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THEY CAME HERE TO FISH: EARLY MASSACHUSETTS FISHERMEN IN A PURITAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

While the accepted paradigm has been that mariners and their families in Massachusetts' port cities were a poor proletariat at the bottom of the labor market, and not really a part of the "New England culture," I offer new findings which shed new light on the old stereotype regarding early maritime society. Evidence has pointed in a different direction – that early New England fishermen did have a place in Puritan society, other than that of simply marginalized outsiders. It is apparent that fishermen and their families both lived in and participated in most aspects of their communities to a similar degree (positively and negatively) as did those of any other occupation.

Using the Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Massachusetts, as well as merchant and church records, it is evident that offences such as drunkenness, violence, or slander were present in Puritan society as a whole, not just among its mariner population. Such a conclusion stands noticeably alone amidst the traditional scholarship. Moreover, accessibility to necessary records has become easier in the digital age, allowing further investigation and analysis which had previously been more difficult, due to the considerable difficulties in locating and acquiring primary source materials. Court and church records, as well as other informative sources, are now available online, allowing independent scholars to pursue and complete valuable research that can ultimately challenge traditional thinking and transition more easily toward a more accurate paradigm.

Keywords: *Massachusetts Bay; social history; fishermen; occupational stereotypes*

INTRODUCTION

"They came here to fish": such was the story according to the Reverend Cotton Mather in his epic *Magnalia Christi Americana* concerning a confrontation between a Puritan minister and a group of fishermen in Marblehead, Massachusetts. As the minister exhorted the congregation to be a "religious people" or otherwise they would "contradict the main end of planting this wilderness," one of the more outspoken of the fishermen (so the story goes) informed the preacher that he was mistaken, and must be thinking he was addressing the folks at the Bay Colony, that their "main end was to catch fish." While one might hope, as Mather did, that "something more excellent" was the "main end of the settlements," it is undeniable that a new and complex culture was emerging along the New England shoreline, one with a wide range of cultural divergences that would ultimately have many "main ends" in mind.

The accepted paradigm has been that mariners and their families in the port cities of Massachusetts were primarily a poor proletariat at the bottom of the labor market, and not really a vital part of the "New England culture." This understanding has long been supported by many in the scholarly community, such as Daniel Vickers (*Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850*), and Christine Heyrman (*Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1750*)¹ who have both argued that there was a

¹ Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Christine Heyrman, *Commerce and*

distinct divide between the fishing communities and the larger Puritan society which tended to keep mariners apart, both socially and culturally. This belief was further supported from an economic viewpoint in Bernard Bailyn's *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century*, and Murray Rothbard's "The Rise of the Fisheries and the Merchants."² And while Richard Archer stressed the "complexity" of New England society in *Fissures in the Rock: New England in the Seventeenth Century*,³ it did little to change the overall paradigm. However, in this paper I share some findings that shed new light on the old stereotype regarding early maritime society, and which I believe provide sufficient evidence for concluding that early New England fishermen did have a place in Puritan society, other than being simply marginalized outsiders.

Although I started this research a few years ago, it has recently been facilitated by the new and expanded digital resources which are now available electronically. Accessibility to necessary records has become easier in the digital age, allowing further investigation and analysis which had previously been more difficult. For example, at the beginning of this research, the Essex County Court Records were only available in hard copy *and* only available for 2-hour check-outs at the University of California-Riverside! Now all eight volumes are available online, as are the Court Records for Plymouth County and a number of the individual towns in the area. Relevant digital sources include those at the University of Virginia, and at www.archives.org, including the Essex County Quarterly Court Records.⁴ On a more detailed reading, name searches such as Row, Roe, Roes Sarah, William produced results in the index of the Quarterly Courts,⁵ while general searches (e.g. 'fishermen') produced results such as nineteenth-century typescripts of seventeenth-century records by the Essex Institute at

www.archive.org.⁶ In addition to the court and maritime records,⁷ church records, such as those for the First Church in Salem,⁸ have also been valuable sources, as well as Stephen Innes' *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (available on Google Books⁹) which provides a useful description of the ironworkers, who were not subject to the same requirements as the fishermen.

In examining some of the available records, it has become increasingly apparent that fishermen and their families both lived in and participated in most aspects of their communities to a similar degree (both positively and negatively) as did those of any other occupation. In fact, for the most part, Massachusetts fishermen appeared to be fairly ordinary men who knew and lived by the cultural norms of their society as much as they could – and knew they must answer to the General Court when they did not – hence expressing, in their own right, both an important and influential expression of New England culture.

Unlike the farmers in the interior, mariners were often absent for extended periods of time, leaving family matters to their wives, who needed the support of a home community – family, friends, and church. It provided rootedness and a sense of belonging, without which mariners could have easily drifted away to any port, but most returned to family and community, as merchant, town, and church records indicate. The fact that there was a large and dynamic shipping trade throughout Essex County points to the need for a large and also dependable labor force. Furthermore, the need for credit from local merchants to outfit vessels from fishing ketches to trading ships required a level of trust which could only be achieved through an intimate knowledge of the applicant in question – a requirement hard to meet with only a transient maritime labor force.

Life at sea often was only a part of a mariner's life, with most retiring before mid-life to pursue various endeavors – sometimes maritime and sometimes not.

Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690 - 1750 (NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984).

² Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955); Murray Rothbard, "The Rise of the Fisheries and the Merchants," <https://mises.org/library/rise-fisheries-and-merchants>

³ Richard Archer, *Fissures in the Rock: New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England [for] University of New Hampshire, 2001).

⁴ <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/home.html> (7/4/2016)

⁵ <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/vol5/index/essvol5R.html> (7/4/2016)

⁶ <https://archive.org/stream/recordsfiles04esse#page/n3/mode/2up> (7/4/2016)

⁷ <http://www.pem.org/library/collections/manuscripts> (7/4/2016)

⁸ <http://www.firstchurchinsalem.org/recordbook45.html> (7/4/2016)

⁹ https://books.google.com/books?id=9XUKUkulSkIC&pg=PA256&lpq=PA256&dq=Hammersmith+ironworkers&source=bl&ots=BrRmDduXlw&sig=taOBiS90KhjUtN7cQQQjqpaxaDo&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiH1pjID74_NAhWJ_R4KHSPMDbYQ6AEIPJAG#v=onepage&q=Hammersmith%20ironworkers&f=false (7/4/2016)

Many sons, once old enough, followed in their fathers' footsteps, taking over where their fathers had left off – often for much-needed family support, sometimes for training, and other times for the love of adventure. However, so too did a number of sons from non-

maritime families. Hence, to depict the maritime communities dotting the New England coastline as a whole and congruous culture, separate from a particular "Puritan culture," denies a diversity that was a part of the "new world" from the very beginning.



The "Great Migration" in the 1600s brought thousands of settlers across the Atlantic to build a "new" England – for many, a "godly commonwealth" where they would be free from religious persecution by the Church of England. Others arrived in the hope of establishing themselves in a place that would allow them to pursue a better life for themselves and their

families. Still others held interests more economically ambitious than the Puritan leaders would have approved of.

John Cotton, one of the great "Puritan divines," recognized that among the faithful there would undoubtedly be some "worldlings" in the New

England migration. He did not deny their mixed motives, but observed in 1648 that the churches of New England would be the means of conversion "of sundry . . . persons who came hither not out of respect to conscience or spiritual ends, but out of respect to friends or outward enlargements."¹ Whether that always turned out to be the case cannot be ascertained, but among the diverse population of Massachusetts Bay and Essex County, the experience of Cotton Mather's preacher with the Marblehead fishermen, whose "main end" was to fish rather than to plant "God's garden" in the "wilderness,"² has been less difficult to envision. Nevertheless, John Winthrop, first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, believed that a home-grown, resident fishing population would be more beneficial to the plantation than allowing those from outside to take the profits earned and return "from whence they came." Better, he argued, to keep the profits among one's own people.³

Easily recognizable from the traditional "outsider" paradigm was Christine Heyrman's example, in *Commerce and Culture*, of a later interaction between Marbleheaders and their clergy. In a case brought before the General Court in November 1667, "fisherman"⁴ Henry Coombs of Marblehead was fined by the magistrates for "abusing" their preacher, Mr. Walton by "saying that he preached nothing but lies." Coombs was not exactly a stranger to the court. He had been before the magistrates twice before, once for battery against Nicholas Barkley in 1649 and again for "cursing" in 1663. Two years after his last presentment, in November 1669, Henry Coombs' widow was presenting his inventory. A jury of inquest found that he had drowned, an accident due to "being drunk." This was conceivably a "typical" story: the drunk, rowdy fisherman, un-churched and with little respect for the clergy, going before the court, and then coming to an untimely end, but the only problem with this conclusion is that Henry Coombs was not, as Heyrman had assumed) a fisherman. He

was instead a farmer with six acres of land (considered fairly large by Marblehead standards), an orchard, a garden, and "corne land," as well as some "unimproved land," plus three swine "a year old and four smaller swine." Furthermore, the court records show no dealings of any kind with fishermen.⁵ That Coombs lived in Marblehead (described by Daniel Vickers in *Farmers and Fishermen* as having had a nearly 100% fishermen/mariner population⁶), had some less-than-pious behavior, and then accidentally drowned by "being drunk," it is not hard to see how the "logical" conclusion could be made, as Heyrman did, that his was a fairly typical mariner story. In fact, the long-held stereotype of the drunken, rowdy fishermen who could not fit into a Puritan society is what has led to the "typicality" of such an example. However, the paradigm built around this image is not entirely borne out by the evidence. Therefore, in examining the records for some of the Essex County towns such as Marblehead, it is apparent that fishermen and their families did participate within their communities in a similar manner as those of any other pursuit. Furthermore, although Marblehead has not been thought of as a typical Puritan town, even it had a small share of non-mariners and a few of the at least "nearly-pious."⁷

Marblehead's first settlement was around 1629: primarily a "fishing station" with itinerant fisherman coming from various locations. Purely a commercial venture, there were no impending plans for permanent settlement. Within a short time, however, this would change. By the early 1630s, a small contingent of entrepreneurs, including a ship-builder, arrived in Marblehead to take up a more permanent residence. Shortly thereafter, their numbers began to increase – so much so that by 1635 the General Court at Salem allowed Marblehead to become a "Plantation" and instructed the proprietor to sell land at cost to the inhabitants as they "stood in need." The increasing number of family households moving into Marblehead called for the services of a pastor, so by 1635 a fishing boat was dispatched to Newbury to

¹ John Cotton, *The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared: In Two Treatises* (London, 1648), 102.

² Herbert Adams, "Village Communities of Cape Ann and Salem," *Studies in Historical and Political Science*, First Series (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1883), 329 [taken from Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*].

³ John Winthrop, *The History of New England*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1853), 207, 210.

⁴ Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 222.

⁵ *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, 8 vol., ed. George Francis Dow (Salem, MA, 1911-21), 1:169; 3:117, 461; 4:206, 211 (Hereinafter cited *Essex Ct. Rec.*); Thomas E. Gray, *The Founding of Marblehead* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1984), 60-61.

⁶ Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 156 fn. 18.

⁷ First Church of Christ, Marblehead, *Under the Golden Cod* (Canaan, NH: Phoenix Pub. Co., 1984), 5-6.

pick up the Reverend John Avery who had reluctantly agreed "to come with his family" and take up residence as Marblehead's first minister. Avery, however, never made it to Marblehead. He and his family were caught in a severe storm and almost all aboard perished.⁸ Continuing in its first steps toward township, Marblehead inhabitants again looked for a spiritual leader and settled on William Walton, who would remain as their spiritual head for thirty years. Granted eight acres "on the Main"* in 1638, and a regular "rate" set for his support – which sometimes included partial payment in fish – added in 1648, a minister became Marblehead's first paid official.⁹

Little is known about William Walton other than that he was educated at Cambridge and ordained an Anglican minister around 1625. After coming to New England with his family, Walton served as a teacher in Hingham before becoming a "missionary pastor" to Marblehead in 1637. Although little direct information is available, First Church historians described Walton as what would be known today as "non-denominational," with a belief in church autonomy and lay participation strong enough to have pushed him from a traditional ministry in England to a colonial outpost like Marblehead.¹⁰

Following the Reverend Walton's instillation as the pastor of Marblehead's small flock, town leaders made arrangements to build a meetinghouse at the top of one of the rocky hills. Although Walton never became officially ordained by the central church at Salem during his long ministry, apparently Marblehead inhabitants did function for a number of years from 1638 as a church body. Relations were undoubtedly strained at times – the Essex Court Records attest to that fact – nevertheless, Walton remained undaunted and adamant that his somewhat motley sheep would heed their somewhat unconventional shepherd as much as possible. In fact, acceptance of his services is attested to by both church growth (with the 1672 addition of a new lean-

to) and fairly regular increases in his salary (£70 by 1658). Furthermore, Marblehead petitioned the General Court in 1667 about "the calling and settling of a meet person" to help Mr. Walton. Apparently the Reverend Walton had found a niche within Marblehead society, for he chose to remain with them (and they with him) for the remainder of his lifetime.¹¹

The church and the ministry played a central role in colonial New England life, even if only in the breach. There seemed to be an expectation on the part of Salem officials and clergy that all understood the requirements of ecclesiastical participation, as well as having an awareness of the consequences for repeated failure to at least make an effort to comply. Otherwise, why would cases such as John Bennet's being fined for "taking tobacco in the meetinghouse on the Lord's day" (1653) or Boston's George Hiskutt's "sailing on the Sabbath" (1680) – for which he was acquitted on the testimony of his first mate that Hiskutt had gone "ashore to meeting" – have come up in the General Court? And, perhaps just as determinedly, were some Marblehead residents giving their heartiest efforts to avoid any more compliance than was absolutely necessary? For example, in 1649 George Hardinge was fined for saying that he planned on joining the church and "would then have his dog christened,"¹² and Joseph Gatchell's remark that when the Church of England was set up "with the orgones," then he would "come to religious services." By 1684, Gatchell again crossed the New England clergy and was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced by the Court of Assistants in Boston to have his tongue "pierced through with a hot iron." What is particularly interesting though, is that once again Gatchell was *not* an unruly fisherman (as Heyrman thought), but was actually a tailor.¹³ Ultimately, it became impossible (wherever the community) to live and work in proximity to Puritan society in all its facets without being thereby influenced to some degree – and apparently Marblehead was no exception to that rule. In fact, Vickers noted that those who were literate often owned Bibles, and that "as a group" seemed to

⁸ Ibid. 8-9; Gray, *Founding of Marblehead*, 4-5, 8-11; James R. Pringle, *History of the Town and City of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Massachusetts* (Pringle, 1892), 25.

⁹ Winthrop, *The History of New England*, Vol. 1, 196; Samuel Roads, Jr., *The History and Traditions of Marblehead*, (Marblehead: Allen Lindsey & Co., 1897), 20-1; First Church . . . Marblehead, *Golden Cod*, 8-9; Gray, *The Founding of Marblehead*, 11, 18, 26-7, 65, 117.

*The part of town near the harbor. (Roads, 14 fn. 1).

¹⁰ Roads, *History & Traditions*, 14; First Church . . . Marblehead, *Golden Cod*, 9-10; Gray, *Founding of Marblehead*, 127.

¹¹ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, vol. 1-3, (1636-67); First Church . . . Marblehead, *Golden Cod*, 14-15; Roads, *History & Traditions*, 20.

¹² *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1:320 (Bennett), 6:59 (Hiskutt), 1:170 (Hardinge).

¹³ Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 216 ("fisherman..."), 222

("orgones" i.e. organs), 223n (blasphemy); *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 7:114, 1678 ("...reckoning for work done by [Joseph] Gatchell in his trade . . . in finishing her clothes . . .").

have attended lecture on the Sabbath "almost as often as anyone, when they were in town."¹⁴

Fishing, although by far the primary industry followed by Marblehead inhabitants, was not the only one, though it has often received the most attention. As more settlers moved into the area with other useful skills and interests, occupational diversity widened somewhat (although all were still affected, either directly or indirectly, by the fishing industry). It was a tailor working late one night who saw a house fire and was able to warn Isaac Allerton and his "many fishermen whom he employed that season," and thereby, according to John Winthrop, all were "preserved by a special providence of God."¹⁵ There were some fairly unique occupations as well, such as "keeper of the commons," where village animals were pastured during the day; "keeper of the ferry" who was responsible for operating the ferry between Marblehead and Salem; fence inspector; and of course, shipbuilders. Within a few years, a local grist mill was established. Aside from small farmers and husbandmen, some more traditional tradesmen and craftsmen also found work in Marblehead: coopers, carpenters, masons, locksmiths, shoemakers, and merchants, as well as "ordinary" (tavern) keepers – of which Arthur Sandin was the first to be licensed in 1640. Therefore, although on a smaller scale than that of Salem, the so-called "fishing outpost" of Marblehead actually became home to a fairly diverse population, especially as time went on. By the 1650s, Thomas Gray (*The Founding of Marblehead*) found that about 28% of the identifiable males were employed in non-maritime pursuits – rather than Vickers' almost 100% maritime estimate).¹⁶ In addition, some were employed in more than one venture, such as coasting, outfitting, or tavern keeping, as well as fishing.¹⁷ Without such a shift away from a purely seasonal and transient, or even semi-transient, workforce and economy, Marblehead would have found it impossible to sustain the status of 'town' over the course of many years and hardships.

That Marblehead began to function as a town in its own right is evident from both Salem's allowance for it to officially separate from Salem into a township in 1649, and from the inhabitants' own behavior. Increasingly, it is apparent from the records that Marbleheaders began to distinguish in their own minds between transience, based on employment availability, and permanency, which allowed for a sense of belonging and community similar to the more typical Puritan settlements around them. For example, in 1646, the General Court granted a petition preventing "seasonal fishermen" from gathering wood in settled parts of town without permission; and in their Town Records of 1648, it was agreed that "all strangers fishing or employed about fish shall pay to the Towne . . . the sum of 10s a year for every man."¹⁸ Marblehead and its inhabitants were both a part of the greater New England whole, but separate in "calling," thereby making them somewhat unique in their social and cultural expression, yet maintaining a cognizance of, and cooperation with, the larger center.

Similar to Marblehead, neighboring Gloucester can also trace its early beginnings to "a place where fishing [was] set forward," when it was known as Cape Ann – a place "peopled almost entirely by fishermen."¹⁹ But as with Marblehead, this would soon change. Initially the idea had been put forth by some enterprising "merchant adventurers" (including the Reverend John White) that on a regular plantation at Cape Ann "planting on the land might go on equally with fishing on the sea." Although some early speculators believed the two to be fairly compatible, for the Dorchester Company it failed to work out as they had envisioned. For both employments to succeed fully proved too difficult since, as the Reverend White observed, the ground for one is rarely adequate for the other, and those knowledgeable about the land usually knew little about fishing, and vice versa. Discouraged by both economic losses and the "ill carriage" of some of their "land-men" (apparently not fishermen in this case), the project

¹⁴ Daniel Vickers, *Maritime Labor in Colonial Massachusetts* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1981), 125; Gray, *Founding of Marblehead*, 11.

¹⁵ Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1:147; First Church . . . Marblehead, *Golden Cod*, 13.

¹⁶ See Vickers, fn. 15

¹⁷ Gray, *Founding of Marblehead*, 16, 32, 148; First Church . . . Marblehead, *Golden Cod*, 12.

¹⁸ Ibid. 22, 28; Roads, *History and Traditions*, 18-19. [Note (QC, v1p29): Incomplete records for 5 years from 1641 – abstracts from "Waste Book" only; (QC, v1p114): Ten pages of the original Court Records missing.]

¹⁹ *Memorial of the Incorporation of the Town of Gloucester, Mass.* (Boston: A. Mudge & Son, 1901), 41.

was abandoned in 1625.²⁰ But, although the few remaining settlers soon moved a few miles west to Naumkeag (later known as Salem), the foundation for Gloucester had been established.

In its early stages, Gloucester, like Marblehead, saw its share of itinerant fishermen, single men who could easily move on to other coastlines if and when the need arose. However, according to Thomas Lechford, at one point after the Dorchester "adventurers" had moved on there were some few fishermen with "stages builded" and "one master Rashley [as] chaplain."²¹ Whether Puritan or Anglican is unclear, but that there was concern of a religious nature, even in such an outpost, seems to speak for the nature of the worldview in general – fishermen or otherwise – at this time.

By 1641, Gloucester was again on its way to becoming a town. Commissioners from Salem were appointed to settle the boundaries of Cape Ann, Ipswich, and Jeffries Creek (later to become Manchester). The Reverend Richard Blynman and several families from Plymouth Colony arrived in 1642 to settle at Cape Ann and, in May of that year, the General Court allowed them to incorporate the "plantation" of Gloucester, with First Church of Gloucester soon to follow. Shortly thereafter the Blynman group was joined by some families from Salem.²² Despite Gloucester's first years being somewhat difficult, the beginnings of town government did form and remained functional. The church also persevered, despite a number of disruptions. However, unlike its near neighbors of Marblehead and Salem, maritime work was actually sporadic. Shipbuilding, agriculture, and other pursuits seemed more prominent than fishing for the first couple of decades. Yet, people with names such as Elwell, Ingersol, and Sargent helped to form a foundation for the maritime industry, along with

fishermen and other maritime-related workers²³ – some of whom that would find their way into the Records of the Court.

An unusual maritime case before the General Court was that of Mr. John Tuttle vs. Robert Elwell, William Browne, and William Dudbridg in July of 1647 "concerning a boat which was delivered to them and lost." How one, or in this case three, might misplace a boat in as small an area as Gloucester is hard to understand – probably what John Tuttle was wondering at that time as well! Unfortunately, most court cases were not quite as unique as that of Tuttle. Fisherman John Jackson Jr. was brought in on a debt suit. The most important aspect of his case is that Jackson was able to present a letter to the court from a number of his neighbors, many of them well known and reputable in the community, such as shipwright William Stephens, selectman²⁴ William Sargent, selectman and shoreman Robert Elwell, and fisherman/shipmaster Osmond Dutch, who collectively attested that Jackson had lived in the town for seven years and had "behaved himself in good order . . . and lived honestly . . . as far as [they could] see."²⁵ Regardless of the initial cause, the community's support speaks well of Jackson's general character, as well as to the characters and reputations of the twenty-seven signatories – most of whom were involved in some aspect of maritime work.

Fisherman John Jackson, Sr., however, was called into court for "attempted assault on his maid," and was (Heyrman believed) "representative of [his] group," a "disorderly subculture" which had grown up in Gloucester after the departure of their minister, Blynman. Granted, Essex County Court Records are filled with cases such as that of Jackson Sr., but the preeminent (and difficult) question is whether he could be termed as "representative" of Gloucester's maritime group as a whole. If the good reputations of the twenty-seven Gloucester signatories for Jackson, Jr. is any indication, then perhaps not.²⁶ Furthermore, Heyrman noted that over a twenty year span, 1650-1669, the court heard five additional cases "involving

²⁰ John Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann* (Gloucester: Procter Bros., 1860; Peter Smith Publisher, Inc., 1972), 31, 36-38, 40-42; Pringle, *History of the Town*, 21-22; Adams, "Village Communities..." in *Stodie*, 326.

²¹ Babson, *Gloucester*, 50, 188; Pringle, *History of the Town*, 23; Adams, "Village Communities," in *Studies*, 21.

²² *The Fisheries of Gloucester* (Gloucester: Procter Bros. Publishing, 1876), 8; Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 35; Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth* (NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 291-92; Babson, *Gloucester*, 50-51, 188; <https://storiesfromipswich.org/2014/12/03/history-of-gloucester-ma/>; www.capeannmuseum.org/media/web_03_first_church.pdf.

²³ *Memorial*, 42, 113-14; *Fisheries of Gloucester*, 8; Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 35, 38, 40; <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/maritime/commerce.htm>.

²⁴ Selectman: a member of the local government board of a New England town

²⁵ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1:115, 124; 2:237-39; Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 39.

²⁶ Of the 27 signatories, 12 could sign their name.

assault or threats of physical violence . . . two for swearing . . . one for drunkenness," plus numerous cases of slander, with the majority of the defendants identified as "having maritime occupations."²⁷ While the smaller population has to be taken into consideration, a total of nine offenses by all inhabitants (not including slander) committed over a two-decade period hardly seems to indicate a constant "disorderly subculture." In fact, debt and slander seemed to have been fairly normal legal fare for Puritan society as a whole. Simply "watching out for one's neighbor" too ardently could land an "obedient servant" in court on a charge of defamation of character.

Numerous Gloucester court cases derived from conflicts with and within the church. Serious divisions regarding religious matters hindered the constancy of any one ministry, and Gloucester worshipers had four ministers over a roughly twenty year span. First Church, Gloucester had begun under the Reverend Blynman in 1642 – and ended with his departure in 1649 (see above). Apparently, Blynman's flock was anything but tranquil, and dissension and disrespect seemed to mar his ministry from the outset.²⁸ In 1647, Matthew Coe, Morris Somes, John Wakely, and David Wheeler were fined by the court for "hunting and killing a raccoon . . . to the disturbance of the congregation." Somes and Wakely (both non-fishermen) showed up for the court presentment, but not Coe or Wheeler. The case was continued, but nothing further is recorded about Wheeler. There is no way of telling whether he might have been a fisherman, but in this instance at least, two of the miscreants were not. Since Coe, however, was a resident fisherman, in 1652 he did appear and pay his fine.²⁹ Apparently, no matter whether the offender cared to, and regardless of how insignificant the charge may have seemed, the community still expected a certain amount of cooperation and conformity from their residents – and had no problem using the court to get their point across. Oddly enough, many of the troublesome residents seemed to believe they had to comply. Even when one admonishment, fine, or public punishment was not enough to alter their undesirable behavior, those

considering themselves inhabitants, if charged again, would once again appear in court to answer to the infraction and suffer the consequences. Those who chose to not respond likely had no permanent ties to the area.

The Reverend Blynman's problem with his unruly congregations, however, did not stop at mere disturbances. As with the Reverend Walton in Marblehead, some of the parishioners (although not always from the maritime community) seemed to have had some significant differences with their minister. Their displeasure was expressed in different ways, including absence from meeting, "trading" the pastor, and openly defying his scriptural interpretations – an unusual charge, depending on who exactly made the claim. In one such instance, an accusation was brought by John Stone.³⁰ He was fined 50s in 1644 for "scandalizing Mr. Blynman, charging him with false interpretation of the scriptures [and] for telling . . . things that tended to the reproach of the doctrine [he] delivered." Witnesses testified that Stone had claimed that Blynman "falsely interpreted . . . two places of scripture: in Nehemiah and Ezra." From the available record, it appears that Stone may have been a general laborer, since he was engaged in both cutting timber and going to fish "when . . . the school had come in."³¹ What is most compelling about this account is not that another parishioner had troubled the preacher, but that he did so with at least some degree of scriptural knowledge. Regardless of the correctness of Stone's Biblical interpretation, just the fact that someone (who might be thought of as an uneducated, unruly, second-class citizen)³² attempted to argue with the minister and his fellow townspeople from this perspective, could bring a new and unexpected understanding of the social and cultural atmosphere of Stone's day. Shortly thereafter, Blynman left Gloucester, along with most of the Plymouth Colony people who had followed him there, leaving his contentious congregation behind.³³

The ensuing ministerial void was filled by William Perkins, who had come to First Church as "teaching elder" in 1650. Mr. Perkins met with much the same reception as had Blynman, with various members of

²⁷ Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 39-40, fn. 15.

²⁸ Babson, *Gloucester*, 190-91; Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 36; *Memorial*, 42.

²⁹ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1:134, 273; Babson, *Gloucester*, 69.

³⁰ Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 36; Babson, *Gloucester*, 191.

³¹ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1:4, 32-33, 70;

³² Babson, *Gloucester*, fn., p191: [Stone did not leave much of a mark in town.]

³³ Babson, *Gloucester*, 190; Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 36-37.

the congregation soon facing charges of “absence from church,” “affronting [Perkins] in the time of his preaching,” and “speaking against” the minister in town meeting. One parishioner brought Reverend Perkins to court on a defamation charge for having accused the plaintiff of causing dissension in the church, and calling him “a plague on the town.” When Mr. Perkins departed, he was replaced in 1655 by Elder Thomas Millet – who fared little better. At one point, he even had to sue the town for his wages. Like Perkins, Millet was forced to contend with criticism throughout most of his service. The disparaging words of one townsman, William Brown, sums up the state of affairs rather well: “Mr. Blinman was naught, and Perkins was starke naught, and Millet was worse than Perkins.”³⁴ Expectedly, one might assume that in a port town such as Gloucester, most of the conflict would be brought about by some of the “unruly subculture” of fishermen and laborers, but it was often caused by members of what should have been the more “respectable society.” Since only one of the identifiable parties (Robert Dutch) was connected to the still fairly small maritime quarter (approx. 30%, according to Daniel Vickers*),³⁵ it seems that even the more “average Puritan” society could easily become embroiled in some rather contentious behavior.

A few years later, Robert Dutch sold his Gloucester lands and removed to nearby Ipswich – settled in 1633 by John Winthrop, Jr. (son of the Governor) and twelve Bay Colony leaders. Incorporated in 1634, Ipswich was settled mostly for agriculture by East Anglia colonists. However, maritime concerns were evident as well. Two settlers set up fish weirs on the Chebacco River in 1635, and a special committee was established in 1641 “to promote the interest of fishing.” It was agreed that the area known as Little Neck, “where the fishing stage is” was to be “sequestered and set apart for the advancement of fishing, and that the fishermen there [to] have liberty to enclose it” from the cattle, and that every boat that came to fish to “have sufficient roome to make their

fish in,” and “every boat gang” to have “liberty to . . . plant an acre of ground.”³⁶

Most early New England towns placed restraints on who could reside within their borders and thereby maintain a certain amount of control over who lived among them. Any who appeared to be less than desirable could be denied residency. For example, Humphrey Griffin found himself turned away from Ipswich in 1639, “...the town being full” – but was somehow able by 1641 to obtain the necessary permission. When someone came in for a specific purpose, such as a particular job or to visit family members, the usual allowable stay without special permission (or posting a bond to save the town from any untoward expenses) was about two weeks. If someone failed to secure permission, overstayed their official welcome, or had become a problem to the town, that person could face a call before the magistrates to be “warned out” of the jurisdiction within a set time limit.³⁷ Therefore, for most communities, those who could not or would not fit in could find themselves leaving. These stipulations did not fully apply, however, to a town like Marblehead whose transient workers had usually “come in on a fishing contract” – a problem Marbleheaders later brought to the attention of the General Court. When unemployed fishermen, who were not regular inhabitants, remained in the towns during the off-season or when work was scarce for whatever reason, the accommodating town often experienced unusual expenses, as well as unusual disturbances. In fact, in several cases it was migrant fishermen or seasonal coasters who engaged in much of the undesirable behavior that would bring them before the courts – and which helped mariners in general to receive such negative reputations, especially one like Peter Harling for threatening “mischeefe [on] the military clerk before [going] out of the contry.”³⁸ Not that resident fishermen and coasters didn’t participate along with their temporary comrades in such intemperate behaviors as excessive drinking, brawling, and swearing, but the inhabitant who wished to remain, and still have some degree of acceptable reputation

³⁴ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1:254 (reverse suit), 275, 287, 302, 306; 2:63-64, 161, 216-17; *Ibid.* 193-94; *Ibid.* 40-41.

³⁵ Babson, *Gloucester*, 292, 378-79; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 156 fn. 18.

*Gloucester’s maritime population probably didn’t reach the 30% mark until after the town stabilized somewhat in the 1660s.

³⁶ Joseph Felt, *History of Ipswich* (Ipswich: Clamshell Press, 1966), 108-10; Waters, *Ipswich*, 7-12, 79-81.

³⁷ Ruth Wallace Herndon, *Warning Out: Living on the Margin in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 2, 4-5; Waters, *Ipswich*, 90-91, 491; *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 6:192.

³⁸ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 5:373 (Marblehead); 7:42 (Harling).

left, was forced to face the consequences of his actions and penitently promise to curb such behavior in the future.

In 1646, the town of Ipswich allowed Robert Gray the "free liberty" to become an inhabitant. It seems that the town leaders would not have had cause to regret their decision since at his death, mariner Gray's estate was worth a little over £588, including a part-ownership in a ketch; and his only brush with the Quarterly Court had been in June of 1656 when he had left Abraham Whiteare's son (Gray's servant at the time) in Virginia. The court ordered that he be brought back by the end of the next April. Fisherman William Hodgkins came to Ipswich at a fairly early age and resided in the town for the remainder of his life, being called to court only once for "excessive drinking on a training day." He was also a church member; he and some others members were allowed to "raise the meetinghouse bench" for their wives in 1680.³⁹ The town might have wished they had stuck by their first decision regarding Humphrey Griffin, however. Unlike fishermen or coasters, Griffin owned property and was apparently regularly employed, having gained the town's permission in 1655 to set up a slaughterhouse. Even so, he still found his way into the court on at least three occasions. The first offense landed both him and his mother-in-law in court for what appeared to be a case of mutual "reviling," and a year later he was fined "for profaning the Sabbath in unloading barley before sundown."

Another (quite interesting) offense drew, instead of the usual fine, a strict admonition "as to drinking" – the defendant being "found not drunk," although so he had "appeared . . . by his gestures, evil words, falling off his horse twice, and his breath scenting much of strong liquors." By 1664, someone else was using his former area for a "cow-house," and Humphrey Griffin had moved on.⁴⁰

In 1663 Henry Greenland sued servant Henry Leasenby for what appeared to be an average slander charge, but the underlying issue behind it seemed a little contrary to the idea of an orderly Puritan community. There's no surprise that Greenland wouldn't want Leasenby's story to go any further. In

the servants' daily interactions in such a close community, word had gotten around that Greenland and his friend, Richard Cording, were out about midnight and had "offered five shillings to a man [servant Richard Smith] to help them to a couple of women." Allegedly, they had even named a couple of possibilities, saying if one would not come, then to bring the other. On the testimony of a few more witnesses (including one Mary Rolfe) the verdict went in favor of defendant Henry Leasenby.⁴¹ It appears that both Greenland and Cording were beginning to develop questionable reputations, and this is confirmed in a subsequent case.

Greenland himself was summoned before the magistrates charged with "soliciting Mary, the wife of John Rolfe, to adultery," even "coming into her own house," and his friend Cording was charged with "attempting assault . . . in the stable." Both desiring trial by jury, the two men who had not long before been given special welcome as full inhabitants (with rights to practice in the surrounding areas), "doctors" Henry Greenland and Richard Cording were now "found guilty" as charged, sentenced to jail time, and then to be whipped or fined, £30 for Dr. Greenland and £20 for Dr. Cording. Dr. Cording petitioned the court and was allowed to "give security [and] depart this jurisdiction within one week." Dr. Greenland requested an appeal, but then asked to have it withdrawn a few months later. It seems that his wife was at that point on her way to New England and Greenland desired it dropped at any cost.⁴² Apparently, the doctor preferred to pay his fine rather than have his wife discover his indiscretions.

Greenland's problems didn't disappear as quickly as he had hoped. It seems that mariners weren't always the "defendants" when appearing in court. When Mary's husband, John Rolfe, returned from a fishing voyage to Nantucket, he too took the doctor to court. Therefore, in an unexpected turn about, one from their own mariner community had petitioned the Quarterly Court magistrates and received redress from the guilty party (regardless of status) for the wrongs committed.⁴³ The fact that some fishermen took advantage of the court system does not necessarily prove that they were considered by others as part of

³⁹ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 424, 2:425-426; 7:187, 8:375; Waters, *Ipswich*, 90, 114; Abraham Hammatt, *The Hammatt Papers: Early Inhabitants of Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1633-1700* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), 138-40.

⁴⁰ Waters, *Ipswich*, 90, 276, 491; *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1:113, 422; 2:3.

⁴¹ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 3:44-45; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 156 (fn. 18).

⁴² *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 3:47-48, 54, 56. [Greenland's wife was en route from England.]

⁴³ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 3:75, 88-89; Hammatt, *Hammatt Papers*, 290.

the larger society; however, that they felt able to bring their claims to the magistrates, and that their cases were heard, as well as acted upon, does indicate a certain degree of acceptance on both sides.

Andrew Peter's request in November of 1673 for "liberty" to keep Sarah Roe at his house "till eleven weeks be expired . . . she declaring some inclination to live with her husband as a wife, and to go to him when he comes to town"⁴⁴ was just the end of what had been a fairly long story. William Rowe, a fisherman from the Isle of Shoals, charged John Leigh (also Lee) of Ipswich in the spring of 1673 for "insinuating dalliance and too much familiarity with his wife, drawing away her affections from her husband to the great detriment both in his estate and the comfort of his life."⁴⁵ In the testimony in this case, somewhat similar to that of John Rolfe, a very different kind of story emerges than that often presumed about fisherman living on the "periphery" of Puritan society.

William and Sarah Rowe had married about two years earlier. Sarah was well known in her neighborhood, working as a maid at the minister Hubbard's house at the time. Apparently, they fared pretty well during courtship, although initially Sarah had had some reservations. (She had once refused to let Rowe in when he came to see her, and neighbors said he had "walked all night in Mr. Hubbard's orchard."). Sarah's parents had approved of the match because they believed Rowe to "be a man of good carriage, good estate, able to maintain a wife . . . very industrious . . . and kind," and a "match . . . with mutual satisfaction." However, having been brought up in a farming family, with little exposure to maritime life save that of Uncle Andrew Peter's ordinary – where she may have met William Rowe, and to which she returned in 1673 – Sarah may have been somewhat unprepared for the reality of her new husband's absences at sea. However that winter, right after the marriage, Rowe was apparently not going out, even though he had been asked by a friend; and when asked if she would go to live at the Isle of Shoals, Sarah said that Rowe was buying some land in town for a house – which he did in 1671, near Mr. Glover's wharf.⁴⁶

Defendant John Leigh had known Sarah for a number of years and claimed to the court that he'd "had some thought of matching with her." It seems that he never said as much to Sarah, because although it was apparent she held some interest in him, no mention shows up in the recorded testimonies of any intention of marriage. What does appear, however, is a combined charge for "several great offenses" for which Leigh is "bound to good behavior" with bond set at £15, as well as a neighborhood rumor that Elizabeth Woodward "was with child, and John Lee the father of it."⁴⁷ A few months after her marriage, Sarah was seen multiple times in Leigh's company. According to one witness when "stopping by . . . and seeing somebody in bed" had asked if Sarah's husband was home, and was told that he was "at sea." A relative said that Sarah "had carried well to her husband till John Lee frequented . . . her company when her husband was abroad fishing." When the case came before the magistrates, Leigh claimed he was not "insinuating into [Sarah's] affections," that she was not happy with Rowe due to their "differences in disposition," and averred that she had been "persuaded contrary to her own inclinations" to marry. However, before her marriage, Sarah had assured her mother and "Aunt Peters" that she "loved [Rowe] well enough." At one point, Sarah defended her husband's appearance against Leigh's disparagements, telling him that if he "had been a seaman for as long as [Rowe], you would have wrinkles in your forehead too." Many of her acquaintances believed that if Leigh had not continually sought her company, Sarah would not have acted as she did.⁴⁸

Ultimately, John Leigh was unable to escape punishment "for his great offense," and was sentenced to be whipped or fined £5, "bound to good behavior," and was "not to come in company with Sarah Row." Sarah, too, was unable to avoid the consequences of her behavior, and was charged with "unlawful familiarity . . . and abusing her husband." She was sentenced to jail for one month and ordered to stand in view of the meetinghouse wearing a sign bearing the nature of her offense. Leigh lost his appeal of the judgment at the next court session, and the verdict stood in favor of plaintiff William Rowe.⁴⁹ Rowe did

⁴⁴ Hammatt, *Hammatt Papers*, 261; Waters, *Ipswich*, 284-85.

⁴⁵ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 5:186.

⁴⁶ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 5:187, 229; Hammatt, *Hammatt Papers*, 261; Waters, *Ipswich*, 81.

⁴⁷ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 5:145, 231.

⁴⁸ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 5:143, 145, 187-88, 228, 229.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 5:143, 144, 147, 186, 227, 233; Waters, *Ipswich*, 284-85.

not receive any kind of remuneration for his difficulties other than that valued by all within Ipswich's Puritan society: his reputation and good name.

While the record is silent about the future outcome for William and Sarah Rowe, the ultimate silence indicates that apparently the fisherman and the farmer's daughter were able to come back together. Otherwise, Sarah's name (or that of her sureties) would have shown up in the next court session since she had been further ordered "to appear at the next Ipswich court, unless she be reconciled to her husband and go to him before that time." Apparently, Sarah was waiting at Andrew Peter's house later that year "to live with her husband as a wife, and to go to him when he comes to town."⁵⁰

Both fishermen and farmers, who were discouraged by their Cape Ann experience and had moved west with Roger Conant, seemed to have found more of what they were looking for in Salem.* They were joined by John Endicott in 1628, along with "some other good men," to carry on the work of "erecting a new Colony upon the old foundation." Matthew Cradock (a joint holder in the Massachusetts Company) assured Endicott that ministers Samuel Skelton and Francis Higginson would be sent over by the next ship. William Wood, who came over with the Reverend Higginson to observe the new plantation, wrote in *New Englands Prospect* of Salem's "abundance of fish, and the like," as well as "nearly every household having a water-horse** or two." He noted that Salem had "good harbors" which would provide an "excellent opportunity for fishing and trade."⁵¹ Little might Wood have known just how true his observations would become.

Apparently, the Puritan leaders were not averse to encouraging a fishing industry. Along with the ministers, the Massachusetts Co. also sent over some servants skilled in fishing in an effort to help Salem's infant fishery become more profitable for both the colonists and the investors back in England and, to assist such an end, the Reverend Hugh Peter (once he had arrived in New England) preached at both Salem

and Boston and "moved the country to raise a stock for fishing." Within a short time, Gov. Winthrop noted that as the Rev. Peter went about laboring "to raise up men to a public . . . spirit, he so prevailed as to "procure a good sum of money to . . . set on foot the fishing business" and to establish a "magazine of provisions and necessaries" so the men would have what was needed "at hand and for reasonable prices."⁵²

The home-grown fishery that Winthrop envisioned probably did not ultimately turn out just as he had hoped. Diligent, Puritan-minded men, who also knew the art of fishing and desired to continue in that calling, were not always readily available. Nevertheless, while Winthrop and the Puritan leaders of Essex County did not quickly get what they wanted, they also did not get entirely what they didn't want either. Salem and its surrounding maritime areas attracted quite a diverse group of both seekers and settlers, including some who came over simply to make money or to try their hand at something that had been difficult or unrewarding back home. They now had a chance to labor for a season and leave. A number of fishermen came over on short-term "fishing contracts," which enabled them to work, but did not bind them permanently to any one region. Hence, these people had no lasting ties to the area, and many did not intend to change that. Therefore, these itinerant fishermen came just long enough to work, get their names recorded in a local outfitters account book (like George Corwin of Salem), and sometimes into the court records as well, such as Corwin's Richard Estbrook from 1671, or Thomas Nore in the 1663 Quarterly Court.⁵³ Frequently, a drifting fisherman was just an unaccountable name in a fishing ledger or an untraceable name in the court record. They were there long enough to leave a mark, both on the books and in the minds of Puritan society – and ultimately onto the social and historical memory as a whole – as part of a rowdy and uncivilized group of worldly laborers, laboring only in the fields of self-interest, rather than in the fields of religious effort and communal good. However, those were not the only

⁵⁰ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 5:308; Hammatt, *Hammatt Papers*, 261.

⁵¹ Sidney Perley, *The History of Salem Massachusetts*, (Salem, Mass., 1924), 1:80-82, 89, 104; Adams, "Village Communities," in *Stodie*, 332, 339-40, 345 (and fn. 28).

*Formerly "Naumkeag."

**Canoes.

⁵² Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1:370; Perley, *Salem* 1:139, 300-01, 378; [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Peters,_Hugh_\(DNB00\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Peters,_Hugh_(DNB00)).

⁵³ George Corwin Account Books, 1658-1672, Curwen Family Papers, 1641-1902, James Duncan Phillips Library, Peabody-Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.; *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 3:84; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 131-32.

men laboring at sea in seventeenth-century Puritan New England. Working "at their calling," as a number of New England fishermen referred to it, to make their living (or "competence") to support family and community, kept a vast number of Essex County maritime workers engaged – and in their home-ports.

Isaac Woodbury was one committed to his calling, his family, and his community. When chosen to serve as constable in 1675, he appealed the appointment to the Quarterly Court on the grounds that, while civic service was a duty, he would not be able to fulfill both the demands of the position and his calling. Woodbury explained to the court that "as the providenc of God . . . so ordered . . . that my calling is at sea," and being required to "attend it in a constant way the greatest part of the year for the providing for my famely as the word of God requires," being otherwise "worse than an infidel in not providing, [I] am therefore not capeable of executing the Office in my owne person as the Law . . . requires."⁵⁴ Apparently, besides just care for his employment, both the needs of his family and concern for the town he called home weighed heavily upon him.

A similar situation confronted John Brown. Contrary to the accepted paradigm, Brown was a Ruling Elder in the Salem church in 1660. But he had "found by experience [that] he could not attend the office of Elder with the constancy and expense of time that the work of it did require." Therefore, "professing the need [to] attend [to] his calling as a seaman, wherein he was . . . much absent," Brown requested that the Church "dismissing him from his office that he might with more freedome of Spirit attend the necessary duties of his calling." The church understood Elder Brown's dilemma and "consented to his desire," dismissing him in 1664.⁵⁵ The nature of his work had kept him from doing some things he might otherwise have done, but did not separate him from home and community.

Of a different character and situation was Matthew Nixon, a fisherman who came to the area and received a grant of land in 1639 at the age of twenty-three. Not much stands out about Matthew Nixon in particular. In fact, he was probably similar to a number of working fishermen in and around Salem at the time.

He married the daughter of a local family, and lived in Salem for a little over forty years. As his fishing business prospered, Nixon formed an "and Company" after his name and signed the Petition Against Imposts, along with the majority of Salem men, in 1668. In 1651, he took on an apprentice, Jeremiah Boutman, for seven years to "train him in fishing and in the same service at sea in which he was engaged."⁵⁶

It appears that during his forty plus years in Salem, however, that Matthew Nixon (unlike Woodbury or Brown) never served in any civic or church-related capacity, being described by Vickers as (representative of most Salem fishermen) "a chronic debtor with a penchant for the bottle"⁵⁷ who never served in any public capacity or joined the church. While it is true regarding public office and never officially becoming a church member (although he was responsible for an apprentice who, by law, would have to be trained in the Scriptures as well) he was neither a chronic debtor nor a habitual problem drinker – not until the last few years of his life when age and circumstance apparently diminished ability and clouded better reason. It appears that Nixon's troubles started shortly after the death of his wife of nearly thirty years in 1671. Before this time, the only presentments that Nixon had in court were for wages owed to a seaman in his employ and for a single case of drunkenness in 1658. However, in 1672, the selectmen ordered that Matthew Nixon, along with a few others, "should not frequent the ordinaries nor spend their time and estates in tipling." In 1674, though, he was employed on a voyage to Virginia. But by 1679 Nixon was in debt for cod lines, twine, and mackerel hooks, as well as brandy. It appears that he had very little in the way of an estate, and with age working against him, may by then have been trying to support himself fishing near home. At about 63 years of age, without the assistance of either wife or adequate income, Nixon sank deeper into debt and was forced to sell most of his land, and one year later found himself in court again for drunkenness.⁵⁸

While not as positive an outcome as either Woodbury or Brown, Nixon remained in the same area and was

⁵⁴ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 6:101-02.

⁵⁵ Richard D. Pierce, Ed. *The Records of the First Church in Salem Massachusetts, 1629-1736* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1974), 85, 99.

⁵⁶ *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (Boston: Samuel G. Drake, 1855), "Petitions Against Imposts, 1668," 9:81; *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1:231.

⁵⁷ Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 96-97.

⁵⁸ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 2:136; 4:414; 6:87; 7:249, 325, 425; Perley, *Salem*, 2:73-74, 211-12; 3:80; Pierce, *First Church*, 4.

employed in the same calling for most of his life. He had married, trained an apprentice, formed a small fishing company, and interacted in the day-to-day life of a Puritan town. Nixon would not be representative of all working fishermen in Salem, but neither would he be an example of a drunken, rowdy mariner "type" who had little concern for any of the "shackles" of settled society. Had he been a marginalized member of a sub-culture, he would not likely have owned property, held an apprentice, managed a fishing company, or responded to the expectations of those around him. Nor was he a member of the more privileged or elite fishermen, who many times went on to become merchant-outfitters or shareholders in vessels, and who were occasionally called upon to serve the community in some way. For the most part, Matthew Nixon was probably a fairly ordinary sort of man who knew and lived by the cultural norms of his society as much as he could, and answered to the general court when he did not.

As time went on, Salem and the surrounding mariner communities began to attract more married men with families. Essex County fishing communities could offer a sense of stability and community support, two important elements (especially for mariners' wives) that were not always available in other areas. Wives and families often found themselves on their own for extended periods of time, and the home community, as well as the church, was an invaluable resource, especially when need arose. In the early stages of manning the fishing fleets, mostly young single men signed on to fish, but past mid-century, things had changed, and married men represented more than half of the workers between 1665 and 1674. This helped provide stability to both the industry and the area, and as a result home ownership increased as well. By 1674, Marblehead alone listed 114 householders.⁵⁹ Something about this maritime area or community seems to have been attractive to those coming here to fish.

Salem was not big enough, as Vickers noted, to develop a "sailor town,"⁶⁰ and the Puritan leadership

was not going to let that change. Aside from laws against disorderly conduct and "misspending" of one's time, orders against idleness, living outside of "family government," absence from meeting, and requiring that all be employed in an "honest calling" had been standard rules for living since the beginning. If anyone cared to challenge the accepted standards, they could find themselves before the magistrates, as did one Samuel Bennett of Marblehead in 1645 "for saying scornfully that he cared neither for the town nor its orders."⁶¹ In both legal and ecclesiastical forms, Puritan authorities attempted to keep a fairly tight rein on its society in the wilderness.

If, as Winthrop had envisioned, they were to be a "city on the hill" in view of the world, then it was imperative to maintain as disciplined and godly a community as possible. Therefore, all were equally obligated to heed all expectations and constraints. When ministers exhorted the people to circumspect living, the messages were for the community as a whole, such as the "general fast" called in 1638 over the apparent "decay of . . . religion and . . . general decline."⁶² There were, however, also sermons and admonitions addressed principally to the mariner communities, as well as specific calls for prayers. The Reverend Cotton Mather preached "a sermon to the seafaring people, 'The Religious Mariner'" in 1699, and "A Brief Discourse . . . to Sea-men" the following year. In addition there were numerous "prayer bills" read regularly in the various congregations for those at sea, and notes of thanks from those returned. The mariners' profession appeared to not be generally looked down upon because Mather had exhorted his congregation that those in a "calling" should remain in that calling (either land or sea), if he had the "gifts to perform it well," as having been called of God, and warned that they were "not to give it up lightly."⁶³ With sermons, prayers, and exhortations directly intended for them and their families, apparently

⁵⁹ Innes, *Commonwealth*, 29, 32; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 133-34; Vickers, *Maritime Labor*, 72, 121, 144 fn. 129; Richard Archer, "New England Mosaic: A Demographic Analysis for the Seventeenth Century" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, Vol. 47, No. 4 (October 1990): 477-502; Roads, *History and Traditions*, 28.

⁶⁰ Daniel Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 132.

⁶¹ *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1:15 (Grand Jury to be informed of " . . . any person living out of a particular calling." 1639.), 85; Perley, *Salem*, 126, 129, 138-39. [Letters from the Massachusetts Bay Co. to Gov. Endecott.]

⁶² Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1:337; Innes, *Commonwealth*, 14, 36.

⁶³ Cotton Mather, "The Religious Mariner" (B. Green & F. Allen, Boston, 1700); *Diary of Cotton Mather* (Massachusetts Historical Society, 7th Series, Boston, 1911), 1:323, 62-63 (fn. 1), 212; Robert Middlekauff, "The Mathers" (University of Calif. Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1999), 268.

mariners were not as commonly excluded from the overall concerns of the church as might have been supposed.

The only inhabitants who could be considered on the periphery, not subject to all of the rules, regulations, and customs of the townships were the ironworkers at Hammersmith in Lynn. A substantially rough and rowdy crew – having come to the colonies on work contracts which they entered into in England – they believed themselves exempt from the basic Puritan standards of government, often acting as if the only law they knew and obeyed was their own. They were “exempt from the colony’s church attendance requirement,” and as a separately incorporated area within Lynn, legal stipulations regarding church and religious behavior had no hold over them. The courts could act aggressively only if a civil or criminal offense occurred. A simple “admonishment” for not coming to meeting “more than once or twice in a year” that coal-worker Henry Stiche experienced from the Quarterly Court in 1649, or no warrant nor fine when he hadn’t shown up for court the year before, would be unheard of for resident fishermen in Salem, whose appearances at the general court were mandatory unless they were “at sea” and allowances for missing church mostly limited to the times of the spring and fall voyages. Additionally, the town and First Church Salem also exempted fishermen from military training during fishing season, and had once sought to “hasten the ordination of the [new] Pastor and Elder [since] many of the brethren would be shortly absent upon the necessary occasions of their callings at sea.”

⁶⁴ No such considerations would have been necessary for the Hammersmith ironworkers.

That Salem fishermen did attend First Church is apparent from the record, although undoubtedly a number of the men and their families thus represented were often from a group of fairly elite mariners, those who were more able to take part-ownership in a fishing ketch, to become small merchant-outfitters, innkeepers, or perhaps something other than fishing entirely. Many were also involved in civic duties such as selectman, constable,⁶⁵ or juror. Out of a sample of 100 mariners on merchant

George Corwin’s account books, 41 of them were also on record as church members. For example, Pasco Foote was referred to as a “very enterprising merchant” besides fisherman, and two of his sons followed in his footsteps. Job Hilliard had other fishermen working under him and was later able to buy a share in the ketch, *Mayflower*. Nicholas Woodbury was part-owner in a mill; Nicholas Merrit was also a farmer. Both Thomas Giggles (a master-mariner) and Elias Mason served on the jury; Merrit on the Grand Jury. Mason was also tythingman⁶⁶ in 1678. Joseph Grafton served as tythingman in 1677, Gilbert Tapley was licensed to sell “1-penny beer” from his ordinary, and Ambross Gale became a merchant-outfitter and helped to found the official Marblehead church.⁶⁷

Some of Salem’s mariner church members were not quite so noteworthy. Mordecai Craford seemed to have suffered from a chronic problem of debt for most of his life. He ultimately lost his boat and some other possessions. His wife was also accused (although later acquitted) of burning down their house when it was to be repossessed by merchant Thomas Savage of Boston, and both of his daughters had found their way into court as well. Nevertheless, Mordecai kept working, shuttling fish and supplies between Salem and Monhegan Island. Through all of his sundry difficulties, Craford was still assigned the “fore seat in the south gallery” of the meetinghouse and was allowed by the general court to “keep an ordinary” in 1667. Edward Winter began obtaining supplies for fishing from George Corwin in 1661, but was still only being assessed 2 shillings (the lowest tax) for the “country rate” in 1683 – possibly due to his having been “deliver[ed] in person” to merchant Edmund Batter in 1678 “for five years service,” with

⁶⁴ Innes, *Commonwealth*, 259; *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1:183, 136; John G. Palfrey, *History of New England* (Little, Brown, & Co., Boston, 1865), 55; Pierce, *First Church*, 86.

⁶⁵ Constable: an officer of the peace or person having minor judicial functions

⁶⁶ Tythingman: person appointed to collect taxes mandated for the support of the church, to detain or arrest Sabbath travelers (not going to or from church), as well as holder of “tithing sticks” (long sticks with feathers attached to the end) to awaken sleeping parishioners.

⁶⁷ P. Foote: *Essex Institute Historical Collections* (Henry Whipple & Son, 1859), 1:172; *Essex Ct. Rec.* 4:398; Pierce, *First Church*, 14, 23; Perley, *Salem*, 1:368; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 96; J. Hilliard: Perley, 2:216, 228; Vickers, 111; N. Woodbury: Pierce, 25, 27; *Essex Ct. Rec.* 5:221; N. Merrit: *Essex Ct. Rec.* 4:187; Pierce, 35; Roads, *History and Traditions*, 26; Gray, *Founding of Marblehead*, 95. T. Giggles: Pierce, 28; *Essex Ct. Rec.* 4:292, 5:245; Perley, 1:390 n7; E. Mason: Pierce, 24; *Essex Ct. Rec.* 2:250, 6:73, 7:68; J. Grafton: Pierce, 19; *Essex Ct. Rec.* 6:290; G. Tapley: Pierce, 41; *Essex Ct. Rec.* 7:77; Perley, 1:38; A. Gale: Pierce, 26, 158; *Essex Ct. Rec.* 6:290; First Church . . . Marblehead, *Golden Cod*, 132; Gray, 69; Corwin Account Books, 1658-1672.

Batter keeping "one-third of his earnings toward debt." Still, Winter and his wife Deborah joined the church, were baptized, and brought in their children as well. His son, Edward Jr. also brought his children in for baptism some years later.⁶⁸

Getting one's name on the official church record was a fairly detailed process; therefore, a number of families who actually did attend meeting were often not fully represented. According to Vickers, approximately 26% of land-based inhabitants were church members, as opposed to about 6% from the mariner community by the early 1680s. Aside from the question of why only about one-quarter of farming families had attained membership, two factors may affect such calculations: first, the lack of records for the early Marblehead church, as well as the loss of the first records from Gloucester; and secondly, the somewhat difficult and lengthy requirements for reaching full membership status. Puritan ecclesiastical policy required that for one to become a church member "in full communion" there had to be both recognizable evidence and a verbal confession of a substantial religious experience that would indicate beyond doubt a "divine election," followed by a meeting with the minister and elders to assure of "orthodox" belief. Only then would their names be submitted before the congregation. From that point, their general "conversation and carriage" was carefully examined to determine if there was any suspicion of contradiction between confession and community life. If there were any problems, the potential member would need to explain and make amends. The entire process usually took a month, or longer, depending on individual situations.⁶⁹ Therefore, it would not be out of line to consider that a fair number of attendees simply by-passed the difficult process of being "propounded" before the congregation for "full fellowship" in favor of the more simple, yet acceptable, status of "communicant." In fact, a minister in England wrote Boston's John Wilson in 1637 to the effect that: "You are so strict in the admission of members to your churches that more

than halfe are out of the church in all your congregations."⁷⁰

Some of the most readily available information regarding church affiliation can be gained from baptismal recordings; however, without full church membership, non-members could not bring in their children for baptism as did those considered "visible saints," and consequently would not be on record. Therefore, until this practice was addressed by the Reverend John Higginson (and other members of the Congregational clergy in 1662) through the "Half-Way Covenant," which allowed members' adult children who now had children of their own to have them baptized, there were perhaps a number of families who remained unnamed – and therefore unaccountable for the first years of Salem's settlement. It became of such concern that Higginson warned that the church could be considered remiss in its responsibility to all members.⁷¹ That a part of the excluded community he was referring to would have included some of the poorer families, as well as those absent for extended periods such as fishermen, seems to be a logical assumption for maritime Salem.

Besides the other factors affecting the knowledge of church participation in seventeenth-century Salem, the original First Church Salem record book was reproduced in part in 1660 because it had aged beyond safe usage, and therefore, portions not considered necessary or appropriate for full public knowledge "by vote of the church" were "omitted" from the newer reproduction, which included (among other things) various decisions and actions regarding members or communicants under censure for such offenses as drunkenness.⁷² Thus, it is possible that information which would shed more light on other members of the congregation who may not have been "in full fellowship" is not readily available, and could allow an inconclusive assumption that the numbers of at least church "participants" was lower than might be expected where church attendance was required of all.

⁶⁸ On Mordecai Craford: *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 256; 2:390; 3:75, 208, 260, 330, 420-21; 4:9, 84, 195; Perley, *Salem*, 2:221, 228, 397; *Records of the Court of Assistants*, 3:179; Vickers, *Young Men*, 35, 38, 40; on Edward Winter: *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 7:153; Perley, *Salem*, 2:30, 3:32, 421.

⁶⁹ Vickers, *Maritime Labor*, 125; Richard Archer, *Fissures in the Rock*, 52-53; Kenneth Lockridge, "History of a Puritan Church" in *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society, & Culture*, ed. Alden Vaughn & Francis Bremer (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 94.

⁷⁰ Thomas J. Wertenbaker, "The Fall of the Wilderness Zion" in *Puritanism in Early America*, ed. George Waller (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1950), 27 [Letter: April 17, 1637].

⁷¹ Daniel Appleton White, *New England Congregationalism: In Its Origin and Purity* (Salem: Salem Gazette Office, 1861), 92; Pierce, *First Church*, xiii, fn.4 (xiii).

⁷² White, *Congregationalism* 48, 59; Pierce, *First Church*, xiii, xxiii-xxiv.

It appears that mariners were not completely outside of the scope of Puritan inclusion. Apparently, fishermen and other mariners (similar to the actual society itself) seemed to have been classified in the social and religious mind into at least two categories: godly (or at least redeemable) and reprobate. Such reasoning seems to have influenced some of the ministers and a few others, such as John Winthrop, who were involved with the mariner communities. The Reverend White of Dorchester (a moderate Puritan), who had backed the new colonial commercial venture, argued that part of the importance in supporting the new fishing grounds was its benefit to the "poore Fisherman" rather than just to the London merchants; and the Reverend Hugh Peter had worked tirelessly to acquire the funds necessary to help support a local fishery, rather than importing the less-desirable itinerant seamen easily found in the West Country or Newfoundland.⁷³ Likewise, John Winthrop recorded in his *History of New England* a number of incidents involving mariners in various employments and of varied temperaments. His distinctions between the godly and the ungodly were readily apparent, such as when mariner Bezaleel Payton of Boston was caught in a storm between Cape Cod and the Bay, Winthrop related that "the men commended themselves to the Lord, who delivered them marvelously." Similarly, when Richard Collicut and his men, in a small open vessel, were caught in a storm, the men "went to prayer" and were delivered, the sea "heav[ing] their vessel over into the open sea between two rocks." However, in 1643, Winthrop recorded the demise of "three fishermen of a boat belonging to the Isle of Shoals. . . . very profane men, scorers of religion, and drinking all the Lord's Day, [who were] the next week . . . cast upon the rocks . . . and drowned." Conversely, the saving of a "pinnacle" and all its passengers, going between Salem and Cape Cod in 1640, was accomplished, according to Winthrop, through the able manoeuvrings of one John Jackson, who he referred to as "a godly man and experienced seaman." No implication seemed intended here by Winthrop, especially since it was complimentary, that the two "did not necessarily go together" – as Vickers thought it might. It was more likely just a manner of speaking, such as in his entry regarding the ordination in 1640

⁷³ Adams, "Village Communitie," in *Studies*, 339; Perley, *Salem*, 63; Innes, *Commonwealth*, 71; Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1:207, 210.

of Mr. Knolles of Watertown, "a godly man and a prime scholar."⁷⁴ It would appear that the Puritan community demonstrated in various ways that they expected the two to go together, and were determined to call to task those on whom this expectation might be lost.

The Puritan community was built on the idea and practice of a covenant, both theological and governmental. A covenant requires mutual consent and, according to theologian Thomas Hooker, this consent is the "cement" that holds a society together. If consent is voluntary, then "no man [is] constrained to enter into such a condition unless he will . . . and he that will enter must also willingly binde and ingage himself to . . . that society to promote the good of the whole or else a member actually he is not,"⁷⁵ therefore, any who chose not to become (or remain) a member would not be forced to continue in such arrangement. Hence, for those who found the constraints of Puritan society in seventeenth-century Essex County too difficult to contend with, for the most part, took leave of the colony. In the first years of settlement, moving out of direct control of Puritan authority could actually take the form of simply going across the harbor to Marblehead. However, as time and close proximity went on, regular interaction one with the other was unavoidable, and the conflicting cultures of the two – predominantly East Anglia immigrants and West Countrymen – began to moderate somewhat, allowing for at least a modest degree of compliance and consanguinity.

CONCLUSIONS

It is hard to tell if the contentions and misdemeanors that brought some of the maritime community into the court was very much different from or more often than that of the general population. However, a more definitive estimate is obtainable through an examination of the court records for Essex County residents. Daniel Vickers' work estimated the proportion of mariners within the population in several towns,⁷⁶ and in a random sampling of the court records it was found that the number of mariners in court for either drunkenness or violence

⁷⁴ Winthrop, *History of New England*, 2:21-22 (Knolles), 23, 75, 187, 410, 411; Vickers, *Young Men*, 19.

⁷⁵ Perry Miller, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity" in *Puritan New England*, 59.

⁷⁶ Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen*, 156n.

actually did not exceed this estimate. In Salem, for instance, where the estimated mariner population was about 20%, there were 8 fishermen in court, 5 for drunkenness and 3 for violence, or approximately 20%. Similar results were found for Ipswich and Gloucester/Beverly. Marblehead has often been referred to as one of the worst areas for rowdiness, with an almost 100% mariner population. For the current random sample evaluation though (since there were some other known trades within it as well), mariners were estimated at 90% of the overall population (a figure which may still be slightly high), and the incidence of misdemeanors was actually smaller than would be expected. For a sample size of 14 cases, 10 of those were fishermen or coasters, from which one could conclude that the fishing industry made up about 71% of Marblehead's population.

Therefore, in all of the sample areas and cases, the mariner population brought to the Quarterly Court between roughly the 1650s and the 1680s fell within the average and accepted range of their proportion of the towns' overall population. Marblehead's somewhat low mariner-offender percentage, considering its larger than usual seaman population, may be due to the small sample size used for this particular investigation, and therefore, could be more accurately adjusted with a larger sample size.⁷⁷ With a more detailed and larger study – which could be more easily accomplished now with new and expanded digital resources – a more accurate representation should be possible to determine.

Nevertheless, for a starting point, this estimation has demonstrated that while the mariner population did find themselves in trouble, they seemed to do so at about the same rate as the others around them, and for similar offenses. This observation seems to have been overlooked by some otherwise notable authors, such as Daniel Vickers and Christine Heyrman, in favor of the more traditional "rowdy fisherman" stereotype. This paradigm found further support from the economic perspective, such as that of Bernard Bailyn, that fishermen were usually considered only insofar as they were an asset to a growing colony and not as a permanent part of the society as a whole. On the other hand, while Richard Archer's *Fissures in the Rock*

did not go far enough to break down old stereotypes, the "complexities" of New England society he noted allowed for a slight shift in the correct direction. Furthermore, I believe that this close reading of mariners' behavior, compared to that of other occupations, has demonstrated the fact that the mariners were being held to account for their behavior, as would any other member of the society. I argue that they did indeed form a part of the New England culture and society long considered and restricted to a particular group of people who were in essence as different from each other in some ways as they were the same in others. With such a paradigm shift, it will be possible to view early New England society through a new and more inclusive lens. This new evidence shows that this was not necessarily an extraordinary sub-group that existed within Puritan society, but this new society was in itself a fairly extraordinary group.

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⁷⁷ Results were obtained from comparisons of estimated population proportion of mariners within the general population to the proportion of verifiable mariners in the Court Records.

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