



Delaware Public Archives, Collection 1380.6, Photo # 496-2004, April 22, 1926

Above, in spring, the shad swam from the Atlantic Ocean to spawn upstream in the fresh waters of the Delaware River. Prized for their excellent flavor, shad were harvested from the river in the millions of pounds during the 1890s and early 1900s.

By the 1880s, the Delaware River was the country's largest sturgeon fishing ground. Fishermen harvested sturgeon roe, salted it, packed it in 135 pound kegs, and shipped it to Europe as caviar. Little wonder that, as the price of \$12 per keg in 1885, rose to over \$100 by 1900, the harvests increased until the sturgeon were nearly wiped out.

The large rodent, native to North America and prized mainly for its pelt, is also valued for its meat and for its musk glands that produce a distinctive scent used to make certain perfumes.



Muskrat



Winter was the time for trapping muskrats. Below, Ike Cleaver, famed hunter of Port Penn, posed draped in pelts.



The rivers and marshes around Delaware City provided the ideal habitat for fishes, waterfowl and muskrats. In the 1800s, local residents thought this wildlife would always be available and abundant.

The harvesting of fish and birds in excessive numbers put populations at risk. Serious pollution in the Delaware River reinforced the downward trend. The annual springtime spawning runs of sturgeon, shad, and herring became increasingly precarious.

Finally, the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 largely put an end to the hunting that had harvested hundreds of thousands of birds annually. Today the State of Delaware protects much of the marshland around Delaware City as state parks and wildlife areas.



Mallards

Port Penn Area Historical Society, Port Penn, Delaware

Local "market gunners" harvested ducks, packed them in barrels with ice and shipped them via steamboat to Philadelphia, Baltimore and beyond. In the early 1900s the range and power of hunting guns increased allowing ever larger harvests of wildfowl until curtailed by protective legislation in 1918.

FISHING, HUNTING & TRAPPING



Sources: *Delaware City—Port of History*, Delaware City Historic District National Register Nomination; Delaware Public Archives; *Federal Writers' Project—Delaware*, William P. Frank, *News Journal*, 1979; Port Penn Area Historical Society; Bruce Stutz, *Natural Lives—Modern Times, People and Places of the Delaware River*