

Advocate - Dec. 1942

Grandbankers In The 1900's: In the year 1900 the Grand Bank headline fleet was still fishing out of Provincetown. During the earlier years of the codfishing industry the vessels were small and usually made two trips to the banks. The season generally lasted from March to October and in-between seasons the vessels were hauled out on the beach. The War of 1812 and '14 put a stop to the codfishing industry, but after peace was declared the Grandbankers came back with redoubled vigor. During the war of the Rebellion, the price of fish was high and the codfishing industry was profitable and naturally more vessels were added to the fleet. New and larger craft were built to carry crews of between twenty and thirty men. The fleet was composed of some of the finest vessels afloat and the captains were known as real old sea-dogs.

In 1900 the schooner DIDO, Captain Simeon West, was the first vessel off to the banks on April 25th. She came back to port with a full hold on July 30th. On August 16th Captain West refitted and made a second profitable trip and returned to port on October 30th. Captain Alex Kemp sailed in the schooner SEA FOX on May 8th and brought his vessel back on September 27th. The schooner GLEN-ELG, Captain Wm. J. Corea, followed close on Captain Alex's heels by sailing on May 12th. The vessel returned home on August 28th. Captain Eli McKay, of the schooner GLADSTONE, sailed on May 15th and arrived back in port on September 4th. Making a second trip Captain McKay sailed again on September 26th and the vessel docked here again on November 20th. The F. W. FREEMAN, Captain Jos. Hatch, also sailed on May 15th. but made just the one trip and arrived home on September 12th. Captain Martin Nelson sailed in the schooner WILLIAM MATHESON on May 16th and arrived home on October 1st. The schooner FREDDIE ALTON sailed on May 17th and Captain Norman Matheson fished the banks until October 9th. (Captain Matheson later moved to Anacortes, Washington). The WILLIE L. SWIFT, Captain Angus Matheson, sailed on May 17th and returned home on September 27th. Captain Antone C. Silva sailed in the ADA K. DAMON on May 22nd and arrived home on September 15th. The CORA S. MCKAY, Captain Roderick Matheson, sailed on May 24th and the vessel was lost at sea. (In 1889, an exceptionally poor year,

when very few vessels got over a half-fare of fish the CORA S. MCKAY did well.) . . . Captain Antone Marshall (Doody Marshall's father) sailed in the HATTIE WESTON on May 25th and arrived home September 16th. . . . The schooner LOTTIE BYRNES sailed on May 30th and Captain Gus Olson was taken sick on the trip. He was put ashore in Nova Scotia and Captain George Brier brought the vessel home on September 21st. . . . The WILLIE A. MCKAY sailed June 2nd with Hollis Perkins as captain. She was lost at sea and was the second banker to be lost that year. . . . Captain Manuel Caton sailed in the ADDISON CENTER on July 5th. He made a short trip and arrived home on August 24th. . . . The CARRIE SAYWARD, Captain James Enos, sailed on July 7th and was the third vessel lost at sea during the year. . . . To the best of my present knowledge Captain Alex Kemp is the only surviving captain. He resides at 350 Commercial Street and can be seen every day making "a passage" to the grocery store. Captain Alex has the look of "a seagoing man" and his memory of those good old days is inexhaustable. If you ever want some authentic stories of the old fishing vessels just mention their names.

By this time of year the Provincetown fleet of grandbankers would have been hauled out, or run up on the beach, for winter storage. Some of the largest vessels in the fleet were put to year around use in the winter months and sailed as "coasters" or in the West Indies' trade. But the most were too small for anything but the seasonal trips to the banks. In between seasons—November to April—the vessels were overhauled. Weather-beaten sails were mended, or replaced. Strained seams were recaulked and doubtful looking planks frequently had to be renewed. All the rigging and gear had to be carefully checked and frayed lines removed. The masts and spars were scrapped down and revarnished. When the fleet started out in the early Spring the various craft were in first class shape.

The official lists of the owners, and part owners, will give you some idea of how the town was dependent on the "Bankers." Each trip was watched with considerable interest and, generally speaking, the financial returns kept the crews and owners going. Sometimes the vessels were lost with their entire crews, but the others kept on fishing and many record trips were logged by Provincetown vessels.

Althea's Grandfather

"The Freddie Alton, schooner, of Provincetown was built in 1864 at Provincetown. She was 86.21 tons, length 73 feet, breadth 22.75 feet and depth 8.25 feet. The owners were Frederick T. Daggett 3/16, James Cummings, 1/16, John Garland 3/16 and James Daggett 3/16. Other owners included brokers in Boston.

"The Lottie Byrnes, schooner, of Provincetown was built in Essex in 1876. She was 92.18 tons, length 82 feet, breadth 22.5 feet and depth 8.5 feet. The vessel was owned by Philip A. Whorf 17/32, Daniel McKennon 6/32, Solomon Bangs 4/32, Isaac Collins 1/32, Adam McCool 1/32 and Stephen Mott 1/32. Two Boston brokerage firms held the remaining share."



176. SHIP A. G. ROPES LEAVING PROVINCETOWN HARBOR, CAPE COD, MASS.

118305

From The Advocate - June 5, 1872

"Now that the fishermen have sailed the quiet of our town is extreme. We long for something to stir us up."

CAPE COD STANDARD-TIMES, TUESDAY, MAY 15, 1945

Fishing Industry Barometer For Town's Financial Status

PROVINCETOWN, May 15—Dating to the time of the "Grand Bankers," fishing has been the main industry of this village. The fishing fleet consists of draggers, dory trawlers and weir boats, of which the largest and most important in the group are the draggers.

There are about 40 of these boats, each one having a crew of from 4 to 6 men, including the captain. They leave their moorings at about 4 o'clock in the morning, having equipped the boat the night before with food, ice, and sometimes packing boxes. The fishing grounds vary, according to different locations where fish are accustomed to appear according to the season; sometimes off Chatham, sometimes off Plymouth or Race Point.

Drugging Process Explained

When they reach their destination, the drag, which is a net with a 50- to 60-foot mouth, is put down. It has two boards, one on each side, which open out during the process of dragging. The fish, feeding along the sea bottom, swim into the mouth of the net and cannot escape. From one-half to one hour time is allowed for each drag before it is brought up by a hoister on the side of the boat, and the catch dumped on the deck. While the second drag is under way, the first one is dis-

posed of, either boxed and iced, or put into the hold with ice, to be boxed when they return to the wharf.

The boxed fish are lifted to the wharf and if they are in the hold, the fish are ladled out into baskets, and hoisted to the wharf, then packed in boxes, and weighed. The fish buyers, representing Boston and New York wholesale firms, are on hand to look over the fish and buy whatever is wanted by their firms. They are then covered with more ice and the covers nailed on. Large refrigeration trucks transport them to New York or Boston, leaving here in the late afternoon, and arriving in New York in the early morning in time for the opening of the wholesale fish market.

When the supply is greater than the demand, or the price is low, the surplus is placed in the cold storage plants here, where it is frozen in solid blocks, to be sold later. A great deal of the fish thus frozen is shipped to the mid-west towns throughout the year. Haddock, cod,

flounder and mackerel are most in demand.

Dory Trawlers. Few

At present, there are only about four dory trawlers. They look like oversized rowboats, and have a canvas across the forward part of the boat. They fish with about four lines, each about a mile long. From these lines at six-foot intervals are tied three-foot lines, each with a hook at the end. These hooks are baited, usually with squid or other small fish, on the way to the fishing ground, then coiled and put in a tub. When the boat arrives at the fishing ground, the fishermen lower one end of a line, marking it with a flagged buoy. The boat moves in a straight line until the fish line is exhausted, then it turns and drops another, so that the lines are all parallel. When the end of the last line has been reached, the boat proceeds to the beginning of the first line, and starts hauling it up, taking off the fish and coiling the empty line.

One of the earliest signs of Spring is the setting up of the weir poles. They are taken up in the Fall, and lie on the beach all Winter. In the Spring they are creosoted, and put on barges which are towed to the place where they are to be driven down by the pile-driver on the barge. From the poles are hung the nets or seines or traps, into which the fish swim through a mouth, and from which they cannot escape. Once or twice a day the trapfisherman visit the traps, and bale the fish out into their boats.

In many ways does the fishing industry prove to be the barometer for the town's financial status. So many industries are affected by a poor or profitable season—the chandlers, the boat repairers, the ice men, carpenters to make the boxes, fish handlers on the wharves, as well as the town merchants, who all do well when the fishing business is good.

Yarmouth Register August 24, 1889

— Joseph E. Dyer, master of the whaling schooner Gage H. Phillips, was before Commissioner Hallett, in Boston Thursday, charged with beating and wounding one of his crew. He was held for trial in the United States district court.

— Capt. Gardner, of sch. Valkyrie, from the banks reported at Gloucester Thursday that sch. Martha A. Bradley, on the western part of Grand bank picked up Capt. Chas. Rogers, Aug. 10, in the small boat Nickelodeon, in an exhausted condition. Capt. Rogers was bound from Boston to Paris and had been at sea 38 days.

— The fishing schooner Stowel, Sherman, which arrived Thursday from a four weeks' cruise, with four barrels of mackerel, reports that some vessels have from two to twenty barrels each and that numbers have nothing.

— A large school of mackerel was off the backside Friday and Saturday, several of the fishermen stocking from \$40 to \$50.—[Advocate.]

Yarmouth Register April 5, 1890

MARINE INTELLIGENCE.

Fishing schooner Ben. T. Crocker, 70 tons, of Provincetown, has been sold to parties in Green's Landing, Me., to be used in the stone trade. Schooner Daniel Webster, 22 tons, has been sold to parties in Bath.