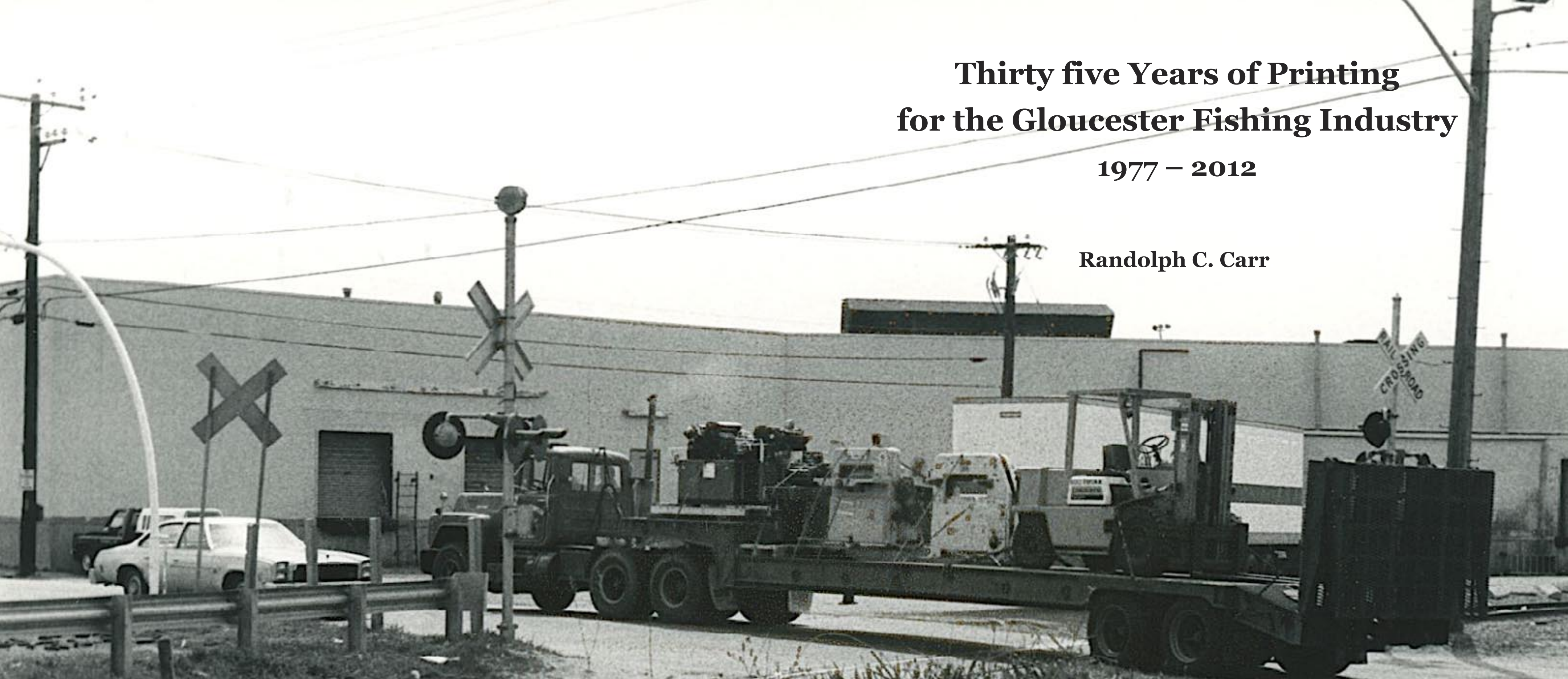


**Thirty five Years of Printing  
for the Gloucester Fishing Industry**

**1977 – 2012**

**Randolph C. Carr**



**Thirty five Years of Printing  
for the Gloucester Fishing Industry  
1977 – 2012**

by Randolph C. Carr  
Carr Printing, Inc.

*Cover – 1986 Rigging out of Maplewood Avenue*

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Photographs by:  
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Gabrielle Barzaghi  
Randolph C. Carr

Produced by Carr Printing, Inc.  
Gloucester, Massachusetts  
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First Printing – May 2024  
Second Printing – August 2024



This monograph was prepared in response to a request  
from the Cape Ann Museum in 2024  
to document the story of Carr Printing, Inc.

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33 Commercial Street in 1980

### **In the Beginning**

My printing career began in 1971 at Gordon College Press in Wenham as a general apprentice. I went to work right out of high school and was released in February on a work study program. It was exciting for me to have real work, and I learned the basics of printing very quickly.

By 1974 I was put in charge of the college print shop. The person who trained me retired but the administration did not want to give me an official title or much of a raise so I had to find another position in order to support my wife and son. I think I was probably earning about \$1.75 per hour when I left.

After being at the college for four years I moved to Defiance Graphics in Rowley to work in the pressroom. During my two years at Defiance the country entered a serious economic recession and there was sometimes not enough work to keep me employed full time. So I asked the owner if I could go out on the road and make cold calls to see if I could drum up some business. And keep myself employed!

I wasn't wildly successful, but I did get some new customers and a lot of valuable experience meeting prospects and selling printing. This practice served me well throughout my career.

### **The Curhan Company**

In 1977 I began working in Gloucester as the production manager at what was then

called The Curhan Company, located at 33 Commercial Street.

The company was a general commercial printer serving a variety of local businesses, but the majority of our work was for the Gloucester, Boston, and New Bedford fish packers and secondary processors.

### **The Fisheries Industry**

At the time, the fresh fish segment of the industry was still strong and there were many small to medium sized packers in Gloucester including Atlantic Seafoods, Empire Fish, Frontiero Brothers, Mortillaro Lobster, New England Coast Seafoods, North Atlantic Fish, Ocean Crest Seafoods, and Star Fisheries.

These companies packed fresh fish landed by the local fleet. The fish was then transported to wholesalers or retail stores. Time was of the essence in packing, labeling, and selling this fish.

There were also large companies that processed frozen fish. These were the secondary processors. The product they handled would be caught and frozen at sea on "factory ships", then formed into blocks, packed in cartons, and palletized.

After the ships were unloaded, the pallets of frozen fish blocks were trucked to companies like Gorton's, Mass Coastal Seafoods, and O'Donnell-Usen Fisheries in Gloucester, or Caribou Foods, Channel Fish, Slade Gorton, Capeway Seafoods, and Frionor Seafoods in Boston or New Bedford. Because the product was frozen during

transport and processing, time was not critical when handling this fish.

The basic products that came out of the secondary processor's plants included breaded cooked fish sticks, fish cakes, breaded cooked fish portions, or unbreaded raw fish portions. There were also many specialty products including scallops, shrimp, crab, lobster, and other prepared items.

In addition to the packers and secondary processors there were also smaller broker/dealers scattered around the North and South Shore. We did business with Universal Fish, Lewis Mills Seafood, Grotta Bay Seafood, Rainbow Seafoods, Dawnkist Seafoods, and Aquanor.

These broker/dealers acted as middlemen between various counterparties in the industry.

### **Fish Labels**

All of these industry participants needed labels which Curhan supplied. There were three basic types. The first type were lay-on labels ("outserts") that were placed or glued on top of a paperboard carton containing the fish.

These lay-on labels were used by the fresh fish packers and the secondary processors to identify their own brand. The label contained a description of the contents, the net weight, the specie of fish, cooking or preparation instructions, and starting in the mid 1990's, a bar code.

The second label type was for direct food contact (“inserts”). They were small, usually 3” x 2”, and carried the packer’s brand, and the specie of fish. They would be placed directly on top of a piece of fresh fish then overwrapped with plastic before being boxed and transported to a retailer.

The secondary processors also used these insert labels, but they usually included preparation instructions and other information. Their labels were slightly larger, and sometimes we printed them in large sheets of 10 with perforations between each label. The processors would put a “10 block” sheet in each box containing 10 pieces of frozen fish. When the retailer got the product they would tear off one label from the “10 block” and place it on the frozen fish. They would then place it on a tray and overwrap it with plastic for retail sale.

These labels differed from outserts because inserts were placed directly on the fish. This meant that both the ink and paper had to be approved by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration for “direct food contact”.

Because of the special ink and paper, most printers were not able to produce these economically. We had enough business from the various customers to make it worthwhile to purchase large quantities of the ink and paper. This enabled us to produce a competitive specialty product.

During the late 1970’s and early 80’s these insert labels were mostly used by the fresh fish packers.

The third type of label we produced were pressure sensitive (self adhesive) labels that

would be applied to either inner boxes or shipping cartons. These labels were most often used by the secondary processors and the broker/dealers. They could serve as a primary label or be used to relabel existing packages. The pressure sensitive labels we produced used a special cold temperature adhesive that could withstand freezer storage. Again, this was not something the average printer could provide.

### **Overprinting**

For about a decade between the middle 1970’s and into the early 1980’s we also did a large volume of what was termed “overprinting”.

This involved taking flat, diecut, unformed, preprinted paperboard boxes, and running them through a modified offset press using a special type of flexographic rubber plate. Gorton’s was the primary client for this work. Overprinting was necessary because the paper box manufacturers required 6 - 8 week lead times... and Gorton’s would often not have the right boxes on hand.

For example, they may have had inventory of boxes that listed “cod” in the ingredients. But when it was time for the production run, they may have only had “pollock” available. So they would send us thousands and thousands of boxes to overprint, which we would do by blocking out the word “cod” and imprinting the word “pollock” slightly above. Fortunately, there was usually enough blank space on the box to do this.

This was heavy, hard work due to the weight of the flat cartons, and the fact that Curhan’s Commercial Street plant had uneven floors and no facilities for pallet jacks or forklifts, so all the loading and unloading had to be done by hand with two wheelers. Freight coming in the loading dock had to be two-wheeled down a wooden ramp, then make a 90° turn onto the production floor.

Often we would receive truckloads of cartons containing the flat boxes. After unloading and imprinting the boxes, the cartons had to be wheeled back up the ramp and re-palletized inside the waiting truck. Coupled with the large quantities and short lead times involved, it was not easy work.

### **Early years**

During my early years at Curhan, in addition to my responsibilities managing the print production (and unloading trucks along with everyone else), I also took on the responsibility for estimating new work and billing completed orders. When I was at Gordon College, I learned to cost and price work, so it was not too difficult for me to do this at Curhan.

When there was free time, I would also go out on the road to sell printing, building on the skills I had started to develop at Defiance. New businesses like Varian Extrion were moving into the Blackburn Industrial Park, and I wanted to get some of their printing business. It was slow going, but over time we earned the trust of many new customers.



*Commercial Street pressroom*



*Box imprinting presses with cartons of boxes to be imprinted piled against walls*



*Commercial Street loading dock ramp*



*33 Maplewood Avenue in 1980*



*Building the loading dock at Maplewood Avenue*



*Maplewood Avenue 1980 buildout and installation*



*Maplewood Avenue 1980 buildout and installation*

### **Cape Ann Printers – 1977**

There were four printers on Cape Ann in 1977. Curhan Printing, Cape Ann Ticket & Label, and Chisholm & Hunt were all in Gloucester... Cricket Press was in Manchester. All of us were using the sheetfed offset printing process for the majority of our production, with some letterpress work for special applications and finishing processes. Artwork was prepared for printing using phototype paper galleys, pasted up mechanical art, film, and metal plates.

### **Maplewood Avenue**

In June of 1980 our landlord informed us we would have to move because they wanted to renovate the Commercial Street building. They had space available in another building, so in July we moved the company to 33 Maplewood Avenue in Gloucester.

Moving a printing company is expensive because virtually all of the equipment needs to be moved by professional riggers, and the new facilities have to be built out to suit the production needs of the pressroom and other departments. Moving is also disruptive, because the fishery related work we produced was time sensitive with very short lead times.

Consequently, it required careful advance planning to keep the orders on schedule, while also managing the buildout on Maplewood Avenue and coordinating the riggers while we moved out of Commercial

Street and into Maplewood Ave.

We only had to shut down production for a couple of work days. Long nights and several weekends were involved, but one of the best things that came out of the move was that we got a real loading dock, pallet jack, and flat interior floors, so material handling became much, much easier!

Once the move to Maplewood Ave. was completed, business settled into a steady routine for a few years. I managed the overall operations and finances while continuing to spend time on the road developing new business and delivering work to the fisheries in Gloucester, Boston, and New Bedford. There was a lot of driving around.

### **Peak years for the Fisheries**

Meanwhile, the fisheries industry, while still a major player in the city's economy, was beginning to show signs of stress. The Magnuson-Stevens Act had been passed in 1976 to extend U.S. territorial waters to 200 miles.

This was supposed to keep foreign vessels out of U.S. waters. Unfortunately, it did very little to prevent overfishing because the U.S. fleet expanded to take advantage of the protectionist policy. 1980 was the peak of fish landings in Gloucester.

By 1982 there was concern over declining fish stocks, along with talk of more government regulations on catch sizes and restrictions on the number of days at sea.<sup>1</sup>

### **Fishery Products International**

Gloucester was not alone in feeling the effects of overfishing. The Canadian fisheries were also having problems. In 1982, the province of Newfoundland combined eight bankrupt fishing companies to form Fishery Products International, a quasi Crown corporation partly owned by the Canadian government.<sup>2</sup>

Fishery Products would open a frozen fish processing facility in Danvers, Massachusetts and become Curhan's largest account, a relationship which continued for many years.

During the 1980's Fishery Products worked with Caribou Fisheries. I spent many Friday afternoons stuck in Boston's rush hour traffic after delivering labels to Caribou's Northern Avenue facility where they also produced onion rings.

I will always remember walking through the processing plant enveloped by a haze of thick blue smoke from the fryers. When I got back in my car I smelled like a big cooked onion ring.

Eventually the Boston plant was sold and the operations moved to Danvers.

### **The Passing of Ed Curhan**

In June 1982 Ed Curhan, the founder of the company, passed away. Before he died he transferred ownership of the business to his son Serge Curhan.

Serge was employed elsewhere, and was not actively involved in any of the daily activities of the Curhan Company. Other

than renaming the business as Curhan Printing, Inc., and asking for regular financial reports, he pretty much left the operations and management to me.

### **Buyout**

By late 1983 we had settled into our Maplewood Avenue location. Printing is a capital intensive business and equipment needs to be constantly maintained, upgraded, or replaced in order to stay competitive and provide the level of quality customers expect.

Since I was managing the business and was familiar with the condition of our equipment and the demands of our customers, I felt comfortable purchasing new presses and machinery when I felt it was appropriate. Which I did.

Unfortunately for me, Serge Curhan was not pleased with my decisions in this regard. In January of 1984 he took me out to dinner and informed me I would be fired.

This was a shock, but I tried to stay calm and pointed out that as far as most of the customers were concerned, I was the face of Curhan Printing, and without me, he would probably lose a lot of clients. He had no interest in running a printing business, so I offered to buy him out and take over the company myself.

The purchase was negotiated over the course of the next 12 months, and in January 1985, I became 51% owner of the slightly renamed Curhan Printing, Ltd.

Unfortunately I did not have the financial resources to manage the complete purchase by myself, and found it necessary to take a partner.

We both took out second mortgages on our homes. Between the funds from the second mortgages, a bank loan, and an agreement with Serge Curhan to take back part of the purchase price as a loan, we were able to complete the transaction, and carry on with business.

### **Changing Gloucester**

By late 1984 there were changes happening in the Gloucester business community. Varian Semiconductor Equipment had become one of the largest employers in the city, and other medical, technology, and manufacturing firms were being established at the industrial parks around town.

A fifth printing company had also started up in Gloucester. The Pressroom opened for business in the basement of the old W. G. Brown's department store on Main Street. They eventually moved to the Blackburn Industrial Park. Now there were five printers on Cape Ann.

### **1985**

1985 was a turning point in my career because the full financial burden of the business was on me and my partner. My partner managed the production and I concentrated on sales and finance.

For several years we did work for the

U.S. Government Printing Office out of Boston, and had printing contracts for the Pease Air Force Base, U.S. Coast Guard, and other Northeast region government agencies.

We also did work for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and developed other commercial clients who were not fishery related. This helped, for a time, to reduce our concentration on the fisheries industry.

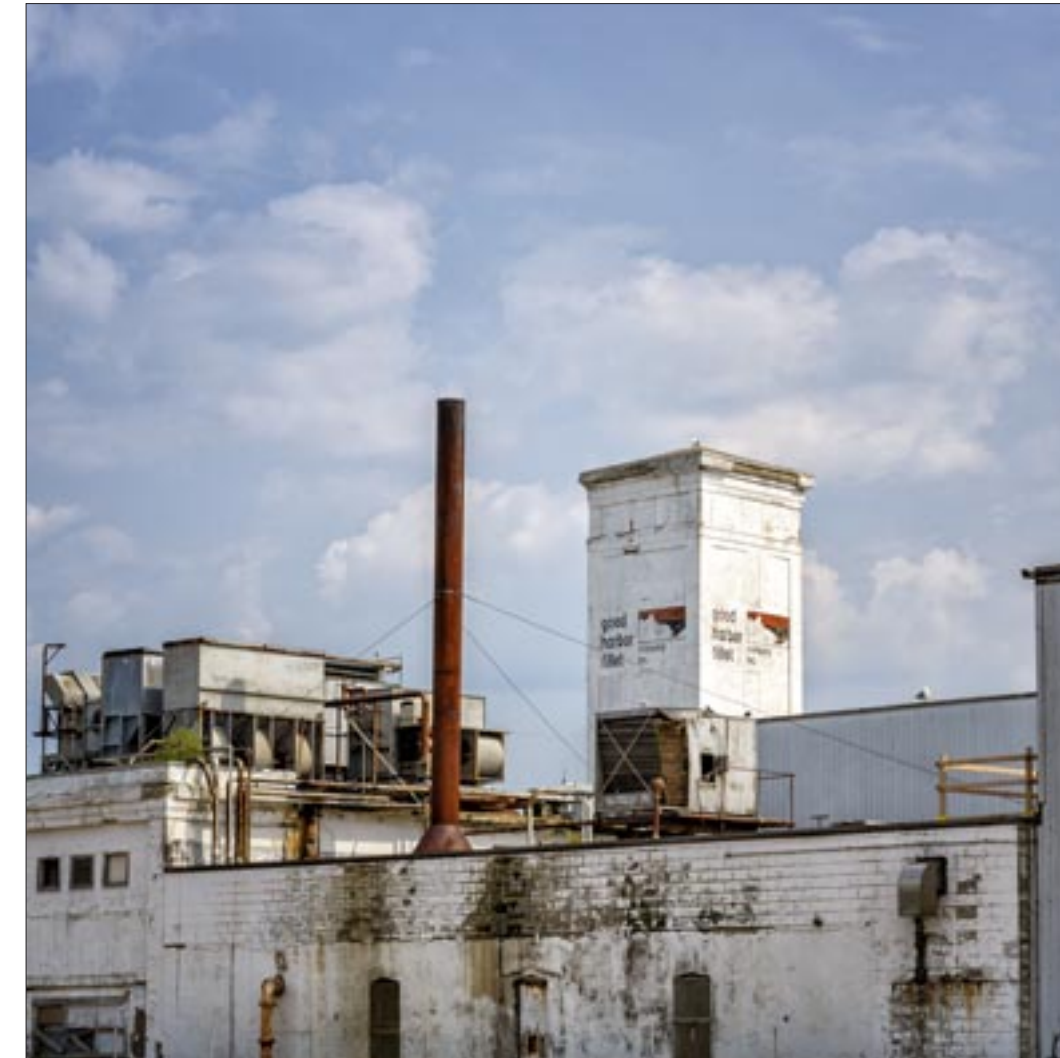
Our primary focus, however, was still on the fisheries, with Fishery Products in particular providing an ever larger share of our overall volume. As hard as I tried to diversify away from the fisheries, they just kept giving us more work.

### **Good Harbor Fillet**

One reason for this was that Good Harbor Fillet came to Gloucester. The company was started by two young men whose families had long been active in the Boston fisheries industry. They started out at the Gloucester State Fish Pier, working their way up until they eventually gained enough scale that they were able to move into the old Birdseye plant on Commercial Street.

The plant had been built in the 1920's by Clarence Birdseye to produce his newly patented frozen fish products.<sup>3</sup> More recently it had been owned and operated by O'Donnell Usen Fisheries. After they ceased operations the plant was taken over by Good Harbor Fillet.



In addition to printing large volumes of



*Good Harbor Fillet logo on the tower of the old Clarence Birdseye building before and during 2014 demolition*

*Photographs by Paul Cary Goldberg*

INDIVIDUALLY QUICK FROZEN  
KEEP FROZEN

2553386.A

# Prime Sea Strips™

## Oven Style Breaded Cod

### Cut From Natural Fillets

**NET WT. 10 LB (4.53 Kg)**

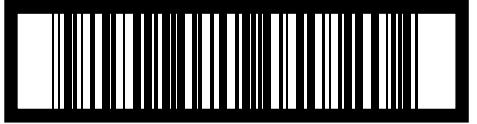
COOKING INSTRUCTIONS: PLACE FROZEN STRIPS ON BAKING PAN. BAKE IN PREHEATED 425° F OVEN FOR 18-22 MINUTES OR UNTIL FISH FLAKES EASILY. TURN STRIPS HALF WAY THROUGH COOKING.

**29153**

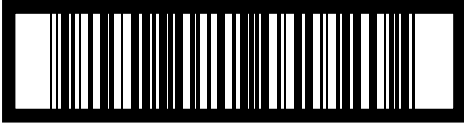
INGREDIENTS: COD, ENRICHED WHEAT FLOUR (FLOUR, NIACIN, FERROUS SULFATE, THIAMINE MONONITRATE, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLIC ACID), WATER, BLEACHED WHEAT FLOUR, MODIFIED CORN STARCH, YELLOW CORN FLOUR, ENRICHED YELLOW CORN FLOUR (CORN FLOUR, NIACIN, FERROUS SULFATE, THIAMINE MONONITRATE, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLIC ACID), SALT, SUGAR, WHEY, YEAST, SORBITOL, LEAVENING (SODIUM BICARBONATE, SODIUM ALUMINUM PHOSPHATE, SODIUM ACID PYROPHOSPHATE, MONOCALCIUM PHOSPHATE), PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED SOYBEAN OIL, ONION POWDER, MONOSODIUM GLUTAMATE, HYDROXYPROPYL METHYLCELLULOSE, CELLULOSE GUM, EGGS, OLEORESIN BLACK PEPPER, SODIUM TRIPOLYPHOSPHATE (TO RETAIN MOISTURE), PREFRIED IN COTTONSEED AND/OR CANOLA OIL.

**CONTAINS: FISH, WHEAT, MILK, SOYBEAN, AND EGG.**

DISTRIBUTED BY:  
FISHERY PRODUCTS INTERNATIONAL, INC.  
DANVERS, MA 01923



1 00 35493 29153 3



1 00 35493 29153 3

Lay-on / Outsert Label

**1 OZ. PRECOOKED BREADED COD STICKS**  
MADE FROM MINCED FISH

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS: PLACE FROZEN STICKS IN A 425° F. OVEN FOR 15 MINUTES.

INGREDIENTS: MINCED COD, ENRICHED WHEAT FLOUR (FLOUR, NIACIN, FERROUS SULFATE, THIAMINE MONONITRATE, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLIC ACID), WATER, MODIFIED FOOD STARCH, YELLOW CORN FLOUR, SALT, DEXTROSE, IODIZED SALT, WHEY, SOYBEAN OIL, PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED CANOLA OIL, COLORED WITH OLEORESIN PAPRIKA, NATURAL FLAVOR, SODIUM TRIPOLYPHOSPHATE (TO RETAIN MOISTURE). PRECOOKED IN CANOLA AND/OR PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED SOYBEAN OIL.

DISTRIBUTED BY  
**SLADE GORTON & CO., BOSTON MA 02118**

BS 326

Direct Food Contact / Insert Label

**NAUTICAL NIBBLERS**



Oven Ready  
Made From Minced Fish



0 286411866111

INGREDIENTS: MINCED COD, WHEAT FLOUR, WATER, POTATO FLAKES (POTATOES, MONO AND DIGLYCERIDES, SODIUM ACID PYROPHOSPHATE, CITRIC ACID), ENRICHED WHEAT FLOUR (FLOUR, NIACIN, REDUCED IRON, THIAMINE MONONITRATE, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLIC ACID), SALT, MODIFIED FOOD STARCH, YELLOW CORN FLOUR, DEHYDRATED ONIONS, DEXTROSE, IODIZED SALT, WHEY, YEAST, PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED CANOLA OIL, COLORED WITH OLEORESIN OF PAPRIKA, SPICE EXTRACTIVES, SILICON DIOXIDE (TO PREVENT CAKING), SODIUM TRIPOLYPHOSPHATE (TO RETAIN MOISTURE), PRECOOKED IN CANOLA AND/OR PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED SOYBEAN OIL.

Nutrition Facts	Amount/serving	%DV*	Amount/serving	%DV*
Serving Size 3 nuggets (84g)	<b>Total Fat</b> 7g	<b>10%</b>	<b>Total Carb.</b> 46g	<b>15%</b>
Servings Per Container 6	Sat. Fat 1g	<b>12%</b>	Fiber 2g	<b>10%</b>
<b>Calories</b> 300	<b>Cholest.</b> 35mg	<b>24%</b>	Sugars 2g	
Fat Cal. 60	<b>Sodium</b> 570mg	<b>11%</b>	<b>Protein</b> 14g	
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.	Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 30%	Calcium 6%	Iron 8%

CONVENTIONAL OVEN: PLACE NAUTICAL NIBBLERS ON A COOKING SHEET AND BAKE IN A PREHEATED 425° OVEN FOR 18-20 MINUTES. MICROWAVE OVEN: PLACE FROZEN NAUTICAL NIBBLERS ON A MICROWAVE SAFE DISH AND COOK ON HIGH FOR 1 MIN. 30 SEC. DEEP FRY: DEEP FRY AT 350° FOR 3-5 MINUTES OR UNTIL GOLDEN BROWN.

Produced By: Good Harbor Fillet Co., Inc., 21 Great Republic Dr, Gloucester, MA 01930

**NET WT. 18OZ [1LB 2OZ] 510g**

Pressure Sensitive / Self-Adhesive Label

Good Harbor's labels we also designed their logo. It appeared on all their printed materials and corporate communications, and was also painted onto the tower of the Clarence Birdseye building. In 2014 the building was demolished to make way for a large tourist hotel... a harbinger of the "new Gloucester".

Good Harbor Fillet eventually outgrew the Birdseye building and moved to a newly constructed facility in the Blackburn Industrial Park where they continued until 2010, when they were acquired by American Seafoods Group of Seattle.<sup>4</sup> Production operations were moved out of Gloucester to a facility in New Bedford.

### 1985... continued

But let's return to 1985. It was about this time that the first major wave of technological change started to sweep over the printing industry.

Desktop computers and laser printers started to supplant earlier typesetting and mechanical art systems. We invested in our first desktop computer, scanner, and laser printer in 1985. It was revolutionary.

Although we were still using film to image the metal plates for the presses, nearly all of the prepress artwork and typesetting was now prepared digitally.

We were settled into Maplewood Avenue and had finished with the buyout. All of our energy was focused on sales, production, meeting the weekly payroll, and paying off our debt. I was constantly on the road trying to develop new business.

The fisheries were still busy, although signs of stress continued to build, with regulations, competition, and continual price pressure on the processors to keep the cost of their products low.

A difference of pennies per pound mattered in the processed seafoods business, and this price pressure meant that our label pricing needed to stay very competitive. Staying profitable was a constant challenge, and several fishery related businesses declared bankruptcy that year.

Our corporate annual minutes for 1985 recorded that we "received notification of Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Proceedings from Pappas International Foods (Boston) and Capeway Seafoods (New Bedford)". We also wrote off bad debt from Seamark Seafoods.<sup>5</sup> Not the best way to start our first year of ownership.

### Not again!

Then, as we began 1986, our landlord told us we had to leave Maplewood Avenue soon, because they wanted to renovate the building and turn it into condos.

Facing another expensive, disruptive move I decided that there was no way I wanted to go through this a third time, so I immediately began looking for a suitable building we could purchase.

After a brief reconnaissance of the commercial real estate market we located a 6,000 square foot building in a local industrial park. Although we had already taken on substantial debt to finance the

company buyout, we found ourselves back at the bank to ask for a real estate loan.

Fortunately, our bankers thought we were a good credit risk, and so in the summer of 1986 we moved to Kettle Cove Industrial Park at 743 Western Avenue in the Magnolia section of Gloucester.

As we had done only six years earlier, we worked long nights and weekends to keep the print production on schedule while managing the buildout and move.

By the autumn of 1986 we were in our new building and getting settled in, again.

### A bit of a slog

After we purchased the building, finished the buildout, moved, and got organized in our Western Avenue space, the next few years became a steady routine of printing, printing, printing, selling, selling, selling, and paying off debt. It was a bit of a slog.

Our main fisheries clients still included the secondary processors Fishery Products, Mass Coastal Seafoods, Good Harbor Fillet (and their subsidiary Midship Seafoods), Universal Foods, National Fish and Seafood, a reorganized Capeway Seafoods, and Tichon.

There was still a small amount of work coming from the local fresh fish packers like Atlantic Seafoods and Empire Fish, but it was dwindling.

I was constantly trying to find new clients that were not fishery related, but rarely did the non-fisheries work ever exceed 35% of our overall sales.



Rigging out of Maplewood Avenue



Installation at Western Avenue



2006 Pressroom at Western Avenue

In 1985 and 1986 we booked small profits, and although our volume was increasing, our expenses were increasing faster.

In 1988 Mass Coastal Seafoods filed for bankruptcy.<sup>6</sup> Although it wasn't a huge financial hit, we did miss the volume that they added, and it was another indicator of the problems in the fishing industry.

#### Early signs of stress

By the end of 1989 we had booked three consecutive years of operating losses. I had reduced the rent we paid (to ourselves) for our building, and lowered my salary and my partner's. Health care insurance premiums had increased by 30% and, to be fair to our employees, we had increased factory wages by 5%.

It was a struggle to cover our payroll and debt expenses while maintaining cash to fund daily operations, and my relationship with my partner was showing signs of stress.

He did not share my perspective on the use of funds and this caused constant tension between us. He wanted higher pay. I wanted to keep our expenses to a minimum, and to reinvest profits in the business or pay down debt.

Things between us got so difficult that we had preliminary talks about me buying him out. It was premature and the discussions broke down, but it wasn't a happy environment.

#### 1990's

By 1990 the cuts we had made to expenses started to pay off and our sales volume had increased. We returned to profitability and stopped bidding on work for the state and the U.S. Government Printing Office because of the intense price competition. The profit margins were so small that it made little sense to continue.

By 1992 our sales volume had dropped, the banks were telling us not to increase our debt load any further, and we had laid off a full time employee. In spite of all that, we managed to stay profitable.

The fisheries were continuing their slow decline. Business and employment in Gloucester was moving away from the fisheries into manufacturing and tourism.

The Gloucester Daily Times reported that *"the percentage of Gloucester jobs in the fishing industry went from 40% in 1966 to 18% in 1991. Manufacturing made up to a third of industrial employment: 3,100 employees vs, about 1,000 for the fishing industry. The biggest gain was in the service industry, fostered by tourism"*.<sup>7</sup>

#### Resolution Trust Corp.

During 1992 an unexpected gift came our way. We were contacted by the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC) acting for the U.S. government. The RTC had been put in charge of collecting bad debts that were on the books of insolvent or struggling

Savings & Loan institutions.<sup>8</sup>

When we purchased the company in 1985 Serge Curhan took back a note from us for part of the purchase price. This was booked as a 15 year loan that we owed to him. We had been paying him back on a regular schedule since the beginning.

He had used our note as collateral for a different loan he obtained at a commercial bank. The RTC had taken over these loans and said we could payoff our original loan from Serge at a discount.

The balance of what we owed Serge would be written off by the RTC as uncollectible. I happily took advantage of this opportunity. It allowed us to eliminate our long term debt to Serge Curhan and save some money.

By 1993 our financial situation had begun to turn in a more positive direction. Thanks to the RTC arrangement, and careful control of our costs we had been able to make significant progress paying down our bank debt and had booked several years of net profits.

#### Difficult Business

By the middle of 1993 it was becoming more difficult to get new business. Many large businesses were consolidating their supply chains, reducing the number of vendors, and moving their manufacturing operations to other countries. These were the years that saw a drastic reduction in the U.S. manufacturing base.

It was becoming harder to develop new

clients. Many businesses simply would not see you. Often there was not even a human in the front lobby, just a telephone connecting to some faceless gatekeeper who would tell you that no one was available. The days of talking to the receptionist at the front desk and spending time with the print buyer were vanishing.

### **Goodman Engraving**

One of the ways we tried to deal with the declining sales was to purchase the assets of Goodman Engraving Co., a small Boston operation that was basically a one man shop. We acquired a few new customers along with the assets of the business, so for a couple of years we were doing steel die engraving and foil stamping along with our regular offset printing.

None of our employees, or my partner, would learn the process or run the machines, so I ended up being the one who ran the engraving presses. It was an interesting experience, and the engraved printing was beautiful, but it was not really the best use of my time. After about a year we sold the operation and went back to the offset printing we knew best.

### **Building tension**

Even though the Goodman acquisition had briefly boosted our sales and profitability and our financial situation had improved, the overall business conditions were difficult. By 1995 the sales volume dropped back to the pre-Goodman level.

From the earliest days, my partner had been responsible for hiring and running the production operations, while my focus was on sales and finance.

As we moved into the mid 1990's, he seemed to become less engaged in the business. One of his responsibilities was quality control, but we had ongoing issues maintaining consistent products.

The Goodman acquisition had showed me that my partner was not really interested in growing the business, and it became frustrating to bring in new business only to have quality problems that would result in a lost client.

After we sold the Goodman assets, we laid off several good employees to realign our costs with sales. I expected my partner to step up and help with production, but he did not.

I did not realize the increasing resentment that my partner was developing towards me. I thought the needs of the business came first, but I failed to really understand that he did not share this belief. I often felt that he was somehow trying to sabotage the business.

### **Carr Printing, Inc.**

I'm not sure of the exact date, but one afternoon during the first week of January 1998 an employee who we had recently laid off stopped by to talk. He told me an alarming piece of news.

He had heard, from a reliable source, that my partner had been negotiating with Fishery Products to set up and run an in-

house printing operation for them.

This really shocked me and made me angry. I immediately called my contacts at Fishery Products and requested a meeting to discuss what I had heard.

At the meeting they confirmed that it was true. I was in a difficult spot, but talked with them at length explaining why I thought it was a very bad decision on their part. After a rather tense discussion they agreed with me, but said that if I wanted to retain their business I would need to give them a substantial discount on the label work.

In addition to negotiating with Fishery Products, my partner had also shared confidential cost and pricing information with them, and with this information they felt they could demand a price reduction.

I was not really in much of a position to say no, because their volume was such a significant part of our business. I needed to keep them as a customer. So I said yes and ended the meeting by asking them to give me several days to sort out the situation with my partner. They agreed.

As soon as I left the meeting I went to see my local attorney. As I explained the situation to him, he advised me that he could not represent me because he had already spoken with my partner about the matter, and would have a conflict if he spoke to me. This was another shock.

Fortunately I had recently met a Boston lawyer who specialized in corporate matters. He quickly put my mind at rest.

Over the next few days my partner agreed to resign, and a separation agreement with a non-compete clause was drawn up and executed. Within a week I was the sole owner of the renamed Carr Printing, Inc.

### **Everything changes**

After my partner was gone it was a very different company. It was much smaller, both in terms of sales volume, and also in the number of employees. Besides myself and my son, we only had two other full time employees, plus my father, who came in part time to help with shipping, billing, and filing.

### **The Fisheries**

As 1998 got underway, the fisheries were under continuing pressure. The industry had seen fleet reductions in 1992, and the closure of a large portion of the Georges Bank fishing grounds in 1994.<sup>9</sup>

In 1995 there were only three fish processing plants left in Gloucester,<sup>10</sup> and the groundfish catch limit was cut by 50%.<sup>11</sup> By 1997 the daily cod limit had been set to 1,000 pounds per day.<sup>12</sup>

Even though the local fresh fish packers had never been our largest customer base, the problems they were facing reflected the fishing industry as a whole.

The secondary processors like Fishery Products were also feeling the effects of global overfishing and declining stocks. In order to keep their operations running they

began to turn to alternative sources of supply. They bought seafood from around the world, and used farm raised species like tilapia and pangasius that would have previously been considered undesirable.

During the next few years our business became ever more dependent on Fishery Products, Good Harbor Fillet, and a couple of other seafood companies. Because we had downsized our own operation, it was more difficult for me to be on the road selling, and I became more involved in production. Consequently, our client base narrowed and became concentrated on a small handful of companies. The fisheries related work continued to dominate our sales.

### **The Printers**

By the end of the decade the printing industry was starting to show the effects of globalization and changing business conditions. U. S. companies had moved manufacturing offshore, and computerization and supply chain consolidations were chipping away at demand for printing.

Total printing industry employment peaked in 1998 at about 828,0000. A relentless downward trend began the next year.<sup>13</sup>

In Gloucester, Cape Ann Ticket and Label went out of business. I'm not sure of the exact date, but they were the first printer in the community to close. This left four printers still operating, but because the overall demand for printing was declining,

Ticket and Label's closing did not really make much difference to the rest of us.

### **A New Millenium**

The year 2,000 started off with lots of consternation about the Y2K bug that was supposed to crash global computer systems. Nothing much happened and it turned out to be uneventful.

I continued to invest in equipment that would allow us to maintain productivity with fewer employees, and kept using available funds to reduce debt.

Unlike the early years of the business when expenses were outpacing sales, now things were different. Even with the declining volume and the price concessions to Fishery Products, we had a smaller payroll and no partner. We were showing some profits.

### **A Bad Start**

Then came 9/11 and the first recession of the new century. The period between 2000 and 2003 was marked by increased unemployment, decreased business activity, and the terrorist attacks of Sept 11, 2001.

It was a difficult time, and our business struggled along with most others. Our sales were down by 25% and we laid off one of our two remaining employees. By the end of 2003 we had booked two consecutive years of losses.

The printing industry had lost 17% of its total workforce since 1998. Employment was down to 686,000... a drop of 142,000.<sup>14</sup>

In 2005 we wrote off a significant bad debt from Good Harbor Fillet. They had been contending with the same problems as everyone else and in 2010 they were acquired by another company.

#### Four Color Process

In spite of the difficult times, Fishery Products expanded their product offerings and began to purchase “4 color process” labels from us. To produce these labels we needed to buy different and more expensive presses, as well as more precise imagesetting and platemaking equipment. We purchased the first press in 2002, and a larger, more productive press in 2006. These were large capital expenditures that took substantial investments.

But we really had little choice if we wanted to remain in business. Fishery Products and four other fisheries companies gave us about 75% of our total sales volume.

The only good thing about this situation was that we were profitable. By 2007 we were running very lean... just one employee, my son, my father and myself. We had been able to increase our pricing for the “4 color process” labels. This, coupled with the reduced payroll and expenses, enabled us to have several years of decent profits and pay off the loans for all the new equipment we had purchased.

#### The Global Financial Crisis

In early 2007 the world experienced “the most severe worldwide economic crisis since the Great Depression.”<sup>15</sup>

This affected us just like everyone else. Our volume declined as most of our clients reduced their orders. We laid off our remaining employee, and my father no longer came in to help out.

Elsewhere in Gloucester, The Pressroom went out of business. This left three printers remaining on Cape Ann... Carr Printing, Cricket Press, and Chisholm & Hunt.

#### Fishery Products Sold

In August 2007, Fishery Products was split up and sold to High Liner Seafoods and Ocean Choice International, both of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The fate of the Danvers plant was uncertain. The Toronto Star reported that...

“High Liner chief executive Henry Demone said he’s going to review the fate of two secondary processing plants the firm will own in New England.

The FPI factory in Danvers, Mass., and the existing High Liner plant in Portsmouth, N.H., have been operating below capacity and are located close to one another, Demone noted.”<sup>16</sup>

Several years later the Danvers plant was closed.

#### Still Printing

By 2011 our volume was so low that it was no longer profitable to maintain our production facilities. My son left the business and moved on to other ventures. I sold our building and equipment.

Sometime around 2014 Chisholm & Hunt closed their doors. In 2018 Cricket Press sold all their assets and transferred their client list to Calendar Press in Peabody, Massachusetts. Six months later, Calendar Press also went out of business.

Gloucester no longer has any sheetfed offset printing facilities. There are only two silk screeners and a couple of sign & graphics providers left in the city.

By the middle of 2023 total employment in the U. S. printing industry was under 400,000... half of what it had been at its peak in 1988.<sup>17</sup>

Employment numbers for production and nonsupervisory personnel were even grimmer. From its 1990 peak of about 600,000... the 2024 number had declined to just under 250,000.<sup>18</sup>

Even though there have been major changes in printing and the fisheries, I still provide print services for my remaining clients, and labels are still one of the main products I provide. It’s just that they no longer go on boxes of fish. Instead, they go on parts for semiconductor equipment manufactured by the Varian division of Applied Materials in Gloucester.

And so, life continues...

2555796 5/9/11 9:35 AM Page 1

INDIVIDUALLY QUICK FROZEN KEEP FROZEN

FPI 89526 89526

UpperCrust

Tortilla Crusted Tilapia With Chipotle & Lime Tilapia Empanizado con Tortilla

2555796

NET WT. 10 LB (4.53 Kg)

1 00 35493 89526 7

2555470 10/28/09 8:39 AM Page 1

INDIVIDUALLY QUICK FROZEN KEEP FROZEN

FPI 79340 79340

Pangasius

4 oz. Southern Style Precooked Breaded Pangasius Portion Pangasius Estilo Sureño

JFFC300800 2555470

NET WT. 10 LB (4.53 Kg)

1 00 35493 79340 2

Four Color Process Labels



2009 – Pressroom at Western Avenue

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*Randy Carr has been  
in the printing industry  
for over 50 years*

*Photograph by Gabrielle Barzaghi*