

Filename: Gloucester_1.pdf
Title: 1. Gloucester, Mass. Interviews by Joint Fisheries Commission. November, 1893.
Location: National Archives, College Park, MD. RG 22, Box No. 18, E44, Stack Area 150, Row 1, Compartment 17
Source: RG 22. Records of the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Records of the U.S. Fish Commission & the Bureau of Fisheries. General Records. Records of the Joint Committee Relative to the Preservation of the Fisheries in Waters Contiguous to Canada & U.S., 1893-1895. 1893, Gloucester, MA.

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Gloucester, Mass.

Capt. William H. Greenleaf

Interviewed by William Wakeham, Richard Rathbun and Hugh M. Smith

Nov. 20, 1893

Aged 45. Commenced in the mackerel fishery when he was 12 years of age. Was fishing this year. Went out in the Mary A. Clark, but not as master.

Cannot tell when mackerel spawn. Has found them with spawn from the 1st of June to the 20th of July. Has seen them the 1st of June on this coast. Would not say they were ready to spawn, but pretty near to it.

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They begin to let their spawn out by the 10th of June on the Mass. coast. Has seen them spawn the 20th of July in the Bay Chaleur. They do not all spawn at the same season of the year. There is a difference of 6 or 7 weeks. Never fished at Block Island except some little time when coming home in the spring. During spawning time fish are not so apt to come to the surface, especially in the

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Bay Chaleur. More so there than anywhere else.

Before they spawn they are poor. Get fat about 2 to 3 weeks after spawning. They fatten up rapidly after spawning. Late in the fall those fish commence to lose flesh again. Mackerel 6 weeks ago were very fat; today (Nov. 20) are not so fat.

There has been a decrease in the abundance of mackerel. Do not

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find the same quantity of fish that they used to. In 1881-2-3 were very heavy catches.

Had his vessel built in 1882. Entered in the business at that time and followed it up until 1889. Since that time there has been a great falling off in mackerel, but whether there is not as many in the ocean is not prepared to say.

Should say there were more large mackerel according to the quantity caught. Not many

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small mackerel on the coast this year. Did not go south this spring.

Is not prepared to say whether the purse seine has had any effect on the abundance of mackerel or not. The seining must certainly break up the fish and scatter them. Anything that will annoy fish and disturb them will certainly separate them, but in regard to diminishing the quantity, does not know that it does.

Does not know

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that bluefish destroy mackerel, but they drive them and scare them. Does not think whales annoy them much. The horse mackerel probably would drive them.

Does not think the purse seine needs to be regulated in any way. If that is really the cause of diminishing the catch, which he does not think it is, let it go and see.

Does not think much of the close season. Would not sign

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the petition for a close season. It is not late enough to protect the fish. Everybody should know that the spawn is in them at that time. Would not advocate extending such a season to the 1st of July. Would not regulate the seines in any way.

The south mackerel fishery never is to their advantage. A close season might be a protection to the owners of vessels, but otherwise does not see that it is any benefit.

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There is no way in which he would regulate the mackerel fishery. His idea is "catch them when you can."

Would not protect them in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Has been in the Gulf before the war; about 1858 and up to 1866-67 and has seen fish as scarce there as they have ever been since, when the heaviest trip that came out, excepting one, was 94 barrels. That is 24 years ago this summer. Cannot say positively as to the above dates.

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If purse seines were given up, mackerel could be caught with hook and line as they used to be, but thinks it would take time to adapt the fish to the habit of taking bait, but they would learn in time. Does not know whether hook and line fishing would give employment to more men or not,

but probably it would increase the fleet about double, and that would tend to give more work to more men, and give the boys a chance.

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But it would make the share a great deal smaller, unless the price on the fish should double.

Has known them to come home and sell extra large fish for from \$17 to \$19 a barrel. This year they paid \$20 a barrel for the extras.

Seines are a more expensive way of catching them. Vessels generally carry 2 seines – a few only have one. A large purse seine costs about \$840. The last one he had made cost him

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\$1030.

To fit a vessel out with hook and line does not cost anything comparatively speaking. Perhaps \$15 for the gear. But they use more bait. Our vessel went in the 1st of July, and commenced fishing, and would use from 65 to 80 barrels of pogies and clams in a season. Used to pay \$5 to \$6 a barrel for pogies and \$7 to \$9 a barrel for clams. Would use 30 bbls of pogies to 7 to 8 barrels of clams.

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In the hook and line fishing days it began as early as it does now. They used to go as far as Sandy Hook, and from there on North. Would get to Sandy Hook about the 1st to 5th of May. Only about half a dozen sails would go down there. Did not take much account of it.

The 1st of July expected to see them all preparing for the Bay Chaleur. Some would not go until the 10th or 15th of July.

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Vessels that took 200 barrels considered it quite a fine catch, in the southern fishery. Does not think they got any fancy price for them.

Did not begin to run fish fresh into New York until they used the purse seines, although some might have run a few in.

It is within 10 years that vessels have begun to follow fish along the Cape Shore.

Previous to that they used to enter the Gulf of St. L. directly, at the proper season. When

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the vessels formerly entered the Gulf they did not arrive there until the spawning season was pretty well over. The earliest he has ever been in the Gulf was the 1st of July. After the 20th of June they used to bite quite well until they settled, apparently to spawn. They had then a very small fleet, perhaps a half dozen to a dozen.

Did not use gill nets then. Only knows of 2 vessels that carried gill nets. All the

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gill nets he ever saw used there were used by the Nova Scotia people at the Magdalens.

In 1883 some 4 or 5 seiners commenced around Lockport, N.S.

Has not been in the Bay Chaleur for 5 years.

Never went menhaden fishing.

As a general thing when you find a school of fish, do not find much difference in the size. Some schools that are No. 1s have a few No. 2s

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mixed with them. Some years ago when tinkers were very plenty they would bail up considerable quantities of them, and as they did not want them, would throw them out.

Does not think the introduction of the purse seine has been a good thing. If the purse seine had never been invented, and the trawls never put in the water, considers our fishing industry would be just as well off. The fleet as

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a whole has been benefited by the use of the purse seines. They are benefited every year by the use of them. Thinks the trawl has been injurious because it is apt to clean the fish up faster than they multiply. The trawl line and purse seine have cheapened the price of fish because it introduces more on the market. Always has been a demand for all the fish taken.

For the last 3 or 4

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years a smaller number of vessels engaged in fishing than there used to be. In good years a greater number of vessels purse seining than there ever was with the hook and line.

The percentage of large fish is just as great now proportionately as ever. They have been larger this year according to the number taken than for some years before.

No mackerel lost by the feed burning their stomachs; that is

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for the last 3 or 4 years, because they have not caught them in large enough quantities. Now we bunt the seine after pursing and do not kill them. Probably out of 100 barrels would be 10 or 12 barrels that would get killed. The loss from this cause was the greatest in the southern fishery. Was fishing south in 1884-85-86. There was a great many fish brought in during those years, and as people

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did not want them, had to heave them overboard. Nothing else to do with them.

Has known of scattering mackerel being caught in the winter months down on Brown's Bank. They were small fish. Would be taken from the stomachs of cod fish. Could not say what caused them to be there, but probably were spawned in the Bay Chaleur and came out late. Has known them to be caught there in January. Has heard of mackerel

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being taken with the herring at Newfoundland in the winter, in Fortune's Bay. Has seen them in January and also in February. They would be medium size fish. Good No. 2 fish. Never saw larger ones.

Mackerel stop in the Bay of Fundy as long as anywhere. After they once get there in the middle of July will find them all the rest of the summer.

They catch them later, however, around Block Island then anywhere else.

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Has seen fish around the Sable Islands in August. Does not know which way they were going. About the 16th of August every year they see fish schooling around the Sable Islands; that is, people living around there.

Mackerel generally strike Cape Sable in the spring about the 12th of May, and sometimes as early as the 9th.

(Capt. Adams thinks it is a little later, about the 18th when they are taken in the

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traps at Yarmouth.)

They enter the Gulf of St. Lawrence before that time. They are seen after the first spring tides in May.

Those early mackerel go in around Cape Breton. The second run begins about June 20. They come around Cape Breton also. Very few go through the Straits. A few go through the Gut of Canso. Does not think large schools go through the Gut of Canso. Remembers one

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year – thinks it was 1885 – a large school went in through the Straits of Canso, but they were small fish. That year (1885) he went through the Straits of Canso about July 5, and from the time he went into Chedabucto Bay they never were out of sight of fish. They were tinker mackerel, and were in abundance, but those small fish do not remain long in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and do not go far north. Probably not as far as North Cape.