The background of the entire page is a collage of three photographs. The top photograph shows a steep, forested hillside under a clear blue sky. The middle photograph shows a large, multi-story building with a red-tiled roof, likely the cannery. The bottom photograph shows a wooden pier or dock area with several white tents and outdoor seating. The collage is overlaid with a series of vertical bars of varying heights and colors (blue, green, red, grey) that create a rhythmic pattern across the page.

THE SHIFTING SKEENA INDUSTRY

TRACKING THE EVOLUTION OF THE SALMON CANNING INDUSTRY ON
THE SKEENA RIVER FROM 1870's TO 1960's

**NORTH PACIFIC
CANNERY**
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Melanie Bellwood

History 493

Dr. Benjamin Bryce

October 1, 2017

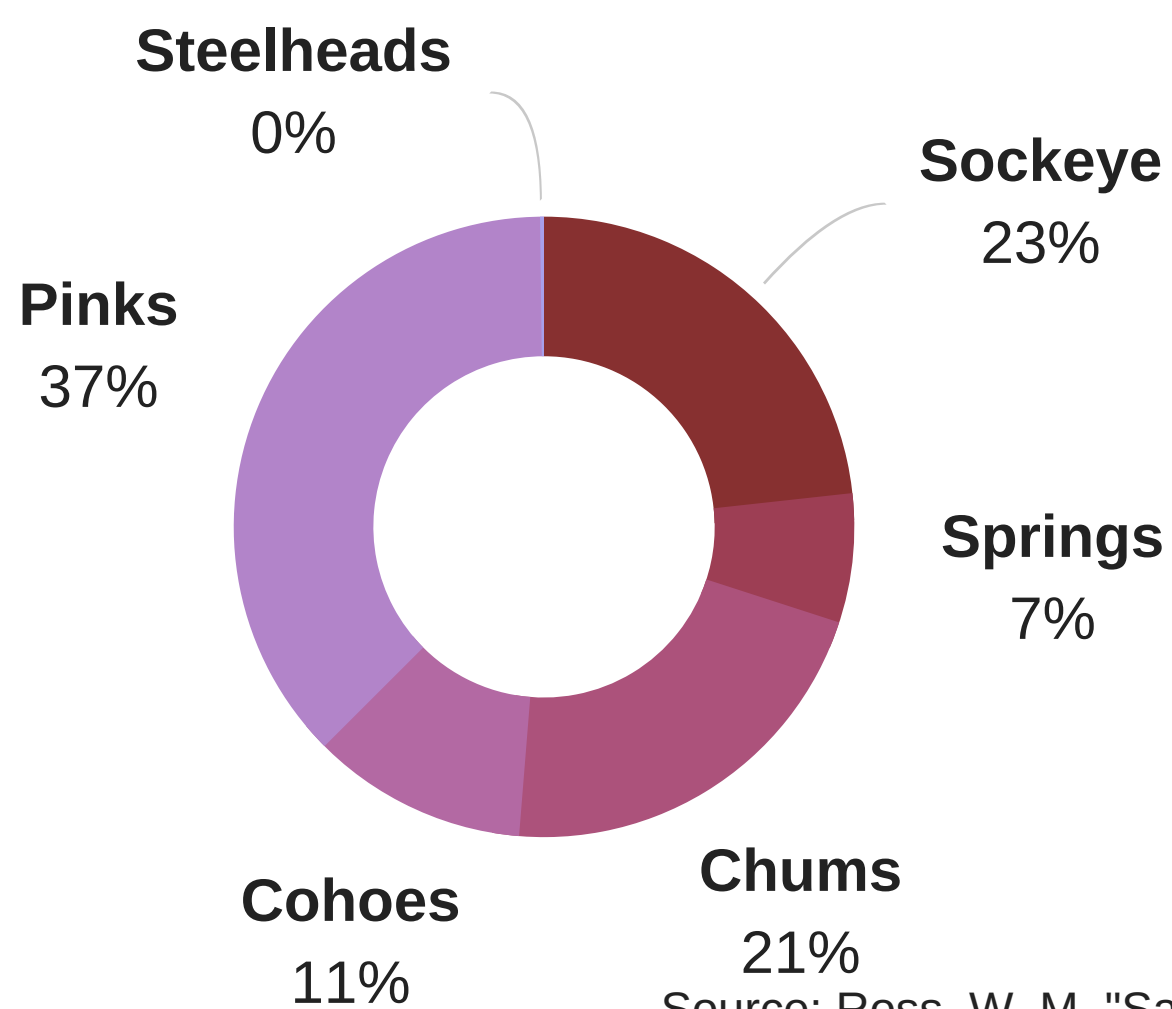
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THE DIVERSITY OF THE CATCH

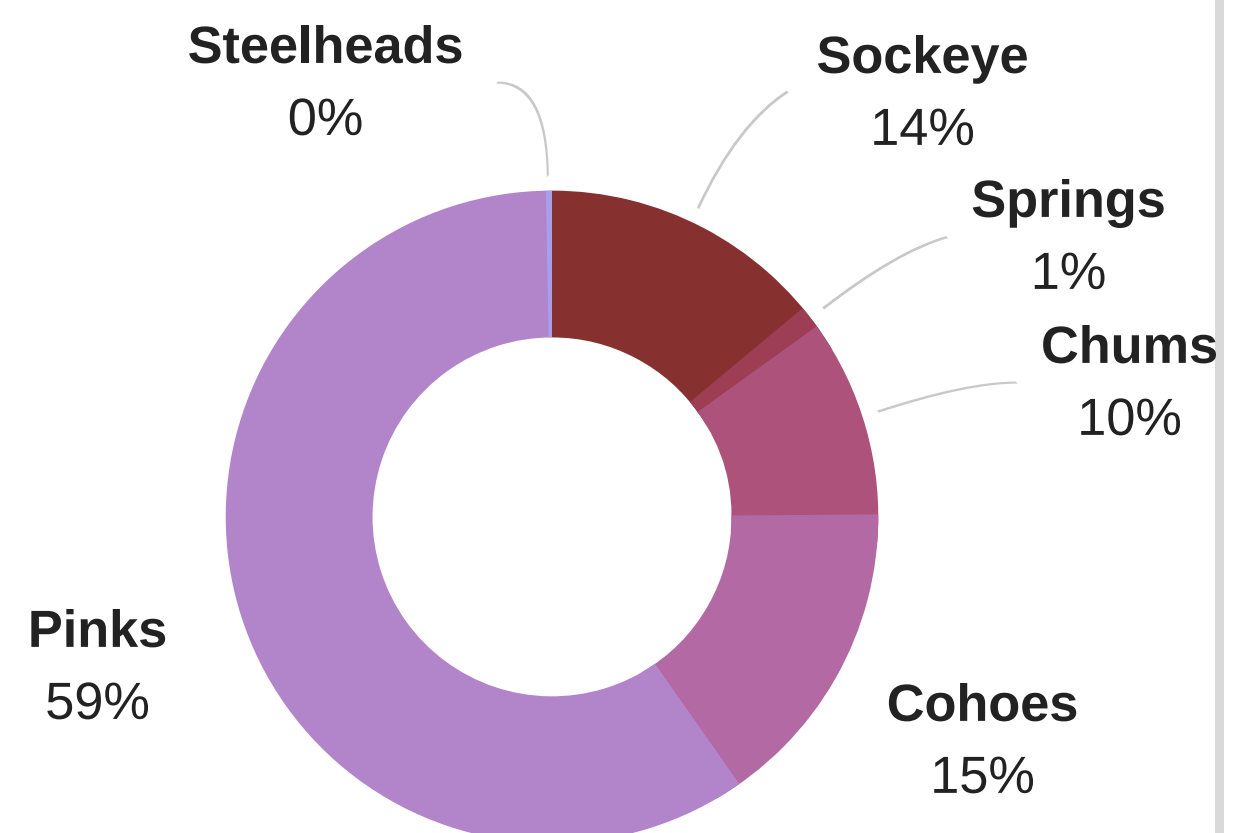
AND THE RISE OF THE SKEENA'S YEARLY PACK

It's often difficult to imagine just how rapidly the canning industry grew in a short period of time, let alone the variety of salmon the Skeena rivers had to offer entrepreneurs. In 1877, fisherman caught and sold Sockeye Salmon exclusively to local canneries, whereas the diagrams below represent the vast diversity of salmon types that were caught and canned for export in the years to come.

**Total Annual Pack in
1925: 348,866**



**Total Annual Pack in
1955: 305,996**



Source: Ross, W. M. "Salmon Cannery Pack Statistics: Nass and Skeena Rivers of British Columbia," 31-39



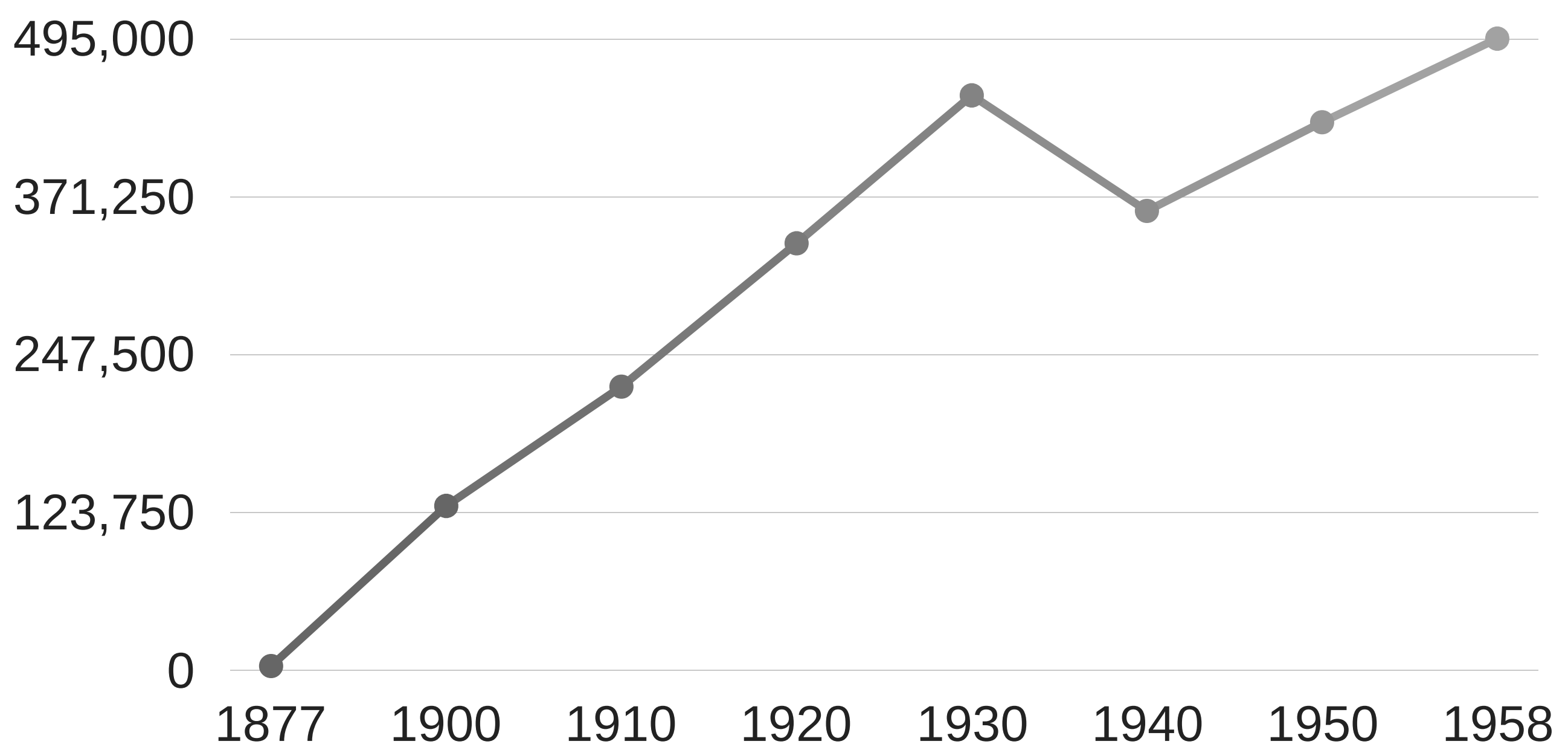
Photo Credit: "Types of Salmon," *Practical Fishing Tips*. 2017.

Keep in mind that while the goal of most canneries was to catch salmon, it was also common for other fish to be caught accidentally, such as halibut. They could also be canned and sold, but were not often preferred.

THE DIVERSITY OF THE CATCH

AND THE RISE OF THE SKEENA'S YEARLY PACK

ANNUAL PACK (APPROX.)



Source: "Sessional Papers," Department of Fisheries Annual Reports.

As decades passed, and the variety of salmon caught and marketed expanded, so did the Skeena River's annual pack itself. The 1920's saw a skyrocket in the salmon canning business, representing incredible opportunities for canneries, fishermen, shoreworkers, immigrants, locals, and entrepreneurs alike. As the pack increased, so did the population. This was related to the shift from catching exclusively sockeye to other types of salmon; due to the decline in sockeye numbers as time passed.

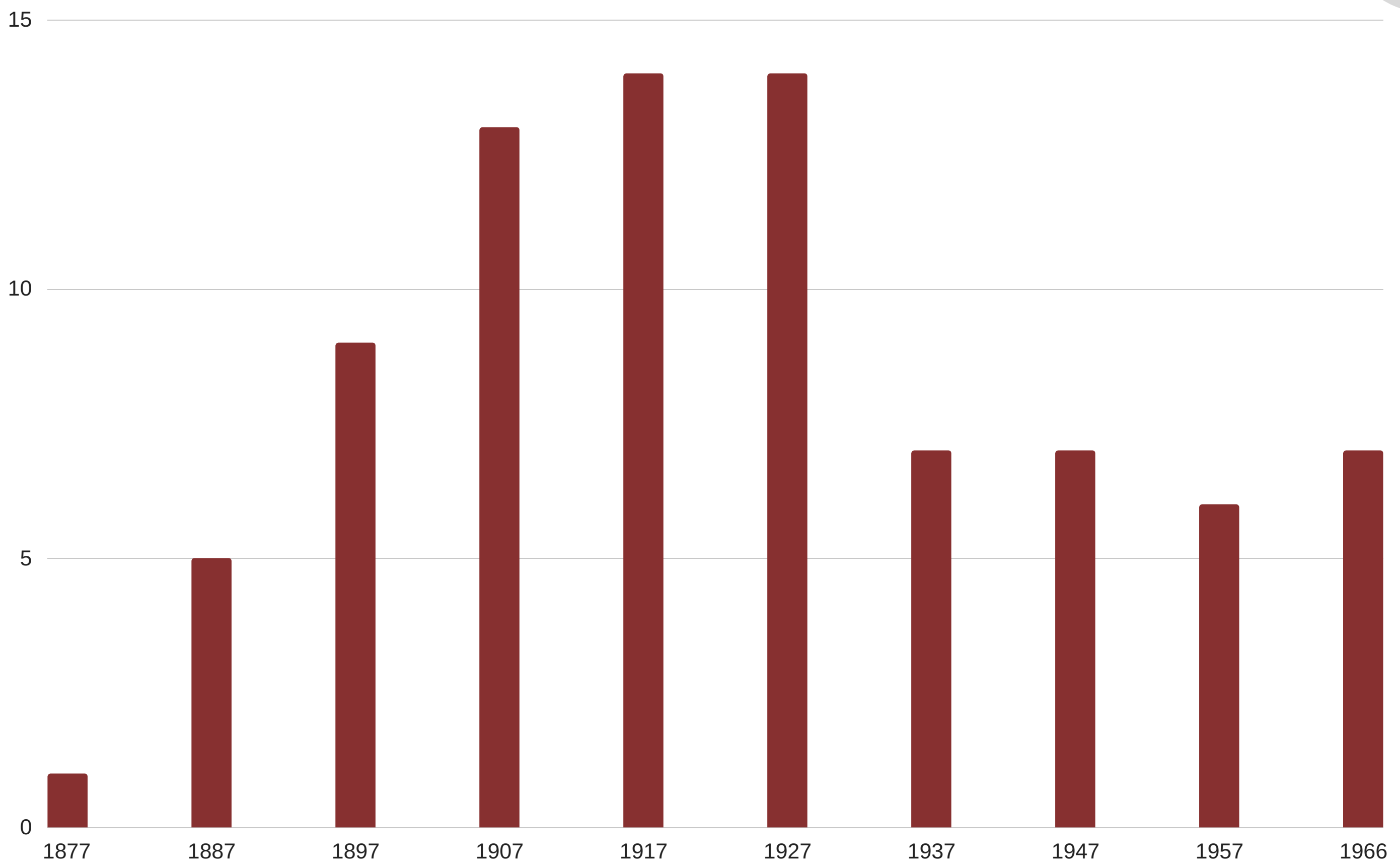
But, what is a "pack"?

On the Skeena's shores alone, the annual amount of salmon canned rose heavily between 1877 and the early 1960's. The total amount of cases produced were referred to as the district's yearly "pack," and encompassed contributions from all the Skeena's canneries as monitored by the Department of Fisheries.



Photo Credit: North Pacific Cannery Website, 2017.

NUMBER OF OPERATING CANNERIES ON THE SKEENA RIVER



Source: Ross, W. M. "Salmon Cannery Pack Statistics: Nass and Skeena Rivers of British Columbia," pp. 40-43.

BOOM AND BUST BUSINESS

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF CANNERIES ON THE SKEENA RIVER

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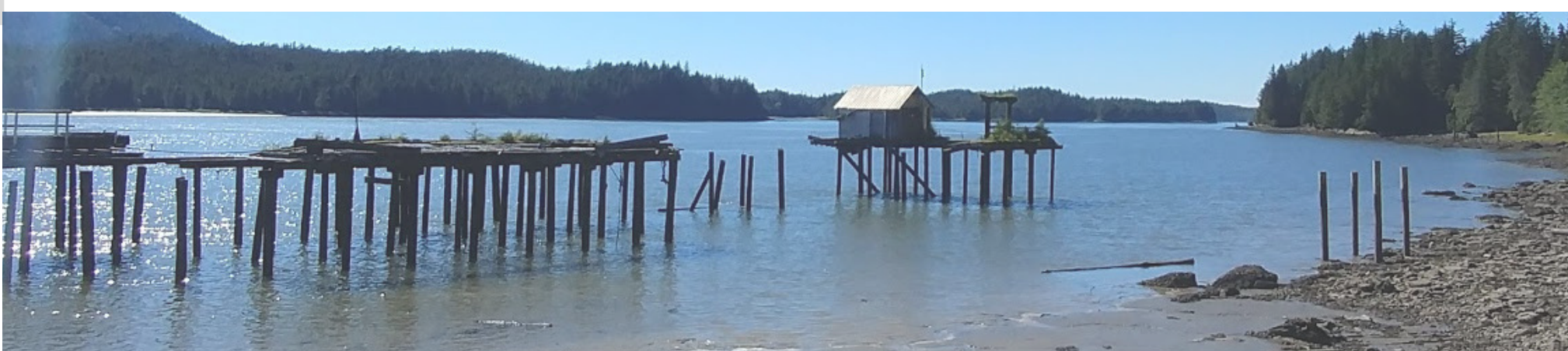


Photo Credit: Melanie Bellwood 30/08/2017

1877-1966

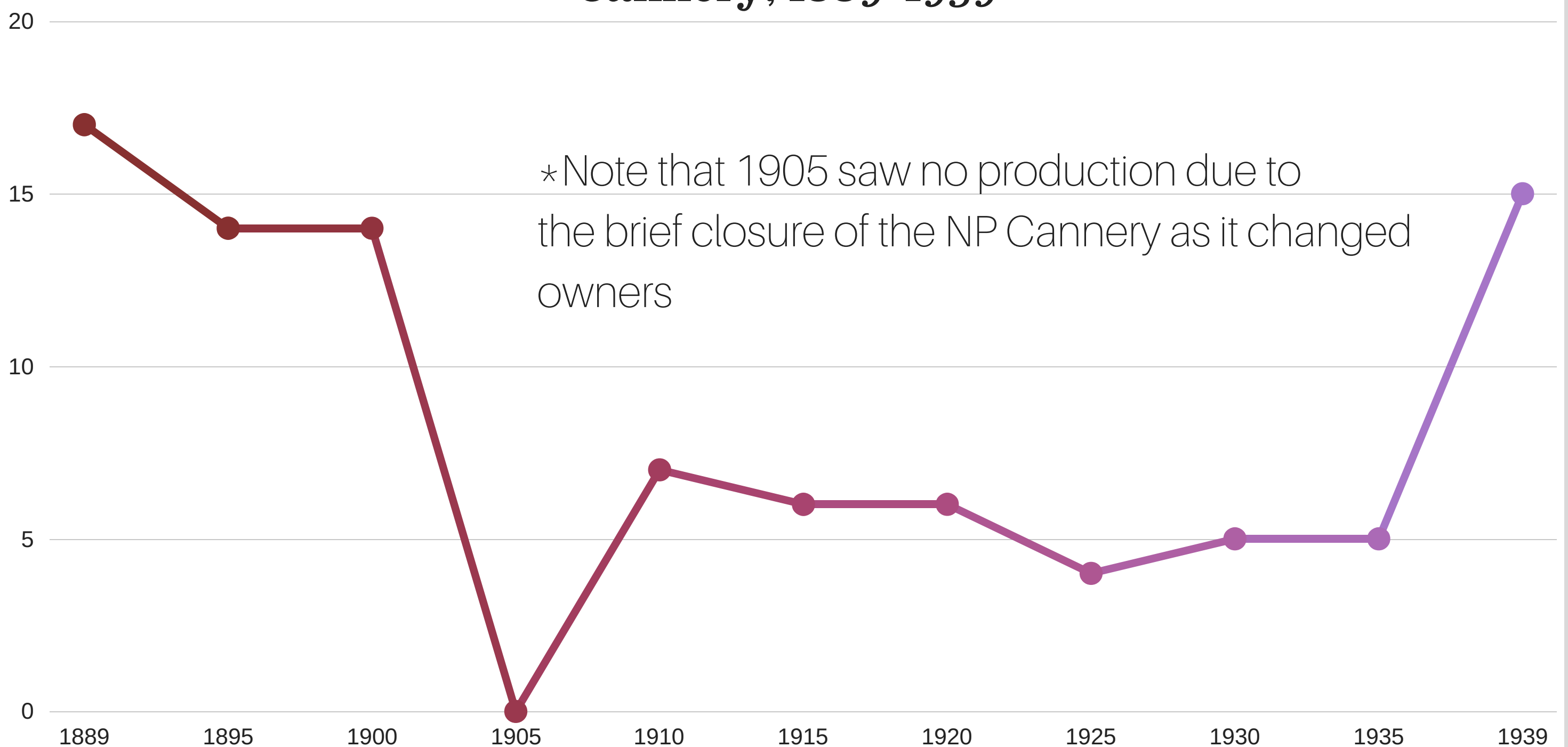
The North Pacific Cannery was not the only cannery to capitalize on the beautiful shores of the Skeena River. Over a period of 90 years, it was joined by 33 other canneries, each populating the busy waters with their own fisherman, boats, and equipment. The most canneries to operate at one time was 15 in 1926, during the height of the salmon canning industry's success. The chart above shows how many different canneries operated on the Skeena between the years of 1877 and 1966.

THE NORTH PACIFIC CANNERY

HOW IT CONTRIBUTED TO THE SKEENA'S SALMON CANNING PRODUCTION

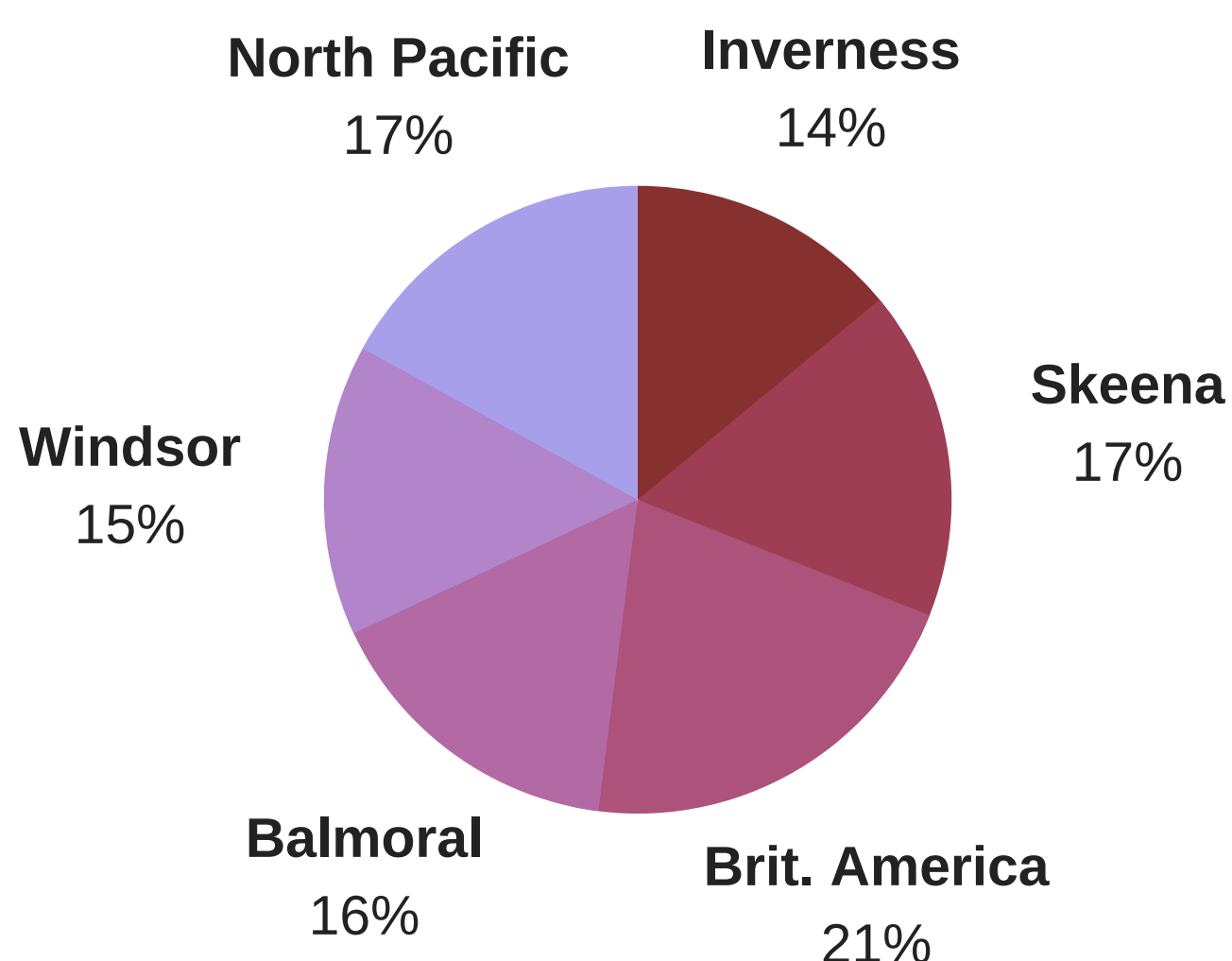
As canneries opened and closed over the decades, the North Pacific Cannery saw a roller-coaster of contribution to the Skeena River's total production of canned salmon, as depicted below.

Percentage of Skeena District production by the North Pacific Cannery, 1889-1939



Source: Ross, W. M. "Salmon Cannery Pack Statistics: Nass and Skeena Rivers of British Columbia," pp. 14-17.

Percentage of Contribution by Cannery in 1889



When the North Pacific Cannery first opened in 1889, it competed with only 5 other canneries in operation. This allowed it to enter the scene strong, supplying 17% of the Skeena district's total canned salmon production in its first year of operation.

Source: Ross, W. M. "Salmon Cannery Pack Statistics: Nass and Skeena Rivers of British Columbia," pp. 14.

1911

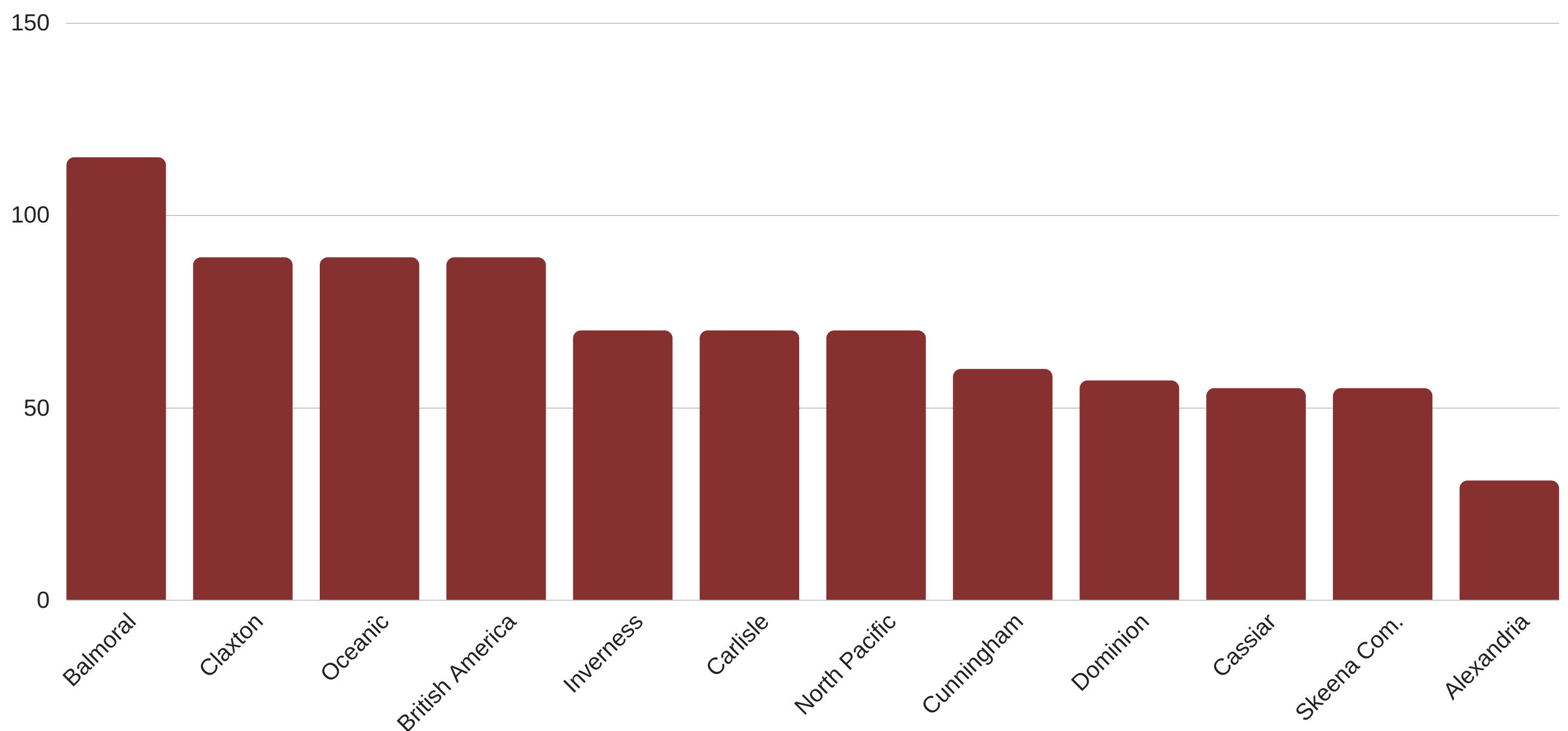
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POPULATED WATERS

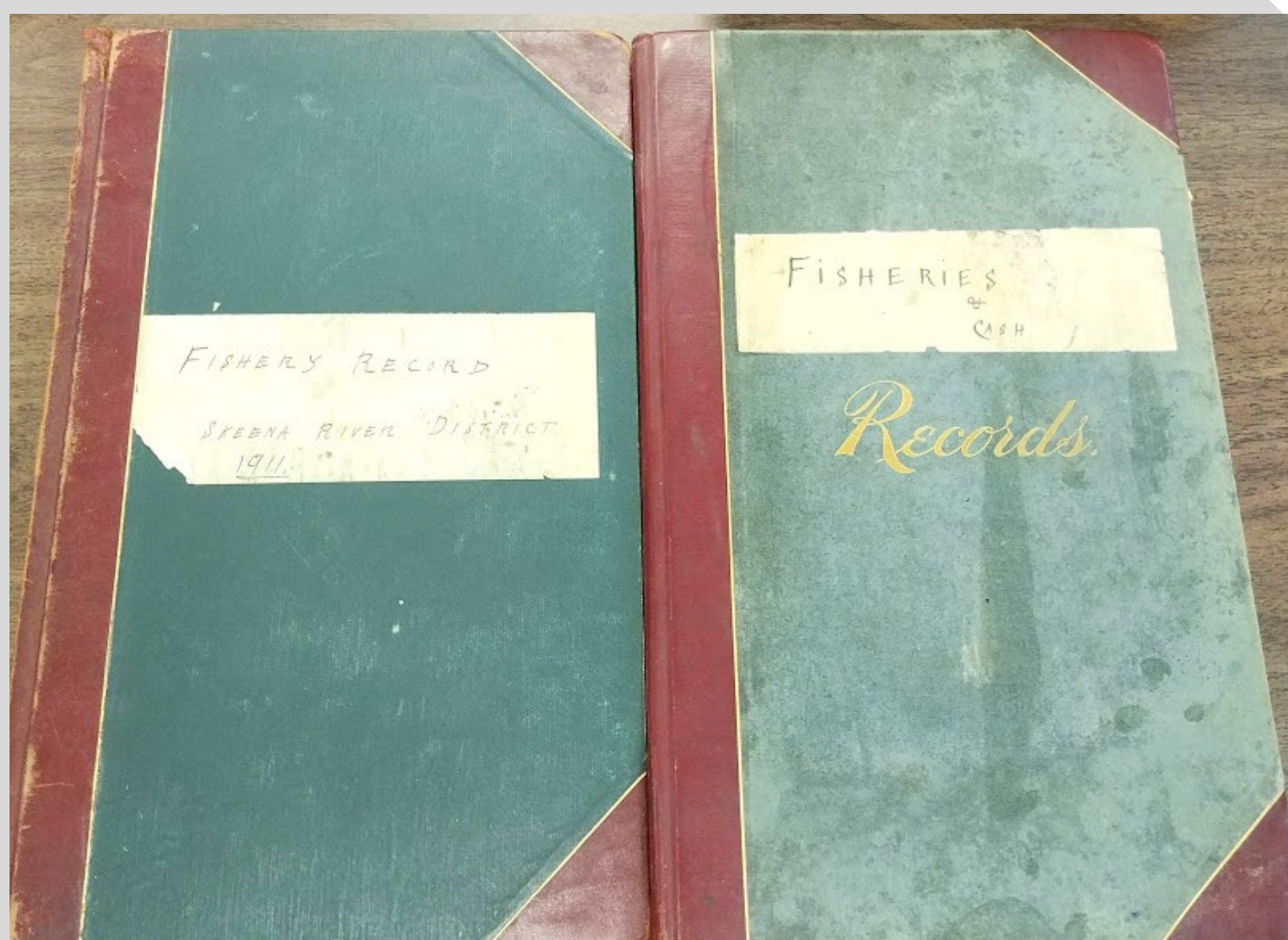
THE SKEENA RIVER CALLED TO FISHERMEN FROM NEAR AND FAR

European colonists were not the only men and women to settle on the Skeena River looking to take part in the rush on salmon. As canneries populated the shorelines, more workers were needed not just to operate the facilities, but to man the fishing boats on their excursions further and further down the river. The North Pacific Cannery held 70 of the 850 boats licensed in 1911, making them substantial contributors to the fishing of that year.

Fishing Boats Licensed in 1911 - By Cannery



Source: "Daily Logbook, 1911," Royal Canadian Mounted Police, pp 1.



The licensing and monitoring of these fishermen was entrusted to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who kept detailed records of fishing license holders in the area.

Photo Credit: "Fishery and Cash Ledgers," Prince Rupert Regional Archives.

POPULATED WATERS

THE SKEENA RIVER CALLED TO FISHERMEN FROM NEAR AND FAR

Japanese Fishermen



By 1911, all 70 of the North Pacific Cannery's fishing boats and licenses were held by Japanese immigrants and Japanese-Canadians who were hired for their incredible reputation as fishermen. They were known for their abilities to build, maintain, and operate fishing boats skillfully and often hired directly by the cannery. Those hired were almost exclusively male, and they were not known to bring their families with them to Northern BC, leaving them in Vancouver.



First Nations Families

That is not to say, however, that the only fishermen were of Japanese descent. First Nations peoples played a substantial role in not only the fishing, but the shore-working for most canneries. Entire families of First Nations peoples were hired from all over Canada and relocated either to North Pacific (Prince Rupert) area or further south in the Vancouver and surrounding area. Men often fished or packed, while women were known to work in the cannery itself, often cleaning, gutting, processes, and packing the fish into cans. Often, children were helpful doing small tasks, such as keeping work areas tidy. If children were too young to work, or simply did not want to, they were still found nearby their mothers, often playing in and around the cannery area. The majority of these workers were of the Tsimshian peoples, and other local bands.

Chinese Immigrants



The Skeena canning industry also saw an influx of Chinese immigrants, which resulted in the hiring of many Chinese and Chinese-Canadian men. In many records, those of Chinese descent were found to be renowned for their ability to cook and clean. They were often hired as crews by the "China boss" that would handle all interpreting and transacting for the group, as he would often be the most experienced in Canada. They quickly built a reputation for their fascination skill in the canneries gutting, scaling, and slicing fish, becoming known as "The Men with the Singing Knives" for many decades. Often, their jobs were affected directly as inventions such as the "Iron Butcher" replaced the need for the man-power of 30 in these areas in the early twentieth century with the need for only 3 men.

Discussing the Impacts:

While the opening of canneries in the North Pacific was fast and furious, it is not fair to say that these were the first instances of fishing in the area. The First Nations peoples on the Skeena and Nass had used the land traditionally, including the catching and using of salmon, for a very long time. After the development of fishery that colonization brought with it, First Nations peoples saw a lot of change in their own fish camps. This topic has been the subject of conversation among many historians, as some believe that this played a significant role in the way First Nations peoples experienced a serious detriment to their own communities due to the laws and restrictions put on fishing over the decades.

For example, historians such as Douglas Harris have studied the way that policy and Anglo-Canadian law evolved the way that Native fisheries were controlled. In his book, *Landing Native Fisheries*, Harris says that the Canadian government made a point of allowing First Nations peoples access only to smaller portions of land in less convenient areas, while also restricting the ways in which they were allowed to fish. He believes that this resulted in an exclusivity and limitation that prevented Native fisheries from creating their own economical force within their communities.

Some scholars look to recognize the First Nations peoples as part of a larger group of shareholders to the North Pacific canning industry. In his book, *Fisherman's Frontier*, David Arnold chooses to discuss the history of salmon fishery in Alaska, exploring not only how this business boom affected politicians, scientists, industrialists, and businessmen, but First Nations peoples. He asserts that Native fishery assisted the growth of the industry in Alaska by providing customers, services, and knowledge about the area, and in return was incorporated into the larger idea of a colonized salmon fishery.

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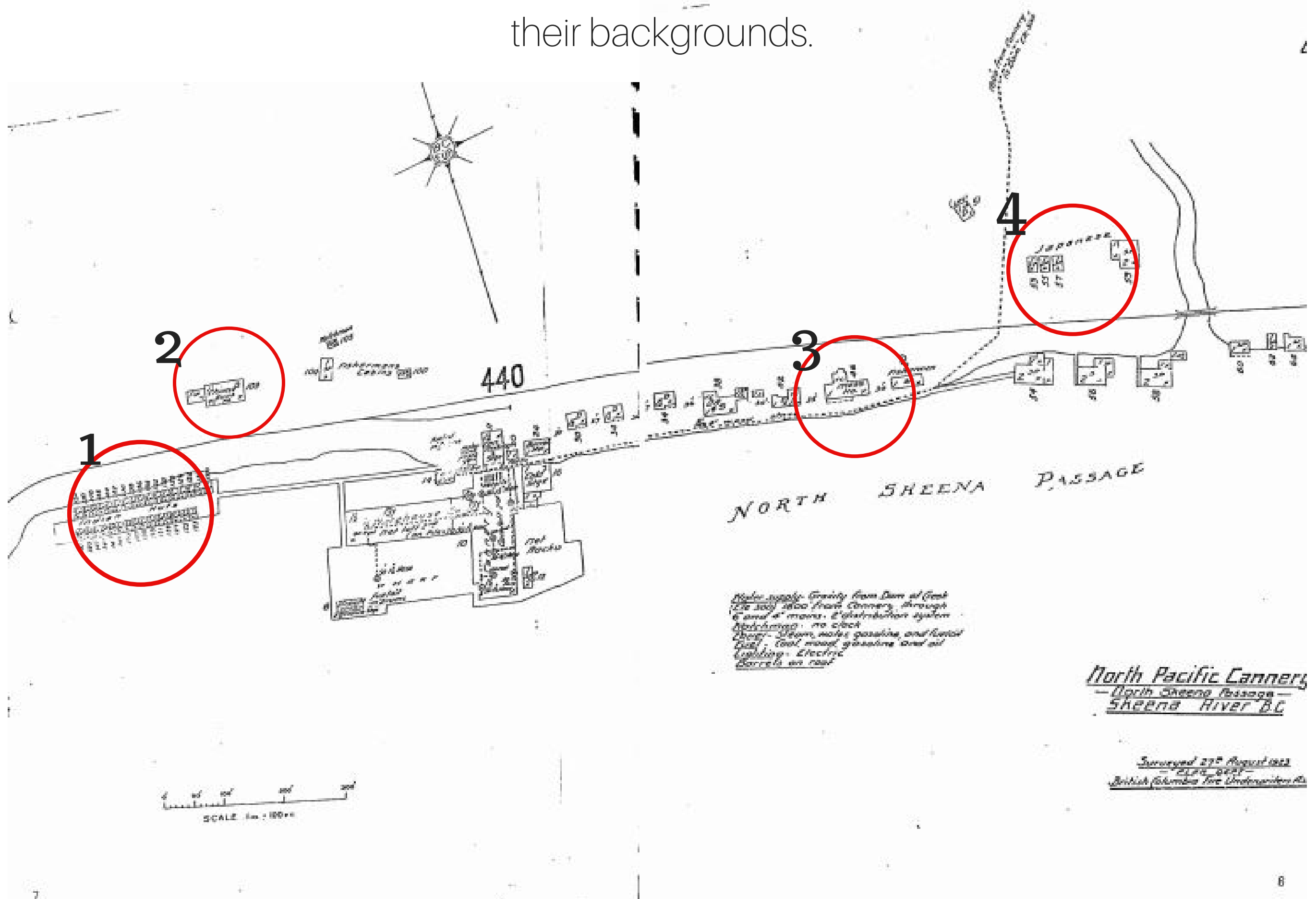
FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES

HOW CANNERIES AFFECTED THE FIRST NATIONS FISHERIES IN BC

POPULATED WATERS

LIVING CONDITIONS AT THE CANNERY

As canneries, such as the North Pacific Cannery, became places where people of many races met (often for the first time) there has been discussion over whether they were positive or negative forces of colonization. History scholars such as Renisa Mawani have described canneries as "contact zones" that allowed for social hierarchies to form where similar concepts had not existed previously. On the other hand, interviews with people who had first hand experience from the time (such as Joan Skogan's interview of Alex Blythe and Bill Ross) saw the environment as that was not racially charged, but a great opportunity to meet and learn about new peoples and their backgrounds.



Source: "1952 Fire Prevention Report for North Pacific Cannery," Prince Rupert Regional and City Archives.

The red circles above represent the various living spaces for those living on site at the North Pacific Cannery.

1. is the rows of First Nations housing built on site
2. is the Chinese bunk-house
3. is the European bunk-house
4. is the Japanese bunkhouse and adjoining trail to the village they built for themselves nearby.

Melanie Bellwood
History 493
Dr. Benjamin Bryce
October 1, 2017
University of Northern British Columbia

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Melanie Bellwood
History 493
Dr. Benjamin Bryce
October 1, 2017
University of Northern British Columbia

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