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Gloucester, Mass.

Capt. Russell D. Terry

Interviewed by William Wakeham and Hugh M. Smith

Nov. 18, 1893

Aged 52. Has had 42 years experience as a fisherman. Has been in the mackerel fishing most every season up to the present. Name of vessel, schooner Centennial.

Did not go south for mackerel this year. Has always been south before. Has found mackerel about 40 or 50 miles south of Cape Henry, about 40 miles off shore.

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Has been on the ground south sometime before seeing the fish, sometimes 10 days before one saw them. When we did see them they were heading N.N.E. as a general thing. Has seen them in as close as a mile from land, and, again, off 30 or 40 miles. Generally follow them until they get up to Cape Cod, off Block Island. They lose the fish there, and that ends their voyage.

They generally

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strike them then in the Bay of Fundy. The fish strike through the South Channel down to the Bay of Fundy.

Has seen fish south of Georges. They appear to remain there, but some say they pass down to the Cape Shore. See fish south every year that go on Georges and do not strike this coast at all.

Mackerel have a very regular course. They strike anywhere from close in to 30 or 40 miles off.

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Those early fish are very poor. They are full of spawn. Has seen the spawn run out of the quite freely when on deck of vessel. That would be along about May. When they first strike the shore they are full of spawn. Are full of it about the middle of May. Generally have the spawn in them until we leave them. The fish on the Cape Shore also have the spawn in them.

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They fit for the Cape Shore along about the 25th of May. Find fish on the shore for 2 months, but only fish there about 10 days. Some of these fish go through Canso – lots of them. Has never seen schools there, but has seen people that have caught them there. Some of them come out through Canso in the fall also.

Has followed fish in the fall as far south as about 15 or 28 miles off

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Chatham. Leave the fish there on account of the weather. Might catch them later if the weather permitted. Catch them off Chatham sometimes as late as the 25th of November. Those fish, we presume, come from the Bay of Fundy, but cannot say for certain.

Has never caught mackerel in the winter. Never knew anyone on the coast to take them then.

Along about the 4th of November they

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are supposed to be done schooling.

When he was a boy, about 40 years ago, used to fish off Cape Cod the 25th of November, but now do not go much longer than the 25th of October.

Mackerel feed upon different things. Presume they feed on sun-squalls, sometimes bait, and various things. We find these things in them. Sometimes come across a school with this cayenne in them. It will poison

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your hands when you take out the innards.

Mackerel average about the same size as they did 20 years ago. Some years larger, some years smaller.

Does not notice any difference in the habits or movements of mackerel. Since the seining began they school a good deal more than they did before. Does not know that they can catch them quite as easy in the seines now as they used to when they first went seine

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fishing, but does not think there is much difference.

Was on a voyage a number of years ago off Block Island, when they would heave all day until 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon and would not catch a fish, and then probably within an hour every

vessel would catch a school. The spring fish are harder to catch than the fall fish. Spring fish are most always running, and summer fish are

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lying quiet.

Fish are more easily caught about the time of spawning than at other times he thinks. Has never noticed that they lose the fish about the time of spawning. Fish are governed a good deal by the tide in schooling, and also by the weather.

Has not seen, for the last 5 or 6 years, 1/100(?) part as many mackerel as they did 20 years ago. Does not know what has become of them –

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whether they have taken a different route or what – they do not appear to come on the coast. Does not think they have been caught up. Does not think they catch a thousandth part of the mackerel that come along in the spring. Has seen some days, more mackerel, apparently, than the vessels caught during the whole year.

Does not think there was any benefit in the close time law. It was passed

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to help the mackerel and as a general thing the southern fishery was not a paying business.

Used to do better on an average, when they went hooking than they do seining. The whole fleet used to make a better average on the whole. Forty years ago there was more mackerel fishing carried on at Cape Cod than there has been for the last 15 or 20 years. When he was a boy there were three

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firms running there, and from 8 to 10 vessels in each firm, and most always engaged in the mackerel business, but now there is no fishing there at all, hardly. They used to share more evenly hooking than they do seining. One year, about 30 years ago, we had a bad year hooking, but as a general thing they averaged about the same. The vessels expected to make a good voyage every year. Used to carry 15 men hooking. Vessels were about

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40 to 50 tons. The cost to fit out a vessel for hooking – for the fishing gear – was not more than \$10 to \$15. Now it costs to fit a vessel for seining about \$2,500; that is for a new outfit.

The general opinion of the fishermen was that the close time law did not to any good. Does not think a man of them would like to see it renewed. Do not like anything that is compulsory. Like more freedom.

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Does not think there should be any regulations, as far as the east fishery is concerned. Thinks the mackerel will come back in time. 16 years ago, the fishing was very good, and he thought the next season was going to be a good one, so he went to work and built a new vessel; and the result was, when the season came around it was a failure, and was a failure for 2 or 3 years, and they thought there

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would be no fishing, but they came again more plenty than ever; and we have those spells all along.

Does not think the introduction of the purse seine has been a good thing. Think it has been an injury to the fishing community at large. Does not know whether it decreases the quantity of fish or not – may possibly. Do not catch as many fish with the purse seine as are used to in the old days.

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In the year 1831 more fish caught than at any time since. They used to catch from 1400 to 1500 barrels on the hook in a good vessel. Have shared as high as \$500 a man on the hook.

Thinks if they should remove the purse seines there would be a good many men abandon the business. Does not think they could catch as many fish with the hook and line as they did formerly, for the reason that

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the fish seem to have forgotten how to bite. Thinks the fish would come back again if they all went hooking. Thinks, in that case, a larger number would be benefited by it than are today. Lots of boys who are not large enough and strong enough to hand the seine could catch them with the hook, and old men also. Purse seines throw a good many old men and boys out of employment.

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They want men now about from 18 to 45. For seining you want a good active crew and a smart sailing vessel.

Did not catch enough fish south this year to eat. His vessel was gone about 2 months and got only 47 bbls. When he was a boy used to start south about the 19th of May, sometimes not until the 20th. Used to make 2 trips in those days, and get about from 150 to 300 barrels a trip.

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The second trip would be about the 4th of July. Used to fish part of the time, and come in and get our toll bait, and circle around on the southern end of Georges and go home; then went to the Bay of Fundy.

Never saw a purse seine south until about 15 years ago. The seine fishery in the spring on the Cape Shore, began about 8 or 10 years ago. Now some of the best fishing done there.

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Formerly never used to go there. Never used to think of going to the Cape Shore.