



Lobstering in Maine : Then and Now

As hard as it may be to believe there has not always been a lobstering industry on the coast of New England. That's because in the early days, anyone could easily catch a lobster. In fact, lobsters were so abundant that a person could wade into the water and easily pull one out. Native Americans used lobsters to fertilize their crops and bait their fishing hooks. They also ate the **crustaceans**, preparing them by covering them in seaweed and baking them over hot rocks. This cooking method inspired the classic New England clambake.

Since lobster was readily available, a poor family might make a meal of it several times a week. Sometimes storms would wash ashore hundreds of lobsters at one time. During the colonial era and beyond lobsters were routinely fed to prisoners, **apprentices**, and slaves. In Massachusetts, some servants sought to limit the amount of lobster in their diets by including stipulations in their contracts that they would only be served the shellfish twice a week. Today it is hard to believe that this pricey delicacy was once free and there for the taking by anyone.

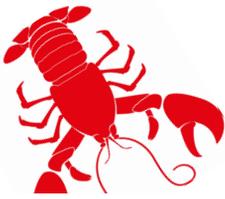
The earliest report of organized lobster fishing in Maine dates from 1605 when James Rosier wrote after a haul in Muscongus Bay, "With a small net, very nigh the shore, we got about thirty very good and great Lobsters." In those days a lobsterman could lean over the side of his boat and using a net or gaff (pole with a hook at the end) catch several in little time.

Gradually a market for lobsters grew in Boston and New York, but simple methods of fishing them were still used. In the mid-1800's the French invented a method for canning food and everything changed. Now there was a way to preserve **perishable** foods like lobster. This made it possible for lobster to be consumed year round and in places far from the ocean. The first lobster **cannery** was established in Eastport, Maine around 1843. By 1880 there were 23 lobster canneries in the state of Maine shipping lobster throughout the United States and even overseas.

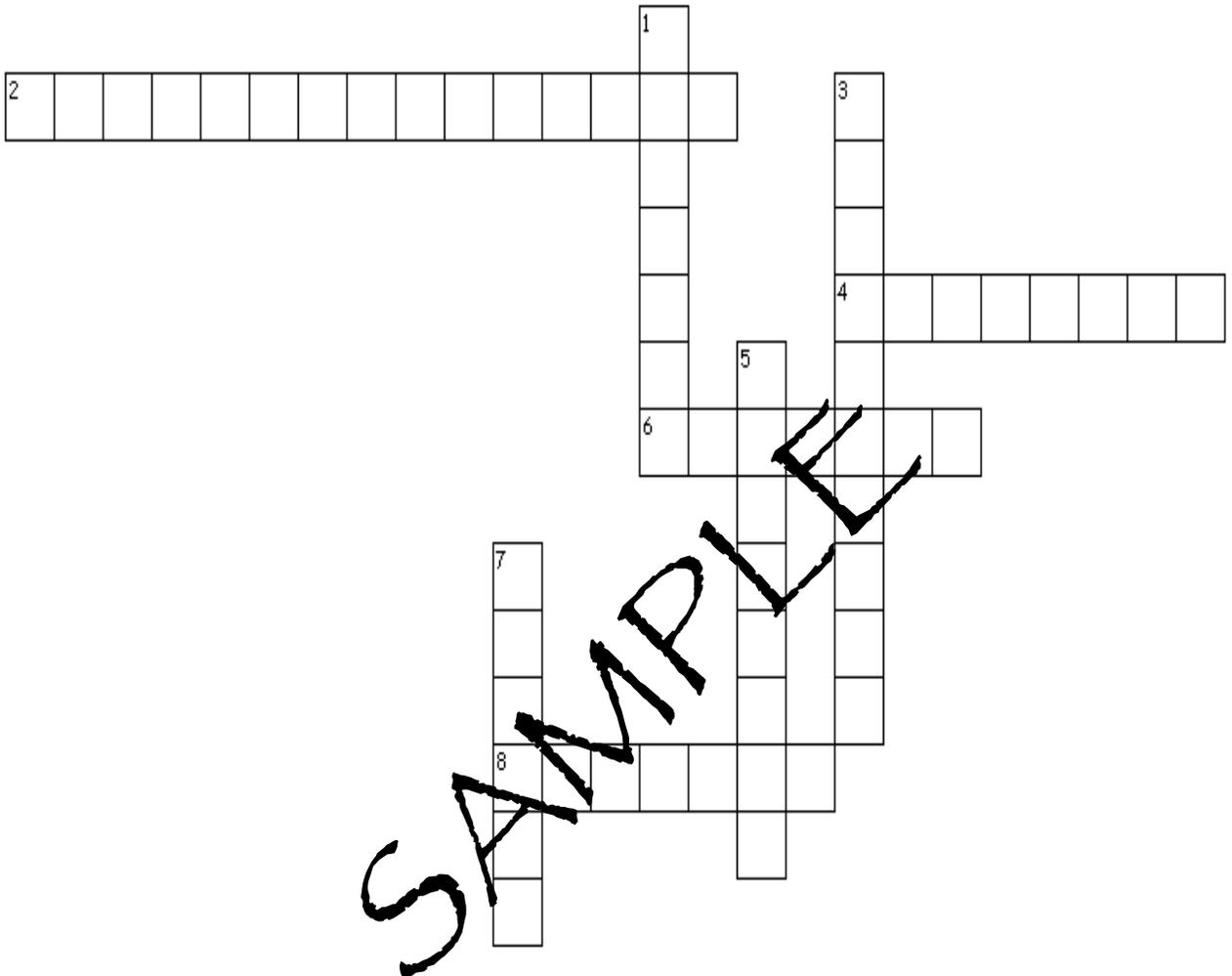
With demand for lobster increasing, the simple hoopnet trap (1) was replaced by the wooden lobster pot (2). These were dumped over the side of a row boat and hauled by hand. Sailing boats evolved for lobstering, such as the Muscongus Bay **sloops**, and fishermen could travel farther afield to tend their traps. Then engines were developed, providing power to go long distances and haul traps in deep water. Eventually, the wooden lobster pot was replaced by today's more durable plastic coated wire trap (3).

Lobstering, which once was as simple as a walk to the shore where a free meal was there for the picking, has evolved into a multi-million dollar industry. Unfortunately for today's lobstermen, the cost of catching this popular mouth watering meal is far from free.





Lobstering : Then and Now Crossword Puzzle



Across

2. They used lobster to fertilize crops.
4. They refused to eat lobster more than twice a week.
6. Ocean plant in which lobster was baked.
8. One of the earliest market cities for lobster.

Down

1. These allowed lobster boats to travel further.
3. It replaced the hoopnet trap.
5. Location of the first lobster cannery.
7. Country that invented the canning process.



The Life of a Maine Lobster

In the early days, four foot lobsters were not uncommon, and they grew even larger. In 1858, Robert Carter dropped a hook over the side of his boat in Pulpit Harbor, got it tangled in the tail of a lobster, and pulled in a 12-pounder! Today lobsters found in the fish market or on your plate at a restaurant are much smaller. That is because there are strict lobster **conservation** laws controlling the size lobstermen are allowed to keep. The catch is **restricted** to the minimum size of 3.5 inches from the eye socket to the beginning of the tail. This minimum length means that before a lobster becomes dinner it has to be given a chance to reproduce and lay its eggs. To protect known breeding females, lobsters caught carrying eggs are notched on a tail flipper. Following this, the female cannot be kept or sold.

The gauge used to measure the **carapace** of a lobster. If the carapace fits within the smaller (top) notch, the animal is too small to take. If the carapace is larger than the larger (bottom) notch, it is an over-sized animal and may not be taken in Maine.



The Lobster Life Cycle

Lobsters hatch from eggs and start life as tiny larvae floating near the surface of the ocean. After several days they molt, the process of shedding the old shell and developing a new and larger

lobster may molt seven times in its first year. By the time it has reached a one-pound size, the lobster will molt only once a year. When it molts, a lobster leaves its shell intact, claws and all.

Adult lobsters molt at times partly determined by seawater temperatures. In Maine you'll find shedders in July along the southern coast and in August farther east. The price for shedders, also referred to as soft-shell lobster, is less than for hard-shell lobsters because they have less meat per pound of lobster. However, some say that shedder meat is sweeter.

All of the world's lobsters live in the sea. They cannot survive in freshwater like some crabs and crayfish do. They crawl along the bottom where they feed mainly on **carrion**, but also capture some live prey such as fish, crabs, clams and mussels. Due to their hard shell, lobsters have few natural predators. Maine lobsters are usually bluish green to brown with red spines, but a number of color variations have been observed. It is not until the lobster is cooked that its shell becomes red.

Maine lobster can weigh more than 40 pounds and grow up to 3 feet long, making it the heaviest crustacean in the world. The lobster's pincers, or claws, account for up to 45 percent of its body weight. They tend to favor one front limb, meaning they can be right-clawed or left-clawed. When crowded into tight quarters such as store display tanks, lobsters tend to become **cannibalistic**. Sellers tightly band their claws to prevent them from feasting on their neighbors.

The lobster, which has changed little over the last 100 million years, is known for its unusual anatomy. Its brain is located in its throat, its nervous system in its abdomen, its teeth in its stomach and its kidneys in its head. It hears using its legs and tastes with its feet.

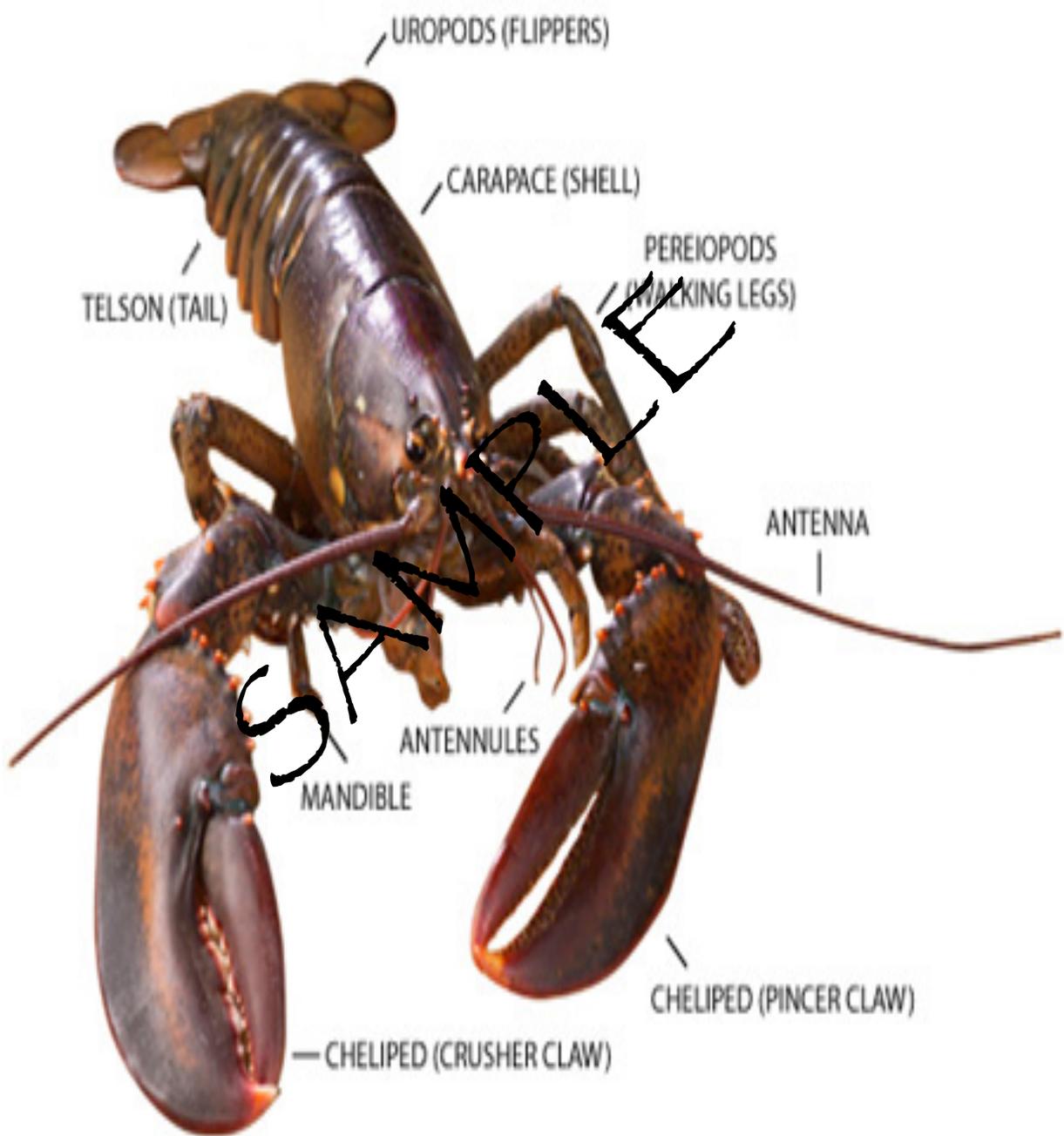


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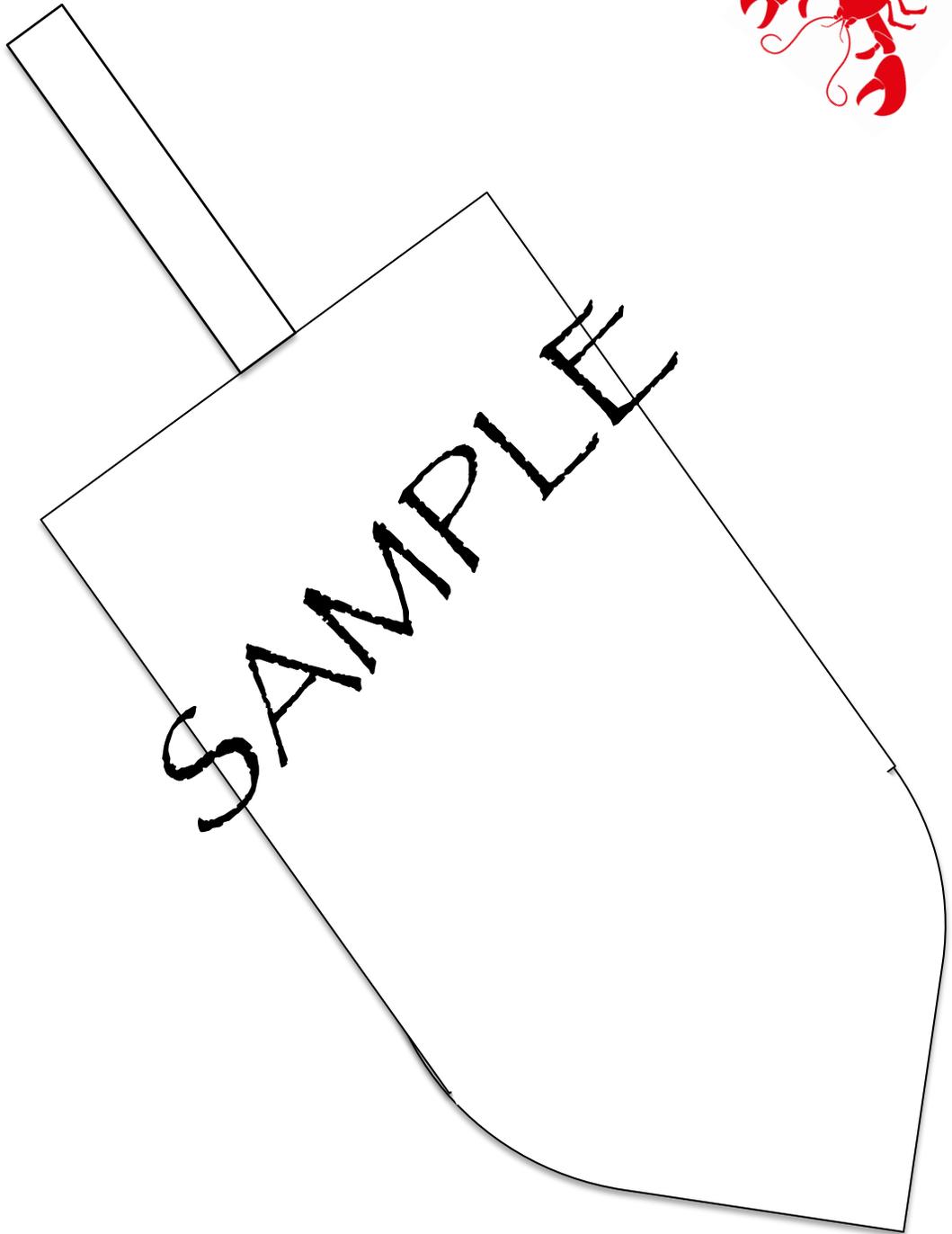
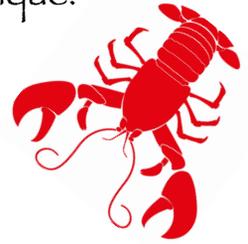
The Life of a Maine Lobster True or False?

- _____ The lobsters we buy today are larger than lobsters caught in the 1800's.
- _____ There are strict laws about the sizes of lobsters that can be harvested.
- _____ If a female is found to be carrying eggs, her tail gets a notch cut in it.
- _____ Lobsters begin their lives as larvae that crawl on the ocean floor.
- _____ Once a lobster reaches a size of one pound it molts about once per year.
- _____ When a lobster molts, its shell breaks into many pieces.
- _____ Hard shell lobsters sell for more than soft shell lobsters.
- _____ Some lobsters like to live in freshwater.
- _____ A lobster will only eat live prey.
- _____ Lobsters have many natural predators.
- _____ Lobsters are the heaviest crustaceans in the world.
- _____ Lobsters can be right-clawed or left-clawed.
- _____ If they don't have bands on their claws, lobsters might eat each other when in a small space, like a tank in the fish market.
- _____ Lobster anatomy has changed a lot over time.

Anatomy of a Maine Lobster



Lobstermen paint their buoys in their own unique color schemes in order to tell their buoys apart from someone else's. Pretend you are getting started in lobstering. Show how you would design your buoys. Be creative and unique!



Name _____