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Page 1 [Title Page]

2

GLOUCESTER, MASS.
Interviews by
JOINT FISHERIES COMMISSION.
November, 1893.

Page 2 [1]

Gloucester, Mass.
Capt. H. M. Seelyr
Interviewed by William Wakeham, Richard Rathbun and Hugh M. Smith
Nov. 21, 1893.

Began mackerel fishing in 1870. Has not been fishing for two summers.

Mackerel as a whole have apparently decreased in abundance, but within the last 2 years, seem to be increasing back again.

Thinks the cause of the decrease is from killing so many with the seines.

The first few years they were in the business had no pockets. Would get larger schools of fish than

Page 3 [2]

we have gotten since. Would dress part of them and part of them would die, and the seines would burst and would kill more fish than they took. That trouble lasted until about 12 years ago. The first 7 or 8 years they started in were troubled with bursting seines, etc.

The way we first found the mackerel fishery was going to the Bay hooking. That was about 1872; and they were making good year's work; and in about

Page 4 [3]

1875 or 1876 commenced June seining. In those years quite a number had gone into it.

Up to 1884 the fish continued in abundance, but there has been a decrease since until last year. If the seines were condemned, and a man was not allowed to use one, the vessels would make better catches of fish and more money. Would fish more evenly.

And another thing, the last time we had reciprocity with Canada, would get fish anywhere

Page 5 [4]

then, were having good hooking in the Bay, and the consequence was the vessels had good fishing on that shore with seines, but after that all the vessels dropped on the Bay and came home here and went to hooking, and from that time in the Bay the fish seemed to leave there and come on our coast. Think it was the bait they throw that held them.

When they stopped throwing bait there the fish came on this shore

Page 6 [5]

altogether.

In about 1889 we lost the fish and they went back into the Bay, and the fish 2 years there was good fishing, but after reciprocity run out the fish left the Bay and we could not find them anywhere. Then we went to the Magdalen's and went to throwing bait when we could not find any fish schooling. The bait fishermen claim that brought the fish back, and they have been

Page 7 [6]

catching them ever since. We used to run up on Fisherman's Bank and lay there and throw bait, and consequently it was not long before we would find fish there.

It is his opinion that if every vessel was compelled to stay on our own shore, and throw a quantity of bait, we would bring the fish on our own shore, and would not care about reciprocity or anything else. Think mackerel can be tolled by bait.

Page 8 [7]

Mackerel feed upon small minnows and the red feed principally.

When we went hooking in the '70s would scarcely ever heave to on this Bank (think he refers to Fisherman's Bank-M.), and if we did would never get anything. When the vessels came up then they went to heaving bait on the bank, and the fish have been on it ever since.

The purse seine has done injury to the fish. If it was abolished entirely

Page 9 [8]

in less than 5 years it would be a benefit to every man that goes fishing. Think also, that it breaks up the schools.

In the southern spring fishing at times we killed twice as many fish as we took to market. That was in the beginning of seining. Undertook to put them on the market, and found it overstocked, and would have to dump them overboard. If we salted the fish taken on the southern grounds we could

Page 10 [9]

sell them. They would average from \$7 to \$10 a barrel salted.

Went down then between Cape Charles and Cape Hatteras. Was down there in 1874. They hook just as well down there in the early spring as they do at the north later in the season. Would catch a trip and be home in June to go to the Bay.

Would go down to Cape Charles about the last of April. They go now very much earlier.

In the early days of

Page 11 [10]

the seine fishing we would lose the most fish in June and July. Would burst the seines oftener then. That would be off Nantucket to the western part of Georges.

Think if they abolished the purse seines there would be more mackerel taken on the whole, and a better chance of their increasing. If it could not be stopped entirely, no use to try to stop it at all. Would have to be stopped up to July anyway,

Page 12 [11]

and that would make to short a season for the purse seine. Would not prohibit them in any one place. Would not prohibit them in the southern waters in the spring, nor in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Apparently the fish must lay off on the edge of the gulf stream in the winter. Probably do not all go as far south. The smaller fish may be far south.

The early schools, the

Page 13 [12]

fish come in from the edge of the gulf stream between Hatteras and Cape Charles, and work easterly; and some schools will work in and trim this shore. Fish would be caught just as readily with hook and line as they ever were. When there were many American vessels in the Gulf that used toll bait they took fish in large quantities. When we had an abundance of mackerel we were fishing right along and the vessels

Page 14 [13]

throwing bait, all working easterly on our own shore, and in fact right down into the Bay.

This year and last year they have commenced to stay down there and throw bait, and consequently the whole of that ground is fishing ground. Wherever they throw the bait, fish come. Whether they come for that bait or for other fish that feed upon the bait, is a question.

This year they did first rate. Some men

Page 15 [14]

should be as high as \$600 or \$700.

Think very few owners from here would be in favor of abolishing the seine.

Mackerel spawn in June and July. Around Block Island in July. On the coast of Maine in July. Supposes the spawn is leaving them all the time from the 1st of June to about the middle of July. After the middle of July hardly ever see any spawn in the fish.

The close time law was

Page 16 [15]

passed because a few years ago when all the vessels went south they had to put the price down to nothing. Was not a cent made. They supplied New York with mackerel and got no benefit from it, consequently there was no money in going south, and then they went to work to shut it off, as they thought it would benefit the fishing. Think the close season did some good. He threw away 200 barrels at two different

Page 17 [16]

times because he could not sell them at New York. That was in 1885.

The first 3 years he went for mackerel he went hooking, and averaged about 1,000 barrels a year. He did the best that was done by any vessel from here. After that started seining, and never did so well, but the trouble was he did not know much about the business and had a seine that was not made right.