

# NATIVES IN THE NEWS

A HISTORY OF THE COLD SPRING HARBOR FISH HATCHERY, PART I

By Norman Soule

In 1879, the happy proximity of freshwater springs, ponds and lakes and Long Island Sound led the government of New York State to select the vilage of Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, New York, as the site of its second fish hatchery. Starting operation in 1881, the hatchery is now the second oldest continuously operating hatchery in New York State and quite possibly in all the United States.

In the early days of the hatchery's operation, most work was done, interestingly enough, with commercially important native saltwater species. Lobster, Blueclaw Crab, Tomcod, Flounder, Smelt, Seabass and Shad were just a few of the many different saltwater species cultured at the hatchery during the early days of its operation. The Cold Spring Harbor Hatchery thus anticipated today's important efforts in mariculture. To be sure, early operations were, at best, rudimentary: Eggs were collected by either the hatchery staff or obtained in cooperation with local commercial fishermen. In most cases the eggs were hatched and the resulting fry were stocked almost immediately. This enabled the hatchery to stock tremendous numbers of fish; up to 500,000,000 in one year.

At first freshwater work was confined to Brook Trout. In 1881 it took 10 days to collect 1013 Brook Trout eggs from the stream feeding the ponds above the hatchery. In 1883 the first Brown Trout to enter the United States came to this hatchery and in 1887 came the first "Rocky Mountain Trout", the Rainbow Trout. Unfortunately,

during this time some of the first Carp to enter the United States also found their way here. Other freshwater fish cultured at this time were the Landlocked Salmon, Lake Trout, Walleye, Whitefish, Tench, Golden Ide and common Goldfish. Most species were stocked throughout New York State; thus the hatchery is at least partly responsible for the spread of native fish to many parts of New York.

By the turn of the century most saltwater culturing had been phased out at the hatchery with the notable exception of smelt and lobster culture. Lobster work was finished during the 1920's and the last smelt were hatched in 1944 before a violent hurricane disrupted the spring run. Remnant smelt culturing continued until the mid 1970's with none being seen since 1976.

From 1933 to 1979, most work was done with Brook, Brown and Rainbow Trout. These fish were raised for stocking public waters. From 1906, when the first concrete raceway was constructed and the first artesian wells drilled through 1949, when the present raceways were installed and two larger artesian wells installed, production of trout was mainly of fingerlings with a few thousand yearlings produced annually. Yearly production totaled no more than 6000 pounds. After 1949, the increased water supply and more modern raceways led to increased production until a maximum of 120,000 9 inch trout weighing 24,000 pounds were produced in 1976. However, even with this increased production during the early 1970's the hatchery was threatened with closing due to the budget constraints placed upon the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Citizen complaints as well as a fishing license fee increase kept the hatchery

open until April 1, 1979 when it was closed as a production facility. The main reason, however, for closing the hatchery was that the existing facilities could not be expanded to meet the new NYSDEC minimum production standard of 50,000 pounds of trout hatched per year--a figure that had to be met with a three man crew! The hatchery is on only three acres of land, with steep hills and salt marches all around; thus expansion was impossible.

Luckily for native fish enthusiasts, however, public outcry was instantaneous and intense and it was decided to keep the Cold Spring Harbor Hatchery open as an educational center, provided it could become self-supporting. Next time, more about our facility.

(Editor's note: I've visited the Cold Spring Harbor Hatchery since I was a boy; indeed, my fascination with natives was probably born watching the huge Rainbow Trout at the CSHH pools! NANPA members will not want to miss a truly unique and extensive display of native fish if they're out on Long Island. Admission to the Hatchery's education center is well worth the admission price).

**COLD SPRING HARBOR HATCHERY AND FISHERIES**  
**INFORMATION CENTER**

Located on Route 25A, west of the picturesque village of Cold Spring Harbor, this historic hatchery offers a unique educational experience for both young and old.

The outdoor ponds and the large aquariums inside the hatchery building bring you eye-to-eye with many interesting fresh water fishes, all found in New York waters.

Some of the fish that can be seen include:

Brook Trout	Walleye	Garfish
Brown Trout	Largemouth Bass	Muskellunge
Rainbow Trout	Smallmouth Bass	Brown Bullhead
Lake Trout	Chain Pickerel	Sunfish
	Atlantic Salmon	

Presently, three types of trout are hatched and reared at the hatchery. Different stages of development can be viewed, from egg (November and December) to adult.

Someone is always available to answer your questions.

Guided group tours are scheduled on a reservation basis.

The information given during a tour is tailored to the educational needs of each age group.

Due to hatchery budget limitations, there is a nominal fee of 50 cents per person.

For group tours, between 30-60 people, a \$15.00 fee is in effect. Fish food costs 10¢ so bring plenty of dimes. All fees charged help to keep the hatchery open.

**HOURS:**

Monday—Friday (all year)  
8:00 A.M. — 4:30 P.M.

For further information  
For reservations

Saturday, Sunday, Holidays  
March 15 — October 15 9:30 — 6:00  
October 16 — March 14 8:00 — 4:30

Call 516—692-6768  
(during business hours only)