



"Large steel fishing vessels can be constructed in foreign shipyards for as much as 50 percent less than in domestic shipyards and wooden vessels can be constructed at costs in excess of 33-1/3 percent less than in our own domestic yards."

A recent study of the age of American commercial fishing vessels made by the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service, placed the total number of American fishing vessels of five net tons or over at 11,964. Of these, 4,805 are in the Pacific Ocean fisheries, including Hawaii and 7,159 in Atlantic--Gulf of Mexico and the Great Lakes operations. The study was based on information obtained by the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries from Bureau of Customs vessel documentation records.

The heyday of Pacific construction was in the 1939-1953 period when 2,500 vessels were launched. More than 500 ships now being used were constructed before 1920 and approximately 500 have been launched since 1953. The oldest boat in Pacific service is a salmon purse seiner of 1891 vintage; a salmon troller dates to 1894.

Of the approximately 6,600 craft in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico fisheries 1,212 were built before 1940 and only about 2,800 built during the past decade. The average building date is 1954, making the fleet average age 18 years. One fleet, the Chesapeake menhaden purse seiners, has had added no new craft since 1951.

The oldest fishing vessel operating out of an eastern American port is the 45-foot Virginia, launched as a two-masted schooner along Fish River, Alabama, in 1865 and converted to a commercial fishing craft in 1946. Two clam dredgers, one out of New York and one out of New Jersey, date to 1872; another New Jersey clammer was launched in 1873. A Gulf Coast shrimp vessel and a New England trawler date to 1874 and 1875; three menhaden vessels built in 1877 are still in service.

The age study showed that the Chesapeake oyster dredgers propelled by sail constitute the oldest fleet in point of average years in service--52. The first one was built in 1881.

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