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Gloucester, Mass.

David Tarr – of the firm of James G. Tarr & Bro.

Interviewed by William Wakeham and Hugh M. Smith.

Nov. 18, 1893.

Began fishing at 9 years of age, and continued until he was 23. There were only a few purse seines at that time, about 1858.

Have no handline fishermen in this country to amount to anything. Sent one vessel, the David Sherman hooking this summer.

Thinks the southern fishery is not a paying

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one. Had 2 vessels south this year and they did not get a barrel of fish. That fishery has always been unprofitable. Never been a paying voyage for 20 years. The close season did not affect the fishery except those who made a specialty of early fishing. In the whole the hook would be less destructive than the purse seine,

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but do not think they will ever bring it about now.

The mackerel fishery as prosecuted at the present time may be compared to the liquor question. We know it is an evil, but cannot stop it. If we could be away with all seines, would like to put them all in a furnace and burn them, but cannot get fishermen to go any other way.

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Had 2 vessels this year with \$1800 worth of seines and boats, that went for two months and a half and never got a solitary fish. Down on the Cape Shore one vessel got 16, and the other 37 barrels of fish. They were careful not to break the Canadian laws. There were years that mackerel were extremely scarce. Has known

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a good many years when vessels would go with hook and line and get 100 to 150 barrels for the season.

There were some of the largest schools on this coast this fall than ever – schools (?) acres in extent. Knows of one case where they rowed right through a school and got 50 bbls., and the fish did not sink on either

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side of them.

The fish are shyer now than they used to be. When the water is cool it is impossible to catch them in day time. They will dive the seines. Most of the fishing done this fall here has been at night.

The old hook and line fishery began in May. That was they went south in May.

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They usually went south in May, and came home and started for the Bay along the middle or last of June, and from that to the 4th of July.

Does not think the seines have any influence in keeping the fish away. They caught more fish in the old days with the hook and line than they do now. Had a larger fleet.

The quantity

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caught by seines is very small as compared with the mass of fish in the water, and the amount destroyed by other fish that prey upon them.

They expected to get lots of fish south this spring on account of the 5 years close season, but never did so poorly. Were lots of fish, but could not catch them.

Thinks the merchants

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generally who fit vessels would have no objections to a close season. Does not think the southern fishery has ever been any benefit. Has been in it 32 years, fitting vessels for it. They catch mackerel in the weirs down at Nova Scotia in the latter part of April or in May when they come in. Thinks the

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close season was a good thing, if they could have had it a little earlier – say 20th of May instead of 1st of June. Does not think the close season increased the supply of fish. Would not make

hardly any difference. Do not catch enough to affect the schools. The fleet amounts to only about 50 or 60 sails. During the summer

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might be 150 sails.

When they went with hook and line they would always get something, now with seines it is the smartest captains and the big crews that get the most fish.

Men get tired of cod fishing in the spring, and go to Block Island or the coast of Maine, or the Bay.

Seiners in the Bay have not

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caught many mackerel for some years in the spring and early in the fall. Vessels get only a few barrels in the fall. One vessel went down one fall and got 300 barrels. Would be in favor of a renewal of the close time law, if they would make the date about 10 days earlier. Does not think the mackerel need any protection. Thinks there

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would be just as many on the coast if there was no close season. As regards the winter fishing, it is not profitable as a whole; except to a few experts, but to the average fishermen it is not profitable. It would be in the interest of the greatest number not to have any mackerel caught before the first of May.

Would not want to

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put any restrictions on the purse seine, because could not get men to go with hook and line. Would not want any international law doing away with the purse seine absolutely. Should want to get out of the business if there were any restrictions put upon fishermen who are fishing within three miles of the shore. The bulk of the

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fish were caught off shore when he used to go fishing. Not many places in the North Bay where they can fish within three miles without tearing their seines all to pieces.

Prohibiting the early fishing would be in the interest of owners of vessels.

In regard to the codfish, experts can have some idea about how they are

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going to work, but cannot tell about the bodies of mackerel.

Has been no small mackerel seen since 7 or 8 years ago until the present season.

When there used to be 200 or 300 sail of vessels go to the Bay and throw bait the quality of the mackerel down there was much better than it is now. Remembers the time

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when Bay mackerel sold for shore mackerel in this market.

Does not know of any legislation that would satisfy the fishermen. Bad to have much legislation in regard to the fisheries. Thinks they had better let the fishermen use any device they wish to catch fish until it is very apparent that it is

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injurious to the fish.

Has fitted out the schooner Jenny Severus with 18 men and 2 seines, and the schooner Commonwealth with the same number of men and seines. On this coast we had the Richard Lester, Ralph Eaton, Epes Tarr and David Crockett. Those that went to Block Island got about enough

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to pay their bills. The Daniel Sherman went to the Bay – she got 160 barrels. Would have got a full trip if it had not been for the weather – very stormy all the time. Those vessels that started late did fairly well considering, but the early ones only got about 200 barrels for the entire season on the Cape Shore in the spring.

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Did not do well. One vessel got 16 and the other 37 barrels.

The dealers, as a rule, would prefer that there were no southern fishery. Our vessels would inform on each other if they caught mackerel before the law was up.

Scientists like Prof. Baird do not think any contrivance of man would reduce the catch of mackerel.

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They say when the mackerel come up from the warm water they have a sort of scale over their eyes and it is easy to catch them.

Knows no reason why mackerel should not be as numerous on our coast at some early day as they have been.

No extent of shore fishery carried on along this coast. There is trap fishing all up and

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down the coast, but do not take many mackerel in the early season. Does not think the poor fishing of this year will affect the number of vessels sent out next year. Used to make lots of money in the mackerel fishery, but have not made a dollar for the last 5 years. Will probably be about the same number of vessels go

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south next year as this year; and should there be a fair catch south in May, the fleet would be doubled, because the Bank fishermen have not done much this year, and they would rush to go mackerel fishing if there was anything to catch. The Gloucester fishermen are rather in a bad way at present.

He

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is interested in the Iceland fishery. Vessels sent there this year got about enough to pay their bills. Only had one vessel at the Grand Banks fishery this year.

Thinks the mackerel fleet will be larger next year, if there is any prospect of catching fish.

The large bulk of the southern mackerel are sold fresh.

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New York fish dealers do not want any close law.

There was considerable argument here in regards to the effect upon the fish that the seines would. We thought catching so many before spawning might decrease the number of fish on the shore. Used to catch lots of small fish and let them go – hundreds and

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thousands of barrels. If these small mackerel should come on the coast and in with the large ones they would catch thousands of barrels and heave them overboard. That waste of small fish has been kept up ever since the purse seine has been in use, but not every year. It has been irregular.

Do not suppose there could be any law passed to

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prohibit the use of purse seines. (?) for mackerel. Wishes there could be. Thinks the fishermen would catch more fish with the hook in the Bay. Most of the fish caught on the hook are caught after the spawning season is over, and they are better fish as a rule.

Vessels do not (?) (?) pockets.

Thinks if

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they could prohibit the use of seines we should be better off. Mackerel would be a good price in the start, but they would soon catch just as many as ever. Sol Jacobs' brother has been fishing all summer and got only (?) barrels.

Could not say as to what fitters generally think about seines, but they all would

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like to see the southern fishery stopped.

The steam seine boat is not likely to come into general use. It is too expensive. The vessels using the steam seine boat this year have not done any better than other vessels. The Augusta Herrick and the Greyling used them this year. Experiments with steam seine boats generally

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(?) have been unsuccessful. There has been nothing new that (?) have got in the way of catching mackerel that has proved more than usually successful.

In 1884 we packed on our wharf 26,000 barrels of mackerel, and bought 15,000 barrels outside. Have not had much business with mackerel since. Prices did not run as high in 1884 as they do now.