

PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN IN MAINE'S CANNING INDUSTRY, 1907-1911

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The canning and preserving of local fruits, vegetables, and shellfish became an important element in Maine's economy during the latter part of the nineteenth century. By 1900 Maine was the nation's only producer of canned sardines and was third in the country in the packing of sweet corn. However, for at least four canned products — corn, blueberries, lobsters, and sardines — children played an important role in the preparation or processing. The canning industry was second only to Maine's cotton mills in the employment of children. At the turn of the century, reformers across the nation began weighing the immediate gains from child labor against the long-term effects on the nation's youth. In Maine, the sardine industry in particular became the focus of a campaign to ensure that early work did not interfere with education. The historical records resulting from this reform movement shed light on the nature of work and attitudes toward children in rural Maine.

The canning industry adapted easily to the web of economic life in nineteenth-century rural Maine. Sweet corn canning, for instance, added an important source of income in Maine's pattern of mixed husbandry and gave Maine corn a glowing reputation for quality at a time when the state's agriculture was under competitive stress from western farmers. Lobster canning, popular until the 1890s, offered expanding markets for Maine lobsters, otherwise restricted to consumers in coastal New England and to the seasonal vacation industry.

Like many rural activities — logging, fishing, trapping, and farming, for instance — canning was seasonal; families could easily fit several weeks employment in the canneries into the complex yearly cycle of activities typical of Maine's farm towns and fishing villages. Like farm work and other rural pastimes, labor in the canneries was irregular, alternating between periods of intense labor and slack times. The organization of activities in the canneries resembled the natural rhythms of farm work or fishing more than it did the sustained,



At the turn of the century, Maine's canneries ranked second only to the textile industry in numbers of children they employed. The industry's erratic work schedules often meant periods of intense labor, as this boy's expression suggests. Photographs such as the above, taken by Lewis Hine, were used to garner support for legislation to outlaw child labor. All Hine photos in this article courtesy Library of Congress.

mechanically routinized work patterns characteristic of urban factory work. Finally, the canneries were able to accommodate an important element of nineteenth-century rural life: the family work unit. Often entire families were recruited into the canneries during the brief but busy canning season. This pattern duplicated other rural work routines in which all members — including children — contributed to family economic subsistence. Children, an important part of the family economic unit, worked as a rule rather than an exception in rural Maine. The work routines and patterns common to nineteenth-century rural Maine — including child labor — lent themselves handily to the needs of the new industry.

Canning of Maine produce began with sweet corn and spread to other crops. Starting around 1840 when Isaac Winslow began experimenting with canning near Portland, Maine quickly became a leader in the development of the American corn canning industry. Over the next sixty years the process was refined, and by 1899 there were approximately seventy-five corn factories, as the canneries were called, scattered throughout the state (with the exception of Aroostook County, where the short growing season precluded commercial farming of sweet corn). During an annual canning season lasting between four and six weeks, usually from late August through early October, these factories employed approximately 7,500 workers, who were mostly local residents and often included entire families.¹ While the actual canning of the corn was primarily men's work, large numbers of women and children labored at husking. This early step in the processing, conducted outdoors, was described in 1900 as "a husking bee on a big scale." "While the huskers are a jolly crowd," an observer noted, "they are all intent on their work and their hands fly swiftly as they strip the husks from the white, rich looking ears. The baskets hold about a bushel and for every basketful the huskers receive four cents."² Although the work extended for only a short time each year, it did provide added employment and income in an often "cash poor" rural economy.

Some of the corn factories canned a variety of other products as well, each with its own harvest and processing time. In 1887, for example, the employees of the Winslow Packing Company's factory in Buckfield canned corn from late August through the beginning of October. During the rest of October, pumpkins and squash were packed, while in November the work shifted to the packing of apples.³

In 1866 Maine's first blueberry cannery was established at Cherryfield. Confined to Washington County in eastern Maine, this industry also provided short-term employment for entire families, many of whom worked in the fields or "barrens" picking the lowbush blueberries for local processors while others worked at the canneries. According to the 1900



Commercial canning came to Maine in the 1840s, soon after the process had been developed. By the end of the century, canned corn, blueberries, sardines — and lobsters — were important adjuncts to Maine's rural economy. The above photos of men sealing cans were taken in the Underwood plant at Jonesport. William Underwood Collection, Fogler Library, UMO.

annual report of the Maine Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics,

the number of hands employed in the various factories would aggregate a little over a hundred, but if we include the pickers, we shall find from one thousand to two thousand men, women and children employed in the blueberry packing industry during the canning season. There were distributed to the pickers in 1899, the sum of \$31,000. About this sum of money is distributed annually among a poor but worthy class of people who otherwise would have but few opportunities of earning ready money.⁴

As in the sweet corn business, the work was concentrated in a three-to-six week picking season which usually began in late August or early September.

The canning of Maine lobsters was still another aspect of Maine's food processing industry during the late nineteenth century, but one that was no longer important by the turn of the century. In 1895 the Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics stated that lobster canning had "assumed large proportions, there being numerous factories along the coast, the goods enjoying a widespread sale."⁵ Here, too, the processing season was short, being concentrated for the most part during the late spring and early summer months. In 1885 an amendment to earlier legislation concerning the capture and processing of lobsters limited the canning season to three and one half months between April 1 and July 15 each year.⁶ As early as 1870, children were being employed in this process; nineteen children of both sexes were listed in the census of that year as working in the lobster factories at Deer Isle. By 1900, however, this phase of the Maine canning industry had practically ceased, having migrated northward and eastward to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

The most important aspect of the Maine canning industry, and the one that employed the largest number of adults and children of various ages, involved the sardine canning factories, most of which were centered around Passamaquoddy Bay

in easternmost Maine. Starting at Eastport in 1875, the industry grew until there were approximately seventy-five sardine factories in the state by 1900. As with the canning of corn, blueberries, and lobsters, the sardine canning season was short — sometimes starting as early as April, but usually at its height between the end of August and the middle of November — and the cannery employees worked long hours during this concentrated period.

Although the Maine Child Labor Law of 1887 provided that “no child under twelve years of age, shall be employed in any manufacturing or mechanical establishment in the state,” the canning industry was exempted from this restriction by a provision that stated “nothing in this act shall apply to any manufacturing establishment or business, the materials and products of which are perishable and require immediate labor thereon, to prevent decay hereof or damage thereto.”⁷ Thus one of the industries in which children worked the longest, hardest hours escaped regulation by the statutes established to protect the children and assure their right to an education.

A number of factors help explain the prevalence of child labor in the canning industry. Cannery operations, first of all, generally required a large number of unskilled workers; for the most part, it was a labor-intensive process that required little previous training and relatively casual attitudes toward work. Children could be put to work easily in the industry at low costs to the operator. Second, the short but intensive season for canneries called for a large pool of reserve workers, who could be hired and just as quickly laid off without disrupting the rural economy as a whole; women and children provided this flexible labor pool. Farm families, on the other hand, needed subsidiary incomes to supplement a pattern of agriculture that was tied to the market economy in relatively marginal ways. Maine farmers traditionally were part-time fishermen, part-time loggers, and part-time trappers, and in some cases took in summer boarders; work in the canneries complemented this pattern, and children worked alongside their fathers, mothers,

brothers, sisters, and cousins in the processing factories as they did in many other supplementary occupations. Although the disadvantages this system imposed upon the children were becoming apparent to outsiders by the end of the nineteenth century, quite probably few farm families themselves gave the situation serious thought.

In the sardine canning industry especially, the extension of the canning season into the middle or late autumn had a serious effect upon the working children's school attendance. Yet while it is known that many children worked in the Maine canning industry, accurate figures for child employment are impossible to ascertain, for several reasons. Typically in the food processing businesses, the workers were not specifically placed on the factory payroll as part of a regular work force. Rather than being formally hired, they worked independently and then received "checks" or "scrip" for the specific amount of work done. Thus, the identities and ages of the women and children working at this process were not recorded. Second, because the "perishable goods" industries were exempt from the child labor laws until 1911, these children did not need the certificates of age and school attendance required in other industries. Third, the decennial U.S. census statistics were usually compiled at a time of year when the canneries were not in operation, and therefore did not list these children as wage earners. For example, when photographer Lewis Hine visited the sardine factories of Eastport in August of 1911, he interviewed and photographed a number of young workers, thirty of whom, between the ages of five and fifteen, are identified by name in his photo captions.⁸ None of these children was listed as working when the federal census was taken in June of the previous year, although at least twenty-one of them were identified as living in Eastport.

Still further uncertainty is introduced into any analysis of the sardine cannery work force by the fact that the number of employees in the canneries and the daily hours of work varied widely and unpredictably, depending upon the quantity of fish caught and delivered for processing on a day-to-day basis.

Moreover, the sardine processing families included not only local residents but also a number of families that came from surrounding towns or islands in Passamaquoddy Bay and returned home when the canning season drew to a close. These families, too, missed being counted as sardine factory employees if the census was not conducted during the canning season.

Children were integrated into the work process at different stages. Many of the young laborers in the sardine factories worked at cutting the fish. According to a description of the industry in an 1887 report of the U. S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries, "when the boat nears the wharf, the cannery whistle or bell is sounded as a signal for the cutters, who are usually boys and girls from eight to fifteen years of age. These are presently seen brandishing their large knives as they rush through the streets on their way to the building."⁹ Babe Baine, who was born in Eastport in 1884 and went to work in the sardine factory at an early age, remembered that the young boys often had large hands and could grab and cut four fish at a time. She, on the other hand, did not do as well; "I could only handle one. My hands were little."¹⁰

Other children — or the same children at different times — also worked at packing the fish into cans with mustard or oil, setting the covers on the cans, or placing the finished cans in cartons. Some children seem to have done several of these jobs, depending upon which section of the factory most needed workers at any given time. Others, such as Babe Baine, progressed from one job to another as they grew older. As she said, "My father took me out of school when I was ten years old, to cut fish. Long as you could handle a knife, they expected you to go to work My father built a box so I could stand on to reach the table We went from the cutting shed up to the packing room, to pack the fish [when I was fourteen years old]."¹¹

Another Eastport resident who worked in the sardine factories early in the twentieth century remembered the hard work, but also remembered the fun that she and her young friends had. Like Babe Baine, Sara Aker went to work cutting sardines at an early age. As she stated, "I've been working since I was



Eastern coastal Maine towns provided a ready work force of young boys and girls. When the cannery whistle blew, they would be "presently seen brandishing their large knives as they rush through the streets on their way to the [fish processing] building." Underwood Collection.

nine years old. I've cut my fingers half off as you can see, look at these old hands, cutting the heads off fish. Five cents a box."¹² Yet Sara Aker's memories also included picnics on islands in the bay and the joys of life for the young. "Oh, I believe they could hear me laughing ten miles away when I was a girl. We didn't care. We owned the sky and everything under it."¹³

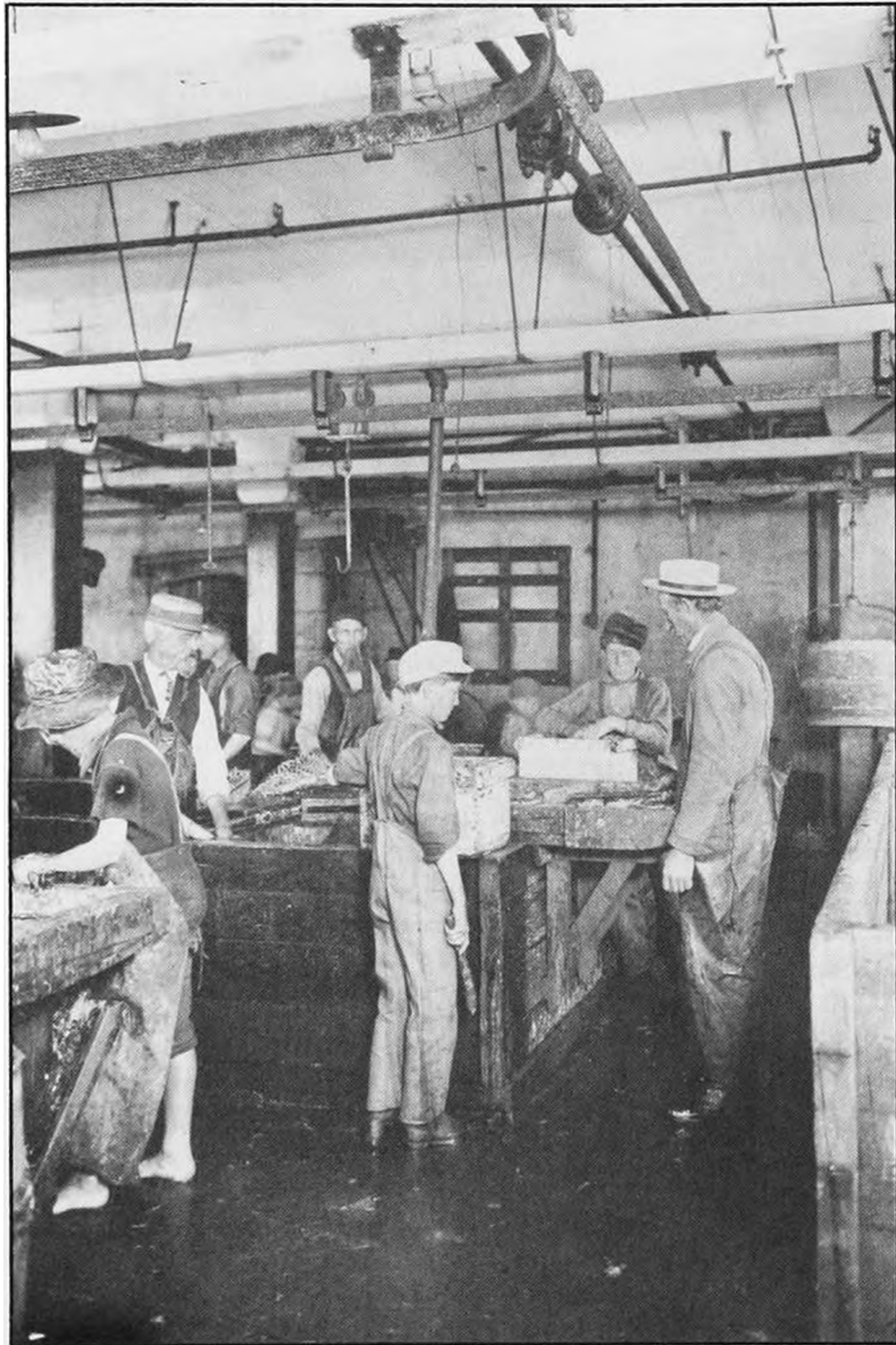
The negative effects of Eastport's child labor situation did not go unnoticed. Because the sardine canning season extended from spring through fall, many of the working children missed part of the school year annually. As early as 1886, the editor of the Eastport newspaper expressed concern about the problems created in the schools, both for the children who worked in the factories and those who attended school full time. On December 8, 1886, the newspaper carried an editorial that stated:

As the factories in town will soon complete packing operations for the winter and will not resume again until about the first of May, a large number of boys and girls will be deprived of work, all of whom should, and many do attend school during

this time. Almost the whole of this increase in school attendance comes upon the Brooks School. Last winter there was an addition of eighty scholars to the regular register of the school, principally from this source, which as may readily be seen crowds a regular graded school to such an extent and in such a way as to seriously affect the work of the regular scholars who are expected to advance in their studies at stated periods sufficiently to enter a higher grade. Not only this, but those who come into school for the winter and then are obliged to return to work in the spring, cannot receive under such conditions the greatest benefit the few months of school time, so valuable to them, ought to afford. Perhaps some of the teachers could suggest a feasible remedy for this difficulty.¹⁴

By the mid-1890s, the response to this problem was to conduct a school specifically for the children who worked in the sardine factories. As Babe Baine remembered, "In the winter when they'd [the factories] get through in November, there was a school opened then for the working class It was under the old Opera House. Upstairs was a dance place. Underneath, that's where we went. They called it the ungraded school. So we got our education in winter."¹⁵ Thus, Babe Baine and her working friends attended school during the winter months, but "when the whistle blew the first of April ... then we'd have to get out of school."¹⁶ This situation continued to be a problem well into the twentieth century. In 1907 it was estimated that 45 percent of the Eastport children did not attend school at all after reaching the age of fifteen, the age limit set for compulsory education.¹⁷

By the early 1900s social reformers on the national level were attacking child labor as part of a larger movement concerned about exploitation of the working class, industrial hazards, and involuntary poverty. G. Stanley Hall and other sociologists and educators were propounding new theories concerning both the biological and education needs of children



Maine's sardine industry gained national attention with the publication of John Spargo's *The Bitter Cry of the Children*. "Nothing," an informant wrote Spargo, "equals for sheer brutality what I see right here in Washington County."

and their growth and development. Progressive reformers organized a crusade against child labor which led to the establishment of the National Child Labor Committee in 1904. This committee, the objectives of which included nationwide investigation of working conditions, efforts toward more stringent protective laws, and enforcement of existing laws, for its first decade directed its activities toward reform at the state, rather than national level. It was, at the same time, the first organization of its kind to make extensive use of photographic propaganda, through the works of Lewis Hine and others.

This, briefly, was the background from which emerged John Spargo's 1906 book, *The Bitter Cry of the Children*, which contained the following passage concerning Maine's sardine factories.

In Maine the age limit for employment is twelve years. Children of that age may be employed by day or night, provided that girls under eighteen and boys under sixteen are not permitted to work more than ten hours in the twenty-four or sixty hours in a week. In 1900 there were 117 establishments engaged in the preservation and canning of fish. Small herrings are canned and placed upon the market as "sardines." This industry is principally confined to the Atlantic coast towns, — Lubec and Eastport, in Washington County, being the main centres. I cannot speak of this industry from personal investigation, but information received from competent and trustworthy sources gives me the impression that child slavery nowhere assumes a worse form than in the "sardine" canneries of Maine. Says one of my correspondents in a private letter: "In the rush season, fathers, mothers, older children, and babies work from early morn till night — from dawn to dark, in fact. You will scarcely believe me, perhaps, when I say 'and babies,' but it is literally true. I've seen them in the present season, no more than four or five years old, working hard and beaten when they lagged. As you may suppose, being

out here, far away from the centre of the state, we are not much troubled by factory inspection. I have read about the conditions in Southern mills, but nothing I have read equals for sheer brutality what I see right here in Washington County."¹⁸

Spargo's exposé of child labor brought numerous reactions in Maine, as it did throughout the nation. In addition to being debated in the U. S. Senate, the need for more rigorous and effective child labor laws was also an important issue in the Maine legislative session of 1907. In his annual address to the Maine Legislature, Governor William T. Cobb urged the lawmakers "to change and improve the laws bearing upon the question of child labor in this State." Maine, he noted, fell behind other states in child protection, and the children themselves, unlike adult workers, were helpless to challenge harsh working conditions. "You must be their champions, and neither the thoughtlessness of parents nor the indifference of employers must be permitted to interfere with the performance of the State's manifest duty to provide, as best she may, for the moral, physical and educational welfare of these children to whom unfortunately so many of the pleasures and opportunities of childhood are denied."¹⁹ This advice was followed, and Chapter 46 of the Public Laws of 1907 was approved by the Maine Legislature on March 6, 1907.²⁰ This chapter revised the earlier child labor law, raising the minimum age of employment from twelve to fourteen years of age and stating additional conditions for the employment of children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen.

Another important change appeared in Section 55 of the new law — that portion dealing with the exemption of "perishable goods" industries. Here, for the first time, the exemption was tempered by a proviso relating to poor working conditions for young children in these industries. It was mandated that "the employment of children therein shall be under the supervision of said inspector who shall on complaint investigate the sanitary conditions, hours of labor and other conditions detrimental to children and if in his judgment he finds detrimental

conditions to exist, he may, in conjunction with the municipal officers of the town or city of which the complaint is made, prohibit the employment of children therein until such conditions are removed." The law, in retrospect, seems weak in the sense that it relied on support from local municipal authorities, but it did provide a framework for child labor restrictions in the canneries and encourage an investigatory attitude toward the industry.

Responding to legislative initiatives, the Maine Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics took up the charges leveled by Spargo in his book. Having presented a lengthy description of the canning industry in its 1900 annual report, the bureau had not planned another concentration on this industry so soon. But, because of the Spargo allegations and their discussion in the U. S. Senate the previous winter, "it was deemed advisable and necessary that an investigation be made at this time."²¹ Thus, the bureau sent one of its investigators, Miss Eva L. Shorey, to Washington County and included her seventeen-page report on the working conditions for women and children in the sardine factories in its 1907 annual publication.²² Shorey's instructions had been to "make a full and thorough investigation of all existing conditions in connection with the industry, and to ascertain so far as possible any facts that would substantiate or contradict the serious charges that had been made."²³

The Shorey report offers a detailed factual account of work in the canneries, especially that of women and children. It describes sardine processing in close detail and records snatches of conversation that hint at cannery workers' attitudes toward their jobs, pay, and fellow workers. The report, however, reflects Shorey's historical situation as well; the document is a Maine official's response to Spargo's exposé — to the muckraking criticism of an outsider who had never set foot in Eastport. Although professional and detached, the report at times assumes a defensive tone. Descriptions of children "cheerfully and heartily performing their tasks," references to the vast differences between child labor in southern textile mills and that in the sardine canneries, and conclusions that criticize only



Lewis Hine wrote of this photo: "Shows the way they cut the fish Large sharp knives are used The slippery floors and benches, and careless bumping into each other increases the liability to accident. 'The salt gets into the cuts an' they ache'."

the messy nature of work and the obstacles to proper education point to certain biases in Shorey's report. Moreover, her stress on family stability, moral upbringing, education, and church and Sunday school reflect perhaps the values of Maine's middle class, professional world rather than that of the cannery workers themselves. Nonetheless, the informant's statement in *The Bitter Cry of the Children* and the follow-up report by Eva Shorey provide us with a rare look at two contemporary perspectives of the industry, and Shorey's detailed account offers a chance to view child labor more accurately as contemporary Mainers — particularly those less driven by the reform spirit of the age — saw the situation.

According to Shorey, the sardine factories in Eastport and Lubec employed approximately two hundred children. She

estimated that half of these were probably under fourteen years of age, but pointed out that accurate statistics were impossible to obtain, since the number of employees varied on a daily or even hourly basis. Her observations indicated that more children worked in the factories of Lubec than in Eastport.

After a section describing the various steps in the canning process and the amount of pay earned for each step, Shorey's report turned to the allegations in Spargo's book. For her, "in this age of civilization, to be informed that Maine resorts to child beating and brutality in its industrial life, is, to say the least, rather startling."²⁴

Shorey believed it unfortunate that Spargo, while stating the facts of child employment in Maine as he understood them, did not note that child labor in the "perishable goods" industries was a specific exemption to normally more strict Maine laws; she also pointed out that the Maine Legislature had, since the publication of Spargo's book, raised the minimum age for work in other industries from twelve to fourteen. She noted that the work in the canneries was seasonal; that many of the jobs performed by children took place in the open air or in well ventilated areas; and that for many of these families the short intensive work period accounted for the families' entire yearly income. She denied the notion of "slave driving," observing that

the young children come and go as they wish. It may not be very attractive or desirable work for one of tender years, but it is honest and healthy and does not continue day in and day out nor for any great length of time consecutively. The children appear to enjoy it and are very proud to tell how many boxes they have cut.²⁵

According to Shorey, at least some of the young children wanted to work and were not forced to do so by their parents. With the rest of the family — including the mother — working, it was apparently sometimes the choice of the youngest family members to join in the work and camaraderie of the factory rather than stay at home alone. Eva Shorey reported an incident

in which she came upon a little girl washing her hands at a tub outside the factory. When asked what she had been doing, the child said she had cut two boxes of fish and proudly displayed her ten cents worth of scrip. Shorey "later saw the young child enjoying a long stick of striped candy, which her earnings had provided." The child reported that she "*worked with her mother when she wanted to; was six years old and her people came from one of the nearby towns and lived in a camp for the season.*"²⁶

In a more recent study of the area, historian Harold A. Davis reported on a visit to a sardine factory at Robbinston in 1904 and stated that "small children were likely to be left unattended in fly infested shacks ... while the mother and older children were at the factories."²⁷ In those days before the advent of child care facilities, it may well be, as Shorey intimates, that young children were better off in the factories, under the eyes of parents and other relatives, than left to their own devices at home.

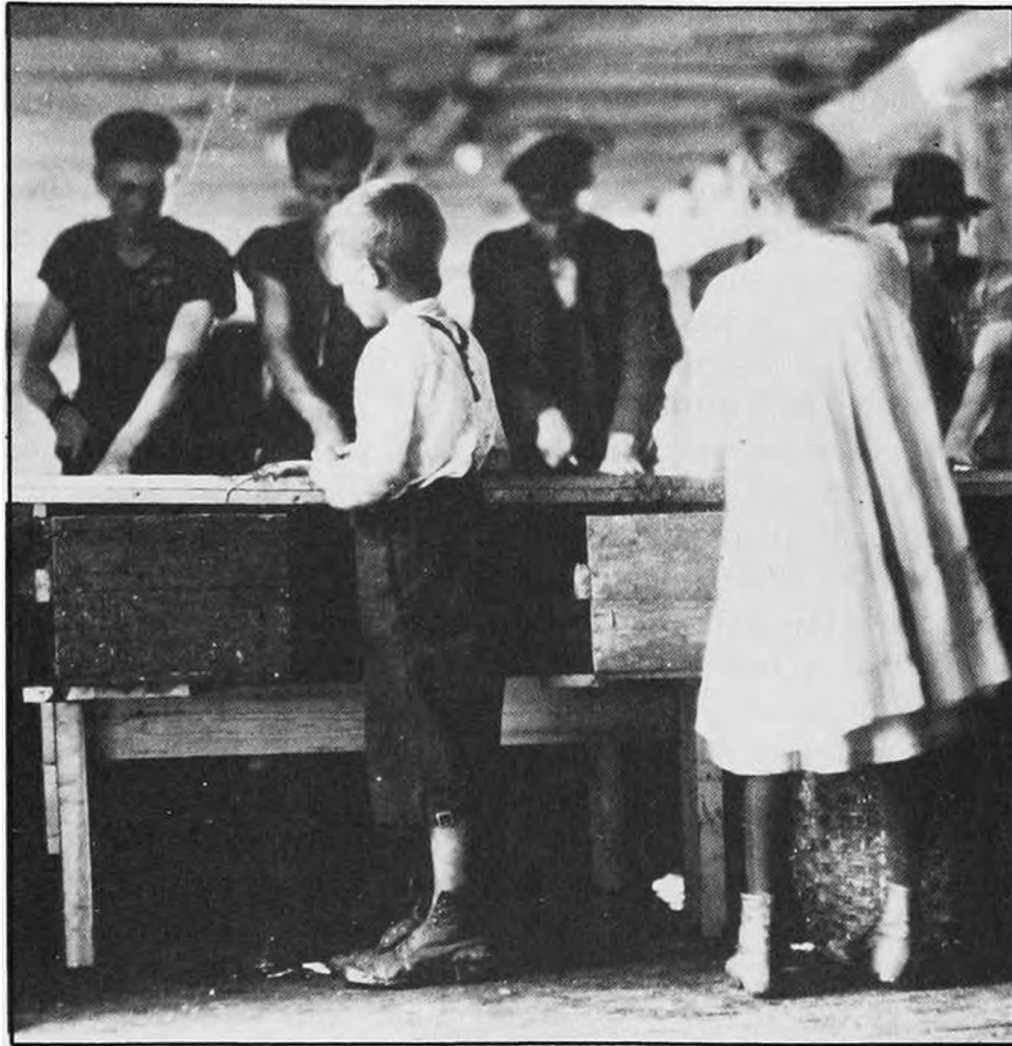
In her talks with local residents, Shorey could find no one who could confirm the reports of brutality toward the child workers; indeed, most seemed surprised that the charges had been made. It was the problem of educating these children, rather than the fact that such young children were working, that bothered Shorey and many of her informants. As she said, "It is not the work nor the earning of money which is to be deplored ... but the harm comes in doing it at the expense of the education so freely offered by the towns."²⁸

In concluding her report, Shorey again addressed the bleak view of child labor drawn by Spargo's informant and suggested an alternative that criticized Maine's sardine industry in more subdued tones. She mentioned the cheerfulness of the sardine factory workers and their pride in their work. In summary, she noted that "children under fourteen are employed in some of the factories. It is not, however, an industry which can be compared with one in operation all the year." Life at the canneries, she noted, "presents many problems." It was undeniable that many of the young workers were forced to "leave

their school homes and naturally drift into industrial life, without proper education" Exposure to the harsh world of work at a tender age, she implied, could also encourage "some of the undesirable qualities resulting from a nomadic existence." After thorough investigation of Spargo's allegations, Shorey reported that "it has been impossible to find any proof that conditions, as described by [Spargo's] correspondent, exist, or ever existed, in Washington County."²⁹

The 1908 Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics annual report again took up the issue of child labor, with a report by George E. Morrison, inspector of factories, workshops, mines and quarries. Morrison mentioned the 1907 amendment to the child labor law dealing with "detrimental conditions," which he said was included at the instigation of "those directly interested in the canning of sardines."³⁰ Morrison stated that, while he had not received any complaints of violations, he had made numerous visits to the factories that year. As a follow-up to the 1907 investigation, he reported that "modern machinery and methods have to a large extent done away with the employment of children in this work. Some are still employed in certain locations, but not in as large numbers as formerly."³¹ It may have been true to a degree that machines were replacing children in the most obnoxious tasks in the canneries; Morrison's 1909 and 1910 reports on the industry suggest as much. But like Shorey he was perhaps overly optimistic in his assessment of the situation.

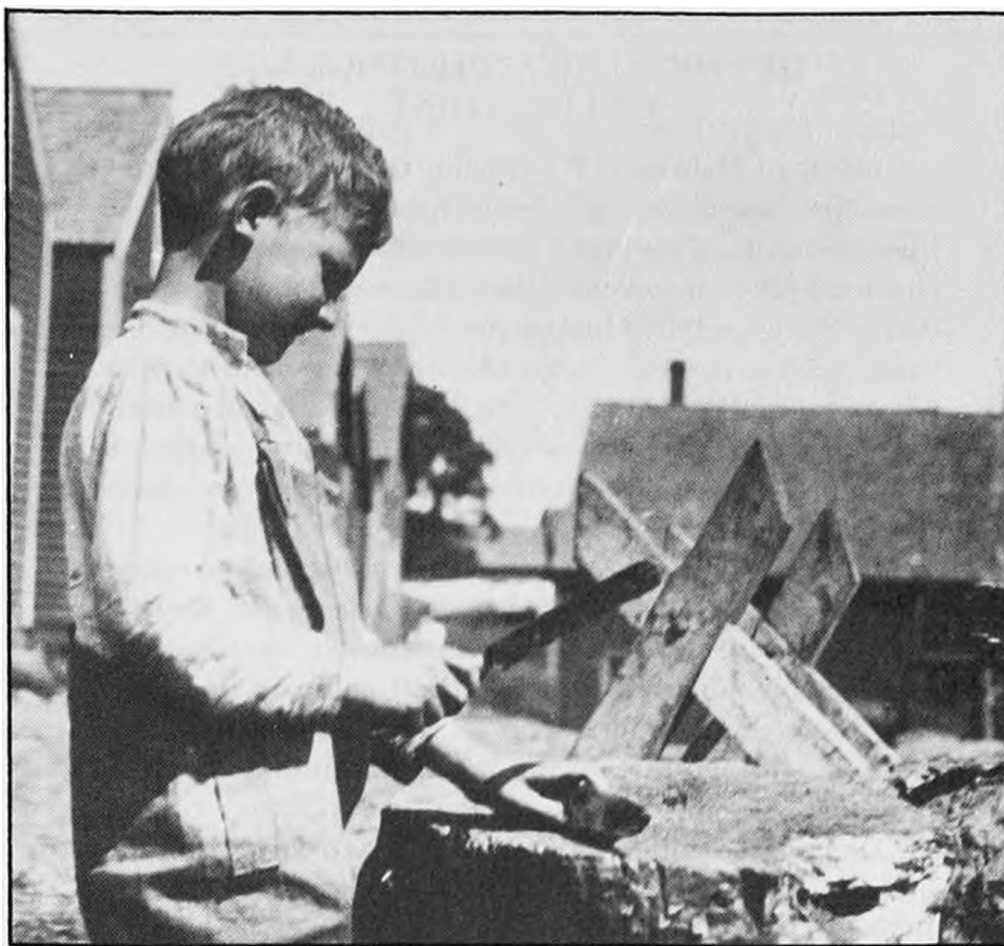
A few years after Spargo's informant, Eva Shorey, and George Morrison compiled their various reports on the child sardine workers, photographer Lewis Hine added another dimension to the historical record. When Hine visited Eastport in August of 1911 in connection with his work for the National Child Labor Committee, he photographed and interviewed a number of children working in the sardine factories. While Morrison and other state officials chose to look on the bright side of the situation, Hine, like Spargo, was concerned with bringing about reform in the child labor area, and seems to



Hine identified these two children as Clarence, eight years old, and Minnie, age nine. Their efforts brought them five cents for each box (such as those by their sides).

have concentrated on the negative aspects of the situation. Given the purpose of his visit to Eastport, and with knowledge of the economic factors that affected the sardine canning families, one must take Hine's photographic impressions too with a grain of salt. As with Spargo, Shorey, and Morrison, Hine's record is tinted by the historical circumstances under which he created it.

Indeed, as his photographs indicate, there were young children working in the factories. But, as mentioned before, many of these families needed the income earned during this



Young Clarence Goodell demonstrates sardine decapitation for Hine.

brief period of intensive work and long hours to carry them through the entire year. As Shorey had stated in her report concerning the children, the problem was not so much that the children were earning money to add to the family coffers, or to buy their own clothes and an occasional toy or treat, but that "the earning of money often tends to give them that spirit of independence which sends them out as small wage-earners without sufficient education to become larger ones as time goes on."³³ In deploring the lack of education for these children, Shorey, Hine, and others were repeating the concerns which had led to Maine's first child labor law in 1847, which required that working children under twelve years of age attend school for four months a year and that those between twelve and fourteen were to attend school for three months each year.³⁴

THE CHILD LABOR PHOTOGRAPHS OF LEWIS HINE

Born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in 1874, Lewis Hine went to work in an upholstery factory at age eighteen upon the death of his father. After short stints working in a clothing store, as a water filter salesman, and in a local bank, Hine in 1900 entered the University of Chicago, studying to become a teacher of nature and social science. The next year he moved to New York City to teach at the new Ethical Culture School. While there, Hine continued his own studies and received a Master's degree in education in 1905.

Hine first became interested in photography around 1903, looking upon it as a valuable teaching aid. By 1911 he had given up teaching to devote himself completely to photography and social reform. Following in the tradition of social reformer Jacob A. Riis, Hine produced a series of photographs on European immigrants quarantined at Ellis Island. His subsequent photographs of workers, slum dwellers, and immigrants could be found in such prestigious reform journals as *Survey* and *Charity and the Commons*. After working on a freelance basis for various reform organizations, Hine became associated

If one keeps in mind the reformer's slant in Hine's work, his fifty-five Eastport photographs and captions, like Shorey's report, can be useful documents. It should be noted that Hine was in Eastport in August, when the children would not have been in school even if they were not working in the factories. Naturally, Hine made a point of photographing and interviewing the youngest children he could find working to add fuel to his photographic propaganda for the National Child Labor Committee. He also concentrated on the dangers of the job, photographing as many children as he could find with badly cut fingers — the result of inexperience or childish carelessness with the large butcher knives used to cut the fish. Given all of these caveats, Hine's photographs and captions from Eastport present important documentation of children working in the sardine canning industry. They also illustrate work processes,

with the National Child Labor Committee as an investigator and photographer between 1906 and 1918 and again briefly in 1921.

Lewis Hine's child labor photographs, respected today for their poignant and compelling views of youthful laborers, were produced as integral parts of his reports for the committee — the photographs were supplementary visual documentation of the written word, rather than individual pieces of evidence. The National Child Labor Committee was the first reform organization to utilize documentary photographs to such an extent, and Lewis Hine's work was a major contribution to the committee's forceful statements concerning the plight of child laborers in America.

Continuing his career in social reform into the 1930s, Hine produced a brilliant photographic record of construction work on the Empire State Building. He died in 1940.

For further information, see Verna Posever Curtis and Stanley Mallach, PHOTOGRAPHY AND REFORM: LEWIS HINE AND THE NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1984).

workers of all ages, the factories themselves, and the living quarters of the canning families.

The photographs of the children and adults at work in the canning factories show them concentrating intently on their work (as is to be expected of people who were paid on a piecework basis). Even through Hine's editorially inclined lens, however, the views of the groups of children holding the tools and products of their labor show strong evidence of the pride mentioned in Eva Shorey's report.

The captions that Hine provided for his photographs also contain valuable biographical information on the people he saw and the life and work of the sardine canners. Because the sardine industry was, at that time, unique to Maine, Hine appears to have found it especially interesting, and he compiled extremely detailed data, including the children's names

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and ages, family situations, and other facts that bring us closer to these people of seventy-five years ago.³⁵

Several of Hine's captions emphasize the erratic, uneven level of work, which fluctuated depending upon the amount of fish arriving each day at the factory wharves. Among the fifty-five captions are the following:

Work is very irregular.

At times they [the children] start at 7 a.m., work all day and night until midnight, but the work is very irregular.

They work whenever there are fish.

They work at night when the rush is on.

They all work, but they waste a great deal of time, as the adults do also, waiting for the fish to arrive.

Even through Hine's reform-biased lens, the children holding their products show enormous pride in their work.





Eleven out of these fourteen "cartoners," Hine noted, were under twelve years of age; the smallest was eight.

The father is dissatisfied with the irregular income³⁶

Hine's captions also document the fact that, while many local families worked in the sardine factories, their numbers were augmented by others who traveled to Eastport during the canning season to find short-term work. For example, in describing the deGallard family, including nine-year-old Nan, her mother, and two sisters, Hine stated, "The family comes from Perry, Maine, just for the summer months."³⁷ This explains, in part, why Nan, her sisters, and some of the other children photographed by Hine in 1911 were not included in the 1910 Eastport census. Of the thirty children between the ages of five and fifteen whom Hine photographed and identified, twenty-one had been recorded as living in Eastport the previous year. Other children missing from the 1910 census for Eastport

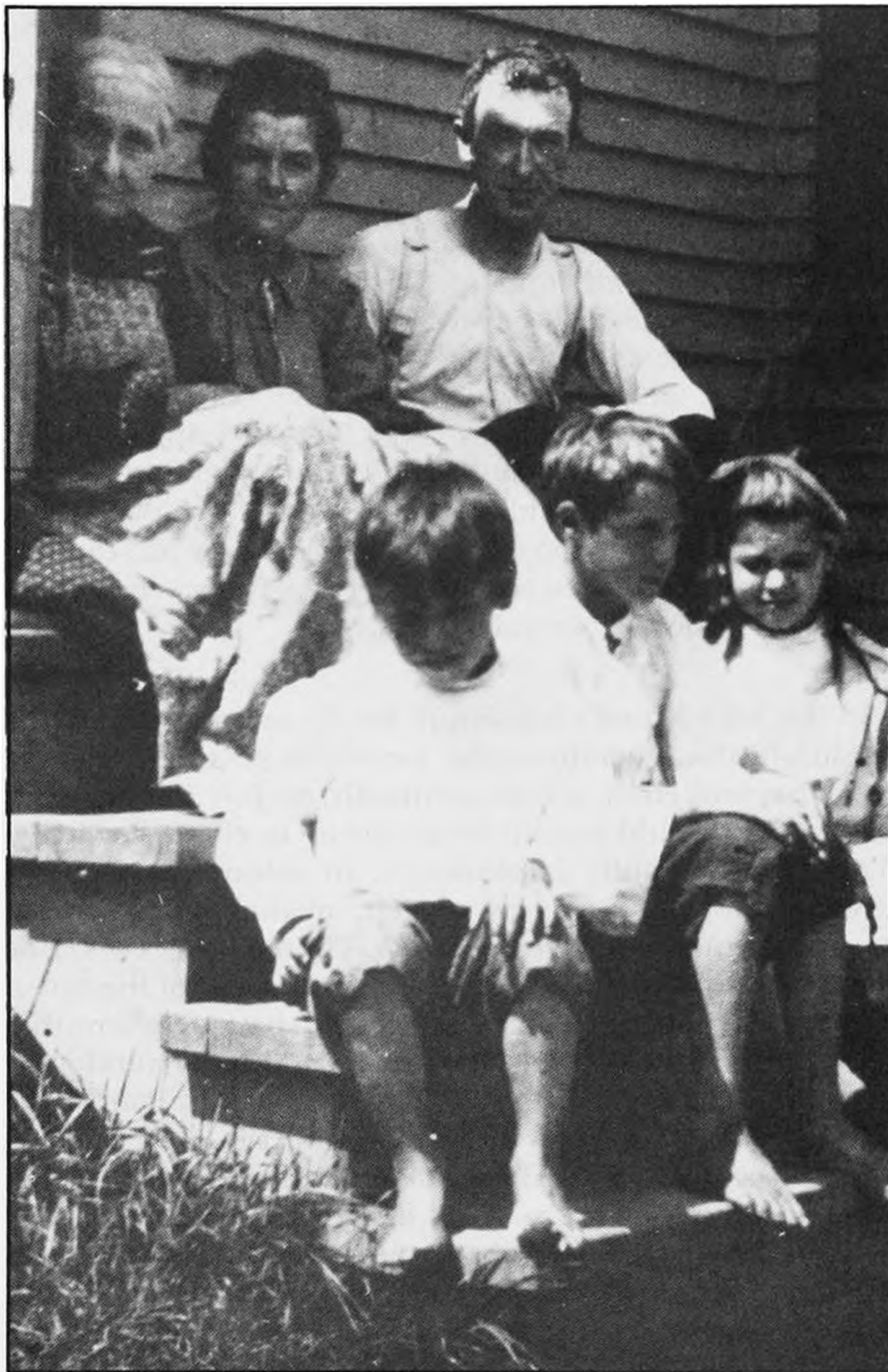
included the Goodell children — Clarence, 8; George, 9; Lottie, 12; and Violet, 15. Perhaps the Goodells moved to Eastport after the federal census was taken, for in his caption for the photograph showing the family's home, Hine stated, "They live here all year in these temporary quarters."³⁸

Among the Hine photographs are several of five-year-old "Preston" (no last name given), a cartoner in the factory. Hine "saw him at work different times during the day — at 7:00 a.m., in the afternoon, and at 6 p.m., and he kept at it very faithfully for so young a worker."³⁹ Naturally, some children were faster workers than others (the same being true of adults). While Hine captured on film ten-year-old Wilford Clark returning home at noon after cutting five boxes of fish during the morning, nine-year-old Hiram Pulk was less efficient; he told Hine "I ain't very fast — only about five boxes a day."⁴⁰

The economic situation of many of Eastport's families is also reflected in Hine's captions. Two of the photographs show six-year-old Elsie Shaw standing posed in the street outside the family's living quarters; Elsie worked at cartoning, and her father was boss of the cutting room in one of the factories. According to Hine, Elsie's father "asked me to take some photos of her, as he has her do a singing act in vaudeville in the winter, 'and she's old enough now to go through the audience and sell her own photos' "⁴¹

Among the most poignantly informative of Hine's captions is the one accompanying his photograph of the Hamilton family gathered on the front steps of their home. Quoted in its entirety here, the caption not only provides documentation of the names and ages of the working children and the fluctuating nature of the pay earned by the family as a whole, but also brings out some of the worst aspects of the child labor problem.

Hamilton family, sardine works, Eastport. Father earns \$15 to \$20 a week irregularly during the work season of three months. Said that 20 years ago he made \$5 a day as a boy, cutting. The mother is a packer, makes \$10 a week and upward during the active season. Another boy [Raymond, age 17], not in



The Hamilton family of Eastport. The detailed captions Hine provided with photographs such as this (see text, opposite this page) provide information about the lives and attitudes of turn-of-the-century cannery workers.

the photo, works also. In the front row are George Hamilton, 11 years old, who cuts regularly — made a dollar in three hours the day before; Byron [age 7], with a badly cut finger, earns 25 cents a day; little Erna, 8 years old, works at cartoning. The father is dissatisfied with the irregular income, but cannot see the connection between his early boyhood work and his present stagnation. He is putting his little ones through the same process.⁴²

Hine's brief description hints at the broadest implications of the Eastport child labor situation: that work at an early age locked Eastport area residents into lifelong labor patterns in the seasonal, low-paying cannery operations and thus contributed in some sense to the economic decay that characterized the region over the next several decades.

In 1911 Maine's legislature finally amended the state's child labor law to eliminate the "perishable goods" loophole.⁴³ This law took effect, at least nominally, on July 1 of that year, although it would be a bit longer before its effective enforcement could be fully implemented. In subsequent years, as George Morrison's reports suggest, mechanization further crowded children out of the industry. Thus in 1911 Lewis Hine had been witnessing and documenting a pattern of life and of child labor the end of which was already at hand. The days that Preston and his young friends would spend at the cutting and packing tables were numbered, and a new but uncertain future lay before the children of the sardine canneries.

It was clear, in the aftermath of the 1911 legislation, that the children's long hours of toil beside their working parents were nearly over, but it was by no means clear as to what would fill those hours in the days to come, or what, if anything, would fill the income gap left by the elimination of the children's modest earnings. Nor was there an obvious replacement at hand for the guidance and security provided by parents, relatives, and neighbors who had been the children's co-workers and supervisors during the days of their "exploitation." The

crusaders who had fought so long and so hard to free children from the tyranny of the workplace had done little to anticipate the problems that this form of liberation would bring to the children themselves, or to their families, or to their communities.

It would be satisfying to be able to report that the 1911 law, by taking children out of the sardine canneries and offering them the opportunity of two or three months' additional schooling each year, transformed their lives and broke the cycle of poverty and menial employment that Hine observed in Washington County sardine canning families. But there is little evidence that such a social or economic renaissance ever took place.

NOTES

¹*Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics for the State of Maine, 1900* (Augusta: Kennebec Journal Print, 1901), p. 72. Hereafter the Bureau's annual reports, published from 1887 through 1910 by various printers, are cited as *BILS*.

²*Ibid.*, p. 73.

³Winslow Packing Company, Account Book, vol. 1, Buckfield, 1887, in the collections of the Maine Historical Society.

⁴1900 *BILS*, p. 77.

⁵1895 *BILS*, p. 113.

⁶Chapter 275, Section 2 of the *Public Laws of the State of Maine, 1885*, amended Section 20 of Chapter 40 of the *Revised Statutes*.

⁷Chapter 139, *Public Laws of the State of Maine, 1887*.

⁸Lewis Hine photographs and captions, National Child Labor Committee Collection, Library of Congress.

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⁹George Brown Goode, *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), section 5, vol. 1, p. 520. See pp. 78-89 of the 1900 *BILS* for a good description of the various stages in the processing of sardines.

¹⁰Quoted by Hugh T. French, "Born with a Fish in my Mouth," *Salt* 6 (December 1983): 74.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹²Quoted by Lynn Franklin, *Profiles of Maine* (Waldoboro, Maine: Maine Antique Digest, Inc., 1976), p. 71.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁴*Eastport Sentinel*, December 8, 1886.

¹⁵French, "Born with a Fish in my Mouth," p. 75.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Eva L. Shorey, "Women and Children in Sardine Factories," 1907 *BILS*, p. 129.

¹⁸John Spargo, *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), pp. 170-71.

¹⁹Governor Cobb's Address to the Legislature, *Public Laws of the State of Maine, 1907*, p. 1563.

²⁰Chapter 46, *Public Laws of the State of Maine, 1907*.

²¹1907 *BILS*, p. 121.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 121-37.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁴Shorey, "Women and Children in Sardine Factories," p. 127.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 129 (emphasis added).

²⁷Harold A. Davis, *An International Community on the St. Croix (1604-1930)* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1950), no. 63, pp. 243-44.

²⁸Shorey, "Women and Children in Sardine Factories," p. 130.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁰1908 *BILS*, p. 445.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²1909 *BILS*, p. 477; 1910 *BILS*, p. 464. In 1911 the Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics and the inspector's position were superseded by the Maine Department of Labor and Industry (Chapter 65, *Public Laws of the State of Maine, 1911*).

³³Shorey, "Women and Children in Sardine Factories," p. 130.

³⁴Chapter 29, *Public Laws of the State of Maine, 1847*.

³⁵Lewis Hine photographic captions, National Child Labor Committee Collection, numbers 2405-2459. These captions are far longer and more informative, for example, than Hine's captions for his photographs of children who worked in the textile mills of Sanford and Lewiston, taken in April of 1909.

³⁶Hine captions, numbers 2406, 2419, 2421, 2424, 2429, 2453.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 2406.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 2433.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 2414. There was no child named Preston listed in the 1910 Eastport census, but there was a *Prescott* Emery, four years of age, who is likely the same child Hine photographed and interviewed a year later.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 2427.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 2408.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 2453.

⁴³Chapter 55, Section 3, *Public Laws of the State of Maine, 1911*.

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