



# Farmers & Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850

*Daniel Vickers*

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**Farmers & Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850** Daniel Vickers

Daniel Vickers examines the shifting labor strategies used by colonists as New England evolved from a string of frontier settlements to a mature society on the brink of industrialization. Lacking a means to purchase slaves or hire help, seventeenth-century settlers adapted the labor systems of Europe to cope with the shortages of capital and workers they encountered on the edge of the wilderness. As their world developed, changes in labor arrangements paved the way for the economic transformations of the nineteenth century. By reconstructing the work experiences of thousands of farmers and fishermen in eastern Massachusetts, Vickers identifies who worked for whom and under what terms. Seventeenth-century farmers, for example, maintained patriarchal control over their sons largely to assure themselves of a labor force. The first generation of fish merchants relied on a system of clientage that bound poor fishermen to deliver their hauls in exchange for goods. Toward the end of the colonial period, land scarcity forced farmers and fishermen to search for ways to support themselves through wage employment and home manufacture. Out of these adjustments, says Vickers, emerged a labor market sufficient for industrialization.

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