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3.
 Gloucester, Mass and Portland, Me.
 Interviews by
 Joint Fisheries Commission.
 November 1893

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Gloucester, Mass.
Capt. Levi N. McLean
Nov. 17, 1893
Interviewed by William Wakeham and Hugh M. Smith

Aged 63. Has been in the business since he first began to go fishing 49 years ago. Has spent 43 years in the mackerel fishery. Name of vessel Sch. Herald of the Morning.

Went south this year for mackerel along the first of April. Did not get any fish. Saw the first fish down off Chincoteague.

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Could not remember the date. They were about 30 miles off shore. Heading to the N.E. Has been south a number of years. Usually find the first fish down off the capes of Virginia, about 60 to 70 miles off shore. They are heading to the Northeast generally. They are in schools when we first see them. The schools are generally moving fast, but not always.

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Has followed these spring schools down back of Nantucket. Has never followed a single body any great distance. Has followed a body of mackerel from off Cape Henry down to Five Fathom Light Ship off Cape Dover; with them every day. These early fish follow the coast. Do not go any nearer the shore of late years. Keep right along about such a distance they get up to

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Nantucket, then they come a little nearer than they used to 10 or 12 years ago. Strike in right along close off New York, within 3 or 4 miles of the land.

Never followed any of these early schools over Georges. They go that way, but he has never followed them any further than Nantucket; then he generally goes home and refits and goes down onto Georges, but never found them, but

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of course they go that way.

They do not stop at Georges in the early part of the year, but keep right on. Some come in this way on our coast and some on the Nova Scotia coast; that is his opinion.

The farthest north he has been mackereling is 7 Islands.

When the fish leave the shores in the fall thinks they take the same direction about that they do when they come in, but

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of course, does not know for certain. All he knows is that sometimes he sees them going on the same track. Never followed them any farther south in the fall than Block Id.

Looks for the fish on the Cape Shore, around Cape Sable, generally about the 20th of May to the 1st of June. The fish then are following the shore right along. Some strike right in from sea. Others strike to the

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westward and follow the shore right down. They travel pretty fast on the Cape Shore.

Never followed them any further than down to Cape Breton in the spring, but along in July or the last of June, has gone into the Gulf. Never followed them on one straight route. Always came home and then went back again. His reason for going home at that time is that they are generally

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looking for them to sink, and then we have a slack time, which he supposes is the spawning time, and they do not school.

While these fish are going down the Cape Shore there is generally a body of fish on the New England shore. Find them about the 1st of June on the New England shore. Used to find them all the way from Fire Island down to Nantucket, and some

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around this city the first of June.

No particular difference in the size of those on the Cape Shore and those found here, usually about the same. Sometimes they are small fish here, then there is a difference.

Generally large fish go down the Cape Shore. But later in the season a small school. As a rule the first school are larger than those that come afterwards. Look for the second,

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about the same time, perhaps 3 or 4 days, or a week later. The second school goes around North Cape in the same way that the first does. Has known fish to go through Canso in the spring, and come out that way also.

Has caught mackerel in the winter, but not any quantity. Years ago when he used to go to Georges, before we had frozen herring, used to go there and catch our bait. Has

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seen half a dozen mackerel in the net in the morning. That was in the month of February. Their condition was poor. They would generally be a medium sized fish. Would catch them on the surface. Was setting herring nets at the time. That is 35 or 40 years ago.

Has not noticed any blue fish this year, because he has not been in the way of seeing them. Has

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noticed blue fish following schools of mackerel. Generally see the first blue fish at Block Island, and then they come all along the coast of Maine. Never saw any blue fish across the Bay of Fundy on the other side. Blue fish drive mackerel, and also bonitoes.

When they meet the mackerel down south they are very poor. Do not fatten at all before the

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spawning season. No fat on them until after they spawn.

The spawning season along the coast is at different times. Thinks they spawn a good deal earlier here than they do on the eastern coast; that is down in the Bay. Thinks they spawn here along about the middle of May. The fish that they run fresh into the New York market have not spawned. Lots of the fish on this coast spawn

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around Block Island, and they spawn in the Bay of Fundy. The fish that we catch on the Cape Shore are full of spawn, and very ripe sometimes. The spawning season for fish in the Gulf of St. Lawrence is in June. Finds that the fish go down about the time they are ready to spawn.

They remain down about a fortnight, and when they come up they are poor; about the same as before they spawn.

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Do not always school immediately after coming up. Some years hardly school at all. Do not get fat very rapidly after spawning. Not so fast there (Gulf) as they do on this coast. Fatten earlier here than they do there.

The fish seem to get somewhat logish and sickly just before they spawn. They are easier to catch then after they spawn. Are pretty lively just after coming up. As lively as

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at any time of the year. When we get them in the seine before spawning they are dead like.

Catch as many large mackerel as we did 20 years ago, and more in proportion. Do not have as many small mackerel now in proportion to the large ones as we used to have. See more of late years of the little ones, about 4 or 5 inches long. Never saw so many

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small ones in his life as he has this year. Saw them to the south of Prince Edward Id., in the South Bay, Nova Scotia shore, Cape Breton and coast of Cape Breton, around Sidney – the water has been alive with them. In proportion to the number of fish, we catch as many mackerel as we did 20 years ago. The average size fish has not decreased. Of course 20 years ago we used to catch a great many small size mackerel,

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which now we do not catch but very few of.

Mackerel feed upon different things. There is what we call shrimp and there is this red feed. This feed seems like hay seed, only of a different color; and there is something they get off the bottom that looks like curd; almost white, and at other times I have seen it green. And then there is this sun(?) jelly.

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Do not find this red feed all along the coast. Used to have it on this coast every year, all along the coast, but of late years have not found it. Only particular times you get a school of mackerel that

has it in. Most apt to find the red food of late years around Block Island. Find lots of it in the southern fishery. Did not see any this year, because we did not catch

Page 22 [20]

any fish. Has seen it in the water when it would look just like kelp. Has seen patches of it for a mile. Thinks it is not as common as it was some years ago. Do not see as many shrimp now as we did 5 or 10 years ago.

The red food burns the mackerel. And it will burn the hands. Have seen a man go to work at dark in the summer when it was short nights,

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and at 11 o'clock slip his mittens off and the blood was running right off the ends of his fingers.

Do not find as many mackerel now as we did 20 years ago. Do not see 1/10 as many as we used to see then. Do not know what has become of them. They are not there, and that is all I can say. Have no reason to give. Does not think they have been caught

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up. Of course there has been a great many fish caught up, but there is a reason besides that for the scarcity of mackerel. Has no opinion on that subject. Does not know of any man who can give one.

Used to be a common occurrence when one year we had small fish, that the next year they would be larger, etc. About 8 years since they began

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to disappear. Those young fish in the fall are about 8 inches long, on this coast. There would be hardly any difference in the growth of those fish in the spring, but along the next fall there would be considerable difference. A mackerel hatched in the spring is about 8 inches long in the fall. They are all

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sizes, and thinks the reason for that is the different time of spawning.

Has often taken them out of the stomachs of large mackerel. Has done so this fall.

Has been south in April and seen mackerel so small they could not save one in the seine. Every one would go through the meshes. Not longer than 3 to 4

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inches. Saw them down north of Chincoteague about 15 years ago. Did not see any bodies of very small fish there this year. Saw a good many fish there, but does not think they were very small.

Was not in favor of the close time law, and never thought it was any good. Does not think it was any benefit to the fishery.

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Supposes that some thought by having that law passed it would give the fish a chance to spawn before they were taken, but he does not think it did. Of course some of them spawned before that, but the majority of the fish did not get on the spawning ground before the close time expired. Does not think deep

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sea fishing, the catch amounts to anything.

Does not think they need any protection. If there were nothing to prey upon fish but the fishermen, does not think we should have any trouble.

Could not account for the present long period of scarcity. All that he knows about it is that when the young

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do not return, of course we cannot have them. Does not know the reason why they do not return.

Does not think any regulations are necessary in the mackerel fishery. Some of the fishermen used to think so, but not many think so now as before that close season. Does not think many of them would like to see that law renewed.

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None would that he has talked with.

The southern fishery used to be a very profitable one. Of course it is like all other fishing. Some men never accomplished anything in the southern fishery, and others did. The majority of them made money.

Do not fit out any earlier than we have for the last 20 years.

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In the old days of hook and line fishing did not fit out until about the 1st of May to go south. Would go north along in June. Get in the North Bay somewhere along in June from June to July.

All the fish that are taken before a certain date have not spawned. In the old days of hook and line fishing took a considerable many

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before the spawning season. All that we took south was before the spawning season. Did not take so many in the Bay.

Did not take so many fish south in those days as they have of late years. Along about the first of July the heft of the fleet used to commence to go down the east coast. Was probably 200 or 300 sail there.

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Got most of their fish along the west shore; that is up on the New Brunswick shore and Bradleys Bank, and around North Cape.

Thinks the fish spawn all along in the Gulf. In the South Bay, Prince Edwards Island, up on the west shore, up around all the islands.

Sometimes they begin to go out of the Gulf

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along in September, and supposes they keep coming out until Dec. Some years they commence to come out a good deal earlier than they do others. Has always found that when there was any great body of fish down between Prince Edwards Island and Cape Breton, they generally started out earlier than they do when not so many.

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This year he caught about 150 bbls. off Prince Edward Island, off East Point, and the rest they caught around Sidney. Did not catch any in Bay of Fundy. Made only one trip.

Mackerel are different in regard to the movements from what they used to be. When they are abundant they are tame. Fish do not school as well as they

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used to when they were plenty. Does not think the old fashioned way of baiting kept the fish together. Has always used bait as long as they could catch fish. Thinks they have changed their habits in that respect.

Since the seining, fish seem to school more than when we went hooking. If they should give up seining and

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go to hooking does not think they could catch as many fish as they do with the seines.

Since July he has been throwing bait every day when on the fishing grounds, and would raise the mackerel and get a few, but not so many as we used to. They will not stay there as long as they used to. Used to stay all day. Has been down

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in the Gulf when mackerel were as plenty as you could wish, and yet could not catch them on the jig. Has been throwing bait where he knew there were plenty of mackerel, and could not catch one, and perhaps in a few hours time would be schooling all over the water around us. Their habits have been changing for the last 20 yrs.

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Not many seiners going into the Gulf now – about 10 or 12 sails. Most of the seining is done on the Atlantic coast and this coast. The Gulf never was much of a place for seining. All the vessels now carrying seines take bait along with them, in order to raise the mackerel around the vessel. Caught most of his fish

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that way.

Mackerel leave here earlier than they do the Nova Scotia coast. The first fish that goes down is the last that comes back; that is in the Gulf.

Never followed fish along the Newfoundland coast. Never saw any down there except stray ones; that is in the winter, in January, February and those months, will

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see an occasional straggler among the herring.

Was at the Magdalens this summer. The boats did well there, up to August 25. He left there then.

Does not think the use of seines is injurious to hand line fishing. Thinks the vessels do better off Block Island hand line fishing than they used to. Where they fish cannot do much

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seining, because the bottom is too rough; would tear the seines all to pieces.

The cost of our seines is about \$600. Will last, with ordinary care, about 3 years. Has used them 4 or 5 years, but not very often. The wings will last 6 or 7 years. Made of lighter material than they used to be.

Thinks the steam seine

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boats are too expensive to get in general use.

The spring mackerel are all No. 3s. Fish taken with spawn in make nothing but No. 3s. There is no food in them. There is a difference in the quality of fish caught down the Bay and those caught here. Mackerel here on this coast in September are as good

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as at any time, but down the Bay do not get as fat in Sept. as in Oct.

There was a large body of mackerel about Margurie. The vessels did well. Got all they wanted. One of the vessels was the Norumbega, the other the Yosemite. As much fishing done about the East Point of

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Prince Edward Island as there has been during the last 4 or 5 years. Bay Chaleur used to be a good fishing ground. Does not think any vessel went up to the 7 Ids. this years.