

Serena Newman, "They Came Here to fish: Early Massachusetts Fisherman in a Puritan Society" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 36, No. 2 (Summer 2008).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

You may use content in this archive for your personal, non-commercial use. Please contact the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* regarding any further use of this work:

[masshistoryjournal@westfield.ma.edu](mailto:masshistoryjournal@westfield.ma.edu)

Funding for digitization of issues was provided through a generous grant from MassHumanities.



Some digitized versions of the articles have been reformatted from their original, published appearance. When citing, please give the original print source (volume/ number/ date) but add "retrieved from HJM's online archive at <http://www.westfield.ma.edu/mhj>.



**They Came Here to Fish:  
Early Massachusetts Fishermen in a Puritan Society**

**By**

**Serena L. Newman**

Such was the story according to the Reverend Cotton Mather in his epic *Magnalia Christi Americana* concerning a confrontation of a sort between a Puritan minister and a group of fishermen in Marblehead, MA. 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 were not really a vital part of the “New England culture” that has been so widely studied and written about. This marginalization of the maritime communities is arguably overdrawn. Maritime Massachusetts and the families it encompassed became an important and influential expression of New England culture, albeit in a somewhat different form from that of the inland communities. Unlike farmers in the interior, mariners were often gone 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 records, town records, and church records indicate. The fact that there was such 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 that could only be had through an intimate knowledge of the applicant in question – a requirement that would be hard to meet with only a transient maritime labor force.

Life at sea often was only a part of a mariners life, with most retiring before mid-life to pursue various endeavors – sometimes maritime and sometimes not. Many sons followed in their fathers' footsteps, once old enough, taking over where their fathers had left off – often for much-needed family support, sometimes for training, and sometimes for the love of adventure. However, so too did a number of sons from non-maritime families. Hence, to depict the maritime communities that dotted the New England coastline as a whole and congruous culture, apart from a "Puritan culture," denies a diversity that was a part of the "new world" from the very beginning.

From about 1630 to almost the end of the century, what is known as the "Great Migration" brought thousands of settlers across the Atlantic to build a "new" England – for many, a "godly commonwealth" where they would be free from the religious persecution of the Church of England, and from its "worldly and popish" entanglements. For others, the impetus to undertake such a long and dangerous journey was the hope of establishing themselves in a place that would allow them to pursue a better life for themselves and their families, both economically and socially – something that was increasingly difficult in England, except for the already fairly well-off. 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 elder and young persons who came over hither not out of respect to conscience or spiritual ends, but out of respect to friends or outward enlargements, but have here found that grace which they sought not for.”<sup>1</sup> Whether that always turned out to be the case is uncertain, 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,”<sup>2</sup> has been less difficult to envision.

Similarly easy to recognize was Christine Heyrman’s example of a later interaction between Marbleheaders and their clergy. In a case brought before the General Court in November 1667, “fisherman”<sup>3</sup> 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.” Conceivably a “typical” story: the drunk, rowdy fisherman, un-churched and with little respect for the clergy, coming before the court, and then coming to an untimely end, but the only problem with this conclusion is that Henry Coombs was not a fisherman (as Heyrman had assumed). He was instead a farmer with six acres of land (actually 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

---

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

[With a brief interlude after 1649 while England was under Oliver Cromwell.]

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Adams, “Village Communities of Cape Ann and Salem,” *Studies in Historical and Political Science*, First Series (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1883), 329 [taken from Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*].

<sup>3</sup> Christine Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1750* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), 222.

fishermen.<sup>4</sup> That Coombs lived in Marblehead (described by Daniel Vickers as having had a nearly 100% fishermen/mariner population<sup>5</sup>), had some less-than-pious behavior, and then accidentally drowned by “being drunk,” it’s 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 that has built around this image is not entirely borne out by the evidence. In examining the records available for some of the towns of Essex County, such as Marblehead, 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 (positively and negatively) as did those of any other occupation. 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.”<sup>6</sup>

Marblehead’s first settlement was around 1629 as primarily a “fishing station” with itinerant fisherman coming from various locations. Some of the first fishermen for whom there is some written account were sent from investor Matthew Cradock, who held fishing rights from the English authorities. 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 such as Isaac Allerton (who had first been at Plymouth Colony until his self-seeking behavior regarding business matters and personal profit led to his ouster by the authorities), Moses Maverick (who married Allerton’s daughter Remember), and ship-builder John

---

<sup>4</sup> *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, 8 vol., George Francis Dow, Ed., (Salem, MA, 1911-21), 1: 169; 3: 117, 461; 4: 206, 211 (Here-in after cited *Essex Ct. Rec.*); Thomas E. Gray, *The Founding of Marblehead*, (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1984), 60-61. [Gray also notes that Coombs helped Thomas Dixey with the ferry in 1662.]

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 156 fn. 18.

<sup>6</sup> First Church of Christ, Marblehead, *Under the Golden Cod* (Canaan, NH: Phoenix Publishing Co., 1984), 5-6.

Coit arrived in Marblehead to take up a more permanent residence. Shortly thereafter, the numbers began to increase – so much so that by 1635 the General Court at Salem allowed Marblehead to become a “Plantation” and instructed proprietor John Humphrey, Esq. to sell land at cost to the inhabitants as they “stood in need.” Also the increasing number of family households moving into Marblehead called for the services of a pastor, so by 1635 an Allerton fishing boat was dispatched to Newbury to pick up the Reverend John Avery who had reluctantly agreed “to come with his family” and take up residence as Marblehead’s first minister.<sup>7</sup>

Avery, however, never made it to Marblehead. He and his family were caught in a severe storm and (except for his cousin Anthony Thatcher and his wife) all aboard perished. Continuing in its first steps toward township, Marblehead inhabitants again looked for a spiritual leader. The man they settled on, William Walton, 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 (plus an additional amount for wood) in 1648, a minister became Marblehead’s first paid “official.” Husbandmen James Smith and Joseph Daliber were appointed “to gather Mr. Walton’s pay” – which sometimes included partial payment in fish, or in one instance, half of a cow.<sup>8</sup>

Little is known about William Walton other than that he was educated at Cambridge and ordained an Anglican minister around 1625. When Charles I continued his father’s policies regarding High Church theology and practices, Walton sailed with his family for New England. He taught first as a teacher in Hingham, and then became a “missionary pastor” to Marblehead in 1637. Although little direct information is available regarding his “politics or philosophy,” First Church historians have described Walton as what would be known today as “non-denominational,” with a belief in church autonomy and lay participation

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 8-9; Gray, 4-5, 8-11.

<sup>8</sup> John Winthrop, *The History of New England*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1853), 196; Samuel Roads, Jr., *The History and Traditions of Marblehead*, (Marblehead, MA: Allen Lindsey & Co., 1897), 20-1; First Church...Marblehead, 8-9; Gray, 11, 18, 26-7, 65, 117.

strong enough to have pushed him from his ministry at coastal Seaton, England to a colonial outpost like Marblehead.<sup>9</sup>

Apparently Walton found a niche within Marblehead society, for he chose to remain with them (and they with him) for the remainder of his lifetime. 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. (Acceptance of Reverend Walton's services is attested to by both church growth and fairly regular increases in his salary, reaching £70 by 1658.)<sup>10</sup>

Following the Reverend Walton's instillation as the pastor of Marblehead's small flock, Moses Maverick with some of the other leaders made arrangements to build a meetinghouse at the top of one of the rocky hills. Although Reverend 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 (as opposed to Heyrman's date of 1684 for a fully official church). Various improvements to Marblehead's meetinghouse appeared in official records until 1683, as well as the addition of a new lean-to in 1672, and attests to the fact of an expanding congregation. In fact, Marblehead petitioned the General Court in 1667 about "the calling and settling of a meet person" to help Mr. Walton, and the court appointed both magistrate Major Hathorne and Salem's pastor, Mr. Higginson "to assist the people with their advice and counsel" – hardly an action the court would have agreed to if there had been no church pastor or church body to "assist." Marbleheaders, it seems, were allowed a certain degree of autonomy as far as their church arrangements were concerned as long as they worked within the basic regulatory framework. Walton's forbearance to be ordained through the Salem church permitted them somewhat more liberty as far as some of the ecclesiastical stipulations went, enabling Marblehead to avoid some of the more severe clerical regulations and restrictions enforced in Salem. Conversely, however, they could not exercise certain privileges and functions either, such as the sacraments of baptism or communion; and only "freemen" – a designation restricted to full church members – could

---

<sup>9</sup> Roads, 14; First Church...Marblehead, 9-10; Gray, 127.

<sup>10</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, vol. 1-3, (1636-1667); First Church...Marblehead, 14-15; Roads, 20.

operate in other civic capacities, such as selectman or constable. Therefore, it was still necessary, and in some instances, imperative to make the difficult trip across the harbor to Salem to receive church sacraments, to answer court “presentments,” or to enter pleas of any kind in the General Court.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of any area’s preference as to religious practices, the church and the ministry played a central role in colonial New England life to some extent, even if only in the breach. Furthermore, there seemed to be a degree of 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” case (1680) for which he was acquitted on the testimony of his first mate, John Fairfax, that he had gone “ashore to meeting” have come up in the General Court? Also, and perhaps sometimes just as determinedly, Marblehead residents may have given their heartiest efforts to avoiding any more compliance than was absolutely necessary. For example, George Hardinge’s fine (1649) for saying that he planned on joining the church and “would then have his dog christened”<sup>12</sup> or 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 was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced by the Court of Assistants in Boston to have his tongue “pierced through with a hot iron.” Interestingly though, Gatchell was again not an unruly fisherman (as Heyrman thought), but was actually a tailor.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, it became impossible (wherever the community) to live and work in proximity to Puritan society in all its facets without being thereby influenced and

---

<sup>11</sup> Priscilla S. Lord & Virginia C. Gamage, *Marblehead: The Spirit of '76 Lives Here* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Co., 1972), 27; Essex Co. Ct. Rec., 3: 462; Roads, 14-15; Heyrman, 223; Vickers, 139 (fn. 124).

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

<sup>13</sup> Heyrman, 216 (“fisherman...”), 222 (“with the orgones”), 223n (blasphemy); *Essex, Ct. Rec.*, 7: 114, 1678 (“...reckoning for work done by [Joseph] Gatchell in his trade...in finishing her clothes...” to be paid “in money or mutton.”). [See also *Records of the Court of Assistants of the Colony of Mass. Bay*, 1: 253-254.]



effected to some degree – and apparently Marblehead was no exception to that rule. Actually, the list of those formally asked to leave the area was quite short. In fact, Daniel Vickers noted that those who were literate often owned Bibles, and that “as a group” seemed to have attended lecture on the Sabbath “almost as often as anyone, when they were in town,”<sup>14</sup> which could be a fairly difficult trip, especially in winter.

As Marblehead continued to grow, land grants by necessity became less generous. The increase of non-fishing interests, such as planters and tradesmen, made the move unavoidable. Acreage allotments, for the most part, began to be registered in two to three acre grants per inhabitant, depending sometimes on a particular need. Fishermen’s allotments were usually centered in the area known as Little Harbor through to the lower end of town; and allowances for others, such as tradesmen, yeomen, and husbandmen, were usually located more toward its upper end. Those involved directly in shipbuilding received grants containing forest acreage, and were often owned by some of the more influential Salem dwellers (who usually did not reside within Marblehead), such as Richard Holligsworth. Unfortunately for some of the fishermen’s interests, allotments, after mid-century, were often reduced to what became known as “house lots,” “planting lots,” and “flake or stage room.” Apparently the General Court did not want to encourage farm interests over the interests of fishing.<sup>15</sup>

Fishing, although by far the primary industry followed by Marblehead inhabitants, was not the only one, though it has often received the most attention. For the first several years it was the heart of the economy, but 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 fire at Matthew Cradock’s house and was able to warn Isaac Allerton and his “many fishermen whom he employed that season” of it, and thereby, according to John Winthrop, all

---

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Vickers, *Maritime Labor in Colonial Massachusetts* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1981), 125; Gray, 11.

<sup>15</sup> First Church...Marblehead, 11; Gray, 15-16, 18-19, 35-36. A similar development occurred in Ipswich by the early 1640s. Thomas Waters, *Ipswich in the Bay Colony* (Ipswich Historical Society, Salem Press Co., 1905), 80.

were “preserved by a special providence of God.”<sup>16</sup> Also in 1638, the General Court allowed a pond area to be set off to keep it “private from plowmen, herdsmen, or others.”<sup>17</sup> 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 would be operated by William Beale from Plymouth Colony. Aside from small farmers and husbandmen, some more traditional tradesmen and craftsmen also showed up in Marblehead: coopers, carpenters, masons, locksmiths, shoemakers, and merchants, as well as “ordinary” keepers – of which Arthur Sandin was the first licensed in 1640. (Merchant-outfitter Moses Maverick had previously been authorized to sell not more than a “tun of wine” in 1638 – an allowance limited at that time to only his and Isaac Allerton’s fishermen.) 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, according to Thomas Gray, approximately 28% of the identifiable males were employed in non-maritime pursuits, (rather than Vickers’ almost 100% maritime estimate\*). In addition, some were employed in more than one venture, such as coasting, outfitting, or tavern keeping, as well as fishing.<sup>18</sup> 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 did begin to function as a town in its own right is evident from both Salem’s allowance for them to officially separate from them 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

---

<sup>16</sup> Winthrop, 1: 147; First Church...Marblehead, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Gray, 17-18.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 16, 32, 148; First Church...Marblehead, 12. \*[See fn. 5.]

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.”<sup>19</sup> Marblehead and its inhabitants were both a part of the bigger New England whole and a part separate in calling and was, thereby, somewhat unique in social and cultural expression, yet maintained cognizance of and cooperation with the larger center. In fact, it was to that stronger center that appeals directly affecting their lives and livelihoods were made (such as the 1644 petition to secure the harbor with “wals and bulwarks” since they feared being vulnerable to even their “weakest enemy”<sup>20</sup>) – in essence a reverse expectation on their part that the dominant authority would consider and act on their requests.

Similar to Marblehead, 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.”<sup>21</sup> But as with Marblehead, this would soon change. Initially the idea had been put forth by some enterprising “merchant adventurers” (including 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 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,” (possibly the encounter between the Dorchester men and some fishermen from Plymouth Company) the project was abandoned in 1625, but apparently (as White later said), while the “first stocks [were] consumed” they had served as a

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 22, 28; Roads, 18-19. [Note (QC, v1p29): Incomplete records for five years from 1641 – abstracts from “Waste Book” only; (QC, v1p114): Ten pages of the original Court Records missing.]

<sup>20</sup> Gray, 20. [See fn. 21 above re: Quarterly Court Records.]

<sup>21</sup> *Memorial of the Incorporation of the Town of Gloucester, Mass.* (Boston: A. Mudge & Son, 1901), 41.

“foundation to the work.”<sup>22</sup> For, although Roger Conant and the few settlers with him shortly removed a few miles west to Naumkeag, later known as Salem, the foundation for Gloucester had been established.

In its early stages Gloucester, as with 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.” Whether Puritan or Anglican is unsure, but that there was some early concern of a religious nature, even in such an outpost, seems to speak for the nature of the worldview in general at this time. Religious considerations were a part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century culture of most Europeans – fishermen or otherwise – and undoubtedly followed with them to some degree to their colonial environment. Apparently, the ecclesiastical expectations of those who supported the new world ventures were such that ministers were considered a regular and expected necessity, and often “provided by the Company” as a matter of course. In fact, “Minister” topped the list of items entered for outfitting the colony in the records of the Massachusetts Company.<sup>23</sup>

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), and deputies instructed to dispose of “all lands...at Cape Ann.” The Reverend Richard Blynman and several families from Plymouth Colony arrived in 1642 to settle at “Cape Ann.” In May of that year, the General Court gave them leave to incorporate a plantation there, to be called Gloucester. The Blynman group was soon joined by a few families from Salem, and according to some early records, the total number of families reached eighty-two by 1650 – about one-third of whom remained as permanent residents (including the well-known shipwright, William Stephens).<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> John Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann* (Procter Bros., 1860; Peter Smith Publisher, Inc., 1972), 31, 36-38, 40-42; Adams, “Village Communities...,” in *Studies...*, 326.

<sup>23</sup> Babson, 50, 188; Adams, “Village Communities...,” in *Studies...*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> *The Fisheries of Gloucester* (Gloucester: Procter Bros. Publishing, 1876), 8; Heyrman, 35; Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth* (New York: W.W.

Gloucester's first years were apparently a bit rocky. In-migration was fairly steady for awhile, but as the rate of out-migration increased, the resulting fluidity hindered overall stability. Nevertheless, the beginnings of town government did form and remained functional, regardless of a shifting population. The church also persevered, despite disruptions – and there were a number of them. However, unlike its near neighbors of Marblehead and Salem, maritime work remained sporadic at best. Shipbuilding, agriculture, and other pursuits seemed more prominent than fishing for the first couple of decades. Yet, names such as Elwell, Ingersol, and Sergent helped to form a foundation for the maritime industry; and there were fishermen and other maritime-related workers among them<sup>25</sup> – some who also found 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.”<sup>26</sup> How one, or in this case three, might go about misplacing 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 Tuttle's. Fisherman John Jackson's case for an “attempted assault on his maid” was, (again according to Christine Heyrman), “representative of [his] group,” a “disorderly subculture” that had grown up in Gloucester after the departure of their minister, Blynman. Jackson was also presented at the same time for obscene language – but not as a separate case, as Heyrman had supposed – and it was Jackson's son, John Jr., not Jackson himself that was brought in for the debt suit. An important aspect of his case is that he 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, selectman William Sargent, selectman and shoreman Robert Elwell, and fisherman and shipmaster Osmond Dutch who attested that Jackson had lived in the town for seven years and had “behaved himself in good order...and lived honestly...as

---

Norton & Co., 1995), 291-92; Babson, 50-51, 188. [A ship was built in 1643 here by Stephens for a Mr. Griffin.]

<sup>25</sup> *Memorial*, 42, 113-114; *Fisheries of Gloucester*, 8; Heyrman, 35, 38, 40.

<sup>26</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 115.

far as [they could] see.”<sup>27</sup> Regardless of the ultimate outcome, it speaks to both his general character, as well as to the character and reputations of the signers – most of whom were involved in some aspect of maritime work.

Granted, Essex County Court Records are filled with cases such as Jackson’s, but the preeminent (and difficult) question is whether or not he could be termed as “representative” of Gloucester’s maritime group as a whole. If the good reputations of twenty-seven Gloucester signers for Jackson is any indication, then perhaps not. Furthermore, Heyrman notes that over a twenty year span, 1650-1669, the court hears five additional cases from Gloucester “involving 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.”<sup>28</sup> 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.” Actually debt, absence from church, and slander seem to be fairly normal legal fare for the Puritan society as a whole. Simply “watching out for one’s neighbor” too ardently could land an “obedient servant” in court on a defamation of character charge.

Numerous Gloucester court cases derived from conflicts with and within the church. Serious divisions regarding religious matters hindered the constancy of any one ministry. Gloucester worshipers had no less than four ministers over roughly a twenty year span. First Church, Gloucester began under Reverend Blynman in 1642 – and ended with his departure in 1649. Apparently, Blynman’s flock was anything but tranquil. Dissention and disrespect seemed to mar his ministry from the outset.<sup>29</sup> In 1647, Matthew Coe, Morris Somes, John Wakely, and David Wheeler were fined by the court for “hunting and killing a raccoon in the time of the public exercise 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 to tell if he

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 2: 237-39; Heyrman, 39.

<sup>28</sup> Heyrman, 39-40, fn. 15. Of the 27 signers, 12 could sign their names.

<sup>29</sup> Babson, 190-91; Heyrman, 36; *Memorial*, 42.

might have been a fisherman or not, 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.<sup>30</sup> As with some of the Marblehead presentments, apparently, whether the offender cared to or not, 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 who considered themselves inhabitants of the towns seemed, if charged again, to 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.

More serious than raccoon hunting, Reverend Blynman's problems with his unruly congregation didn't stop at mere disturbances. As with Reverend Walton in Marblehead, some of the parishioners (although not always those of the maritime community) seemed to have had some significant differences with their minister. Their displeasure was expressed in different ways, including absence from meeting, "traducing" the pastor, and openly defying his scriptural interpretations – an unusual charge, depending on who exactly had made the claim. In this instance, such an accusation was brought by a John Stone.<sup>31</sup> He was fined 50s in 1644 for "scandalizing Mr. Blinman, 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."<sup>32</sup> 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

---

<sup>30</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 134, 273; Babson, 69.

<sup>31</sup> Heyrman, 36; Babson, 191.

<sup>32</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 4, 32-33, 70; \*Babson, fn., p191: [Stone didn't leave much of a mark in town.]

Stone's interpretation, just the fact that someone (who might be thought of as an uneducated, unruly, second-class citizen\*) 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.<sup>33</sup>

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 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. In one instance, however, a parishioner brought Perkins to court on a defamation charge for having accused the plaintiff of causing dissention in the church, and calling him "a plague on the town." When Mr. Perkins departed within five years for Topsfield, he was replaced in 1655 by Elder Thomas Millet – who fared little better than Perkins. 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,<sup>34</sup> sums up the state of affairs rather well: "Mr. Blynman was naught, and Perkins was starke naught, and Millet was worse than Perkins." 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)<sup>35</sup> was connected to the still fairly small maritime quarter (not more than 30%, according to Daniel Vickers\*), it seems that even the more "average Puritan" society could easily become embroiled in some rather contentious behavior.

---

<sup>33</sup> Babson, 190; Heyrman, 36-37.

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

<sup>35</sup> Babson, 292, 378-379; Vickers, 156 (fn. 18). \*[Gloucester's maritime population probably didn't reach the 30% mark until after the town stabilized somewhat in the 1660s.]



A few years later, Robert Dutch sold his Gloucester lands and removed to nearby Ipswich. Ipswich, Captain John Smith's "good and safe harbor," was settled in 1633 by John Winthrop, Jr. (son of Governor John Winthrop) along with twelve Bay Colony leaders. The town was incorporated in 1634, and was settled mostly by East Anglia colonists whose principal calling was agricultural. However, maritime concerns were evident as well. Richard Kent set up a weir on the Chebacco River in 1635, as did John Perkins, Jr. 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." In addition, the Little Neck fishermen "professed... agreement ...that those [who]... hereafter come to fish...shall have equal privilege there with themselves." Wharf and warehouse construction commenced at about the same time, and a larger "town wharf" was built in 1656.<sup>36</sup>

As with most early New England towns, Ipswich placed restraints upon who could reside within its borders. Humphrey Griffin found himself turned away in 1639, "...the town being full," but was somehow able by 1641 to obtain the needed permission. Any who appeared to be less than desirable inhabitants could be denied residency. Thereby, New England townships were able to maintain a certain amount of control over who lived among them or not. 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 (as did Phillip Welch and family from Topsfield), overstayed their official welcome, or had become a problem to the town, that person could face a call before the magistrates

---

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Felt, *History of Ipswich* (Ipswich, MA: Clamshell Press, 1966), 108-110; Waters, *Ipswich*, 7-12, 79-81. [William Paine, Daniel Hovey, Thomas Clark, and Robert Pierce were some of the earliest builders, and Francis Wainwright soon after – who went on to be one of Ipswich's leading merchants.]

to be “warned out” of the jurisdiction within a set time limit.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, for most communities, those who couldn’t or wouldn’t 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. Such a situation occurred in the late fall of 1659 when “a seaman, name unknown, was fined for being very drunk.” 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.”<sup>38</sup> 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 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. Abraham Whiteare of Marblehead charged him with having left his son John, who was 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

---

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

<sup>38</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 2: 192 (unknown seaman); 5: 188, (“ugly fishermen”), 373 (Marblehead); 7: 42 (Harling).

because he and some others members were allowed to “raise the meetinghouse bench” for their wives in 1680.<sup>39</sup>

The town might have sometimes wished they had stuck by their first decision regarding Humphrey Griffin, however. Despite the fact that he owned some property and, unlike fishermen or coasters, was apparently regularly employed, (having gained the town’s permission in 1655 to set up a “shamballs” or slaughter-house), Griffin still found his way into the court on at least three occasions. The first offence landed both he 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 (and quite interesting) offence 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.<sup>40</sup>

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 an orderly Puritan community (although perhaps less so if Ipswich’s approximately 10% mariner population be considered). There’s no surprise about Greenland not wanting 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 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)<sup>41</sup> the verdict went in favor of defendant Henry Leasenby. It appears that both

---

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

<sup>40</sup> Waters, 90, 276, 491; *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 113, 422; 2: 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 3: 44-45; Vickers, 156 (fn. 18).

Greenland and Cording were beginning to build up questionable reputations. A subsequent case confirms as much.

Greenland himself was then 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 to be tried 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.<sup>42</sup> Apparently, the doctor preferred to pay his fine rather than have his wife discover his indiscretions.

Greenland’s problems didn’t disappear as fast 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 a perhaps unexpected turn about, one from their own mariner community petitioned the Quarterly Court magistrates and received redress from the guilty party, (regardless of any privileged status) for the wrongs committed.<sup>43</sup> The fact that some fishermen took advantage of the court system does not necessarily prove that they were considered by others as part of 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”<sup>44</sup> was just the end of what had

---

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

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 75, 88-89; Hammatt, 290.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 261; Waters, 284-85.

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.”<sup>45</sup> In the testimony from 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 before. Sarah was well known in her neighborhood, and had been 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 where she returned to in 1673 – Sarah may have been somewhat unprepared for such things as 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.<sup>46</sup>

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

---

<sup>45</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 5: 186.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 5: 187, 229; Hammatt, 261; Waters, 81.

Lee the father of it.”)<sup>47</sup> 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” asked if Sarah’s husband was home, 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 that 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. Actually, before her marriage, Sarah had assured her mother and “Aunt Peters” that she “loved [Rowe] well enough.” At one point, Sarah had 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 out her company, Sarah would not have acted as she did.<sup>48</sup>

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. The verdict stood in favor of plaintiff William Rowe.<sup>49</sup> Rowe did 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

---

<sup>47</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 5:145, 231.

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

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 5: 143, 144, 147, 186, 227, 233; Waters, 284-85.

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.”<sup>50</sup>

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. About thirty people had accompanied Conant in the short migration in 1626. They were joined by John Endicott in 1628, along with “some other good men,” to “unite with those... formerly planted into one body” 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.<sup>51</sup>

William Wood, who came over with Reverend Higginson to observe the new plantation, wrote in the “New England Prospect” of Salem’s abundance of fish, eels, lobsters, and the like, as well as commenting that there seemed to “be more canoes in this town than in all the whole Patent, nearly every household having a water-horse of two.” Salem’s “good harbors too...one being called Winter and the other Summer,” would keep out opposing forces “if well fortified,” as well as provide an excellent opportunity for fishing and trade.<sup>52</sup> Little might Wood have known just how true his observations would become.

Along with the ministers and some much-needed supplies for the new colony, the Massachusetts Company 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. However, indicative of what a primarily servant-based maritime enterprise might bring, two of the applicants had to be dismissed before departure for fear “their ill lyfe might be prejudicial to the plantacion.” John Winthrop thought, however, that a different strategy might be better for the budding venture. He believed that a home-grown, resident fishing population would be more beneficial to the plantation than allowing those from outside – and likely outside of family government as

---

<sup>50</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 5: 308; Hammatt, 261.

<sup>51</sup> Sidney Perley, *The History of Salem Massachusetts*, (Salem, MA, 1924), 1: 80-82, 89, 104; Adams, “Village Communities...,” in *Studies...*, 332, 339-340.

<sup>52</sup> Adams, 345 (and fn. 28).

well – to take the profits earned and return “from whence they came.” Better, he argued, to keep the profits among one’s own people. To such an end, the Reverend Hugh Peter (once he had arrived in New England) preached at both Boston and Salem and “moved the country to raise a stock for fishing.” Within a short time, Winthrop noted that as Reverend 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.” The General Court also contributed to the effort with the ruling that “for further incuragement of men to set upon fishing, such ships and vessels and other stock, as shalbee properly employed and adventured in taking...and transporting fish...and the fish itselfe, shalbee exempt for 7 years...from all country charges.” It also exempted from mandatory training all fishermen who were “imployed abroad during fishing seasons.”<sup>53</sup>

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, itinerant fishermen, (and sometimes coasters as well), came just long enough to work, get their names recorded in a local outfitters account book (like George Corwin of Salem), and sometimes to get their names into the court records as well, such as Corwin’s Richard Estbrook from 1671 or

---

<sup>53</sup> Winthrop, 1: 207, 210, 370; Perley, 1: 139, 300-301, 378.



the 1663 Quarterly Court's Thomas Nore.<sup>54</sup> 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 men laboring at sea in 17<sup>th</sup> 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 home-port.

Isaac Woodbury was one who was 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 the demands of his calling. Woodbury explained to the court that “as the provedenc of God...so ordered...that my calling is at sea,” and being required to “atend 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.”<sup>55</sup> 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. As Ruling Elder in the Salem church in 1660, Brown soon “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 “dismisse him from his office that he might with more freedome of Spirit attend the necessary duties of his calling.”

---

<sup>54</sup> George Corwin Account Books, 1658-1672, *Curwen Family Papers, 1641-1902*, James Duncan Phillips Library, Peabody-Essex Museum, Salem, MA; *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 3: 84; Vickers, 131-132.

<sup>55</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 6: 101-102.

The church understood his dilemma and “consented to his desire,”<sup>56</sup> dismissing him in 1664. The nature of his work 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 Elizabeth Harwood, 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.” 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 Daniel Vickers\* as (representative of most Salem fishermen) “a chronic debtor with a penchant for the bottle” who never served in any public capacity or joined the church. While it is true to an extent 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 tippling.” 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 perhaps he had very little in the way of an estate, and with age working against him, may have by then been trying to support himself fishing near home. At

---

<sup>56</sup> Richard D. Pierce, Ed. *The Records of the First Church in Salem Massachusetts, 1629-1736* (Essex Institute, Salem, MA., 1974), 85, 99.

about 63 years of age, and without the assistance of either wife or money, Nixon became deeper in debt and was forced to sell the majority of his land, and found himself in court again for drunkenness one year later.<sup>57</sup>

While not as positive an outcome as either Woodbury or Brown, Nixon had remained in the same area and employed about the same calling for the majority 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.

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 mariner 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, could be an invaluable resource, especially when need arose. Hence, it is of little surprise that church membership and attendance were often predominately female – actually in both farming and fishing communities. In the early stages of manning the fishing fleets, predominately young single men signed on to fish out of either Salem or Marblehead ports. Vickers noted that approximately only 42% were married men between the years of 1645 and 1664, leaving about 58% that were unmarried (or had no available record). However, he found

---

<sup>57</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 231; 2: 136; 4: 414; 6: 87; 7: 249, 325, 425; Perley, 2: 73-74, 211-212; 3: 80; Pierce, 4; *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (Samuel G. Drake, Boston, 1855), “Petitions Against Imposts, 1668,” 9: 81. \*Vickers, 96-97.

that past mid-century, things had begun to change, and married men represented about 61% of the workers between 1665 and 1674. Therefore, he concluded that overall a little more than half of the men filling berths on fishing voyages out of Essex County were married men, thereby lending a degree of stability to the industry and area.<sup>58</sup> However, while that determination in itself may be a fairly accurate estimation – and conclusion, the change over time is what seems to be a significant factor in this situation. If the two sets of years are considered separately, then the number of (and therefore percentage of) married fishermen appears to have gone up considerably from the 42% estimate in the twenty years between 1645 and 1664 (inclusive) to a 61% estimate over the course of the next ten years (1665-1674), approximately a 19% change in half as much time – a not insignificant difference. In addition, for the century as a whole, the average age of marriage for men in Salem, Gloucester, and Beverly were relatively close, ranging from 23 years in Beverly to 24 years in Salem and 26 years in Gloucester. Also home ownership increased as well. By 1674, Marblehead alone listed 114 householders.<sup>59</sup> 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,”<sup>60</sup> 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

---

<sup>58</sup> Innes, 29, 32; Vickers, 133-134; Vickers, 72, 121, 144 (fn. 129).

<sup>59</sup> Richard Archer, “New England Mosaic: A Demographic Analysis for the 17<sup>th</sup> Century” in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Oct. 1990), 477-502; Roads, 28.

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

“for saying scornfully that he cared neither for the town nor its orders.”<sup>61</sup> 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 usually for the community as a whole, such as the “general fast” called in 1638 over the apparent “decay of...religion and...general decline.”<sup>62</sup> There were, however, also sermons and admonitions addressed principally to the mariner communities, as well as specific calls for prayers. 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. Both, he said, “found good acceptance among them.” 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.”<sup>63</sup> With sermons, prayers, and exhortations directly intended for them and their families, apparently 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 of a sort, 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

---

<sup>61</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 15 (Grand Jury to be informed of “...any person living out of a particular calling.” 1639.), 85; Perley, 126, 129, 138-139. [Letters from the Massachusetts Bay Co. to Gov. Endecott.]

<sup>62</sup> Winthrop, 1: 337; Innes, 14, 36.

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

work contracts – sometimes short-term – 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, and the courts could act aggressively only if a civil or criminal offence 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 immediate warrant or 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. (Both the town and First Church Salem did take such seasonal things into consideration when exempting fishermen from military training during fishing season and when the church agreed that they needed 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.”<sup>64</sup>) 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 or innkeepers, or perhaps had gone on to something other than fishing entirely. Many were also involved in civic duties such as selectman, constable, 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

---

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

also tythingman 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.<sup>65</sup>

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 Batter keeping “one-third of his earnings toward debt.” Still, Edward 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.<sup>66</sup>

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. (As late as 1686, Reverend Cotton

---

<sup>65</sup> P. Foote: *Essex Institute Historical Collections* (Henry Whipple & Son, 1859), 1: 172; *Essex Ct. Rec.* 4: 398; Pierce, 14, 23; Perley, 1: 368; Vickers, 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, 26; Gray, 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: 381. A. Gale: Pierce, 26, 158; *Essex Ct. Rec.* 6: 290; First Church...Marblehead, 132; Gray, 69; Corwin Account Books, 1658-1672.

<sup>66</sup> On Mordecai Craford: *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 256; 2: 390; 3: 75, 208, 260, 330, 420-421; 4: 9, 84, 195; Perley, 2: 221, 228, 397; *Records of the Court of Assistants*, 3: 179; Vickers, 35, 38, 40. On Edward Winter: *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 7: 153; Perley, 2: 30, 3: 32, 421.

Mather of Boston noted that “several religious families among us...are not yet joined.”) 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.<sup>67</sup> Aside from the question of why only about one-quarter of farming families had attained membership, two factors may effect 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.” Furthermore, those wishing full acceptance had to meet with the minister and elders to assure of “orthodox” belief, and then have their names 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 – in other words, an examination of the “fruit” of their profession. If there was evidence of a habitual weakness or of a disagreement with a neighbor or in a business matter, the potential member would need to explain the circumstance and make amends; otherwise, his acceptance was delayed or sometimes denied. The entire process usually took about one month, or longer, depending on individual situations.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, it would not be out of line to consider that a fair number of attendees simply bypassed 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, Reverend Stansby of England wrote Boston’s minister, John Wilson in 1637 that “you are so

---

<sup>67</sup> *Diary*, 1: 135; Vickers, *Maritime Labor*, 125.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Archer, *Fissures in the Rock: New England in the 17th Century* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2001), 52-53; Kenneth Lockridge, “History of a Puritan Church” in Alden Vaughn & Francis Bremer (Eds.), *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society, & Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 94.



strict in the admission of members to your churches that more than halfe are out of the church in all your congregations.”<sup>69</sup>

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 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 to both clergy and laity that Higginson believed the church could be considered remiss in its responsibility to all members, and the rising agitation within the community between “visible” members and non-members regarding the receiving of such sacraments lent credence to his concern.<sup>70</sup> 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 as 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 things as “drunkenness.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, it is possible that information that 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

---

<sup>69</sup> Thomas J. Wertenbaker, “The Fall of the Wilderness Zion” in George Waller (Ed.), *Puritanism in Early America* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1950), 27. [Letter: April 17, 1637]

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Appleton White, *New England Congregationalism: In Its Origin and Purity* (Salem Gazette Office, Salem, MA, 1861), 92; Pierce, xiii, fn.4 (xiii).

<sup>71</sup> White, 48, 59; Pierce, xiii, xxiii-xxiv.

assumption that the numbers of at least church “participants” was lower than might be expected where church attendance was required of all.

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. At least 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. Reverend White of Dorchester (a moderate Puritan) that 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 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.<sup>72</sup> 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, he 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, scornors of religion, and drinking all the Lord’s Day, [who were] the next week...cast upon the rocks...and drowned.” Just prior to this incident, Winthrop had referred to a group of eight or nine “loose” mariners who drowned going toward Long Island. Conversely, the saving of a “pinnace” and all its passengers, going between Salem and Cape Cod in 1640, was accomplished, according to Winthrop, through the able maneuverings 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,

---

<sup>72</sup> Adams, 339; Perley, 63; Innes, 71; Winthrop, 1: 207, 210.

such as in his entry regarding the ordination in 1640 of Mr. Knolles of Watertown, “a godly man and a prime scholar.”<sup>73</sup> For, actually, it appears that the Puritan community demonstrated in various ways that they did expect 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 be 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,”<sup>74</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> century Essex County too difficult to contend with, for the most part, took their leave of the colony. In the first years of settlement, the removing out of direct control of Puritan authority could actually take the form of a simple move 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. When Mr. Guilielmus (William) Snelling was called before the court for “cursing” in 1652, he explained that he had only “intended to declare a proverb of the West Country” in saying, “I’ll pledge my friends [but] for our foes, a plague on theare heels and a pox on theare toes” in a toast (or “merry discourse”) with his friends. Nevertheless, Snelling soon realized that his choice of words actually had a far different cultural meaning in his new world surroundings. Although he meant no harm, along with his explanation to the magistrates he still “acknowledged a weakness in saying it.” The court

---

<sup>73</sup> Winthrop, 2: 21-22 (Knolles), 23, 75, 187, 410, 411; Vickers, *Young Men*, 19.

<sup>74</sup> Perry Miller, “The Marrow of Puritan Divinity” in Vaughn & Bremer (Eds.), *Puritan New England*, 59.

appears to have accepted Mr. Snelling's explanation and acknowledgement.<sup>75</sup>

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 may be obtainable through an examination of the court records for Essex County residents. Daniel Vickers estimated the proportion of mariners within the population in several towns.<sup>76</sup> In a random sampling of the court records, it was found that the number of mariners in court for either drunkenness or violence actually did not exceed this estimate. In Salem, for instance, where the estimated mariner population was about 20%, there were 8 fishermen in court, five for drunkenness and three for violence, or approximately 20% of 39 cases. Similar results were found for Ipswich and Gloucester/Beverly. With an approximate 10% mariner population in Ipswich, out of 23 total court cases, two were mariners, or almost 9%. Gloucester/Beverly was estimated at roughly between 30% and 40% mariner population, with the two areas combined. Therefore, out of the sample six cases for drunkenness or violence, two of them were mariners, or about 33%. Marblehead has often been referred to as one of the worst areas for rowdiness, at about a 100% mariner population. For this random sample evaluation though (since 100% mariner would be difficult to compare in the actual cases, and since there were some other known trades within it as well), mariners were estimated at 90% of the overall population (which might still be a bit high), and the results were actually smaller than would be expected. For a sample size of fourteen cases, ten of those were fishermen or coasters, or an approximate 71% of Marblehead's population. Therefore, in all of the sample areas and cases, the mariner population that was brought into 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.<sup>77</sup> (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, should be more accurately

---

<sup>75</sup> *Essex Ct. Rec.*, 1: 250.

<sup>76</sup> Vickers, 156n.

<sup>77</sup> See Appendix below.

adjusted with a larger sample size.) With a more detailed and larger study, the approximations for the combined areas of Gloucester and Beverly (along with possibly Manchester) could be better adjusted for accuracy as well. 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 offences. In addition, the fact that they were being called on their behavior, as would any other member of the society, seems to further indicate that they did indeed form a part of the New England culture and society that has long been thought of 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. This was not necessarily an extraordinary sub-group that existed within Puritan society, but this new society was in itself a fairly extraordinary group.

To be a part of society means to share in an “enduring and cooperating group...who interacts with one another [and] has common institutions and traditions...distinguishable by particular aims [and] standards of living.” In addition, culture is described as “the customary beliefs and social forms” of a group, along with an “integrated pattern of human behavior that includes [both] thought and action,” and ultimately depends on a society’s “capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.” It appears that seventeenth century Puritan society was doing just that. Those who would remain would become more integrated and acculturated as time went on, although not to a perfectly homogeneous level of congruity, for societies by their nature are dynamic and have various facets. Even Vickers noted that increasing duration brought with it more general contact, as well as intermarriage, and those who had perhaps “come for practical reasons” began to fall more in step with the “Puritan experiment.” Gaps that had once existed “began to vanish [and], with each passing decade,” it had become “increasingly harder to distinguish them from the rest of the population.” However, to readily assume that there was just one simple overarching “Puritan culture” would be to oversimplify such a diverse and complex social order. While the culture of New England could be considered coherent, no one person in seventeenth century Essex County could be considered as completely “typical.” As Richard Archer argued in *Fissures in the Rock*, there is “no inherent contradiction in an individual’s not being typical and still being a member of a culture.” In fact, Archer points out, it would be quite “rare...if one was

representative of all aspects.”<sup>78</sup> Hence, it was the differences that tended to divide certain segments of society from another, but it was their overall similarity of purpose and world-view that brought them together.

---

<sup>78</sup> *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1979), 274, 1094; Vickers, *Young Men*, 58; Archer, 152-153, 156.

## Appendix

**Statistical Method:** A null hypothesis is proposed ( $H_0$ ), in this case that the number of mariners in court (drunk & violent) was the same as their proportion of the population. A sample is taken from the court records of cases fitting the criteria. A positive determination is made of occupation (see Note). If this cannot be done, the subject is eliminated from the sample. Appropriate statistics are then calculated to determine first if the proportion of mariners in the sample would be reasonable just from their assumed proportion in the population in general, and second, what could be the range in population proportions from which this sample could have been drawn within a certain confidence interval. With this information, it may be concluded whether population proportion alone determined the number of mariners in court or else that they may have been rowdier than their non-mariner neighbors. Standard statistical formulas were used to determine these issues numerically as seen below. \*Population estimate is from Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 156n.

	$H_0$ :      Region of Acceptance						
	n	$\pi^*$	p	SE(pop)	$-Z_{\alpha/2}$	$<Z<$	$Z_{\alpha/2}$
Salem	39	20%	20.5% (8)	0.064	-1.64	0.080	1.64
Marblehead	14	90%	71.4% (10)	0.080	-1.64	-2.316	1.64
Ipswich	23	10%	8.7% (2)	0.063	-1.64	-0.209	1.64
Beverly - Gloucester	6	30%	33.3% (2)	0.187	-1.64	-0.178	1.64

### 90% Confidence Interval

	SE(samp.)	low	$<\pi<$	high
Salem	0.065	9.9%	$<\pi<$	31.1%
Marblehead	0.121	51.6%	$<\pi<$	91.2%
Ipswich	0.059	-0.9%	$<\pi<$	18.3%
Beverly - Gloucester	0.192	1.8%	$<\pi<$	64.9%

Where... n = Sample size,  $\pi$  = Population Proportion, p = Sample Proportion, SE = Standard Error,  $Z_{\alpha/2}$  from a table of normal distributions depends on "Probability of Type I Error" ( $\alpha=0.1$ ), and z = the test statistic =  $(p - \pi) / SE$ . Standard Error is calculated as  $\sqrt{[\pi (1 - \pi) / n]}$  (Square root). Substitute 'p' for 'pi' to get the SE for a sample. The 90% Confidence Interval is based on the "Probability of Type II Error" ( $\beta=1-\alpha$ ) and is calculated as 'p' + or -  $Z_{\alpha/2} * SE$  which is the sample SE in this case.

**Conclusion:** In each case, the conclusion is to accept the null hypothesis except for in Marblehead where the number of mariners in court was actually too small for their proportion in the population, i.e. that they appeared to be less rowdy than their neighbors. From the study there seems to be no evidence to support the "drunken sailor" stereotype.

Note: The occupations of the subjects were determined by a diligent search into various sources including *Probate Records of Essex County, Massachusetts*, *Records of the Court of Assistants of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, George Corwin Acct. Books, Sidney Perley's *The History of Salem Massachusetts*, Christine Heyrman's *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts*, and the *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts* themselves.