



## Business History

**J.T.R. Freeman Wharf**

**William Lawton Factory**

**Alton E. Farnsworth Sardine Factory**

**The Southwest Harbor Packing Company**

**Seacoast Canning Company**

**Addison Packing Company**

**Stinson Canning Company**

**Great Harbor Marina**

Address – 11 Apple Lane

City – Southwest Harbor

State - Maine

Map and Lot – Map 3 – Lot 61

Map:

CS 1887 – FREEMAN WHARF

SAN 1921 – ADDISON

Original Owner - Freeman - John T.R. Freeman (1838-1916)

John T.R. Freeman (1838-1916) built the J.T.R. Freeman Wharf at the head of Southwest Harbor in about 1885.

Subsequent Owners:

Lawton - William Lawton Sr. (1824-1881)

Lawton - William Lawton Jr. (1850-1940)

William Lawton Sardine Factory

William Lawton canned there for several years. William Lawton Sr. was a tinsmith, as was his son William Lawton Jr.

William Jr. canned clams on his own wharf

William Lawton Jr.'s Clam Factory

SWH – Clark Point Road - 130

William Lawton Jr. may have used the Freeman wharf too. The Lawtons both started out as tinsmiths, a natural outgrowth of which would have been canning. It is unclear whether William Lawton Sr. was actively involved in canning fish in Southwest Harbor.

Alton E. Farnsworth Lobster, Clam and Sardine Factory

Farnsworth - Alton E. Farnsworth (1866-1926)

Alton E. Farnsworth came to work for William Lawton Jr. in 1887. Alton E. Farnsworth and William Lawton Jr. managed the business together as The Southwest Harbor Packing Co. during 1888 and then closed it. Farnsworth bought out Lawton. They were listed in the Maine State Register in 1888 as:

"Laughton & Farnsworth – Canned Fish and Lobsters"

"A large canning factory, 35 by 80 feet and two stories high is being constructed at Freeman's wharf by Mr. Alton Farnsworth. The more such industries well conducted the better." - Bar Harbor Record, January 7, 1892.

In 1901 Farnsworth sold the business to Addison Packing Company [may have been named Sea Coast Canning Company], owned by Jones Everett Wass. Farnsworth stayed and managed the Southwest Harbor factory. The sale included the wharf, which Mr. Freeman still owned until this time. After the sale, Freeman retained part of the wharf for the coal business then being carried on by his son-in-law Fred Abbott Walls.

Walls Coal Company I  
SWH – Apple Lane – 012  
Walls - Fred Abbot Walls (1888-1949)

Alton E. Farnsworth enlarged the buildings in Southwest Harbor and made many improvements - "Traditions and Records of Southwest Harbor and Somesville, Mount Desert Island, Maine" by Mrs. Seth S. Thornton, p. 176-177 – 1938

Addison Packing Company  
Jones Everett Wass added considerable machinery and greatly increased the output. The first year the product was 16,000 cases, which grew to 60,000 cases in the three successive years following. - "Traditions and Records of Southwest Harbor and Somesville, Mount Desert Island, Maine" by Mrs. Seth S. Thornton, p. 176-177 – 1938

Wass – Jones Everett Wass (1882-1956)  
Jones Everett Wass came to Southwest Harbor from Addison, Maine, in 1914 as manager and part owner, with Calvin Laforest Stinson Sr. (1891-1992), of the Addison factory at Southwest Harbor. Stinson - Calvin Laforest Stinson Sr. (1891-1992)

Calvin Laforest Stinson started as a child cutting fish at the Prospect Harbor sardine factory, operated by Addison Packing Company and owned by Jones Everett Wass with Charles A. Stewart (1866-1937) and his brother Frank H. Stewart (1876-) blueberry canners, with their father, Arthur L. Stewart (A.L. Stewart & Sons), from Cherryfield.

By 1927, when Calvin Stinson returned from service in WWI, the Prospect Harbor cannery was in financial difficulties. Calvin Stinson bought out Charles and Frank Stewart. Wass then joined Stinson as joint owner of The Addison Packing Co.'s plants in Prospect Harbor and in Southwest Harbor. (All or part of the business was at one time called Wass & Stinson.)

In 1931 Wass sold his interest to J. W. Stinson and Son [named for John Wesley Stinson and his son Calvin Laforest Stinson Sr.] who now wholly owned and operated the Southwest Harbor factory, but retained the Addison Packing Company name for it and ran the factory with Austin Mitchell as manager.

Mitchell - Austin Malvery Mitchell (1892-1954)

The Southwest Harbor factory remained as Addison Packing Co. until 1978, when the name was changed to Stinson Canning Co.

Stinson Canning Co. at Southwest Harbor thrived during WWII, but after the war government restrictions began to impinge on the business.

In 1946 Stinson, with a partner named Glen Lawrence, built a new sardine factory in Bath, Maine, and called it the Bath Canning Company.

In March 1947 Calvin Stinson had an extension built on to the SWH factory. The main packing room was now 120' x 100' and could accommodate 85 packers, Stinson also installed a fish pump to make the unloading of the fish more efficient and less damaging. During the winter of 1947 the factory in Southwest Harbor rigged several of its sardine carriers with mussel dredges, so they could drag mussels during the winter months. The mussels were canned at the factory.

Stinson's various enterprises did well for the next several years. By 1960 he had consolidated and closed most of his "Down East" factories except those in Prospect Harbor, Southwest Harbor, Belfast, Bath, Yarmouth and South Portland.

In the late 1940s, the Southwest Harbor plant produced 114,000 cases of fish a year. In later years, under the factory general manager and company vice president, Willard F. Colson, the factory produced 200,000 cases. This was a large part of the company business as the entire Stinson Canning Co. produced a total of 500,000 cases in a year.

Colson - Willard F. Colson (1923-)

"Stinson's was a "going concern" and its only real competition was the large Canadian company Connors Bros. By the early 1980s competition became fierce for sardine herring and work wasn't steady. As the tourism industry grew along the Maine Coast workers became harder to find. Many of the women packers could find easier work with the same pay in the many restaurants and motels that catered to the "rusticators."

"The Southwest Harbour [Sic] factory was particularly affected by this problem. Tourists had descended upon Mt. Desert Island in droves and people were cashing in. The Harbour itself soon became a favourite [Sic] place for yachts. No one wanted a "smelly old sardine factory" in the area.

After the 1986 season the decision was made to close the factory and cease operations in Southwest Harbour. The factory had been in operation for sixty years and packed clams, mussels and flaked fish as well as sardines and fish steaks. Some of its labels were "Beach Cliff", "Deep Sea" and "Neptune." With the closure, 114 women and 20 men were put out of work. Several of the older company sardine boats were retired and the remainder sent to the other Stinson factories." This was the end of the fish business that had been conducted on Freeman's old wharf for 101 years.

Great Harbor Marina

"The factory buildings remained empty from 1987 to 1991, when they were sold to a group of investors who tore them down and started the Great Harbour Marina. That business was later taken over by The Hinckley Company" and later by other investors. The Deck House Restaurant and Cabaret Theater occupied space on the wharf for several years after moving from Bass Harbor.

The last sardine factory in Maine, at Prospect Harbor, closed in 2010. Since then there have been a few small attempts to revive the industry. – The account of the various fishing enterprises conducted on the Freeman Wharf has been put together from many sources, starting with Nell Thornton’s account quoted in the beginning and, most notably, from “Canned: A History of the Sardine Industry,” Part I, by John Gilman, privately published, September 2001. The final story, as told here, is a combination of these sources along with many histories and newspaper accounts, all of which were helpful, but none of which can be considered completely accurate. Further research will, no doubt, prove inaccuracies in this account.

For the history of the sardine canning industry see:

“Early Canning Pioneers & Related Trades – 1820 & Up” – Video produced for the Old Sardine Village Museum by Barney and Becky Rier, 2000. A home-made, but amazingly complete video on the sardine canning industry in Maine – 119 minutes.

“Canned: A History of the Sardine Industry,” Part I, by John Gilman, privately published, September 2001.

“It’s the Maine Sardine!” video produced by Northeast Historic Film from old footage found in Maine. – 40 minutes.