

Øyvind Malmin

# **Norwegian-Americans in the King Crab Fishery**

Exploring and Explaining the Norwegian-American participation in the  
King Crab Fishery in Alaska from 1920-1983



**Master thesis in History**

Department of Archeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion

Faculty of Humanities

University of Bergen

Spring 2008

## Preface

The process of writing this thesis has been at once a journey of joy and a trial. It has taken me halfway around the world and has led me to people and places I have dreamed of meeting. A year after I began the work, I stand here fatigued, but proud of what I have accomplished.

First of all, this thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and inspiration of my advisor, Nils Kolle, who also introduced me to the topic of the king crab fishery. The Faculty of Humanities at the University of Bergen deserves credit for providing me with the funds necessary for my fieldwork in Seattle. I am also grateful to Harald Mannes, a Norwegian-American fisherman from Karmøy. He patiently explained the most basic aspects of boats and fishing to a landlubber like myself.

In Seattle, Tor Tollesen of the Karmøy Club of Washington introduced me to the Norwegian-American community, and I owe the entire Norwegian-American community in Ballard a debt of gratitude. They were extremely helpful during my stay. A special thanks to all the fishermen who shared their experiences in the king crab fishery with me (See the list of informants). I would also like to thank the University of Washington and the Public Library of Seattle for the access to their collections.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my friends and family, especially my fiancée, Silje, for her bearing with me over the past year.

Front page shows the king crabber *F/V Wizard*, originally built in 1945 for the U.S. Marine. In 1979 the *F/V Wizard* was converted to a king crab boat for the Norwegian-American fisherman John Jorgensen. Picture, [gathered May 13, 2008] <http://www.crabwizard.com>

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.1 THE KING CRAB FISHERY IN ALASKA.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>1.1.1 Norwegian involvement in the Pacific Northwest fisheries .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENTS AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>1.2.1 The history of the king crab fishery .....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>1.2.2 Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>1.2.3 Explaining the Norwegian-American participation in the fishery.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<b>1.3 DELIMITATIONS AND DEFINITIONS.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.4 LITERATURE AND SOURCES.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>1.4.1 Literature.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>1.4.2 Sources .....</i>	<i>14</i>
<b>CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN KING CRAB FISHERY .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.2 THE BEGINNINGS OF THE KING CRAB FISHERY IN ALASKA (1920-1959).....</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>2.2.1 The foreign crab fleets in Alaska .....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>2.2.2 The beginnings of the American king crab fishery .....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>2.2.3 The Wakefield Company.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>2.2.4 Boats, gear, equipment and restrictions.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>2.2.5 Product .....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>2.2.6 The situation of the king crab fishery in 1959 .....</i>	<i>26</i>
<b>2.3 THE KING CRAB FISHERY DEVELOPS INTO A MAJOR FISHERY IN ALASKA (1960-1969).....</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>2.3.1 Kodiak becomes the U.S. king crab capital .....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>2.3.2 Other major king crab fishing areas in Alaska.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>2.3.3 Economic performance of the king crab fishery .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>2.3.4 Boats, gear, equipment and restrictions.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>2.3.5 Product .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>2.3.6 Companies and fishermen .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>2.3.7 The situation of the king crab fishery in 1969 .....</i>	<i>35</i>
<b>2.4 THE KING CRAB BOOM IN BRISTOL BAY (1970-1983).....</b>	<b>36</b>
<i>2.4.1 Renewed fishing in the Bering Sea .....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>2.4.2 An increasing catch .....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>2.4.3 The price of king crab increases.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>2.4.4 Unalaska – the center of the king crab boom in the 1970s.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>2.4.5 Characteristics of the new crab boats .....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>2.4.6 Gear, equipment and restrictions .....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>2.4.7 The collapse of the king crab fishery in Bristol Bay.....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>2.4.8 The king crab fishery after 1983.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<b>2.5 SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: NORWEGIAN-AMERICANS IN THE KING CRAB FISHERY .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.2 NORWEGIAN-AMERICANS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE KING CRAB FISHERY .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.3 NORWEGIAN-AMERICANS IN THE KING CRAB FISHERY FROM 1960 TO 1969 .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>3.4 NORWEGIAN-AMERICANS IN THE KING CRAB FISHERY FROM 1970 TO 1983 .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<i>3.4.1 Percentage of Norwegian-American skippers in the king crab fishery.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>3.4.2 Percentage of Norwegian-American crewmembers .....</i>	<i>63</i>
<b>3.5 THREE LIVES, THREE STORIES.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>3.6 SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>69</b>

<b>CHAPTER 4: EXPLAINING THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN PARTICIPATION IN THE KING CRAB FISHERY.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>4.1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>4.2 ISSUES FOR ETHNICS IN A LABOR MARKET .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<i>4.2.1 Issues for ethnic entrepreneurs .....</i>	<i>73</i>
<b>4.3 ISSUES FOR THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICANS IN THE KING CRAB FISHERY .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<i>4.3.1 Issues for Norwegian-American entrepreneurs .....</i>	<i>76</i>
<b>4.4 WALDINGER, ALDRICH AND WARD’S THEORIES ON ETHNIC ENTREPRENEURS .....</b>	<b>76</b>
<i>4.4.1 Opportunity structures.....</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>4.4.2 Group characteristics .....</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>4.4.3 Ethnic strategies.....</i>	<i>82</i>
<b>4.5 SOCIAL CAPITAL AS A FACTOR IN ETHNIC BUSINESS .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>4.6 SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>5.1 THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN PARTICIPATION IN THE KING CRAB FISHERY.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>5.2 CONTRIBUTION OF THIS THESIS AND RESEARCH AHEAD .....</b>	<b>92</b>

**LIST OF FIGURES** .....

FIGURE 1: AREAS OF THE AMERICAN KING CRAB FISHERY, 1920-1959 .....23

FIGURE 2: THE CATCH OF THE AMERICAN KING CRAB FISHERY IN ALASKA, 1920-1970.....29

FIGURE 3: AREAS OF THE AMERICAN KING CRAB FISHERY, 1960-1969 .....30

FIGURE 4: AREAS OF THE AMERICAN KING CRAB FISHERY, 1970-1983 .....37

FIGURE 5: THE CATCH OF THE AMERICAN KING CRAB FISHERY IN ALASKA, 1970-1983.....38

FIGURE 6: ALASKA KING CRAB EX-VESSEL VALUE, 1960-1983 .....39

FIGURE 7: THE MAJOR SHIPYARDS BUILDING CRAB BOATS IN THE U.S., 1966-1981 .....44

FIGURE 8: MAPS OF KARMØY AND SUNNMØRE .....56

## Chapter 1:

### Introduction

#### 1.1 The king crab fishery in Alaska

King crab consists of more than 40 different species in waters around the world. In Alaska, three kinds of king crab are of commercial importance: red king crab (*Paralithodes camtshaticus*), blue king crab (*Paralithodes platypus*) and golden king crab (*Lithodes aequispinus*).<sup>1</sup> The red king crab has a leg span of nearly six feet, and has been the most commercially important species since the beginning of the king crab fishery. The red king crab is widely distributed throughout the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, Gulf of Alaska, Sea of Okhotsk, and along the Kamchatka shelf. It lives in the mud on the sea bottom in huge groups.<sup>2</sup> The American fishery is conducted with 600-pound crab pots measuring seven by seven feet.<sup>3</sup> The pots are baited with herring and codfish and are lowered to the sea floor, typically at around 500 feet, soaking for about a day before they are pulled up to the boat. The crabs are then sorted and kept alive in tanks aboard the boat. Processors, either floating or on shore, refine the product into frozen or canned crabmeat, and the main markets for the products are in the United States and Japan. The king crab fishery has gained some attention because of the large amounts of money associated with it, and because of the hazardous conditions of the areas in which the crab is fished.<sup>4</sup>

The king crab fishery is a relatively new fishery, started in the late 1800s by Japanese fishermen in the Sea of Japan. The American fishery grew to prominence in the 1960s, when it became one of the chief fisheries in Alaska. The late 1970s is usually highlighted as the golden age of the king crab fishery in America, when it was one of the most important fisheries in the nation. In the early 1980s, the fishery crashed, and has not since recovered to the heights of the 1970s.

---

<sup>1</sup> Golden king crab is occasionally referred to as brown king crab.

<sup>2</sup> Herrmann M., J. Greenberg, C. Hamel and H. Geier 2004:13

<sup>3</sup> American fishermen experimented with trawls and tangle-nets in the early days of the fishery.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Discovery Channel's TV-series, *Deadliest Catch*.

### 1.1.1 Norwegian involvement in the Pacific Northwest fisheries

Norwegian pioneers started to settle in the Pacific Northwest in the late nineteenth century. The Norwegian settlement in this region is largely associated with the completion of the transcontinental railroads, from the East Coast of the United States to the Puget Sound area in Washington, in 1888.<sup>5</sup> Around this time, a number of Norwegian settlements were built in the states of Oregon and Washington. Among them was the town of Ballard, today a part of Seattle, where Norwegians formed the majority of the population. The Norwegians coming to the Pacific Northwest came mostly from Norwegian settlements in the Midwest. However, in the early twentieth century, immigrants started to come directly from Norway as well.<sup>6</sup> In Oregon and Washington, they found work as farmers, lumberjacks, and in shipping.

Beginning in the late 1800s, Norwegians joined the Pacific fisheries as well. The fisheries they entered were already established, but after 1900 Norwegians became among the major participants in the fishing industry of the Pacific Northwest.<sup>7</sup> The first fishery Norwegians joined was the salmon fishery on the Puget Sound in Washington. Soon after, they engaged in the salmon fisheries in Alaska as well. Several Norwegians participated in the cod fishery in the Bering Sea, and the Alaskan herring fleet was occasionally referred to as “The Norwegian Army.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it was the halibut fishery off the Canadian and Alaskan coast where Norwegians were most prominent. The halibut fishery was started in 1888 by Americans, but Norwegian fishermen gradually became the major developers of this industry. By 1920, nearly 90 percent of halibut fishermen were Norwegians, and they remained the dominant group until at least World War II.<sup>9</sup>

From the early 1960s, an increasing number of Norwegians and Norwegian-Americans engaged in the growing king crab fishery. By the late 1960s, they were major participants in the fishery. A number of Norwegian-Americans invested in new boats and became highly successful in the booming king crab fishery of the late

---

<sup>5</sup> Lovoll, O. 1999:234

<sup>6</sup> Semmingsen, I. 1950:378

<sup>7</sup> Arestad S. in *Norwegian-American Studies* 1985:96-111

<sup>8</sup> Lovoll, O. 1999:245

<sup>9</sup> Semmingsen, I. 1950:378, Lovoll, O. 1999:245, Arestad S. in *Norwegian-American Studies* 1985:108

1970s. Partly based on their success in the king crab fishery, a number of Norwegian-Americans invested in huge factory-trawlers in the 1980s. Several vessels were converted to modern trawlers in Norway, most of them for Norwegians or Norwegian-Americans.<sup>10</sup> The main resource exploited by these boats was Alaska pollock, a fish in the cod family living in Alaskan waters.

## **1.2 Problem statements and the structure of the thesis**

The main scope of this thesis will be to explore the Norwegian-American participation in the American king crab fishery. How important were the Norwegian-Americans, and which roles did they play in the fishery? Who were they and why did they go into the king crab fishery? In order to explain the role of the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery, there must be a context to relate to. Thus, chapter 2 will describe the history of the American king crab fishery in general. With this foundation, the history of the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery will be elucidated in chapter 3. Chapter 4 will explore the Norwegian-American involvement in the king crab fishery in a different light. Here, the focus will be on theories of ethnic business and entrepreneurship, and how the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery dealt with the challenges ethnic groups generally face in an industrial society.

### **1.2.1 The history of the king crab fishery**

Chapter 2 will describe the development of the king crab fishery from the 1920s to the early 1980s. The focus will be on how the fishery changed during these years. Who were the fishermen and the companies involved? What boats, gear and equipment were used? In which geographical areas did the fishermen fish for crab? What kinds of products were made from the crabmeat, and what were the market conditions? Chapter 2 divides the fishery's history into three eras, and the above questions will be adapted to each of them in order to highlight the changes in the fishery.

---

<sup>10</sup> Hornnes, R. 2006:40



### **1.2.2 Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery**

Chapter 3 will focus on the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery. Like the previous chapter, this chapter discusses three eras. Did Norwegian-Americans pioneer the king crab fishery? When did they join the fishery? Who were the Norwegian-Americans who first joined? Were Norwegian-Americans important as skippers, crewmembers or owners? What was the background of the fishermen involved in the fishery? Were they born in Norway or the United States? Where did the Norwegian participants come from in Norway? Did the Norwegian-American participation change during the period covered?

### **1.2.3 Explaining the Norwegian-American participation in the fishery**

Chapters 2 and 3 will be mainly descriptive, describing the history of the king crab fishery and the Norwegian-American participation in the fishery, respectively. Chapter 4 will adopt a different perspective and explain the Norwegian-American participation in the king crab fishery. What are the general challenges for ethnics in a labor market, and how did the Norwegian-Americans respond to these challenges? What are the challenges often facing ethnic entrepreneurs, and how did the Norwegian-American entrepreneurs respond to these difficulties? Why did so many of the Norwegian-American business owners/managers become successful? Was being a part of the Norwegian ethnic community an advantage for the fishermen? Did the Norwegian participation in the king crab fishery differ from that of other ethnic groups? How important was social capital for the Norwegian-American fishermen? These questions will be answered by the use of theories on ethnic business and entrepreneurship.

## **1.3 Delimitations and definitions**

As already mentioned, there are three kinds of king crab of commercial importance in Alaska. Of them, the red king crab has clearly been the most important since the

beginning of the fishery. For the sake of simplicity, the term “king crab” will be applied to cover all three varieties.

Two other variations of crab are of commercial importance in Alaska as well, the tanner crab (*Chionoecetes bairdi*) and the opelio crab (*Chionoecetes opilio*). In the period covered by this thesis, the fisheries for these species were minor compared to the king crab fishery. Nevertheless, it was the same vessels and fishermen who performed the fishing, typically out of the king crab season. The tanner crab and opelio crab fisheries will not be investigated here, even though the opelio crab fishery became more important than the king crab fishery in the late 1980s.

The period to be covered in this thesis is from 1920 to 1983. 1920 was the first year American fishermen caught king crab for commercial purposes, while 1983 marked the end of the king crab boom in Alaska. The fishery carried on after 1983, but has never recovered to its previous heights. The focus of the thesis will be from 1960 to 1983, as those were the years when the fishery was most important in terms of total catch and value.

The group of fishermen in the king crab fishery with ties to Norway was not homogenous. The term “Norwegian-American” will be used to describe the participants, but it needs to be clarified.

One of the main differences among the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery regards their country of birth. Some of the fishermen were born in Norway, while the others were born in the United States. The ones who were born in the U.S. were typically second or third generation Americans with parents or grandparents from Norway. This group fits well under the term “Norwegian-American.” They were Americans with Norwegian origins.

There are some differences among the fishermen who were born in Norway, not all of whom fit well under the category “Norwegian-American.” The majority of the participants born in Norway settled in the United States, at least for a period of time. Some of them went back to Norway after years in the fishery, while most stayed in the United States permanently. All of those who settled in the United States could be

described as “Norwegian-American.” However, a few of the participants born in Norway did not settle in the United States at all. Typically, they traveled back and forth to work in the U.S. fisheries on a seasonal basis. These people do not fit into the “Norwegian-American” category very well. Even though they worked in the United States, they remained Norwegian. The two reasons they are described as Norwegian-Americans are, first, because they are a marginal group, and second, for simplicity’s sake.

## **1.4 Literature and sources**

In this section, literature will be organized into two categories, topical literature and theoretical literature. The topical literature consists of books and written materials that somehow relate to the topic of Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery. The theoretical literature includes published materials about ethnic business and entrepreneurship. Much of the information used in the thesis comes from sources other than scholarly literature. The fundamental sources contributing to this thesis are newspapers, databases and interviews.

### **1.4.1 Literature**

#### **Topical literature**

Norwegian immigration to the United States began in the early nineteenth century. A number of historians have researched this field, but Ingrid Semmingsen and Odd Lovoll have written some of the most respected books in this regard. Both have written about Norwegian immigrants settling the Pacific Coast and becoming involved in the Pacific Coast fisheries. Lovoll mentions the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery as well, but only with a few sentences.

Robert J. Browning’s *Fisheries of the North Pacific: History, Species, Gear & Processes* (1974) is among the most detailed accounts to cover the history of all the North Pacific fisheries. The section about the king crab fishery is relatively brief, but

he includes a fairly detailed description of the evolution of gear and boats used in the fishery.

Norwegian-American fisherman and historian Sverre Arestad wrote the most detailed presentation of the Norwegian fishermen with the article “Norwegians in the Pacific Coast Fisheries”, published in 1943. This piece made him an authority in the field, and his account is undoubtedly a source for Lovoll and his information about Norwegians in the Pacific Coast fisheries. In 1985, Arestad extended the article and included a few sections about the Norwegian involvement in the king crab fisheries. Here, he dedicates a large portion of his article to the career of a few prominent crab fishermen. Arestad also propose that Norwegians have been the innovators in methods in the king crab fishery, but that others have exploited the Norwegian’s technological advances. Because of that, only a few Norwegian boat owners and fishermen have done well in the king crab fishery. In chapter 3, we will take a closer look on Arestad’s details.

Terje Garvik delivered his master’s thesis, “Karmøy Club of Washington,” in 2006 at the University of Oslo, Norway. Garvik’s thesis tells the story of the establishment and life of the Karmøy Club of Washington, an organization for Norwegian-Americans with origins on the island of Karmøy. Even though Garvik does not say anything explicit about the king crab fishery, his account is still interesting in a number of ways. When the club was established in 1991, nearly all the male members were fishermen, and several of them had been involved in the king crab fishery. Garvik has interviewed a number of them and gives an interesting account of the Norwegian-American community in Seattle. Garvik’s account is useful to get an insight of the Karmøy-group’s situation. He explains why people emigrated from Karmøy and how they adopted to the United States.

In various degrees, materials about the king crab fishery’s history have been written. In 1965, Graham Miller, a master’s student at the University of Alaska, delivered his thesis, “The Development of the King Crab Industry in Alaska up to 1964.” Miller gives a fairly detailed overview of the king crab fishery’s history until 1964. Mansel G. Blackford published *Pioneering a Modern Small Business: Wakefield Seafoods*

*and the Alaskan Frontier* in 1979. This book presents the history of the Wakefield Company, a pioneering king crab company.

“The Red King Crab Fishery of the Southeastern Bering Sea” was published by P. A. Larken et al. in 1992. In this document, the authors focus on the recruitment of new king crab in the Bering Sea and the quota system in place for the fishery. A section on the history of the king crab fishery in the Bering Sea is also included. “Alaska King Crab Historical Document” was issued in 1990 by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. This material includes articles written decades earlier about the early king crab fishery. The articles had not been published before and were written by an anonymous author. “Regional Economic Impact Assessment of the Alaska Snow Crab Fishery Integrated with an International Snow Crab Market Model” was published in 2004 by M. Herrmann et al. In this investigation of the opelio crab fishery, the authors include a section about the history of the Alaskan crab fisheries.

To sum up all these writings, we find that very little is written about the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery. Arestad is the one who includes the most information, but he only briefly mentions the topic along with a few prominent individuals in the fishery. The available writings do not give us a consistent and detailed impression of the Norwegian-American participation in the king crab fishery and need to be supplemented with other sources in order to do so.

### **Theoretical literature**

Theories can be useful tools for researchers in order to limit the scale of their research, sharpen their questions and supply general concepts and categories to guide the interpretation of the material at hand.<sup>11</sup> Even though this thesis is not meant to be primarily theoretical, theories have proven useful to explain the Norwegian-American involvement in the king crab fishery.

In 1990, Roger Waldinger et al. published *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies*. This book is a collection of articles from different scholars

---

<sup>11</sup> Kjeldstadli K. 1999:131

focusing on ethnic business. Here, we find theories developed to understand why some ethnic groups become more successful in business than others. Scholars have suggested that ethnic minorities are disadvantaged compared with the rest of the population. Waldinger explores which strategies ethnic groups employ to make up for these disadvantages. Waldinger's main focus is on ethnic entrepreneurship.

*Immigrant Business: The Economic, Political and Social Environment*, edited by Jan Rath, was published in 2000, and consists of articles from several scholars. In this book, many of the difficulties immigrants face in a new country are identified. Rath's book explores how ethnics adapt to the challenges they face and how they can become successful in a labor market. Jennifer Sequeira and Abdul Rasheed write one of the articles, where they discuss "social capital" in relation to ethnic business. According to them, the idea of social capital can be used to explain an ethnic group's success in business.

The theories in both Waldinger's and Rath's book on ethnic businesses can be used to explain the situation of Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery. Although these theories might not apply perfectly to the situation of Norwegian-Americans, they still apply in many useful ways. As a number of Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery bought boats and became entrepreneurs, Waldinger's theories will be useful to explore the situation of the boat owners. As many Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery were immigrants, Rath's theories about immigrants in a labor market are also relevant.

## **1.4.2 Sources**

### **Newspapers**

Several newspapers covered the fishing industry on the Pacific Coast, and three of them have been particularly useful for this thesis. The stories covered by these newspapers have been essential in the research for this thesis. The newspapers also become a gateway to the past, illustrating the fishing industry at the moment the material was written.

*The Fishermen's News* is a newspaper based in Seattle covering the fishing industry on the West Coast of the United States and Alaska. The newspaper was established in 1945 and is still published today. *The Fisherman's News* is a newspaper for the fishermen, and the journalists seem to have always had strong ties to the fishing community in Seattle. *The Fisherman's News* reported on the construction of nearly all boats built for the West Coast fisheries, including the king crab fishery. The volumes from 1966 to 1981 are available as microfilm from the University of Washington in Seattle. However, there are a number of difficulties with the existing collection of volumes. First of all there are a number of issues missing in all volumes, especially in the early ones. Secondly, every year there are thousands of pages, and it is hard not to overlook some important information. Thirdly, some of the microfilms are of poor quality and are hard to interpret. Nevertheless, *The Fishermen's News* has proved to be the best available source on the crab boats that were built. Furthermore, much of the information collected from *The Fisherman's News* is backed up by other sources, such as the participants in the king crab fishery.

*Pacific Fisherman* was a newspaper published in Seattle covering the fishing industry on the Pacific Coast of the United States. *Pacific Fisherman* began in 1903 and went out of print in 1965, when it merged with *National Fisherman*. *National Fisherman* covered the entire fishing industry in the United States, but focused mostly on the East Coast fisheries. The yearbooks of the *Pacific Fisherman* are available at the University of Washington Libraries. Included in these records are yearly summaries of each of the different fisheries on the Pacific Coast. The king crab fishery is mentioned from 1956.

The last newspaper of importance is *Alaska Fisherman's Journal*, published in Juneau, Alaska, from 1977. The paper was issued monthly and covered the fishing industry in Alaska. In 2005, *Alaska Fisherman's Journal* was folded into *National Fisherman*. Volumes from 1977 to 1981 are available in microfilm format at the University of Washington Libraries. *Alaska Fisherman's Journal* has proved useful for double-checking the information from *The Fisherman's News*.

## **Fishery statistics from the National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS)**

NMFS, a division of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is the federal agency responsible for the stewardship of the nation's living marine resources and their habitat. NMFS takes care of the management, conservation and protection of living resources within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (water three to 200 mile offshore).<sup>12</sup> NMFS has recorded the catch of each species, including king crab, in the United States since 1950. NMFS provides information about how much king crab was harvested each year, the areas in which the crab was harvested, and the value of the catch for each year of the fishery. The statistics are also useful in comparing the king crab fishery with other fisheries in Alaska and the United States. The database is available online at the NMFS homepage.<sup>13</sup>

## **Interviews**

The use of personal interviews with those involved in the king crab fishery at various stages has several advantages and has contributed much to this thesis. Very little is written about Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery, and the participants themselves can contribute information about specific events. The details they give can contradict or support the established understanding of events. Furthermore, information about the Norwegian-American community may well be better explained through a personal conversation, rather than written material. Meeting the participants in person gave me a much better understanding of their situation, which was helpful working with this topic.

The first interviews conducted for the thesis were with Harald Mannes and Jan Gunnar Fagerland on Karmøy. Both traveled to the United States in the 1960s, and involved themselves in the scallop fishery and the king crab fishery. As for fieldwork in Seattle, I met with several Norwegian-Americans who participated in the king crab fishery in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The Norwegian-born fishermen include Magne Nes, Kåre Ness, Einar Langesæter, Gunnleiv Løklingsholm, and John Sjong. Interviews with second generation Americans, those with parents from

---

<sup>12</sup> NMFS, [cited March 18, 2008] <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> NMFS, [cited March 16, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>



Norway, included Buddy Bernstein, Morris Hansen and Konrad Uri. Additionally, I spoke with the American James Cole, a designer of king crab vessels during the 1960s.

Although there are several advantages using interviews as a source of information, there are also several challenges. Knut Kjeldstadli is among the leading Norwegian scholars in the field of source criticism and oral sources. According to him, informants are like pieces in a puzzle.<sup>14</sup> The more informants the researcher makes use of, the easier it will be to see the entire picture. Additionally, it is vital that the informants are independent from each other. An informant who only re-tells what the researcher has heard from someone else cannot be relied upon. The details gathered from informants should be weighed against other information, and if there is conflicting information, the researcher needs to apply critical judgment.

Perhaps the most elementary issue with respect to oral sources is the possibility of misremembering or forgetting. The informants are re-telling events they experienced years ago, and it can be hard to remember the events correctly. However, it is not always obvious what a person will or will not remember. Some people remember what happened 40 years ago better than what happened a week ago. A typical problem is that informants cannot always recall the exact sequence of events. Furthermore, people often forget dates and names.<sup>15</sup> The way informants remember events can also be affected by the lapse of time after the event. Episodes happening to the informant himself, or others, may blend into his own understanding of the past. Kjeldstadli also proposes that a historian should rely more on uninvited information given by the informant. If the researcher call upon details, some informants tend to answer questions he does not have the answer to.

As there are several specific issues associated with the use of interviews, the historian should always use general source criticism to investigate the value of an oral source. The consistency of the information needs to be verified, and the details need to be cross-checked with other material and other accounts.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Hodne B., K. Kjeldstadli og G. Rosander 1981:68

<sup>15</sup> Hodne B., K. Kjeldstadli og G. Rosander 1981:70

<sup>16</sup> Hodne B., K. Kjeldstadli og G. Rosander 1981:83

## **Chapter 2:**

# **The History of the American King Crab Fishery**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will describe the history of the king crab fishery in Alaska. The underlying question in this chapter will be: How has the American king crab fishery in Alaska developed from the early days up to today? Complementing this matter, the chapter will seek to answer more specific subjects. How did the fishery start? When did the fishery become one of Alaska's most important? Why is the king crab fishery in the 1970s often compared to the gold rushes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? What sort of technological progress occurred with respect to gear, equipment and boats in the fishery? Who were the fishermen and the companies, and where did they come from?

This chapter is a vital part of this thesis, and in many ways lays the foundation for the issues that will be dealt with in chapters 3 and 4. A detailed overview of the American king crab fishery's history will give the background that is needed to fully understand the topics of the next chapters. Without this detailed presentation, the rest of the thesis would have no context to relate to, and would be of little value for someone without deep knowledge of the fishery. Additionally, a complete outline of the king crab fishery's history has not yet been written. Material has been written about the different periods of the fishery's history, but this will be the most detailed account to cover the entire period.

## **2.2 The beginnings of the king crab fishery in Alaska (1920-1959)**

The American king crab fishery had a difficult start. The industry would not reach a high level of importance until the 1960s. The obstacles for the fishery were many, especially the fierce competition of the foreign king crab industry.

### **2.2.1 The foreign crab fleets in Alaska**

The Japanese and the Russians were the first to fish for king crab in Alaska on a commercial basis. In some ways these nations paved the way for the Americans joining the fishery later. The Japanese and Russians proved there were substantial numbers of crab to be fished, and demonstrated the quality product being made from the king crab. Furthermore, they were the first ones to sell the product to the United States, thus creating a market for king crab there.

#### **The Japanese king crab fishery in the Bering Sea**

Japan was the first nation to develop an industry based on the king crab.<sup>17</sup> The Japanese originally began fishing for king crab in the Sea of Japan, with a processing plant at Hokkaido, Japan, in 1892. The bulk of the crab was sold in Japan, but beginning in 1906, some crab was sold to the United States as well. During the first three decades the fishery had an annual production of around 200,000 cases of canned crab.<sup>18</sup> In the 1920s the Japanese expanded their operations to the eastern Bering Sea and used factory ships to process the harvest. This resulted in an increased production, which reached 400,000 cases a year by 1930.

In the 1930s the Japanese king crab fishery in the eastern Bering Sea was intensified. They introduced into the area twelve catcher vessels and a factory ship. The fishing was done by the use of tangle nets. During World War II, Japanese king crab fishing was eliminated, and eventually all Japanese processing vessels were destroyed.<sup>19</sup>

In 1953, eight years after the war, the Japanese re-entered the eastern Bering Sea king crab fishery. The fishery had an annual production of around 60,000 cases until 1959. From 1959 the fishery had a sharp increase, reaching a record high of nearly 250,000 cases in 1964, relating to nearly six million king crabs.<sup>20</sup> From that year, the fishery declined until 1974, when the Japanese were forced out of the Bering Sea. The reason for this was the United States' ratification of the International Convention of the

---

<sup>17</sup> Miller G. 1965:6

<sup>18</sup> Miller G. 1965:6

<sup>19</sup> Miller G. 1965:7

<sup>20</sup> Larkin P. A., Scott B., and Trites A. W. 1990:14

Continental Shelf in 1964, which declared that all crab on the U.S. continental shelf belonged to the U.S. In this convention, Japan and the United States agreed that the American fleet would gradually displace the Japanese crab fleet until 1974, when the Japanese crab fishery in U.S. waters would stop altogether.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Russian king crab fishery in the Bering Sea**

The Russians first began to fish for king crab in the eastern Bering Sea in 1928.<sup>22</sup> In the first year they employed two factory ships and an unknown number of catcher boats, and processed 35,000 cases of king crab. The Russians used small vessels with trawl to catch king crab, each delivering to a factory ship. The catch increased during the 1930s, averaging 2,250,000 pounds of crab annually from 1930 to 1939.<sup>23</sup>

The Russians halted their king crab fishery in the Bering Sea during World War II, but re-entered the fishery in 1959. They intensified their effort in the early 1960s and caught three million pounds of king crab in 1961. The Russian catch remained steady with over two million pounds annually, before dropping in the late 1960s. 1970 was the last year of Russian king crab fishery in the Bering Sea, with a catch of only 200,000 pounds of crab.<sup>24</sup>

#### **2.2.2 The beginnings of the American king crab fishery**

American fishermen began fishing king crab on a small scale in Seldovia, Alaska, in 1920. For the following twenty years, the fishery remained spotty and weak, and only a few cases were produced annually in the towns of Seldovia, Kodiak and Hoonah.<sup>25</sup> The American king crab fishery was pioneered by salmon purse seiner fishermen, who supplemented their income by fishing for crab in the winter when the salmon were not running. The crab was harvested from areas adjacent to the fishermen's own

---

<sup>21</sup> Larkin P. A., Scott B., and Trites A. W. 1990:14

<sup>22</sup> Miller G. 1965:10

<sup>23</sup> Miller G. 1965:10

<sup>24</sup> Larkin P. A., Scott B., and Trites A. W. 1990:14

<sup>25</sup> Miller G. 1965:13

villages, because they did not have the proper facilities to keep the crab alive on board their vessels for any length of time.<sup>26</sup>

In 1940, the U.S. Congress approved a special appropriation authorizing the Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct for one year a “technical, economic and biological investigation” of the king crab fishery off the coast of Alaska.<sup>27</sup> Objectives were to “locate the areas of abundance, and to develop satisfactory methods for taking and canning king crabs.” They did not find very good fishing, but nevertheless concluded that “this fishery may well supplement the established salmon industry.”

Even though the report was unenthusiastic about the possibilities of a larger scale American king crab fishery, some Alaskan fishermen thought they saw possibilities in the king crab. Among them were members of the Wakefield family, who processed herring at a Kodiak Island plant, and the Suryan family, who worked in salmon operations on the south end of Kodiak Island. Both families began king crab fishing shortly after World War II.

### **Issues for the American king crab fishery**

The American king crab fishery did not grow into a significant industry until the 1950s. A number of factors were responsible for the late development of the American king crab industry. Most of the difficulties had to do with the Americans’ lack of experience in the fishery. One segment of the problem was the fact that the Americans knew little about fishing the king crab.<sup>28</sup> For instance, Americans first used pots intended for the much smaller Dungeness crab to catch king crab. This gave a low catch per pot compared to the bigger pots used later in the fishery. Furthermore, the fishermen did not have the proper boats and gear to catch the crab. The Japanese and Russians used relatively efficient tangle nets and trawl to fish for crab. Another concern was the Americans’ ignorance of the king crabs’ migratory habits, which made it hard to know where to fish.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Miller G. 1965:14

<sup>27</sup> *Pacific Fisherman*. June 1965.

<sup>28</sup> Miller G. 1965:13

<sup>29</sup> Miller G. 1965:13

The other segment of the problem had to do with the eventual product and the marketing. The market for king crab in the United States was very weak, and the Japanese already had the majority of the market. The Japanese king crab industry was more mature and managed to sell the product at a lower price than the Americans. The American king crab industry had problems refining the product, which often resulted in a lower quality product than the Japanese. Another factor for the late development of the American king crab industry was the exceedingly healthy salmon fishery, which already provided adequate employment opportunities for Alaska's fishermen.<sup>30</sup>

### **An emerging industry**

Beginning in the late 1940s, a few companies started to explore the possibilities in the king crab fishery. The most notable of these was the Wakefield Company, started by Lowell Wakefield in 1946.<sup>31</sup> Instead of fishing by pots near land like the earlier king crab fishermen, Wakefield used trawlers to fish in the Bering Sea, much like the Russians. One of the most ambitious ventures in the 1940s was the introduction of the factory ship *Pacific Explorer*, owned by Nick Bez. In 1948 the *Pacific Explorer* worked the Bering Sea with a dozen draggers supplying her crab. She packed 17,000 cases of crabmeat, but failed to show a profit, and was never again used in the king crab fishery.<sup>32</sup>

---

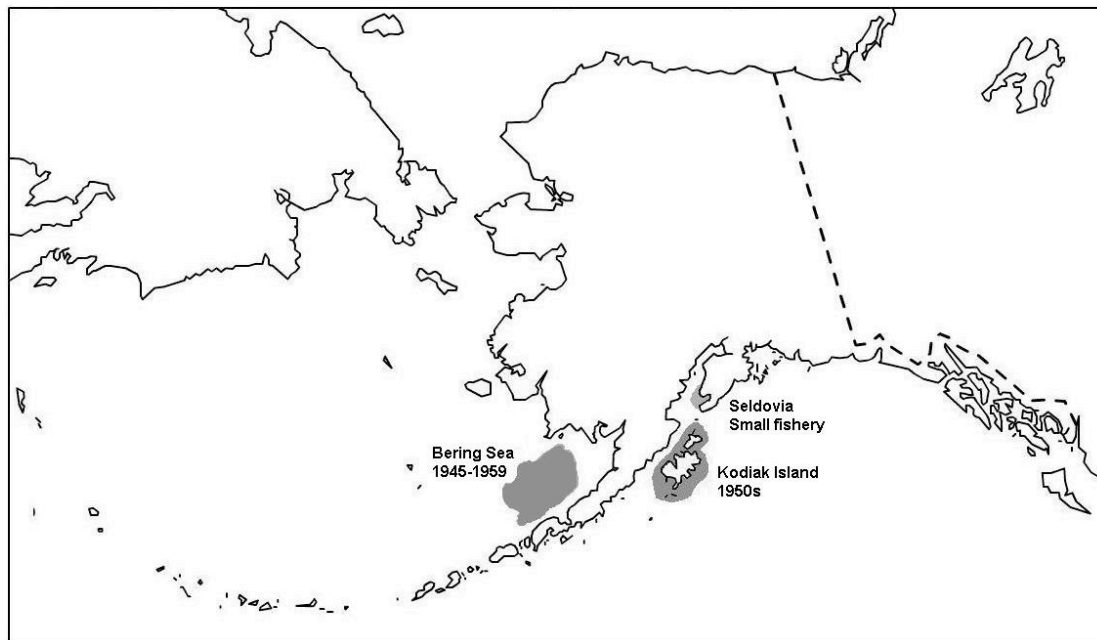
<sup>30</sup> Miller G. 1965:14

<sup>31</sup> The Wakefield Company changed name several times during the 1950s and 1960s. Here, "Wakefield Company" will be used, as that is the name the company is commonly referred to as by the literature and the fishermen.

<sup>32</sup> Anonymous Author 1992:5

**Figure 1.**

Areas of the American king crab fishery, 1920-1959



Source: *The development of the king crab industry in Alaska up to 1964.*<sup>33 34</sup>

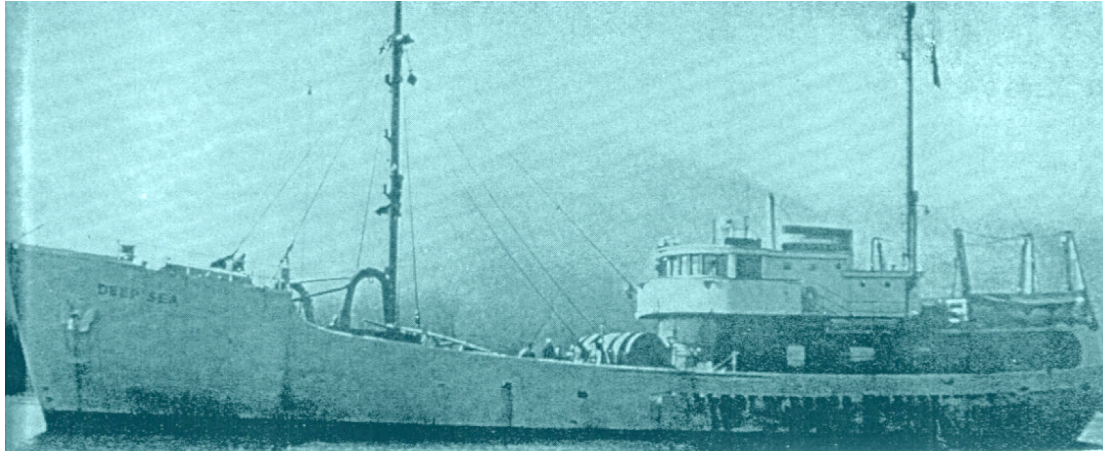
### 2.2.3 The Wakefield Company

The Wakefield Company was started in 1945, then by the name Deep Sea Trawlers. As most of the companies involved in the Alaskan fisheries, the Wakefield Company was based in Seattle. The founder, Lowell Wakefield, had gained first hand knowledge of king crab while he worked at his father's herring plant at Kodiak Island. His plan was to build a trawler that could both fish and process king crab, thus being more efficient and competitive than the earlier king crab operations. The 141-foot trawler *Deep Sea* was completed in 1947, and began fishing in the Bering Sea the same year. The first couple of years proved to be tough for the Wakefield Company. They had trouble finding a market for the product and they did not find as much crab as anticipated. In 1948 the company was near bankruptcy and survived only by the will of its creditors.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Miller G. 1965:11

<sup>34</sup> Outline map [gathered May 3, 2008], <http://maps.hist-geo.com/Alaska/Outline/>

<sup>35</sup> Blackford M. 1979:14



Picture: The first American vessel built for the king crab fishery, the trawler/processor *Deep Sea*.<sup>36</sup>

The year 1949 was a major turning point for the Wakefield Company, as they found huge schools of king crab, and for the first year made a profit. Over the next three years *Deep Sea* produced good numbers of king crab, and by 1952 “the corner had been turned” for the company.<sup>37</sup> In the next decade the business changed its name to Wakefield’s Deep Sea Trawlers through the acquisition of Lowell Wakefield’s father’s company, Wakefield Fisheries. The company kept growing, purchasing more vessels and production facilities, and emerged as the leading king crab company in the business. As the king crab fishery in the U.S. matured, more fishermen became involved in the fishery and new areas were explored. The company abandoned the strategy of having catcher-processor vessels and started to process crab on different plants around Alaska, with fishermen delivering to them. By 1962, the king crab fishery was a multi-million dollar industry in Alaska, and Wakefield had 40 percent of the market.<sup>38</sup> The company managed to be the leader of the industry until 1968, but with a gradually decreasing market share. In 1968 Wakefield was bought by Hunt-Wesson.

The Wakefield Company became the first successful business in the king crab industry. There are many factors for its success. First of all, the company was able to fish efficiently with the trawler *Deep Sea*. Secondly, the company’s effort in marketing their product created a market for their goods in the eastern United States. Thirdly, the company had high quality control and could sell the product for a fairly

---

<sup>36</sup> Picture published in the *Pacific Fisherman*, June 1965.

<sup>37</sup> Blackford M. 1979:19

<sup>38</sup> Blackford M. 1979:62



good price. Finally, Lowell Wakefield's contacts in the fishing industry made it possible to overcome the financial problems in the company's first few years.<sup>39</sup> Because of his company's effort, Lowell Wakefield is today known as the grandfather of the king crab industry.<sup>40</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Boats, gear, equipment and restrictions**

The vessels fishing for king crab in the early days consisted of boats of great variety, from the modern factory trawler *Deep Sea* to small salmon seiners. The *Deep Sea* was the only vessel originally built for the king crab fishery; many of the others were converted for the fishery. The vessels used in the Bering Sea were trawlers, often equipped with processing facilities. The salmon seiners used pots to catch crab, and operated closer to shore and processing plants. The larger vessels usually fished for king crab year-round, while the smaller boats participated in the winter months.

As one might expect, the equipment used on the different types of vessels varied widely. The trawlers often had relatively sophisticated equipment. They used a bottom trawl to catch the crab, and sorted and processed the crab on board. The catch was preserved in large freezers on board. From the mid-1950s it became usual to have a radar on board as well.<sup>41</sup> During the 1950s, some boats installed tanks to keep the crab alive for a longer period of time. However, many boats did not have such equipment and had to fish close to the processing facilities to deliver the crab in a satisfactory condition. Furthermore, different types of pots were used in the early days of the king crab fishery. By 1950, the first modern king crab pots were built.<sup>42</sup> Six feet square and three feet deep, the pots outfished the round Dungeness pots many fishermen were using, and this design, with some small modifications, became standard for king crab pots over the next decade.

In the king crab fishery it has always been illegal to catch female and undersized crab. This is because of the bigger size of the males, and to ensure the recruiting of juvenile crab. The carapace of the males had to be at least 5 ¾ inches wide until the late

---

<sup>39</sup> Blackford M. 1979:18

<sup>40</sup> Thorstenson, B. 1996, *Pots of gold: the profit and the sorrow*, video documentary

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Blackford M. 1979:57

1960s.<sup>43</sup> The next restriction imposed on the king crab fishery in Alaskan waters was the prohibition of tangle nets to catch king crab in 1955.<sup>44</sup> It proved impossible to carry out tangle net operations without destroying great numbers of female and undersized crab. Although American fishermen had experimented with tangle nets in the 1940s, almost no Americans were using them by 1955. The Japanese continued their tangle net operations, as they were not under American law.

### **2.2.5 Product**

There were two major products made from king crab before 1959: different types of frozen king crab and canned king crab. The frozen sector was by far the largest, consisting of three divisions: frozen crabmeat, frozen crab sections, and whole frozen crab. In 1959, approximately 80 percent of the king crab processed in Alaska was sold frozen.<sup>45</sup> The Wakefield Company was the largest American producer of frozen king crab. Production of canned king crab started as early as in the 1920s in the United States, but problems with canning techniques and quality control resulted in the product lagging behind the frozen sector during the 1950s.

### **2.2.6 The situation of the king crab fishery in 1959**

In the *Pacific Fisherman Yearbook* of 1956 it is noted that 37,000 cases of canned king crab were produced and an unknown amount of king crab was frozen.<sup>46</sup> This was the first year the king crab catch was reported by Pacific Fisherman. It is also noted that the American king crab catch for the first time exceeded the Dungeness crab in value. This was a significant development, as the Dungeness crab fishery was a traditional fishery on the West Coast of the United States, and for the first year the king crab fishery was the most important crab fishery on the West Coast.

The *Pacific Fisherman's Yearbook* of 1958 reports a bigger harvest of king crab than Dungeness crab in terms of both catch and value. The king crab fishery was concentrated in four different areas: the Bering Sea (where the Japanese and American trawlers with trawls and tangle nets dominated), Kodiak, Sand Point-Cold

---

<sup>43</sup> Browning R. 1974:21

<sup>44</sup> Miller G. 1965:60

<sup>45</sup> Miller G. 1965:26

<sup>46</sup> *Pacific Fisherman's Yearbook 1956*. 1957:175

Bay, and Cook Inlet (where smaller vessels fished with trawls and pots).<sup>47</sup> The *Pacific Fisherman's Yearbook* of 1959 reports an increasing interest in the Kodiak area.<sup>48</sup>

As the Wakefield Company was growing and making profit, the American king crab industry was developing to a much more significant level than the pre-war fishery. By 1959 the fishermen caught nearly 20 million pounds of king crab every year.<sup>49</sup> The fishery had established itself as the most important crab fishery on the West Coast of the United States. Furthermore, fishermen were enthusiastic about the possibilities for the fishery, and many companies had invested in the fishery.

Looking back at the situation in 1959, the years after World War II had been remarkably important for the American king crab fishery. The basic pioneering had been done, and the fishery stood on the brink of rapid growth. Even in 1959, it was a healthy fishery with good prospects. Nevertheless, the fishery was minor compared to the most important fisheries in Alaska, the salmon and halibut fisheries.

### **2.3 The king crab fishery develops into a major fishery in Alaska (1960-1969)**

The early 1960s were the years when the king crab industry grew into one of the most significant fisheries in the United States. In the first half of the 1960s, the fishery attracted new participants, and the harvest increased substantially. In 1967 the king crab fishery was set back by a crash of stock in the Kodiak area, but the fishery would still be healthy by the end of the 1960s. In many ways the first half of the 1960s was a lot like what would happen ten years later in Bristol Bay and the Bering Sea, only on a smaller scale.

---

<sup>47</sup> *Pacific Fisherman's Yearbook 1958*. 1959:187

<sup>48</sup> *Pacific Fisherman's Yearbook 1959*. 1960:222

<sup>49</sup> NMFS, [cited: February 1, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

### 2.3.1 Kodiak becomes the U.S. king crab capital

Kodiak Island is one of the largest islands in Alaska, based in the Gulf of Alaska. The largest city on the island is the City of Kodiak, where most of the king crab industry on the island was based. Since the early 1800s, Kodiak's economy was based primarily on the fishing industry.<sup>50 51</sup> As in other parts of Alaska, large scale processing of salmon on a commercial basis began in Kodiak City in the late 1800s. The salmon industry based in Kodiak became increasingly important during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and by 1959, Kodiak was the largest fishing port in the United States in terms of ex-vessel value.<sup>52</sup>

The crab grounds around Kodiak had been explored by different operators in the 1940s, but the crab population was described as “small.”<sup>53</sup> However, in the 1950s, when the crab fishery was intensified, it became clear that the Kodiak was well suited to support a king crab industry. Large numbers of king crab were found, and the Kodiak area was especially attractive for crab fishermen because of the closeness to shore, a large support industry and the relatively calm waters. By 1954, Kodiak was the major king crab production area in Alaska.

---

<sup>50</sup> Official Visitors Guide, Kodiak, [Cited February 14] [http://www.kodiak.org/fishing\\_boom.html](http://www.kodiak.org/fishing_boom.html)

<sup>51</sup> “Kodiak” refers to “Kodiak Island”.

<sup>52</sup> NMFS, [cited: March 12, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous Author 1992:3

**Figure 2.**

The catch of the American king crab fishery in Alaska, 1960-1970



Source: NMFS.<sup>54</sup>

The Kodiak king crab harvest was around 20 million pounds in 1960.<sup>55</sup> This accounted for two-thirds of the total American production. The production rose during the early 1960s and reached nearly 40 million pounds in 1963. The city of Kodiak was hit by an earthquake and a subsequent tidal wave in March 1964, which caused huge damage to boats and processors in the crab industry.<sup>56</sup> Even so, the fishermen managed to increase production. 1965 became the best year for the Kodiak king crab industry with a production of 94.4 million pounds. In the late 1960s the production decreased, and in 1970 the catch was only a little over 10 million pounds.

### 2.3.2 Other major king crab fishing areas in Alaska

The Kodiak king crab fishery had a dominant role in the Alaskan king crab industry until the late 1960s. Nevertheless, there were other places in Alaska where the fishery was healthy. By the late 1960s, some of these regions were even more prominent than the Kodiak fishery. In 1965, Kodiak Island had nine out of the sixteen king crab

<sup>54</sup> NMFS [cited: April 14, 2008], <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

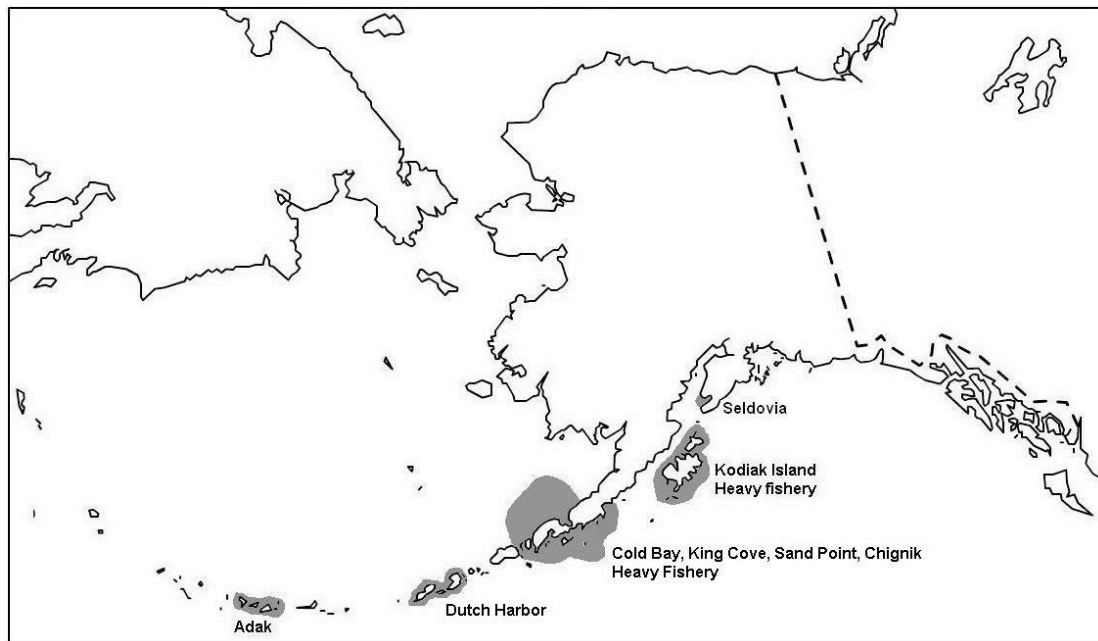
<sup>55</sup> Herrmann M., Greenberg J., Hamel C. and H. Geier 2004:16

<sup>56</sup> Anonymous Author 1992:6

processing plants in Alaska. Of those nine plants, two were located in Port Wakefield and Alitak, with the rest of them in the city of Kodiak. Seldovia had two plants, while Sand Point, Squaw Harbor, King Cove, Cold Bay, and Unalaska had one each. Additionally, a few floating processors operated in Adak.<sup>57</sup> The processors were spread along the Aleutian Islands, and practically all the fishing was done in the area between Seldovia and Adak.

**Figure 3.**

Areas of the American king crab fishery, 1960-1969



Source: *Alaska's fisheries atlas*.<sup>58</sup>

When the catch of the Kodiak king crab fishery declined during the late 1960s, other regions in Alaska grew in importance. From 1967, the Kodiak harvest accounted for less than 50 percent of the total king crab harvest in Alaska and by 1970, only 25 percent of the king crab catch was caught around Kodiak.<sup>59</sup>

The most important region of growth was the western Aleutian area of Chignik, Adak and Unalaska. The catch here expanded rapidly during the 1960s, reaching a peak of 63.2 million pounds in the 1966/1967 season.<sup>60</sup> This accounted for nearly 50 percent

<sup>57</sup> *Pacific Fisherman*. June 1965.

<sup>58</sup> McLean R. and K. Delaney 1978

<sup>59</sup> Herrmann M., Greenberg J., Hamel C. and H. Geier 2004:16

<sup>60</sup> McLean R. and K. Delaney 1978:21

of the total harvest of king crab in Alaska. This fishery remained the largest king crab fishery until the Bering Sea/Bristol Bay fishery took over in the early 1970s.

Some crab boats fished around Kodiak year-round, but from the middle 1960s it became popular to go further west over the course of the season. Boats started to fish in the Kodiak area in the summer months and went west during the fall and winter months. As a result, they were able to fish where the numbers of crab were high and the competition for the crab was not as strong.

### **2.3.3 Economic performance of the king crab fishery**

The increase in the king crab catch during the early 1960s resulted in a boost of the economic performance of the fishery. It grew from around \$5 million in 1960 to an ex-vessel value of \$20 million in 1965.<sup>61</sup> The price of king crab was 15 cents per pound in 1965. When the catch declined during the late 1960s, the price of crab rose slightly and the crab fleet set a 1960s record of nearly \$30 million in ex-vessel value in 1967.<sup>62</sup> The price of king crab for the fishermen was around 25 cents per pound in 1967.

Compared to the economic heydays of the 1970s, the 1960s performance is not impressive, but it was in the 1960s that the king crab industry grew to one of the most successful in Alaska. The king crab fishery outperformed the long-established halibut fishery, almost reaching the heights of the traditionally most important fishery in Alaska, the salmon fishery.<sup>63</sup> The growing value of the fishery generated great results for the companies involved in the industry, such as the Wakefield Company. Furthermore, it meant growing wages for the fishermen involved. For the first time, the king crab fishery proved a lucrative opportunity for Alaskan fishermen; several of them switched from other fisheries and started to fish for crab.

---

<sup>61</sup> Herrmann M., Greenberg J., Hamel C. and H. Geier 2004:15

<sup>62</sup> NMFS, [cited: April 8, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

<sup>63</sup> *Pacific Fisherman*. January 1963., and NMFS, [cited: March 19, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

### 2.3.4 Boats, gear, equipment and restrictions

The majority of vessels used in the king crab fishery were boats originally constructed for other fisheries. Most of these were converted trawlers and salmon purse seiners. To participate in the crab fishery, a boat needed under deck tanks which could be used to store live crab. A live tank had to be able to complete an empty-full cycle every 28 minutes to be effective.<sup>64</sup> This was necessary in order to maintain the oxygen level high enough to keep the crab alive. Converting a vessel for the king crab fishery was a big operation; the cost was around \$100,000, which included the cost of the gear needed.<sup>65</sup> Smaller shipyards in Alaska and Washington performed most of the conversions. By the end of the 1960s, larger vessels were built especially for the king crab industry. These boats were all-steel vessels, typically over 80 feet.

The size of the boats participating in the crab fishery in the 1960s ranged from 40 feet to over 100 feet. Nevertheless, most of the fleet consisted of small vessels of around 50 feet. One reason for this was the many salmon seiners used in the fishery, which by Alaskan law had a limit of 50 feet.<sup>66</sup> This limit was long-established and imposed to prevent large operations from conflicting with the established salmon fleet, which consisted of mostly small-scale local fishermen.

By 1960 most of the crab fleet in Alaska used pots to fish for crab. The pots were typically seven by seven footers with a height of 36 inches, constructed specifically for the king crab fishery. In the beginning these pots were hauled by hand, but in the early 1960s it became standard to haul the pots with a power block. The power block was originally invented for other fisheries, but was soon adapted to the king crab fishery. The Seattle-based company Marco was the industry leader in this respect and supplied most of the crab fleet with power blocks. The power block proved highly successful in the crab fishery, easing the work for the fishermen.

Electrical and guidance equipment also played important roles in the king crab fishery. Both a recording depth finder and a radar set to find the location of the pots

---

<sup>64</sup> Miller G. 1965:56

<sup>65</sup> Miller G. 1965:57

<sup>66</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. October 1966.



and the boat were standard on crab vessels.<sup>67</sup> Boats fishing in areas offshore from Kodiak needed a loran as well. A loran is a long-range navigation system in which position is determined from the intervals between signal pulses received from widely spaced radio transmitters. The electrical equipment was not always reliable during the 1960s because of the rough weather in Alaska.<sup>68</sup>

In 1960, Alaska fishery regulations prohibited of the use of trawls for king crab fishing around Kodiak.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the use of more than 30 pots by an individual vessel was prohibited. These two regulations were designed to restrict the larger vessels and to encourage Alaska residents to engage in the fishery. In 1961, the ban on the use of trawl was expanded to other prominent king crab grounds.<sup>70</sup> The limit on the number of pots on an individual vessel was dropped in 1964. As a result, larger vessels, such as those built in the late 1960s, had a greater chance of doing well in the fishery.

There were no restrictions on the period fishermen were allowed to fish for crab in the early 1960s. The year-round king crab boats only stopped fishing for some months in the spring to allow the crab to molt. During these months, the king crab had soft shells and did not have any commercial value.

Because of the poor performance of the king crab fishery in the late 1960s, the limit on the size of the crabs was raised to seven inches in the Bering Sea in 1969.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, fishing for king crab was restricted to a five-month period, from August 15<sup>th</sup> to January 15<sup>th</sup>, in the Aleutian Islands and all coastal waters to and including the Kodiak region.<sup>72</sup> Other areas experienced restrictions as well, including the Cook Inlet region, where scientists tried a quota regulation of 4.5 million pounds per year.

Overall, the regulations imposed during the 1960s show an increasing trend of government involvement in the king crab fishery. This trend was especially fueled by

---

<sup>67</sup> Miller G. 1965:57

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007.

<sup>69</sup> *Pacific Fisherman*. January 1961.

<sup>70</sup> Miller G. 1965:62

<sup>71</sup> Browning R. 1974:20

<sup>72</sup> Anonymous Author 1992:11

the downward trend of the king crab catch in the latter half of the 1960s, and the concern for the recruitment of juvenile crab.

### **2.3.5 Product**

As the king crab harvest was going up in the early 1960s, processors were able to create a market for the products they made. The majority of the king crab was sold in urban areas, such as New York City, Boston, Chicago and Seattle.<sup>73</sup>

As in the 1950s, the frozen and the canned king crab products were the most popular. However, in 1959, some processors experimented with fresh king crab as well. The production of fresh king crab grew during the 1960s, but remained at approximately 1 percent of all king crab produced.<sup>74</sup> It was the canned sector of crab that increased the most during the early 1960s. Several plants canning salmon jumped into the king crab industry and started to produce canned crab as well. The problems connected to the canned product had been overcome by the early 1960s, and the quality was excellent. However, the bulk of the king crab was still frozen, especially since the frozen crab meat sector was growing during the 1960s.

### **2.3.6 Companies and fishermen**

As the king crab fishery grew, it drew the attention of already established seafood companies in Alaska. Pacific American Fisheries joined the fishery in the late 1950s and grew to one of the biggest producers of king crab products during the 1960s. By 1958, Pacific American Fisheries was the leading manufacturer of canned king crab.<sup>75</sup> Pan-Alaska was another seafood giant that intensified its efforts in the king crab industry during the 1960s. Other companies were established exclusively for the king crab industry during the early 1950s. Among the major ones were Alaska King Crab Co. and King Crab Inc. Nevertheless, the Wakefield Company remained the market leader.

---

<sup>73</sup> Anonymous Author 1992:16

<sup>74</sup> Miller G. 1965:29

<sup>75</sup> *Pacific Fisherman*. January 1959.

In the early 1960s, most of the fishermen participating in the king crab fishery were locals from Alaska.<sup>76</sup> Independent fishermen owned most of the boats used in the king crab fishery, and many skippers recruited their crew from their local communities. It became increasingly popular for the Alaskan salmon fishermen to take part in the king crab fishery in the winter months.

From the mid-1960s, other fishermen also began joining the king crab fishery. In the fishery communities in the United States, all had heard of the lucrative king crab fishery going on in Alaska and many wanted to give it a try. In particular, fishermen in the Seattle area joined the fishery because of the historical closeness between the fishing communities in Seattle and Alaska. This tendency grew stronger in the mid-1960s, and by the end of the 1960s a great part of the fishermen involved in the king crab fishery had some sort of contact with Seattle.

### **2.3.7 The situation of the king crab fishery in 1969**

The condition of the king crab fishery in the late 1960s was not as good as in previous years. The total catch and profit of the industry had been dropping since the mid-1960s, and the prospects did not seem positive. The Kodiak fishery had nearly collapsed and was producing only a fraction of what it had done five years earlier. The promising crab grounds in the Aleutian Islands showed a downward trend as well.

Even so, the king crab fishery was still healthy, producing nearly 60 million pounds in 1969. The catch was much lower than the result in the mid-1960s, but still greater than in the beginning of the decade. Furthermore, new specialized crab vessels started to enter the fishery in the late 1960s. These boats were capable of fishing in harsh conditions and had huge tanks to store crab. In the 1970s, these vessels would transform the king crab fishery and take the industry to new heights.

---

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Buddy Bernstein, September 13, 2007.

## **2.4 The king crab boom in Bristol Bay (1970-1983)**

*“The king crab fishery: a blink in time was what it was. And if you were alive and healthy, you did It.” – Konrad Uri.<sup>77</sup>*

The Alaskan king crab fishery can arguably be called a booming industry as soon as the early 1960s, when the fishery was concentrated around Kodiak. The king crab catch was increasing every year and was among the most lucrative fishery in Alaska. Nevertheless, it is the 1970s Bering Sea/Bristol Bay fishery that is usually highlighted as the glorious period of the king crab fishery.

### **2.4.1 Renewed fishing in the Bering Sea**

The Bering Sea had been the center of the Alaskan king crab fishery in the decade after World War II. As the Kodiak area became more important, American fishermen paid less attention to the crab grounds of the Bering Sea. Thus, virtually no crab was caught in 1965, when the Kodiak crab fishery reached its peak.<sup>78</sup> The Kodiak fishery declined sharply after 1965, and king crab fishermen had to shift their efforts to other crab grounds to keep the crab industry alive.

With the declining harvest of king crab all over Alaska, fishermen turned their attention to Bristol Bay in the Bering Sea. They now had the boats and equipment needed to fish in these waters, along with a developing fishing industry in Dutch Harbor. In addition, most of the foreign crab boats working in the Bering Sea had been displaced due to the ratification of the International Convention of the Continental Shelf in 1964.

Bristol Bay is an area in the eastern part of the Bering Sea. Bristol Bay had been fished by both American and foreign king crab fishermen before 1970, but never to a great extent. During the 1970s it became the most important ground of the American king crab fishery, and the vast majority of the king crab caught in the Bering Sea was caught in Bristol Bay.

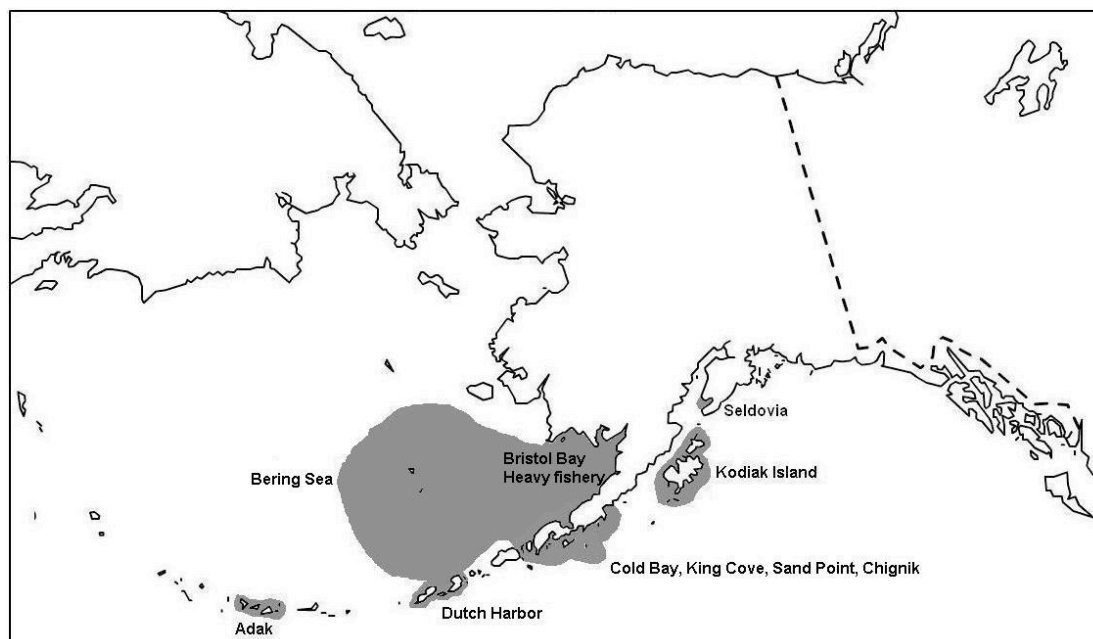
---

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007.

<sup>78</sup> Herrmann M., Greenberg J., Hamel C. and H. Geier 2004:17

**Figure 4.**

Areas of the American king crab fishery, 1970-1983



Sources: Historical catch of red, blue, and brown king crab, 1970-1994<sup>79</sup>, *Regional Economic Impact Assessment of the Alaska Snow Crab Fishery – Integrated with an International Snow Crab Market Model*.<sup>80</sup>

#### 2.4.2 An increasing catch

The Bristol Bay king crab fishery went from a catch of nearly nothing to 13 million pounds in 1971. This was a substantial increase, accounting for 25 percent of all the king crab caught in Alaska.<sup>81</sup> However, this was just the beginning. From 1971 to 1980, the Bristol Bay became the center of the biggest boom in the history of American fisheries. The total catch was 130 million pounds in the peak year of 1980, accounting for 80 percent of the king crab catch in Alaska.<sup>82</sup> The harvest was the largest the king crab industry had ever seen, surpassing the Kodiak fishery's peak year by 35 million pounds.

<sup>79</sup> Alaska Department of Fish and Game, [cited April 27, 2008] <http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/geninfo/shellfish/shelhome.php>

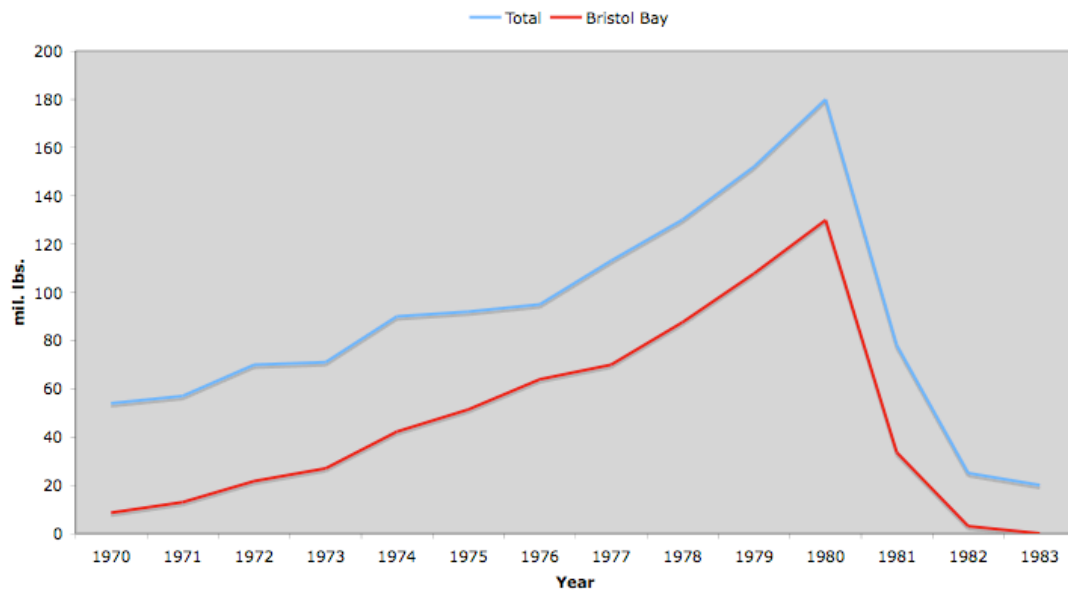
<sup>80</sup> Herrmann M., Greenberg J., Hamel C. and H. Geier 2004:16

<sup>81</sup> Herrmann M., Greenberg J., Hamel C. and H. Geier 2004:17

<sup>82</sup> *The Fisherman's News. Pacific Fisheries Review*. February 1981.

**Figure 5.**

The catch of the king crab fishery in Alaska, 1970-1983



Source: Historical catch of red, blue, and brown king crab, 1970-1994.<sup>83</sup>

As the king crab catch increased in the 1970s, more boats entered the Bristol Bay fishery. In the late 1970s the fishery employed around 200 crab boats with over a thousand fishermen, and even more people in the industry as a whole. The equipment and gear did not change much during these years, but the general tendency was that bigger and more sophisticated boats entered the fleet.

### 2.4.3 The price of king crab increases

There are two main reasons for the king crab boom in Bristol Bay in the 1970s. The first was the increase in catch, which grew annually by an average of 30 percent in the 1970s.<sup>84</sup> The second and no less important reason was the steady price increase of king crab. In the peak years of the Kodiak era of the fishery, fishermen were paid 15 cents for a pound of king crab. This was considered to be a good price, and the king crab fishery was among the most lucrative in the United States at the time.

In the Kodiak era of the fishery, a market in the United States had been created for king crab, especially on the East Coast. When the Kodiak catch started to collapse, the

<sup>83</sup> Alaska Department of Fish and Game, [cited April 27, 2008]  
<http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/geninfo/shellfish/shelhome.php>

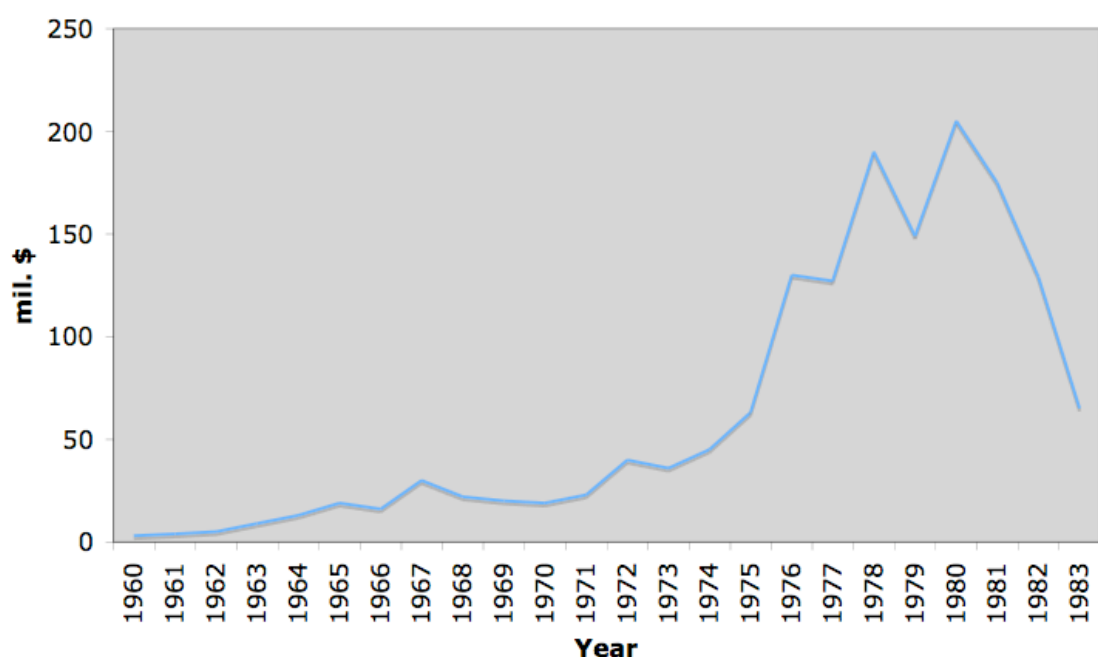
<sup>84</sup> Herrmann M., Greenberg J., Hamel C. and H. Geier 2004:17

price of crab increased, as the demand was bigger than the supply of crab. This was excellent news for the new class of crab boats being built for the king crab fishery at the time. In 1971, the price of king crab hit 30 cents a pound.<sup>85</sup> Three years later, the price was 60 cents a pound. After 1975, the price skyrocketed to a then all-time high average of nearly \$1.50 per pound in 1978. In the next couple of years the price went down to \$1 a pound in 1980, which was still a good price for the fishermen.

The rising price and the increase of harvest during the 1970s meant that the king crab industry grew at an extraordinary rate. In 1965 the total king crab catch in Alaska had an ex-vessel value of \$20 million. Ten years later, in 1975, the catch had an ex-vessel value of \$60 million. From 1975 to 1980 the growth took off, nearly surpassing \$200 million in 1978, before reaching the all-time high result of a little over \$200 million in 1980.

**Figure 6.**

Alaska king crab ex-vessel value, 1960-1983



Source: NMFS.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> NMFS, [cited: March 12, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

<sup>86</sup> NMFS, [cited: April 17, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

These outstanding results had a tremendous impact on the economy of Alaska and the fishing industry in the United States as a whole. The king crab fishery became the second most valuable fishery in the United States, barely behind the brown shrimp fishery in the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>87</sup>

### **King crab – a gold mine**

As we have seen, the king crab boom in Bristol Bay in the 1970s brought a lot of money to the industry in Alaska. The profit was split between different parts of the industry: the fishermen, the boat owners and the processors. The fishermen gained a fixed percentage of the profit of the boat. This was usually 10 percent in the early days of the king crab fishery, but dropped to around 5 percent in the late 1970s. The skipper of the boat would have twice the share of the crewmembers. In the late 1970s, crab boats could earn millions of dollars in a year, and some fishermen earned over \$100,000 for a season of fishing.<sup>88</sup> This meant that some king crab fishermen made ten times as much as the average wage in the United States in the 1970s.<sup>89</sup>

#### **2.4.4 Unalaska – the center of the king crab boom in the 1970s**

The city of Unalaska is located on the island of Unalaska in the Aleutian Islands, 800 miles southwest of Anchorage. Dutch Harbor is the official name of Unalaska's port, and both names are used interchangeably to refer to the fishing industry in Unalaska. Before 1970, Unalaska was a minor town that supplied some of the fisheries operating in the Bering Sea at that time.

When crab fishermen started fishing in the Bering Sea and Bristol Bay, Unalaska had the ideal location to support the industry. As Kodiak had experienced a decade before, Unalaska became a flourishing city when the crab fishery in Bristol Bay took off. Many processors of crab established themselves in Unalaska, as did other supporting businesses.

---

<sup>87</sup> NMFS, [cited: March 13, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

<sup>88</sup> Thorstenson, B. 1996, *Pots of gold: the profit and the sorrow*, video documentary

<sup>89</sup> Social Security Administration, National Average Wage Index, [cited 12 February, 2008] <http://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/awi.html>



In the late 1970s Dutch Harbor became the number one port in the U.S. in terms of the value of the catch delivered there.<sup>90</sup> The vast majority of this catch was king crab. In ten years, Unalaska had gone from a minor fishing community to the most important in the country.

#### **2.4.5 Characteristics of the new crab boats**

The most notable aspect of the new crab boat class was the size of the vessels. In the Kodiak era of the king crab fishery the boats were typically 40 to 50 feet. The new crab boats built in the late 1960s were all over 70 feet; many of them were close to 100 feet.

The increased size of the crab boats brought several advantages for the fishermen. The boats were now capable of having huge saltwater tanks under deck with storage space for at least 100,000 pounds of live crab. The size also helped the boats battle the hazardous conditions in the Bering Sea.

Another feature of the new crab boats was the all-steel design. The former boats were often made of wood and not designed for crab fishing in the first place. Boats made of steel were nothing new for the fishing fleet in Alaska and the United States, but steel was usually used for larger vessels. The all-steel design of the new crab vessels meant that the boats were more capable of surviving the rough Bering Sea. The new vessels could withstand not only the rough sea but also the ice buildup every winter.

The distinctive look of the crab boats was attributed to the raised fo'c's'le style of the vessel.<sup>91</sup> The raised fo'c's'le made the vessels able to shed water, which is vitally necessary in icing conditions, as well as sheltering the work area for the crew of the boat.<sup>92</sup> The majority of the crab boats were built with the wheelhouse in front. This ensured a large deck with working space for the crew. However, the house aft style

---

<sup>90</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. March 1980.

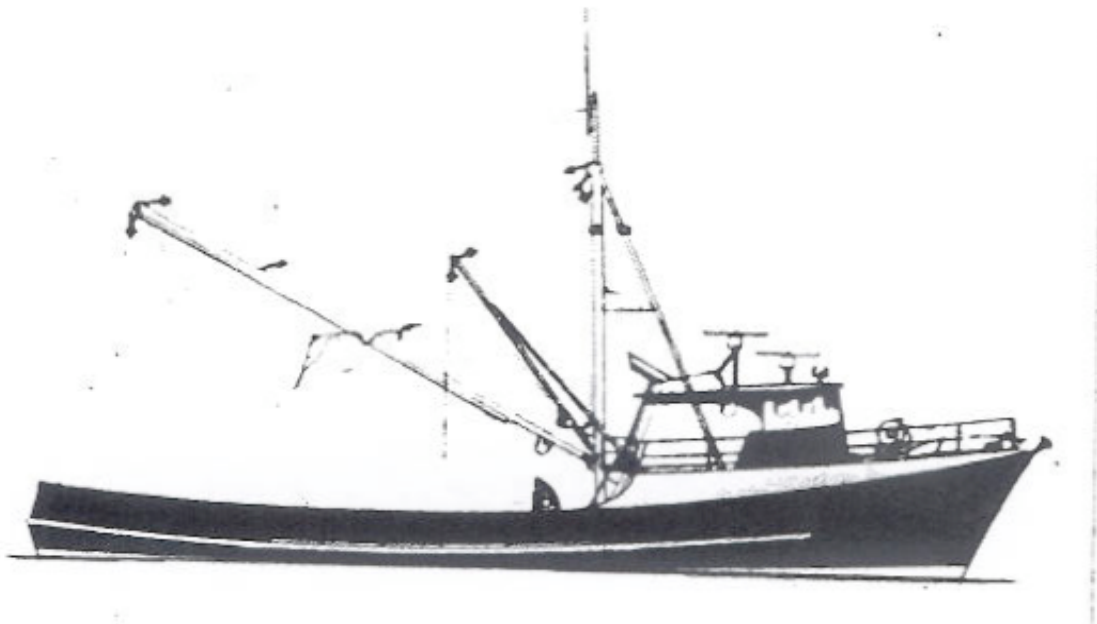
<sup>91</sup> The Fo'c's'le is the forward part of the ship below deck.

<sup>92</sup> Cole, J. 1988:111

was also popular because it made the vessels able to work as salmon and herring tenders.<sup>93</sup>

Even though these boats were principally made for the king crab fishery, they also participated in other fisheries. The vessels are often described as “combination fishing vessels” because of their capabilities. Making the boats equipped for several fisheries, it was easier for the fishermen to obtain a loan for the construction.<sup>94</sup> During the 1970s, it became common to equip the vessels with trawls to bottom fish in the months out of the crab season.

The new features of the boats ensured safer conditions for the crew. The crab fishery was still the most dangerous fishery in the United States, but as the boats and equipment became better, so did the working conditions.<sup>95</sup> The owners of the boats also benefited greatly from the improvements. A new crab boat was a huge investment for most of the boat owners. The risk of losing the boat and the expensive gear was much reduced with the new boat design.



Picture: Marco’s 94-foot design, a typical king crab boat.<sup>96</sup> Note the house-front style, raised fo’c’s’le and the large deck.

<sup>93</sup> Cole, J. 1988:111, See the house aft *F/V Wizard* on the front page.

<sup>94</sup> Cole, J. 1988:110

<sup>95</sup> National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, [cited February 4] <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fishfat.html>

<sup>96</sup> Picture published in *The Fisherman’s News*, May 1969.

## Boat building bonanza in the United States

From the *Peggy Jo* in 1966 to the *Shawn Aaron* in 1981, over 200 vessels were built in the United States for the king crab fishery. As boats fishing in American waters had to be built in the United States by law, all of the crab boats were constructed there.<sup>97</sup> The earliest crab boats were all built in Washington State, around the Puget Sound. The major builders were the Martinolich Shipbuilding Company, from Tacoma, and the Pacific Fisherman and Marco, from Seattle. The Martinolich Shipbuilding Company and Pacific Fisherman employed Ben Jensen, a Seattle naval architect, as their boat designer in their earliest crab boat projects.

Marco was a Seattle-based company that became heavily involved in the king crab industry from the 1950s. In the 1960s their king crab power block became one of the most important inventions for the crab fishermen. Marco also produced other types of gear for the king crab fishery as well as other fisheries. However, it was not until 1968 that they decided to build crab boats. Their first boat was the *M/V Olympic*, built for Harold Hansen, Sam Hjelle and John Sjong. The *M/V Olympic* was the start of a long production of crab boats running up to 1980. Marco soon became known as the leader of the industry, and their crab boat design was considered by many to be the “standard” of crab boats.<sup>98</sup>

From 1968 to 1969, Marco delivered seven crab boats of the same design, known as the Marco 94-footers. Marco’s next popular crab boat was the 108-foot design, the first one delivered to Kåre Ness in 1971. 22 of them were built, the last one being the *Norseman II* to Kjell Fjørtoft in 1979. In 1978 Marco began building 122-foot design boats; nine were built before 1980. Other Marco crab boat designs were built, but none of them were as popular as the three mentioned.

In the 1970s, shipyards from other states began to build crab boats as well. One of the major participants here was Bender Shipbuilding Company from Alabama. Later, builders from Mississippi, Florida, Louisiana, and California joined in.<sup>99</sup> The vessels

---

<sup>97</sup> The Jones Act of 1920 required of vessels operating in U.S. waters to be built in the United States.

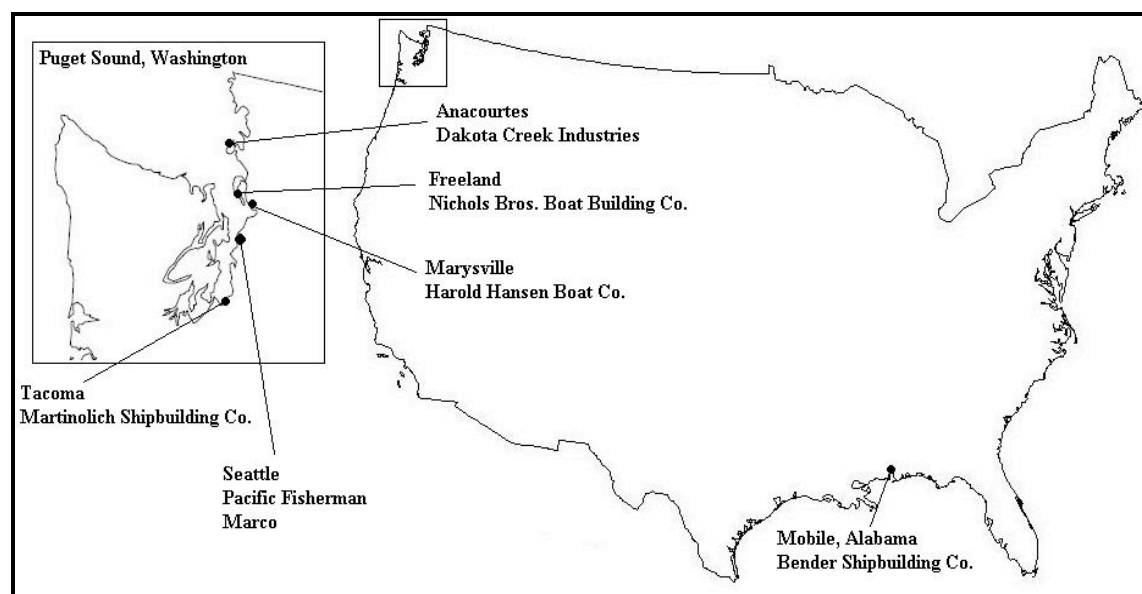
<sup>98</sup> Interview with James Cole, September 21, 2007.

<sup>99</sup> *The Fisherman’s News*. 1966-1981.

built in these shipyards were typically much cheaper than the boats built in Washington. However, the boats were considered by many to be of inferior quality, and some of them sank because of the poor design.<sup>100</sup>

**Figure 7.**

The major shipyards building crab boats in the United States, 1966-1981<sup>101</sup>



Source: *The Fisherman's News*, 1966-1981.<sup>102</sup>

Most of the new boats being built were delivered to fishermen from Washington. By 1979, only 13 percent of the crab boats fishing in the Bering Sea and Bristol Bay were based in Alaska.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, the Kodiak king crab fishery was still a local fishery, with 98 percent of the boats coming from Alaska.

A definite trend in the crab boat construction was that the vessels were getting larger and larger. Nearly all crab boats built in the late 1960s were less than 100 feet. The majority of the boats built in the 1970s were over 100 feet. The purpose of this was to be able to store more crab under deck. The 94-foot Marco design could hold a little over 100,000 pounds of crab. The 108-foot Marco design could hold around 170,000

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Harald Mannes, February 29, 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Shipyards with over 10 crab vessels built from 1966-1981.

<sup>102</sup> Outline map, [gathered April 12] <http://www.theus50.com/images/state-outline-maps/washington-outline.gif> and [gathered April 12] <http://z.about.com/d/geography/1/0/A/H/usa2.jpg>

<sup>103</sup> *National Fisherman Yearbook*. 1983.

pounds of crab. Some of the biggest boats which were popular in the late 1970s could hold over 300,000 pounds of crab.

As the boats became bigger, the price also increased. The 107-foot *Royal Viking*, built by Marco for Kåre Ness in 1971, had a price of \$550,000. The 160-foot *American No. 1*, built by Marco for Ken Petersen, Carl Perovich, and Pan-Alaska Fisheries in 1979, had a price tag of \$7,000,000. Thus, the economic heyday experienced by the crab fishermen and boat owners extended also to the shipyards building vessels for the industry. 1979 was the pinnacle for the shipyards, with over 40 crab vessels completed.<sup>104</sup>

#### **2.4.6 Gear, equipment and restrictions**

The biggest change among the king crab vessels was obviously the new class of boats introduced in the fishery. Most of these boats were built to high standards and made for a totally new experience for fishermen on the boats. The boats were generally more comfortable, with new amenities like microwave ovens, color television, better bathroom facilities, and larger living quarters for the crew on the boats.

The gear used for fishing on the new vessels was not very different from that of the older, converted boats used in the 1960s. The fishermen were still using the same technique, fishing with seven by seven foot pots, power block, radar and loran. Nonetheless, the equipment was getting better and more sophisticated. The new boats had more powerful motors, bigger power blocks, larger live tanks, and improved electric equipment. The radar and loran were now much more capable and became essential in the Bering Sea. Furthermore, modern survival suits were introduced in the fishery in the early 1970s, becoming standard on crab boats in the latter part of the 1970s.<sup>105</sup>

Alaska state biologists were involved in the king crab fishery from the late 1960s, imposing restrictions on the fishery. Until the 1970s, the Bristol Bay fishery was nearly without restrictions, and fishermen could fish year-round and catch as much

---

<sup>104</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. 1979.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Harald Mannes, February 29, 2007.

crab as they wanted. But with the growing output in the 1970s, legislators became involved in the Bristol Bay fishery. The Alaska government sent scientists to determine the abundance of crab and to decide how much crab the fishermen could take. This led to a quota system from the mid-1970s in which the legislators determined the quota of crab before every season began. As in most fisheries with a quota, the quota was based on the maximum sustainable yield, meaning the highest level of catch before the crab population would be damaged. The quota was set for the crab fleet as a whole, resulting in what one might call an Olympic style fishery, where each boat raced to fish as much as they could before the whole fleet filled the quota.

#### **2.4.7 The collapse of the king crab fishery in Bristol Bay**

1980 was the best year ever for the Bristol Bay king crab fishery with a catch of 130 million pounds. The next season started badly with low numbers for the crab fishermen. A representative for Pan Alaska stated that either the crabs had not grouped yet or the fishermen were fishing in the wrong places.<sup>106</sup> As the season went on, it became evident that there were simply less crab and the year ended with a seven-year low catch of 34 million pounds. The next year, 1982, was even worse with a total catch of only 3 million pounds, and as a result the fishery was closed in 1983.<sup>107</sup> The king crab boom in Bristol Bay was definitely over.

The crash of the crab stock in Bristol Bay had a tremendous effect on the king crab industry, but the consequences were not felt right away. Crab fishermen were still catching crab in the other king crab areas of Alaska, and the price of crab went up. In 1981, processors were competing for king crab, and the price went over \$2 a pound, twice what was paid the year before.<sup>108</sup> This meant that the total king crab ex-vessel value was \$175 million in 1981, a slight drop of 15 percent from the year before. In 1982, the price of crab went even higher, up to \$3 a pound, and in total the king crab fishermen brought in \$140 million. 1983 turned out to be the *annus horribilis* for the king crab industry, with low numbers of crab and a huge drop in the price. The crab

---

<sup>106</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. October 1981.

<sup>107</sup> Herrmann M., Greenberg J., Hamel C. and H. Geier 2004:15

<sup>108</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. November 1981.

fleet in Alaska was only able to catch 40 million pounds of crab, with a total ex-vessel value of \$50 million.

The quantity of king crab caught in Alaska in 1983 was the lowest in over 20 years, but the total value of the crab was higher than in the 1960s and the early 1970s. Nevertheless, these numbers could not support the crab fleet that had grown exceptionally in the late 1970s. The main issue for many crab fishermen was the loans they had taken to finance an expensive crab boat. In the peak of the boom, a crab boat could be paid off in a couple of years, but now there were simply not enough crab to pay off the loans.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, it was hard to get a good price for the boat, as there was no market for them. Crab boats were sold for a fraction of their initial cost. This led to bankruptcies for many people and companies involved in the king crab business.<sup>110</sup> Those who tried to fish could barely earn the cost of fuel and food.

### **The causes of the collapse**

The king crab fishery in Bristol Bay followed a similar pattern as in the Kodiak area. A huge increase in catch was followed by a collapse in stock of crab. However, the king crab fishery around Kodiak had not been closed and had continued with an average of nearly 20 million pounds of crab a year during the 1970s. Like the Bristol Bay fishery, the Kodiak king crab fishery was closed in 1983 due to the low numbers of crab.

The easiest factor to blame for the collapse is over-fishing. The crab could simply not reproduce fast enough to keep up with the fishermen. Scientists who have researched the issue are confident that over-fishing was one of the reasons for the collapse.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, they also agree that there must have been other reasons. The Kodiak king crab fishery also had to be closed in 1983, and the fishing activity there was moderate compared to the Bristol Bay.

---

<sup>109</sup> Kåre Ness is rumored to have paid his first vessel off, the *Royal Viking*, in just three months. See, Thorstenson, B. 1996, *Pots of gold: the profit and the sorrow*, video documentary.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Kåre Ness, September 30, 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Herrmann M., Greenberg J., Hamel C. and H. Geier 2004:18

The causes for the king crab collapse have been debated among both scientists and fishermen. The rise of water temperature in the Bering Sea in the 1970s has been put forward as one of the possibilities. According to the veteran fisherman Konrad Uri, the fishermen could see that the king crab was running away to the northwest, where the bottom temperature is lower, in the late 1970s.<sup>112</sup> Another popular theory is that the rising numbers of the crab scavengers, halibut and cod, consumed many of the juvenile king crabs.<sup>113</sup> Different factors may have been working together to collapse the king crab stock, but the full explanation is still not clear.

#### **2.4.8 The king crab fishery after 1983**

The golden age of the king crab fishery was certainly over in 1983. The stock of king crab has never recovered, leaving the fishery with only a fraction of the importance it had in the 1970s. Since 1983, the total catch of the Alaska king crab catch has never topped 25 million pounds, and today there are under 50 boats fishing for king crab in Alaska.<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, the price of king crab has increased through the 1980s and 1990s up to today. Even as the catch went down, the industry overcame most of the problems in the early 1980s and remains an important fishery in Alaska.

The most important tendency after the early 1980s was the intensified effort in the tanner crab fishery and the opelio crab fishery. These creatures are substantially smaller and less valuable than the king crab. The American tanner crab fishery began in the mid-1960s, but gained importance during the late 1970s. The tanner crab fishery had been only a supplement to the king crab fishery in these years and was fished out of the king crab season. The American opelio crab fishery started in the late 1970s and had an exceptional rate of growth after 1983. In the early 1990s, the opelio crab fishery became the most important crab fishery in Alaska in terms of both value and harvest.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Mange Nes, August 28, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> NMFS, [cited: March 20, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

<sup>115</sup> NMFS, [cited: March 20, 2008] <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>



## 2.5 Summary

This chapter has described the development of the American king crab fishery in Alaska. From 1920 until 1950 the fishery was of small scale, and only a minor fishery in Alaska. By 1960, the initial challenges had been resolved and a king crab industry was established on Kodiak Island. The fishery around Kodiak grew extensively during the early 1960s, and the fishery became of significance in Alaska. A huge drop of catch from 1966 around Kodiak set the fishery back, but the crab fleet expanded to other areas in Alaska. In the 1970s the king crab fishery became a modern gold rush for the king crab fishermen. New vessels, increasing catch, and growing prices caused the king crab fishery to be the most important fishery in Alaska, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important in the United States. The stock of crab crashed from 1982, and the fishery has never since reached its former heights.

In many respects the king crab fishery followed a similar pattern as other fisheries. Initial challenges were resolved by experience, technological progress, and marketing of the product. This resulted in a heavy growth of the fishery, until the fishery crashed. The resource was over-exploited because of the increasing competition among fishermen. The fishing capacity of the crab fleet in the late 1970s was many times bigger than the recruitment of new crabs. The government restrictions were introduced too late and were too soft to save the fishery.

## **Chapter 3:**

# **Norwegian-Americans in the King Crab Fishery**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter 3 will describe the Norwegian-American participation in the king crab fishery from the early days of the fishery until 1983. The key task here will be to document the Norwegian-American involvement in the fishery. How big of a part did the Norwegian-Americans play in the fishery? Did their role change over the years? Who were the Norwegian-American fishermen and where did they come from? Did they play an important role with respect to gear, equipment and boats? Were the Norwegian-Americans active as fishermen, skippers or boat owners?

### **3.2 Norwegian-Americans in the early days of the king crab fishery**

It is difficult to determine the influence of the Norwegian-Americans in the beginnings of the king crab industry. The participants themselves are mostly deceased; furthermore, as the fishery before World War II was spotty and weak, there are only a few records of the people involved in the fishery.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, there is some indication of Norwegian-Americans in the early days of the fishery, and these records will be presented.

The first documentation of a possible Norwegian-American in the fishery is Anders Nilsen, who skippered the 69-foot dragger *Champion* in a government survey of king crab potential in Alaska from 1940 to 1941.<sup>117</sup> The records do not say anything about Nilsen's ethnic origin, but the name indicates a probable Scandinavian background. The boats used in the survey were from Seattle, and Nilsen might have been a part of the Norwegian-American fishing community there.

---

<sup>116</sup> Several of the accounts from this period seem to have gathered their information from the same material.

<sup>117</sup> Anonymous Author 1992:2

The next mentioned Norwegian-American is Mauritz Fredericksen, who skippered the two earliest Wakefield vessels, the *Bering Sea* and the *Deep Sea*, on several occasions in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Fredericksen had served in the Norwegian merchant marine until 1940, and had since been fishing for Wakefield as a skipper on herring boats.<sup>118</sup> As most of the Norwegian-American herring fleet and the Wakefield Company had connections to Seattle, Fredericksen was probably a part of the Seattle-based Norwegian-American fishery community as well. Other skippers fishing for Wakefield during the 1950s include Odd Ronstad and Arne Serwold.<sup>119</sup> Both have Norwegian-sounding names, but their origin is not revealed by the sources.

Most of the people mentioned in the accounts are prominent people, such as skippers and company leaders. However, in Mansel G. Blackford's *Wakefield Seafoods and the Alaskan Frontier*, we find what is perhaps the most interesting report from the early days in the king crab fishery. Blackford writes that many of the crewmembers working on the Wakefield ship *Deep Sea* "were Scandinavians from the Seattle's Ballard area."<sup>120</sup> After World War II there were Swedes, Danes, and Icelanders in Ballard, but the majority of the Scandinavians were Norwegian, especially in the fishing community.<sup>121</sup> *Deep Sea* had a crew of nearly thirty men to work on the ship and process the crab. Several of them must have been Norwegian-Americans.

The first Norwegian-American participating in the king crab fishery mentioned by Sverre Arestad is Einar Pedersen. Pedersen arrived in Ballard in 1928 with his mother and five siblings; his father had already been fishing halibut for a couple of years.<sup>122</sup> In 1958 Pedersen entered the king crab fishery off the Kodiak coast with his boat *Susan* and he succeeded right away. In the 1960s and 1970s he invested in several new king crab vessels.

In 1974, Robert J. Browning published the book *Fisheries of the North Pacific*, where he presents the history of all fisheries in the Pacific Northwest. Writing about the king crab fishery, he mentions that John and Sam Selvog had built the first modern king

---

<sup>118</sup> Blackford M. 1979:13

<sup>119</sup> Blackford M. 1979:46, Blackford M. 1979:48

<sup>120</sup> Blackford M. 1979:26

<sup>121</sup> Interview with James Cole, September 21, 2007.

<sup>122</sup> Arestad S. in *Norwegian-American Studies* 1985:113

crab pots by 1950.<sup>123</sup> Selvog is a Norwegian-sounding name, and their place of origin might have been Selvåg in Trøndelag, Norway. Six feet square and three feet deep, their design became standard for king crab pots over the next decade, according to Browning. In the early days of the king crab fishery there was a lot of experimentation concerning king crab pots, and fishermen frequently borrowed designs from each other. The Selvogs might well have played a substantial role with their creation, but the credit for the modern king crab pots should be shared with others as well.

Blackford includes the story about the Selvogs and their crab pot design as well. Even though two different authors present the Selvogs, they are probably not independent of one other. Blackford's book was published in 1979, five years after Browning. Blackford's information about the Selvogs corresponds completely with Browning, and it seems likely that Browning's book is his source.

Arestad claims, "In the king crab fishery Norwegians have been the innovators in methods".<sup>124</sup> He also includes a statement by Harold Lokken stating, "they (the Norwegian-Americans) have produced the most technical advances [in the king crab fishery]".<sup>125</sup> Arestad and his "Norwegians in the Pacific Coast Fisheries" are among the most informative and consistent sources about Norwegian-Americans in the West Coast fisheries. Nevertheless, it seems as he exaggerate the influence of the Norwegian-Americans in the beginning of the king crab fishery. As we saw in chapter 2, it was American fishermen who pioneered the king crab fishery and came up with the most technological advances.

To measure the exact participation of Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery before 1960 seems nearly impossible. The sources are simply not plentiful or reliable enough. However, there is some indication of Norwegian-Americans participating in the fishery, beginning in the early 1940s. The Norwegian-Americans mentioned by the sources are skippers, but that might be because of the lacking information about the rest of the crew. Furthermore, Norwegian-Americans appear to be most present in

---

<sup>123</sup> Blackford M. 1979:57, Browning. R. 1974:25

<sup>124</sup> Arestad S. in *Norwegian-American Studies* 1985:112

<sup>125</sup> Arestad S. in *Norwegian-American Studies* 1985:112

the part of the king crab fleet coming from Seattle. This is highly plausible as there was a major Norwegian-American fishing community in Seattle at the time.

### **3.3 Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery from 1960 to 1969**

From the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, Kodiak was the major king crab producing area in Alaska. Small boats, like salmon seiners around 50 feet, made up the majority of the crab fleet around Kodiak in those days. The boat owners were often local Alaskans engaged in the salmon industry who fished for king crab in the winter months. As a result, the king crab fishery turned into a local fishery with fishermen from Alaska. There were Norwegian-Americans in Alaska, but to a lesser extent than in Seattle.

Among the Norwegian-American Alaskans were Buddy Bernstein and Morris Hansen. Bernstein had a Norwegian father and grew up in Sand Point, Alaska. He began king crab fishing in 1955 for the Wakefield Company.<sup>126</sup> In 1957, he bought his own boat and delivered his catch to a Wakefield plant in Sand Point. Hansen grew up in Chignik, Alaska, with his mother and his Norwegian-American stepfather. His biological father was a Norwegian-American as well, but he died before Hansen was born. Hansen started fishing for crab in the winter out of Bellingham, Alaska in 1964.<sup>127</sup> In the summer he fished for salmon.

Beginning in the early 1960s, there was a growing trend of outsiders coming into the king crab fishery, including several Norwegian-Americans. The main reason why people started to get interested was the growing profits of the fishery. In Norwegian-American fishing communities around the United States, and in some cases even in Norway, people heard about the lucrative king crab fishery in Alaska.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Buddy Bernstein, September 13, 2007.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Morris Hansen, September 13, 2007.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Harald Mannes, February 29, 2007. Interview with Jan Gunnar Fagerland, April 5, 2007.

In this period, Norwegian-Americans were heavily involved in several of the West Coast fisheries as well as some of the East Coast fisheries in the United States. New Bedford, Massachusetts was one of the fishery communities that hosted a large group of Norwegian-American fishermen. They dominated one of the largest fisheries in New Bedford, the scallop fishery. The majority of the scallop fishermen were from the island of Karmøy.<sup>129</sup> Many of the Norwegian-American scallop fishermen left New Bedford for Seattle and Alaska in the mid-1960s. The scallop fishery was doing poorly and the opportunities in Alaska caught their attention.<sup>130</sup>

Magne Nes, from Karmøy, traveled to the United States as an eighteen-year-old in 1955. He had already spent several years at sea on cargo ships and had been to all the continents. In the U.S. he took a job on a scallop boat fishing out of New Bedford. Nes moved to Alaska in 1961 and worked at a salmon and king crab cannery in Kodiak. Soon after, he met with Ole Hendricks, from Sunnmøre, who offered him a job on his boat, the *Seastar*. Hendricks, Nes, Per Petter Myhre from Sunnmøre and Torulf Sjøen from Karmøy, fished for crab on the *Seastar* and delivered to Wakefield's *Deep Sea*.<sup>131</sup> In 1962 Nes skippered *Seastar* when Hendricks went back to Seattle.

The Norwegian-American fishermen in the king crab fishery came from different places in Norway. A few were from the east, some were from the north, but the majority came from the west coast of Norway. The coastal districts of Norway experienced increased emigration after 1900, and the West Coast of the United States was a popular place to settle.<sup>132</sup> Additionally, fishing has been one of the major occupations for people on the west coast of Norway for centuries.

The two largest groups of Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery in the 1960s were from Sunnmøre and Karmøy, both situated on the west coast of Norway. Most of the crab fishermen from Sunnmøre came directly from Norway to the West Coast of the United States. They had various reasons for moving, but many had family and

---

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Harald Mannes, February 29, 2007. Interview with Jan Gunnar Fagerland, April 5, 2007.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Kåre Ness, September 30, 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Magne Nes, August 28, 2007.

<sup>132</sup> Semmingsen I. 1950:366, Semmingsen I. 1950:377

friends on the West Coast when they arrived.<sup>133</sup> For the Karmøy group the story was a bit different. They often went to other places in the United States before going into the Alaska king crab fishery, especially the scallop fishery in New Bedford. Their motivation for going to the United States was somewhat unlike than the fishermen from Sunnmøre. Karmøy had been dependent on fisheries for generations, but the backbone of the fisheries in Karmøy, the seasonal herring fishery, went through a difficult time after World War II. Because of that, it was nearly impossible to support a family as a full-time fisherman, and other types of jobs were scarce.<sup>134</sup> As a result, many young men traveled to the United States in the hopes of getting a better life. Sunnmøre was dependent on fisheries as well, but to a lesser extent, and the fisheries they engaged in were healthier after World War II.

---

<sup>133</sup> Interview with John Sjong, August 30, 2007.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Kåre Ness, September 30, 2007.

**Figure 8.**

Maps of Sunnmøre and Karmøy

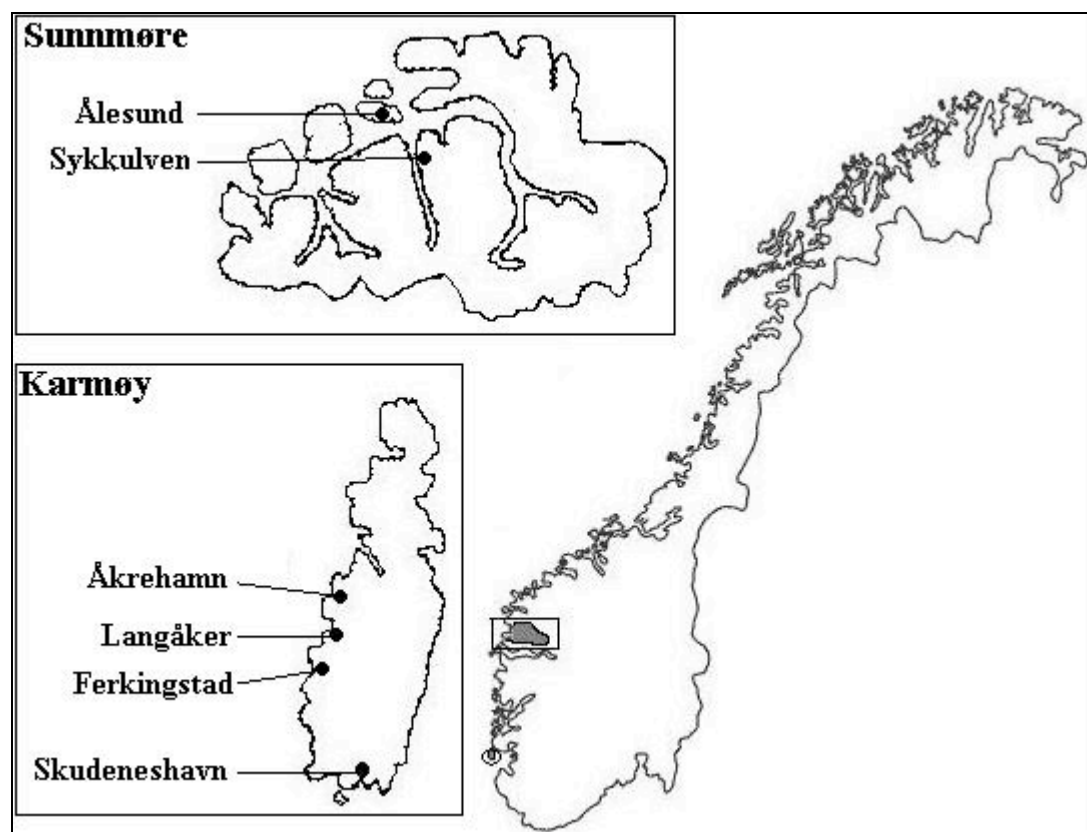


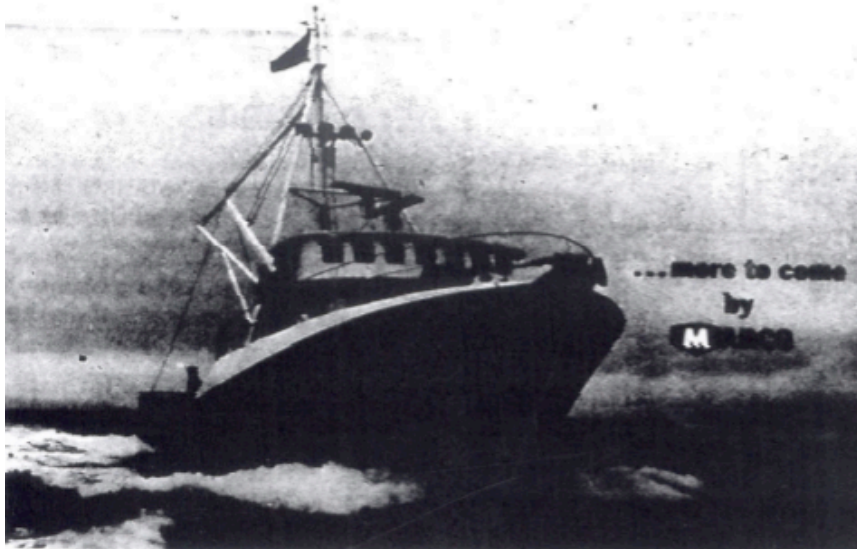
Figure 8 gives a detailed map of the areas where the most Norwegian-American king crab fishermen came from in Norway. In Sunnmøre, the fishing city Ålesund and the town Sykkulven, raised several crab fishermen. On Karmøy we find that the majority of the fishermen came from the west coast of the island, Åkrehamn, Ferkingstad and Langåker and Skudeneshavn. Not surprisingly as these were the communities where the fishing industry was most important.

It seems as though the Sunnmøre group in general engaged in the king crab fishery a few years earlier than the Karmøy group.<sup>135</sup> The first Norwegian-Americans to build the new style of crab boat were Axel Buholm and Per Petter Myhre, both from Sunnmøre, when the Pacific Fisherman, a Seattle shipyard, completed the *Seaern* in 1966. The *Seaern* was the second of the new style of king crab boats built for the fishery. In 1968 Marco completed their first crab boat, the *M/V Olympic*, for the Norwegian-Americans Harold Hansen, Sam Hjelle and John Sjong, all from Sunnmøre. Sjong was the skipper of the boat, and according to him the majority of the crew of *M/V Olympic* came from Karmøy.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with John Sjong, August 30, 2007.



**King crabs beware!**  
**Harold, Sam, and John**  
**are heading north.**



Picture: Advertisement for Marco in *The Fisherman's News* showing the *M/V Olympic*.<sup>136</sup> "Harold, Sam, and John" refers to the Norwegian-American owners of the *M/V Olympic*, Harold Hansen, Sam Hjelle and John Sjong.

The first crab fisherman from Karmøy to invest in the new style of crab boats was Magne Nes, who built the *M/V North Pacific* with Rudy Peterson, from Mosjøen, in 1968.<sup>137</sup> The vessel was delivered by Martinolich Shipbuilding Company from Tacoma, Washington. Nes was the skipper of the boat, and the crew was from Karmøy.<sup>138</sup>

From 1966 to 1969, nearly 30 king crab vessels were completed, according to *The Fisherman's News*.<sup>139</sup> 11 of them had Norwegian-American owners. The boats were generally owned by various kinds of partnerships. Nearly all Norwegian-Americans

---

<sup>136</sup> Advertisement published in *The Fisherman's News*, 1969.

<sup>137</sup> Harald Mannes states that Søren Sørensen of Karmøy was part-owner in the 1967-built *M/V Denali*, but his name is not mentioned by *The Fisherman's News*.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Magne Nes, September 28, 2007.

<sup>139</sup> *The Fisherman's News*, 1966-1969.

partnered with other Norwegian-Americans, with the exception of the *Rosie G*, where the Norwegian-American Robert Ringstad partnered with the American Jack Parks. One of the most influential Norwegian-American crab fishermen in the 1960s was Ole Hendricks from Sykkulven. He built the *F/V Kevleen-K* in 1968 with his brother Sig Hendricks and the *Sea Star* in 1969 with his son Larry Hendricks. Another example of a family partnership was the 1967 built *Mark I*, with the second generation Norwegian-American Einar Pedersen and his son Mark as owners. There were also partnerships based on regional origin in Norway, as shown by the *Seaern* and the *M/V Olympic*. The *Aleutian Spray*, completed in 1969, had two partners from Karmøy, Børge Mannes and Noralf Langåker, but the third partner, Henry Svaasand, was from Hardanger.<sup>140</sup>

A general trend in the late 1960s was the growing number of fishermen from Karmøy who participated in the king crab fishery. Most of them came from New Bedford, but a couple, including Gunnleiv Løklingholm, went directly from Karmøy to Alaska. Løklingholm heard about the king crab fishery through a letter from his childhood friend Harald Mannes.<sup>141</sup> Mannes had been fishing king crab for a year in 1965, when Løklingholm came to Kodiak to participate in the king crab fishery.

Marco was the chief shipyard constructing king crab vessels from the late 1960s. They built seven king crabbers in the 1960s, six of which had Norwegian-American owners. There are several reasons for this. Marco was a Seattle-based company with a long tradition in the Northwest fisheries. They were known for their quality products in the Norwegian-American fishery community, and when the first Marco-built boats were delivered in 1968, word spread in the fishery community about the superiority of the boats.<sup>142</sup> This meant that several Norwegian-Americans ordered Marco boats, though they were more expensive than the boats of competitors.

---

<sup>140</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. 1969.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Gunnleiv Løklingholm, September 13, 2007.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with John Sjong, August 30, 2007.

### 3.4 Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery from 1970 to 1983

The movement of Norwegians and Norwegian-Americans into the king crab fishery continued well into the 1970s. Fishermen came directly from Norway as well as from other fisheries in the United States. During the early 1970s, there was also a growing tendency of Norwegian-Americans to invest in crab boats. Many of the fishermen who joined the king crab fishery in the late 1960s invested in their own boats after a couple of years.

The first Norwegian-Americans to invest in crab boats in the late 1960s often built new boats after a couple of successful seasons of king crab fishing. By moving to a newer, bigger boat, the fishermen could catch more crab and make more money. An example of this is Magne Nes, who built his first boat in 1968, the 86-foot *M/V North Pacific*. In 1973 he became one of the three owners of the 103-foot *M/V Sea Hawk*. In 1975 Nes built the 120-foot *Ocean Leader* where he became skipper. The last king crabber Nes skippered in the 1970s was one of the largest boats in the fleet, the 155-foot *Northern Aurora*. The *Northern Aurora* was built in 1945, but converted to a king crabber in 1978 to become one of the most modern king crab boats in Alaska.

The Norwegian-Americans were often finding new grounds in the king crab fishery. This began when the fleet moved west from Kodiak in the late 1960s. The new boats being delivered to the Norwegian-Americans since 1966 offered the chance of fishing in the Aleutians. As several of the Norwegian-American skippers had the new style of crab boats, they were among the first to enter the Bering Sea and Bristol Bay fisheries as well. Participants of Norwegian heritage emphasize that the rest of the crab fleet often followed the Norwegian-Americans to new grounds.<sup>143</sup>

In the early 1970s, there was a tendency of second generation Norwegian-Americans involving themselves in the king crab fishery. These people had in most cases a father already established in the fishing industry, such that going into the king crab fishery became an obvious move for them. A number of these fishermen worked on their fathers' boats for a couple of years before they invested in boats together with their

---

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007.

families. In 1973, Axel Buholm and his family built the *M/V American Viking*, for which his son Perry became the skipper. Jeff Hendricks, another son of Ole Hendricks, built the *Antares* and *Americus* in 1978. Einar Pedersen's son, Einar Pedersen, Jr., became one of the owners of the 1978 built *Bering Star*.

As in the late 1960s, there were partnerships built on regional origin. Stan Høvik and Marvin Stone, both from the northern part of Norway, became partners in the 1972 built *Nordic Fury*, the 1974 built *Pacific Fury*, and the 1977 built *Ocean Fury*. Partnerships with fishermen from Karmøy include the 1973 built *M/V Sea Hawk* with Pete Nornees and Magne Nes and the 1974 built *Royal Atlantic* with Kåre Ness and John Johanessen. Sunnmøre partnerships include the 1973 built *Sea Rover*, with Per Petter Myhre, Per Nymark and Bjørn Nymark, as well as the 1971 built *American Star* and the 1974 built *American Eagle*, with the owners Harold Hansen, Sam Hjelle and Reidar Tynes.

Although most of the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery partnered with other Norwegian-Americans, there are a few instances of partnerships across ethnic origin. Kåre Ness' partnership with the American Charles Bundrant is perhaps the most significant. Ness started the Royal Viking Company in the early 1970s, where Bundrant soon became his partner. Bundrant started Trident Seafoods in 1973 and Ness soon became one of the largest shareholders. Both companies invested heavily in the king crab industry, and Trident Seafoods became one of the main processors of king crab in Alaska during the late 1970s.<sup>144</sup> Today, Trident Seafoods is the largest American-owned seafood company in the United States, and Bundrant and Ness are still the principal shareholders.<sup>145</sup> Partnerships on a smaller scale include that of Gunnleiv Løklingholm and the Alaskan Howard Carlough, who partnered on the 1974 built *American Beauty* and the 1978 built *Alaskan Beauty*.

A few king crab fishermen were based in Norway, and should be described as Norwegians. These usually traveled back and forth to Alaska from Norway only to work in the fishery. In *The North Pacific Deckhand's & Alaska Cannery Worker's Handbook*, published in 1978, author John Higgins claimed that "many of the boats

---

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Kåre Ness, September 30, 2007.

<sup>145</sup> Trident Seafoods' homepage, [cited May 7, 2008] <http://www.tridentseafoods.com>

are skippered by Norwegians who come over [to the United States] just for the crab season”.<sup>146</sup> However, this does not seem likely, as nearly all skippers of Norwegian origin were based in the United States, and had an American citizenship. Higgins advise people stay out of the crab fishery, as it is too tough and dangerous for most men. Of the Norwegian-Americans he says, “Perhaps they are without fear”.<sup>147</sup>

As in the late 1960s, a considerable portion of Marco’s customers was Norwegian-Americans. 25 of 41 boats built from 1970 to 1980 had Norwegian-American owners. Of those 25, 19 were fully owned by Norwegian-Americans, and 6 were owned by Norwegian-American/American partnerships. Their boats were highly rated by fishermen, especially in the Norwegian-American fishery community.<sup>148</sup> Several of the Norwegian-Americans bought a number of boats from Marco, including Kåre Ness, who partly or fully owned *Royal Viking*, *Pacific Viking*, *Royal Atlantic*, *Nordic Star* and *Columbia*, all delivered by Marco from 1972 to 1979.

The percentage of Norwegian-American boat builders declined during the late 1970s. As Norway’s economy had an upward trend and U.S. immigration was restricted, not as many Norwegians came to America. Furthermore, the lucrative king crab fishery caught the eye of many American investors. The Norwegian-Americans already established in the business stayed in the king crab fishery and built new boats as well, but to a lesser extent than in the early 1970s.

Norwegian-Americans influenced the king crab fisheries not only as fishermen, but also in the support companies surrounding the king crab fishery. Olav Lunde, a Norwegian immigrant from Molde, started Lunde Marine Electronics. Lunde Marine Electronics did the electrical work on several of the king crab boats being constructed in the Seattle area. The Norwegian immigrant Peter Nordby started the Nordby Supply Company in the late 1800s in Seattle. Nordby Supply Company was a ship chandlery business based in Seattle that equipped several of the king crab vessels with buoys and floats. The buoys were imported from Norway because of the superior quality of the Norwegian buoys, which could withstand the conditions in Alaskan

---

<sup>146</sup> Higgins J. 1978:31

<sup>147</sup> Higgins J. 1978:31

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Harald Mannes, February 29, 2007. Interview with Kåre Ness, September 30, 2007.

waters.<sup>149</sup> On the 1975 built *Ocean Leader*, Magne Nes bought much of the equipment from the company Karmøy Mekaniske Verksted because of the excellence of the Norwegian gear.<sup>150</sup>

Norwegian-Americans were not the only fishermen of Nordic origin in the king crab fishery. The skippers Gunnar Gudjonsson and Peter Njardvik were Icelandic-Americans. Kristian and Erik Poulsen were brothers from northern Denmark and were part owners in the 1973 built *Bering Sea*, the 1978 built *Arctic Sea*, and the 1979 built *North Sea*. The only Swedish-American found in *The Fisherman's News* is Martin Larsson, who was a part of the crew on the *Bering Sea* with the Poulsen brothers.<sup>151</sup>

#### **3.4.1 Percentage of Norwegian-American skippers in the king crab fishery**

*The Fishermen's News* reported a total of 151 boats built specifically for the king crab fishery from 1966 to 1981.<sup>152</sup> 66 of them had Norwegian-American owners. 49 of the boats were owned fully by Norwegian-Americans, while 17 were owned by Norwegian-American/American partnerships.

In most cases, the skipper of a crab boat was of the same ethnic origin as the owners. This was especially true for the Norwegian-American skippers; *The Fishermen's News* does not once list a non-Norwegian-American as a skipper on a boat owned fully by Norwegian-Americans. However, there are some instances of Norwegian-Americans skippering for Americans. The 1968 built *M/V Vic Hansen* was constructed for Pan Alaska Fisheries, but John Jorgensen skippered the vessel for them. The 1978 built *Discovery Bay* and the 1979 built *Sunset Bay* were built for Steuart Investment Co., and Olav Austneberg, from Karmøy, skippered the vessels. Schoenfeld Industries Inc. had the enormous 282-foot *Arctic Command* built in 1980, and Arnie Haugen, also from Karmøy, was one of two skippers.

*The Fisherman's News* reported the ownership of the boat when it was delivered, but this does not necessarily mean that the ownership of a boat remained the same until

---

<sup>149</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. July 1977.

<sup>150</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. 1975.

<sup>151</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. 1976.

<sup>152</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. 1966-1981.

1983. In 1981 *The Fisherman's News* issued an overview of the entire Alaska shellfish fleet.<sup>153</sup> The report includes the lobster, shrimp and crab boats. The overview lists the owners of the boats, and could indicate whether the ownerships had changed since the boats were built. However, there are several problems with the list given by *The Fisherman's News*. Some of the boats are missing the owner; others are not listed at all. Vessels could be missing because they sank in the sea or because new owners changed the name of the boat. Nevertheless, where the boat and owner are listed, we find that nearly all boats remained under the same ownership. The two changes found are the transfer of *Sea Venture* from the American Robert Resoff to the Norwegian-American Kristoffer Knudsen, and the transfer of the *Ocean Leader* from the Norwegian-Americans Rudy Peterson and Magne Nes to the American Russel K. Ott.

The numbers from *The Fisherman's News* suggest that nearly half of the skippers of the king crab fleet were Norwegian-Americans, if we combine the Norwegian-Americans skippering for both Norwegian-American and American ownerships. The numbers also indicate that the Norwegian-American participation peaked in the early 1970s. From 1970 to 1975, over 60 percent of the boats built reported by *The Fishermen's News* had Norwegian-American skippers.<sup>154</sup> In the late 1960s the tendency in the king crab fishery shifted from local boats to Seattle-based boats. The information from *The Fisherman's News* suggests that Norwegian-Americans owned the majority of the Seattle-based boats. The records from *The Fisherman's News* also indicate that the Norwegian-American participation as owners and skippers dropped a bit in the late 1970s. In this period there were many American investors coming into the fishery who financed new crab boats.

### **3.4.2 Percentage of Norwegian-American crewmembers**

The percentage of Norwegian-American crewmembers is harder to determine accurately than the percentage of Norwegian-American skippers. There is no register of the crewmembers on crab boats, and the crewmembers are hardly mentioned by *The Fishermen's News*. The issue is further complicated by the fact that crewmembers often stayed on a boat for a season or two, and then moved on to another boat.

---

<sup>153</sup> *The Fisherman's News* "Pacific Fisheries Review." February 1981.

<sup>154</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. 1970-1975.

Additionally, being a part of the crew on a king crab boat was a tough job, and many quit or were fired in the middle of a season. As a result there was a high turnover for crewmembers every year in the king crab industry.

The best indication of the percentage of Norwegian-American crewmembers comes from the fishermen themselves. Many of the Norwegian-American skippers explain that they tried to get as many Norwegian-American fishermen on their boats as they could.<sup>155</sup> The reason for this was their honesty, skill, and willingness for hard work. This was especially true in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Norwegian-Americans who wanted to get into the king crab fishery were plentiful. Some skippers even chose crewmembers from their local communities back home in Norway. For example, Magne Nes tried to get as many crewmembers from Karmøy on his boats as he could.<sup>156</sup>

Although *The Fishermen's News* does not often include information about the crewmembers of the boats, sometimes it does. In these instances we find that the boats with Norwegian-American owners and skippers almost exclusively carry Norwegian-American crewmembers. *Lori-J*, built in 1968 for skipper Arnold Mathisen, had the Norwegian-American crew of Harold Clausen, Arnie Espedal and Chris Knutsen.<sup>157</sup> The 1971 built *American Star*, which Sam Hjelle skippered, had the crew of Alf Halhjem, Salve Ingebriksen and Reidar Tynes, all born in Norway.<sup>158</sup> Marco delivered *West Point* in 1977 for Peter Haugen, Jack Lowman and Kjell Fjørtoft. Skipper Haugen noted that his crew was "50-50 Norwegian and U.S."<sup>159</sup> The crew on the *Sunset Bay* included two Norwegian-Americans, skipper Olav Austneberg and chef Ivar Fjærstad, and two Americans, Luis Arruela and Stephan Brooks.<sup>160</sup>

The information from *The Fisherman's News*, combined with the information from the participants in the fishery, suggests that nearly half of the crewmembers working

---

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Magne Nes, August 28, 2007.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Magne Nes, August 28, 2007.

<sup>157</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. January 1968.

<sup>158</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. October 1971.

<sup>159</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. August 1977.

<sup>160</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. July 1979.



in the king crab fishery were Norwegian-Americans in the 1970s. It also indicates that the ratio of Norwegian-American crewmembers dropped in the late 1970s.

### **Where the Norwegian-Americans successful as boat owners and fishermen?**

According to Sverre Arestad, Norwegian-Americans were pioneers in the king crab fishery. This statement has been contradicted earlier in the chapter. However, Arestad also says that others have exploited the technical advances the Norwegian-Americans made. Thus, only a few Norwegian-Americans have done well as boat owners and fishermen in the king crab fishery, while the majority has not.<sup>161</sup>

It seems as Arestad is both right and wrong in this respect. It was a minority of the Norwegian-Americans that did exceptionally well. Some of the most successful stories have been represented here. But, the overwhelming majority of the king crab fishermen and boat owners did fairly well in the king crab fishery before 1983. The industry was growing at a record pace and all of the boats had their share of the profit. Norwegian-American fishermen invested heavily in new boats costing millions of dollars. How could they have afforded that if they were not successful? There is no indication of the Norwegian-Americans doing worse than the American fishermen. In some respects, it seems as they did even better.

### **3.5 Three lives, three stories**

In this section, the lives of three Norwegian-American fishermen will be presented. They all come from different parts of the Norwegian-American community, Sjong is from Sunnmøre and Ness is from Karmøy, while Uri grew up in Seattle. Here, they will illustrate the situation of their group and we will see how representative they are.

---

<sup>161</sup> Arestad S. in *Norwegian-American Studies* 1985:112

## John Sjong

John Sjong grew up in a small town called Sykkulven in the Sunnmøre area of Norway. His family did not have any fishery traditions and Sjong educated himself as a mechanic. As a mechanic, he had no problems finding work and the income was decent. In 1960, he traveled to the United States and settled for a brief time in Oregon, where his aunt lived. He did not intend to settle permanently in the U.S., and the reason for the move was simply the desire for adventure.<sup>162</sup> Soon after coming to Oregon he moved to Seattle, where he worked as a mechanic for a couple of years. In Seattle, he was drafted into the military, and he spent two years in various places in the United States. According to Sjong, the years in military service were well spent; he learned English and had the chance to see his new country.

In 1964, Sjong was offered a job on a crab boat through friends from Sykkulven working in the king crab fishery. Even though he had no fishery experience, he could make use of his mechanical skills on the boat. On his first trip, he spent three months around Kodiak and went home with \$3,500, which was more money than he had ever seen before. After two years he became skipper on a king crab boat; the owner was from Sykkulven as well. By that time, Sjong had already obtained his American citizenship.

In 1968, Sjong and two partners from Sunnmøre ordered the *M/V Olympic*. It was the first vessel constructed by Marco for the king crab fishery. The *M/V Olympic* could carry more pots and more crab, and was faster than the other vessels fishing for crab at that time. Sjong skippered the boat for the first couple of years, with great results. After ten years the *M/V Olympic* was sold for four times the initial price of the vessel.

In 1971, Sjong partnered with Konrad Uri in the crab vessel *Rainier*, and together they formed Trans Pacific Industries. In 1974, they bought the *Deep Sea*, which processed the crab their boats fished. By the end of the 1970s, they were the owners of 18 boats; 4 of them were catcher-processor vessels that both fished and processed

---

<sup>162</sup> Interview with John Sjong, August 30, 2007.

the crab. According to Sjong, new vessels were going into the king crab fishery every week during the 1970s, and he knew the fishery could not sustain this growth.

### **Kåre Ness**

Kåre Ness grew up on Karmøy in a family that had a long tradition of fishing. As with most of the fishermen of Karmøy, he fished from an early stage in his life, most importantly in the winter herring fishery, but also around Iceland in the summer. Struggling to make a living as a fisherman with little work and low pay, he decided to move to the United States, as many others from Karmøy.<sup>163</sup>

Ness traveled to New Bedford in 1955 and soon found work on a scallop boat through acquaintances from Karmøy. He enjoyed the scallop fishery, as the working conditions were fairly good.<sup>164</sup> The pay was fairly good as well, and the fishermen earned more than most people on shore. After a couple of years, he became skipper on a scallop boat that was owned by a fisherman from Northern Norway. In 1964, he partnered with an American to build his own scallop boat. The majority of the crew on his boats in the scallop fishery came from Karmøy.

In the late 1960s, the scallop fishery in New Bedford had a downward trend, and Ness decided to go into the more promising king crab fishery instead. Ness brought his family with him to Seattle, where they settled in the Norwegian-American district of Ballard. Beginning in 1969, he skippered king crab vessels for his brother, Magne Nes, who was already established in the fishery. In 1972, Ness had his own king crab boat built, the *Royal Viking*. According to Ness, the working conditions in the crab fishery were much tougher; he notes, “There was only one speed: full speed.”<sup>165</sup>

When Ness took delivery of the *Royal Viking*, he started his own company called the Royal Viking Company. In 1973, the American crab fisherman Chuck Bundrant started Trident Seafoods. Soon after, Ness became partners with Bundrant in Trident Seafoods, and Bundrant became partners with Ness in the Royal Viking Company.

---

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Kåre Ness, September 30, 2007.

<sup>164</sup> The fishermen worked shifts on scallop boats, six hours on duty and six hours off. Additionally, the boat could only stay at sea for eight days because of union rules.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with Kåre Ness, September 30, 2007.

This marked the beginning of a huge success for both Ness and Bundrant. Their fleet expanded rapidly, with a great number of king crab boats fishing for them. Trident Seafoods expanded to other fisheries in Alaska as well, and is today among the leading seafood companies in the United States.

### **Konrad Uri**

Konrad Uri was an American-born Norwegian-American crab fisherman. He was born in Seattle in the 1930s, and his parents were Norwegian immigrants from Sykkulven, Sunnmøre. Uri's father engaged in the halibut fishery off the Canadian and Alaskan coast, as did many other Norwegian-Americans. Uri started fishing as a child, in 1945, with his father. In the 1950s and 1960s, he bottom fished off the Washington coast, but from the late 1960s it was hard to make any money, so he decided to get into the king crab fishery instead.<sup>166</sup>

The first boat Uri invested in was the *Rainer*, built in 1971. At the same time, he became partners with John Sjong and formed Trans Pacific Fisheries. The company grew steadily in the king crab fishery during the 1970s and went into factory-trawling in 1979, when they acquired the *Arctic Trawler*. In the 1980s, Uri and Trans Pacific Fisheries became one of the major participants in the bottom fisheries in Alaska. In total, they had five factory-trawlers converted in Norway from 1986 to 1988.<sup>167</sup>

### **How representative are they?**

Sjong, Ness and Uri were among the most successful fishermen in the king crab fishery. Norwegian-Americans in general did fairly well, but not to the same extent as these three. Even so, they are representative for the Sunnmøre, Karmøy, and U.S.-born groups in some regard. Sjong, and the Sunnmøre group, was among the earliest Norwegian-Americans to invest the new style of king crab boats. However, Sjong did not have any fishing experience before he joined the crab fishery, and that seem to be relatively unusual for the Sunnmøre group. Ness bought his first boat in 1972, and the Karmøy group did typically invest in boats a few years later than the Sunnmøre

---

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007.

<sup>167</sup> Hornnes, R. 2006:40

group. The majority of the Karmøy king crab fishermen had experience from the scallop fishery on the East Coast, and Ness had been fishing scallop for over a decade. As the majority of the participants from Karmøy he had fishing experience from an early stage in his life, and had economic motives for moving to the United States. Uri had a father involved in the halibut fishery, as most of the U.S. born Norwegian-American fishermen, and as many other Norwegian-Americans he grew up in Ballard. It was also typical for the Norwegian-American group in general to partner with other Norwegian-Americans. Ness is somewhat remarkable in this regard as his chief partnership was with the American Chuck Bundrant.

### **3.6 Summary**

In this chapter the role of the Norwegians and Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery has been investigated. There is indication of Norwegian-Americans participating from the early days of the fishery, but the information is suffering under the lack of available sources. When Kodiak became the center of the king crab fishery in the late 1950s, the fishery turned into a local phase, and it does not seem as Norwegian-Americans played an important part of the Kodiak fishery. From the early 1960s, there were a few Norwegian-Americans coming into the fishery, most of them from the Seattle area. As the king crab fishery shifted to other areas in Alaska from the middle 1960s, more Norwegian-Americans took interest in the fishery. As new boats were introduced to the fishery from 1966, Norwegian-Americans were among the early investors in such boats. In the 1970s, over half of the boats being built were for Norwegian-Americans, and this was the period when the Norwegian-American involvement in the fishery was at its greatest. From the middle 1970s, the Norwegian-American participation dropped a little, but they were still a substantial part of the king crab industry.

## Chapter 4:

# Explaining the Norwegian-American Participation in the King Crab Fishery

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter theories about ethnic businesses and ethnic entrepreneurs will be applied to explain the Norwegian-American participation in the king crab fishery. Norwegian-Americans will be seen as an ethnic group entering a business as entrepreneurs, and will be compared with other ethnic entrepreneurs.

Ethnic minorities and especially immigrants often struggle to settle in the labor market. Passed over by the local population, ethnic groups find themselves on the bottom of the job market, forced into low paying jobs with poor labor conditions. How do ethnic groups respond to the challenges they encounter in a difficult labor market? Research has shown that members of ethnic groups often become entrepreneurs. In the United States, ethnic minorities are more likely to become entrepreneurs than the majority of the population.<sup>168</sup> However, they make less money on average than those in the majority.

Could the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery be described as an ethnic group? Waldinger et al. define an ethnic group “as a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people sharing the common national background or migration experiences.”<sup>169</sup> By this definition, nearly all the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery can be described as members of an ethnic group, as they had a common national background and regular patterns of interaction among each other.

What about Norwegian-American entrepreneurs? Could the Norwegian-Americans investing in crab boats be described as ethnic entrepreneurs? Waldinger et al. define an entrepreneur as an owner or manager of a business enterprise.<sup>170</sup> Thus, not only the

---

<sup>168</sup> Waldinger R. and H. Aldrich in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:54

<sup>169</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:34

<sup>170</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:17

crab fishermen starting up companies, but also the fishermen investing in boats and becoming part-owners in crab vessels were entrepreneurs.

In this chapter, the situation of the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery will be compared to other ethnic groups in a labor market. Did the Norwegian-Americans encounter the same problems as other ethnic groups? How did the Norwegian-Americans respond to the issues they faced? Why did so many Norwegian-Americans become entrepreneurs? Did they run into the same difficulties as other ethnic entrepreneurs? Why did the Norwegian-Americans become so successful?

To answer these questions, research and theories on ethnic business and ethnic entrepreneurship will be used. In *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies*, Waldinger et al. present a theory on what stimulates entrepreneurship among ethnic groups. Their model examines why some ethnic groups are more likely to produce successful entrepreneurs than others. Their theory includes three variables: (1) opportunity structures, (2) characteristics of the ethnic group and (3) ethnic strategies.<sup>171</sup> This model will be applied to the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery.

A prominent idea in recent studies of ethnic business and ethnic entrepreneurship is the concept of social capital. Social capital refers to the value of the resources that are available to an individual through his relations with others, e.g. the wealth, status, power and social ties of those other individuals.<sup>172</sup> Social networks as a resource explain why a new business is started, its chances of survival and why some ethnic groups are particularly successful as entrepreneurs.<sup>173</sup> Was social capital an important factor for Norwegian-American entrepreneurs in the king crab fishery?

---

<sup>171</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990

<sup>172</sup> Flap et al. in Rath J. (ed.) 2000:147

<sup>173</sup> Flap et al. in Rath J. (ed.) 2000:145

## 4.2 Issues for ethnics in a labor market

The literature about immigration and ethnic entrepreneurs employed in this chapter is published after 1990. This does not diminish its relevance for immigration to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. Today, most immigration to the Western World is from less modernized countries. However, in the 1950s, Norway was not among the richest countries in Western Europe and was certainly less modernized than the United States. The issues Norwegian immigrants encountered in the 1950s and 1960s are in many ways similar to the issues immigrants encounter today.

Perhaps the most elementary issue for immigrants is the lack of language skills. This issue applies to nearly all immigrants, with some exceptions. Mastering a new language requires a lot of patience and some skill, and many immigrants do not have the time to learn a new language. The largest labor sector in the Western World is the service sector, today employing 55 percent of all workers in the United States.<sup>174</sup> Central to the service sector is interaction with other people, and not being able to communicate is a serious hindrance. Because of this, immigrants often find work where there are other co-ethnics, and the lack of language skills is not as problematic.

Another major problem for immigrants is the lack of education. In most cases, immigrants move from less modernized to more modernized societies. The more modernized a society is, the more valuable an education becomes. The majority of high-end jobs in a modern society require university or equivalent schooling. Immigrants that have higher education find that it can be hard to use in the host country. If the immigration takes place within comparable societies, this may not be problematic. For example, an engineer from Western Europe would probably have few problems putting his education to use in the United States, and vice versa. However, an engineer from a less modernized society would meet challenges.

All immigrants bring some sort of skill with them to the new society. Nevertheless, their skills are not always valued or needed in the labor market. This is especially the

---

<sup>174</sup> U.S Census Bureau, [cited April 9] <http://www.census.gov/econ/www/servmenu.html>



case when it comes to immigrants from less modernized societies. For instance, farmers and craftsmen of various kinds have skills it could be hard to put to use.

Coming from another country is in some cases a problem in itself when searching for a job. Unfamiliarity with ethnic groups and a lack of knowledge of their origins might make employers reluctant to give immigrants work. A further factor is discrimination. Several ethnic groups experience discrimination based on their country of origin. In the Western World, this is especially true for people with a different skin color than the majority of the population.

#### **4.2.1 Issues for ethnic entrepreneurs**

A major issue for ethnic entrepreneurs is that of financing their activities. Banks often hesitate to finance “ethnic” activities, not necessarily because of discrimination, but because banks are less able to determine the risk involved in an unknown market.<sup>175</sup> This leads ethnic entrepreneurs to seek alternative capital sources. Resources are often found in the ethnic community itself; for many ethnic entrepreneurs, borrowing money from co-ethnics and thus allowing others to become partners in the investment is a customary way of financing their projects.

Immigrants regularly operate at the lower end of the market, where obstacles to entrance are weakest, but even here they live a tough existence economically.<sup>176</sup> Competition is often fierce in the low end of the market, and margins are cut to the furthest. In industries where immigrant entrepreneurs operate, there are in many cases co-ethnics already established. Although immigrant business entrepreneurs work long hours assisted by family and co-ethnics, profits are often minimal, and compared to other established businesses, labor conditions are substandard.<sup>177</sup>

An additional obstacle for immigrants is their unfamiliarity with the legislation in the host society. This is a particular concern for ethnic entrepreneurs. Starting up a business in a Western society requires a lot of paperwork, and dealing with the

---

<sup>175</sup> Watson et al. in Rath J. (ed.) 2000:80

<sup>176</sup> Rath J. (ed.) 2000:3

<sup>177</sup> Rath J. (ed.) 2000:3

bureaucracy of Western societies is tough even for natives. For the immigrant population, the bureaucracy can force them to scrap their entire projects, as they do not understand the process of getting a business started. Not knowing the language complicates the matter substantially.

### **4.3 Issues for the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery**

Norwegians immigrating to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s experienced several of the issues facing other immigrants. Generally, they had little education, and only a few of them could speak English before they settled in the United States. As a result, they had to use their ethnic network in order to get a job. The immigrants from Karmøy who joined the scallop fishery in New Bedford are an illustrating example. When they came to the United States, they headed straight to New Bedford, because they knew there was a Karmøy-colony there, which they could make use of in order to get a job.

Traditionally, fishing has been an entry-level job, at the lower end of the market. Managers, owners and skippers can earn a good salary, but the fishermen working on deck or at processing facilities do not generally make very much. Normally, fishermen get a bigger paycheck if the boat does well. Thus, being a fisherman is a profession with great uncertainty. In hard times, fishermen will struggle to make a living for themselves and their family. Additional uncertainty is caused by the fact that by being on a boat, one can never be convinced that one will come home alive, especially if one is fishing far from shore.

The concerns about being a fisherman applied to the Norwegian-Americans working in the king crab fishery as well. The majority of the boats did very well during the late 1960s and the 1970s. However, there was always some doubt about how much crab they could fish during the crab season. Problems with gear or machinery could ruin an entire season of fishing. The crew on crab boats was paid a percentage of the surplus of the boat. Normally this was profitable for the fishermen, but if the boat experienced a troubled season, the fishermen on the boat would hardly make a living. When the

king crab fishery crashed in the early 1980s, the fishermen encountered a huge drop in their paycheck. The crash of the king crab fishery is only one example of how fragile a fishery can be.

Additionally, working in the king crab fishery in Alaska is one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States.<sup>178</sup> The climate in the Bering Sea can be extreme, and even though the boats used since the late 1960s are highly sophisticated, countless accidents have happened in the history of the king crab fishery. Several boats have gone down, causing the death of the entire crew. In 1974, the 86-foot *F/V John and Olaf* went down causing the death of four fishermen; skipper John Blaaid, Art Gilbert, David Gilbert, and Ivar Gjerde.<sup>179</sup> Both Blaaid and Gjerde were born in Norway. In 2005, Magne Nes was asked what he was the most proud of during his career in the fishing industry, and he answered; “I never took out a window, never lost a man, never lost an anchor.”<sup>180</sup>

Crab fishermen in the 1970s had to spend most of the year working in Alaska. In the earlier Kodiak era of the fishery, the boats could make daily trips to the crab grounds. In the 1970s, boats were out on the crab grounds in the Bering Sea and Bristol Bay for weeks or months. Jan Gunnar Fagerland states that he had one week of vacation with his family in New Bedford in his first year of crab fishing.<sup>181</sup> As most of the Norwegian-Americans were based in the mainland United States, they would typically only see their family in the summer, when the crab fishery was closed.

The important point here is that being a king crab fisherman was in many ways a typical ethnic minority job. Hazardous conditions, long hours and demanding work are the first words that come to mind for several of the participants in the fishery. Jan Gunnar Fagerland says, “If it was not for the money, nobody would have done it.”<sup>182</sup> The money associated with the fishery was the key difference between the king crab fishery and typical immigrant work.

---

<sup>178</sup> National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, [cited February 4]  
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fishfat.html>

<sup>179</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. February 1974.

<sup>180</sup> *Pilothouse Guide*. May 2005.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Jan Gunnar Fagerland, April 5, 2007.

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Jan Gunnar Fagerland, April 5, 2007.

### 4.3.1 Issues for Norwegian-American entrepreneurs

For Norwegian-Americans who wanted to build their own boat, financing the vessel was the largest issue. Building a new vessel was an expensive project for most fishermen. The first vessels to be built in the late 1960s had a price tag in the range of \$500,000. Axel Buholm was the first Norwegian-American to invest in a new crab boat with the *Seaern* in 1966. At that time he had already been involved in the fisheries in the United States for over 40 years. Other veteran fishermen buying crab vessels in the late 1960s were Einar Pedersen and Ole Hendricks. Through a long career in the fisheries on the West Coast of the United States, they had the capital and reputation needed to finance such an investment.

According to James Cole, another strategy for several Norwegian-Americans was to have a sponsor help finance the boat.<sup>183</sup> As fishermen began to succeed in the king crab fishery, they had the capital needed to sponsor other Norwegian-Americans entering the fishery. The sponsor had a substantial share in the boat, and the investment paid off heavily if the new skipper did well on the crab grounds.

During the 1970s, several of the Norwegian-Americans invested in more crab boats. At that time the participants had already accumulated enough capital through their other projects to invest in other boats. Owning a share in many boats paid off heavily in the 1970s, as nearly all boats in the crab fleet brought significant surpluses. By the early 1980s, some of the Norwegian-Americans, such as John Sjong and Konrad Uri, had the capital to finance multi-million-dollar factory trawler conversions for the Alaskan bottom fisheries.<sup>184</sup>

## 4.4 Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward's theories on ethnic entrepreneurs

Roger Waldinger, Howard Aldrich, and Robin Ward are among the leading scholars in the research of ethnic entrepreneurs. Since the 1970s, they have published a number of books about ethnic business, and *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant*

---

<sup>183</sup> Interview with James Cole, September 21, 2007.

<sup>184</sup> Hornnes R. 2006:41

*Business in Industrial Societies* is among their most recognized publications. In this book, the authors are particularly concerned with what stimulates entrepreneurship among ethnic groups, and why some of them are more successful than others. They identify three important variables which will now be applied to the situation of the Norwegian-American king crab fishermen: opportunity structures, characteristics of the ethnic group and ethnic strategies.

#### **4.4.1 Opportunity structures**

Ethnic groups can only work with the resources made available to them by their surroundings, and the structure of opportunities is constantly changing in modern industrial societies. Market conditions may favor only businesses serving an ethnic community's needs, in which case entrepreneurial opportunities are limited. Or market conditions may favor smaller enterprises serving non-ethnic populations, in which case opportunities are much greater.<sup>185</sup> Shops supplying the Scandinavian-Americans in Seattle with imported goods from their home countries are an example of businesses with a limited market. In contrast, Norwegian-American salmon fishermen in the early 1900s had a much wider market, serving both the Norwegian and non-Norwegian population.

In order to start a business, there must be a demand for the services it offers. For ethnic groups, the market typically develops within the ethnic community itself.<sup>186</sup> Here, the ethnic entrepreneurs have several advantages over the native population. They know the needs of the ethnic population and how they wish to be served. Businesses serving the immigrant market often struggle to grow beyond the ethnic population. However, in some cases, businesses have also managed to develop a market for their services in the native population. The king crab industry had problems with the demand for the product in the early days of the fishery. By the 1960s a market had been created in large cities in the United States, and the American king crab industry had replaced the Japanese. Furthermore, the American processors managed to sell their products to Japan as well, extending their market substantially.

---

<sup>185</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:21

<sup>186</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:21

In the 1970s, a small market for king crab was created in Europe. Denmark, interestingly enough, was the chief importer.<sup>187</sup>

In the open market, immigrant businesses often establish themselves in underserved or abandoned markets.<sup>188</sup> In the late 1960s, the king crab fishery could be described as an underserved market. The fishery around Kodiak had collapsed, and the abundant crab grounds in the Bering Sea and Bristol Bay were not being fished. The market for king crab had already been created in the United States, and the demand was higher than the supply of crab products. In these circumstances, Norwegian-Americans took their chances and invested heavily in new boats in order to supply the processors of king crab. The rising price of king crab in the 1970s shows that the demand for the product was growing faster than the catch of the crab fleet. Thus, the market continued to be underserved through the early 1980s, when the fishery collapsed.

Where Norwegian-American entrepreneurs distinguished themselves from typical ethnic entrepreneurs is in the investment needed to start the business. New firms are unlikely to arise in businesses characterized by high entry-level costs.<sup>189</sup> A new crab boat had a price tag of over \$500,000 in the late 1960s, and the price multiplied during the 1970s. Even though most boats had several owners, the cost was higher than is usual for ethnic entrepreneurs. However, it should be noted that some of the first Norwegian-Americans to invest in crab vessels were already established in other Pacific fisheries, thus having easier access to capital.

Characteristic of industries favorable to immigrant businesses is that the technical barriers to entry are low. The required skills do not involve high levels of specialization and can be learned through informal, on-the-job training and developed through experience.<sup>190</sup> This is true for the king crab industry as well. Most of the fishermen who joined the fishery had some experience in different fisheries, but it was not required. John Sjong had no prior experience as a fisherman when he was hired on a crab boat, and had little difficulty doing his job.<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, the

---

<sup>187</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. 1976.

<sup>188</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:25

<sup>189</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:25

<sup>190</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:28

<sup>191</sup> Interview with John Sjong, August 30, 2007.

fishermen who built their own boats all had experience in the king crab fisheries. Sjong worked as a mechanic on crab boats for four years before he ordered his own boat.

Given the existence of a market for ethnic businesses, any would-be entrepreneur still need access to ownership opportunities.<sup>192</sup> Immigrants' entrance to ownership positions essentially depend on two aspects: (1) the number of vacant business ownership positions, and the degree to which natives are competing for those openings, and (2) government policies toward immigrants.

In the top immigrant-receiving countries of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, rapid economic growth created new industries, allowing ethnic entrepreneurs to start businesses without significant competition from natives. However, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and up to the present day, economic growth has been slower, and there are relatively fewer vacant positions for ethnic entrepreneurs. Under these conditions, business opportunities for immigrants are principally determined by the supply of native entrepreneurs.<sup>193</sup> If the supply of native entrepreneurs diminishes in an industry, ethnics may take over as replacement owners. In the early 1960s, local Alaskans dominated the king crab fishery, but when the fishery spread out to other areas, the majority of the local fishermen did not invest in new boats. As a consequence, Norwegian-Americans had the chance of investing in boats, and took over as replacement owners.

Access to ownership is also affected by the government's immigration policy and by policies affecting the ease with which businesses can be started.<sup>194</sup> National and local governments vary in the extent to which they limit the businesses that are started. Significantly for the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery, only U.S. citizens could skipper a fishing vessel in the United States. In some instances, an American aboard the vessel was reported as the skipper, while the actual skipper was a Norwegian citizen.<sup>195</sup> Nevertheless, nearly all the Norwegian immigrants achieved U.S. citizenships, thus allowing them to skipper king crab boats. To achieve the U.S.

---

<sup>192</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:28

<sup>193</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:29

<sup>194</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:31

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Harald Mannes, February 29, 2007.

citizenship, you had to have lived at least five years in the U.S. Another restriction by the U.S. authorities was that the boats fishing in U.S. waters had to be built in the United States. If that had not been the case, Norwegian-Americans could have taken advantage of their connections to shipyards in Norway.

#### **4.4.2 Group characteristics**

There are several characteristics of immigrants in general that affect their success in the business market. The process of leaving one's home to enter a new life in a new society is self-selective; people who enter the immigration stream tend to be better prepared, more capable, and more inclined toward risk than those who stay at home.<sup>196</sup> This seems to be the case with Norwegians immigrating to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. They were adventurous and capable people willing to work hard.

Various explanations have been put forward to account for why some ethnic groups do better than others in business. Waldinger et al. have identified three important variables: (1) pre-migration characteristics, (2) the circumstances of migration, and (3) post-migration characteristics.<sup>197</sup> Pre-migration attributes include skill, language, business experience, kinship patterns and exposure to conditions (such as a high level of urbanization and industrialization) that would foster entrepreneurial attributes. The circumstances of migration are the conditions under which the immigrants move, whether as temporary workers or as permanent settlers. Post-migration characteristics include economic and occupational position and discrimination (or the lack thereof). None of these variables will by itself determine the level of self-employment in ethnic groups; rather, the crucial factor will be how these various characteristics work together.

#### **Pre-migration characteristics**

Research has shown that the likelihood of succeeding in business is enhanced if immigrants come with skills that are useful to business in both general and specific

---

<sup>196</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:32

<sup>197</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:41



ways.<sup>198</sup> The educational level of recent immigrants to the United States is much higher than the earlier waves of immigration. However, among these immigrants, there seems to be only a weak correlation between education level and entrepreneurship.

Historically, many immigrants have found work in business fields in which they have experience from their home countries. However, in recent years, fewer immigrants arrive with skills that are specific to the industries they enter.<sup>199</sup> The majority of the Norwegian-Americans had fishing experience before they went into the crab fisheries. This is especially true for the people from Karmøy and Northern Norway who went into the fishery. A number of the U.S.-born Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery had experience from other U.S. fisheries, particularly the halibut fishery. This experience proved to be an advantage for the Norwegian-American participants, who themselves advance this as one of the main reasons why they succeeded.<sup>200</sup>

### **Circumstances of migration**

Migration scholars increasingly agree that whether newcomers arrive as temporary workers or as permanent settlers is an important factor for mobility and integration into the host society.<sup>201</sup> Some scholars have argued that most labor migrations to industrial societies begin as a movement of temporary workers. As they are temporary workers, they are willing to work the low-level jobs that the natives reject. Their main concern is the accumulated capital they can obtain and bring back to their home country. Permanent settlers, whose ambitions extend to the positions occupied by the natives as well as the rewards of those positions, will avoid the low-level jobs. Consequently, the limited mobility for immigrants in the labor market is more likely to cause frustration for the permanent settlers than for the temporary workers.

It seems as though most of the Norwegians immigrating to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s had the intention of returning to Norway after some years in the United States. However, after a couple of years, several of them obtained U.S.

---

<sup>198</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:41

<sup>199</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:41

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Morris Hansen, September 13, 2007. Interview with Magne Nes, August 29, 2007.

<sup>201</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:42

citizenship and became permanent settlers. Their success in the king crab fishery had a lot to do with their decision. Norwegian-Americans built profitable businesses through their investments and were soon established in American society. If they had returned to Norway, they could have invested their capital in Norwegian businesses, but they saw bigger opportunities in the United States. A social network and a family anchored in American society established them in the United States even further.

### **Post-migration characteristics**

A factor that influences self-employment is the ethnic group's position in the economy.<sup>202</sup> Certain environments are more supportive of small businesses than others, and the chance that immigrants will take advantage of supportive conditions is greatest if immigrants are already present in the industries where small business is the prevailing form. One characteristic of environments supportive of small business is precisely that the know-how needed to run the business can be obtained through on-the-job training.<sup>203</sup>

Norwegian-Americans had been present in the Northwest Pacific fishing industry for decades when they started to join the king crab fishery. The fishing industry consisted mostly of small businesses, often run by the fishermen themselves. The small business form was favorable for the Norwegian-Americans, as they did not have to compete with large companies. Furthermore, the knowledge of running a small king crab business could be acquired through experience in the fishery. Countless king crab fishermen learned how to run both a king crab boat and a business through working on deck on crab boats.

#### **4.4.3 Ethnic strategies**

The term “ethnic strategies” refers to how ethnic entrepreneurs adapt to meet challenges related to their businesses. Strategies emerge from the interaction of group characteristics and opportunity structures, as entrepreneurs mobilize resources to meet

---

<sup>202</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:44

<sup>203</sup> Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:45

market conditions, adapting to or creating solutions to problems.<sup>204</sup> Jeremy Boissevain et al. claim that even though ethnic groups are diverse, they utilize similar strategies and sociocultural resources in the resolution of business problems.<sup>205</sup> Boissevain et al. have identified seven common business problems that confront ethnic entrepreneurs: (1) information needed for the establishment and survival of the firm, (2) obtaining the capital needed to establish or expand the business, (3) acquiring the training and skill needed to run a small business, (4) recruiting and managing efficient, honest, and cheap workers, (5) managing relations with customers and suppliers, (6) surviving strenuous business competition, and (7) protecting themselves from political attacks. These issues will now be taken up in respective order as they relate to the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery.

The most common way Norwegian-Americans gathered information about the king crab industry seems to be through their ethnic network. As more people wanted to invest in their own vessels, they asked co-ethnics for advice. For Americans, such information could be harder to gather. They did not have such an informal network they could turn to for assistance.

In order to finance their activities, Norwegian-Americans used a combination of loans and private resources. As the king crab fishery became increasingly profitable in the 1970s, fishermen could secure a loan with relative ease.<sup>206</sup> Among ethnic groups, a frequent way of financing a business is lending from co-ethnics.<sup>207</sup> This does not appear to be the case among Norwegian-American king crab fishermen. Rather, they invested in each other's vessels and went into long-term partnerships.

The skills needed to run a small business was obtained through experience in the king crab fishery. After a couple of years on a king crab boat, the crewmembers learned what was needed of a skipper of a vessel. A few men, such as Konrad Uri, did not have any experience in the king crab fishery before skippering a king crab boat.<sup>208</sup> However, Uri had been in the wheelhouse on several boats of other fisheries off the

---

<sup>204</sup> Boissevain, J., et al. in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:131

<sup>205</sup> Boissevain, J., et al. in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:132

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007.

<sup>207</sup> Boissevain, J., et al. in Waldinger R., Aldrich H., and R. Ward et al. 1990:138

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007.

Pacific Coast. According to him, the king crab fishery was much like other fisheries he had experienced.

As previously noted, most of the Norwegian-American skippers recruited Norwegian-American fishermen as crewmembers on their vessels. Several of them preferred Norwegian-Americans because of their honesty, loyalty and willingness to work hard.<sup>209</sup> A popular route for recruiting crewmembers was taking advice from other skippers and crewmembers in their ethnic network. A fisherman's rumor always got ahead of him, and if the reports were good, he was hired.<sup>210</sup> The labor pool of Norwegian-American fishermen served the skippers well, and this pool was not widely available to Americans. According to several Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery, the Norwegian-Americans were generally better fishermen than the Americans.<sup>211</sup> Being immigrants, they had a willingness to work hard, and most of them had experience from fisheries back home. As a result, it seems that Norwegian-American skippers had a better chance of getting high-quality crewmembers on their boats than their American colleagues.

Seafood companies processing king crab were the customers for the king crab vessels. Through information from co-ethnics, the Norwegian-Americans knew whom to trust and which companies paid the best price for the crab. The price of king crab was negotiated prior to each season, and the crab fleet generally received the same price for the crab. With respect to suppliers of gear, Americans and Norwegian-Americans generally bought their equipment from the same suppliers. A few Norwegian-Americans, like Magne Nes and Rudy Peterson with the 1975-built *Ocean Leader*, ordered equipment from Norway. On the *Ocean Leader*, Karmøy Mekaniske Verksted supplied the drag winches and trawl reel.<sup>212</sup> Nes notes that the Norwegian gear was of superior quality; however, ordering equipment from Norway does not seem to be widespread among the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fleet.<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> Interview with Magne Nes, August 28, 2007.

<sup>210</sup> Interview with Gunneiv Løklingholm, September 13, 2007.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Magne Nes, August 28, 2007. Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007. Interview with Harald Mannes February 29, 2007.

<sup>212</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. January 1975.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with Magne Nes, August 28, 2007.

The competition for the crab stiffened as the number and size of the boats increased. In the late 1970s, Norwegian-American participation in the king crab fishery dropped because of the many Americans investing in boats. However, the boats still produced substantial surpluses as the catch and price of crab went up. Not until the crash of the early 1980s would the Norwegian-American and American crab entrepreneurs experience difficult times.

The Norwegian-American business owners in the king crab industry do not seem to have experienced any political attacks. Norwegians had long been established in the Pacific Coast and Alaskan fisheries, and were not seen as a foreign threat.<sup>214</sup> The Japanese crab fleet was widely criticized by U.S. fishermen in the 1960s and early 1970s, but the Norwegian-American fishermen were as skeptical as the Americans.<sup>215</sup>

#### **4.5 Social capital as a factor in ethnic business**

Social networks are a capital good; they help one achieve ambitions that would otherwise be difficult to accomplish. The essential questions, then, are: how one can fulfill one's goal more efficiently, how social capital can improve the output of one's labor and human capital, and how people can invest in each other, not only for immediate returns, but also with an eye to the future.<sup>216</sup> This is called *generalized reciprocity*: a favor is repaid at a later, indefinite time with an indefinite service, if possible and if needed. Generalized reciprocity is achievable only if the expectation of the common future is long-term.<sup>217</sup> The notion of generalized reciprocity could be adapted to the Norwegian-American community as well. Doing someone a small favor like helping him obtain a place to stay or a job, or a big favor like helping to finance a boat, one could always expect the favor returned in some way or another.

The idea of social capital can be used to explain the success of Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery. The large Norwegian-American community in Seattle

---

<sup>214</sup> Interview with Konrad Uri, September 25, 2007. Interview with Buddy Bernsten September 13, 2007.

<sup>215</sup> *The Fisherman's News*. 1973.

<sup>216</sup> Flap et al. in Rath, J. (ed.) 2000:147

<sup>217</sup> Flap et al. in Rath, J. (ed.) 2000:147

became significant for the immigrant fishermen from Norway. Essentials such as housing and employment were among the things the ethnic community could provide them. Harald Mannes traveled to Seattle in 1963 and met with acquaintances from Karmøy, who found a job for him.<sup>218</sup> The same thing happened the next year in Alaska, where he secured a job on a crab boat through connections from Karmøy. After a couple of years on various crab boats, Mannes obtained American citizenship, which was needed to skipper an American boat. Other Norwegian-Americans advised him to meet with a Norwegian-American woman in Seattle who had helped a number of Norwegians become American citizens.

According to Jennifer Sequeira and Abdul Rasheed in “The Role of Social and Human Capital in the Start-up and Growth of Immigrant Businesses”, immigrants’ dependence on ethnic networks varies in the different stages of a business.<sup>219</sup> Sequeira and Rasheed examine three stages of entrepreneurship: pre-startup, start-up and growth.

In the pre-startup stage of an ethnic business, person-to-person exchanges dominate, and the prospective entrepreneur is becoming familiar with his environment and building social capital.<sup>220</sup> Norwegian-Americans who wanted to run their own business in the king crab fishery went through the same stage. When they joined the crab fisheries, they had to build up sufficient social capital in order to run their own boats. By meeting with other Norwegian-Americans already involved in the business, they built their own network and became familiar with the Norwegian-American community. When they were settled in the fishery and had satisfactory social capital, they could make use of their network to start up their own businesses.

In the start-up stage of a business, the owner is still reliant on his or her social network. Social capital allows access to information, and since information is costly, social capital plays a critical role in the start-up stage of a business. Sequeira and Rasheed argue that strong social ties have a positive effect on a newly started

---

<sup>218</sup> Interview with Harald Mannes, February 29, 2007

<sup>219</sup> Sequeira, J. and A. Rasheed in Stiles, C. and C. Galbraith (ed.) 2004:83

<sup>220</sup> Sequeira, J. and A. Rasheed in Stiles, C. and C. Galbraith (ed.) 2004:84

business.<sup>221</sup> Within the Norwegian-American community in the king crab fishery, it seems as though the social ties were relatively strong. Most of the Norwegian-Americans knew each other and interacted on a regular basis.<sup>222</sup>

The Norwegian-American organizations in Seattle indicate the strong relationship based on common ethnic origin. The Leiv Erikson Lodge, under the Norwegian-American organization *Sons of Norway*, in Ballard has roots back to 1903.<sup>223</sup> A society where numerous fishermen spent time together was the *Norwegian Commercial Club* in Ballard. Another activity where Norwegian-Americans came together was the yearly celebration of the Norwegian national day, May the 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>224</sup> Each May 17<sup>th</sup> Norwegian-Americans paraded through the streets of Ballard. As a number of fishermen were single immigrants without family in the United States, it become customary to invite these people for the celebration of Christmas.<sup>225</sup>

In 1991 the *Karmøy Club of Washington* was founded in Seattle, with over 200 members. Arnold Rasmussen, emigrating from Karmøy in 1953, became the president of the club. Rasmussen was a long time king crab fisherman, skippering and co-owning the 1976-built *Nordic Pride* and the 1980-built *Nordic Monarch*. Of the male members at the foundation of the *Karmøy Club of Washington*, 75 percent were fishermen.<sup>226</sup> A formal association for people of Karmøy had been discussed among the fishermen for decades, but as many of them retired, they had time to participate. Other societies in Seattle based in regional origin in Norway include *Bergens Klubben*, *Sunnmørslaget* and *Nordlandslaget*.

Going into the growth stage of a business, Sequeira and Rasheed claim that strong social ties may constrain the potential for growth, and that ties more market-like than socially embedded are more useful for the entrepreneur.<sup>227</sup> Therefore, the development of weak ties with individuals or organizations outside the ethnic network

---

<sup>221</sup> Sequeira, J. and A. Rasheed in Stiles, C. and C. Galbraith (ed.) 2004:84

<sup>222</sup> Interview with John Sjong, August 30, 2007. Interview with Gunnleiv Løklingholm, September 13, 2007.

<sup>223</sup> Lovoll, O. 1999:291

<sup>224</sup> Garvik, T. 2006:48

<sup>225</sup> Garvik, T. 2006:42

<sup>226</sup> Garvik, T. 2006:29

<sup>227</sup> Sequeira, J. and A. Rasheed in Stiles, C. and C. Galbraith (ed.) 2004:84

has a positive effect on the growth of ethnic businesses. The success of perhaps the most successful Norwegian-American king crab fisherman, Kåre Ness, must be partly credited to his partnership with the American Charles Bundrant. When Ness came to Alaska in 1972, Bundrant was already established in the king crab industry. Together, they built a highly successful seafood company, Trident Seafoods. Without Bundrant's relationship with the American fishing industry, Ness's accomplishments would probably not have been possible. For other Norwegian-Americans, it seems as though links outside the Norwegian-American community became more important as their businesses grew.

Social capital is generally seen as positive and instrumental in the achievement of many goals. However, several scholars have emphasized the negative effects of social capital.<sup>228</sup> People become trapped in their ethnic networks by their investments in the local community, and those who are successful will be approached by job and loan-seeking kinsmen who lay claim to their profits.<sup>229</sup> Entrepreneurs who do not belong to a certain ethnic group seem to have weaker ties to their networks. Thus, they do not have the risk of becoming trapped by their obligations to their ethnic network. Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery must have felt the negative sides of social capital as well. Co-ethnics who wanted a favor contacted the fishermen who were successful and sought a bit of their prosperity. In the 1970s, the competition for a job on a crab boat was fierce, and it could be hard to turn down a friend in the ethnic community. Nevertheless, it seems as though the advantages of social capital were much greater than the disadvantages for the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery.

## 4.6 Summary

In this chapter, the Norwegian-American success in the king crab fishery has been explored through the use of literature and theories about immigrant business and ethnic entrepreneurship. Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery experienced several of the challenges ethnics encounter in a modern society. They had to rely on

---

<sup>228</sup> Flap et al. in Rath, J. (ed.) 2000:151

<sup>229</sup> Flap et al. in Rath, J. (ed.) 2000:152



their ethnic network in order to get a job, and working in the king crab fishery was a tough and dangerous profession. However, Norwegian-Americans were able to overcome the challenges they faced, partly through the close ties in the Norwegian-American community. In many ways they turned their disadvantage situation into something positive. Their ethnic network was made use of, and proved as an excellent way for skippers to recruit crewmembers. They were adventurous in nature and were willing to invest in order to make a profitable business. But most of all, the fishermen were at the right place at the right time. The Alaskan king crab fishery from 1968 to 1983 was a unique opportunity in modern fishery history. Norwegian-Americans, who were there, seized the opening and most of them became highly successful.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1 The Norwegian-American participation in the king crab fishery**

The scope of this thesis has been to document and investigate the Norwegian-American participation in the king crab fishery from 1920 to 1983. The Norwegian-American involvement in the different phases of the fishery has been described, and we have seen what roles the Norwegian-Americans played in the fishery.

Norwegian-Americans did not play a significant role in the king crab fishery before World War II. The first American fishermen to harvest crab on a commercial basis were Alaskans. From 1945 to 1960, a few Norwegian-Americans participated as skippers, most notably for the Wakefield Company. There is also some indication of Norwegian-American crewmembers in the fishery. A few sources mention two brothers, possibly Norwegian, who constructed the first modern king crab pots in 1950. However, the sources are not reliable enough to confirm this. Generally, the Norwegian-American effort in the king crab fishery before 1960 was minor and sporadic.

Beginning in the early 1960s, Norwegian-Americans started to involve themselves in the fishery on a more regular basis. The king crab fishery was growing around Kodiak, drawing the interest of the fishermen and the fishing industry. A few Norwegian-Americans engaged in the Kodiak fishery, but it was still dominated by local fishermen and their boats. When the Kodiak fishery crashed in the mid-1960s, fishermen were drawn west to the areas around the Aleutian Islands. It seems that Norwegian-Americans became increasingly more important there.

From 1966, a new style of boats was introduced in the king crab fishery. Around a third of the vessels built before 1970 were delivered to Norwegian-Americans. A mixture of Norwegian-born and U.S.-born Norwegian-Americans were owners of these boats. Most of the Norwegian-born fishermen were immigrants from Sunnmøre, but there were also increasing numbers of fishermen from Karmøy joining the fishery.

The crewmembers on the boats owned by Norwegian-Americans were almost always Norwegian-Americans as well.

In the late 1960s, Norwegian-Americans played an increasingly more important role in the king crab fishery. By 1970, they were challenging the Alaska-based crab fleet with their new and better boats. The roles played by the Norwegian-Americans were skippers and crewmembers. However, they were still a minor group compared to the established crab fishermen.

The trend of Norwegian-Americans joining the king crab fishery continued in the early 1970s. By then, the fishermen from Karmøy represented the largest Norwegian-American group. The majority of them came from the East Coast of the United States, where they had fished for scallop out of New Bedford.

From 1970 to 1975, over half of the boats built for the king crab fishery were delivered to Norwegian-American owners. This was the period when Norwegian-Americans were most influential in the king crab fishery. Around half of the king crab fishermen in the fishery were Norwegian-Americans. Apart from being fishermen, a few Norwegian-Americans started businesses and went into managerial roles in the fishery.

From 1975 to 1983, Norwegian-Americans continued to play a significant role in the king crab fishery. The percentage of new boats delivered to Norwegian-Americans dropped, but not substantially. The proportion of Norwegian-American crewmembers declined, as there were fewer Norwegians immigrating to the United States. The booming king crab fishery in Bristol Bay benefited the Norwegian-American fishermen greatly. Some of them, like Kåre Ness and John Sjong, became millionaires, largely based on the profits from the king crab fishery.

The Norwegian-American fishermen played a major role in the king crab fishery from the mid-1960s. Most of their efforts were as skippers and fishermen, even though a few were represented in major fishing industry companies. They went into an already established fishery, not as pioneers. By becoming major participants in an established

fishery, they did what Norwegian-Americans had done in the salmon, herring and halibut fisheries in the early 1900s.

By employing different theories, we have seen that the Norwegian-American participation can be explained by a number of different models. The Norwegian-Americans who invested in boats in the late 1960s and the 1970s were able to overcome the challenges ethnic entrepreneurs face. Their willingness to invest brought them success, but it was a risky move; the crab fishery had already witnessed a crash of stock in the Kodiak fishery. The Norwegian-American success must be partly credited to social capital. As members of the Norwegian-American community, they had access to the competence of other ethnics. Because of this, being an ethnic minority might have been an advantage in the king crab fishery, in contrast to many other businesses.

The situation of the Norwegian-Americans in the king crab fishery has also been compared to that of other ethnic groups. The work of the fishermen shares many similarities with typical ethnic work, most notably in the difficult labor conditions with hard work and long hours. However, the profits fishermen reaped from the king crab industry were much greater compared to other representative ethnic businesses.

## **5.2 Contribution of this thesis and research ahead**

This thesis has been the first major attempt to describe the Norwegian-American participation in the king crab fishery. Sverre Arestad was the first to shed light on the topic with his article, “Norwegians in the Pacific Coast Fisheries,” which highlighted the Norwegians as pioneers in the fishery, and said that only a few Norwegians were successful as boat owners and fishermen. This thesis contradicts his conclusions; it claims that Norwegian-Americans were never important as innovators, but played a major role as fishermen from the late 1960s. As fishermen and boat owners, Norwegian-Americans generally did well, and were as successful as the Americans. Hopefully, future research will complement this thesis and contribute to a better understanding of the Norwegian-American involvement in the king crab fishery.

Norwegian-Americans' influence on the king crab fishery is an interesting part of the history of the Norwegian-Americans in the United States. The king crab fishery is a story of fortunes and tragedies at a time when a poor fisherman from Norway could become a multi-millionaire halfway around the world. I have been honored to present their stories, and I look forward to others sharing the same experience. There is certainly more to be revealed about the Norwegian-American crab fishermen.

## Bibliography

Anonymous Author. 1992. "Alaska King Crab Historical Document". Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Kodiak, Alaska.

Arestad, S. 1943. "Norwegians in the Pacific Coast Fisheries" in *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*. Washington State Historical Society. Seattle, Washington.

Arestad, S. 1985. "Norwegians in the Pacific Coast Fisheries" in *Norwegian-American studies, Volume 30*. Northfield, Minnesota.

Boissevain J., Blaschke, J., Grotenberg, H., Joseph, I., Morokvasic, M. and R. Ward. "Ethnic Entrepreneurs and Ethnic Strategies" in Waldinger, R., Aldrich, H. and R. Ward et al. 1990. *Ethnic Entrepreneurs – Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies*. Sage. Newbury Park, California.

Bowers, F. 1998. "Annual Management Report for the Shellfish Fisheries of the Aleutian Islands". Aleutian Islands Management Staff. Dutch Harbor, Alaska.

Browning, R. 1974. *Fisheries of the North Pacific – History, Species, Gear & Processes*. Alaska northwest publishing company. Anchorage, Alaska.

Chaffin, Y. 1967. *Koniag to King Crab: Alaska's Southwest, Kodiak from sea otter settlement to King Crab capitol; history of Hunting and Fishing industries, island villages and scenic beauty*. Anchorage, Alaska.

Chaffin, Y., Rostad, M. and T. Krieger. 1983. *Alaska's Konyag Country*. Anchorage, Alaska.

Cole, James. 1988. "Fishing Vessels of the Pacific Northwest: The Past 30 Years" in *Marine Technology and SNAME News*, Volume 25. New York, New York.

Flap, H., Kumcu, A. and B. Bulder. "The Social Capital of Ethnic Entrepreneurs and their Business Success" in Rath, J (ed.). 2000. *Immigrant Business*. MacMillan. London.

Garvik, T. 2006. "Karmøy Club of Washington". University of Oslo, Oslo.

Gjersvik, M. 1984. *De som dro fra Karmøy til Amerika*.

Herrmann M., J. Greenberg, C. Hamel and H. Geier. 2004. "Regional Economic Impact Assessment of the Alaska Snow Crab Fishery – Integrated with an International Snow Crab Market Modell". University Alaska Fairbanks. Fairbanks, Alaska.

Higgins, J. 1978. *The North Pacific deckhand's & Alaska cannery worker's handbook*. Albacore Press. Eastsound, Washington.

- Hodne, B., Kjeldstadli, K. and G. Rosander. 1981. *Muntlige kilder: Om bruk av intervjuer i etnologi, folkeminnevitenskap, og historie*. Universitetsforlaget. Oslo.
- Hornnes, R. 2006. "Norwegian investments in the U.S. factory trawler fleet, 1980-1998". University of Bergen, Bergen.
- Kjeldstadli, K. 1999. *Fortida er ikke hva den en gang var*. Universitetsforlaget. Oslo.
- Larkin, P. A., Scott, B. and A. W. Trites. 1990. "The Red King Crab Fishery of the Southeastern Bering Sea". The University of British Columbia. Vancouver, British Columbia.
- Lovoll, O (ed.). 1993. *Nordics in America: The Future of Their Past*. The Norwegian-American Historical Association. Northfield, Minnesota.
- Lovoll, O. 1999. *The Promise of America*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- McLean R. and K. Delaney. 1978. *Alaska's Fishery Atlas*. Department of Fish and Game. Juneau, Alaska.
- Miller, G. 1965. "The Development of the King Crab Industry in Alaska up to 1964". University of Alaska. Alaska.
- Rasmussen, J. 1993. *New Land, New Lives*. University of Washington Press. Seattle, Washington.
- Rath, J (ed.). et. al. 2000. *Immigrant Business*. MacMillan. London.
- Semmingsen, I. 1950. *Veien mot vest – Utvandringen fra Norge, 1865-1915*. Aschehoug. Oslo.
- Semmingsen, I. 1975. *Drøm og dåd: Utvandringen til Amerika*. Aschehoug. Oslo.
- Sequeira, J. and A. Rasheed. "The Role of Social and Human Capital in the Start-Up and Growth of Immigrant Businesses" in Stiles, C. and C. Galbraith (ed.). 2004. *Ethnic Entrepreneurship: Structure and Process*. Elsevier. Oxford.
- Stiles, C. and C. Galbraith (ed.). 2004. *Ethnic Entrepreneurship: Structure and Process*. Elsevier. Oxford.
- Thompson, K. 1997. *Fishing Vessels of the United States*. Nautilus. Seattle, Washington.
- Waldinger, R. and H. Aldrich. "Trends in Ethnic Business in the United States" in Waldinger, R., Aldrich, H. and R. Ward et al. 1990. *Ethnic Entrepreneurs – Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies*. Sage. Newbury Park, California.

Waldinger, R., Aldrich, H. and R. Ward. "Opportunities, Group Characteristics, and Strategies" in Waldinger, R., Aldrich, H. and R. Ward et al. 1990. *Ethnic Entrepreneurs – Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies*. Sage. Newbury Park, California.

Waldinger, R., Aldrich, H. and R. Ward et al. 1990. *Ethnic Entrepreneurs – Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies*. Sage. Newbury Park, California.

Walker, S. 1991. *Working on the Edge: Surviving in the World's most dangerous profession, King Crab Fishing on Alaska's high seas*. St. Martin's Press. New York, New York.

Watson, R., Keasey, K. and M. Baker. "Small Firm Financial Contracting and Immigrant Entrepreneurship" in Rath, J (ed.). 2000. *Immigrant Business*. MacMillan. London.

### **Video documentaries**

Eaton, B. 1994. *Alaska King Crab Cowboys*. John Sabella & Associates. Port Townsend, Washington.

Thorstenson, B. 1996. *Pots of Gold: The Profit and the Sorrow*. John Sabella & Associates. Port Townsend, Washington.

### **Newspapers and magazines**

*Alaska Fisherman's Journal*. 1977-1981. Juneau, Alaska.

*National Fisherman*. 1977-1983. Portland, Maine.

*Pacific Fisherman*. 1945-1965. Seattle, Washington.

*Pilothouse Guide*. 2005. Juneau, Alaska.

*The Fisherman's News*. 1966-1981. Seattle, Washington.



## Online sources

Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Fishery Statistics. Available online at:  
<http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/geninfo/shellfish/shelhome.php>

National Marine Fishery Service. About NMFS. Available online at:  
<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/index.html>

National Marine Fishery Service. Fishery Statistics 1950-2007. Available online at:  
<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/index.html>

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Alaska fishery working conditions. Available online at:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fishfat.html>

Official Visitors Guide to Kodiak. Available online at:  
[http://www.kodiak.org/fishing\\_boom.html](http://www.kodiak.org/fishing_boom.html)

Outline maps. Available online at:  
<http://maps.hist-geo.com/alaska/outline>  
<http://www.theus50.com/images/state-outline-maps/washington-outline.gif>  
<http://z.about.com/d/geography/1/0/A/H/usa2.jpg>  
[http://soft-baseball.no/1/ima/norge\\_kart.gif](http://soft-baseball.no/1/ima/norge_kart.gif)

Social Security Administration. National Average Wage Index. Available online at:  
<http://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/awi.html>

Trident Seafoods. The history of the company. Available online at:  
<http://www.tridentseafoods.com>

United States Census Bureau. Labour sector in the United States. Available online:  
<http://www.census.gov/econ/www/servmenu.html>

## List of informants

Bernstein, Buddy. Norwegian-Alaskan fisherman. Place/time: At his home in Ballard, Seattle. September 13, 2007.

Cole, James. Former ship designer at Marco. Place/time: At Trident Seafoods, Seattle. September 21, 2007.

Fagerland, Jan Gunnar. Norwegian-American fisherman. Place/time: At his home in Åkra, Karmøy. April 5, 2007.

Hansen, Morris. Norwegian-Alaskan fisherman. Place/time: At a coffee shop in Ballard, Seattle.

Langesæter, Einar. Norwegian-American fishermen. Place/time: Chinooks restaurant, Fishermen's Terminal, Seattle. September 25, 2007.

Løklingholm, Gunnleiv. Norwegian-American fisherman. Place/time: At Buddy Bernstein's home, Seattle. September 13, 2007.

Mannes Harald. Norwegian-American fisherman. Place/time: At his home in Skudesneshavn, Karmøy. February 29, 2007.

Nes, Magne. Norwegian-American fisherman. Place/time: On his boat, *Berit J*, at the Fishermen's Terminal, Seattle. August 28, 2007.

Ness, Kåre. Norwegian-American fisherman. Place/time: At Trident Seafoods, Seattle. September 30, 2007.

Sjong, John. Norwegian-American fisherman. Place/time: At his office in Ballard, Seattle. August 30, 2007.

Uri, Konrad. Norwegian-American fisherman. Place/time: At Kaffistova, Ballard, Seattle. September 25, 2007.