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Title of Proposal: Reevaluating the Origins of North Carolina's Menhaden Industry

Abstract: The menhaden industry of North Carolina, which began in 1865 and ended in 2005, is one of the state's most thoroughly documented fisheries. Unfortunately, the industry's origins have never been thoroughly explored. Due to a reliance on two sources, scholars have assumed that there were only five menhaden factories in North Carolina prior to 1881. There were, in fact, no fewer than a dozen menhaden factories in the state between 1865 and 1883. Utilizing a variety of sources, this paper will reevaluate the narrative on the origins of North Carolina's menhaden industry. In doing so, this paper argues that North Carolina's early menhaden factories were not merely isolated, discrete factories, but they represent a network of relationships linked to both local interests and the national industry. Furthermore, many of these operations were not solely devoted to processing menhaden but were an attempt by local fishermen to diversify their businesses.