Sea Rovers

SEA ROVERS

(ILLUSTRATED)

BY

R. ROCKWELL WILSON

ILLUSTRATED BY

MAY FRATZ & MURAT UKRAY

ILLUSTRATED &

PUBLISHED BY

E-KİTAP PROJESİ & CHEAPEST BOOKS



www.cheapestboooks.com

Copyright, 2014 by e-Kitap Projesi

Istanbul

ISBN:

978-625-6015-81-4

Copyright© Printing and publication rights belong to the author's & Publisher's own restriction, using and working. According to the law of intellectual and artistic works, without permission in part or in whole not re-produced or re-published. Welding can be done by showing short excerpts..

Table of Contents

CHAPTERS

SEA ROVERS (ILLUSTRATED) _____ *1*

Table of Contents _____ *5*

Chapter I _____ *9*

Gloucester Fisher Folk _____ 9

Chapter II _____ *28*

An Ocean Flyer's Crew _____ 28

Chapter III _____ *52*

The Man-Of Warsman _____ 52

Chapter IV _____ *76*

Soldier Who Serve Afloat _____ 76

Chapter V _____ *95*

The Police of the Coast _____ 95

Chapter VI _____ *115*

The Ocean Pilot _____ 115

Chapter VII _____ *130*

The Deep-Sea Diver _____ 130

Chapter VIII _____ *152*

The Lighthouse Keeper _____ 152

Chapter IX _____ *177*

Life-Saving Along Shore _____ 177

Chapter X _____ *195*

Whalers of the Arctic Sea _____ 195



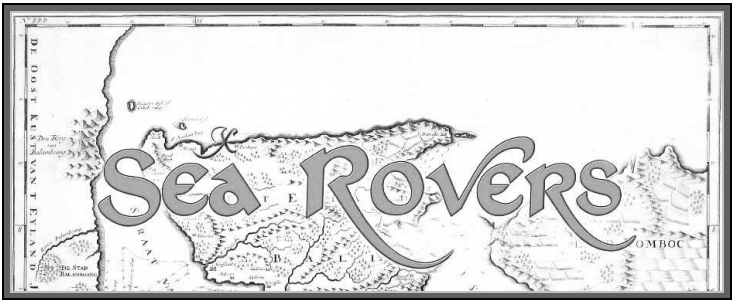
THE SEA ROVERS

By

RUFUS ROCKWELL WILSON

Author of "Rambles in Colonial Byways," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY MAY FRATZ





A GLOUCESTER FISHERMAN

Chapter I

Gloucester Fisher Folk



A glorious vision is Gloucester harbor, whether seen under the radiant sun of a clear June morning or through the haze and smoke of a mellow October afternoon. Gloucester town lies on a range of hills around the harbor, and fortunate is the man who chances to see it as the background to a stirring marine picture when on a still summer's morning a fleet of two or three hundred schooners is putting to sea after a storm, spreading their white duck against the blue

> sky and fanning gently hither and thither, singly or in picturesque groups, before the catspaws or idly drifting to eastward, stretching in a long line beyond Thatcher's Island and catching the fresh breeze that darkens the distant offing. Here the green of their graceful hulls, the gilt scrollwork on the bows and the canvas on the tall, tapering masts are reflected as in a mirror on the calm surface; or beyond they are seen heeling over to the first breath of the incoming sea wind that ruffles the glinting steel of the sheeny swell, forming as a whole a scene of inexhaustible variety and beauty.

Such a spectacle gives the stranger fitting introduction to Gloucester, for from earliest times the men of the gray old town have been followers of the sea. It was three years after the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth that the first Englishman settled on Cape Ann, at the place now called Gloucester, which took its name from the old English cathedral city whence many of its settlers had come. America's Gloucester doubtless seems young to the mother town, which is of British origin and was built before the Romans crossed from Gaul; but, despite the great cathedral in the English town and the importance in the clerical world of the prelates and church dignitaries who found livings there, the Yankee town was for many years a place of more consequence in the world of trade and profit than the English Gloucester has ever been.

Founded as a rendezvous where fishermen could cure their fish and fit out for their trips, in the old days Gloucester in Massachusetts had fishing and whaling fleets, and her boats not only went out on the Banks in search of cod, but to the far limits of the North and South Seas they sailed to bring back rich cargoes of whale oil. Her fleets ventured into every sea from which profit could be brought, and boys born in the town or its neighbors three or four generations agone all looked forward to a half dozen cruises as a matter of course, just as the modern boy knows that he must go to school and learn to read and write. It was a rough school to which the youth of Gloucester and Cape Ann went, but it was a good one. They learned there to be brave and manly, and seafaring broadened the minds of men who had they stayed at home would have been sadly provincial and narrow.

Thus the history of Gloucester centers in the fisheries. The yarns most often told at her firesides are of hairbreadth escapes at sea; her legends and romances have a flavor of the salt waves about them; her rugged granite shore is marked with the scenes of memorable shipwrecks and storms; her town records are the records of fleets that have gone down on the Banks, of pinks and schooners that have foundered on the Georges, of heroes that have toiled for their families and fought the grim battle of life with the fogs, the lightning and the swooping billows of the sou'wester, and with the ice, the hail and the short, savage

cross seas and terrible blast of the raging nor'wester, while their children have cried for their absent fathers and their wives have lain awake through long, dreary nights, burning the light in the window and straining their eyes to see through the gloom of the storm the long expected vessel and the beloved forms that perhaps have already gone down at sea.

The discovery of petroleum struck the Gloucester whaling industry a blow from which it has never recovered, but the town's fisheries are still in thriving condition. Four hundred fishing vessels of sufficient consequence to be registered hail at the present time from Gloucester. The number of men employed in these vessels, the majority of which are as speedy and well built as pleasure yachts, is upward of 5,000. Many of the fishermen are from the British provinces and make excellent skippers and sailors, while Sweden, Norway and the Azore Islands contribute a large number, who are, as a rule, orderly, capable and industrious. They fare well as compared with the fishermen of other days or with men now before the mast of the merchant service, and fresh pies, biscuits, fowls, eggs and like delicacies are frequently seen in the forecastle of a Gloucester banker.

The mackerel fishermen bound for the Georges Banks usually leave Gloucester as early as the last of February, but those bound to other waters with the cod, halibut and haddock fishermen do not start until later. The cod are

caught chiefly on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, where the watch lights of the Gloucester men twinkle in the midnight gloom in company with those of the French fishers of Miquelon and St. Pierre. Mackerel are also caught in the Bay of St. Lawrence, off Cape North, Sidney and the Magdalen Islands, where the fishermen often linger until late in the fall and are sometimes assailed by heavy gales among those inhospitable shores, without sea room, on a lee shore and no safe port to run to. The haddock and halibut are oftener caught on Brown's Bank and within the waters of New England. There are several modes of fitting out for the fisheries, but the one most often followed is for the owner of a vessel to charter her to ten or fifteen men on shares, he finding the stores and the nets and the men paying for the provisions, hooks and lines and for the salt necessary to cure their proportion of the fish.

The crew of a banker is usually composed of a dozen to eighteen men, including the skipper, or captain, who exercises no direct control over the others, but is recognized by them as the principal personage on board. The average Gloucester fisherman is a splendid though rough specimen of an American. You may know him by his free-and-easy manner and his swinging gait. His costume when at work is a red or blue flannel shirt of the thickest material, admirably adapted to absorb and exclude the chilling fogs in which he passes so much of his time, a

heavy tarpaulin or sou'wester, generally his own handiwork, pilot-cloth trousers and heavy cowhide boots completing his attire. His face bespeaks a serious but cheerful and contented spirit, the result of a philosophical, half careless dependence upon luck.

Generous and fearless in his address, he is of simple and economical habits and, like most men of large stature, almost peculiar in a placid good humor which seldom leaves him. Always ready for any fortune, the fisherman tries to look upon the bright side of life and draw whatever there may be of pleasure from his hazardous calling. But among the bankers are occasional roystering, devil-may-care fellows, whose never ending practical jokes and offhand manner serve to enliven the little vessel and dispel the tedium of the voyage to the Banks.

The Grand Bank extends north and south about six hundred miles and east and west some two hundred, lying to the southeast of Newfoundland. Its shape cannot be easily defined, but the form denoted by the soundings give it somewhat the resemblance of New Holland. To the southward it narrows to a point, presenting abrupt edges, which in some places drop into almost fathomless water. This, as well as the adjacent banks of St. Pierre, Bank Querau and the Flemish Cap, abound with fish of various kinds, which at stated seasons adopt this as a shoaling place or grand rendezvous. The most numerous of these are the cod, which thrive here so amazingly that the unceasing

industry of many hundreds of vessels through two centuries has in no way diminished their numbers. The fishery is not confined to the Banks, but extends to the shores and harbors of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Cape Breton. The fish affect sandy bottom. In winter they retire into deep water, but in March and April reappear and fatten rapidly from the time of their arrival on the Banks.

Fishing begins as soon as the smacks reach the Banks. In other years all cod were caught by means of handlines, and some fish are still taken that way. The most, however, are now taken by trawls, which were introduced about 1860 and were first used by the French. A trawl consists of a line some 3,000 feet in length, to which are attached short ones about a yard long, on each of which is a hook. The short lines are placed about six feet apart, so that each trawl has about 500 hooks. Attached to each end of the line by a rope is a buoy, sometimes only an empty powder keg or a mackerel kit. In the head of the buoy is a pole three feet long, upon which is a small flag to attract the attention of the owner when in search of it. To each end of the line is fastened a small anchor.

The hooks are baited with squid, herring or other small fish, if they can be secured. To bait a trawl requires from an hour and a half to two hours. When it is ready it is placed in a tub made of a half barrel. The long line is coiled up in the center and the bait lies next to the sides of the tub. One man uses from two to six trawls, which are usually visited in

a dory very early each morning and once or twice during the day. When one buoy is reached the end of the trawl to which it is attached is drawn up, the hooks examined and the fish taken off. By means of trawls a man may catch more in a single night than by a week's hard work with hand lines.

Each man keeps tally of his fish as he hauls them in to the dory by cutting out the tongues—the number of tongues giving the account of the fish taken. As soon as the day's catch has been taken aboard the schooner the crew divide themselves into throaters, headers, splitters, salters and packers, and the operation known as splitting and salting begins. The business of the throater is to cut with a sharp pointed knife across the throat of the fish to the bone and rip open the bowels. He then passes it quickly to the header, who with a sudden wrench pulls off the head and tears out the entrails, passing the fish instantly to the splitter. At the same time separating the liver, he throws the entrails overboard. The splitter with one cut lays the fish open from head to tail and with another cut takes out the backbone. After separating the sounds, which are placed with the tongues and packed in barrels as a great delicacy, the backbone follows the entrails overboard. Such is the amazing quickness of the operations of heading and splitting that a good workman will often decapitate and take out the entrails and backbone of six fish in a minute. After the catch has been washed off with buckets of pure water

from the ocean the fish are passed to the salters and thence to the packers in the hold. The task of the salters is a most important one, as the value of the voyage depends upon their care and judgment. They take the fish one by one, spread them, back uppermost, in layers, distributing a proper quantity of salt between each. Packing in bulk, or "kench," as the fishermen term it, is intrusted only to the most experienced hands.

When the day's catch has been cared for in the manner just described the watch is set and all but two men turn in. These watches are regulated in such a manner that every man is on deck his part of the night hours. Breakfast is served at 3 o'clock in the morning, and off the men go again to their trawls. If it is foggy dinner is announced by the report of a ten-pound gun from the schooner. It is then about 10 o'clock. After dinner the fishers are away again and back about 4, when the fish which have been caught are split and salted as on the previous day. The only thing that relieves the monotony on board a Gloucester fishing smack is stormy weather or the coming of Sunday. This day is kept holy.

Leaving the Grand Banks, let us cross over to the Georges Banks, where in the months of spring and summer we shall find Gloucester hand-liners, with crews of from eight to ten men fishing for mackerel. Every man is at the rail, as he fishes from the deck of the vessel. The tide runs so strong that nine-pound leads are necessary. Attached to

each lead is a horse, a slingding, or spreader, and a pair of large hooks. Sometimes when fishing in thirty fathoms of water the great strength of the tide forces the men to pay out from sixty to ninety fathoms of line before the lead touches bottom. In front of each man, driven into the rail, is a wooden pin. This is termed the soldier, and it has an important duty. Every inch of the line is hauled across it. Were it not for these rail pins the lines would continually be fouled with one another.

When a smack's crew chance upon a fresh school of mackerel their hooks have only to touch the water to be seized and swallowed. No time is lost in unhooking, but each fisherman hauls as fast as his hands can move until the fish appears in sight, when with one motion he is swung quickly over the rail into a barrel or heap and so dexterously that the hook disengages itself. When the fish continue plentiful the scene is a most exciting one. The long, lithe bodies of the fishermen eagerly bending over their work, the quick, nervous twitching at the line, followed by the steady strain, the rapid hand-over-hand haul that brings the prize to the surface, the easy swing with which he describes a circle in the air as the victor slaps him into his barrel and the flapping of the captives about deck, mingling with the merry laughter of the excited crew, make it a sport to which the efforts of the trout angler or the fowler with his double-barreled shotgun are but puny and insignificant in comparison.

Time was when the use of the hook and line made mackerel catching the very poetry of fishing, but in recent years the purse seine has come into general use. Mackerel seining, however, is an interesting process. A large seine is two hundred and fifty fathoms in length and about fifteen or twenty fathoms deep. The school is sighted from the masthead and the direction in which the fish are swimming is noted. A boat is manned and sets out to head off the school. Two men in a dory hold one end of the purse line which runs through rings at the bottom of the seine. A circle is described by the boat, the seine being thrown out at the same time. When the boat meets the dory the other end of the line is taken into the boat. Then the seines are drawn together, forming a large bag. The fish are inside and it is necessary to gather as much of the net into the boat as possible. The fish are then in what is termed the bunt. This is the strongest part of the seine. The vessel sails up close to the boat, picks up the outside corks and the bailing begins, a dip net that will hold a barrel being used for this purpose, after which the fish are cleaned, salted and stowed in the hold. Vessels have been known to take 300 barrels in one haul, but the average catch nowadays is about twenty-five barrels.

When the mackerel fleet fished with hand lines the pursuit of this industry was exciting in the extreme. Often when massed together in great fleets the vessels carried away their mainbooms, bowsprits, jibbooms and sails by

collision in what was really a hand-to-hand encounter and when the maneuver of lee-bowing was the order of the day. A fleet of sixty odd sail descry a schooner whose crew are heaving and pulling their lines. The glistening scales of the fish sparkle in the sunlight. The fleet as one vessel turns quickly on its heel and there is a neck-and-neck race for the school. The first that arrives rounds to under the lee of the fortunate craft, the crew heaving the toll bait with lavish hands.

The new arrival now shakes up into the wind close under the lee bow of the fish-catching vessel. The fish forsake the latter and fly at the lines of the newcomer. Now comes up the balance of the fleet, and each vessel on its arrival performs the same maneuver and lee-bows its predecessor. Those to windward, forsaken by the fish, push their way through their neighbors, fill away and round to under the bows of those to leeward. The hoarse bawling of the skippers to their crews, the imprecations of those who have been run down and left disabled, rend the air, while the crews, setting and lowering sail and hauling fish, freely exchange with each other language not to be found in any current religious work. In these latter days, however, seines, as before stated, have taken the place of line, and lee-bowing, with its attendant excitement and danger, has passed to the limbo of forgotten things.

Fishing smacks bound for the Georges, the Western, or Banks of Newfoundland may be gone three or four

weeks, bringing their fish to market on ice, or they may be absent from four to six months, dressing and salting their fish on board. But, be the voyage long or short, it is a joyous and moving spectacle to see a schooner come into Gloucester from the Banks loaded to the scuppers and packed to the beams with codfish. The wharf is lined with eager spectators as she glides up to her dock with a leading wind. The foresail comes in and the mainsail is lowered and handed by a crew weatherbeaten and clumsily limber in heavy Cape Cod seaboots, sou'westers and oiljackets. Then the jib downhaul is manned and a number of boys, longing for the day when they can go to the Banks, catch the hawsers and make her fast to the pier fore and aft.

Amidst a storm of questions asked and answered on both sides, the crew range themselves on board and on shore with one-tined pitchforks and proceed to unload with the rapidity and regularity of machinery. The men in the hold heave the fish on deck, whence they are tossed to the wharf. Another turn of the pitchfork lands them under the knife, their heads and tails come off and they are split open in a second and are then salted and spread upon flakes to dry. These flakes are frames covered with triangular slats and are about seven feet wide and raised three feet above the ground. At Gloucester they may be seen not only upon the wharves, but also in all vacant places between the houses and even in the front dooryards, so that at every turn the smell of codfish regales the passerby.

But there is a sadder, sterner side to the life of the Gloucester fishermen than which I have been describing. Danger is their constant, death their familiar, companion, and each season has its sorrowful story of storm, wreck and disaster. Truth to tell, the perils of the trawler are even greater than those of the soldier in battle. He is often four or five miles from his vessel, when suddenly the thick fog closes in upon him and he is lost, perhaps to row for days in hopeless search, without food, drink or compass. He may die of exhaustion or perhaps be picked up at length by a passing vessel and taken to some distant port. More than thirty lives were lost in this way in the summer of 1894. Although horns are blown in warning, a whole crew is sometimes sunk in an instant by some steamer on its way across the ocean. Of all the men lost on the Banks during the last twenty years more than two-thirds have been out in dories attending trawls.

Fierce, too, are the storms which sweep the Banks in winter. Then the wind is bitter cold, deck and mast and sails are clad in ice, and many a crew are never heard of more. The Georges in fair weather is not dangerous fishing ground, but in a gale it defies both skill and strength. The shallow water is churned into rolling mountain waves which almost sweep the ocean bed. At such times the 125-ton fishing vessels, which usually anchor close together when fishing, are at the mercy of the elements. It is impossible