

STORIES of New Jersey

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DELAWARE BAY OYSTERS

The oyster was a favorite food of the Indians long before the coming of the white man. Over the Burlington Path and the Minnisink Trail from the mountains to the sea the Indians made annual pilgrimages and held great oyster feasts. Piles of shells all along the New Jersey coast bear evidence of these seaside picnics. The Indians, of course, knew nothing of oyster cultivation, as we do today. They simply dug the oysters from the natural beds with sharp sticks. For the most part they ate them raw; but they also dried quantities of them and strung them on sinews for future use. Much of the wampum used for currency and decoration was made from the shells of oysters and clams.

Along with sweet corn, succotash, turkey and cranberries, the early settlers of our country learned from the former proprietors to appreciate the strange-looking bivalves, and, as the years have passed, we have improved the cultivation and marketing of this valuable article of diet, until the oyster industry has reached great proportions, representing an annual investment of \$18,500,000 and a gross business of more than \$3,500,000. In New Jersey, which ranks fourth in the United States in oyster production, about 2,000 are employed in a variety of jobs: boatmen, planters, sorters, shuckers and packers.

New Jersey was a pioneer in scientific oyster propagation, just as she was in scientific agriculture. Under the direction of Dr. Julius Nelson of the N.J. State Agricultural Experiment Station at Rutgers University much was learned about the habits and peculiarities of this humble creature. One important phase of the investigations carried on by the scientists was the protection of the growing oyster from disease. As a consequence almost every oyster-producing state, through its own State Board of Health and its Shell Fisheries Commission, lays down rules governing the growing of oysters and the packing and shipping of them to market. Oysters may be handled only by workers who have passed a health examination, and they may not be harvested from waters that have been contaminated or polluted.

In New Jersey oysters used to be produced from Raritan Bay, the Shrewsbury River and Barnegat Bay. But each of these localities has become contaminated or found impractical for breeding. In the lower Delaware River near the outlet of the Maurice River, up the Maurice River at Bivalve, at Port Norris and at several other points in that vicinity the oyster industry now flourishes. The beds are not privately owned, but are under the control of the State Riparian Commission and are leased to operators upon proper terms and conditions. The grounds are leased to the same lessees for continuous terms, and are controlled by them so long as the license fees are kept paid. All lessees are protected in their rights to the stock on their grounds and