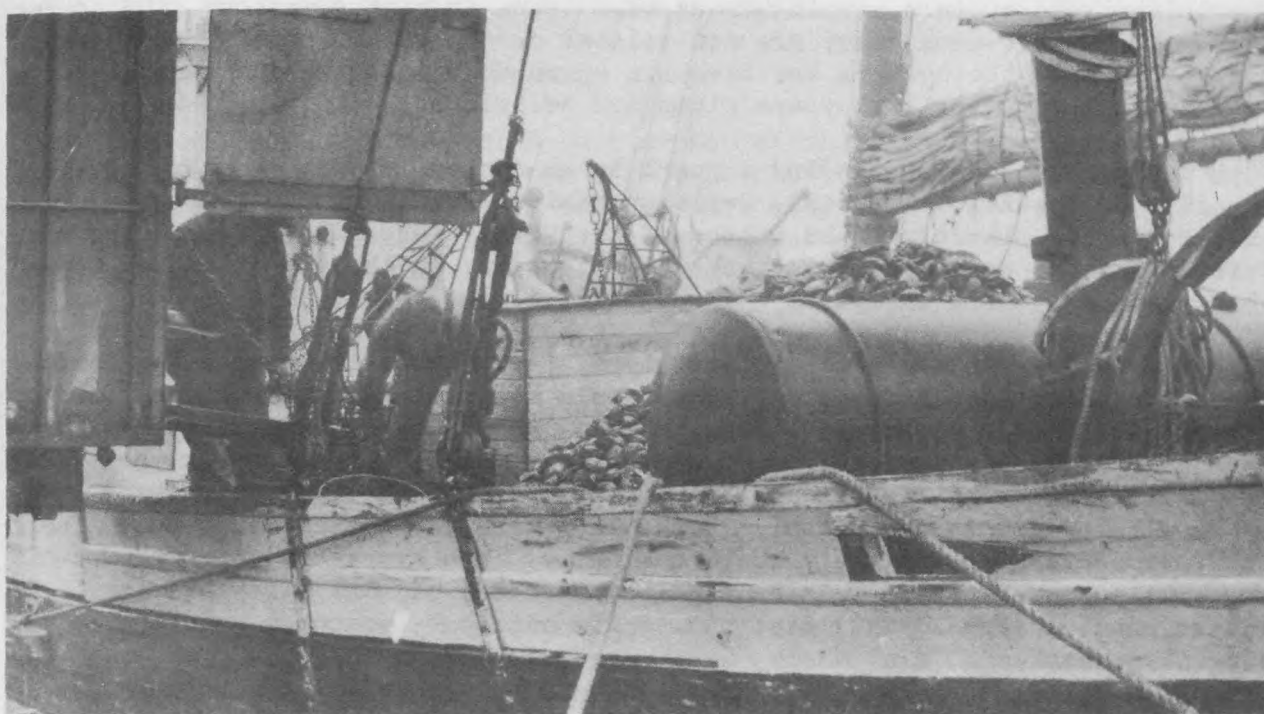


STORIES of New Jersey

content in the water. The oyster shell closes up automatically before too much harmful water has entered. When the water is too cold (48° F. or less) the shell closes and the oyster hibernates, just as does a bear or a frog, and remains so until the water has become warm again.

The harvesting season commences in September. Two-masted schooners cruise over the oyster beds in all sorts of weather. Gasoline or steam craft are prohibited by law for fear of contaminating or disturbing the beds. A few oystermen use power boats to take them out to the beds; but for the most part they sail from shore just as they have done for generations.



Unloading oysters at the dock

The harvesting is done with light metal frames about three or four feet across called "dredges." From the frames are suspended strands of rope. As the dredge is dragged along the bottom the oysters fasten themselves to the ropes. The dredge is hauled on deck, the oysters are dumped from the dredge and it is dropped overboard again. When the boat is loaded she sails back, is unloaded at the wharves and puts out for the beds again. At the wharves the oysters are taken into the "shucking" houses, sorted and prepared for shipment. Some oysters are "opened," that is, removed from their shells for shipment. This is called "shucking." The people who do this work are called "shuckers." They become so expert that they can open an oyster almost as fast as the average person can count. The shucked oysters are placed in gallon and half-gallon tin cans and packed in cracked ice in containers to be sent long distances.