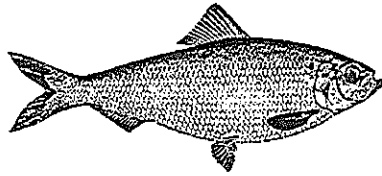


Fish Weir



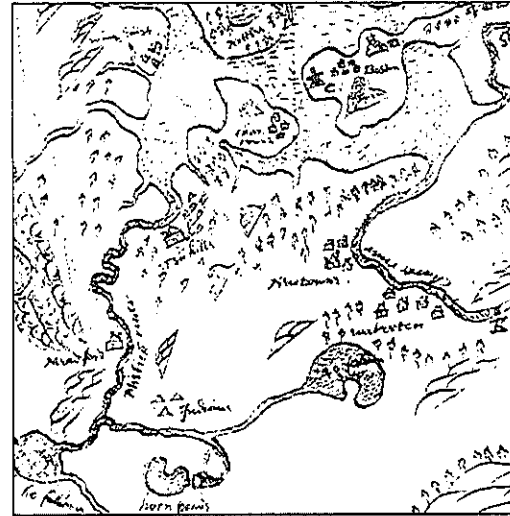
The alewife (*Alosa pseudoharengus*) is a salt-water fish that resembles the shad but is only about 10 to 12 inches long. In early spring, alewives appear in great numbers on the east coast of North America and enter fresh water streams to spawn.

The schools of alewives that spawn in New England's tidal streams each spring were widely harvested by Native Americans for food and fertilizer. By the time Cambridge was settled in 1630, the technique of burying a fish in each hill of corn was well known to the colonists. The settlers recognized the importance of the alewife to their food supply and the value of the waters in which it swam.

Native Americans caught alewives by building dams of brush to force the fish into narrow channels where they could be easily netted. In 1634 the General Court allowed Newtowne to take over a native weir on the Menotomy River, as Alewife Brook runs from Fresh Pond (40 fathoms deep) past an Indian village to the Mystic River. Newtowne, as Cambridge was called until 1636, lies nearby.

the few remaining Native Americans, who were no longer allowed to fish for themselves.

In this early map of Massachusetts Bay, Alewife Brook runs from Fresh Pond (40 fathoms deep) past an Indian village to the Mystic River. Newtowne, as Cambridge was called until 1636, lies nearby.



The Alewife Brook fishery was always controlled by the town. In 1851, Cambridge's Overseers of the Poor purchased the fishing rights; that year, the inmates of the nearby Almshouse caught \$900 worth of fish to help pay for their keep.

The fishery remained valuable until the Civil War, when effluent from nearby tanneries poisoned the water. By the end of the century, Alewife Brook had become polluted from several sources, including city sewers and a nearby cemetery. Construction of

tidegates at the Somerville line in 1875 did little to prevent floods, but greatly diminished the annual fish migration. In the early 20th century, the Metropolitan Park Commission dredged Alewife Brook and placed it in an artificial channel. Nonetheless, a few alewives still ascend the stream each spring.

Sources:

- Lucius R. Paige, *History of Cambridge*. Cambridge, 1877.
- Alan Emmet, *Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Changing of a Landscape*. Cambridge, 1978.
- City of Cambridge, *The Records of the Town of Cambridge, Massachusetts 1630-1703*. Cambridge, 1901.
- John Winthrop, "Massachusetts in New England," c. 1633 with revisions c. 1637. Sloane Collection, British Museum (map).

