

A Short History of Recreational Fishing and its Association with Tourism in Bermuda: 1930 — 1986

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This paper should have been researched and written by an octogenarian, born Bermudian instead of a johnny-come-lately such as I, still wet behind the ears after an all too short twenty five years in these Isles of Beauty.

My only real qualification, and therefore justification, for addressing you today is because of my love of this beautiful country and my unceasing enthusiasm for its fine fishing. I have been privileged to fish in many parts of the world and each time I return home no matter how good my fishing holiday has been, I always thank my lucky stars that I live here and fish as often as government and my wife will allow me.

If you are a fishing nut and have not fished our waters, then put it on your priority list. Come next year, or better still stay on at the conclusion of this conference. Yes, even now our fishing can be excellent. In a local tournament fished on the 26th of October, 1986 a 100 pound wahoo was boated on 20 pound test line and a 62 pound wahoo on 12 pound test line; one boat had a quintuple strike of wahoo and boated 3, another boat weighed in 15 blackfin tuna.

Our game fishing history goes back some fifty years as it does in most parts of the world. While Zane Grey was meeting the challenge of billfish, while Kip Farrington was fishing, writing, and promoting this young sport, so to the Mowbray family, particularly, was developing the sport locally. The name "Mowbray" is synonymous with sport fishing in Bermuda.

In the twenties Louis L. Mowbray created an aquarium on Agar's Island, then for four years worked at the Miami aquarium before taking up the post of Assistant Curator at the New York aquarium. Finally, in 1927, he was asked by the Bermuda Government to return home and open the brand new installation at Flatts, our own aquarium which is so popular with our visitors to this day.

That enthusiasm for the ocean and its creatures was passed on to his sons Louis S. and Territt and they continued his development of our natural resources. Louis S. eventually took over from his father as Curator of the aquarium and Terry, in 1937 became Sports Director for the Trade Development Board, the forerunner of today's Department of Tourism. One of the obvious sports to develop was fishing and it can be said that 1937 saw Government's support of this tourist oriented sport begin.

Of course, local anglers had been rod and reel fishing before this happened and in fact, Furness Withy, the shipping line, and owners of the "Queen of Bermuda", the cruise boat which plied between New York and Bermuda, and also of the Castle Harbour Hotel did bring Kip Farrington to Bermuda to investigate its potential as a game fishing centre — this in the mid 30's.

Louis S. Mowbray was also an avid angler who was preoccupied with light tackle fishing and had built an international reputation even then. Consequently when in 1937, the Alton B. Sharp Trophy was fished for, for the first time, in Wedgeport, Nova Scotia, between teams representing the United States and the British Empire, Louis was invited to captain the British Empire team. Thereafter he remained closely associated with that prestigious international tuna cup match for the rest of his life as angler, team manager, official, and trustee.

To Territt Mowbray, an angling competition for visitors was a must and so was born the Annual Bermuda Game Fishing Tournament which continues to this day. So also was born in the same year, The Bermuda Anglers Club comprising a small membership of local anglers, the first officers being: Louis L. Mowbray, President; Louis S. Mowbray, Vice President; and Territt Mowbray, Secretary.

This close association between local and visiting anglers has continued to this day and even from its inception, the Annual Bermuda Game Fishing Tournament was open to local and visitor alike. Territt Mowbray, however, recalls that he much preferred to see the handsome silver awards go abroad each year. Pre-nineteen thirty nine, there were few private boats fishing rod and reel and again only a very few boats available for charter. Local captains such as Bert and Reggie Darrell, Charlie Christensen, Harry Stubbs, and Roy Taylor spring to mind and Sir Henry Tucker's father Harry Tucker's "Amberjack" is recalled as one of the top amateur boats of that decade.

Although anglers and boats were few in number, the sport still in its adolescence, the fish were mature enough. The occasional blue marlin was caught and white marlin fairly frequently, yellow fin and black fin tuna abounded and Terry Mowbray recalls fondly how the only two wahoo he ever caught weighed 58 and 61 pounds, and were taken off Elbow Beach in the company of well known United States angler Lee Wulf — this in 1938.

All good things come to an end and, albeit temporarily 1939 - 1947 were the seven lean years as World War II took precedence and the search was for submarines rather than wahoo. Mr. Mowbray admits that the occasional trip was taken to the Banks if gasoline could be acquired. However, this was a rare occasion.

It took to around 1947 for the Trade Development Board to build up its tourism business again which allowed time for some of the charter skippers to return from the war, for Terry Mowbray to take over the New York office for the Trade Development Board, and to be replaced by Michael Fountain as Sports Director.

The tourist sports recommenced, the tournament included. Gradually the number of boats available for trips increased and now Gerald Pascoe, Chris Smith, Louis and David Martin, Milton Pitman, and Russell Young became part of the scene.

Famous angler and sports writer Joe Brooks from the United States of America was employed as a consultant and outdoor sports writers were brought to sample our wares and write glowing reports on our light tackle fishing. The quality of the guides improved, the quality of tackle improved — the quality of the fish was always high.

Now we were approaching the golden era of game fishing and in 1963, S. L. Pete Perinchief who had been a photographer with the Trade Development Board, was appointed on September 1st as the first manager of the Fishing Information Bureau in which capacity he remained for twenty one years.

Pete's exacting standards and high attention to detail made him the ideal man for the job and our exposure in sports magazines abroad increased in quantity and in quality. His philosophy and advice to visiting journalists was always "Write about it as you find it, not as we'd like it." Thus no lies were told and visiting anglers got what they'd read about and came back again and again

and again — to fish for and receive handsome citations and silver pins for angling achievements — fine awards for fine catches.

Bermuda has built its reputation on a form of fishing once peculiar to these islands. It was traditional to chum, to bait-up for the persuading then catching of local fish on the reefs. Louis Mowbray and Joe Brooks decided that this technique could apply equally well to the denizens of the deep on and off the Banks. It was tried (with reluctance by those great traditionalists, the charterboat skippers who preferred to troll) and proved fantastically successful; today as we watch 100 pound allison tuna rolling in the chum a few feet back from our anchored boat, we can thank those two gentlemen for that privilege.

Our reputation for light tackle fishing remains untarnished; if you have never fished light tackle for yellow fin and black fin tuna then you have missed one of life's joys; however train for it so that your back doesn't bend and you don't groan in agony during the fight.

Now our reputation can extend to the excitement of marlin fishing. For years, even up to five years ago, marlin catches were in single figures, occasionally ten in a season. In 1985, 101 blue marlin were boated or released; up to October 31 this year, 132 have been caught, 73 boated and 59 released, the biggest a 917 pounder.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for bearing with me, neither a scientist nor an historian — merely an ardent supporter of the sport of game fishing in Bermuda.