The Past Sponging Industry of The Bahamas

Cross-Curricular Focus: Science/Social Studies



Trimming sponges in Nassau 1938



The sponging industry was first introduced into The Bahamas by a Frenchman named Gustave Renouard. The first recorded exports were in 1843 when 132 bales were shipped off. By 1917, $492 000 worth of sponges were exported.

The main sponging area was the **Great Bahama** Bank, a **shoal**, a shallow area of water, west of Andros, known as the Mud. Sponges were also obtained near Long Island, Abaco, and Exuma. About 600 large vessels made up the sponging fleet, each having five dinghies and about ten crewmen. The sponges were harvested from the floor of the ocean. Then they were taken to Nassau where they were sold to merchants, who were mainly Greeks. Next, the sponges were given a final cleaning and were made ready for exporting.

In 1917, there was a peak in the sponging industry. However, by 1938 disaster struck. The sponge beds died, **killed off by a strange fungus** that attacked no other marine life.

Sponging is now carried out on a much smaller scale. This is mainly because this natrual sponge is more expensive than synthetic or man-made sponge. People use more man-made sponge than natural sponge.

Adapted from ***The Making of The Bahamas***

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage to find and confirm your answers.

1) What was the name of the man who first introduced Sponging Industry to The Bahamas?

_____
_____
_____

2) What does the word, **shoal** mean?

_____
_____
_____

3) List the Family Islands where sponges were once harvested.

_____, _____, _____, _____

4) According to the passage, the sponge beds were attacked and killed off by a strange fungus. Define the term fungus.

_____
_____
_____

5) Why do people today use more synthetic sponge than natural sponge?

_____
_____
_____



