

Filename: Lunenberg.pdf
Title: Interviews of Mackerel Fishermen at Yarmouth & Lunenberg, Nova Scotia, Canada, 1895.
Location: National Archives, Northeast Region, Waltham, MA. RG 22, 15/16/11-6.
Source: RG 22. Records of the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Page 1 [1]

QUESTIONS RELATING TO MACKEREL, USED AT YARMOUTH AND LUNENBERG, N.S., MAY AND JUNE, 1895, BY WM. WAKEHAM AND R. RATHBUN.

When do the mackerel first strike this part of the coast? (Has he any records).

Describe the different schools that come in, and the size and period of each.

How far north do the spring mackerel strike in? (Maitland, St. Mary's Bay, Digby).

How do they strike the shore? Broad on, from the north, or how? What direction do they move? What evidence is there to show that they do not also move north?

How about movements at Pubnico, Barrington and Shelburne?

How far off Yarmouth do they take mackerel with gill nets? In what direction are those mackerel moving?

If mackerel are taken on the gill net grounds off shore, do they not move directly on the shore, and why should one trap interfere with the catch of another?

Do mackerel of the first or second run

Page 2 [2]

ever spawn here?

Do any mackerel run here in the summer and fall sizes?

How about St. Mary's Bay?

How about Digby and other places in Bay Fundy?

Where are brush weirs located in this part of Nova Scotia? For what are they set?

Are traps set specially for any fish but mackerel? No.

Description and sizes of traps.

Where are they located and number between Maitland and Shelburne?

When did they begin to use traps?

On what part of the coast do the traps do best fishing?

History of trap fishing, when were there most. How has reduction come about, and are the few now in use preferable to the larger number? Why?

What was used before traps?

History, sizes, mesh, etc., of seines?

How many were in use?

Where were seines used?

Did they make as good catches as traps?

Page 3 [3]

Why were they given up?

History of gill netting, when did they begin? What has been number at different times in past; and at present?

Description of gill nets.

Seasons.

Places where used.

Comparative quality of catch.

When was mackerel fishery first taken up in this region; what has been its general history? Has anything been published on the subject?

When did they begin to ship mackerel fresh? What did they do before that?

Can we obtain statistics of mackerel fishery here in Yarmouth?

Can we rely upon the reports of the Boston Fish Bureau?

What is salmon season in traps?

How many are taken here every spring?

What sizes do they run?

What is done with them?

To what river do they belong?

Page 4 [4]

Isn't there a large waste of small fish in the traps? Cod, pollock, etc. Could these not be thrown overboard in pursing the trap?

In all of this region are the poles to the traps always set in stones, or do they have soft bottom in places where they drive them?

What depth water should there be in the bowl at low tide.

Do they purse the traps early enough each season to know they are catching the first mackerel?

At what time are the traps taken up between Maitland and Shelburne?

If left in later than the mackerel season, for what purpose?

Are any mackerel gibbed or salted now in this region?

What has been the relative catch of mackerel during the past few years?

What causes yearly fluctuations in catch of mackerel?

Are mackerel as abundant as ever?

Does purse seining have any effect upon

Page [5]

their abundance here? Or does it interfere with their fishery in any way?

Why isn't the Yarmouth Bar trap set on a point instead of in a cove?

What are the shipping ports for Boston? What territory is tributary to each?

At what places in Bay Fundy do spring mackerel occur?

Page 61 [1]

CAPTAIN G.W. NASS, LUNENBURGE, N.S.

MAY 30, 1895.

Interviewed by Wm. Wakeham and R. Rathbun (long hand).

35 years' experience in fishing, cod and mackerel. 4 years purse seining. Has not done much the past 3 or 4 years, but has water boat here, and interests about town. Also 1 mackerel trap net in bay.

The first run, which are the large mackerel, comes on between May 16 and the last of the month. It continues a fortnight, sometimes 3 weeks. When they strike on at the western end of Nova Scotia they are longer (last longer) in passing here than if they strike on the outer shore, nearer this place. This run has now been on here this year about a week. This year the mackerel have been very large, 17 or 18 inches; they generally range from 14 to 16 or 17 inches in the first run.

Last year (1894) the mackerel of the first run came right into the harbors about here. The only time they do so is when they butt right on the shore here. When they come from

Page 62 [2]

the west end of the province they stay farther off shore. In 1894 the first run struck directly into the outer shore, all along from Yarmouth to Inginish at about the same time; and came into the bays.

In fishing for the first run with gill nets they generally set from 5 to 10 miles off shore. The purse seiners operate from 3 to 7 or 10 miles off.

The second run last year came on top of the first run, and the two were practically continuous. The time between the two runs varies; they expect several days and it may be more than a week.

The second run lasts anywhere from 1 to 3 weeks. Generally commences about June 20 to 22, and lasts into July. There is much variation. The general size of the fish is about 11 to 13 inches, with odd big ones among them. This run has usually come into the bays, but some years they miss. Chester Bay used to be a great place for them.

The second run comes down along the land close in, generally. That is when they are

Page 63 [3]

separated from the first run. In the spring of 1894 they kept off as the big ones did. Do not generally find this run far off shore. The bulk are inside of 5 miles off.

The summer mackerel are uncertain. There used to be a run in August, but has not been for the past few years. Size generally 11 to 12 inches, but some may be much smaller. Cannot count on the summer mackerel about here. They come on unawares. Thinks they come in from sea. Chester and Marguerette Bays are the principal ones which they enter about here. The total quantity of summer mackerel caught along this part of the coast is not very great, except in odd years, when they may come in abundantly. They depend upon the spring and fall runs for their largest catches.

The fall mackerel generally strike here (going west) about October 20. Are moving west and the length of their stay here varies. Generally ends about November 15, but some years will continue to December 1, and has known of some remaining until near Christmas. They do not move so fast in the fall as in the

Page 64 [4]

spring.

The small mackerel leave the Gulf of St. Lawrence first in the fall and get them here first, the larger ones following.

In the fall there are lots of schools of young mackerel coming out of the Gulf and following along this coast. They are from 5 to 7 inches long, and he supposed they are of the same years hatching. They will come into the bays in immense quantities. The bays will become solid full some seasons. There are a plenty of these small ones in the Gulf in the fall in different places. (Dr. Wakeham says they are smaller there than the sizes given above).

Has never heard of any of the large pole traps east of Cape Sable, except as noted below (Capt. Pratt, of the Curlew) says there are none. In Chester Bay (Mahone Bay), there is one pole trap off the light house on Quaker Island. It was purchased at Yarmouth. Thinks there is also another such trap in the same bay. These traps would be set for the

Page 65 [5]

second and summer runs of mackerel. Knows of no other pole traps between Chester and Canso.

There are no floating traps between Cape Sable and Lunenburg, unless there may be one at Liverpool. Pratt says there are none. They are used in Lunenburg Harbor (28), Chester Bay, and Margeurette Bay (2). Does not know of any such traps being used between the latter bay and Canso, but in some places they will set their seines something like a trap. Around the east end of Nova Scotia (Canso, etc.) there are a good many of the floating traps, set chiefly for bait.

15 years ago there was only an odd floating trap on this shore; now there are many. They are set to catch all kinds of fish, generally for bait. They take mackerel, herring, squid, etc.

Generally set them here for the second run of mackerel, but last year (1894) and this they were set for the first. In 1894, they were successful as the first run came up in the bays, but this year they have not been. About Lunenburg they are taken out the last of July

Page 66 [6]

or first of August, and are not put back again the same year. 2 or 3, however, were set last fall.

The floating traps are of two kinds, with and without bottoms. The latter are called seine traps and are the most numerous. The seine or webbing here ranges from 73 to 110 fathoms long, but

in Margeurette bay they have longer. The seine is bent into the shape shown in Fig. 1. The foot of the seine rests upon the bottom. There are floats at the upper margin, and anchors or weights at the foot. The ladder connects with one side of the mouth.

The mackerel entering the bays come up the middle, and go out along the east or west sides according as they are moving east or west outside. That is in the spring they would pass out along the east side, and in the fall along the west side. The leader is placed in the proper side of the mouth to meet these conditions.

The depth of the seine must be sufficient

Page 67 [7]

to cover the rise and fall of the tide which is only about 6 or 7 feet, ordinarily.

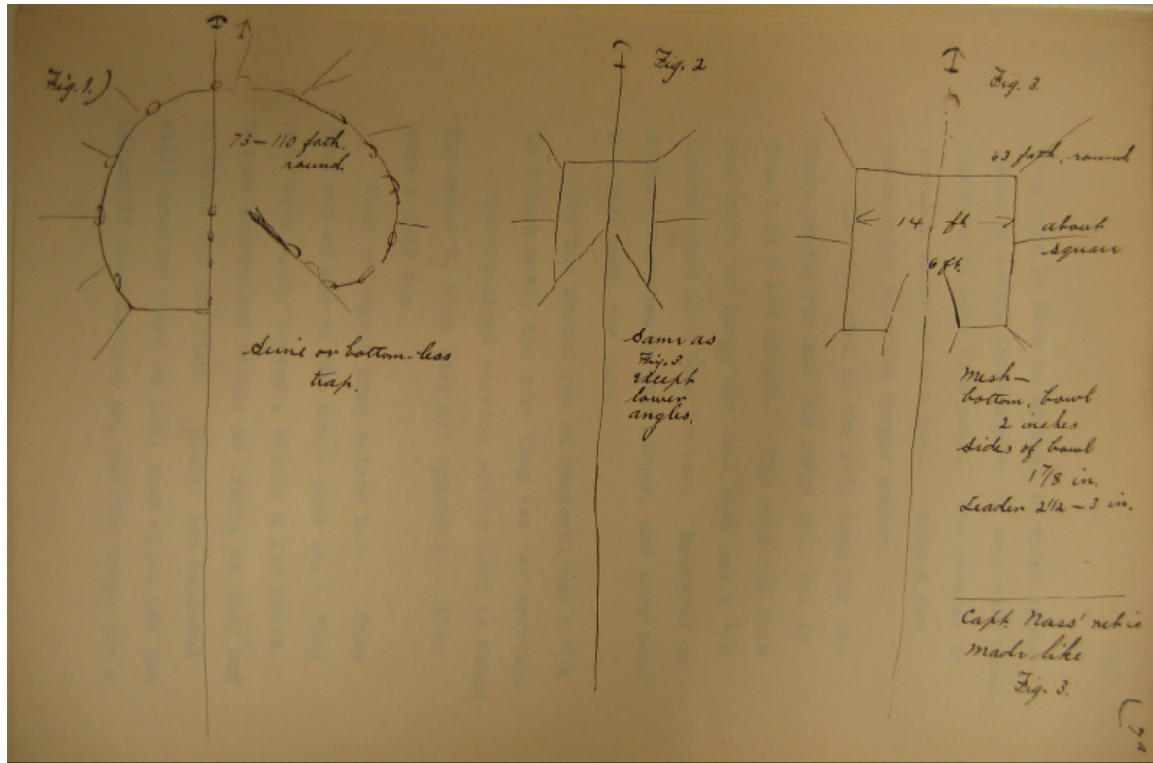
The traps with bottoms are made in two ways as indicated by figures 2 and 3. Fig. 2 is sharp at the inner angles, fig. 3 square, the latter being supposed to hold the fish best. The bowl is about square, about 14 feet, or 63 fathoms around. The leader comes into the middle of the mouth. There are floats, anchors and stays. The leaders do not come up on the shore, at least not in all cases. The bottom rests upon the bottom, which is all muddy about here where they are set, the same being true of the localities of the seine traps.

The mesh in the bottom of these traps is 2 inches, sides of bowl, 1 7/8 inches, leader 2 1/2 to 3 inches. The mesh is about the same in the same seine traps.

Do more fishing with gill nets for mackerel and other kinds of fish than with any other kind of apparatus along the coast from Cape Sable to Cape North.

The principal places for gill netting are

Page 68 [7]



Page 69 [8]

from Cape Le Have to Sambro, in which region there is a very large number of such nets used. Use 5 to 22 nets to a boat. The average is probably about 10 to a boat. Only a few boats which have the larger number.

The size mesh in the nets used for the first spring run and the large fall run is from 3 to 3 ¼ inches. The mackerel this year were too large for that mesh and 3 ½ inches might have been better. Mackerel in olden times used to run larger, and they used a 4 inch mesh for them.

For the second run of mackerel use 2 ¾ to 3 inch mesh, the same they use for herring.

The principal herring season here is about September 1, when they are spawning. Also have a July run.

Used to employ drag seines here. They went out of use as the traps came in. They have been used, however, within a few years. Not so convenient to use as traps, as they had to watch for the fish. Thinks the mackerel still come on shore so that they might use the seines if they desired to, but the traps are a

Page 70 [9]

better method.

The drag seines measured 100 to 140 fathoms long, and 7 to 10 fathoms deep.

In some places they still use drag seines as at Tancook Island. Thinks at Prospect it is all seining. Drag seines are employed between Liverpool and Halifax. Cannot say anything about the region farther east. In the fall they catch many mackerel with seines in Halifax Harbor.

The first run of mackerel seldom comes in close to the shore here, but the seines have been used from the middle of June to the end of November. In some places they make large seine catches.

The only fishermen he knows of who use hooks are from Tancook. They hook only in the fall, September and October. Their principal grounds are North East Shoal (north of Green Island), Bull Rock, Hobson's Nose and Refuse Island Shoal. The mackerel so taken belong to the summer or strawberry run which remain about the shores. At the time they are taken they seem to be playing about these

Page 71 [10]

places.

(Mr. S. has seen them hooking at Liverpool Harbor).

Probably do more or less at different places in September, but Tancook is the principal seat of this fishery. They make a business of it there in the fall.

Only about a dozen purse seiners from Nova Scotia coast. They fish on the Nova Scotia coast and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. There used to be some more, but it is not considered a profitable method of fishing, probably because much of it was begun in poor years.

His chief objection to purse seining is that it is not a sure way of catching mackerel.

The purse seines might scare the mackerel some, but thinks not much. It makes them wild. Doesn't tend to break up the schools. They will dive under the seine and the entire school come up together on the outside. They come right to the surface after diving under the seine, and then may possibly disappear. If after surrounding a school with the seine

Page 72 [11]

you see a few come up on the outside of the seine, you may depend upon losing the entire school. It may make them wild, but does not break up the schools.

The mackerel do not seem to be as abundant on this shore as they used to be. There may be as many mackerel, but if so they keep off more. When he was a boy they used to swarm here. They began to keep off the shore many years ago (that is the appearance of a decrease).

Doesn't think that purse seines have had to do with the decrease about here. Not enough is done by the purse seiners to have produced any effect.

The big fish of the first school never came inshore any more than they do now.

Thinks that the number of persons engaged in the mackerel fishery and the amount of gear as a whole has caused the decrease or has caused the fish to keep off shore.

Lobstering has hurt the fisheries and the mackerel especially, because of the manner in which they occupy the inshore grounds, the

Page 73 [12]

amount of gear, its constant handling, the stinking bait and the foul water caused by the same.

(Pleasant Bay, Magdalene Islands, is covered with lobster pots during the season. When lobstering is going on the mackerel and herring will not come in, but they do so after the close of the lobster season. Thinks the handling of the pots is more to blame than the fouling of the water--Wakeham).

Albacore feed on the mackerel.

The large mackerel going west in the fall are destroyed to a large extent by the squid. This is seen when they are taken in the nets. The squid will devour a large part of a mackerel at times, especially the more fleshy parts, but sometimes only makes bites into the flesh. The squid do a great deal of damage in this way.

(Cod oil is used for leather. The market is really over-stocked for cod oil, and the prices have become low---Wakeham).

Do not ship many fresh mackerel from here. They have poor facilities for so doing, in

Page 74 [13]

reaching the American markets. It is only during the past 2 or 3 years that they have commenced to ship fresh. The most are salted and they are also used as bait. These remarks apply to the first and second as well as to subsequent runs.

Very seldom get any salmon in the traps in Lunenburg Bay. (As there is a fine for so taking them, they may not wish to tell the entire truth in regard to this matter). Salmon are caught very early in La Have River by means of nets. A Mr. Parks seems to do the most of this. This year (1895) he got his first salmon April 1. Last year his first one was taken March 25. These were probably taken about a mile up from the mouth of the river.