

Industries - Fishing

Sturgeon Fishing in the Rappahannock

Marion Brooks Robinson

Until the late 1930s, this large fish, weighing between 60 and 75 pounds and measuring 5 to 6 feet long, was caught regularly in the waters just below the fall line in the Rappahannock River. My father had a trap, known as a “fall” trap, used mainly for catching herring, but fairly often one of the huge sturgeon would be trapped in the weir leading to the trap and would be unable to get out. With the help of fellow fisherman, Mike Brown, my father would get the big fish out alive, wrap it in an old “oilcloth” tablecloth and quickly roll it in his wheelbarrow to Fall Run beside our home. Just at the end of the stone wall that divided our yard from the creek bed was a water hole about four feet deep and he would place the sturgeon in this hole. The shallows all around the waterhole did not allow an escape.

The next move was to put in a call to Joe Goldsmith at Goldsmith’s Men’s Clothing Store in Fredericksburg and tell him of the “catch.” This wasn’t for “bragging rights,” but because Mr. Goldsmith had a friend in a Washington, D.C. synagogue who would purchase the fish to provide a Kosher treat for his congregation. The next day a large touring car would drive up to our home on Washington Street in Falmouth and a Rabbi and his assistant would announce that they had come for the catch. The elegant robes and headdress always caught my eye as they moved to the holding pond. Here my father and the assistant quickly raised the head of the large creature above the water and the rabbi slit the fish’s throat with what seemed like a long silver stiletto.

I watched this part of the procedure only once – the “Kosher” death was more than my young stomach could endure. However, I would say that during the depression my father’s sturgeon sales were a real boost to the family’s meager budget.

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Her father – Saint Clair Brooks

