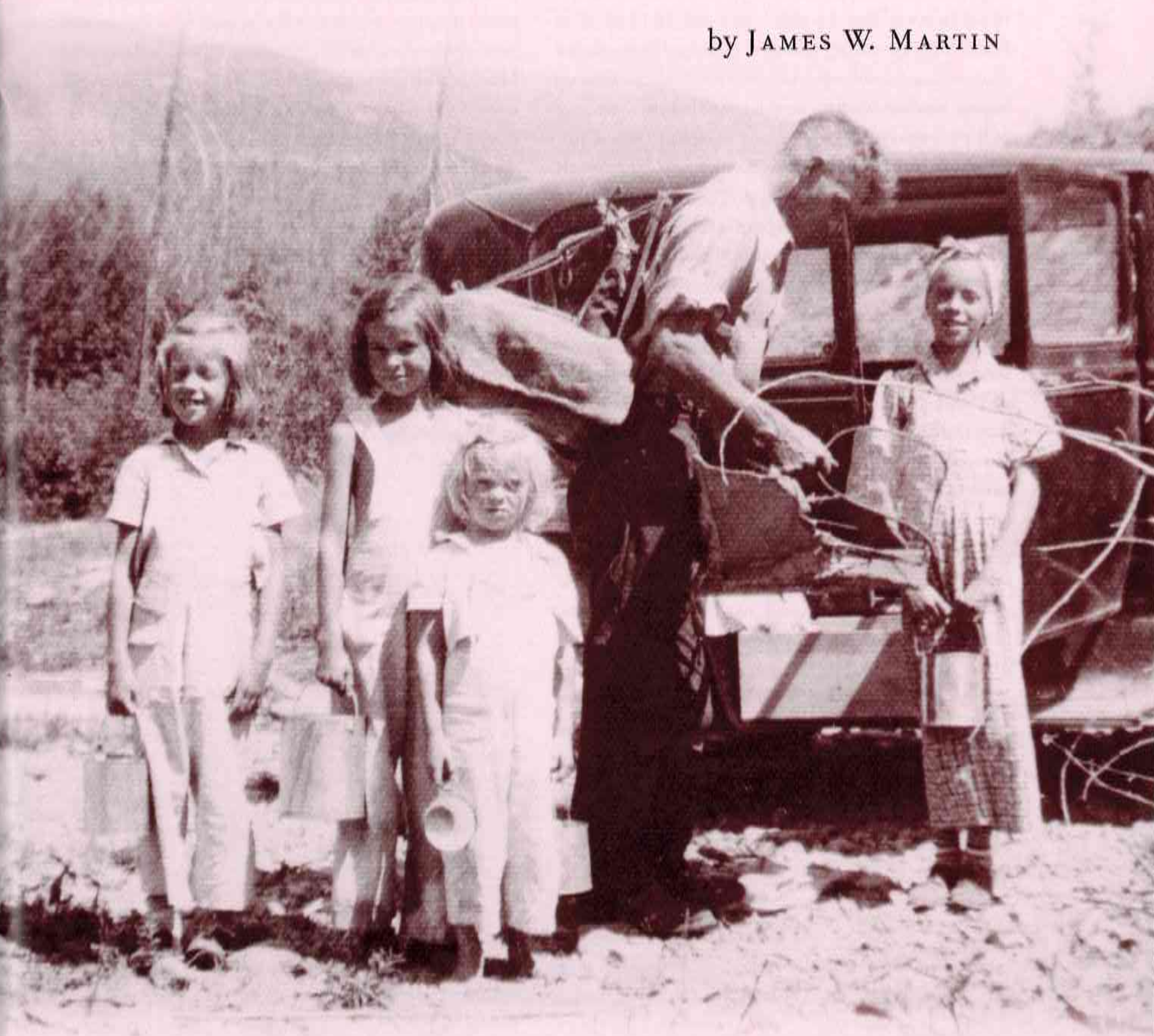
"You made your own job"

A Small Family Business in a North Idaho Timber Town

by James W. Martin

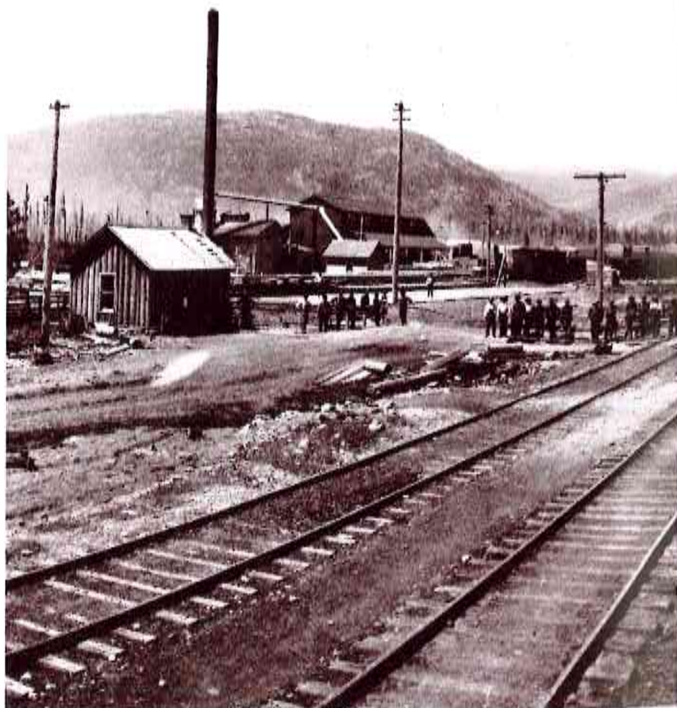


Living on the margins of North Idaho's timber-extraction economy, the Evans family drew on ecological resources, including fish, game, and berries, to make a life and a living for several generations. Martha Miller's (née Evans) husband, Harold, stands in front of their car with his daughters, armed with canvas picker baskets and metal pails for harvesting huckleberries. Author's collection

Sandpoint, Idaho, lived its boom years as a timber town in the early twentieth century. The Humbird Lumber Company, the Diamond Match Company, and a few smaller operations dominated the town's North Idaho hinterlands. Together with the Northern Pacific Railway, the Great Northern Railway, and the Spokane International Railway, these companies rapidly transformed the area into an important resource frontier serving markets hundreds of miles away. On the shore of Lake Pend Oreille, Humbird's sprawling mill gave Sandpoint the flavor of a company town, sporting Humbird-owned housing for workers, a store, and a school. The Humbird mill processed millions of board-feet of timber per year, harvested from the old-growth forests surrounding the town by numerous logging companies. Today, the massive ancient stumps left by this flurry of activity still rot away among second- and third-growth forests, and the remnants of infrastructure—flume pilings in creek beds, slumping trestle abutments, odd bits of concrete—render mute testimony to these long-departed enterprises. The razed ground and bald stumplands in old photographs speak to the power this bonanza exerted over the landscape, as do the wood dynamite boxes still knocking around many garages and the crosscut saws that decorate local restaurants and breweries.[1]

This timber-town backdrop, echoing through kitsch and local historical accounts, obscures the complexity of the region's extractive economies. Many private memories but few visible traces remain of the families who made their living on the margins of this boom. Frank and Nora Evans—who arrived in North Idaho from the Midwest in 1909—formed one such family. Lacking inherited wealth, the abundance of the region's agricultural and extractive industries drew them west. When they found a future in those sectors limited or unattractive, they developed adaptive strategies to survive. They and their children built a series of seasonal enterprises outside of the timber economy and sometimes outside the law: commercial fishing and fish processing, huckleberry picking, moonshining, gardening, and pilfering timber. Seasonal rhythms structured the family's business and sustenance. Although they readily adopted new technologies to more efficiently exploit the resources around them, the textures of daily life and work remained rooted in an intimate relationship with the natural world. Their unusually well-documented work lives offer a window into an informal economy that afforded many North Idaho residents the opportunity to piece together a living well into the 1970s. Near the end of her life, Frank and Nora's daughter, Martha Miller—a lifetime laborer in this informal economy—reflected on her family's experience. She declared that to get by, "you made your own job," an utterance that speaks to the precarious nature of working-class life and the spirit of autonomy she and others cultivated as a survival mechanism.[2]

The Evanses came to Idaho in 1909, a departure from both Frank and Nora's family backgrounds in small-scale midwestern agriculture. Frank, the restless eldest son of a genteel North Dakota farming family, left home in his early twenties. He traveled to San Francisco after the devastating 1906 fire to work in cleanup and construction. He soon returned to



The Humbird Lumber Company's Sandpoint mill on the shores of Lake Pend Oreille, Idaho's largest lake. As a timber town, Sandpoint experienced its boom years in the early twentieth century, but numerous families subsisted on the edges of this extractive economy.
757/11.064, Bonner County Historical Society, Sandpoint

the Midwest to wander and work. While he was a coal miner in Wells County, North Dakota, he met, married, and impregnated Nora Reynolds, a schoolteacher a few years his senior from a Mormon farming family. Always the black sheep, the restless Frank left Nora with their baby son Wardell and traveled west in search of opportunity.[3]

Frank learned of the wheat fields of the Inland Northwest and traveled to eastern Washington where he supervised a threshing crew. He first arrived in the area on the Northern Pacific Railway, passing along the north shore of Lake Pend Oreille. As the train wended its way along the Clark Fork River, through the stunning Cabinet Mountains, and came upon the dramatic expanse of this enormous lake, Evans "decided this was where he wanted to be and he stayed," according to his grandchildren. Beyond these details, the particulars of Evans's work history and personal motivations in this period are lost; whatever the case, he seemed driven by an abiding restlessness. Within a year or so, Nora and baby Wardell traveled by train to rejoin him in an area that breathed possibility. The young migrants first settled in Garwood, an area adjacent to the Rathdrum Prairie between Coeur d'Alene and Spokane. According to his son Deb, Frank worked in Garwood cutting cordwood, running a dance hall, and doing odd jobs; whether he continued working in agriculture is unknown. His years as an itinerant laborer in the Midwest and West likely contributed to his acute desire to work for himself.[4]

In the mid-1910s, the Evans family left Garwood and made Lake Pend Oreille their home. For nearly a decade, they squatted year-round in wood-sided canvas wall tents on the lake's shore. The birth records of the Evans children shed light on this precarious lifestyle. From Bayview in the extreme south, to Glengary Bay farther north, to Sunnyside along the north shore, the older Evans children began their lives on the lake. These were hardscrabble years. Money was tight. Long, fierce winters bracketed North Idaho's idyllic summers. While living at Glengary in a boathouse moored to an ancient tree—its whitened remains still stand—the kids had the run of a small peninsula, attended school in nearby Gamlin Lake (now Gamble Lake), and apparently kept a pet bear cub chained to a tree for a time. One of Frank and Nora's infant sons died of illness, and another

toddler, Howard, fell into the water at Glengary and drowned despite efforts to resuscitate him. During these years on the lake, Nora raised a steadily growing brood—eight surviving children in total—and became an industrious manager of family affairs. Frank became a hunter, fisherman, and forager capable of feeding his family and making money off those same subsistence activities. Frank boated to town occasionally and brought back provisions. His daughter Martha later related that "the only thing he'd ever buy was flour, sugar, and, you know, some of those really basic things. And they had to make do."[5]

The family moved north along the lakeshore for economic opportunity. At its northern outlet, Sandpoint beckoned. Their move to Lake Pend Oreille coincided with the opening of a legal hook-and-line commercial mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*) fishery from 1909 to 1919. Whitefish are a prolific forage fish native to many western waters. The 1909 commercial fishing law emerged from the activism of Sandpoint sportsmen concerned about rapacious fishing with set lines and seining nets. A state warden responded by closing the fishery; in turn, a community of commercial fishers successfully petitioned the state for the legal protection of their livelihood, which they agreed should be confined to hook-and-line and subject to licensing fees and taxes. In effect, the law codified the longstanding practice of selling fish and insinuated the state into the relationship between different fishing communities and nature; at the same time, increased regulation of the fishery contributed to the marginalization of local Kalispel Indians, who had long made use of the same fish.[6]

Frank and Nora's wedding portrait from 1907. After their marriage, Frank traveled west to supervise a wheat threshing crew in eastern Washington but became enchanted by Lake Pend Oreille. Nora and baby Wardell soon followed, and the Evans family would settle and grow in North Idaho. Author's collection

A community of commercial fishers living on the shore and working through the ice at Bottle Bay just south of Sandpoint became a winter fixture. At its peak in the mid-1910s, this "fishers' village" produced as much as two tons of whitefish daily. Sandpoint's Dr. Charles Stuart Moody brought national attention to this fishery in 1912. Writing of this "whitefishing" adventure in *Forest and Stream*, Moody noted that many fishers were seasonally unemployed lumbermill workers, and that many were women, who easily outfished him. Unlike the male-dominated timber industry, fishing on Lake Pend Oreille provided an economic opportunity for entire families. Tensions between constituencies wracked the commercial fishery, however. Some local licensed and bonded fish buyers attempted to fix prices year after year, and spotty enforcement of commercial fishing regulations led to complaints from sport anglers about overfishing and bycatch of their favored cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii*). How Frank Evans negotiated this terrain in the 1910s is unclear, but if his later disregard of fish and game laws is any indicator, he likely caught and sold every fish he could. Whether the Evanses brought their knowledge of fishing with them from the Midwest or acquired it in Idaho is not certain, but between fishing and hunting along the lakeshore, they enjoyed a bare-bones base of sustenance.[7]

Frank Evans established a fish processing and sales business in 1919 that eventually became Evans Fisheries. It was a curious time to do so given the legal changes to the fishery. After opening Idaho's waters to commercial seine netting during World War I to boost domestic food production, Governor Moses Alexander closed Lake Pend Oreille's commercial

Five of the Evans children on the shores of Lake Pend Oreille at Bottle Bay. During the 1910s, the Evans family made their home on the lake and its shores, sometimes living on a houseboat and other times living in canvas wall tents. The family moved north toward Sandpoint by the end of the decade, joining a community of commercial fishers who targeted whitefish. Author's collection

South of Sandpoint, commercial anglers work through the ice at Bottle Bay. At its peak, these fishers could produce two tons of whitefish per day, but the commercial fishery faced criticism from sport anglers, which led to the 1919 closure of the fishery by the government. *Forest and Stream*, Mar. 2, 1912, author's collection

fishery in 1919 after sportsmen complained about dwindling fish catches. This closure stung those who lived off fishing and elevated conflict between them and the genteel sportfishing community, a documented tension wherever fish or game commons were in play. Yet Frank Evans's determination to make money from the lake's fish continued unabated during the commercial fishing closure, which lasted until 1935.[8]

His penchant for poaching is entrenched in family lore. One tale has Frank mobilizing his brood of young sons in such ventures. Where small tributary

Frank, three of his sons, and some friends examine a haul of fish in front of their truck and house. Frank depended on his children in his fishing enterprises, whether it was helping poach fish from streams or in their processing and smoking operations.
Author's collection

streams entered lakes, he had them lock arms some distance upstream and wade down the channel, driving fish into the waiting net that he manned. In another instance, he shot grouse far in excess of the limit and hung them to cool in sacks under a bridge over a creek near the family's hunting camp. When a game warden showed up, Frank had a friendly chat with the officer on the bridge, his mess of poached grouse hanging underfoot. These tendencies accustomed Evans and his sons to the riskier climate of the 1920s and early 1930s, when their livelihood depended on crafty evasion of the law.

Despite the closure of Lake Pend Oreille's fishery, steady demand for fresh and smoked fish underwrote an illicit traffic that kept commercial fishermen and processors like the Evanses in business. Throughout this period, some continued to advertise and sell several species of introduced and native salmonids from Panhandle waters in area markets, including "Lake Pend Oreille Whitefish." Such publicity appeared mostly in Spokane, but occasionally in Sandpoint itself. The small, remote whitefish fishery in Priest Lake—northwest of Lake Pend Oreille over the Selkirk Mountains—remained open to commercial fishing until 1925 and provided cover for illegal fish shipments into Spokane. The commercial seine net whitefish season on Flathead Lake in Montana, which opened in 1926, afforded the same opportunity for fish fraudsters to launder their Idaho catch through mislabeling and disguising shipments. "These 'fish bootleggers,'" declared Sandpoint shop owner Bob Nelson in 1928, "brought their catches in automobiles, selling them as Montana whitefish." Idaho whitefish, fresh and smoked, competed with the same species from both the Great Lakes and northern Canada, all of which sold for around thirty cents a pound throughout the decade. Even as the Washington Game Commission clamped down on the sale of Idaho whitefish in 1933, Idaho fishmongers made house-to-house sales in Spokane. This porous market allowed many to make a living off Lake Pend Oreille's closed commercial fishery. Fishers engaged in other illegal practices too, like taking fish beyond limits and chumming with corn or other attractants. These clever evasions of the law remain a gleeful part of Evans family lore.[9]

It is easier to document Frank Evans's brushes with the law in his other bootlegging business—moonshine. From his earliest years on Lake Pend Oreille, he operated floating and onshore stills, far from population centers. "He had 'em, he moved it around, from the way I understand it," remembered son Lyle. "[He] started out in Farragut, and then came around the horn, Maiden Rock, Garfield Bay. He was in Camp Bay," and farther north in Elliot Bay, a steady march north that took the family ever closer to the lake's main settlements. "And whenever anybody didn't like where he was," continued Lyle with a chuckle, "why he just moved [his stills] over." Mobile stills provided the ability to evade the law once Idaho jumped on the prohibition wagon in 1916. "If they [the authorities] got close to one of

[his stills]," recalled his son, "why, he'd sink it." The family's move to Sandpoint's docks in 1922—a neighborhood of families and small businesses with houseboats moored along shoreline owned by the Northern Pacific Railway—may have stemmed from Frank's illegal manufacture and trade in alcohol.[10]

Bad luck struck just as Frank tried to establish his moonshining operation in Sandpoint in 1922. A week after moving there, Frank and his friend Emil Kraege were walking along Dell's dock and crossed paths with U.S. prohibition agent Oscar Kuchenbecker, who happened to be visiting a friend living in another houseboat. As the men crossed paths, the officer noticed that Evans was carrying a sack over his shoulder, bulging with jugs. Kuchenbecker stopped the men and a struggle ensued. The officer struck Evans in the mouth as Evans tried to break one of the jugs with a fist and kick the others into the water. Evans claimed that he found the jugs while cleaning up the nearby beach and intended to dispose of them in deep water, a flimsy excuse that failed to move the officer. Kuchenbecker later claimed that Evans had been under surveillance for some time. The charges stuck. In November, Evans pleaded guilty and paid a hefty fine of $300. Decades later, Frank's son Deb remembered a rumor that he avoided punishment by promising federal authorities that he would swear off moonshining—a story impossible to verify.[11]

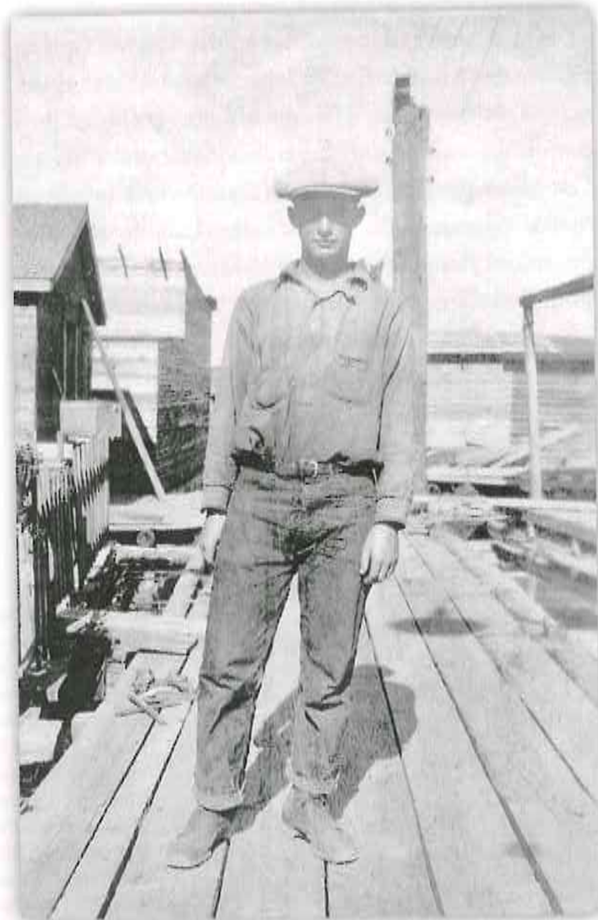
The Evanses' move to the waterfront immersed them in a neighborhood where immigrants and itinerant populations concentrated. The area grew and changed during the early 1900s. Around the turn of the century, a significant population of Japanese railroad laborers lived there; by 1930, these workers had mostly left as construction operations wound down. A cacophony of far-flung accents from the United States, the British Commonwealth, and other languages—Italian, German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Welsh—floated through the clapboard walls. It was a marked contrast to the more affluent population in Sandpoint proper. That year's census reveals that Nora, Frank, and their nine children, aged five to twenty-one, resided in what a census taker termed "Lake Front Below Railroad Tracks. Mostly House Boats and Shacks." The Northern Pacific Railway, the Humbird Lumber Company, and "odd jobs" absorbed some of the seasonal laboring energy of these working-class people. Most of the family's male children were identified as "laborers," an amorphous state designation that simplified and obscured their varied working lives. Whether they worked in sawmills or not, Frank's offspring also served as a ready-made workforce for family business ventures.[12]

Besides bootlegging moonshine and poaching fish, the boys stood ready to help Frank traffic in stolen logs. Deb Evans's account of his parents' lives describes Frank's work salvaging logs going back to the 1910s, but granddaughter Jean Martin (née Miller) relates how Evans occasionally preyed on the Humbird Company's inventory: "They were busy at night. They would go out and you know these timber booms that were on the lake? They would cut those booms and let those logs go free and then whatever they gathered and took back they got paid for. It was very clever. That was his idea of being in the timber business." Neither the authorities nor the company caught on to this scheme.[13]

The Great Depression brought tough times to timber-dependent North Idaho. Symptomatic of the economic contraction, Humbird Lumber Company's Sandpoint mill scaled back its operations in 1930. For the unpropertied folks of Sandpoint's lakefront docks—squatters, as Frank's son Lyle Evans later described his family—a gentrifying movement compounded their woes. In the late 1920s, Sandpoint's affluent agitated for a crackdown on the town's dock

A young Martha Evans holds a homemade fishing rod and stands on a log on Sandpoint's docks. A working-class neighborhood sprang up on Sandpoint's waterfront around the turn of the century. Initially composed of Japanese railroad laborers, by the time the Evans family relocated to the docks in the 1930s, the community was predominantly impoverished whites.
Author's collection

community. Unfounded rumors of diseased water repelled the town's upper-class recreationists from swimming around the sandy bar at the mouth of Sand Creek. Wielding the cudgel of sanitation, city authorities shut off the docks' access to city water in the spring of 1928 in an attempt to "freeze out" those living there and encourage them to move on. A steady drumbeat in favor of dismantling the dock community continued until 1931, when the city council identified a number of floating structures to be destroyed immediately as "a menace to public health and safety by reason of increased fire hazard and unsanitary conditions existing." Of the thirty-four condemned structures, the first on the council's list belonged to "Red Evans," one of Frank's nicknames, after his hair. The cleanup was so contentious that the council appointed two special policemen to guard the workmen executing the city's order.[14]



Standing in front of several shacks on Sandpoint's docks, Wardell Evans was Frank and Nora's eldest child. In the 1930s, under the guise of sanitation, the city administration dismantled the dock community, converting Sandpoint's waterfront into a genteel space for leisure. Author's collection

Facing steep $100 fines for violating these new sanitary laws, most dock residents departed for what one authority sarcastically deemed "greener pastures." For a short time, Evans and a few other holdouts defied the removal order. When arrested and hauled before a judge, all relented. Bracketed by costly and fruitless run-ins with the law, the Evanses' nine-year residency on Sandpoint's docks ended. Fortunately, Evans had accumulated the resources to purchase a lot on Sandpoint's sparsely populated north side. Evidence is scant, but such a purchase was likely made possible by the deflated Depression-era property values, his many sons' coming-of-age as wage earners, and income from his ongoing bootlegging of fish, liquor, and logs. For their part, Sandpoint's political leaders succeeded in removing an unsightly reminder of the town's hardscrabble underbelly and converting its waterfront into a space dedicated to refined forms of leisure—beach bathing, sailing, and sport fishing.[15]

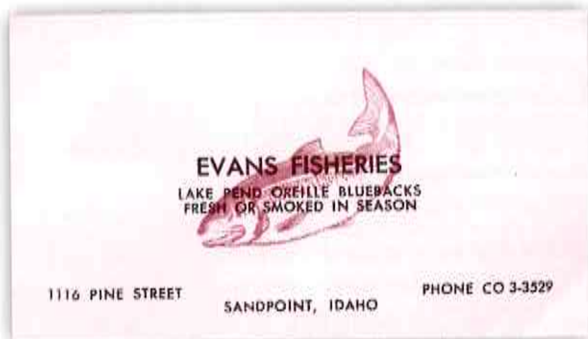
In the midst of the economic crisis, the Evanses and other working-class families fought for a legal space in the area's extractive economy. Commercial-fishing advocates mobilized and made their case at several acrimonious meetings in the winter of 1934–1935—one of which "got very warm at times" and even saw "exchanges of a personal nature." Advocates argued that "it would legalize an industry which exists anyway and would permit those persons who catch whitefish for the market to get a fair price for their fish." Critics from the sporting community decried the rampant disregard for the law among subsistence fishers. Frank Evans emerged as a key spokesman in favor of opening the lake and helped organize the "United Whitefishermen of Pend Oreille and Priest Lakes." Some of his sons and his new son-in-law Harold Miller (his daughter Martha's husband) signed on as members, their tattered membership cards and their advocacy in the local press the only remaining documentation of this organization.[16]

In a December 1934 letter to the *Sandpoint Daily Bulletin*, Evans gave voice to their views. "We have a closed lake with plenty of fish in it," he stated. "If it were open for commercial fishing most of the men could be making an independent living were they permitted to place this wholesome food on the market legally." Bitter from years of evading dual prohibitions to make a living, he proudly declared that

"whitefishing is a trade and not a pastime," at once an affirmation of his guild's dignity and a dig at sport anglers. In a letter to the *Daily Bulletin* in February 1935, Frank Evans made his closing arguments. He grounded them in a certain attitude about the use of a natural resource in times of crisis, his perspective anchored by twenty-five years of scraping together a living from the land. "For what good, then, are these waters," he wondered rhetorically, "if they are not used for a real purpose?" That purpose, he concluded, was to save working men the indignity of seeking government relief. "I believe there is no real man, when he is forced to go to the relief office for aid to support his family, but what is so humiliated the English language cannot express it." A sporting constituency divided by the exigencies of hard times temporarily allied with a well-organized community of working fishers tipped the balance. In mid-February, the Idaho legislature passed the Goodwin Bill, which reopened North Idaho's lakes to commercial fishing. By paying a bond and reporting taxes to the state, the Evans clan and many others like them could fish legally.[17]

The lake's opening proved hugely popular in Depression-era northern Idaho, a note of economic hope in a dismal time. Frank Evans, along with a few other bonded local buyers and processors—notable among them William "Punk" Zinter, Albert Fox, and W. A. Brown—welcomed this turn of events, as did the two to three hundred licensed commercial fishers who plied the lake's waters in the late 1930s. Evans used this legal fishery to expand the family's processing business, but other ecological and social changes profoundly affected the family as well. Even as their processing business expanded into the 1960s, introduced fish transformed Lake Pend Oreille's commercial fishery, and World War II took many of the Evans boys into military service and to jobs away from Sandpoint.[18]

Early on, other established local dealers eclipsed Evans Fisheries in scale and scope, but by the 1950s Frank and Nora's operation was probably the most important fish broker in Sandpoint. The Bonner Meat Company of Sandpoint, the town's largest fish dealer in the late 1930s, reported purchases of nearly 32,000 pounds of whitefish in January 1937 and 18,000 pounds the next month—figures that offer a glimpse into the rapid growth and large scale of this industry. No records of the Evans fish business survive, but by



Deflated property prices and the Evans sons' coming-of-age as laborers allowed Frank to purchase a property at 1116 Pine Street to open Evans Fisheries, a fish processing and smoking operation. They sold smoked whitefish and bluebacks by the ton to markets as far away as New York, but also did a brisk local and regional business. Author's collection

the late 1940s, a Sandpoint newspaper reported that "more of these fish pass through [Frank's] hands than any other man in the area." In 1948, Frank purchased approximately 18,000 pounds of whitefish from commercial fishers, along with an unknown quantity of kokanee, paying out approximately $6,000. The Evans Fisheries building at 1116 Pine Street occupied about fifteen hundred square feet and housed all the necessary equipment to weigh, clean, and smoke fish, along with a small retail storefront, although most sales were by mail or direct distribution. Why Evans Fisheries eclipsed others is unclear. An aggressive pursuit of regional retail outlets, cultivation of local clientele, and diversification of operations (more on this below) are likely explanations.[19]

The 1930s and 1940s brought ecological changes to the fishery through the accidental introduction of bluebacks (*Oncorhynchus nerka*, or kokanee). This began the commercial fishery's gradual transition away from whitefish. Initially considered a nuisance and threat to whitefish, the quality and abundance of these tiny salmon and a concurrent whitefish die-off in the late 1930s made for an easy pivot. Whitefish tackle and techniques translated tidily to the new species. In 1941, the state folded bluebacks into the same regulatory structure as whitefish, a move motivated by alarm over the species' rapid irruption in the lake, and one that enabled commercial fishing. Some, like Sandpoint fish buyer Fay Williford, feared that bluebacks would ruin whitefish catches because "they are a cannibalistic fish and come out winner in any fight over feeding grounds," a perception

that gained enough traction to motivate the state to commercialize the species. By the early 1950s, bluebacks predominated both sport and commercial catches while whitefish declined. Compounding its popularity, the newly arrived species provided forage for Kamloops rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss kamloops*), introduced from British Columbia. These trout quickly achieved world-record sizes in the big lake and brought it to national attention as a trophy fishery. The era that civic boosters dubbed "K & K," for Kamloops and kokanee had arrived. By 1941, bluebacks were so popular that "retail outlets complain they can't get enough of these toothsome fish to supply the trade." Correspondence between Martha Miller and her brothers in uniform and husband Harold working in the Vancouver shipyards reveals the new fish's popularity. She reported smoked bluebacks displayed prominently in Sandpoint's Brownie's Market window in 1943, and her brothers regularly asked her about the new fishery from as far away as Texas and France. Wounded in action in France in 1944, brother Wardell related his injuries from his hospital bed and made sure to ask his sister, "Oh yes, how's the fish?"[20]

As the Evans sons left town for military service or for work at the nearby Farragut Naval Training Station or the Vancouver shipyards, their military service sank their father Frank into a funk. To his intensely local eye, events a world away had decimated his personal workforce. His bad habits flourished. He gambled, drank, and only worked sporadically. For a brief time, he was a laborer at Farragut in Bayview, thirty miles south of Sandpoint. Reentering a regimented wage system must have grated on someone who had made an independent living for three decades. His son Deb recalled Frank's bitter memories of Farragut among people "making war money when he had six sons in the service." What Mormon teetotaler wife Nora made of Frank's decidedly irreligious behavior is lost, but some of his children's voices expose a shared sense of frustration. Their correspondence suggests that they knew his ways well. Eldest son Wardell, then in his early thirties, first stationed with the U.S. Army in the Aleutians and later in France, wondered to sister Martha why their father avoided steady work and questioned the wisdom of sending him money. "I still think it would be cheaper to buy him a pool hall," he wrote Martha in 1943. Brother Ed, then fighting with

After their introduction from British Columbia, the Kamloops subspecies of rainbow trout flourished in Lake Pend Oreille, growing to world-record sizes. Here, Frank and Nora hoist a Kamloops in front of a sign for their fish processing business. Author's collection

The storefront and processing facility of Evans Fisheries on Pine Street. The 1950s and early 1960s saw the heyday of the family's processing business, as they moved tons of fish through their smokers and out for sale. However, by the late 1960s, their processing business would slow and eventually close as the Evans sons moved on to other occupations following their father's death, which coincided with the decline of the commercial fishery in Lake Pend Oreille.
Courtesy of Ila Van Stone

the U.S. Army in Italy, had sent much of his pay home to his parents and wanted some of it returned. Wardell reported that the Old Man had lost it playing poker, and that between him and brother-in-law Harold they would make up the loss for Ed, in part because "I also no [*sic*] just about what hes [*sic*] been through the last year too." At the end of his wits, Wardell declared to his sister, "I don't figure on sending any money to him to play poker with." Ed did not survive to return to his father's personal workforce. A few days after the European war ended, he died while fishing on Wurm See, near Seeschaupt, Germany, when a mishandled German grenade exploded in the boat—the only one of the Evans sons to die in uniform and the only family member to give their life for fish.[21]

Once the disruptions of the war years subsided, the family enterprise entered its peak. Perhaps the emerging boom of the Kamloops and kokanee fishery animated Frank. The economic recovery of the postwar years, the commercial fishery's legality, and a suitable property in Sandpoint ushered Evans's business into its best years. Frank also had other sons he could rely on who had returned to Sandpoint after their military service. Lyle and Merle ran the business's books, perhaps to protect their finances from their father's tendency to drink and gamble. Evans Fisheries became one of a few bonded fish processors in town and shipped smoked whitefish and bluebacks as far as Chicago and New York. One Sandpoint resident recalled that the town's post office took on a distinctly fishy odor on shipment days, usually Mondays. The primary market, however, was local and regional. With his own truck to deliver to bars and markets throughout the Inland Northwest, Frank and his sons moved tons of fish over the years. Their routes stretched to western Montana, the Tri-Cities in Washington, and as far south in Idaho as Lewiston. Supermarkets featured their products, and whole smoked bluebacks were common fare at area taverns.[22]

One such establishment, Curley's Tavern in Hauser Lake, Idaho, sold tons of smoked Evans fish. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Lyle recalled selling Curley's up to seventy pounds of smoked bluebacks a week. In an era when some taverns turned away from the greasy fare because it was harder to clean glasses used by fish-eating patrons, Curley's installed a better dishwasher and sold "an awful lot of fish," according to Lyle. A network of regular clients made up the bedrock of the Evans business, but the smokehouse also served sport anglers. In that era, sport fishers tended to keep and eat their trophy Kamloops rainbows, and the town's smokehouses happily obliged. "He did a lot of custom smoking on the great big ones," remembers Frank's granddaughter Jean, who, along with her sisters, loved secret delicacies fresh out of the smoker. "The cheek meat on those big heads and the eyeballs were specialties to us kids. The eyeballs were like kind of nutty flavored."[23]

Advertising from the early 1950s reveals the sense of pride and optimism that buoyed the business during these boom years. In one, "Yes, Bluebacks *Are So* Delicious!" Frank touted the care taken with the bluebacks he processed. "We handle no 'gunnysack' fish," he declared, adding that "you will note the scales are on the fish just as they came from the waters of Pend Oreille in all their silvery beauty." In a

Wayne Evans pilots a fishing boat on Lake Pend Oreille. The proliferation of small internal combustion engines aided working-class people in their labor and in transportation, and the Evans family came to depend on outboard motors, anchor hoists, and trucks to harvest and deliver their products. Author's collection

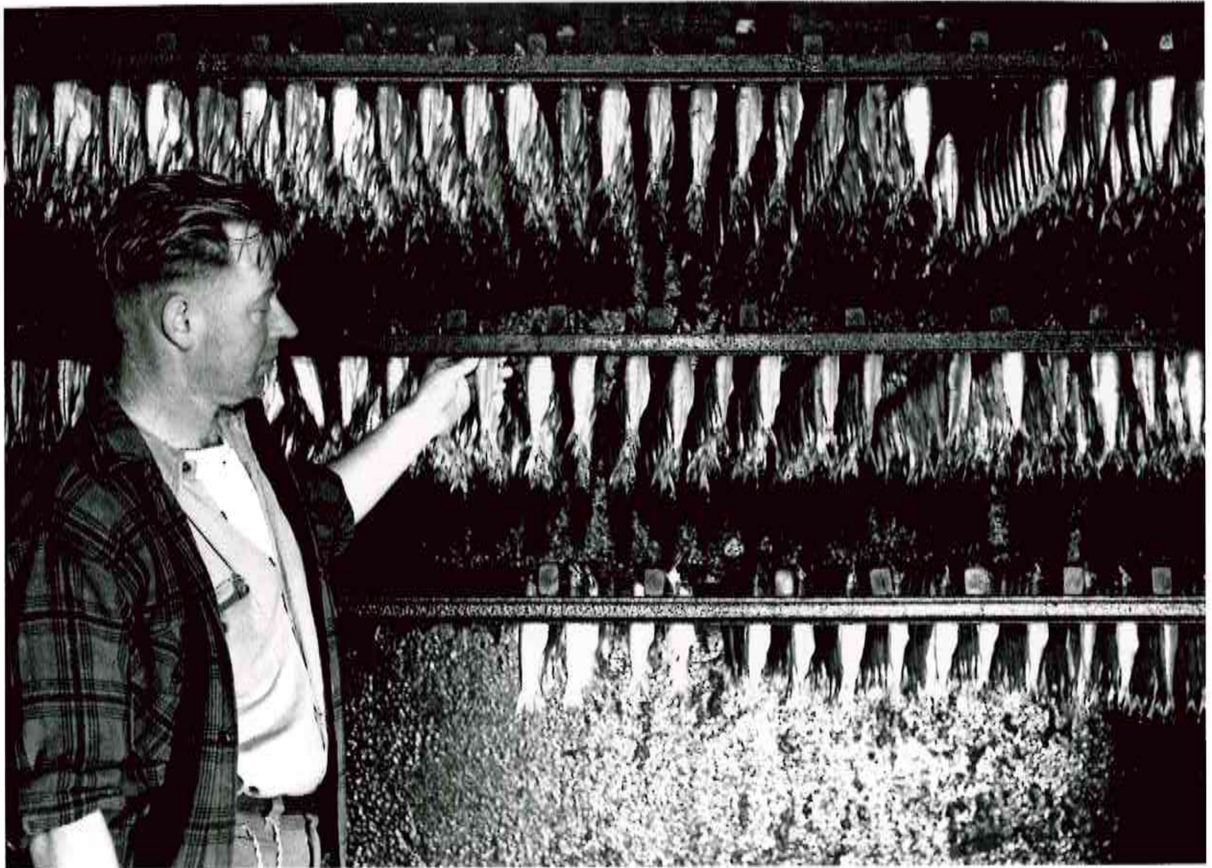
language of technical confidence, he coupled his handling of fish at the smokehouse with the labor that harvested them from the lake. "We have an excellent crew of professional fishermen," he wrote, "and they care for the fish according to our exacting standards. Because they are careful fishermen who value the reputation we have built up for bluebacks from Evans fisheries, we see to it that they receive a fair price for their fish." Apparently demand outstripped his productive capacity, for he included a recruiting appeal to fishers themselves. True to the broader sense of wonder at the booming success of the K & K fishery, Frank's ad concluded with a nod to the reconciled sport and commercial demands on this "diamond mine" of a resource. "It is a great producing fishery," he noted, "and will continue to supply countless fishermen with plentiful sport and also will give this area a fine commercial food fish, if it is properly managed and protected," a wink to those who knew his serial disregard for fish and game regulations.[24]

Lyle, who started working steadily at the smokehouse in the early 1950s and took over management upon his father's death in 1960, offers the most detailed testimony about how the fish processing business worked. Lyle estimated that he moved about thirty tons of fish a year. He recalled having about fifty fishers on the books who regularly sold to him during the season, which ran from spring through early summer. Many fished sporadically, but a few regularly brought hauls of up to two hundred pounds to the smokehouse. They could count on a check on Fridays. Once the fish entered the smokehouse, Lyle and his young sons David and Dan weighed the incoming catches and stored them in metal cans. With meticulous attention to the salinity of the solution, they brined the fish overnight. Early the next morning, they hung the fish through the head on racks, dried them to form a pellicle, and then smoked them at specific temperatures over a birch fire. The process, according to one reporter, "produced a moist, mouth-watering-good blueback." Some 2,200 bluebacks could pass through the Evans smoker every day. At the end of the process, most of the fish went into shoebox-size boxes for shipment, with some displayed in the smokehouse's storefront. In the 1960s, these boxes were cardboard, but in earlier years Frank used small wooden boxes he paid young grandkids to nail together for a nickel apiece. With the expansion of local refrigeration facilities in the 1950s, the Evanses froze part of their blueback purchases so they could sell smoked fish beyond just the fishing season and keep the family income spread across the year.[25]

This income mattered for the family and for the wider community. In the early 1960s, Lyle counted his sister Martha Miller and her daughter Jean among his steadiest fishers. Their records offer the only glimpse into the individual economics of this business. The two fished about eighty days a season from mid-February through the end of May and cleared (after carefully tabulated expenses) $432 in 1960, $594 in 1962, and $578 in 1964. The commercial fishery provided seasonal income for hundreds of working people. In 1955, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) conducted an economic survey of Lake Pend Oreille's commercial fishery. IDFG valued the commercial fishery that year at $1,099,500 and estimated that commercial fishers sold some 43,700 pounds of dressed kokanee to dealers at an average of $0.50 a pound; dealers retailed the fish for $1.00 a pound. The agency publicized these figures with

Lyle Evans weighs fish in preparation for processing and smoking at the Evans Fisheries property. After weighing the fish, Lyle and his sons submerged them in a brine overnight, strung them on racks to dry, and then smoked them.

Courtesy of Dan Evans



Standing in front of the smoker racks, Lyle Evans inspects the day's work. The racks in the smoker at Evans Fisheries could handle a large quantity of fish, enabling the business to distribute their smoked fish, packed in wood or cardboard boxes, to restaurants and markets near and far. Courtesy of Dan Evans

positive reports about the fishery in the 1950s that emphasized both the broad economic picture and important secondary effects: the role of commercial fishers in attracting sport anglers, bringing "added business for resort owners and local businessmen," and the presence of Pend Oreille fish on national markets as advertisement.[26]

Although refrigeration extended the fish market into the months outside of the season, Frank and Nora Evans maintained the family's revenue in the off-season through a commercial huckleberry business. This enterprise likely emerged from the family's subsistence berry picking. At Evans's Sandpoint fish house, the fish intake system shifted to berries in late summer, and the operation carried on until September when harvests diminished. Huckleberries (mostly *Vaccinium membranaceum* and *V. globulare*) are ubiquitous in North Idaho's mountains. Impervious to domestication, they must be sought out and picked either by hand or with rakes or beaters. Long before the arrival of Euro-American settlers, these berries formed a crucial part of the seasonal food-gathering round of Kalispels, Kootenais, and other Indigenous peoples, who had sophisticated harvesting and preservation techniques.[27]

White settlers quickly acquired a taste for the delectable berry, which assumed an important part in many family larders. Part of the hottest summer months found the Evans clan settled into a huckleberry camp complete with wall tents and a cleaning apparatus, usually by a creek. Shady creek bottoms provided a measure of refrigeration for the harvest. Camp locations changed over the years, but in the early 1960s the family was a fixture in the mountains east of Bonners Ferry, Idaho. The Evanses preferred to harvest with a technology likely derived from the area's Indigenous peoples, a beater stick used in tandem with a canvas-lined reservoir. Berries picked in this fashion contain a greater share of leaves, twigs, and blights—shriveled, dead berries—than those that

are carefully hand-picked. Frank's cleaning mechanism centered on an inclined chute whose bottom was strung with tense wires just close enough that most berries would tumble down to a basin while shedding waste material along the way.

While in camp, Frank also bought berries from nearby pickers. Berries were classified according to their method of harvest as "handpicks" or "beater berries"—the latter selling for less because of their rougher condition. Beater berries were a favorite of diners and bakeries, where they went into jams and pies. One group of pickers, Kootenai Indians from around Bonners Ferry, sought out Frank to sell their harvest. The quality of their product revealed their generations of experience working with berries. Frank paid them the highest rate "because they were so beautifully cleaned," according to granddaughter Jean, who occasionally worked the berry-cleaning station after school. "I don't remember having to run their berries down the cleaner, either." "They consistently provided us with good quality large amounts of berries," remembers grandson Dan. "They didn't trust paper currency so we always had to pay them with silver dollars."[28]

The huckleberry business intertwined with the fish trade in several respects. The same garage used for fish processing lent itself to berries, as did the refrigerated spaces the family added in the 1940s and 1950s. The labor pool overlapped, both within and outside of the family. "The same people that fished were the same people that picked huckleberries," recalls Jean; that is, working-class people looking to supplement their regular income. For those without an easy avenue to steady employment, especially women and men working in seasonal occupations, these activities provided an important source of cash income. The only remaining records of the huckleberry business, a ledger covering the 1950 season, lists several pickers who also fished, including two of Frank's star pickers that year, his son Wayne Evans and Albert Fox. Fox, a licensed fish buyer like Frank, ran his own rival smokehouse in Sandpoint. Evans built a huckleberry distribution network in tandem with his fish clients. Many of the establishments and locations listed in his 1950 berry ledger echo those recalled for the fish business a few years later by his son Lyle, and reveal the business's regional reach, encompassing Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, towns throughout the Palouse, and the Tri-Cities.[29]

HUCKLEBERRY PICKERS!

Top Prices

For your fresh-picked Huckleberries
Just Bring 'Em To

F. D. EVANS

1116 Pine St. Sandpoint

An undated newspaper advertisement induces huckleberry pickers to sell their harvests to Frank Evans. He paid between one and two dollars per gallon, which, for prolific pickers, could translate into hundreds of dollars per season. This income helped area families, as many needed the cash for goods and groceries to supplement their main diet of fish, huckleberries, and venison hunted and gathered locally. Author's collection

Economically, huckleberries occupied a similar niche as fish in the informal economy. For full-time summer pickers, berry income rivaled that of the fishing season. Albert Fox and Wayne Evans worked the mountains especially hard that summer. Evans picked 497 gallons, once bringing in an astonishing 62 gallons in just three days, for $571; Fox nearly doubled that take with 1,003 gallons, once picking a prodigious 125 gallons in five days, for $1,153. Evans paid pickers from about a dollar a gallon in the early 1950s to two dollars a gallon in the early 1960s. Although most who sold berries to the Evanses trafficked in smaller quantities, this work brought vital income. In 1950, Frank Evans purchased berries from about two dozen individuals, paying out $3,921 from late June through mid-September. It is impossible to measure the scale of huckleberries—or fish, for that matter—as sustenance for local families, but it was significant. Just as most working-class families smoked and canned some of their bluebacks for year-around use, they canned and later froze hauls of huckleberries.[30]

Forces far beyond the local arena shaped this family business. The development of electrification, transportation infrastructure, print media, and a complex market economy benefited the whole enterprise. The profusion of small engines mediated the relationship of commercial fishers and berry pickers to nature. These technologies expanded their range over water and land, drove refrigeration plants, cut firewood and tentpoles, and hauled up anchors.

Frank used a small boat with a nine-horsepower outboard motor starting in the 1920s, and homemade anchor winches were common by the late 1940s. The family acquired automobiles by the early 1930s, and the steady expansion of roads reduced their dependence on railroads. Most fishers and pickers maintained and adapted such machines to their purposes, and anyone making a living in nature readily adopted these technologies as a means to greater efficiency and improvement of circumstance. Economic forces and government agencies tightened their embrace of forests and waters, and the changes they wrought positively affected how people like the Evanses made their living. The Civilian Conservation Corps and the U.S. Forest Service stitched an impressive network of roads into formerly inaccessible mountains; timber companies cut old-growth forests, creating favorable growing conditions for huckleberry brush; state fish managers propagated millions of economically important fish; and hydroelectric development fed electricity into homes and businesses.[31]

In mountain huckleberry camps or on the lake, labor in nature instilled an intimate understanding of the environment. Hardly unusual in the Mountain West, the Evanses' annual round structured that intimacy: more than four months of blueback fishing from February through early June; huckleberry camps sporadically occupied from late June through mid-September; a garden and fruit orchard tended to in the warm months; and hunting camps for elk, bear, and deer in the fall. These activities required a body of ecological knowledge built up over decades. Fishers had to understand the life cycles of whitefish and bluebacks, where to find them, and which techniques brought fish into the boat. Berry pickers kept abreast of when huckleberries had started ripening

The Evans huckleberry operation was capable of handling hundreds of pounds of berries, both picked by the family and bought from other pickers. They usually camped east of Bonner's Ferry, often by a creek to provide cool water for washing and storing the berries until they could sell, refrigerate, or freeze their harvest. Author's collection

Frank Evans, Nora Evans, and Harold Miller pack huckleberries by the gallon for storage and sale. While many restaurants bought lower-grade or damaged berries for jams, jellies, and baked goods, well-picked berries could fetch a higher price. The storage facilities of Evans Fisheries transitioned into huckleberries in the late summer as the family followed the seasons in their harvests. Author's collection

at low altitudes, and they moved up mountainsides as summer wore on. Hunters needed to understand the habits and habitats of prey species, how to kill them, and how to safely process meat. Domestic vegetable and fruit production depended on long experience with trees, plants, weather patterns, and soil quality.

The fishing and berry-picking had an economic dimension, but all these activities provided food for domestic consumption. Many families in the area produced a large part of their diet by fishing, hunting, gathering, and gardening. Testimony from Frank Evans's daughter Martha and her young family—two adults and four daughters—offers a clear picture of such family economies. "We never bought meat of any kind," recalls Jean of her upbringing in Sandpoint in the 1930s and 1940s. "We had deer meat, mostly. [Martha] canned two or three deer every year." Smoked and canned fish, game meat from deer, elk, bear, and birds, fruit preserves, and mountains of home-canned garden produce made up the bulk of their diet for decades. This food production immersed families in the rhythms, textures, and flavors of growing and living things—an intimacy with nature that grounded their sense of self-sufficiency.[32]

In the 1960s and 1970s, the consequences of manipulating that same nature, sometimes to conflicting ends, brought an end to Idaho's commercial fishery. Harnessing the lake's levels with the Cabinet Gorge Dam about ten miles up the Clark Fork River (online in 1952) and Albeni Falls Dam about thirty miles downstream from Sandpoint (online in 1955) affected the kokanee's access to spawning grounds. Encouraged by local sporting associations, state fisheries managers tried to boost the lake's food supply for fish by introducing mysis shrimp—a small crustacean—in the mid-1960s. This alteration to the food web almost collapsed the kokanee fishery by the end of the century. Although commercial fishers would not admit it, overfishing likely played a role too. Sharply diminished catches in the late 1960s and early 1970s led managers to close the commercial fishery in 1973. By then, the Evanses business had "just petered out."[33]

After Frank's sudden death of a heart attack in 1960, his son Lyle and grandsons Dan and David continued the trade a few more years. Lyle, who worked sporadically on dam-building projects in the 1950s and 1960s, closed Evans Fisheries for good in 1967 to work on the Boundary Dam on the Pend Oreille River. After that, he sold insurance. Nora died in 1968. The other Evans siblings had broken off from their father's business years before. The rifts of the war years likely informed the splintering of the

Martha Miller fishes in one of the family boats on Lake Pend Oreille around the time of her father's death in the early 1960s. Although the Evans family could not know it at the time, the commercial fishery's days were numbered, as the lake's ecosystem was undergoing profound changes due to the installation of dams on the Pend Oreille River and the introduction of mysis shrimp.
Author's collection

family's fish business after World War II. Often at odds with Frank, eldest son Wardell used his G.I. Bill benefits to become a refrigeration technician, a trade he practiced into the 1970s. Another brother, Merle, broke with Frank after the war and started his own fish business with his wife Mary, eventually establishing the aptly named "Smokehouse" at the south end of the Long Bridge across Lake Pend Oreille from Sandpoint—a handy source of jerky, smoked fish, and candy for passing tourists on Highway 95 and any local kid with a bicycle. Along with the closure of the commercial fishery, a more recent move to prohibit commercial gathering of huckleberries in North Idaho has closed the legal door on anyone hoping to supplement their income this way. Increased pressure on natural resources stemming from population growth and ecological change has pushed resource managers to privilege recreational over commercial use—accelerating the end of an era.[34]

A concatenation of ecological change, age and mortality, the desire to build one's own path, and the pull of steady employment with the government or private enterprise brought this family business to an end in the late 1960s. Despite these profound changes, the remnants of decades-long rituals and economies, with their familiar experiences, tastes, smells, textures, and relationships to nature have continued to nourish even after they faded in economic importance. Many who worked in these harvesting trades continued to catch what bluebacks they could, pick berries in the hot summer, and hunt in the fall. After the demise of Lake Pend Oreille's commercial fishery in 1973, for instance, a diminished blueback fishery still played an important role in family sustenance. "The commercial fishing was ended," recalls Frank Evans's granddaughter Jean, "but they still would go out and catch fish. Mother [Martha Miller] did a lot of canning and those canned fish were excellent. And she was good at freezing her fish, smoking them up on special occasions or if they were going to have a family gathering. She could produce fifty, sixty bluebacks." Many Evans descendants still maintain their relationship with the nature and the history of the place by fishing, hunting, and picking huckleberries as they can in the midst of busy, often far-flung lives. Remembering how central these practices were to the many families who shared the Evanses' road underlines the vital role such adaptive strategies played in stitching together a living on the margins of extractive frontiers.[35]

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