

A familiar scene to South Shore residents for generations is the annual run of Alewives, commonly called "Herring", as they return to their spawning grounds at Whitman's Pond. Each spring, heralded by warm weather, countless thousands jam the herring brook in search of passage. A great demand was placed on the fish as a food source from the earliest times and edicts were issued to mill owners to clear a way by their barriers along the river. The Town appropriated funds for many years to cover the cost of catching enough barrels full and transporting them over the dams to the pond, to assure the perpetuation of the species.

The fish were trapped in small cement pools by bridging the river with planks at intervals and driving them into the enclosure with long poles as depicted here. Other men would then take long handled nets and scoop them out into a cement tub where they could be easily gathered up and sold. In the 1860's and 70's, it was not uncommon to net 100,000 a day with taxpayers being charged 25¢ per 100, and non-residents 50¢ per hundred. By the early 1900's, with the advent of the automobile, many city folks looked forward to the prospects of a fish dinner at the nominal cost of 25¢ per dozen.

It is disheartening to see the herring arrive in lesser groups each year, despite the erection of modern fish ladders to assist their passage. It would appear that they have become another victim of ecological unbalance through pollution and waste of our natural resources.

## *"The Herring Run"*



*Catching Herring in the Early 1900's*

*Photo courtesy Tufts Library*