



# A Brief History of Florida Oyster Cultch\* Planting

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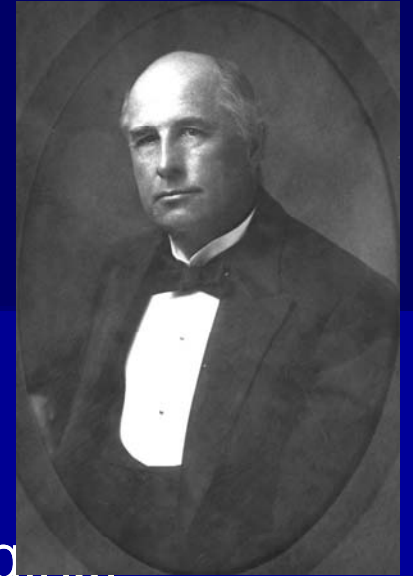
\*cultch – dry, clean oyster shell

# Hats off to Napoleon!

- *Monde*, French newspaper, offers 12,000 francs for a method to cheaply preserve food for Napoleon's armies.
- 1809 Nicolas François Appert vacuum-seals food in a glass jar.
- 1810 an Englishman, Peter Durand, seals food in tin-plated, wrought-iron cans.
- 1812 an American, Thomas Kensett, Sr., establishes New York cannery for oysters, meats, fruits, and vegetables.

# Enter the Americans

- 1814 Appert tinning factory burned by Allied troops invading France.
- 1825 Kensett Sr., granted US patent for preserving food in tin cans.
- 1849 Thomas Kensett, Jr. establishes Baltimore oyster cannery.
- 1850 commercial oyster harvesting starts in Apalachicola.
- late 1860s first oyster canning plant at Goffinsville Florida on the Nassau River.

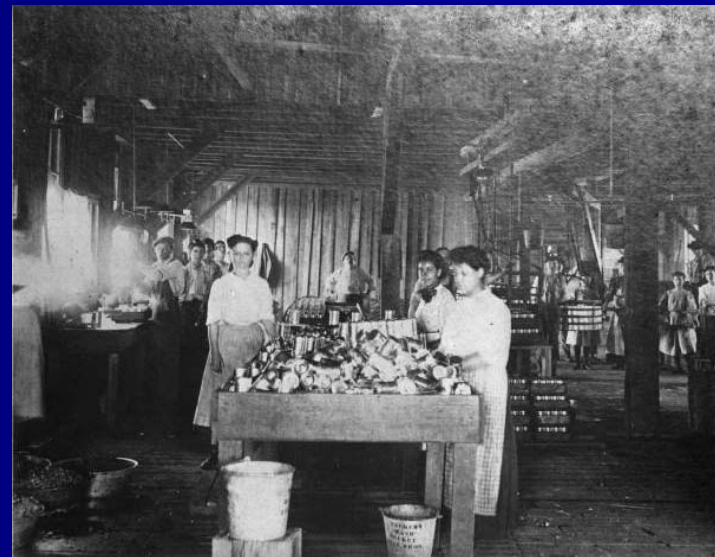
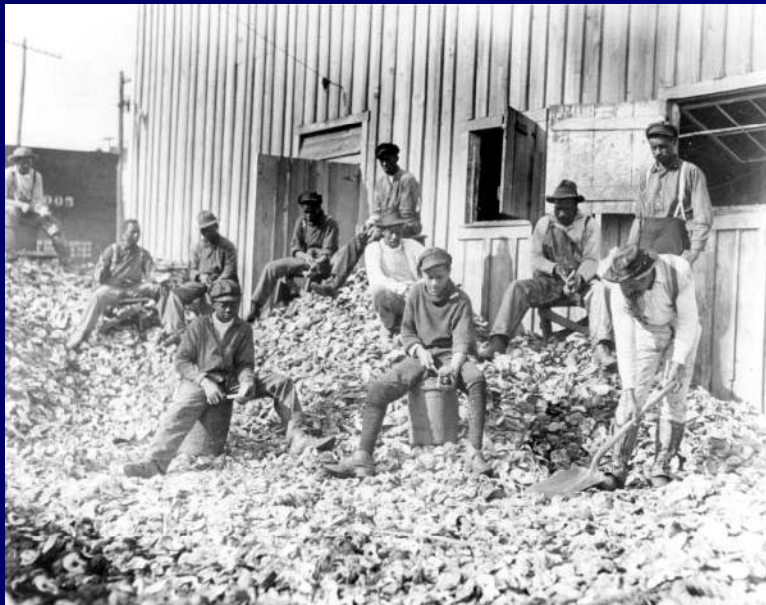


- 1870 Apalachicola Bay oyster harvest intensifies.
- 1881 Biloxi Mississippi oyster canning begins.
- 1885 Ruge Brothers Canning Company formed in Apalachicola.
- John Ruge advocates planting oyster shell.
- 1889 Florida Fish Commission created, John Ruge serves as sec/treasurer.



- 1907 Apalachicola Northern Railroad runs “oyster special” to Atlanta with oysters packed on ice.
- 1913 Shell Fish Division created in the Florida Department of Agriculture.
- 1915 400 men manned 117 oyster boats, 250 shuckers worked in various oyster houses and two canneries.
- 1915 Biloxi surpasses Baltimore in canned oyster production.

# Apalachicola – 1880s



# Apalachicola



# Florida Fish Commission 1889 – 1904(?)

- 1898 – Commission criticizes Riparian Proprietors Act of 1856 that gives landowners control of oyster reefs and lack of state funding for the Commission
- 1902 – Commission calls County Commission ability to lease barren oyster beds “outrageous” and “unconstitutional.” Reports bloodshed and mayhem.
- 1903 – appoints first Fish Warden that arrests four men illegally harvesting oysters to supply a St. Augustine-based cannery.

# Shellfish Division

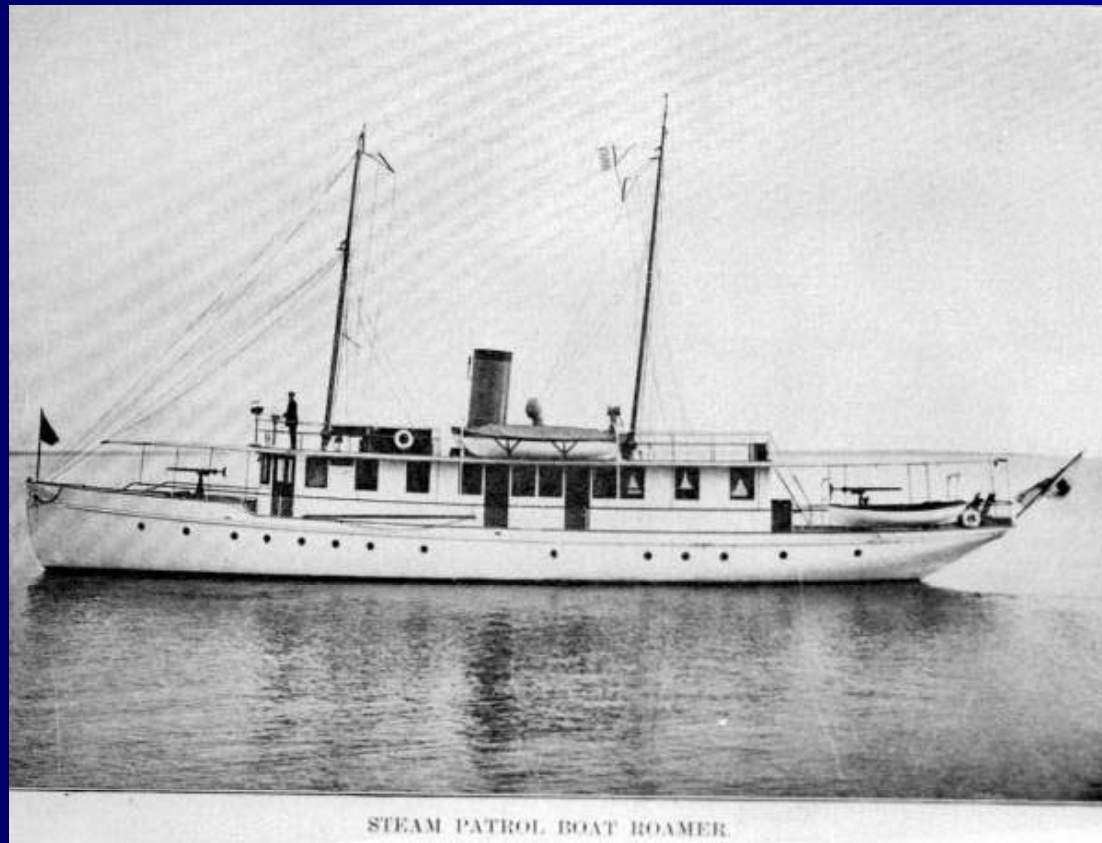
## Florida Department of Agriculture

### 1913 - 1932

1913-1914

- Plants 15,000 barrels of oysters
- Leases 6,509 acres
- Reports 980,204 bu oysters and clams processed
- Enforces 3-inch oyster and 2-inch clam size limit.
- Three patrol vessels purchased.

# Shellfish Division



STEAM PATROL BOAT ROAMER

# Shell Fish Division

1915-1916

- Reports 869,266 bu oysters and clams processed, 13,000 bu of clams in Lee County.
- Federal research vessel *Fish Hawk* surveys Apalachicola Bay.
- Enforcement responsibilities added for fish laws.
- Adds 22 small patrol boats.

# Oyster tonging and culling - 1916



# Shell Fish Division

1917-1918

- Reports 90,833 bu clams processed from Lee County (Caxambas and Marco).
- Estimates marine fishery wholesale value at \$20 million.
- Suggests name change to “Conservation Commission” and the addition of hatchery and research activities.

# Shell Fish Division

1923-1924

- Plants 463,085 bu live seed oysters and 304 bu of clams.
- Establishes sanitation rules/regulations for oyster shucking and packing plants.

# Shell Fish Division

1925-1926

- Plants 203,460 bu shell, 310,116 bu live seed oyster, and 304 bu clams.
- Oyster dredge *Franklin* has capacity of 2,100 bu per day.
- Reports 90% of public oysters from plantings.
- Establishes 3 fish hatcheries.

# Shell Fish Division

1927-1928

- Plants 137,151 bu of oysters and shell.
- Five fish hatcheries release 41,575,000 fish and spiny lobster larvae.

# Shell Fish Division

1929-1930

- Plants 36,114 bu shell.
- *Franklin* sold and small boat fishers hired to plant shell.
- Two fish hatcheries active: Welaka and Martin.

# Shell Fish Division

1931-1932

- Plants 153,876 bu seed oysters and reports 32,643 bu privately planted.
- “Eat More Seafood” promotional campaign boosts Florida consumption by 2 million pounds.
- 1933 - merged into the new State Board of Conservation.

# Federal Emergency Relief Administration - 1935



# Federal Oyster Planting Activities

Job employment activities by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Projects Administration during the period 1935-1938 resulted in over 950,000 bu planted in every Florida coastal county except Monroe.

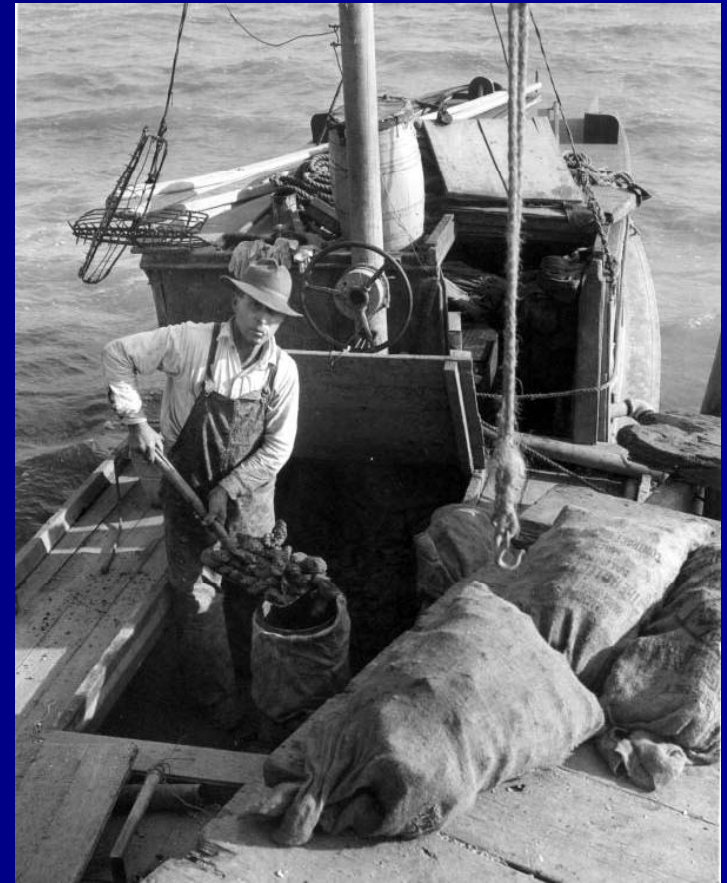
# Oyster Division

## State Board of Conservation

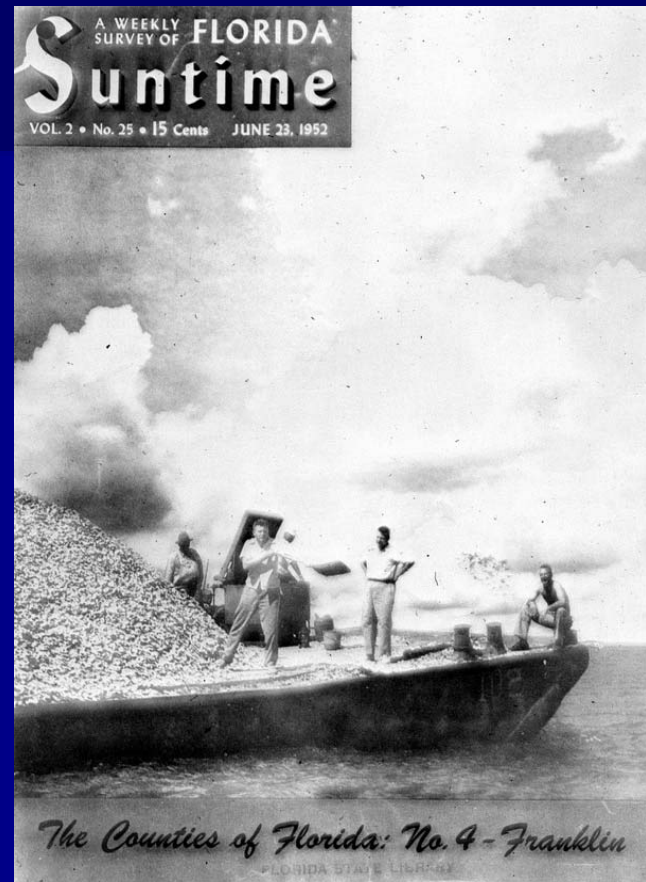
### 1947 - 1969

- 1947 authorized by the Legislature.
- 1948 organized under Director Dr. F.G. Walton Smith and Assistant Director Robert Ingle.
- 1949 – shucked shell property of the state, 2,000 bu shell planted Franklin County.
- 1950 – 88,000 bu shell planted Franklin Co., 8,576 bu of live oysters planted Franklin Co.
- 1951 – 50,500 buy shell planted Franklin Co.
- 1952 – 63,700 bu shell planted Franklin Co.
- 1953 – 13,288 bu of shell Franklin Co., 6,510 bu of shell planted Levy Co.

# Apalachicola Bay - 1947



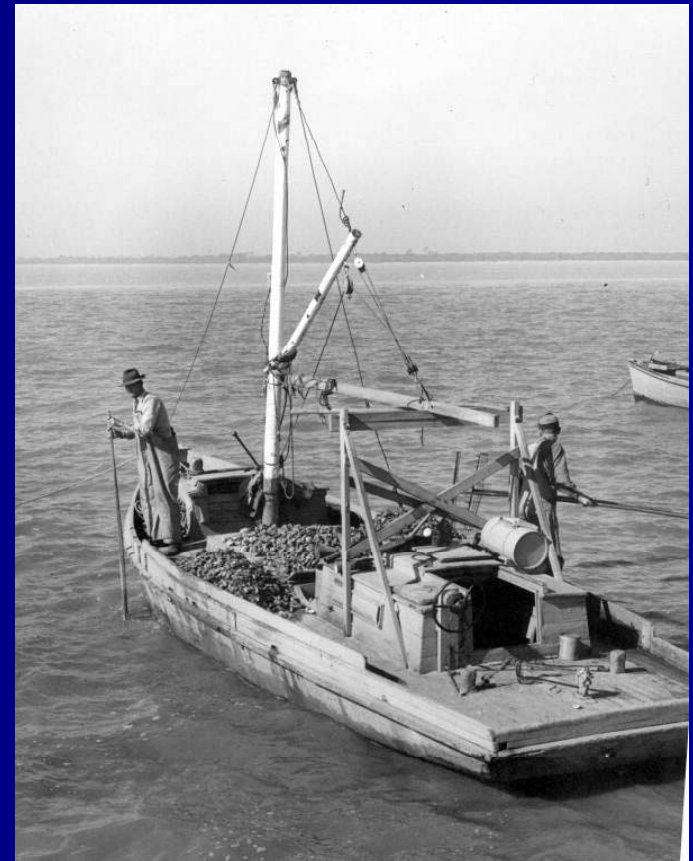
Robert Ingle shoveling  
oyster cultch from a  
barge delivering oyster  
cultch from Bayou La  
Batre Alabama.



# Oyster Division

- 1954 – 72 leases, 2,113.57 ac.
- 1954 – 27,720 bu shell Franklin Co., 5,389 bu live oysters Franklin Co.
- 1955 – dead shell revenue used to establish St. Petersburg marine research laboratory.
- 1955 – 2,170 bu oysters Levy Co.
- 1956 – 125,950 bu shell Franklin Co., 25,300 bu shell Bay Co., 100 bu oysters Citrus Co., 6,510 bu shell Lee Co.
- 1957 – 3,400 bu oysters Citrus Co., 600 bu shell Citrus Co., 1,943 bu oysters Wakulla Co., 1,396 bu oysters Franklin Co., 31,992 bu shell Bay Co., 43,400 bu shell Walton Co.
- 1958 – lease owners can keep all cultch to return to private bottom.
- 1958 – 183,700 bu shell Franklin Co., 3,460 bu oysters Wakulla Co.

# Apalachicola Bay - 1954



# Planting cultch - 1957



# Oyster Division

- 1959 – no planting.
- 1960 – 229,174 bu shell Franklin Co., 65,100 bu shell Walton Co., 1,760 bu concrete rock Bay Co. 7,595 bu shell Lee Co., 4,032 bu oysters Wakulla Co.
- 1961-1962 – Report “northern production” ravaged by disease. Leases increase from 2,000 ac to 6,016 ac.
- 1961 167,420 bu shell Franklin Co., 117,180 bu shell Hillsborough Co., 6,072 bu shell Walton Co., 1,980 bu shell Citrus Co.
- 1962 – 320,826 bu shell Franklin Co.
- 1963 – 10,000 bu shell Franklin Co., 21,700 bu shell Walton Co., 6,510 bu shell Lee Co.
- 1964 – 201,500 bu shell Franklin Co., 22,000 bu shell Bay Co. 246 leases, 7,861 ac.

# Oyster Division

- 1965 – 153,000 bu shell Franklin Co., 19,530 bu shell Hillsborough Co.
- 1966 – 2,170 bu oysters Levy Co. 67 leases 1,229 ac granted.
- 1967 – 295,294 bu shell Franklin Co.
- 1968 – 332,813 bu shell Franklin Co., 347 Brevard Co. Artificial reefs constructed in Apalachicola Bay with 50/50 match federal funds. 62 leases, 1,386 ac granted.
- 1969 – 463,295 bu shell Franklin Co., 47,740 bu shell Bay Co.

# Oyster Division

- 1970 – 410,282 bu shell Franklin Co.
- 1971 – 222,989 bu shell Franklin Co.,  
37,105 bu oysters Levy Co.
- 1972 – 195,300 bu shell Santa Rosa  
Co., 62,735 bu shell Franklin Co.,  
43,704 bu rock Brevard Co., 42,275 bu  
oysters Levy Co., 2,659 bu oysters  
Santa Rosa Co.

# Summary

- 1880s oyster canneries begin planting cultch to restore oyster reefs.
- 1913-1932 Shell Fish Division plants 1.35 million bu cultch or oysters, 608 bu clams.
- 1935-1938 federal programs plant 950,000 bu cultch.
- 1949-1971 Oyster Division plants 4.2 million bu cultch or oysters.
- State programs focused cultch planting in Franklin, Bay, Wakulla, Levy, Lee, Citrus, Walton, Santa Rosa, and Brevard counties.
- Federal programs planted in all Florida coastal counties except Monroe.
- Materials planted included oyster cultch, scrap metal, dredged fossil shell, holite rock (phosphate slag), oolitic limestone, and railroad slag.
- oyster conservation and cultch planting the earliest and longest running marine conservation effort in Florida.

# References

- Biennial Reports of the Fish Commission.
- Biennial Reports Shellfish Division, Florida Department of Agriculture.
- Biennial Reports of the State Board of Conservation.
- Minutes State Board of Conservation.
- Whitfield, Jr., W.K. 1973. Construction and rehabilitation of commercial oyster reefs in Florida from 1949 through 1971 with emphasis on economic impact in Franklin County. Florida Department of Natural Resources, Tallahassee, FL Special Scientific Report No. 38.
- The Florida Memory Project, <http://www.floridamemory.com/>.