

STORIES of New Jersey

That part of Port Norris where oysters are shucked and packed has been given the local name of "Shell-Pile" because of the immense piles of shells that have accumulated in the process of shucking. This has given the place a new and unique industry, that of packing the shells and shipping them to various parts of the country where they are ground up for use on poultry farms for stimulating a stronger growth of egg shells.

Recently there has been established at Port Norris a packing plant where shucked oysters are put up in 8 oz. enamel-lined tins, vacuum-packed at a time of the year when they are in the best condition -- so that one may now eat oysters anywhere and at any time regardless of the "R" months. There is a tradition that oysters are injurious when eaten in months without the letter "R." The only reason they are not placed on the market during the R-less months is that the oysters are then in spawn and are thin and unpalatable. From September to April they are plump and delicious.

The possibility of finding a pearl in an oyster is very remote, for those who live on the Atlantic Coast. Certain chemicals and warm water are needed to create pearls. Therefore the waters of the Pacific and Indian Oceans are more friendly to the developing of these valuable gems. On the other hand an oyster that produces pearls is apt to be less palatable.

Many oystermen are of a distinct type, tall, athletic and weather-beaten. They like their jobs and most of them would not exchange their lives for any other that seems more comfortable or less hazardous. Their ancestors have been seamen for generations and their children will follow them in the trade. They have little to say to, and very little interest in "outsiders," which means all those not immediately connected with the oyster business. Their interest centers around their small community. The average oysterman owns his own little home, keeps a garden and is perfectly content with his lot. He speaks with a slow drawl distinctly his own but somewhat resembling the Virginia accent.

The Maurice River Cove in Delaware Bay at the mouth of the Maurice River has over 31,000 acres of oyster beds -- the largest single acreage of oyster beds in the world. Wilbur H. Robbins, Secretary of the Maurice River Cove Oyster Growers and Dealers Association, will gladly arrange a tour for school children who wish to visit this interesting community, where they may see the trim schooners unloading their cargo, or watch the oystermen cleaning and painting their boats or packing the oysters off to market.