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STORIES of New Jersey

this protection is enforced by guard boats which are provided, officered and operated by the State. To all intents and purposes, therefore, the contents of the leased grounds are privately owned and controlled so long as the ground rentals are paid.

From Colonial days the oyster beds in the Delaware River along the Salem County shore had been a battleground for warring oystermen from the two states bordering the river. Violent disputes necessitating the interference of the police continued as late as 1932. But on October 9, 1933 the U. S. Supreme Court settled the controversy by decreeing that the oyster beds of Delaware Bay lying east of the main ship channel belonged to the State of New Jersey. The decision added \$1,250,000 to the value of the State's oyster industry, and there has been no more trouble since.

The cultivation of oysters is rigidly controlled by the Board of Shell Fisheries, the director of which must be a practiced oysterman. The operation is conducted very much like farming. The ground is cultivated, "sets" are planted, and the crop is harvested; but instead of horses and tractors, sailboats and dredges are used.

Oysters multiply by spawning. During the summer months when the water is warm the female oyster ejects eggs by the thousands. The eggs float to the surface of the water in a cloudy mass. There the wave action breaks up the mass, and after about two weeks shell begins to form on those eggs that have escaped their enemies. These potential oysters are called "spats." When the shell has become heavy enough the young oysters sink again to the bottom, where they attach themselves to whatever is handy. For this purpose oyster shells are always spread over the bottom of the beds. When the "spat" has become firmly attached to an old shell it is called a "set."

The oyster "set" stays where it sinks for nearly a year. In May and June the oyster boats sail up and down over the beds and dredge the seed stock from the bottom. The "spats," now grown to about the size of a half dollar, are taken to the oyster house, broken off the shells and transplanted to the prepared growing beds, to wait until they have reached marketable size. The old oyster shells are immediately returned to the beds, as required by law, to protect further growth. The smaller oysters to be eaten raw are given four years to develop; medium-sized oysters are five years old, while large oysters are kept under cultivation for six or seven years.

All this time the crop must be protected from its natural enemies -- starfish, drumfish and oyster drills. These latter are perhaps the most vicious of the oyster's enemies. They are conical shelled molluscs that attach themselves to the oyster shell, drill through and gradually absorb the oyster. Also there is danger from storms that carry mud or sand over the beds and suffocate the helpless oysters.

Another enemy of the oyster is poisonous or too cold water. Against this nature has provided its own protection. Around the oyster is a membrane called the "mantle" through which all water must pass. This mantle strains out any foreign substance and is so sensitive that it detects any dangerous