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Portland, Maine

Capt. James Ellsworth

Interviewed by Richard Rathbun

Nov. 23, 1893

Goes in different vessels. Owns and charters vessels. This year went in the Lillie B. Fernald. 18 years experience in mackerel fishing.

Does not think mackerel are decreasing at all as a whole. His reasons are that long before there was a purse seine, in hooking times, we had these falling off years every 6 or 7 years. In 1831 there was not a purse seine thought of, and there were almost 500,000 barrels

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of mackerel landed, and in 1884, our best year, there were about 520,000 barrels; about 20,000 bbls. more.

The mackerel, in his opinion, after they grow to be No. 1s, that is large size, do not school except at very rare times. Will see by the records that the years of the largest catch was the smallest size fish, and in 3 or 4 years they grow to these big mackerel.

Did not see the fish

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this spring at the south. We started for the Nova Scotia shore, and when we got there, there was a body of mackerel came from the south and struck on the Nova Scotia shore.

Don't know where they go, but suppose they go up to the Straits of Belle Isle and lay on the bottom. Do not see them until they come back

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in the fall. The later schools that go up the coast are a smaller run of fish; part of them go through the Gut of Canso, but not to amount to anything. There is only a remnant goes into the Bay Chaleur proper. They may go up on the east coast of Labrador, but the great body of the fish go somewhere where our vessels are not looking for them. The small

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fish most generally leave the Gulf last. Most always find the small fish on the tail end of the big ones. Might strike the big mackerel off the Capes of Delaware, while the small fish would be off the capes of Virginia. The small school that goes into the Gulf last will come out first sometimes. When the small fish go into the

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Gulf of come on our own coast, they go up into the bays and harbors more than the big ones.

The fish that go up strike the Cape Shore around Liverpool and Halifax. This year they struck to the eastward of Halifax. We got 136 barrels off Liverpool, about 50 or 60 miles eastward of Halifax, this year. My opinion is that the heft of the fish come from the south, way

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down in the latitude of the capes of Virginia, off the edge of the Gulf Stream, because we have traced them, ourselves all the way up, and we find they make that passage of about 1,000 miles in about 6 weeks. Sometimes they may stop a day when they strike on the southeast part of Georges. The southern part of Georges may be a good fishing ground

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at times. They strike the Nova Scotia shore from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of May. Then it is some 10 to 15 days before they round Cape North. It takes that body of fish as much as 10 or 15 days from the first time we fall in with them until they all get clear.

The fish that go into the Bay of Fundy, sometimes come close in, perhaps 25 or 30

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miles off Cape Cod, and other times off eastward of Georges Bank and over Browns Bank, and strike in east of what we call the Seal Islands, and work over toward Mount Desert. The fish that go around North Cape all go into the Gulf. It is a large school. They are seen clear across on the other side close over on the Straits of Belle Isle.

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The fish born last spring will be about 5 inches in length this fall. Sometimes we see them the next spring and sometimes not.

Thinks some schools remain all summer down off the Capes of Virginia.

Would not consider it expedient to make any regulations regarding the purse seine fishery. Thinks the fish will regulate themselves.

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Does not think it would be any use to have a close season. Does not think it amounts to anything, has not benefited anyone. Mackerel will school only just when they feel like it. His experience has extended back to 1875. Never went hook and line fishing. If the purse seines were given up, thinks it would take some time before the fish could

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be caught in the old way. Some year's fish are wilder than they used to be. When they grow to large size they seem to be very wild; and there are different reasons for making them wild. When there is plenty of cayenne on the surface of the water it benefits schooling; the fish will come on top of the water to school, and feed. When we have a hard

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year you will not see any of that on the surface. It may be underneath the surface, and mackerel will not come up. Thinks it makes the fish tame. Mackerel also feed on shrimp. When they are chasing this feed they are very wild. The shrimp are going every way, and the mackerel are all scattered. Has seen the "all-eyes." Seen them mostly out around

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Block Island, and also on our own coast of Maine and Mass. They are a little fish, not a crustacean. Mackerel will eat herring, and will also eat their own young.

Thinks what (the fishermen) catch does not amount to anything. If these fish stayed year after year it would be a different thing, but it is only a matter of 10 or 15

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days that we catch any.

There were vessels 2 or 3 years ago got mackerel off Liverpool. Some got such big schools that they burst their seines. Could see schools just as far as you could see. That was 3 years ago; and there has been different times that mackerel have showed that way.

The law which made the close season originated right

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through our mackerel dealers, for the reason that vessels would go out and get a trip of poor mackerel, would take them into New York or Philadelphia, and would sell them; and of course, the more that were landed there hurt the market just that much, and the men that bought mackerel the fall before to hold them over; it hurt their trade. The majority

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of the vessel captain's here were not in favor of the close season. The object of the law was to regulate the market, not to protect the fish.

Some of the men interested in the fish business here are – John Emery, E.G. Willard, the Lord Bros. The Jordans have not had much interest in the fish business except for the last 2 or 3

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years. Mr. Whidden and Mr. Smith at one time had the biggest fishing industry out of here. They were the two parties that were interested in getting this law; and the very first ones, when the close season came along, to send their vessels out before the law was up. Mr. Whidden would have but one vessel south; the rest would go to the banks, and would not get any mackerel

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until about the last of June or first of July. Mr. Smith sent some of his vessels to the south, and some to the banks; and he also was buying mackerel.

Doing away with the purse seines would do away with about \$2,000 expenses each year, and I would say, go back to the old times if I thought it better in other ways, but in my opinion

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it pays better to use the purse seine.

The squid are a great enemy to the mackerel, and so are dog fish and blue fish. Blue fish are the worst enemy they have in the sea, but they do not go down east. Last summer they were know to be down in the Bay of Fundy; that is the farthest east that I ever knew blue fish to be.

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(Names of other fishermen)

Eben Lewis lives in Booth Bay, Me. He never goes fishing in the winter, could see him at Booth bay. Also Capt. McGowan and John Seavy, Booth bay. They would be likely to be there during the winter until March. At Vinal Haven there is James Crockett, he is about the principal one there.