

► INGO HEIDBRINK

## Introduction: 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the North Atlantic Fisheries History Association (NAFHA)

The North Atlantic Fisheries History Association (NAFHA) held its 10<sup>th</sup> conference at the German Maritime Museum in Bremerhaven between August 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 2006. Like previous NAFHA conferences, it was an important gathering of scholars and scientists dealing with fisheries history from all around the North Atlantic.

Furthermore, the 10<sup>th</sup> NAFHA conference in Bremerhaven marked some important changes inside NAFHA. First of all, the older generation of NAFHA Steering Committee members handed over the helm to a younger one. Jón Thór, the founding president of NAFHA, completed the generational change by retiring from the presidency. Together with many colleagues who had served NAFHA as members or committee members, he had created and developed NAFHA. Starting with a small group of mainly Scandinavian historians interested in the fisheries, NAFHA has become a well-established international scholarly organization. Without Jón's extensive contacts in academia around the North Atlantic, his consistent commitment to promoting the idea of a scholarly association dedicated to fisheries history, and at times his special Icelandic (or maybe even Viking) style of running the association, NAFHA would not have become what it is today: the leading focus for fisheries history research in the North Atlantic area.

At Bremerhaven Frits Loomeijer and Ingo Heidbrink agreed jointly to take over the NAFHA presidency from Jón Thór. The old and the new presidency concurred in the view that there is a need for some structural changes to NAFHA as a scholarly association that has to find its place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in the context of a substantially digitalized academic world. The process of developing a new structure for NAFHA started right away in Bremerhaven with the first meeting of the newly appointed NAFHA Steering Committee, made up of fisheries historians representing all countries currently participating actively in NAFHA.

Part of the new structure of NAFHA, which will be presented as a draft at the 2007 NAFHA conference in Bergen, will be easier access to NAFHA for young scholars and scientists: this element of the new structure was already implemented at the Bremerhaven conference.

For the first time ever at a NAFHA conference there was a dedicated session for young scholars, which gave a new generation of scholars and scientists the opportunity not only to present their research, but also to discuss it with many experienced senior colleagues in fisheries history in the creative and hopefully fruitful atmosphere of an international conference.

As the conference was part of the scientific programme accompanying the special exhibition on Fish Fingers at the German Maritime Museum, there was a special focus on the history of the fish processing industry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The majority of the papers given at the 10<sup>th</sup> NAFHA conference clearly demonstrated that fisheries history research has greatly improved since the founding of NAFHA in the early 1990s. While the major goal of NAFHA – the creation of a general history of the North Atlantic fisheries from the medieval period to the present, based on individual national histories of fisheries – is still an ongoing project, a number of new research approaches broadened the focus

of NAFHA. As in other sub-branches of maritime history, research questions were added which have a special relevance for today's society: globalization, global climate change and international governance, to name but a few.

All the papers presented in Bremerhaven were of high academic quality and demonstrated that fisheries history is much more than just the history of the people and/or the technology that have contributed to utilizing the biological resources of the oceans. While the papers by Dominique Confolent, Jean-Louis Lenhof, Jesús Giráldez together with Luisa Muñoz Abeledo, and Henrique Souto together with Luis Martins gave an overview of the work-related social history of the fisheries and fish-processing industry of south-western Europe, the papers by Björn-Petter Finstad, Årstein Svihus and Julia Lajus dealt with the interaction between politics, science and the fisheries of northern Europe.

The whaling historian Klaus Barthelmess opened a window on the history of the use of the oceans in Early Modern days, while Chris Reid, in his paper, presented thoughts about conceptual issues in future fisheries history research. This paper also opened the session for young researchers, all of whom presented new and stimulating approaches to fisheries history:

Katharina Jantzen explained how she would combine economic and historical research to achieve a better understanding of management systems for the biological resources of the oceans, while Christine Overgaard discussed the relationship between Dutch fishing interests and family businesses as a basis for the survival of fishing companies at times of economic crisis. Ole Sparenberg and Dag Hundstad both dealt with the perception of fisheries and of the oceans by different societies, the first raising the question of whether the oceans had proved to be a utopian resource for the German economy during several periods of crisis, the second considering whether there was a common coastal culture in Norway.

Finally Ingo Heidbrink gave his paper on the history of fish fingers as an introduction to the visit to the special exhibition at the German Maritime Museum.

Although all the papers presented cutting-edge research in fisheries history, it was necessary to choose among them for the purposes of this publication. In the end the papers assembled in this combined issue of *Studia Atlantica*, the scientific journal of NAFHA, and *Deutsches Schifffahrtsarchiv*, the scientific yearbook of the German Maritime Museum, were selected by the organizers of the 10<sup>th</sup> NAFHA conference. However, it must be emphasised that the papers that were not chosen were not of lesser scholarly quality; they were interim research notes of ongoing projects, and will be published later, when the respective research projects have finally been completed.

As the organizer of the 10<sup>th</sup> NAFHA conference I would like to thank not only all colleagues and conference participants, but also – and especially – the German Maritime Museum, which made this conference possible. Beatrix Fromm, Britta Steffens and Inga Brantzky of the museum's staff played a major part in organizing and preparing for the conference. Furthermore, NAFHA owes special thanks to Lars U. Scholl, managing director of the German Maritime Museum, for his willingness to host the 10<sup>th</sup> NAFHA conference in Bremerhaven and to publish the papers as a part of the scientific yearbook of the German Maritime Museum. Last but not least there is a special thanks to Erik Hoops and Katharina Jantzen, without whom this publication would not have been possible, and to Silke Brinkmann for the cover design of the offprint (*Studia Atlantica*, 10).