

6. Pile Driver Raft

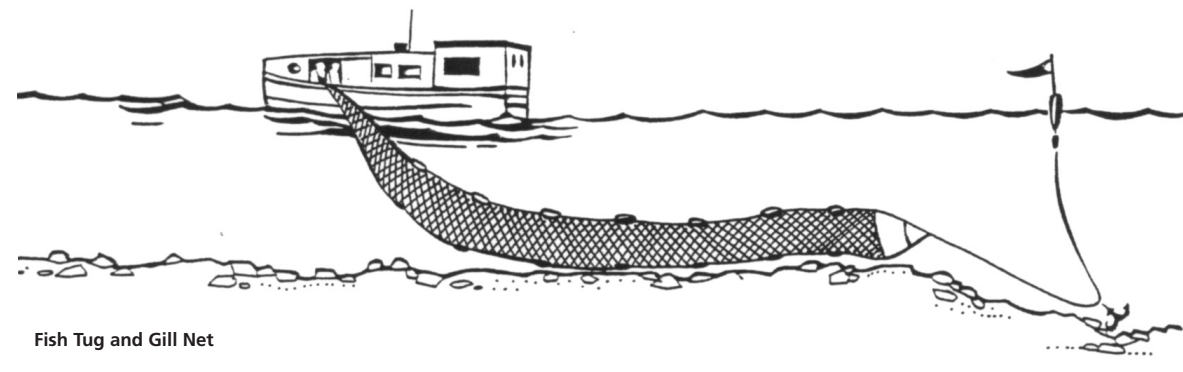
The Hokensons primarily fished with pound nets; large, stationary nets suspended from poles driven into the lake bottom in 20-70 feet of water. One way to set the poles was to use a pile driver mounted on a raft and towed to the site. A pole would be held in position until repeated drops of the weight pushed it far enough into the sand and clay to stay upright.



7. The Twilite (may be in dry dock for restoration)

Wooden, enclosed and high-bowed, the 38-foot diesel-powered *Twilite* is a typical Great Lakes fishing tug. Built in 1937 by the Hokensons with help from their cousin Halvor Reiten, a professional boatbuilder, this boat allowed the fishermen to travel further and in worse weather. The tug was equipped with a winch to lift gill nets so that they could fish for herring in the fall.

The name *Twilite* stems from the period when the Hokensons were still farming during the day. The brothers' habit of fishing in the evening led neighbors to nickname them the "twilight fishermen."



Fish Tug and Gill Net

Eskel recalled, "We were setting poles and one kept popping up, so I reached to push it in place, and that one time the hammer let go, 250 lbs. right on top of my hand."

According to Roy, the Twilite would heel far over in storms. The brothers would climb to the side and sit on the windows.

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
415 Washington Avenue
Bayfield, Wisconsin 54814



You could make a lot of money in herring season, but when hunting season came along, well, they'd drop everything and go hunting.

Florence Hokenson

8. The Dock and Herring Shed



The dock was the first structure built at the fishery site. Its "L" shape afforded boats some protection, but in northerly storms, the brothers occasionally had to move the *Twilite* to Sand Island.

Herring season was a busy and profitable time for Apostle Islands fishermen. Lake herring is a small whitefish that schools together to spawn in the late fall. Tons of herring were harvested using miles of gill net. The Hokensons would lift their gill nets early in the morning, gathering the nets loaded with herring into the *Twilite*. In the Herring Shed, wives, children, and hired hands awaited their arrival - each with a separate job in the assembly line process. The fish were untangled from the net, rinsed in the wooden tank, gutted and beheaded, rinsed again in the other tank, drip-dried on the rack, salted, and stacked in a barrel.

As you stand on the dock and look out over the lake, the scene is the same as it was when the fishery was operating, but the story has changed. Commercial fishing was a vibrant industry when the Hokenson brothers began their business in 1927. By the time they retired in the mid-1960's, the Lake Superior fishery had drastically changed. Sea lamprey, a parasitic fish, invaded Lake Superior in the 1940's. By the 1950's it had nearly decimated the lake trout and reduced the number of whitefish. Another exotic fish, smelt, may have reduced the herring population. Overfishing had also greatly diminished all three species.

Today's few remaining commercial fisherman have had to realize that the profits of the business are limited not just by skill and stamina, but by the need to conserve and share the resource.

When we first started there was fish in the lake. But we must've fished 'em out.

Roy Hokenson

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
Bayfield, Wisconsin

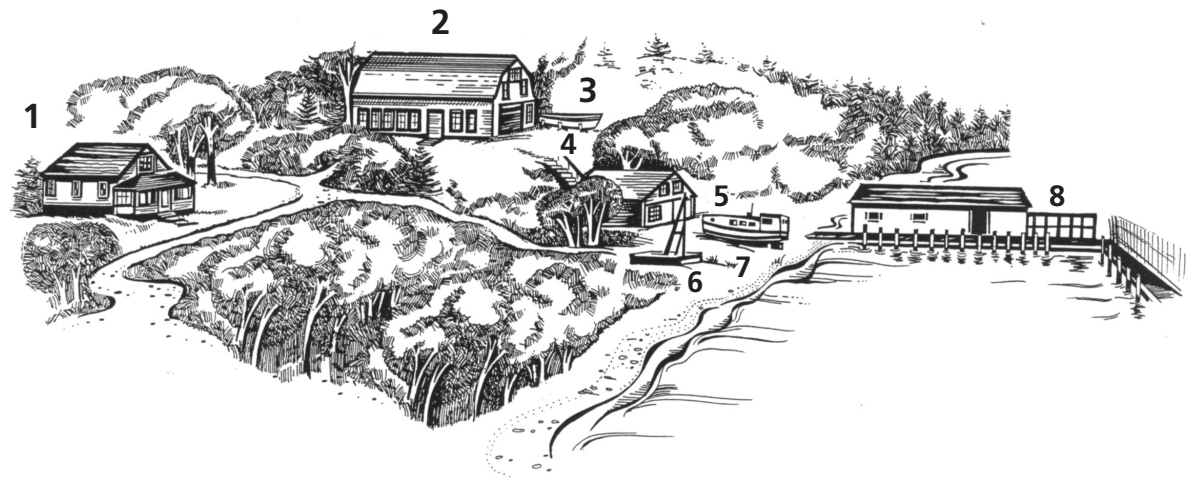
Hokenson Brothers Fishery

Farming wasn't going too well for three families...we could hold up a mirror and watch ourselves starve to death.

Florence Hokenson on why her husband and his two brothers started fishing for a living.



Leo, Roy, and Eskel Hokenson (left to right above) operated a family-owned commercial fishing business at Little Sand Bay for more than 30 years. The three brothers, sons of Swedish immigrants, grew up in Bayfield. As young men they started out as dairy farmers on the family homestead, but found the cold climate and poor soil didn't yield enough to support three families. In 1927, the brothers began their fishery, entering an industry that had thrived in the Apostle Islands area since railroads linked this remote region to the markets in Chicago and New York. They used skill, strength, and courage to profitably harvest fish from the largest expanse of freshwater in the world.



1. House

The house was built in 1940 for Roy and his wife Irene. Having one of the brothers on site provided peace of mind during stormy nights. It is now used as employee housing. Please respect their privacy.



2. Twine Shed

In this barn-like building, named for the twine used in fishing nets, nets were prepared, repaired, and stored. The bulky pound nets are arranged along the wall. Fish boxes full of gill nets and floats are stacked on carts.

The Twine Shed was more than just a storehouse for fishing equipment. Machinery, spare parts, and lubricants share the south end of the building. Rings, anchors and other tools could be made or fixed at the forge, sometimes by using the scrap metal stored under the bench. Here too the engines used to power the boats could be repaired. A workshop and storehouse, smithy and junkyard, machine and carpenter shop, the Twine Shed embodies the assortment of skills commercial fisherman had to practice to get their catch from lake to market.

If we didn't know how to do something, we'd figure it out.
Roy Hokenson

Before they built the Twilite, the brothers went out to their nets in the pound boat. Eskel's wife Florence recalled the danger. "That's when I got my first gray hair. I'd see them come in and just disappear in those waves."



3. Pound Net Boat

Flat-bottomed so fishermen could stand and haul in lines without capsizing, a pound boat would be maneuvered around the pot to raise the net and scoop out the fish. Though it could be used alone, it was usually towed to the pound nets behind the *Twilite*.

Fishing could be dangerous. The Hokenson's hired hand, John Nelson, was laid low when a winch handle spun free and hit him in the head. He awoke blind. Roy and Irene cared for him until he eventually regained his sight.

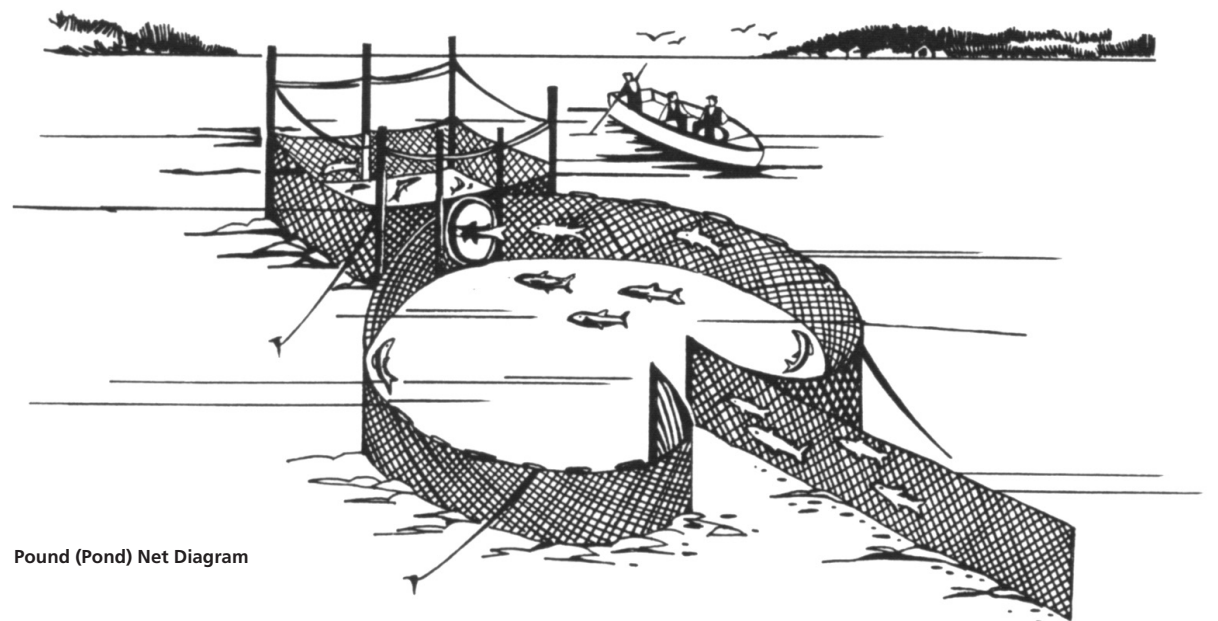
4. Yard Items

Tar barrel: Because pound nets were set out in May and not pulled from the lake until October, the nets had to be dipped in tar to prevent them from rotting. The tar also stained the linen and cotton net material brown. The dark netting was more visible to fish, and guided them into the pot.

Gill net reel: Gill nets were wrapped around reels to dry between uses, thereby slowing the twine's decay. Unlike pound nets, these nets had to be invisible to the fish in order to work and thus could not be coated with a heavy preservative like tar.

Winches: Lifting and hauling the heavy nets, poles, and boats, winches gave the fishermen the mechanical advantage they needed. The winch permanently mounted in cement was used to pull the *Twilite* up the beach when storms would have pounded it against the dock.

With pound nets you get good fish. That's one thing about it, we took good care of 'em. They had fresh fish. They'd still be kicking in the pan two hours later...up at the farm. That's fresh fish, you bet it is. And fresh when they get to Chicago.
Roy Hokenson



Pound (Pond) Net Diagram

5. The Ice House

Ice harvested from the lake in winter kept the summer's catch of lake trout and whitefish fresh. When lake ice was about 2 feet thick, the brothers used a horse-drawn ice plow and ice saws to cut blocks approximately 2' x 4' x 2'. In the 1940s, the brothers built a sled mounted, gas-powered circular saw to replace the ice plow and speed the cutting. Ice blocks were loaded on trucks and driven to the ice house. The heavy blocks were slid through the lakeside window and down a ramp in the back of the building. Snow was packed between the blocks to prevent them from freezing together, but a thick layer of sawdust insulated the ice from the walls and roof.



Cutting Ice at Little Sand Bay