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White Man's Dam Vs Indian's Weir

By GEORGE BARTTER

NEWMARKET — When white men destroyed the Indians' fishing on the Lamprey River by building a dam where the present dam now stands. They changed friendship into hatred, here as well as elsewhere, Richard Schanda told the Newmarket Historical Society Monday night.

This was the act that broke the patience of Chief Kancamagus, this was the reason Major Waldron of Dover was murdered. Schanda points out that the Indians had virtually supported and kept alive the early settlers in the Great Bay area. They liked white men until the settlers ran hodgshod over them.

Schanda and Richard Atherton discussing fish and shellfish of the Great Bay area, covered the subject historically, biologically, ecologically. Both known primarily as outdoorsmen and sportsmen, they proved to be specialists who had learned every aspect of their avocation.

The reason for Kancamagus' wrath according to Schanda was that the Indians had a large permanent weir at the "great falls" on the Lamprey where the dam was built. The weir was made of rocks with a willow screen and above it was a platform from which the Indians speared fish, which included Atlantic Salmon, shad, sturgeon. With the dam the white men cut their own throats both literally and figuratively. They destroyed the food supply out of which they had been fed, and they turned the red men against them. Within a few years the salmon had gone and even the alewives couldn't go upstream.

Schanda went on to describe how Kancamagus wiped out a force of 30 men on Durham Point that had been sent to avenge Waldron, and attacked the Hilton holdings in what is now Newfields.

Continuing, Schanda said that it was the codfish that led to the swift settlement of New England. All along the coast codfish provided food here and in Europe. The first settler in Great Bay, Thomson or Thomas, settled in 1623 and worked in fishing and lumbering. The people of Plymouth Plantation on Cape Cod, were in contact with the "plantations" on the New Hampshire and Maine coasts.

Schanda mentioned the book, Gulf of Maine, which lists 167 New England coastal fish species of which 56 are found in Great Bay as well as some exclusive to the bay such as the "half-dollar sole."

Atherton described how the earlier settlers fished for eels and oysters in the Bay. He displayed and described the use of eel spears and oyster dredges of early days. Osysters were even drudged up during the winter with scoops using a horse. He said that there were several species of oysters in the Bay, the fattest ones being found separately on hard bottom. The clustered oysters were usually thin and small, Atherton remarked.

He described the life cycle of eels explaining how baby transparent eels returned from the ocean to go up New Hampshire rivers, and how grackles lined the banks to eat them.

Atherton, speaking in a ligh, humorous vein, said the State government ignored the oysters until someone saw a source of revenue in them. Licenses for collecting oysters were then set at $2 and rece tly raised to $4. He claimed that the state was raising seed oysters and shipping them to Chesapeake Bay but doing nothing for Great Bay.

A check with the University of New Hanpshire reveals that Atherton is correct in part. Seed oysters are being raised in Great Bay in a research project conducted by the University in cooperation with the State Fish and Game Department. They are indeed being shipped to Chesapeake Bay, buh they eventually return to Great Bay.

The reason given for shipping them to the south is that Great Bay waters are not warm enough for enough months of the year to permit the oysters to grow steadily. The seed oysters are therefore wintered over in Chesapeake Bay and returned to New Hampshire when the ocean warms up. It is also believed that Great Bay waters will not prove suitable for commercial production of seed oysters because of this warmth factor.

The present supply of oysters in the bay is quite large, and Atherton believes that many beds of them have yet to be discovered.