

Pringle
1928

FISHERMAN'S
STATUE

THE GLOUCESTER FISHERMAN

Standing at the entrance to the City on the Western Avenue Boulevard is the bronze statue on its granite pedestal of "The Gloucester Fisherman" fittingly the permanent memorial of the 300th Anniversary Observance of the Foundation, in 1623, of the Massachusetts Bay Colony at Fisherman's Field, now Stage Fort Park, representing the Commonwealth's most ancient industry.

The fisherman at the wheel of his craft under the stress of a strong breeze locks across Gloucester Bay. It is indeed the complement of the "Minute Man" at Concord Bridge. Of this statue, "The Fisherman", Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes of the United States Supreme Court stated to the Mayor of this City that of all the statues in all the cities he had visited, none so strongly impressed him as typifying and vivifying what was intended to be represented than the fisherman, adding that as he viewed it, tears came to his eyes. And this is the general sentiment.

A short history of the inception and consummation of this memorial may be opportune. The Fourth of July Committee was an organization of citizens formed in the 80's to conduct Independence Day celebrations. In 1892 under the auspices of these men, perhaps the finest and most unique celebration of this character, the 250th anniversary of the incorporation, was undertaken - the feature of which was the Homeric Fishermen's Race among its outstanding events. Fisherman's Field, Stage Fort Park, had been acquired through the efforts of these gentlemen as a historical reservation forever.

It was not until 1907 that the plans for a memorial of this event were consummated. Then, a massive bronze tablet, suitably inscribed, was placed with due ceremony in the hillock of granite near Stage Head and dedicated with appropriate ceremony.

The idea of this tablet originated with the late City Clerk, John J. Somes, and the nautical scheme of decorative framework and embellishment was the composite suggestion of various members of the Committee. James R. Pringle was designated to write the inscription and the execution of the design was entrusted to Eric Pope.

Shortly after the 250th celebration, three of the active members of this Committee resolved to carry on with a 300th anniversary celebration of the Foundation of Gloucester in 1623. These members comprised John J. Somes, Fred W. Tibbetts and James R. Pringle. Mr. Somes, who was well in his sixties at the time, died a few years before the 300th came to pass, but Messrs. Tibbetts and Pringle carried on. To the latter was given the Pageant and the Permanent Memorial Committee for assignment, the latter especially being deemed highly important, the avowed intention being as a matter of appropriateness to erect a monument of The Fisherman on the site it now occupies - the Western Avenue Replacade - the latter in itself a monument to the public spirit of George O. Stacy, who beat down all opposition and carried it to a successful consummation.

The chairmanship of this Committee eventually came to Carleton H. Parsons, who during the inevitable differences which are bound to arise in cases of this kind, officiated with impartiality. However, all's well that ends well.

Credit to whom credit is due! With whom did the idea of "The Fisherman" as a civic memorial originate? We will answer! A. W. Buhler, an artist who made Gloucester his home for more than 25 years, his studio being at Rocky Neck. He came here in the nineties residing here permanently and was intimately in contact with the active fishermen, painting many types true to life.

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The writer became what may be termed "intimately acquainted" with Mr. Buhler and at the time of the early celebrations, he (Buhler) gave it as his opinion that the Fisherman was the obvious memorial - it was the Fisherman who stood out above all other things as typifying Gloucester in the minds of the outside world. Practically all Gloucester agreed with him.

Carrying his idea into concrete form, Mr. Buhler painted his celebrated Fisherman from life. At the time, in the early nineties, it was a true and lifelike depiction of the Gloucester Fisherman - a composite of a seiner, a two-hooker, and Grand Bark halibut catcher. The writer refers to no man in his judgment on this matter.

So compelling and so completely had Buhler gotten what he sought that the Gorton-Pew Company purchased the painting and the copyright, using it as a trade mark. It was reproduced in colors and distributed over the country and is also familiar in black and white.. All the firm's processed goods carried it in miniature. It is true to life and technically correct in every way.

The State having appropriated \$10,000, provided the City contributed an equal amount, the Committee then got down to its work and invited artists and sculptors of the North Shore to submit designs. A number of those prominent in their profession responded and several meritorious designs were submitted. While they were acknowledged as excellent and of the highest artistic merit, it was the almost unanimous opinion that the one submitted by Leonard Craske was practically what the sentiment of Gloucester demanded; namely, a representation of a fisherman on the deck of a schooner - Craske, as had Buhler, placing his man at the wheel during a stiff breeze - a clean shaven fisherman of the present day.

But the selection of the Craske design did not end the matter; in fact, the situation came within an ace of being switched to another scheme. This was a plan brought forward by Col. A. Piatt Andrew who proposed the purchase of an eminence in Ward Two overlooking the harbor which proved a good vantage ground to hear the Carillon in the Portuguese Church in the procurement of which Mr. Andrew was the leading spirit. On this eminence, those who wished might view the superb scene of land and sea which it afforded. At night, the proposition was to have it illuminated by a strong beacon light which would be the first landfall fishermen would see on returning to port, combining sentiment and utility. This plan had many strong points to recommend it and immediately won high favor. It became apparent, however, that the funds on hand were not sufficient to accomplish the purpose; nevertheless, it was strongly campaigned and at one time seemed to have won adoption. Nevertheless, those who favored the fisherman idea were not sidetracked, and an impasse resulted promising to develop into one of those unseemly rows which seem inseparable from these enterprises. That it did not, was due largely to the consideration of Col. Andrew who withdrew his proposition, and the adoption of the fisherman followed. But the courtesy of the Colonel brought its early reward. A few months afterwards, the City purchased at what seemed a high price to many, the entire tract which it now holds, and the probability is that at some time the tower and beacon suggested will be erected from the masses of boulders that are strewn about the premises. Then the City will have a counterpart - not as high, but equally impressive, as the Provincetown Campanile.

Mr. Craske's design was turned over to a committee from the Master Mariner's - an exacting group - who suggested numerous changes. The artist proved himself broadminded and readily fell in with these suggestions, taking a trip to the fishing banks on a schooner that he might visualize right on the scene of action just what was wanted. Eventually, his final design passed the test of these critics, and this is written in order to inform inquirers that it has received the official hallmark of approval of the jury of the last resort.

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In due time it was dedicated with appropriate ceremony and thus came to pass through the agency of the last of the old Fourth of July Committee the series of memorials that had been planned from the first to erect and in the form agreed upon. It had served well its day and generation.

Right here we may quote from "The Book of the Three Hundredth Anniversary Observance" by James R. Pringle:

"As at Concord, the Minute Man placed 'Beside the rude bridge that arched the flood' symbolizes the patriot-yeoman, so the figure of the Fisherman guiding his craft through storm and stress, should suitably typify the indomitable spirit of Gloucester. No more appropriate spot for its placing could be chosen than the site selected, a bastion in the center of the seawall overlooking Gloucester Bay. Here it will stand for all time, token of a community task nobly fulfilled that, as at Lexington and Concord,

'Memory may their deed redeem
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.'

There are many who will second the noble thought voiced at these exercises by the late Col. Edward H. Haskell, himself a native, that there shall be placed on the memorial a tablet to the wives and mothers of Gloucester who have made the greater sacrifice. And yet, the writer may venture to say that the tribute to the "Woman of Gloucester" may well be a memorial in itself. Perchance, when the years mark another anniversary outpost, this may be well the outstanding complement to what has come before. The "Pioneer Mother", she who braved the terrors of the great adventure over the pathless plains, looks out on the waters of the Golden Gate as the tribute of the West to its founding Womanhood.

So also in this oldest fishing town of the Atlantic will there eventually be consecrated a similar testimonial to these truly pioneer women of the Atlantic seaboard."

'Give us the sailor soul that dares
Nor counts the cost what'er it be;
Give us the patience of the coast
That whoops - a woman - by the sea.'

The footnote as indicated reads - "As these proofs are being revised (September 1924), a statue, "The Pilgrim Woman" is being dedicated at Plymouth by the New England Woman's Society as a fitting complement to the Tercentenary Observance and a tribute to the Founding Mothers."

By James R. Pringle
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