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Gloucester, Mass

Capt. Sol Jacobs,

“ John Chisholm

“ Joseph Smith

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

Nov. 21. 1893.

Capt John Chisholm has not been fishing for mackerel in 3 years, but did engage in that fishery previously, from that time he came to this country, about 25 years ago. Is now a fishery merchant in Gloucester. Had 14 vessels this year, of which 7 went mackerel fishing.

Capt Sol Jacobs has been mackerel fishing for 23 years. Is now Captain of the sch. Ethel B. Jacobs.

Capt Joseph Smith has been mackerel fishing about 25 years. Now

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captain of schooner Mabel R. Bennett, but has interests in other vessels also. The furthest south he ever saw mackerel was in 35 degrees north latitude, about the latitude of Body Island, just north of Hatteras. At the same date has seen them some 3 or 4 degrees north of that. Once saw them the 18th of March in 38° 11'. That was a number of years ago. This spring the furthest south he saw them was about Body Island.

The southern

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seining fishery has been going on for 18 or 19 years.

Has gone as far as 37° 30'.

Would be some variation where the schools first appeared. Does not think the fish ever go to the gulf stream. Think they occur inside the gulf stream from off Body Island to Chincoteague. This mackerel go north. They lay along from Body Island to Cape May for 2 or 3 months, February, March and

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April. Has seen fish in February at the south, and the same place some 24 years ago, when down there in the bark J.S. Winslow. The fishermen never go there to look for them in February.

A few straggling fish will be caught in the neighborhood of Block Island in the weirs about May 10. Mackerel do not become abundant there before June.

Then the schools go north, and the school

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that goes to the Cape Shore goes over and around Georges, the southeast part of Georges. Those go directly to the Cape Shore about N. and E.N.E. We consider the biggest body of those mackerel go up the Straits and into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Strike the Nova Scotia shore from Cape Sable to Scatteri. They come right in from the gulf stream. They strike down about a certain temperature

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water and keep working east until they get pretty well down the Nova Scotia shore and strike right in.

Has followed large bodies of fish right down N.N.E and they struck right on the bell of the Cape. They struck all the way down the Cape Shore, and never struck down Canso until 2 days after they struck the Cape. The main body struck first at Cape Sable. Some went

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up into the Bay of Fundy. Got fish on the Cape Shore 4 days before they got them at the Magdalen's this year.

The heavy body of those fish came in from the south and go in from about N.N.E. Strike well toward Sable Island and cross Western Bank.

Mackerel strike the Maine coast about the 1st and 10th of June this year. That would be rather earlier than usual.

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The best schools come later than that about the 15th to the 20th of June.

Have caught them in the traps at Yarmouth as early as the 10th or 12th of May. About the 18th of May have fair fishing at Yarmouth.

The first fish that go into the Gulf go right down around Scatteri. The Mollie Adams followed them, and struck from the Cape Shore to North Cape, right in the field of ice. The ice was

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late and the mackerel early. They go right up between Magdalen's and Prince Edward Island.

Capt. Jacobs followed them up as far as Gaspé and lost them. Does not know whether they went up on the Labrador coast or not. This summer they traced them up pretty well, and they went up on the Labrador coast. Have followed them through the Straits of Belle Isle.

The first school is much larger than the second

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and comes in through the main entrance. Goes mostly the same way down the Cape Shore. Three schools go down, 3 to 5 days following each other. The second school goes around mostly as the first. The third school strikes the Cape Sable shore. There are 3 sizes. Some of the third school goes through the Gut of Canso, but not a large proportion. Mostly go through the main entrance. The second and third

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schools do not go very far north, and come out earlier than the others. This fall the 1st of November they were going by Halifax. Then the next school that comes are a little larger. The schools around Prince Edwards Island belong to 2 or 3 schools. They go as far north as the Magdalen's, and get on the main shore, on the New Brunswick shore; and some up in the Bay Chaleur. Does not think

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they go up on the Labrador shore. The first school will average about 100 barrels. We caught them when they would go 117 fish to 200 pounds. They were about 16 to 21 inches long. The largest body of mackerel he ever saw was this fall about the first part of November, from Louisburg all along the Cape Shore. The size of the second school is from 12 to 14 inches, and the third school

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about 11 to 13 inches.

There are a good many fish go into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. They do not school as there as in the Gulf of Maine, and it is not so easy to take them. They do not appear to show good when they got down there.

The reason they do not bite down there is because they have so many gill nets; that breaks them up and scares them. Thinks if they did not have the gill

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nets down there they would school better. Gill nets are the worst thing they ever put in the water for any fisherman, whether hook and line or anything else.

Used to get these large fish in the old days with hook and line. Used to get them on the north and south sides of Prince Edwards Island; and at the Magdalen's. Larger fish at the Magdalens and north and North Cape, and at 7 Islands; and around

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Brine Island are some of the largest fish that are caught in the Gulf. About 13 or 14 years ago began to follow the spring schools on the Cape Shore. Jacobs made the first trip to the Cape Shore that he knows of. He was in the schooner Sarah M. Jacobs. The next time he went down in the Edward Webster and got a trip. At that time they were getting plenty of fish on our own

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shore; that was the reason they did not go down there, and the fleet of mackerel vessels was small. He had followed them down from Georges right down to the Cape Shore.

In the spring before last Jacobs was out about S.W. from Georges, about 90 miles south by east from South Shoal Light Ship, and those fish were going right down N.E., and he followed them right down the

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Cape Shore to Canso.

After the fish start to move north from the southern grounds until they reach the Cape Shore they are moving too fast to make it possible to catch them. They are moving at the rate of 5 miles an hour. Sometimes they go even faster than that.

The fish coming out of the Gulf in the fall, as they pass down the Cape Shore, are only seen at night. Do

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not appear in the day time, and fishing has to be carried on mostly at night. About 10 days ago, about the 10th or 12th of November, there were some of our fleet off Canso, some off Louisburg, some off Sidney, some off North Cape and off St. Paul, and fish were seen at all of these places at the same time, and all going in large bodies. Seemed as though there were 200 miles of them. Those fish were moving by

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Sidney for 10 days, and going by Halifax for 10 days.

From Grand Manan to Cape Cod, while there may have been plenty of fish during the summer, they did not school well, and very few were taken.

This fall a large body of schooling fish were seen at the south of No Man's Land out by Block Island. That was in July and August; all large fish. Vessels could do nothing with them because they were going very fast.

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There were thousands of them southwest of South Shoal Light Ship going to the northward in September, and the first thing we know they turned up in Boston Bay about the 1st of October, from Cape Cod to Thatchers Island. All through Cape Cod Bay. Capt. Smith saw an immense body of fish at Monhegan at the same time, and they were reported at Mt. Desert Rock at the same time. Also all up along Portland. These

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fish were about all large fish. They staid about a fortnight. Had a north east wind, which broke them up. They kept moving south all the time. They got them up to the 20th of October. Also other fish were present in Massachusetts Bay subsequent to that, and were taken in the weirs at Truro as late as November 10. Some very large mackerel were taken during last in the gill nets in Ipswich

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Bay.

About November 15 Capt McGinnis, Sch. Landseer, saw a large body of fish S.S.E. of Boon Island, 10 or 15 miles, probably, in the night.

Capt. Jacobs has caught them in Mass Bay as late as the 20th of November. Capt. Smith has caught them about the same time. Capt. Chisholm has caught them as late with the hook. Caught 17 barrels in Barnstable Bay on the 17th of Nov.

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That was about 1870.

Capt. Jacobs caught some mackerel around Block Island last year as late as Christmas. Taken with the hook and line. This year they appeared to leave pretty early. Does not think there are any there now.

No southern fishing in the fall, and therefore cannot say anything about the movements of the fish after they leave this part of the coast.

Mackerel leave the coast of Nova Scotia about the 25th of November.

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There were larger schools this fall than he has ever seen before. As a rule, have larger schools in the fall than in the spring. Capt. Smith thinks they are in larger bodies while moving along the coast up and down than when they are practically at rest and feeding.

None of these captains have caught mackerel in the winter. Capt. Smith has known of small ones taken out of fish on the southern

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part of Georges, from the stomachs of codfish. They were tinker mackerel, and only an occasional one. Capt. Jacobs caught about 20 last winter down in St. Mary's Bay, Newfoundland, with the seines, with herring. That was the 2nd of December. They were about 13 inch mackerel, No. 1s. Has seen large mackerel come ashore and die on the beach in December on the Newfoundland shore.

They are

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never so good on the Newfoundland coast as they are on this shore. Never so fat. In 1876 we went right down to the Cape Shore and caught 450 barrels, when the last school they got was about N.N.E. from Scatteri, about 25 miles. They could see the ice plainly from the deck of the vessel. All those fish were apparently benumbed, and were not very fast at all. Had been going fast previous to this. This was about

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the 4th of June. Lost them just short of the ice. Seemed to come up a little breeze and they sunk. Seemed to be frozen stiff.

North side of Prince Edwards Island from East Point right up to the west Cape of Prince Edwards Island is the best fishing ground in the Bay Chaleur for mackerel, and the best feeding ground. Around the Magdalen's is a good place to hook, and Bird Island is a nice place to

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hook. Often larger mackerel around there than anywhere in the Bay. The best hooking place in the Gulf is south from East Point.

On the Cape Shore there are not many fish excepting as they are traveling east or west. A few summer fish of small size. A number of good schools taken in the Bay of Fundy up to last year, but nothing this year. This is above Grand Manan in St. Mary's Bay, some

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seasons get some fish, but very small size. That is on the west end of Nova Scotia, about 30 miles north of Yarmouth. In the St. Mary's Bay is a resting place, to some extent, for them in the summer, but not at Yarmouth.

The Gulf of Maine is supposed to be our best fishing ground during July, August, and September. This year it was very good in October. Block Island

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is a good fishing ground. Our vessel found the best there this season of anywhere. Cape Cod Bay is a good place in October and November while fish are moving south.

This spring from the 1st to the 10th of May found mackerel about 80 miles off shore from Five Fathom Bank Light Ship, and about 120 miles from Sandy Hook.

Predaceous fish destroy more mackerel

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than the whole fleet of vessels. The principal fishes are the blue fish. Squid are very bad, and also dog fish. Whales also are very destructive. Also horse mackerel, bonitoes and albacores. All the larger fish appear to be after the mackerel. Gannets are about the worst thing yet. Get 10 or 12 of those small mackerel out of one gannet.

Pollock are just as bad as any fish. Gulls take the young fish, but not

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big ones. Mackerel are found in the cod fish on Georges in the summer to some extent. Pollock prefer mackerel to herring.

The very small fish generally appear to go together. That is the tinker and the larger fish go together until they get up to 12 inch mackerel, and then they mix together. The schools that pass down the Nova Scotia shore in the fall are about all large fish. The fish they

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catch on the southern coast, some are large and some small. Generally our early catch there are the largest fish. They did not take many of the small tinkers seen last spring at the south, and

they have not been seen since. Only one vessel took any. Except these very small fish, the remainder were about all large fish.

Capt. Smith thinks that the number of mackerel taken by man, compared

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to the number killed by predaceous fish and birds is as to a drop in a bucket of water.

In 1883 or 84 Capt. Chisholm, coming from the Bay of Fundy, southeast from Monhegan, about 10 miles, saw a body of mackerel which was being attacked by dogfish. The mackerel were each wheeling, and he decided to set the purse seine about them and take what he could. The purse seine

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was set around both mackerel and dog fish, about 50 barrels of dog fish, and about 50 barrels of mackerel; and there were about 25 barrels of mackerel that were caught and mutilated by the dog fish, which had continued feeding upon the mackerel during the process of pursuing the seine.

Capt. Jacobs, in setting for a pod of mackerel containing perhaps 10 or 12 barrels, which were chased by dog

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fish, pursued about them and took the business in, and found that the dog fish had about destroyed them all, so that there was no attempting to save any of the mackerel.

(They told several stories about the dog fish chasing mackerel in different places in Mass. Bay, doing much destruction to them).

Capt. Smith says dog fish will each wheel around small bodies of mackerel and feed upon them. Probably about 50

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barrels of dog fish in one instance as observed by him, and about 2 barrels of mackerel.

Capt. Jacobs tells of mackerel being frightened by horse mackerel and getting up alongside the vessel and small boats for protection.

Scattering mackerel are found over very large areas in the summer season, and over the mackerel grounds.

Capt. Jacobs thinks the percentage of large mackerel is greater this year than it has

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has been for 23 years before. Capt. Smith says the percentage of large mackerel is fully as great as ever, - and that is Capt. Chisholm's opinion.

Mackerel have different kinds of feed. They feed on a little fish we call sand fleas, and another little fish that we call alleyes. The best feed is the red seed, and it is the most common, and they like it the best. The red feed will burn their stomachs

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pretty quickly, but the alleyes – a species of fish – will not. At the Seven Islands they feed altogether on lant.

Mackerel with full stomachs will not keep as long as mackerel with empty stomachs. These alleyes are about 1 1/2 inches in length.

The big mackerel will eat their young. Will eat them 4 1/2 to 5 inches long. Find a great many young mackerel in the old ones.

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They feed on these alleyes mostly in the Bay.

This fall the mackerel on the Cape Shore were full of young mackerel, and last fall also, and this happens every year. The old mackerel will begin to feed on the young ones from the time they hatch until fall.

Mackerel do not feed at all times. Do not think they feed at night. They must be moving around to feed. They do not feed during the spawning season, for

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the reason that they do not have anything in them then. When the spawn is running from them, find nothing in their stomachs.

Mackerel spawn from Block Island up to Gaspé. Would begin to spawn as early as the 4th of June in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and continue until the 1st or 10th of July, and some times until the 17th of July. Do not apparently spawn on the Cape Shore. Never saw small mackerel at Seven Ids.

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during the summer. The mackerel evidently spawn at different times in the Gulf, because when the young of one year are passing out they occur of different sizes, from 6 to 9 inches. On the American coast they probably spawn somewhat earlier. Capt. Jacobs thinks that they spawn

about the same time on the American coast that they do in the Gulf, even down to the Block Island. He judges this by the fact

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that fish born that year are about the same size at the two places.

The fish in the same schools do not all mature at the same time. Capt. Chisholm, Capt. Jacobs, thinks there is not much difference in the date of spawning fish in the same schools.

Get them during both day and night with spawn running out of them. It takes a fish 2 or 3 days to spawn, and it may take a week.

Fish remain

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about up to the surface when they are spawning, about a foot or two under water. That is Capt. Jacobs' opinion. Capt. Smith thinks they go down rather deeper under water when they spawn than what Capt. Jacobs says. Mackerel in the spawning season never show at the surface of the water. Capt. Jacobs says 1 to 6 feet is as far as they go under water. He is quite positive of this

All the

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Captains think there are just as many mackerel to day as there ever was. In 1881-2-3-4 were years in which there was an abundance of small mackerel. They were nearly all small ones. Only a very few large ones mixed with them. They see more large fish now than they did at that time. The Cape Shore fish were small those years, but were not so plenty as they have been the last 3 years.

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Capt. Smith believes there should be no law to regulate the fishery. Capt. Jacobs wishes there could be a law made to regulate gill nets. Capt. Chisholm thinks gill nets are an injury to the fish if left out a week or fortnight at a stretch. Gill nets are stationary and an obstruction to the fish. Capts. Smith and Jacobs think pound nets and weirs destroy more fish than the seines. They will destroy lots of little

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codfish.

Capt. Jacobs does not think the purse seine has ever done any injury. Capt. Smith does not think the purse seines are an injury any more than any other method of catching them. Capt. Chisholm is of the same opinion.

Capt. Smith has no doubt but what the gill nets, pounds and purse seines, and the hook and line fishing, tend, if the ground is fished to any extent, to scatter the fish and change their

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course and habits, but not particularly to diminish them. Thinks the nets diminish them more than anything else. Does not see how you could regulate the purse seine fishery. They do not think the close season did any good. In the first place, the southern fishery was carried on at a loss, and yet a number of captains would go early and probably be fortunate enough to get a few fish;

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and there were thousands of dollars lost in the business one year after another, and yet we could not bear to stop it, so we got this law. Think that it is the opinion of 90 per cent of the men that this experiment did no good. Capt. Chisholm had two vessels there last spring and caught one mackerel. Capt. Smith had 2 vessels there and got 2,000. This law was put through

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with the expectation that it might be of some benefit, the business having been carried on at a loss.

We have destroyed more mackerel by going down the Cape Shore this last three years, by killing those large fish which were full of spawn, than we did for the last 20 years by going south. Thinks they do more damage by the Cape Shore fishing in the spring than they do with the southern fishery = Jacobs.

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For the last 5 or 6 years small mackerel about 6 to 8 inches long have been very abundant and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and these have not been seen the following years in either instance. These are preyed upon to a great extent by the squids and that has been especially the case this year; more so than he has ever seen before, but also a larger number of small mackerel this year than ever before.

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Do not see any large quantities of two-year-old mackerel which should be derived from these young ones. But a very small quantity of these two-year-old mackerel have been seen principally around Block Island. The question is whether they have been destroyed by the squid or whether

they have a place where they remain unobserved until they attain a larger size. There may be some place off

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shore to which they are in the habit of schooling which has not yet been found out.

(On the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence mackerel are only (?) (?) (?) years. It is rather the exception than the rule to see them – Dr. Wakeham).

In the old years there was good catches made, but where (?) (?) (?), but now, (?) (?) (?) (?). The pinkies would carry (?) to (?) men and the

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larger vessels 20 to 25 men.

Capt. Jacobs thinks that the fish which keep up the supply are those born on the American coast, not on the Cape Shore or in the Gulf. Hardly ever find very large schools in the Gulf. In the Gulf of Maine they get larger schools than elsewhere. Most of the traps are east of Yarmouth to Cape Sable, and some around Canso, on the coast of Nova Scotia.

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A majority of the fish there are caught between St. Mary's and Cape Sable. The gill nets used from Cape Sable down to Louisburg from 3 to 6 miles off shore take the large fish which pass up that shore in the spring. Capt. Jacobs tolled a quantity of fish around the vessel this summer and tried to kill them with dynamite but would not kill over a dozen. Dynamite tried on cod fish showed

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that they would not come up to the surface from a depth of more than 7 fathoms.

Purse seines will not be used much in the Gulf of St. Lawrence inside of 16 or 17 fathoms, as the bottom is so rough the seines would be torn, and the mackerel are not schooling fish as they are on the American coast, and when they do school they are going all over the

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water, and could not catch them. Never will be carried on with marked success. More been done previous to this than will ever be done again.

Capt. Smith is decidedly against any legislation that will prohibit purse seining.