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Capt. Eliphalet Wharf of Gloucester
Interviewed by William Wakeham, and Hugh M. Smith
November 16, 1893

Aged 63. Has had 40 years experience in mackerel fishing. His first experience was in 1851. Master of Sch. "Nolice," of Gloucester. Has been south 8 or 10 years seining; and was hooking when he was a boy. When he was a boy found fish off Cape May and Sandy Hook. That was the southern limit. Was about 11 yrs. old then. Used to heave bait and toll them up; were not in schools then. Has used the seine about 6 years. This last 4 years been hooking. Has not been south in the last 4 years. Been hooking in the North Bay. Before that was seining on this shore. Got down to the North Bay in July. Do not intend to be there before the 1st of July. In the Bay after

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the 4th of July. Made for East Point, and then Magdalen Islands. Go down the Bay (Gulf of St. Lawrence) because think we can get better hooking than on this shore. Do not make a practice of hooking on this shore, because think they do better at other places. Thinks seining interferes with the hooking. Remains about 3 ½ months in the Bay. 10 or 15 years ago were no hookers around. Averaged about 20 bbls. a year. Went hooking before the use of purse seines. Could average about 500 to 600 bbls. Has been in the Bay 15 or 16 years. Could fill the vessels. All the rest of the vessels used to get them about that time. Much larger fleet fishing in the bay then than now, about 200 sails. Has been as far north as Gaspe.

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Never been up in the St. Lawrence river, nor on the North coast. He was the first that started hooking. Got 220 bbls. in 1889. Cod fishing in July has been his business, and then go for mackerel.

Gave up seining 4 years ago because he had a vessel with another man, and he sold out, and after sold his vessel, this vessel happened to suit me, so I concluded to fit her for the Bay.

Go down to the bay about the beginning of July, and generally stay until the 1st of November. Last year left the 6th. This year came away the 15th of Oct. There were mackerel there when he left. In the hooking business of late years, after October comes in do not have many fish days, and the reason we do not stay is we only get about

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one day a week and the men get dissatisfied. If we had a seine would stay longer.

Mackerel not as abundant in the bay as they were in years gone by. Could heave vessel to in any part of the bay, and toll up fish and catch them, almost as many as you could take care of. More fish this year than he has seen for 3 years. Are getting rather scarce however. For three weeks use Cape Breton, have seen fish as far as the eye could see. One vessel caught 270 bbls. in 6 days. Went to the Magdalen Ids. about the 10th of July and staid until the 1st of Sept. Got most fish off Grosele(?) Island [Grosse Île]. Did not go over by Miscou. Was up as far as North Cape last year and this year, but did not do anything.

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Last 4 yrs. what mackerel he has caught have been caught from East Point to Magdalen Ids.

Thinks mackerel spawn in the bay about June 25 or along the 1st of July. Spawn was all out of the fish he got this year. Most of them spawn the first of July. Was there about the 15th and did not see any spawn.

The mackerel he caught the 15th of July at Magdalens were the fattest fish. The first mackerel were better than the last ones, but cannot tell much about that as they are different schools of fish. The fish on the north side of the Magdalens are larger than what we get off East Cape. They are the largest size fish there are. At the Magdalens got

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mixed mackerel this year; a good deal smaller than in years past. The first two years I went there got 16 and 17 inch mackerel. Now they average about 13 ½ to 14 inches.

There were 25 or 30 sail there this year, all seiners. Shallow grounds mostly, some places they can seine and some they cannot.

The shore fishermen did well this year. The average boat got from 35 to 40 barrels to a boat of three men. Did the best in July, and the most fish then.

They come out of the bay down through the Gut. Never saw any mackerel enter the Gulf through the Gut. Thinks of the later years most of the fish go around Cape North. See a good many fish when they go down, but in the fall do not see them come back; suppose on

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account of the weather. Did not see many fish on his way home. Was rather too early for them. Thinks the fish that they get at the Magdalens are the same ones that pass along here in the spring. When they leave the bay in the fall, does not think they come this way now, but they used to. Not many go inside Cape Sable now. Go out the other way, and come that way too.

Fish on this shore never trouble the bay any, of late years. Has been on the southeast part of Georges laying at anchor when fish were going down by; - all those fish strike Cape Sable, and when they go home, go the same way.

Does not know what the mackerel feed on in the bays. Does not think they feed on anything

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of late years. Can see this feed in the water, these small fish they are chasing. Have not seen any cayenne this last 4 years, but used to.

It takes longer to raise fish now than in the early days. Will lay now probably two or three hours without raising any fish, and then again will raise them in half an hour; not a very big body. They do not appear to be large bodies of fish at all. Has seen bigger bodies this year, however, looked rather like old times. They came up on top of the water this year. Several times thinks they had 50 to 100 bbls. under their bottom, but had no seine to catch them.

At Magdalens hardly ever see any fish. They do not show.

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When vessels are fishing with hook and line, they keep the fish together. The vessels spread apart more and find the fish. The first year he went in the bay, there was nobody down there but himself, except a cod fishing vessel. I found the fish and did well; other vessels would have done the same had they

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been there. Caught them on the same ground that I caught them this year.

Mackerel are not much preyed upon by other fish. Do not see blue fish in the bay. What disturbs the fish in the bay is the dog fish. Never saw dog fish before until last year. They were in great number at Magdalens. They

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are something new. Mackerel do not like squid very well, although there are plenty of them.

Thinks they get bigger fish with the seines than with the hook & line. When you have a seine and get around a school of fish you get them all as a general thing. In laying to for fish, you cull them out; the small fish come to the surface of the water and

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the big ones stay under.

Thinks the seines are destructive to mackerel. If you have a hundred schools of fish and a hundred seines there, they are going to catch every one of them. Since the seine has been in general use the amount of mackerel taken is not as large as it used to be with hook and line. There were more fish there than now. More

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fish between Cape Cod and Cape Ann. Have not seen any fish for 12 years that I call fish. Attributes the decrease of mackerel to the seines.

When the mackerel first came in at the south we used to catch them on the hook close in. Mackerel had a regular route to go. They used to come up off Block Island around in shore all the way along.

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Now they strike way off. Do not come up as close inshore as they used to on account of the seines. Mackerel would have been scarcer than they are now if the close season had not been put on.

Thinks the same mackerel which they find on the southern ground come up on the New England coast later in the season.

He would favor the close time law. Would do away with the

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purse seines altogether, that is how he would regulate them. Thinks a good many fishermen are of that opinion. Does not think it would cripple the industry. Thinks they would do better. They would take the hooks as they used to do. Might not catch so many fish, but would make more money. Could catch enough fish with the hooks to supply the market, at any rate.

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Cannot catch near the amount of fish on Georges bank that they used to. Large quantities of young mackerel have been destroyed by the seines. More destroyed than are ever brought into port; by catching small fish, getting them meshed, and filling the seine, and then drawing the seine and throwing them away. Have had 500 bbls. in the seine, and picked out 20 bbls.

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and let the rest go. They were all dead. Other vessels catch 4 times as many as I catch; - murder barrels where I murder buckets.

Weirs do a good deal of that too. Of late years they have not been mashed so much, as they have been big; that is, for about the last 12 years.

If they catch mackerel before they spawn it will make them much scarcer. June mackerel are all full of spawn,

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and are poor. The best mackerel we get are in August, then they are fat. Thinks the mackerel along this shore spawn earlier than they do in the Bay.

Thinks a regulation prohibiting purse seining in the bay would be a good thing. That would not cripple the industry to any great extent, and would encourage the hook and liners in the bay, and everywhere, for that matter.

Only

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4 hook and liners from Gloucester this year. Does not know whether there were any along this shore or not. Not much hooking done along here. About every boat has a seine. Boats of any size have a little seine in the dory.

Find sick mackerel in the schools. Find mackerel just as poor in Sept. as in the spring. Supposes it is the result of some disease, that they do not feel like eating.

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Very seldom find other fish mixed with mackerel. But catch dog fish on this shore. Never caught any blue fish with mackerel, but has caught whole schools of blue fish. Lots of blue fish caught off Block Island; also shad and butter fish. All kinds of fish there when he is catching mackerel.

Would favor doing away with the purse seine. Always believed

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in hooking, but lots of captains would not agree to that. They prefer to go seining. It is a quick way to catch fish. Can get 500 bbls. of fish in 2 to 10 minutes. These purse seines clean the ocean right out. Everything they see in the shape of mackerel they capture. If there are 100 schools of mackerel and 100 seines, they will catch them all up.

There are lots of little mackerel growing

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up. Saw a good many this year. They were this year's mackerel. They say mackerel only grow an inch a year after the first year. Has seen fish in the bay and at Magdalen's one year, and the next year would not see them. Did not know where they went.

Mackerel spawn right where you catch them. Off Magdalen's there is a place called the Green Banks where he thinks they go to

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spawn, and then come back to the shore again.

They take the hook freely before they spawn. Catch them as soon as they get in the Bay the first of June. Does not think they bite as freely about the spawning time, but they always used to catch them then. Last years he went seining, they said where we got off No Man's Land we could not catch any mackerel because they

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were getting ready to spawn, but we did catch some. Has never taken mackerel with the spawn running from them that he knows of. Has caught them when the spawn was pretty ripe but not ripe enough to be running. The most he has seen this last 4 years, the spawn was all out of them. Used to find them down south near New York with spawn that was hard.

There has been vessels

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some 30 years ago that have caught 1700 barrels a year. Had some bad years when vessels would not average 100 barrels a year. He never went in the bay but what he got a full fare.

Does not intend to follow the fishing business much longer, but would like to see seining stopped. If you put 50 sails around the Magdalen's with seines, they would clear

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them entirely out; boats would not get 20 barrels of fish; because it is a small place, about 4 or 5 acres, and they would catch them all up; and drive away what they did not catch. There would be a good many complaints made at the Magdalen's if the seiners were to stay there, but it is a pretty hard place to seine and they might lose a good many

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vessels by running on the rocks. There are many bad places in the bay besides the Magdalen's where it is hard to go into for a vessel drawing about 14 feet of water. Tonnage of his vessel 63. Would be lots of money made at hooking if there were no seines. Thinks mackerel are more shy than they used to be. In years past used to jig sometimes all night on

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the west part of Georges. Got 100 wash barrels in a night. This happened when he was young. Seining is easier than jigging, but it is a more expensive outfit.

He got 180 barrels this year. That number of barrels would not pay a seiner. They have a large crew – 15 to 20 men, and the cost of seines and seine boats. All it costs us is our

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boat, which costs in the neighborhood of \$150. Getting two seines ready for sea would cost that much. A vessel under ordinary circumstances would use from 50 to 60 barrels of bait during 3 months fishing. We carry about 60 barrels and generally use it all. We use what we call pogies. It costs us \$1.50 a barrel and put it

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up ourselves, but if we buy it already put up it costs us about \$4.00. Not as easy to get men to go hooking as it is seining. My crew are made up of old men mostly, from 40 to 65 yrs., and some 70 years old. We find men about 50 are the best men on the hook, because young men have not got on to it. My crew go on shares, every man for himself

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gets half his fish. All the hookers have that arrangement. The other vessels with him this summer got about the same as he did. Their names were, the – “M.H. Pickins,” “Christie Campbell,” and “David Sherman.” They carried about 15 men.

Clams, we think are better than menhaden for bait. Take clams generally for change of bait.

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Mix them in with the pogies, about 10 bbls of pogies.

Does not think there was a larger mackerel fleet seining this year than usual. Used to be a great many hookers at one time. This harbor has been packed full as that you could walk from one vessel to another right across the neck. Has seen 500 or 600 sail of vessels when he first went seining.

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Have chased the mackerel to Cape Cod and Cape Ann. That is the last we got. That was the close of the season. They were very large fish too some years. One year they were small.

This year had a good show of fish on our shore; all taken with seines. Last year did not do as well. Did very well at Block Island, for the reason that the blue fish did not trouble them.

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Did not hear how the lobster fishing was; guess they did very well at the Magdalen's. One man said he, with two boys, made \$15.00, with lobsters and mackerel. Get the most mackerel about South Beach at Magdalen's.