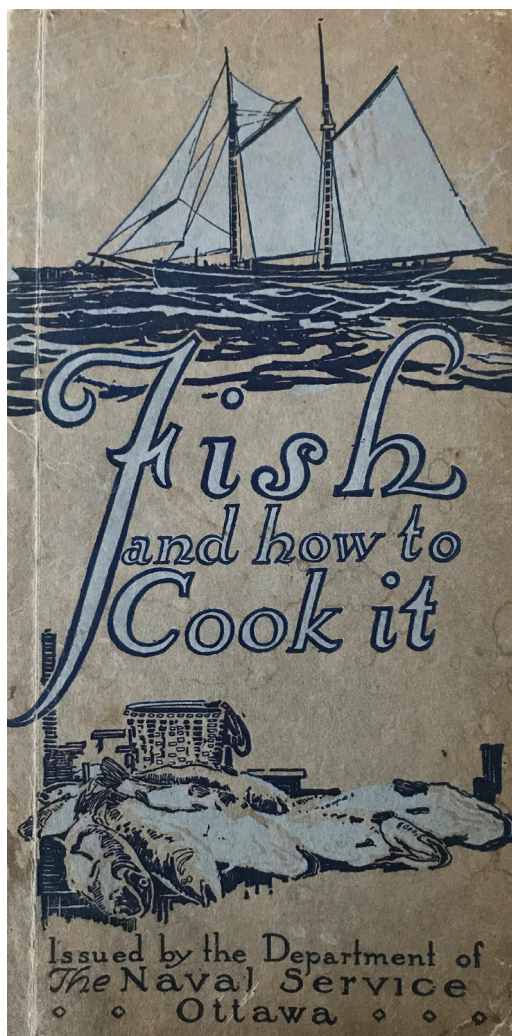
49 Howard, “Selling End,” pp. 202–203.

50 “Gospel of Clean Fish,” pp. 43–44.

51 “Gospel of Clean Fish,” pp. 43–44; “Helping the Fish Business in Canada,” *Canadian Fisherman* 1 (March 1914), p. 71.

52 Morton, “The End Man Is a Woman,” 156–7.

53 Driver, *Culinary Landmarks*, p. xxxiv.



**Figure 2.** *Fish and How to Cook It*, 1915.

Source: Author collection and photograph.

was less knowledgeable than the booklet's author."<sup>54</sup> Such was the case with *Fish and How to Cook It*, which assumed that women lacked the requisite skills to properly cook fish for their husbands.<sup>55</sup> Beginning with a "SPECIAL NOTICE TO HOUSEWIVES," the cookbook first offered purchasing advice: "In buying fresh fish, see that the eyes are bright and prominent and the flesh firm, not flabby."<sup>56</sup> This notice was followed by an introduction that acknowledged the many structural

54 Cook, "Cookbooklets and Canadian Kitchens," p. 25.

55 Sherrie A. Inness, *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender and Class at the Dinner Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 4.

56 Canada, *Fish and How to Cook It* (Ottawa: Department of Naval Service, 1915), p. 9.

problems that afflicted Canadian fisheries: from lack of availability to poor retail practices, fresh fish had not historically been a trustworthy food item in Canadian markets.

Women nonetheless had to shoulder blame, according to Cowie, because they were ignorant of fish-cooking techniques, preferring to fry and boil fish over other methods. This failure to properly cook fish reflected on their abilities as responsible and frugal homemakers especially “when the cost of living has become such an important factor.” It was incumbent upon “the average housewife to give careful thought to providing for the table. The articles procured must not only be reasonably cheap, but they must be palatable and nourishing.”<sup>57</sup> The cookbook offered women a range of tools to guide their consumption decisions. There were general instructions on cooking methods and a glossary of cooking terms. The cookbook also drew on home economics and heightened interest in nutrition and diet, presenting tables that compared the relative nutritional content of fish with other proteins such as beef and pork.<sup>58</sup>

The fisheries department was not alone in registering women as the fish-consumption campaign’s central problem. The *Canadian Fisherman*, which kept the campaign forefront in its pages, issued a call to “Educate the Women!” and argued that the fishing industry depended on more rational consumption by women.<sup>59</sup> Fixing women in the gendered sphere of the domestic, the *Canadian Fisherman* made them responsible for food choices and preparation. “The wife is the Dictator of the Kitchen. It is she who decrees what Hubby shall eat, and what Hubby eats, so shall Sonny and Sis and other members of the household,” the magazine declared. “Fish is a food, and as a food it comes to the table via the housewife.” The “average housewife,” however, knew “very, very little about fish”:

All fish look alike to her, and in her imagination must necessarily taste alike. Salmon, cod, haddock, and halibut are her commonest choices in fresh fish, and as a rule these are either fried or boiled and probably garnished with a plain egg sauce. With such a limited viewpoint and such a restricted knowledge in fish cookery, how can the Fish Trade of Canada prosper!<sup>60</sup>

Cookery was the key to improving consumption. As the cookbook proclaimed, “the digestibility and nutritive value of fish depends greatly on the manner of its cooking.”<sup>61</sup> What this approach did not acknowledge was that fish cookery was already represented in contemporary cookbooks or that fish had a long-standing place in Indigenous and Canadian diets. Elizabeth Driver’s survey of Canadian cookbooks reveals that fish cookery was not a complete mystery with cookbooks containing significant selections of fish recipes. Many cookbooks also provided advice on purchasing fresh fish. *The Canadian Housewife’s Manual of Cookery*, published in 1861, advised a visual check of the gills, which should be “bright and

57 Canada, *Fish and How to Cook It*, p. 9.

58 Canada, *Fish and How to Cook It*, pp. 12–14.

59 “Educate the Women!,” *Canadian Fisherman*, October 1915, p. 325.

60 “Educate the Women!,” p. 325.

61 Canada, *Fish and How to Cook It*, p. 10.

red” rather than “brownish and slimy.” The *Manual* also provided recipes for a wide variety of marine and lacustrine fish, both fresh and preserved. *Fish and How to Cook It* was therefore circulating advice already well known to women through experience and manifested in earlier cookbooks.<sup>62</sup>

If the shopping for and preparation of fish were coded as feminine responsibilities, the consumer of the meal was marked masculine. Cowie compared fish to fuel for the engine of production, the working man. “Fish contains the metal of which the engine is constructed,” the cookbook read, “and the fuel for getting up steam.” Since fish was cheap, it was an ideal food for working men. Two salt herrings “contain as much proteid [*sic*] as is requisite in the daily dietary of an ordinary working man,” but were a third less expensive than beef.<sup>63</sup>

In addressing masculine consumption, Cowie and others stressed responsibility and bodily strength. The replacement of meat with fish was represented as a responsible shift toward an affordable diet. “The man who asks for a steak nowadays is eating dollar bills,” the *Canadian Fisherman* proclaimed. “It is all very well for the wealthy man to have what he wants, but it is a great mistake for the working man to indulge his appetite at the expense of his pocket.” This type of sumptuary admonishment was, at the same time, delivered with some reassurance that fish was an appropriately masculine food. The *Canadian Fisherman* emphasized, as Cowie had done, that working men could perform “as hard a day’s work on fish as he can on meat,” even when those workers were racialized ones. Japanese soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, for example, had subsisted on dried fish, “and it would be hard to find tougher men.” Likewise, the “hardy fishermen of the Northern countries”—Scotland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden—endured “long hours of downright hard work” and ate a diet largely composed of fish. Cowie connected fish consumption to military service, the most masculine of roles: increasing the consumption of fresh fish would not just rescue “a languishing national industry,” Cowie argued, but develop a “hardy race of seamen” to serve in Canada’s navy.<sup>64</sup>

This discourse of fish as a substitute for meat had to contend with the powerful gender and class associations that marked meat, especially beef, in North America and especially in Britain. A “particularly eloquent signifier of class,” beef-eating was associated with the good life of the middle and upper classes.<sup>65</sup> Beef was also strongly marked by “gender distinctions and prerogative.” In England, men ate more meat than women and children, claiming it on account of their breadwinner status. Meat was thus a symbol of men’s work and masculine privilege. Some fish, however,

62 Cowie, “Non-progression,” p. lxxx; “Helping the Fish Business in Canada,” p. 71; Duncan, *Canadians at Table*, pp. 27–35; Driver, *Culinary Landmarks*, p. 199; Richard Pillsbury, *No Foreign Food: The American Diet in Time and Place* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), p. 25; *The Canadian Housewife’s Manual of Cookery* (Hamilton, ON: Henry L. Richards, 1861), p. 60; Cooke, “Cookbooklets,” p. 25.

63 Cowie, “Non-progression,” p. lxxii.

64 “Beef versus Fish,” *Canadian Fisherman*, August 1914, pp. 228–229; Cowie, “Non-progression,” p. lxxx.

65 Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 17.

were also included in this breadwinner diet with kippers (or smoked herring or mackerel) marked as part of male dietary prerogative, according to Ellen Ross.<sup>66</sup>

*Fish and How to Cook It* was a marked departure for the fisheries department, although the direction had already been pointed out by John Cowie in 1908. His advice then, and again in 1914–1915, and his gendered view of consumers drove the fish consumption campaign forward. The year the cookbook was issued the fisheries department took another step in the direction of consumption and ran a fish restaurant at the CNE. There, the modelling of fish moved from the domain of sight to the realm of taste. Like other displays, however, cookery displays and demonstrations with fish were also fraught with difficulties—and with considerations not just of gender, but of class too.

### The Fish Restaurant

The same year that *Fish and How to Cook It* was published, the fisheries department took the display of consumption one step further along the commodity chain and opened a fish restaurant at the CNE. The restaurant, which the department operated between 1915 and 1918, extended the “gospel of clean fish” to directly address consumers through the act of consumption. Eating was an educational act: hungry, fair-going bodies entered the restaurant and took both nourishment and instruction. Diners not only received a cheap meal but a copy of *Fish and How to Cook It*, which offered recipes and rationales to convince people to make fish consumption a regular part of their diets.<sup>67</sup>

The fish restaurant was first proposed for the 1914 CNE, but the outbreak of war in August dashed those plans. The fisheries department resurrected the idea for the 1915 exhibition and contracted with Nasmiths Ltd., an established Toronto bakery and experienced CNE food concessionaire, to run a restaurant “devoted to the purpose of advertising ‘Fish as Food.’” The department agreed to pay the rent and supply all the fish: in return, Nasmiths promised to equip the restaurant, hire staff, and deliver a 25-cent meal that consisted of “fish, sauces, potatoes, bread, butter and biscuits, pie, tea, coffee or milk.” The department also contracted with F. T. James Company and the Maritime Fish Corporation, the fish dealers who participated in the fish-retailing exhibit, for daily deliveries of fresh and frozen fish.<sup>68</sup>

The restaurant opened for business on the first day of the fair, August 30, 1915, and welcomed 395 diners. Within a few days, it was serving more than 1,000 fish meals a day and on September 6 served almost 5,200 diners, which a fisheries official claimed was “the largest number ever handled by one restaurant in one day in Canada.” The promise of “a generous helping” of fish and potatoes attracted

66 Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 32–35.

67 The restaurant followed in the tradition of fish restaurants at earlier exhibitions. There were fish restaurants to supplement fisheries exhibits at both the Great International Fisheries Exhibition in London in 1883 and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. See John Flinn, ed., *Official Guide to the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Columbian Guide Co., 1893), p. 165; and Arthur Trendell, ed., *The Great International Fisheries Exhibition of 1883* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1883), p. xxxix.

68 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, Canadian National Exhibition to G. J. Desbarats, April 26, 1915; LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, “Memorandum re restaurant at Toronto Exhibition,” April 16, 1915.

hungry fairgoers throughout the exhibition; in its first year, the restaurant served more than 25,000 meals. Diners were also served a generous dollop of education and instruction concerning fish consumption.<sup>69</sup>

While taste was the primary evidence on display at the restaurant, it was reinforced by messages throughout the restaurant that prepared diners for the wholesome act of eating fish. Drawing on late nineteenth-century ideas of “scientific food,” the fisheries department emblazoned the marquee tent that sheltered the restaurant with slogans about fish’s digestibility, its protein content, and its comparative value in relation to meat. These were the same messages offered in the cookbook. One canvas banner stressed fish as an inexpensive source of protein, “the chief food constituent in meat or fish,” and provided a cost comparison to beef: a one-pound serving of protein from cod cost \$0.72 while the same measure from beefsteak cost \$2.33. Another banner declared that fish was easier to digest than meat, “therefore, for your health’s sake, use more fish.”<sup>70</sup>

Inside the tent, the restaurant menu continued the lesson in frugality. Designed by Frederick William Wallace, editor of the *Canadian Fisherman*, the folding menu cover depicted the geographical sweep of Canadian fisheries, with three important commercial species: Pacific salmon, freshwater whitefish, and Atlantic cod. In between the covers, the menu listed the bill of fare and stressed the economic benefits of a fish diet over meat. “Are you anxious to reduce your food bill without detracting from the tastiness or nourishment of the meals?” the menu asked. “You can do so by largely substituting fish for meat.” Anxieties about fish spoilage were also addressed: cold storage and rapid transportation made “fresh fish in prize condition and at moderate prices” available across Canada. “There is no longer good reason,” the menu declared, “why fish should not daily have an important place on the bill-of-fare of every home.”<sup>71</sup>

Deliberations over fish and dish selection show the department calibrating the restaurant’s offerings to appeal to consumers who would most benefit from—and afford—its instruction. The fisheries department, for example, stipulated that the restaurant would not serve expensive items such as Atlantic salmon and lobsters. But nor would it serve too cheap a fish. Canned Pacific salmon, an inexpensive staple of English working-class diets, represented a promotional conundrum. Nasmiths, the restaurant operator, did not want to serve canned salmon at all; it was, the contractor protested, an unsuitable entree for a “hearty 25-cent dinner.” The other problem with canned salmon was its appearance. The fisheries department was concerned about serving a tin of salmon turned out on a plate. “It is not likely that most of those visiting the restaurant would like the appearance of the salmon if it were served directly from the can,” a fisheries official noted. The department asked the caterer to serve the canned salmon “in some prepared way” to thus make it “more attractive to the patrons of the restaurant.” The fisheries department, however,

69 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, Alex Finlayson to W. A. Found, September 6, 1915; “Fisheries Exhibit at the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto,” in Canada, *Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries 1915–16* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1916), p. xvii.

70 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, “Memorandum,” June 9, 1915.

71 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, Frederick William Wallace to W. A. Found, July 30, 1914; LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, “Memorandum,” June 9, 1915.



wanted to occasionally serve canned salmon because the free cookbook contained many recipes for the product.<sup>72</sup>

Yet even within the category of canned salmon, some varieties were more acceptable than others. The fisheries department did not want to promote sockeye salmon, the most expensive Pacific salmon, nor Chum salmon, the cheapest. Sockeye salmon already enjoyed a large market. It was also expensive with a one-pound tin costing \$0.21; by comparison a tin of Pink salmon only cost \$0.08. Chum salmon were cheaper yet. According to the fisheries department, Chum salmon did not “appear to the same advantage” as other salmon and were left off the restaurant menu altogether.<sup>73</sup>

The anxiety about promoting “cheap fish” was that it would link fish consumption with meanness and poverty. It was also strongly marked by racist assumptions about consuming certain types of fish. Chum was coded for race through its association with Indigenous and Japanese fishermen, who were among the only fishers to target this species of Pacific salmon.<sup>74</sup> Salt fish was another food item strongly coded by racist values even when the association was intended to underline the worthiness of fish as a source of bodily power. The *Canadian Fishermen* claimed in one article that “even a West India[n] ... will work all day in the hot sun on a couple of salt herring or a piece of dried codfish.”<sup>75</sup> Japanese soldiers, as noted earlier, and West Indian men demonstrated the value of eating fish—but also marked the fish they did consume as inappropriate for White Canadian bodies.

That some species of fish were considered appropriate food for respectable working- and middle-class White people is also apparent in discussions about the types of fish the department would serve, as well as preparation methods. Before proposing a fish restaurant in 1914, the department had planned to operate a “fried fish counter,” which was sketched into blueprints for the 1913 fisheries exhibit. The CNE, however, asked the fisheries department to cancel the concession. As fisheries official W.A. Found put it, “We would not likely attract to it the class of people whom we want to reach which we no doubt would do by having a thoroughly up-to-date restaurant.”<sup>76</sup>

Found’s characterization of fish-and-chips eaters suggests he may have agreed with English reformers who viewed fish-and-chips as a disreputable food associated with lower-class street culture. In England, as John Walton has shown, fish-and-chips were considered an unsanitary food served in unsanitary conditions; that working-class families took at least one weekly meal from such shops was evidence to reformers that lower-class families were unable to responsibly manage household

72 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, James Calder to G. J. Desbarats, July 30, 1915; LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, G. J. Desbarats to James Calder, August 11, 1915; Elizabeth Driver, “Regional Differences in the Canadian Daily Meal? Cookbooks Answer the Question,” in Nathalie Cooke, ed., *What’s to Eat? Entrees in Canadian Food History* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), p. 199.

73 “Beef versus Fish,” pp. 228–229.

74 Geoff Meggs, *Salmon: The Decline of the British Columbia Salmon Fishery* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991), p. 105.

75 “Beef versus Fish,” pp. 228–229.

76 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, “Memorandum,” May 6, 1914; LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, P. W. Rodgers to W. A. Found, April 20, 1914.

resources. Fish-and-chips shops were classified as an “offensive trade” in England, which reformers connected to a lower-class “pathology of culinary ignorance.” Although it is unclear when fish-and-chips arrived in Canada, they were present at the CNE before the meal gained middle-class respectability in England. In rejecting fish-and-chips, the fisheries department also rejected the lowest of the lower classes as an audience for their instructional efforts. Instead, the department focused on working- and middle-class consumers who patronized the exhibition and who may have agreed with the department that dishes such as “Boiled Haddock with Egg Sauce” were more respectable and economical.<sup>77</sup> As the *Canadian Fisherman* put it, “‘Cheap fish’ sounds like it. It is invariably associated with cheap dress goods, cheap furniture and cheap other things—in fact it falls under the odium of cheapness as applied to mean and worthless articles.”<sup>78</sup> The fisheries department recognized the challenge as one of differentiating “cheap fish” from “fish cheap.” Just as gender and race figured into the modelling of fisheries at the CNE, so too did class.

From its inception in 1915, the restaurant proved to be popular. Twenty-five thousand fairgoers ate there in its first year, and the fish industry praised its operation and promotional efficacy. *Canadian Fisherman* editor Frederick William Wallace attended a special press dinner and was “very much impressed by the tasteful manner in which the fish was cooked.” The restaurant was an example of “splendid educational work.”<sup>79</sup> Despite this initial success, restaurant contractor Nasmiths did not find the fish restaurant profitable enough to warrant another year’s operation. The company, complaining of war-related labour shortages and increased wage costs, declined the contract for 1916.<sup>80</sup>

From 1916, a Toronto contractor named J. A. Mumby operated the restaurant on the fisheries department’s behalf. But as a model of “the gospel of clean fish” the fish restaurant appeared to fall victim to its own success. Even with the price of the dinner raised from \$0.10 to \$0.35, the restaurant served 37,417 meals in 1916, an increase of almost 50% over the previous year. Mumby reported tremendous difficulties in serving so many customers and maintaining standards of service and food. “Indeed, the patronage was too great to enable the service to be as satisfactory as desirable,” the fisheries department reported.<sup>81</sup> Other observers found reason to critique the restaurant. Two reporters from the *Toronto Star Weekly* offered a review under the headline “Government Fish Dinners Very Bad.” The reporters found the service poor and the fish almost inedible: they were served one fish dinner that “was burned to a cinder” and another that was “almost rare.”<sup>82</sup>

A year later, another more influential observer noted the restaurant’s failure to uphold the “gospel of clean fish.” In 1917, an official from the Office of the Food Controller, the federal government’s wartime food-supply authority, visited the restaurant. The Office of the Food Controller was created in 1917 to supervise

77 John K. Walton, *Fish and Chips & the British Working Class 1870–1940* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1992), p. 141–150.

78 “Cheap Fish or Fish Cheap,” *Canadian Fisherman*, June 1918, pp. 771–772.

79 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, D. J. Byrne to John D. Hazen, September 9, 1915.

80 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, John Turnbull to G. J. Desbarats, May 13, 1916.

81 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, “Memorandum,” January 27, 1917.

82 “The Exhibition Can Still Be Improved in Many Ways,” *Toronto Star Weekly*, September 9, 1916, p. 9.

Canada’s food supply, stimulate food production, and mobilize food conservation. Its fish commissioner, G. F. Beers, had specific authority over fisheries and could “purchase, requisition, store, sell and deliver” fish to meet Canadian needs. Beers also inspected fish consumption in hotels, restaurants, cafes, private homes, clubs, and other places, a mandate that brought the fish restaurant and the department’s fish-consumption campaign under his supervisory gaze.<sup>83</sup> Beers found much that made him unhappy. From bad waiters to filthy dishes and cutlery, Beers found the restaurant unsanitary and unappealing.<sup>84</sup> Plugged drains after a summer storm worsened the conditions, making it difficult to keep the restaurant “clean and wholesome.”<sup>85</sup> Such was the disarray that Beers reported that it would be better “not to have the dining-room at all” than to have it operated in such a manner.<sup>86</sup>

Beers also took issue with the cookbook distributed at the restaurant. *Fish and How to Cook It* was “admirable,” but was expensively produced. Beers thought it contained “a good deal of information . . . not essential to the purpose in mind, namely to increase the use of fish.”<sup>87</sup> Beers recommended the department produce a less elaborate publication such as a cheaper eight-page pamphlet. The fisheries department defended *Fish and How to Cook It*, claiming that such pamphlets were thrown away without being read “whereas this little booklet is kept in the homes and used as a reference book.” Moreover, many thousands of copies had already been distributed at the CNE and through “Industrial and Cooking schools.”<sup>88</sup> The department promised the Food Controller that his criticisms would be taken into account as it undertook a new edition. The revised edition, however, never came to pass as responsibility for the fish-consumption campaign shifted from the fisheries department to the Food Controller.<sup>89</sup>

### Ceding Control

The Food Controller’s visit to the CNE restaurant marked the moment when this control began to shift from the fisheries department to wartime food officials. Fisheries officials had earlier recognized that the war presented a unique opportunity to increase fish consumption in Canada. The war’s “forced economies” provided, the fisheries minister had earlier argued, the “psychological moment to impress upon the people the advantages of Canadian fish as an economical and healthful diet.”<sup>90</sup> War brought foods, diets, and bodies under closer inspection as they figured into domestic and front-line military strategy: what was once a private matter had become a public, national concern.<sup>91</sup> “Fight with Food,” urged one Canadian government advertisement, “We cannot achieve victory without food.” This ad, along with posters and other promotional materials, asked Canadians to

83 “Commissioners to Deal with Fish Foods,” *Canadian Fisherman*, July 1917, p. 250.

84 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, G. F. Beers to G. J. Desbarats, July 19, 1917.

85 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, G. J. Desbarats to G. F. Beers, July 24, 1917.

86 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, G. F. Beers to G. J. Desbarats, July 19, 1917.

87 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, G. F. Beers to G. J. Desbarats, July 19, 1917.

88 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, G. F. Beers to G. J. Desbarats, July 19, 1917.

89 LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, G. J. Desbarats to G. F. Beers, July 24, 1917.

90 “Canada’s Fisheries Need Advertising,” *Canadian Fisherman*, October 1915, p. 324.

91 Cummings, *The American and His Food*, p. 7.

conserve foodstuffs such as wheat, meat, dairy products, and beans, which “should largely be reserved for the fighting men.” In their stead Canadians were asked to increase their consumption of vegetables, fruits, other cereals, and fish in particular.<sup>92</sup>

In 1918, the Canada Food Board replaced the Food Controller and assumed more extensive powers, including the licensing of all retail dealers of fish. As these new state bodies absorbed the fisheries department’s consumption campaign, they also broadened its distribution in other media and intensified its use of gendered norms to rally citizens to wartime food strategy.<sup>93</sup> One of the Food Board’s first efforts with regard to fish was to issue its own fish cookbook that an anonymous *Canadian Fisherman* reviewer praised as being a “vast improvement over former cook books.” Illustrated with images of fish, the cookbook contained “simple and revised recipes” for Pacific cods and flatfishes, cheaper fish that both the Food Board and the fisheries department were united in promoting over more expensive halibut and salmon. But unlike the fisheries department’s free recipe book, the Canada Food Board’s cost five cents.

The Canada Food Board also close kept a close eye on the CNE restaurant’s menu. When halibut and salmon were discovered on it, the Food Board’s chairman wired the fisheries department to complain that these expensive fish were being served at the CNE. The fisheries department in turn telegraphed the restaurant and its supplier and ordered the restaurant to remove the offending items and “to procure and feature cod, haddock, flounders, etc.” Cheaper fish, however, were hard to find; according to the restaurant’s fish supplier, “the submarine menace” limited the supply of Atlantic fish the department urgently demanded.<sup>94</sup>

By mid-1918, the Canada Food Board had effectively commandeered the fisheries department’s fish-consumption campaign. The Board expanded the campaign beyond the CNE restaurant exhibit and cookbook to include large-scale fish purchases and mass advertising and poster campaigns.<sup>95</sup> In June, it brought three rail-car loads of fresh haddock—75,000 pounds in all—to Toronto where they were “rapidly disposed of” at \$0.10 per pound. The Board also transported and sold other fish such as mackerel and Pacific flatfishes at “cut-rate prices” to introduce these cheaper varieties to Ontario consumers.<sup>96</sup>

The Food Board also produced campaign materials in other mediums. It hired Frederick William Wallace, editor of the *Canadian Fisherman* and an experienced photographer, to make films about Canada’s fisheries. One film was devoted to Pacific flatfishes and cods, fish that the Food Board wanted consumers to eat more of and divert pressure from other species. The film followed these cheaper fish through the commodity chain from the moment “the steam trawler leaves the dock

92 Ian Mosby’s *Food Will Win the War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013) deals with Canadian experience during the Second World War.

93 Donica Belisle, *Purchasing Power: Women and the Rise of Canadian Consumer Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), pp. 46–47.

94 “Food Board Issues New Cook Book,” *Canadian Fisherman*, June 1918, p. 778; LAC, RG 23, vol. 1146, file 722-2-4, W. A. Found to A. B. Brittain, September 16, 1918.

95 “Canada Food Board’s Fish Section Bulletin,” *Canadian Fisherman*, June 1918, p. 777.

96 “Fish Campaign in Toronto,” *Canadian Fisherman*, June 1918, p. 778.

for the Banks until the fish are sold over the retail counter.”<sup>97</sup> Wallace also produced a film about trawler and schooner-dory fishing in Atlantic Canada; both films were shown at the CNE.

The Canada Food Board also produced a series of advertisements and posters, which replicated the dichotomy of masculine producer and feminine consumer. One series of posters featured the same photographic image of a bearded fisherman in sou’wester and rain slicker hailing consumers with the tag line “Ahoy Canadians!” One version of this poster asked, “Have you tried Pacific Flat-Fish and Codfish yet?” Another posed the question, “Are you eating more FISH these war time days?” Both implored people to consume more fish to “save meat for the fighters.” The board’s most colourful poster was headlined: “Buy Fresh Fish—Save the Meat for our Soldiers and Allies.” The poster featured an illustration of a fashionably dressed woman admiring a display of fresh fish in a butcher shop. The butcher was depicted smiling and pointing to the fish, ignoring the large cuts of beef arranged on the shelf behind him. The shelf also displayed a sign that read “A Good Butcher.”

These posters showed how seamlessly the fisheries department’s consumption campaign was integrated into the wartime food-conservation program and how it adopted the educational techniques of rational consumption. These materials reflected the gendered and classed ideas concerning food that animated Cowie’s original campaign and how they were reframed within wartime patriotism. Barbara Wilson and Donica Belisle note how White middle-class women were recruited into the war effort through food-conservation campaigns that enjoined them to substitute foods and sacrifice accustomed eating habits to guarantee victory. Viewed as “buyers of the nation,” women were considered central to food rationing because they were seen as being entirely responsible for food-consumption choices.<sup>98</sup> And while wartime appeals to female consumers may have granted them recognition as “important civic actors,” as Belisle argues, the campaign also played on contemporary notions of feminine nature that posited vanity as an essential womanly trait.<sup>99</sup> Victory through food substitution could only be accomplished, Canadian war propaganda suggested, by overcoming femininity. As one wartime cookbook put it, “Food must be conserved;... women must sacrifice their vanity, their mean self-indulgence and criminal selfishness on the altar of their country’s safety.”<sup>100</sup>

Pleas to substitute fish for meat also had to contend with the understandings of beef as an essentially masculine food. Simply put, beef fuelled manly warrior bodies. The fisheries department’s fish-consumption campaign had earlier attempted to counter this discourse by stressing fish’s protein content and noting how fish diets sustained “hardy” seagoing men, as noted above. The Canada Food Board eschewed such parallels and stressed that meat should be reserved for men on the front lines, a message taken up and reproduced in other quarters. The Women’s Convention for Food Conservation issued a cookbook that took as its premise that “without beef, of

97 “Canada Food Board’s Fish Section Bulletin,” *Canadian Fisherman*, June 1918, p. 777.

98 Belisle, “Buyers of the Nation,” pp. 1–3.

99 Belisle, “Buyers of the Nation,” p. 15.

100 Barbara M. Wilson, ed., *Ontario and the First World War, 1914–1918* (Toronto: The Champlain Society for the Government of Ontario, 1977), p. xcii; quoted in Wilson, *Ontario*, p. 123.



**Figure 3.** “Buy Fresh Fish” poster by artist E. Henderson. Ottawa, Canada Food Board, 1918.

Source: Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1983-28-702.

course, no army can fight.”<sup>101</sup> Women were browbeaten to substitute foods such as fish for meat to guarantee victory: “Could your family refuse mutton, kidneys, liver, pigs’ feet, tripe, or fish, thoroughly understanding that a shortage of muscle and strength-giving beef would mean a weakened, inefficient army, and anaemic, incompetent munition workers?”<sup>102</sup> This discourse figured women and their domestic vanity as a weak link in national mobilization; it also drew on anxieties

<sup>101</sup> Wilson, *Ontario*, p. 125.

<sup>102</sup> Wilson, *Ontario*, p. 127.

about malnourished male bodies such as those expressed in England over the poor physical fitness of British army recruits.<sup>103</sup>

The Canada Food Board thus intensified and amplified the discourse that had been active in the fisheries department’s fish-consumption campaign. The board issued a broad range of new materials, including posters, advertisements, films, and cookbooks that appropriated the consumer-focused campaign. The appropriation of the campaign extended to the CNE: in 1919, the fisheries department ceded its central place in the CNE fisheries exhibit to the Canada Food Board and the Canadian Fisheries Association. Those two organizations, along with the Ontario provincial government, mounted a joint exhibit that replaced the Canadian fisheries department’s exhibits. Like the federal fisheries department display, the new exhibit preached “the gospel of clean fish,” with displays of fresh, frozen, and cured fish that promised “absolute cleanliness and sanitation.” There were also displays of “fresh sea and lake fish on ice” by T. Eaton Co. and Simpsons, whose presence signalled a sea change in Canadian food retailing as chain stores began catering to food shoppers.<sup>104</sup> The exhibit also featured novel displays and demonstrations that continued to gender the fisheries. Fish-cookery demonstrations given by female “Domestic Science experts,” for example, “cooked and prepared [fish] before the eyes of the public.” This form of gendered display—part of the emerging practice of home economics—became popular at later fisheries exhibitions in Canada as the fisheries department continued to invest in the precepts of rational consumption.<sup>105</sup>

### Conclusion

The fish-consumption campaign launched at Toronto’s CNE between 1913 and 1919 marks an important moment in Canadian consumer and food history. Directly addressing consumers for the first time, the Canadian fisheries department acknowledged their presence and their consumption as factors in the administration of Canada’s fisheries. While the department continued to stress production issues, consumption became an important priority. A key assumption in this approach was that consumers were middle-class or “respectable” working-class women who were responsible for familial food purchasing and preparation—and who required training in buying and preparing fish. Carolyn Goldstein characterized this shift and approach in home-economics education as “rational consumption”: home economists no longer trained women to be efficient producers but to take up new roles as intelligent consumers who were able to shop and prepare food in more efficient ways. Goldstein argues this shift responded to structural changes in food production, marketing, transportation, and gender relations in North America. For home economists, it was an opportunity to establish their discipline as a professional one and to reshape women’s domestic purpose within an expanding consumerist society.

<sup>103</sup> Cummings, *The American and His Food*, p. 120.

<sup>104</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, p. 11.

<sup>105</sup> “Fisheries Exhibit at the Canadian National Exhibition,” *Canadian Fisherman*, September 1918, p. 991; Morton, “End Man,” p. 157.

The fisheries department's fish-consumption campaign, and its array of cookbooks, exhibits, and restaurants, shows how "rational consumption" took form in Canada, despite the absence of departmental home economists. Indeed, the CNE provided an ideal opportunity to promote the rational consumption of fish, which Canada's fisheries trade magazine called the "gospel of clean fish." Aimed largely at women, the campaign sought to train women in fish purchasing and preparation, assuming that they lacked the requisite skills. An initial exhibit of retail display was quickly followed with the publication of a fish cookbook and the establishment of a fish restaurant. Launched just as the First World War began, the campaign appeared ready-made for wartime and was integrated into the Canadian state's efforts to mobilize consumers on the home front in 1917. War provided an emergency context for amplifying the "gospel of clean fish" and promoting fish consumption, though the fisheries department had to cede control to the Canada Food Board. The wartime campaign further entrenched gendered notions of women and their roles and linked them to national duty.

Further work is required to understand the conjunction of home economics and state understandings of, and accommodations to, consumerism in the early twentieth century. With regard to Canadian fisheries, home economists began to play a more prominent role in the fisheries department after the First World War. Through the 1920s and 1930s, women experts began to produce and present cooking demonstrations at regional exhibitions, and in the early 1950s the federal fisheries department hired a senior home economist, Helen McKercher, to coordinate and plan further efforts to promote fish consumption.<sup>106</sup> This intensification of work and focus on consumerism, however, was first revealed in Toronto in 1913. Launching the fish-consumption campaign at the CNE also launched the Canadian state's new awareness of consumers and its orientation to the exigencies of consumer capitalism.

106 William Knight, "Home Economics: From Domestic Science to Professionalization," *Ingenium*, last modified May 28, 2019, [https://documents.techno-science.ca/documents/ENFinal\\_CAFM\\_HallofFame\\_HomeEconomics\\_29mai2017.docx](https://documents.techno-science.ca/documents/ENFinal_CAFM_HallofFame_HomeEconomics_29mai2017.docx)