

*“Mauger’s career in Halifax was most successful.
The dense ignorance of the new officials,
their inability to cope with SO experienced a contrabandist,
all favored his plans to make money. The profits were enormous;
they charged whatever they pleased.
For years Mauger had the undeniable notoriety of being
the king of smugglers in North America.”*

– James MacDonald on Joshua Mauger...

Life and Administration of Governor Charles Lawrence: 1749-1760
As read before The Nova Scotia Historical Society, 1880

*“This could be the tip of the iceberg
to one of the greatest smuggling rings in the history
of the British Empire prior to the theft of
the Quina-Quina Trees’ Sacred bark.”*

Christopher L. Boze

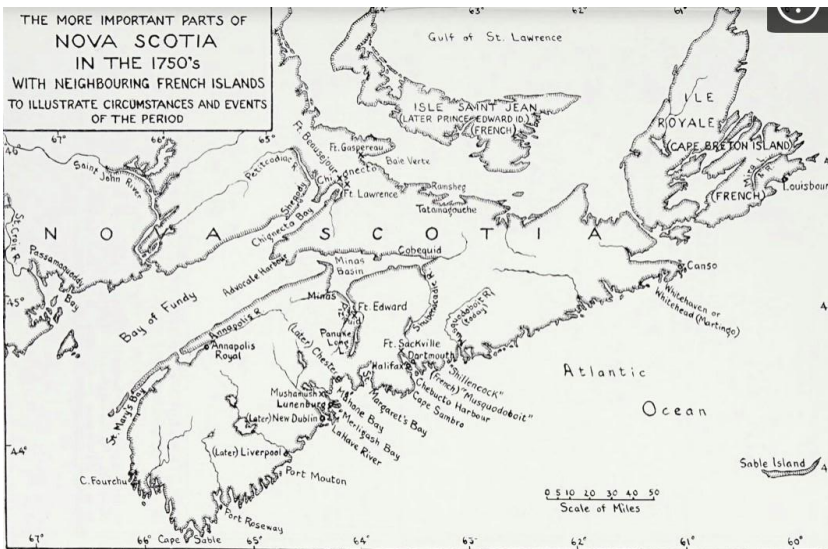
Chapter Two

FISHY BUSINESS

SEARCHING FOR GIFFORD AND SMITH: Merchants & Smugglers of Mahone Bay

By Christopher L. Boze

So, who were John Gifford and Richard Smith and why would it matter if they were on Oak Island? Well... according to Oak Island lore, John Gifford and Richard Smith were fish agents from New York who were granted islands in Mahone Bay for the purpose of establishing a fishery. One of the islands included in their grant was



Island #28 or as we know it today - Oak Island.

Courtesy: W. Bell, The "foreign Protestants and the settlement of Nova Scotia."

Fish merchants running around on Oak Island has never been held in high regard when it comes to explaining the Money Pit on Oak Island. For that reason, the "fish story" never seems to get any love. Ultimately, I think that is a problem. It can be that one story

which may have absolutely nothing to do with the other yet both may be important, especially if we are sorting through radiocarbon dated samples of layers of island occupation. As it has been said before by Rick Lagina, *“the story of Oak Island inhabits many layers of history and only through the identification of those layers, will we ever be able to tell the whole story of Oak Island.”*

Many researchers believe Gifford and Smith abandoned their grant due to the hostilities of the French and Indian War. Some cite the general lack of evidence of the men working the island and state the pair never stepped foot on Oak Island. This chapter hopes to present evidence that not only did John Gifford and Richard Smith occupy Oak Island during the summer of 1754 but one of the men held an interest in Mahone Bay for the next forty years.

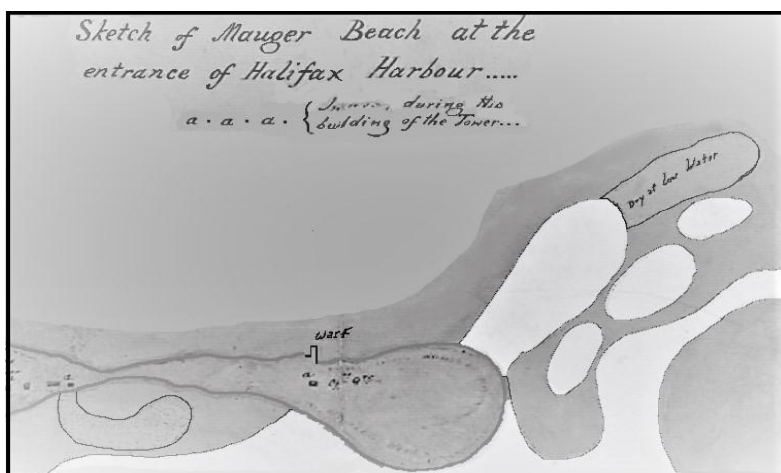
As we make our way through this layer of history, we may see evidence of something much bigger – the tip of an iceberg to one of the greatest smuggling rings in the history of the British Empire.

CITY BUILDING, 101, Halifax and Lunenburg

With the establishment of Halifax in 1749, commercial fishing began immediately. Fishing boats loaded with barrels and salt accompanied settler transport ships to Halifax Harbor. Outside the harbor entrance on present day McNab’s Island, a major fishing hub quickly developed. (See Appendix N, *“Notorious Networks”* Fig.1)

Then called Cornwallis Island, it was licensed to four men: Joseph Rous, fisherman and brother to the famous naval commander John Rous; Ephraim Cook, who would go on to settle the town of Mahone at the mouth of the Mushamush River; Abraham Bradshaw, who was one of the original settlers of Chester; and Joshua Mauger (pronounced Major), held the office of *Agent Victualler* for the entire navy at Halifax. This position was the sole provider of rum, rations, clothing and the like. He also was an early entrepreneur and “accused” smuggler. Even today the shore of

that island, is still called Mauger's Beach. Please take note of these names because these men will continue to pop up again and again throughout this chapter.



Courtesy: Nova Scotia National Archives

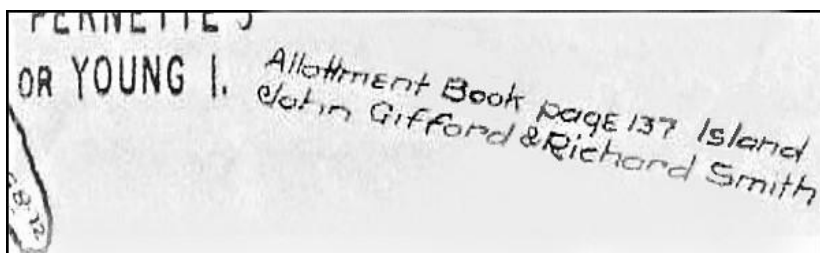
Before the Shoreham Grant and the creation of Chester there was the founding of Lunenburg in the summer of 1753. Governor Hopson had been tasked by the British Board of Trade to empty Halifax of its German population and fulfill the crown's promise to give them their own plot of land. Mahone Bay which lay between Halifax and this newformed city was now ripe for exploitation by merchant traders and the New England fishing companies. The potential profits to them were immense. For generations, they had fished the bay under threat of losing their lives to the Mi'kmaq. Now with the full protection of the British war machine, the race was on to see who could develop the resource first.

Gifford and Smith

In October of 1753, Governor Hopson was replaced by Charles Lawrence. One of Lawrence's goals as the new governor was to establish fisheries in the waters around Lunenburg to improve the local economy and grow more jobs.

On December 27th 1753, Gov. Lawrence granted: **Captain John Gifford and Richard Smith, merchants for the purpose of fishing,** three islands in Mahone Bay to establish a fishery. Location descriptions were given for each island selected and later after the islands of Mahone Bay were numbered, they were then assigned to John Gifford and Richard Smith:

"Gifford Island (#12), Young Island (#13), and Smith Island (Oak Island # 28)."



Courtesy: Crown Lands Record Centre, NS Dept. of Natural Resources

The "G Stone" (right) on Oak Island has been attributed to many theories since it was discovered by Dan Blankenship in 1967. One of those theories was the G Stone could have been carved by Gifford's men, marking the island as part of their grant. Though possible, there are also stories of previous diggers carving on stones for fun and mischief.



Courtesy: NS Nat. Archives

We may never know for sure but regardless, John Gifford & Richard Smith certainly explored Oak Island, sometime in 1753. It should also be noted that another "G Stone," is rumored to have been found on Young Island. This would be interesting to explore someday, to compare or substantiate the potential true use of the G Stone. Only through the gathering of all available evidence will we ever be able to tell the whole story of Gifford and Smith and their actions in Mahone Bay and on Oak Island.

At this point in our search, we are lucky enough to have Gifford and Smith's operations recorded for us to read. The *Halifax Gazette* founded in 1752 was Canada's first newspaper and is a wealth of research information concerning day to day activities in the lives of early Nova Scotians. Entirely dependent on government funding, it was published weekly by Boston printer John Bushell. Although difficult to read at times, it quickly puts one into the shoes of those early settlers and how they lived, loved, and suffered.



On May 4th, 1754, the *Halifax Gazette* announced Gifford and Smith's arrival in Lunenburg, as they were preparing to begin operations of their fishery. The reporter states:

"This week arrived at Lunenburg from New York, Messrs. Smith and Gifford, who, as we are informed, have bro't with them several Fishermen, and a large quantity of stores, as they intend to carry on a fishery and cultivate land in Mahon Bay."

In the very next paragraph, the reporter makes mention of another group arriving, also hailing from New York. They too have arrived with hopes of finding suitable land for starting a new settlement.

"On Sunday last arrived here from New York, Mr. Murray, who is going to Lunenburg to look out for a quantity of land suitable for a settlement, which, we hear, Mr. Murray in Company with some of the wealthiest merchants of New York, intends to make somewhere thereabouts, if the land is approved of; which the latest accounts leave us no room to doubt. The proprietors of the Eastern Settlement are in such readiness we presume the people will speedily be sent out and have reason to hope will be very successful."

H A L I F A X,

We hear that the Detachment lately sent to *Ghibenaccadie* River, discover'd there a very fine Country, well stock'd with large Timber, chiefly Oak and Elm, and several considerable Rivers and large Lakes, abounding with all sorts of Sea and River Fish. We are also inform'd, that there is a very considerable Quantity of clear'd Land upon the Banks of this River, which seems to be more fertile than any other Land yet discovered in the Province.

This Week arrived at *Lunenburg* from *New York*, Messrs. *Smith* and *Giffard*, who, as we are informed, have bro't with them several Fishermen, and a large Quantity of Stores, as they intend to carry on a Fishery and cultivate Land in *Mahon Bay*.

On Sunday last arrived here from *New York*, Mr. *Murray*, who is going to *Lunenburg* to look out for a Quantity of Land suitable for a Settlement, which, we hear, Mr. *Murray*, in Company with some of the wealthiest Merchants of *New York*, intends to make somewhere thereabouts, if the Land is approved of; which the latest Accounts from that Part leave us no Room to doubt.

The Proprietors of the Eastern Settlement are in such Readings, we presume the People will speedily be sent out, and have Reason to hope, will be very successful.

On Wednesday last arrived here Capt. *Allen Whipple*, in a Schooner belonging to *Joshua Manger*, Esq; of this Town, after a Passage of 39 Days from *North Carolina*, who informs us, that they met with exceeding hard Gales of Wind almost the whole Passage; that on

All newspaper clippings are courtesy of Nova Scotia National Archives.

Two groups of investors are arriving in Nova Scotia at the same time and from the same place. One group is led by partners John Gifford and Richard Smith while the second is led by a Mr. Murrey. Oak Island lore tells us that Murrey's operation ultimately fails due to the governor not promising military protection or rations.

The late, Oak Island researcher Paul Wroclawski, documented letters from Gov. Lawrence to the Board of Trade stating that a Captain John Gifford is also assisting this second group in their search for a suitable site. The governor further explains Gifford is acting as "a consultant" for the New York group and provided them with "recommendations on where to settle." Wroclawski wondered if Gifford's role as consultant came from his previous knowledge of the bay and thought this indicated Gifford was fishing in the area prior to the settlement of Lunenburg.

While this could be an explanation for the connection, between you and me, I feel like something is missing. Is it possible the story is being misinterpreted or are there details we know nothing about? From a business standpoint, rarely have I heard of a businessman being so generous with their competition. Certainly, Gifford could have been there before, Mahone Bay was renowned for its bounty. But it seems more likely that some sort of partnership existed or a connection we have yet to discover. My supposition is It is not unusual for a business entity to divide itself into two disguised fronts, betting one would succeed should the other fail, most likely based on simply on personalities.

The closest I can come to an answer comes from a letter written by Governor Lawrence to the British Board of Trade, dated June 1st, 1754. He writes:

“The land about and especially in Mahone Bay is so very fine that I have had a proposal from a Company of Twenty of the richest people of the Province of New York to settle a tract of it. I imagine they were incited to this partly by the example of the new Settlement at Musquodoboit and partly by the good report made there of that place by one of their Company who was at Lunenburg last fall and is now returned there as an Agent to another Company of seven substantial persons of New York who are concerned with him to carry on a fishery.”

Who is Gov. Lawrence referring to as the Agent, Mr. Murray or John Gifford? We know Gifford was around the preceding fall because he was searching for islands to include in his requested grant. Also, Gifford appears to be taking the “New York Group” to tour Mahone Bay. With Mr. Murray’s identification and occupation still unknown to us, I must lean towards Gifford having at the very least, an involvement with the New York Group. Then, strangely enough, Gifford and Smith’s fishery makes the news again in just three short months.

A simple notice runs in the *Halifax Gazette* on August 13th as well as August 24th, 1754:

"To all whom it may concern: Any person or persons who have any demands on the New York Company carrying on a fishery in Mahone Bay, by applying to Richard Smith may have immediate satisfaction. The said Company not being liable to any contracts or engagements whatever, as a company, but what are controlled by the above'd mentioned Richard Smith, their sole agent in the province of Nova Scotia. Richard Smith. N.B. Said Smith is to be spoke with, (if in Halifax) at Mr. Maccleur's; or if in Lunenburg at the company's store."

Halifax, August 13, 1754.

To all whom it may concern :
ANY Person or Persons who have any De-
mands on the New-York Company carrying on a Fishery at Ma-
hone Bay, by applying to Richard Smith may have immediate Satisfacti-
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Richard Smith.
N. B. Said Smith is to be spoke with, (if in Halifax) at Mr.
Maccleur's ; or if in Lunenburg, at the Company's Store. 2

A note for those curious of what "N.B." stands for. It is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase "nota bene" meaning, "note well" or as we would say today "please note". In those days it would be included as part of the 'legal language' of the day, as people advertised in the local papers requiring payments or in the settling of debts and estates. Much like the requirements of a probate period of today. At the time it was illegal to leave a port with debts and in fact a ship's captain could be held liable for assisting a debtor in leaving a port town.

Once again, the *Halifax Gazette* provides us good information about Gifford and Smith. It verifies they did operate their fishery in Mahone Bay. Whether this occurred on Oak Island will require more evidence but for now, let me provide a translation of what the paper wrote at the time:

“He is now the sole agent for the New York fishery and even though the company has no contracts to fulfill, if anyone believes they have a debt with him, here is where to find him. Basically, this is simple legal jargon of the day from a gentleman settling his debts. But he goes on to tell us of a store in Lunenburg where he can be reached, as well as at another business - “McCleures, when in Halifax.”

In my opinion this type of language suggests multiple partners across both towns. If not, he must have certainly been well known and/or connected for other merchants to conduct business for him personally. After searching lists of settlers who were in Halifax at that time, a *Samuel McClure* can be found. He lived inside the pickets (the most secure part of the new settlement) with the wealthy merchants and military officers. Mr. McClure was a cord wood inspector who operated a wood lot for that purpose, in Halifax Harbor.

With the Crown having a ban on the mining of coal, the cord wood business was extremely profitable in Halifax. Since the town had been founded it had been placed under siege by angry Mi`kmaq and Acadians and it was no simple matter to just enter the forest and cut your own. In fact, entering those woods without a well-armed guard was a 50/50 shot, at best, of being scalped. The Halifax poor who could not afford the 6 schillings a cord from McClure’s woodlot, suffered immensely from hyperthermia-related deaths or scalplings.

At this point we must ask what is Gifford and Smith’s connection to Samuel McClure? Why, the wood of course. Most all of it is coming from the clearing of farmland between the Mushamush River and the 30 acre lots in Lunenburg. Wood needed for warmth and cooking in Halifax, was being shipped from this new community in Mahone Bay, simply called then the “Mushamush.” The Mushamush Community as we know it today, is the seaside town of Mahone.

Only 100 days had passed since Gifford and Smith began official operations and now, Richard Smith is announcing that the company is dissolving. *What the hell happen?* Quite a lot it would seem, according to the Halifax Gazette.

Around the same time Gifford and Smith were starting their fishery, a 21-year-old major named George Washington was bumbling into the start of the French and Indian War. After his troops ambushed a French patrol in the Ohio region, the thin peace between Great Britain and France, began to breakdown once again. By July, the *Halifax Gazette* reported that the French Fleet was taking ships. Native attacks increased all along the colonial frontier. There is little doubt trade would be affected with a muti-continental war on the horizon.

Extract of a Letter from Barbados, dated May 4.
 "The French are now become troublesome Neighbours, as well in the West-Indies, as on the Continent; not many Days ago the Rebecca, Capt. Louther, of Philadelphia, was taken off Gorda-loup, and carried into Martinico: And we hear that they are fully determined to make Prizes of every Englishman they find within four Leagues of any of their Islands. How the French can justify such illegal Proceedings, when represented to a British Parliament, Time only must discover. I am, &c.

The Spaniards are so troublesome in the Bay, of late, as to put the Traders to great Difficulty in procuring their Logwood.

A Ship belonging to Bolton lay ready to sail homewards. There were five others loading in the Bay belonging to the same Place.

B O S T O N,

June 17. A few Days ago a Fishing Schooner arrived here from the Banks, and by the People on board we are informed, that being in want of Provisions, they put into Louisbourg on the 28th of May past for a Supply, where they were informed by several Persons, that some Indians had lately brought in 21 English Scalps from Canso, and that they received from the Governor Five Pounds Sterling as a Reward for each Scalp.

Custom-House, HALIFAX, May 28.

Entered Inwards, John Clapp from Newfoundland, Jonathan Cra-thorne from Fyal, Abraham Rath from Corker, & John Homer from Boston.

HALIFAX: Printed by JOHN BUSHELL, at the
 ments are taken in, and all Persons may be supply'd

The Halifax Gazette reported in June that the French Governor located in Louisbourg had bought twenty-one English scalps for five pounds sterling each. Evidently, The scalps came from fishermen killed near Canso. The paper also reported Capt. John Rous was set to sail from England to help protect Nova Scotia with the Royal Fleet. On such news, settlers became busy forming new militia companies and on improving defenses.

The biggest markets of commercial fisheries at the time were Spain, France, and the West Indies. Such a war would make those in Nova Scotia off-limits. Anyone who expected to profit trading fish, suddenly found there were significantly fewer markets to trade with and an increase in expenses. Worse yet, they began to lose skilled labor as able body seamen left fishing boats (voluntarily or not) for warships and higher pay. The workforce of the fishing fleet would be reduced to the young or the very old and infirm. These available employees a month before were only good for jobs like tending camp or packing fish.

Times in Danger of being hang'd since) and one Chetter, were executed for Houfe-breaking.

N E W Y O R K, May 27.

On Tuesday last Cap^t. Bennet of the Jamaica Packet arrived here in 8 Weeks from Madeira, who in Lat. 23 and half, Lon. 32 West from London, spoke with the Walpole, Capt. Fowler, in 14 Weeks from India, but left from St. Helena, in 29 Days: He informed Cap^t. Benner, that the French and English were at *Open Wars* in the East Indies.

June 3. Several Albany Sloops are now preparing for the Reception of Governor *De Lancey*, and a Number of Gentlemen who propose to attend the Treaty the 14th Instant at that Place. We are told they embark this Week.

Yesterday Cap^t. Gifford arrived here from the Bay: He sail'd from thence the first ult. in Company with the Capts. Duncom, Winthrop, and Byvank of this Place, and 14 Days after, off the East End of Cuba, (having parted with Cap^t. Duncom 2 Days before) were all chased by a Spanish Snow, from 10 o'Clock in the Morning 'till Dark, when Night coming on, and imagined they must have been taken, as he saw two Snows and a Sloop in Company two Days after, and as one of the Snows ply'd to Windward after Cap^t. Gifford, he imagined the other two were Prizes.

Extract of a Letter from Williamsburg, dated March 25.

I Am sorry Pennsylvania has as yet contributed nothing to the Ohio Expedition, but hope at their next Meeting something will be done. The Province of North Carolina has given 12,000 l. Proc. [equal to 9000 l. Sterling] and order'd 750 Men to be immediately march'd into Virginia, under the Command of Col. Innis. There is no Doubt but the Men will be rais'd, for several of the Officers will be able to compleat their Companies in five or six Days. This Advice we have from an Officer just come in from Carolina.

Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in London, to his Friend in

From this point forward, our Richard Smith can no longer be traced. I found no victualling or housing record of him in Halifax or Lunenburg. While he evidently held an interest in the Lunenburg store, it would appear he left the area soon after closing the fishery. However it is possible he remained as an investor in some other facet of the business. But as

far as this story goes, I believe Richard Smith settled his accounts with Gifford and returned to New York, his pocketbook lighter than when he arrived.

Which Gifford?

Over the years Oak Island researchers have found several individuals which could fit the bill as the real Captain John Gifford. Mr. Gifford, a.k.a. *John Gifford*, or *Capt. Giffard*, or *Jonathan Gifford*, are all possibilities to be our Gifford from Oak Island Lore

as the original Oak Island fish merchant. In 1752 there is a Jonathan Gifford listed as a distiller in Halifax. There is another John Gifford with a Nova Scotian connection reported in the Pennsylvania Gazette, in February 1754, who had witnessed the quelling of the Hoffman Rebellion in Lunenburg. Another well-known report from 1775 mentions a John Gifford in a British report on blockade activities of the America's. And yet another report describes a Captain John Gifford of Philadelphia living on Old County Road, as "a coastal trader under duress" which some researchers believe is code for "a smuggler" of sorts.

Through the years these stories have been used to construct a 'Franken-Gifford creation' of sorts. An amalgamation of stories from different sources to be warped into our Captain Gifford. But if we go a little deeper, we find research that could help us get a better picture of the real man.

Captain John Gifford the MARINER

I do not know when the actual wills of John Gifford and his wife Mary were made available online, but we can certainly be thankful for their preservation. They are presently available for anyone to view on Ancestry.com. In 1776 Captain John Gifford the Mariner, prepared his will on Staten Island, in the Province of New York. After his death in 1780, his will was probated. Mary's will was prepared in 1790 and probated after her death in 1793.

John Gifford never left his interests in Nova Scotia. Evidently after Richard Smith and he parted ways in the summer of 1754, Gifford continued to do business. Then almost thirty years later, his mortal end in sight, he thought Gifford Island valuable enough that it and his other lands, should go his grandson as a legacy.

The island then passed to Mary in stewardship, who held it for over a decade more. Finally in 1793 with her passing, we can assume Gifford Island and all the other lands amassed by John Gifford, were finally passed on to a grandson through the Gifford's executors,

forty years later. Note the following excerpt of John Giffords will from 1780.

Courtesy of Ancestry.com.

Black walnut round Table, one square ditto, one point Silver Cup, Six Silver Teaspoons, one pair Silver Tialongs then after her Death to her Heirs to be kept in the hands of my Executors for her Children and one Bedstead. Then I give and bequeath unto my beloved Grandson Edward Dubois all my Right and Title to the Lands granted by his Excellency Benning Wentworth Esq. Governor of New Hampshire 1763 since granted by the Governor of New York it being in this Province to the eastward of Wood Creek to the said Edward his Heirs Executors Administrators & assigns forever; likewise an Island called, Giffords Island in Mahone Bay granted by Governor Lawrence I give and bequeath unto my well beloved wife all my Estate Real and personal And in case she should die before my Daughter Mary Dubois then I give devise & bequeath the whole of my Estate (aforesaid) unto my Daughter Mary Dubois if she becomes a widow (after her Death), unto which I

Transcribed paragraph:

"Then I give and bequeath unto my beloved grandson Edward Dubois all my Rights and Title to the lands granted by his excellency Benning Wentworth Esq. Governor of New Hampshire 1763 since granted by the Governor of New York it being in this Province to the to the eastward of Wood Creek to the said Edward his heirs Executors Administrators and assigns forever; likewise an Island called Giffords Island in Mahone Bay granted by Governor Lawrence."

By combining the information of John and Mary Gifford's testaments we can put to rest the "destitute" Gifford from old county road in Pennsylvania, the "costal trader in duress." Our John Gifford although not fabulously wealthy, was more financially secure than most of the population living in the other colonies.

We must remember the Revolution is going on all around them. By the time of Giffords death in 1780, Staten Island had been under occupation by the British longer than any other place in the United States. English warships were anchored around the island and British soldiers are stationed on it.

Trade had been suppressed for years and was now relegated to supplying the military. Gone are the things that a proper fish merchant would need to do business, such as ships, warehouses, and wharves. In fact, the only things left of Gifford's former life, is his moniker of being a Captain and a Mariner.

We are simply too late to learn anything of John Gifford's career as a fish merchant or ocean trader. What we see is a man in the last years of his life showing only the assets he hopes to pass on. Dying over a decade earlier than his wife and in leaving such a small family, his will is not much more than a technicality. Everything he



Courtesy of: Library of Congress

owned was to be transferred to his wife, excepting the one thing he appears most proud of – his land grants.

On these Gifford's becomes specific and lists them singularly. Namely, lands granted to him from New Hampshire in 1763 and his namesake, Gifford Island in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia. Later with the death of Mary, we learn there are other deeds in her papers acquired by

Capt. John Gifford to include one grant in New Jersey. All held for Gifford's grandson as a legacy of land grants.

With the death of Mary Gifford, we learn much more about the Gifford estate. Mary listed over a two-dozen books and “Letters,” she thought important enough to pass on. While these books composed a small library for the time, there very well could have been many more. We could surmise at least one of them was educated or at least self-enlightened. I point to the content of some of the books contained in the collection. Two-volumes on the History of England, a book on French grammar and two-volumes of Greek Philosophy were not simple fare. Whether their house was large enough to have contained a study, we do not know. We do know they owned a large mahogany desk, evidently filled with land deeds. Probably Gifford had at least a small office to manage his affairs.

Based on the number of furnishings, the couple’s home contained at least two bedrooms. Comfortably supplied with blankets, soft pillows, feather bedding and chests for clothing. They also sported a large dining room for entertainment, generally unique to the colonial upper classes. They dined with their guests at a large table, populated with several pounds of silver serving ware and China plates. Afternoon tea could have been served from their mahogany tea chest, which was adorned with silver cannisters.

John and Mary Gifford dressed well and had a collection of jewelry to adorn themselves with. Listed in the wills were five “fancy” gold rings along with two “plain.” Captain Gifford also had two pair of gold “sleeve buttons” or cufflinks and a turtle shell snuffbox, inlaid in silver. Mary had a large collection of “wearing apparel” which was divided among her closest friends at her death. Two rings were listed separate; One called “a hand in heart” ring and another that was set with some “stone.” She also had two pair of stone earrings, one set in gold and another in silver. The last piece of jewelry listed seems like a keepsake or a gift for a special occasion or event. The item is simple, yet extravagant and certainly unique – one turtle shell, “put in gold.” Neither of their wills mention money, so we can only guess at the Gifford’s financial situation.

The executors and the witnesses of John and Mary Giffords last will and testaments, are of interest as we wrap up their documents. Gifford lists a Capt. John Journey and a Joseph Bedel Jr. as his executors. Mary's will includes the Huguenot family of the Mersereau and the old Dutch family of the Van Pelt's. The Van Pelt family are interesting in that they received one of the first land grants to Staten Island in 1674 and a patent to a spit of land known as Black Point.

Ultimately it would appear that the connection between all of Gifford's friends was Saint Andrews Church. This church was one of the few that survived the war and was never closed or burned. Probably because British officers were known to attend it with their wives and had their children baptized there. Everyone involved in both wills are listed as attending Easter services there in March of 1769, including a Cap Geiffers (Gifford) and his wife.

Digging into Captain John Gifford's time on Staten Island, revealed very few leads and even fewer Gifford's. One that can be found is a Revolutionary War hero, Major Bernard Gifford, but he came to Staten Island around 1792 after the death of his wife. His house became a landmark of sorts. There also is a road on the island called Gifford Lane that still exists today. Thanks to that, there are schools, bus routes, a library and even a train station that carry the Gifford name. That road makes its way towards The Great Kills Harbor.



Courtesy of: marinas.com

An ideal natural harbor for ships to lay at anchor, it has had many names over the years, such as Clarendon and Newton (New Town). Historians say it was finally given the name Great Kills in 1865 and the name appears to have come into use during the 1850's on local maps of the time.

Interesting enough, there was a settlement on the western side of harbor shore, recorded as being called "*Gifford's*" or "*Gifford's by-the-Sea*." The name was in use through most of the 19th century. The harbor itself was private property and had a commodore until 1939, when it was bought by a group of South Shore residents. The settlement, along with a road have been marked on maps starting as early as 1760's.

Most modern historians attribute Gifford Lane to Daniel Gifford who was said to be a surveyor and commissioner in 1773, but I cannot find their source. "*Staten Island and its People*" by Leng and Davis, contain four volumes and are the go-to books about the history of Staten Island. Recorded there is a statement made by Leng concerning Gifford's Lane:

"Gifford's Lane was named for John Gifford, commissioner and surveyor of highways, who laid it out in 1773. This Gifford was a weaver, whose will made in 1776, probated in 1780, is recorded. Giffords Lane, not named, is on the map of 1797."

Now I understand this statement is a one-off, but the dates Leng refers to, match the will of our John Gifford, the Mariner. Apparently at some later date, modern historians have updated this statement and replaced John Gifford with a Daniel Gifford, thus attributing Gifford Lane to him. Why... I do not know. But after considerable searching, I can find no documentation of this Daniel Gifford the surveyor, other than modern references.

At this time, the simple fact remains, there is no will for any Gifford, probated on Staten Island in 1780 other than that of our John Gifford the Mariner. Further, there is no will on record for this Daniel Gifford, probated during the year of 1780 on Staten Island.

Were historians Leng and Davis as confused about their Gifford's in 1929, as we are today? It would appear so.

However, I have focused too much on this detail and we must return to Mahone Bay. In wrapping this up, I will point to the earliest reference of a Gifford in Staten Island, I can find. This reference is from early historian J.J. Clute who in 1878, included a short bio in his Early Families section of the "Annals of Staten Island." It simply states:

"Gifford – This name occurs in the records only with the reference to a single individual, as early as 1770. He was a man of considerable influence, and his name is perpetuated in the public road called from him, Gifford's Lane, near Richmond."

At this point I will say that I am curiously suspicious and believe more research needs to be done. The period leading up to the Revolution was an extremely difficult time and many records were lost or destroyed. That said it would be interesting to know the extent of Gifford's early operations on Staten Island and if the first settlement at Great Kills Harbor could be attributed to him.



Courtesy: W. Bell, The "Foreign Protestants and the settlement of Nova Scotia."

Mahone Bay of 1754: The Founding of Mushamush

When Mahone Bay was opened for settlement by the British it hosted a bounty of resources. Cod, herring and mackerel were in such abundance, fishermen would run out of salt or barrels and catches would be left to waste on the beach. One account mentions the filling of four-hundred barrels in one single haul of the net. There were shellfish of all kinds to be had with some of the mollusks being nearly a foot in length. Salmon would make great runs from the ocean and head up the rivers to spawn during their mating season. To a fish merchant or fishery, this would be a treasure that only needed to be caught, barreled and sold. (See Appendix N, *“Notorious Networks”* Fig.2)

The Gold River was a known spawning river for salmon. Even the first settlers of Chester were catching Salmon there with their bare hands in the 1760's. With the location of Oak Island close to the mainland and during a time of lower sea levels, nets could be strung across the narrow channel and receive large catches. It is possible the water rights around Oak Island were a valuable commodity during the seasonal salmon runs. Unfortunately, after a decade or two, I would imagine the commodity was pretty much exhausted by overfishing.

Governor Lawrence wrote in one of his letters that the islands of Mahone Bay were important resources and would only be granted to those settlers who could develop them properly. Looking at the names of island ownership in 1755, reveals a *Who's – Who* of what could be called the “settler elite” of the period. Names like *Prescott, Creighton, Zink, Sutherland, Grant, Pernette, Bridge, Refuse, Payzant and Rous*, are all recorded to have received island grants. Most of these grantees were former military men and all had been in the province since the early years of the settling of Halifax.

Captain Ephraim Cook, had been in Nova Scotia since the founding of Halifax and was known throughout the province as a “cantankerous character.” Cook has the dubious distinction of participating in some of the first personal property litigation cases of the early Nova Scotia courts. Apparently short tempered, he ran into a little trouble when he insulted a judge in Halifax and was thrown in jail for contempt of court. This event started a firestorm which ironically ended up with more judges being installed to please the merchant class.

Cook also had powerful friends in Halifax. After the founding of Lunenburg, Cook enlisted the backing of entrepreneurs Joshua Mauger and Joseph Rundell, who along with other merchants founded a small industrial community known as the *Mushamush Community*. Taking its name from the river, which was used to power at least two sawmills, today the town is known as Mahone Bay. Gifford Island lies just outside the mouth of the Mushamush River, within spitting distance of the mainland. Ultimately, all the men who operated fisheries on McNab’s Island, followed Cook to this new site.

Your's, &c.

H A L I F A X.

We hear, that Capt. *Cooke*, Mr. *Rundell*, and some other Gentlemen in this Town are going to erect a very considerable Saw-Mill upon a fine Run of Water somewhere in *Mahone-Bay*; a Blockhouse to cover the Work is actually building here for that Purpose, and will be finish'd in a few Days. We also hear that a Ship of 200 Tons is to be set up there this Spring.

We are credibly inform'd, That some Gentlemen in this Town, to the Number of Twenty, have petition'd the Hon. President and Council of this Province for Tract of Land for a Settlement at a Place call'd *Little-Jedore*: So that we have great Hopes that the Place will still flourish.

Custom-House, HALIFAX, *March 15.*

Entred Inwards, Benjamin Donnel from Old York.
Cleared Out, Matthew Pinnel for New-York, John Homer for Boston, and John Conckling for New-London.

Advertisements.

CHOICE Nova-Scotia RUM, to be sold by
Joshua Mauger, at Two Shillings a Gallon, in any Quantities
not less than a Barrel.

By April of 1754, Cook requested a grant to establish a sawmill and shipyard but also talked of raising cattle, producing hay and growing vegetables. Cook wished to build two ships as soon as he was established, one of 160 tons and a schooner of 70 tons. Evidently a man of his word, the ship *Edward* was the first ship constructed by his shipyard in Mahone Bay.

The group of merchants was granted the use of an armed government sloop to haul a prefabricated blockhouse to the site and a garrison of Rangers to protect the men during its construction. No grant has been found concerning Cook's request for the land, however, on the map of Crown Grants, it is recorded, "*for the use of the sawmills on the Mushamush.*" It would appear, local contacts received better treatment from Governor Lawrence.

Very quickly another sawmill was put into operation cutting barrel staves exclusively. In short order a sizable barrel producing facility was established, with coopers, blacksmiths and all the accompanying support staff. In one of Governor Lawrences letters to the Board of trade in 1755, he notes that Mr. Mauger is operating one of two sawmills on the Mushamush. In another letter, Lawrence mentions many people being employed at the mills and that barrel staves and hoops are being produced there. The new governor was apparently happy with the progress and that much needed jobs were being created.

Farm goods like turnips and potatoes were soon being produced by the northern farms of Lunenburg. Wagonloads of "roots" made their way to the Mushamush to be shipped to the hungry masses of Halifax. Wood ships made constant rounds carrying cord wood from the Mushamush to Samuel McClure's woodlot in Halifax. Ultimately, these shipments would be fulfilling Joshua Mauger's contracts to the Board of trade. The Mushamush became an important component to the colony of Nova Scotia and was protected like a military resource.

So, where was our John Gifford at during all this activity? Unfortunately, whatever he was up to, is as of yet undiscovered. But it stands to reason Gifford continued operations at his fishery on Giffords island, from where it is possible, he shipped goods like lumber and fish to the West Indies.

Halifax, Jan. 19. 1754.

‘ **T**His Day I arrived with Col. *Monckton* from *Lunenburg*.---I gave
 ‘ you an Account in a former Letter of the late Insurrection
 ‘ at *Lunenburg* : The Colonel has humbled their rebellious Spirits ;
 ‘ he has traced the Scheme thro’ all its Meanders to the Source of
 ‘ Mischief, Mr. *Hoffman* ; who is now closely confin’d here : The
 ‘ Evidences which Col. *Monckton* has this Day brought with him,
 ‘ and his own Letter to Mr. *Webb*, are sufficient to convict him, if
 ‘ the Law admits of it.---During my Stay at *Lunenburg*, I recon-
 ‘ noitered the Country adjacent as far as *Le Have* and *Mahon Bay*.
 ‘ This last Place is on the East Side of *Merlegash*, and *Le Have* on
 ‘ the Western Side : There is almost a Communication with *Lunen-*
 ‘ *burg* and *Le Have* by Water : The Distance over Land is not quite
 ‘ a Mile. *Mahone Bay* is perhaps one of the richest and most curious
 ‘ Places in *North-America* : There is in it One Hundred and Eighty
 ‘ Islands ; which are all surrounded with smooth and pleasant Beach :
 ‘ Each Island is a secure Harbour, and the Land of an excellent Na-
 ‘ ture ; being cover’d chiefly with Oaks.-----Had these insolent
 ‘ Wretches the Patience to consider the Means they have of becoming
 ‘ independant and comfortable, by applying themselves with a little
 ‘ Industry to the Cultivation of these Lands, which Nature has been
 ‘ so profuse in, that I am certain in a few Years this Settlement would
 ‘ not be among the least considerable in *America*.

Your’s, &c.

H A L I F A X.

We hear, that Capt. *Cooke*, Mr. *Rundell*, and some other Gentle-
 men in this Town are going to erect a very considerable Saw-Mill
 upon a fine Run of Water somewhere in *Mahone Bay* ; a Blockhouse

Gifford’s apparent connection to Joseph Rous (who he had sold or more likely deeded, a part of his island), connects him to Joshua Mauger and Capt. Cook as - at the very least - a business associate. It is this researcher’s opinion that there is no way Gifford could do business in Mahone Bay without at least working with that certain group of men.

In closing this segment, there is one last connection I would like to present concerning some of the founders of Mahone Bay. As previously mentioned, Capt. Cook's shipyard produced the first ship, the *Edward*. Its construction was finished in time for it to be outfitted as a privateer in the French and Indian War. Guess who else operated as privateers in the waters of Mahone Bay?

Joshua Mauger would between 1756-58, finance three privateer ships during the coming war. The first ship, a snow *Musketo*, sailed in 1756 with 24 carriage guns and 80 men. The second ship *Wasp*, a brigantine, also sailed in 1756 with 10 guns and 150 men. Lastly a Schooner also of the name *Musketo*, sailed in 1758 and carried 14 guns and 80 men. All their resulting voyages met with mixed results.

Capt. Joseph Rous from Giffords Island, also got into the legal pirate business as well. Halifax merchants Mr. Saunderson and Salter financed the Schooner *Lawrence*, which Joseph Rous commanded for a Captain's share. It carried 14 guns, 20 swivels and 100 men.

Cook, Mauger and Rous had fisheries on Cornwallis Island. All of them were associates of Joshua Mauger and each man started new operations at the mouth of the Mushamush in 1754. They almost certainly operated in Mahone Bay during the war years. This period deserves more research to answer these questions, along with many more:

1. With the increase of military presence in Halifax during the French and Indian War, did Joshua Mauger move his smuggling hub from McNab's Island to Mahone Bay?
2. Did Gov. Lawrence, knowing he could not stop smuggling, turn a blind eye once Mauger and his associates moved their operations to the Mushamush?
3. Was Gifford a part of these operations and did he receive lands in New Hampshire for his part of Oak Island? The date of 1763 would have also seen Oak Island surveyed as part

of the Shoreham Grant. If so, that would go a long way in proving Oak Islands value to him as a resource.

4. Ultimately, what impact would Giffords operations have on Oak Island, if any?

The Halifax Party

The Halifax Party and Mr. Mauger are covered fully in Appendix N, *“Notorious Networks,”* see Fig. 3. A short description of the Halifax Party could be described as: a group of merchants put together by Joshua Mauger to maximize the profits supplying Halifax and Lunenburg, as well as the entire British military force stationed in Nova Scotia.

Mauger was the agent victualler for almost everything shipped there, including flour, clothing and all the rum for the military. He was the main point of the trading triangle that connected Nova Scotia to England and the American Colonies, with Parliament footing the bill. You simply could not *fart* in the province, without Mauger getting his sniff. He controlled the entire trade system supplying Nova Scotia and held powerful connections with the benevolent British Board of Trade.



Mr. Joshua Mauger

Courtesy: NS National Archives

Mr. Mauger and many of his associates have been accused of smuggling many times before and by many governors beginning with Cornwallis. Nothing ever stuck and he was never replaced. In fact he was rewarded with even bigger contracts.

Joshua Mauger was almost certainly protected by a bigger cog who back in England, profited from his operations. It is almost certain that Gifford is connected to Halifax Party through his operations on Gifford Island, but I imagine he would have been a very small gear in a much bigger machine. It is also possible he made regular runs to the West Indies, trading fish and lumber from Mahone Bay for sugar and molasses or even slaves.

Could Gifford have been a smuggler with a New York Connection? It looks possible but certainly not proven and besides, “smuggler” is a harsh term for the time. Today we think in terms of illegal goods and certainly illegal goods were smuggled at that time as well. But at the time, the real money was in avoidance of taxes and charging ridiculously high shipping costs from freight company’s he owned or were partners with. This was Mauger’s Modus Operandi so to speak.

One of his associates was Thomas Hancock, who was also in on the scheme at a very high level. Part of Boston’s Merchant Row, he was partners with Apthorp and Co. and his association with Mauger helped him to become one of the richest men in the colonies. He of course was uncle to Declaration of Independence signer, John Hancock, who became known as a fashionable smuggler himself. Back then it seems it was almost a requirement and simply a matter of doing business among the gentleman merchant class.

In fact, Richard Bulkeley, a long-time civil servant and Secretary of the Province for multiple governors, estimated in 1780 that over 400,000 pounds sterling had been lost by the government to smuggling. Truth be known it was probably much more.

By account of Money granted by Parliament for Nova Scotia Colony Regiment, March 23, 1748, granted upon account towards the charge of transporting to His Majesty's Colony of Nova Scotia, and supporting and maintaining there such reduced officers, etc., etc	£ 40,000	0	0
1749. Granted upon account for defraying the charges incurred by transporting to H. M. Colony of Nova Scotia. and supporting and maintaining settlers not provided for by Parliament	36,476	3	10
1749. Granted on account for supporting, maintaining and employing the settlers, March 19, 1750	39,778	17	2
Exceedings	57,682	19	3
	<hr/>		
	£173,938	2	3
	<hr/>		

CHRISTOPHER KILBY.

Courtesy: T. Akins, History of Halifax City, Parliamentary Budget of 1749

Conclusions

Knowing John Gifford maintained operations in Mahone Bay as well as the activities of the Mushamush Community - *radiocarbon dating of artefacts on Oak Island are likely contaminated by operators from the 1750's*. Carbon dating in the 80-year range before 1750 could be from an occupation zone left by British colonists. In fact, middle to late 18th century industrial activity should be expected to be found on Oak Island.

We know that by 1764 Oak Island had been surveyed and divided into the 32 lots we see today and by 1765 the lots were made available through a lottery. Early recordkeeping of the Island Shares document is questionable at best, but certainly, not every previous lot owner was a farmer. There were lot owners who were lumber merchants, shipwrights, wheelwrights, coopers and fishermen and local legends tell of sawmills, pottery kilns and possibly a brick factory operating on the island. It is also in the historical records that wood, sand, gravel and lime mortar made from mollusk shells was shipped from Mahone Bay to Halifax in those early days for the construction of early buildings. What other industry occurred in Mahone Bay that has yet to be identified?

More work needs to be done on this period of Mahone Bay history to separate fact from fiction and build a true historical model of Oak Island for the British Colonial Period. Oak Island has a very long history with humans, and prior to 1795, it was not just original diggers who walked amongst its mystery canopied trees.

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