

THE PORT OF PROVINCETOWN 1776-1900, By George D. BryantOur Little Fishing World

"The finest fleet of bankers that ever lived or existed was down at Provincetown.there was no finer fleet ever sailed the ocean than went out in the Grand Bank business from Provincetown."

Said George Ira Tarr (1856-1929), Gloucester and Rockport, dealer in hake sounds. Spoken to the Joint Special Committee to Investigate the Fish Industry, State House, Boston, March 1918.

Provincetown was built principally from the profits of the salt codfish trade as it was carried on in the 18th and 19th centuries. At times and in their proper seasons, all other forms of fishing common to the Western North Atlantic region were pursued and developed by our men sailing in vessels of all descriptions, but none ever rivaled salt codfishing for importance or duration. Prior to the settlement of the town it was a station for Cape Cod Bay mackerelling. American whaling began here and was exported to Nantucket long before the Revolution. Lobstering as an industry, began here. Each year during the late 19th century from August to October our harbor was the rendezvous of the east coast mackerel fleet, numbering several hundred schooners with seine boats. Dragging for fish, as distinct from beam trawling, was invented in Provincetown by immigrant Portuguese fishermen about 1895. In this country it is difficult to find another town whose fortunes have been so totally tied for so long to fishing as this one. The inhabitants of years ago had no choice of occupations as the land was unsuitable for farming or grazing. For the bulk of our population for most of our history it was a matter of fishing or leaving. A writer to the Provincetown Advocate in 1874 referred to "our little fishing world", - and indeed it was.

The remarkable growth of Provincetown from the 1770's to the 1870's can be illustrated and contrasted in a number of ways. In 1776 the metropolis of the Cape and Islands was Nantucket with 4500 people, 15000 sheep, a whaling fleet of 150 ships employing 2000 men, gathering 30000 barrels of sperm and 4000 barrels of whale oil annually. Two fulling mills processed the wool, a factory made candles from the sperm oil and four other mills operated in the town. In the same era the towns of Cape Cod were underdeveloped by comparison. The average town had a thousand inhabitants, with Provincetown well below that figure. By 1870 Provincetown had become the largest and busiest town in the same area with a population of 5000 people. Fate had turned Nantucket into a virtual ghost town. One hundred years of hard work, good fortunes and high profits in the fish trade had built a town here that visitors called: "The City in the Sand."

The Labrador Codfishery -- or the 2000 Mile Limit

The adventurous young Provincetowner in the years following the Revolutionary War was more than likely to work one or more summers fishing for cod off "the Labrador". The territory was familiar as the town had sent whalers there for many years. In spite of the long voyage down to the numerous bays of the Labrador coast the men were in fact engaged in an inshore codfishery. While fishing they were always in sight of the shore working in pairs in the same manner that had been the custom of New Englanders for the previous 150 years. The men themselves were nearly all of the original immigrant stock with surnames such as Snow, Cook, Mayo, Rich, Nickerson, Smith, Dyer, etc. They or their fathers had travelled up the Cape to found Provincetown from their birthplaces in Sandwich, Barnstable, Yarmouth, Harwich, Eastham and Truro. But for the different appearance of the cliffs of Labrador surrounding them they were skimming the waters for fish in the same manner as they did at other times of the year in the bay between Plymouth and Provincetown.

The best accounts of the Labrador fishery date from the first decades of the 19th century. Each schooner was from 45 to 100 tons burden and carried a crew or as many as twelve men. The vessels sailed from Provincetown after the 1st of May and up to the 1st of June in order to be sure that the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Strait of Belle Isle would be free of floating icebergs. The only provisions that the vessels would bring from Provincetown were salt pork, salt beef, biscuits, coffee, flour and water. Later, off Labrador they would augment this with what they caught along with puffin eggs, which in their fluid state were used as a substitute for cream or as a snack while fishing if hardboiled. Bait in the form of pickled mussels or clams was carried from Provincetown to allow them to fish immediately upon arrival in Labrador. When the need arose local bait such as the capelin was used. They entrapped or shot sea birds such as gannets and Mother Carey's Chickens which were chopped up finely for bait if fish were unavailable.

The crew's fishing day began at 3 A.M. with the captain shouting: "All hands, Ho!" After being fortified with a breakfast of meat, bread and coffee the men set out in large dorys or what came to be known as the early version of the Hampton boats: they were a little more than twenty feet long, clinker-built with a moderately sharp bow and a pinkie stern, sometimes provided with a large foresail and a smaller mainsail. Aboard the schooner the boats were either lashed on deck or hung in stays. While fishing one man stood in the bow and the other in the stern and each manipulated two handlines. The catch was contained in a pen between them. The boats anchored and fished inshore waters whose depth varied from 10 to 20 feet. The three or so boats from each schooner tended to travel together and were usually close enough so the men could pass a comment or joke from one to the other. Frequently a Labrador harbor would contain 300 of these boats each catching about 2000 codfish a day. During the morning aboard the vessel the Captain, cook and four men who were not fishing prepared for the return of the boats at noon by erecting gutting and salting tables and carrying materials and green salted fish to shore. After the midday meal the same boat crews returned to the grounds for the balance of the daylight hours while the six aboard the vessel processed the fish for drying on the rocks ashore. Cod livers were saved and put in barrels where they fermented. The drying of the fish on the

immediate shore was one step that distinguished the Labrador from the later Gand Banks fishery where all of the fish was carried home green or undried.

The day didn't end for the Labrador men until 12 Midnight when they washed up, put on clean clothes and headed for the forcastle for three hours rest. No fishing was done on Sunday and the day was often used by the captain to transfer the vessel to another harbor. When the capelin struck in the harbors, they did so in great numbers to the extent that a cucumber-like odor was sensed in the air. The lure of the capelin brought codfish in in masses at which point some vessels would set up a deep shore-anchored seine to pull around the feeding codfish with the aid of boats and capstan. By the 1830's the fishermen in this trade earned from \$16 to \$30 per month depending on performance. Some of the fortunate skippers were able to acquire several vessels because the profits could be quite considerable. So were the risks. The Labrador codfishery as well as the early whaling activities provided the substantial amounts of capital necessary to keep Provincetown growing and the fleet healthy. In those days, most vessels more than ten to twenty years old were considered overage for high seas employment.

Life Ashore in the Early 19th Century

"During the greater part of (the War of 1812) with Great Britain (Provincetown) was occupied by the enemy, who kept a strong squadron almost constantly stationed here, enabling him not only to dictate not only the terms upon which its inhabitants were permitted to exist, but also to cripple our commerce"

Said James D. Graham, Major, US Corps of Topographical Engineers in his 1836 report on the Chart of the Extremity of Cape Cod.

Except during the wartime occupation, the town was in a state of steady growth and foment. Religion played a prominent role in the life of the village. Until the early 1830's the Congregational Church was the established religion of the town and all taxpayers supported it whether they liked it or not. The detailed set of Town assessor's records prior to the year 1833 are not presently found at the town hall. It is my theory that they may have been in the possession of the deacons of the Congregational Church. It is hoped that they will turn up some day and give us a more complete record of those early years. Those records still there give a rather complete and detailed record of real and personal property ownership in town. If a man owned a "sain" to go fishing, it was so stated. If Widow Elliott owned one-sixty fourth part of the schooner Eagle it was also recorded. A person sometimes owned shares in vessels but did not own a house.

The houses of the early 1800's were one or two story affairs with the great majority in the first category. The ground floor

was divided into two to four rooms and under the rafters was usually an unfinished attic where the boys of the house would sleep. Fireplaces were the only heaters and wood was the fuel. The inhabitants of Provincetown and Truro turned forests into dunes by cutting down all standing wood. The Lower Cape's great tourist attraction of the present day: the rolling dunes that stretch from High Head to Race Point constantly threatening to fill East Harbor and bury US Route 6 were entirely man-made by this process of deforestation, with ample sworn contemporary testimony existing to confirm this.

deforestation

Besides houses there were "stores" which were often in fact warehouses, fish and salt sheds, loft buildings, a candle factory at one point, saltworks vats and windmills, gristmills, "fishyards", which were areas in which flaking was set up, orchards and small gardens. Green patches were created with great difficulty by hauling muck from the bogs back of town and mixing it with sand to create loam. There was hardly a square foot of land in the village that wasn't used by the townspeople in some way.

gardens

During the first quarter of the century before schooling became thoroughly organized, boys began to fish at the age of 8 or 9. This they did in the inshore boats in the immediate vicinity of Provincetown with their fathers, relatives or friends. Boys of this age were not, of course, taken as fishermen on the banks. For the fishing techniques of the time a boy was just as useful as a man manipulating handlines over the side of a boat in the bay or steering under sail as the adult fished. With the advent later in the century of heavier seines boys were not as useful, AND AS A RESULT VALUABLE EARLY TRAINING WAS LOST.

school

Ashore, women, old men and children operated the saltworks while the men skimmed the banks. Utilizing only sun and wind power marine saltmaking was only possible during the summer months when the rays are direct. The salt produced one summer would be stored for use on the salt bankers the following summer. In the fall, under a slightly more complicated process byproducts of the evaporation process would be heated and cooled to make epsom salt.

Salt Works

Blueberries were picked in July. Watchful eyes were kept on the cranberries behind town. The cultivation of cranberries was made possible by diking off the shallow perimeters and coves of the ponds. The idea was to reduce the size of the actual pond itself and create drier beds along the edge suitable for cranberry growth. By the 1870's Provincetown was producing over 1000 barrels of berries a year.

Cranberries

It is difficult for someone today to understand how costly cloth was during most of the 19th century and earlier. Garments were very expensive in contrast to the scale of values today. The average person's clothing, in the era we are discussing was patched and repaired until hardly any of the original material could be seen. A suit of cotton sails could constitute one-half of the total value of a vessel - running into the thousands. Great attention was paid to the condition of sails while bent or stored.

cloths

Sails

(please add to bottom of page 4)

Acts of the Massachusetts legislature in 1812 and 1821 shed light on the origins of the lobster industry in the US. State restrictions were placed on the maximum tonnage of smacks coming from Connecticut to Provincetown. They were equipped with live wells in the midsection of the vessel. We can only wonder how forceful the wishes of the legislature and the townspeople were when we were occupied by a foreign power, but we do know that for years the Connecticut lobster pirates were supplying the entire demand of New York City from Provincetown waters.

The Grand Banks Codfishery and Atlantic Whaling Era-1825

"To form some idea of the agreeableness of Bank fishing one must fancy the vessels rolling and pitching about, the men scarcely able to stand, the fog dripping like rain from the rigging, on a dark, cold, night and feeling the hooks to bait them."

From Newfoundland and its Fisheries
Matthew H. Warren, St Johns, 1853

The question has often been asked: Why did the Provincetown^{FISHERMEN} as well as other Massachusetts and Maine^{FISHERMEN} go as far as Labrador, the Grand Banks, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence to catch fish? The answer is, first, they felt that they had to, and, second, they had every right to.

The rights are more easily explained than the necessity for fishing at such distances. The first seige and capture of Fortress Louisburg on Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, in 1745 was underwritten and physically performed by the New Englanders, many of them fishermen. This act secured Canada for the British Crown. It, and subsequent measures cleared the seas of the French and by custom and usage gave New Englanders the inshore and offshore fisheries of every valuable spot north and east of Maine. This was recognized by the treaty following the Revolutionary War, but, from a fisherman's point of view adversely changed in the treaty signed after the War of 1812. We have in the Gifford Cemetery here the body of a man named Talbot, from Connecticut, who according to his headstone fought the French at Louisburg. It is known that many Cape men did the same.

The reasons why we had to go such distances to fish and why we expanded full scale into the Grand Banks fishery about 1825 were a long time in coming. As with many changes in the world of nature, understanding of events is easiest after some years pass. Fishermen of the early decades of the 19th century complained that in their own experience there were fewer fish to be caught as time went on. They were right. In 1878, the Canadian government, in connection with the Treaty of Washington, drew conclusions about this lack of fish on the New England^{COAST} some fifty years before. They said that it hadn't been due to overfishing but rather was in large part a result of the damage that the leather, shoe, textile, paper etc. manufacturers had done to the streams that alewives - a major codfish food - had used to reproduce. If a stream was blocked by a dam or sufficiently polluted for a period of five years it was rendered barren of alewives. The period 1800 to 1830 saw many new industrial developments on our streams. Today there are a handful of streams in Southeastern Massachusetts that have alewife runs, whereas prior to development nearly every river, large and small was a fish hatchery. The Cape Cod that Gosnold found had become a "fishyard" for foreign caught codfish.

Provincetown was a fishing town by habit and one that provided a magnificent natural, normally ice-free harbor that was ideal for the maneuvering of sailing vessels and protection from the major

oceanic storms. To the people of the mid-19th century "bank" fishing meant Grand Bank fishing and similarly "bank" codfish were those caught there. The Grand Bank is the easternmost of the string of shoals that begins with Georges. Fish caught were reckoned in quintals, pronounced kentles, which was a hundredweight measure of salted and therefore partially dessicated codfish of 112 pounds. A quintal averaged about 30 split bank codfish. A bank vessel of 100 tons burden, about 100 feet long, would bring back *about* 1500 quintals, stocking a good trip having "wet" or used in the process about 200 hogsheads of salt. This meant that the men caught, split, salted and packed away about 50000 codfish in the course of a voyage. Early in the century the vessels made one spring-summer Grand Bank voyage but later, in the '70's sometimes two were attempted. The fishing methods used by bank fishermen weren't radically different from those of the Labrador men. Bank fishermen were, however, operating on the high seas, not inshore, and were subject to separation from the main vessel and collision by other fishing vessels and mercantile traffic proceeding to and from Europe. They seldom saw the shore of Newfoundland or Nova Scotia, and then only to pick up supplies, bait or to repair the vessel. Provincetown also fished for cod in the Gulf of St Lawrence, which was then known universally as the "bay". The "bay" was more famous for mackerel fishing, was treacherous to sail in and claimed many Cape vessels during storms.

Much of what we know about Provincetown fishing during the period 1825-1875 is from the writings, lectures, and testimonies of Capt. Nathaniel Ellis Atwood (1807-1886), who was shipwrecked twice in a period of two weeks in the "bay" in 1851. Atwood was raised on Long Point where his father was one of a group of Cape Cod Bay boat fishermen settled there. Capt. Atwood was a fisherman until the double shipwreck at age 44. He then tried his hand at coasting and at freighting salt fish to foreign ports. Later he returned to fishing and set up a small cod liver oil mill here. He was customs collector for the port of Provincetown, selectman and representative to the Massachusetts legislature. He somehow managed to find time to become recognized as the best practical ichthyologist in our state. Several fishes bear his name. He was the intimate and friend of Louis Agassiz and was elected as a member of the American Academy of Arts and Science and a visiting professor at M.I.T. It is all the more remarkable as there is no record of his ever attending school - his family was too poor.

The second phase of whaling here coincided with the growth of the ~~growth of the~~ Grand Banks fishery. Provincetown whalers stayed in the Atlantic and fished either the Hatteras Ground, the Azores or Labrador. With a few notable exceptions our vessels were schooners not the square-riggers popularly associated with the trade. It was not unusual for a cod vessel to be converted to a whaler or vice versa if one operation seemed more profitable than the other. The last US vessel codfishing in Labrador, hailing from Newburyport was sold in Provincetown in 1874 to be converted to a whaling schooner. She was the 154 ton sch. Charles Thompson and was purchased by Capt J.W. Leach for \$5500. The change to a whaler was made by adding davits for boats and setting up a try-works. Because of Provincetown's poor land connections to the mainland the local whalers discharged

and paid off the crews elsewhere, usually New Bedford. This may be the origin of the habit, only recently on the wane, of buying goods, especially durable ones, there. By the time the railroad got to Provincetown the industry was dying.

For the generation just younger than Capt Atwood there was an increased availability and interest in primary and grammar level education. The effect of this was to keep boys out of fishing and to perhaps expand their curiosities about the landward portion of North America. Beginning about 1840 the young manpower of the Cape started to leave in significant numbers. Sometimes, as in the case of the Bound Brook Island settlement on the Truro-Wellfleet line it was a case of poor fishing luck combined with the prospect of "greener pastures" elsewhere. On May 10, 1846 twelve men and their families, totaling 33 persons, left the island for Swampscott where they began fresh fishing in a vessel appropriately named the Vanguard. The California Gold Rush also seemed to spark the Cape Codder's interest in the West and the rest of the country in general. Many young men moved to urban centers, especially Boston, where they were able to utilize their school knowledge.

Three foreign groups filled the demand for fishing labor and talent over the next several decades. They were in order of their arrival: the Irish who filtered down from Boston, were never very numerous here, and according to Capt Atwood introduced trawl fishing; the Portuguese, principally from the Azores, who became acquainted with Provincetown and Southeastern Massachusetts as a result of the whale fishery; and the Scottish Gaels also known as "Herring Chokers" from Cape Breton who were familiar with the salt fish trade and who filled out the crews of Provincetown and Gloucester fishermen on the way to the "bay" or the Grand Banks. The first two groups were here to participate in the fishing boom of the 1860's. In 1866 Provincetown had 91 vessels salt codfishing, 19 of which used trawls in the Gulf of St Lawrence and 72 handlined on the Grand Banks. This fleet brought back 93663 quintals of fish and used 4098 barrels of salt clams in catching them. Quite early many of the Portuguese became independent dory fishermen either year round or in the winter, and worked singly or in pairs in and around Cape Cod. They landed their fish fresh and started Provincetown on the way to importance in that trade.

The Portuguese tended to stick to themselves and developed their own cultural and financial facilities and aids. Their handicap here was language. Their co-religionists, the Irish, through centuries of English oppression had become superior to their captors in the use of language as a weapon. Most Cape Breton immigrants of the '60's had grown up in homes Downeast where English was used but where Gaelic was the favored means of expression. In going through volumes of material I have found that the Portuguese almost never got in trouble. Trouble in those days, especially the '60's and '70's consisted frequently of running illicit bars or "dram shops" for visiting fishermen when Provincetown was dry and Sandwich was the only wet town on Cape Cod. Court records show that the vast majority

of the violators had celtic surnames of Irish or Cape Breton origin. The Portuguese knew exactly what they wanted: a house and land that they owned, a boat and fishing gear. The first outside man taken into the Yankee fishing establishment here was neither Irish nor a Cape Bretoner, he was Francis Joseph, an owner of fishing vessels who became a director along with the Bowleys, Paines, Cooks, Mayos, Smalls and Smith's of the Equitable Marine Insurance Co. in the '70's. I believe that he lived at what is now 127 Bradford Street and I would appreciate hearing more about him.

The Most Exciting and Populous Town on the Cape 1870-1900.

"A Good Catch"

"Among all of our fishermen none are more hardy and venturesome than the Portuguese, in fact they constitute the body of those who trawl for fish here in the winter. Capt Frank Wager is one of these. He left the harbor Monday before noon in sch. Ira Kilburn set his trawl by 2 oclock PM and at 8PM was back in the harbor with 4690 pounds of excellent cod or \$140.70 worth paid to him by Messers. J. & L.N. Paine."

Provincetown Advocate, Feb. 18, 1874

This is the first article in that paper mentioning a Portuguese fishing captain by name, and one of an increasing number that dealt with the growing fresh fish business. Capt. Wager was the grandfather of Al Wager of Bradford Street. Most of the companies here that handled fresh fish were primarily salt fish firms with one or two exceptions; D. F. Small being an example. Fishing firms were usually organized as partnerships that directly owned a wharf, stores, sheds, flaking etc. and who either owned or managed for a variety of other people a fleet of vessels. The ownership of vessels was divided into 64 shares. Most vessels were owned by from one to ten people. Sometimes very large or expensive vessels had more separate owners. Each owner was responsible for insuring his own shares in the vessel against loss. In the event of a ship's sinking only those shares that were insured would be reimbursed. Insurance specified, of course, the risks that the company was willing to take for the premium. Certain activities such as winter fishing on Georges or the frozen herring trade with Newfoundland were either at times either impossible to insure or only possible at high premiums. Many of the insurers in Provincetown were mutual companies such as the one that Francis Joseph directed. A poorly capitalized local mutual insurance company could be wiped out with the losses in one big storm.

We have sworn statements of the largest of the fishing firms whose vessels fished the Canadian offshore waters in 1876. Some of these firms were also in the fresh fish business in that year. Their establishments ranged from one end of town to the other when Provincetown's whole waterfront was an industrial beehive. Besides the fish houses there was a sailmaker and a blacksmith on every

wharf, as well as caulkers, painters, riggers and blockmakers. The earliest of the large salt fish firms still doing business in 1876 was E.&E.K. Cook, (at what is now Bryant's Market) who became interested in the codfishery in 1837. The Cooks were apparently the only firm to have been engaged in both the Labrador and Grand Banks business as well as Azores and Hatteras whaling. They were followed by the Union Wharf Company, 1847 (rear of Sal's Place restaurant and adjoining property); David Conwell, 1851 (rear of west portion of Pat Hall's parking lot); H.&S. Cook, 1856, (rear of the Nathan Halper property, 481 Commercial Street); Freeman and Hilliard, 1857 (rear of Lands End Marine Supply) where a section of the Hilliard part of the wharf still exists; Central Wharf Co. 1857, (rear of Boatslip Motel); J.&L.N. Paine, 1861, (opposite the home of Miss Edith Bush, 96 Commercial Street, who is the granddaughter of Lysander N. Paine); Crocker and Atwood, 1863, (the property just west of the Seaview Restaurant where Howard Mitchum is going to open a restaurant this summer and which for many years was the property of Mr. John Manta); Bangs Atkins Lewis 1865, (was reached by the alley between the Beverly Mailer and Benjamin Sonnenberg houses and later became Mary Heaton Vorse's theater where Eugene O'Neil plays were performed.); Philip A. Whorf 1870 (Penny Farthing Restaurant) who sold his fleet of salt bankers in Gloucester just before the First World War and thus conducted the last salt fish firm in town; F.M. Freeman, 1872, (near the middle of the rear of the former Cape Cod Cold Storage property)

The extension of the railroad to Provincetown in July of 1873 gave a boost to all enterprise here and provided for the entry of tourism. Up until this time all fresh fish landed in Provincetown was re-shipped by packet boat or any other suitable vessel. With the train, regular schedules could be kept for delivering fish either in New York City or Boston. It was shipped iced in 400 pound boxes. New facilities for storing pond ice were built in 1874 in response to the demand. Townspeople wished for a cold snap in January or February of the years in order to insure an ice supply for the remainder of the year. No ice -- no fresh fish business. In 1874 the pond ice houses of the town had a capacity of nearly 5000 tons.

Consumers in the United States took a liking to fresh fish and began to prefer it over the salted or pickled product. In response the salt fish firms of Massachusetts started to market boneless and skinless codfish and canned fish balls and other more convenient ways for the housewife to buy fish. Here, at least one firm prepared boneless and skinless codfish, but either through the lack of capital or the lack of manpower Provincetown, to its eventual detriment didn't adapt to the new ways and continued to send to market the hard-dried fish of tradition. Gloucester excelled in preparing large quantities of the boneless and skinless variety. Men ripped the skins and bones off the dried fish and women picked the fine bones out with tweezers and packed the product in the familiar little wooden boxes. Prior to the development of artificial

refrigeration the industry as a whole needed its salting and salt and smoked fish processing capacity in order to take up the slack if the fresh fish market was low or if pond ice was unavailable or expensive.

We have documentation from Capt. Atwood about the 48 Provincetown vessels fishing the banks of Newfoundland in the centennial year of 1876, that indicates the origins of the captains: "6 are native born citizens of the United States; 9 are Portuguese, who I think without exception were born in the Azores; and 33 are natives of Nova Scotia, I include P.E.I. with Nova Scotia." From the report of the loss of the Provincetown Schooner Addie Osborn in October of 1873 we have a crew list that reflects the ethnic mix of many of our fishing vessels of the era: Captain Duncan MacDonald, Mate Roderick Cummings, Dan McLinn, W.C. Carmichael, Philip Morse, Thomas Rhynn, Chas. Stephens, Antonio Rodger, John Campbell, Manuel P. Short, Thos. and Frank (surnames unknown), Label Berell, Allen McLeod and Andrew Penny. Only the last three survived in the collision with an English steamer. Out of the group I calculate that at most two would have been "native born citizens", with the rest either Cape Bretoners, Irish (possibly from Newfoundland) or Portuguese. The ownership of the vessels was still in the hands of the native born but the operatives were immigrants. In both Provincetown and Gloucester this had been true since about 1860. From studying the records available for the 1870's and 1880's the following conclusions can be drawn: At times as much as 75% of both the fresh and salt Gloucester fishing fleets were manned by Nova Scotians; the Provincetown fresh and Georges fleet was almost 100% Portuguese manned and the salt fleet was about 50% Nova Scotian manned. As detailed above, two thirds of the salt captains were Maritimers. Fishing vessel captains had to be US citizens.

Mackerel catching grew in importance here whereas in Wellfleet and Truro it was dying. In 1841 there were over 60 Pamet schooners pursuing them not only in the "bay" but wherever they were to be found. By 1875 there wasn't one left. Wellfleet suffered to a great degree by the cyclical nature of the business which has been described as being akin to a lottery --an expensive lottery. There were many branches to the mackerel fishery: the Southern Spring Fishery, which involved chasing this school fish from the Virginia Capes to New England (suspended from 1888 to 1893); the Fall Fishery, which from August to October brought many seiners to Provincetown, and the Cape Cod Bay Boat Fishery. In 1847 for the first time since 1764 blue fish came north of Cape Cod and destroyed this business in our bay. Captain Atwood said that this forced the settlers to leave Long Point as their major reason for being there was to be convenient to the fish in season with their small boats. The depopulation of the point started that year and was completed by the time of the Civil War. More than any other fishery mackerelling was a feast or famine business for the majority of those who engaged in it. Like in any skill though, there were a small group of captains who were consistent highliners.

The late summer and early fall mackerelling in the '70's and '80's brought a lot of excitement to the town with as many as 300 schooners with seine operations.

with seines operating out of the harbor. It was during these times that the dram shops were well patronized. A few of these mackerel schooners hailed from Provincetown but the great majority were from elsewhere. During fishing breaks and sometimes as frequently as every weekend the crews would return home. With the completion of the railroad link many of these men were practically commuting from Gloucester, Wellfleet and Harwich to Provincetown to work.

Another event of a more sober nature was the location here in 1879 of the Summer Station of the US Fish Commission, complete with the commissioner himself, his scientists and a steamer on loan from the Navy. They stayed at the Gifford House and set up a laboratory on Bowley's Wharf near the foot of Court Street. It was determined here for the first time that the body temperature of many fish is elevated several degrees above the water in which it swims. It had almost been axiomatic for centuries that fish assumed the temperature of the surrounding water. New England was a particular concern of the commission because in the '70's over 90% of the fishing vessel tonnage hailed from Massachusetts and Maine. Connecticut, New York, California, Rhode Island and New Hampshire shared the rest.

In 1851, according to Capt. Atwood, the first deepwater fish traps were driven around Provincetown. The Solomon Bangs family, whose homestead still stands at 448 Commercial Street and whose wharf was where the Beachcombers stands, were prominent in this business for over 50 years. The traps here became a valuable source of bait fish especially during the Canadian-American dispute of the 1870's and 1880's known as the "Fishery Question". The British Canadian authorities, no friends of the Scottish Cape Bretoners, tried to force the US into expensive and needless treaties. As an inducement they cut off our access to bait, food and fuel in the Maritimes. The traps really came into their own with the development of the anhydrous ammonia absorption freezing system by Paulsen at Gloucester and the establishment of the Provincetown Cold Storage in 1893 at the foot of Johnson Street and all subsequent ones. In fewer than ten years the freezers became more valuable as the preservers of food fish, especially with the decline of trawling and handlining. As a result of the trap and freezer development here, Provincetown was still landing the same poundage of fish in 1935 as it was in 1887, whereas Gloucester had declined by a half. //

As the end of the century neared the salt bankers were replaced with faster fresh fishing vessels. Sloops, especially the beamy Gloucester style ones became more popular. There were off and on attempts at shore whaling and porgy seining based at the factory on Long Point. Swordfishing was pursued. Some Provincetown fishermen changed their ways, like Capt. Alex Kemp, who lived to be the last Grand Banks skipper, who had the little Atlanta built for shore fishing. Some, like Capt. J.A. Matheson left Provincetown and spread the gospel by reestablishing himself at Anacortes, Washington in the 1890's, and started the first salt codfishing operation in the northern Pacific states.