

Fourth Biennial Report
—OF—
Oyster Commission
of Louisiana

—TO—
The Governor and General Assembly
1908--1910

—O—
OFFICERS

L. J. DOSSMANN,	PRESIDENT
C. S. E. BABINGTON,	SECRETARY
FRANK T. PAYNE,	CHIEF SURVEYOR
THOMAS SHANNON, SR.,	CHIEF INSPECTOR
JOHN. C. WICKLIFFE,	ATTORNEY

—O—
COMMISSIONERS

L. J. DOSSMANN	H. H. HARVEY	CLEMENT STORY
F. E. GUIDRY	A. E. HOFFMAN	

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*To His Excellency, Governor Jared Y. Sanders and the
Honorable Members of the General Assembly of the
State of Louisiana :*

In conformity with Section 4 of Act 167 of 1908, we have the honor to submit herewith the fourth biennial report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana, covering a period from April 1st, 1908, to April 1st, 1910.

The members comprising the present Commission are :

Mr. L. J. Dossman, St. Landry Parish ;
Mr. Clement Story, St. Bernard Parish ;
Mr. Horace H. Harvey, Jefferson Parish ;
Mr. A. E. Hoffman, Lafourche Parish ;
Mr. F. E. Guidry, Terrebonne Parish.

These gentlemen were appointed to their positions by your Excellency, and, after taking Oath of Office, met in the City of New Orleans on October 31st, 1908, for the purpose of effecting an organization, and this they proceeded to do by electing the following officers, to-wit :

President—L. J. Dossman, St. Landry Parish.
Secretary—J. W. Hyams, West Baton Rouge Parish.
Chief Surveyor—Frank T. Payne, Orleans Parish.
Chief Inspector—Harry Cage, Terrebonne Parish.
Attorney—John C. Wickliffe, Orleans Parish.

Two vacancies have occurred among the officers of this Board ; that of the Chief Inspector, due to the regrettable death of Mr. Harry Cage on September 14th, 1909, and the resignation of Mr. J. W. Hyams as Secretary.

Mr. Thomas Shannon, Sr., of St. Mary Parish, was elected Chief Inspector, and Mr. C. S. E. Babington, of St. Tammany Parish, succeeded Mr. Hyams as Secretary.

The present Commission, immediately after its organization, set about to make a thorough investigation of the oyster industry in the State, and to inaugurate a new system for its management. The Commission found that the oyster industry, as it was car-

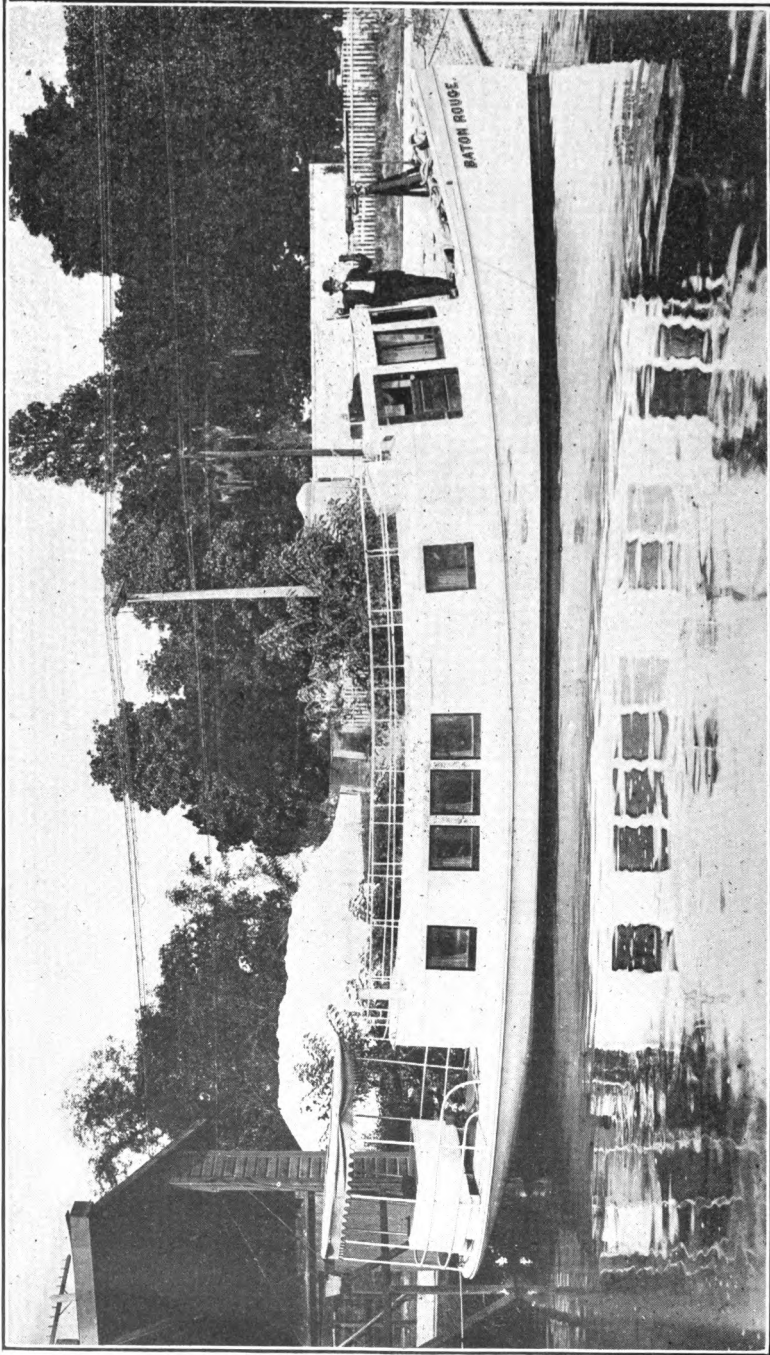
ried on, depended almost entirely on the product of the natural reefs for its oyster supply (only five per cent of the oysters marketed were grown by planting shells; the remainder were taken from the natural reefs) and, as the demand was greater than the supply the inevitable result was depletion.

An examination of all of the natural reefs was made and they were found to have been depleted to such an extent that drastic steps were necessary in order to preserve the oyster industry of the State. Therefore, at the opening of the season of 1909-1910 (from September 1st, 1909, to April 30th, 1910) an order was issued permitting no dredging on these reefs except where the water had a depth of ten or more feet, and then under the strict supervision of an inspector who would see that the law was observed. In consequence of this order and reduction of the supply by the over dredging in former years there was a heavy decline of the oyster output compared with past seasons, as shown by the following tabulation:

OYSTER CROP STATISTICS.

Year.	Catch in Barrels.
1902-1903	435,442
1903-1904	570,018
1904-1905	674,936
1905-1906	504,752
1906-1907	804,345
1907-1908	861,487
1908-1909	741,131
1909-1910	320,054

It is a point of satisfaction to this Commission as demonstrating the soundness of its reasoning in the promulgation of this order, and recent examinations have disclosed that a heavy growth of young oysters has resulted on the reefs that were closed to dredging the past season. These young oysters will have attained a marketable size by September 1st, thus assuring a large crop for the season of 1910-1911.



Dredging when properly conducted and supervised is, in the opinion of this Commission, a benefit rather than a detriment to reefs of large area and in deep water. This opinion is borne out by an extract taken from a letter of Dr. H. F. Moore, Assistant, Bureau of Fisheries, Washington, and dated March 29th, 1910, which is as follows:

“The statements attributed to me are essentially in accordance with my views, though I do not advocate the use of dredges in beds of limited extent in shallow water. My experience is that if the culling laws be properly enforced dredging is not more destructive than tonging, and on such beds as bear badly clustered oysters is a material benefit. The danger to the beds arising from dredging is that when large quantities of oysters are taken, the culls and shells may not be returned to the beds as required by law. This is a question of policing.”

RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS.

The direct revenues derived from the oyster industry and paid into the treasury of the State of Louisiana from April 1st, 1908, to April 1st, 1910, is shown in the following tabulation:

RECEIPTS.	DISBURSEMENTS.
April, 1908..... \$4,012.60	April, 1908..... \$3,148.24
May, 1908..... 2,869.33	May, 1908..... 2,489.21
June, 1908..... 964.61	June, 1908..... 3,293.82
July, 1908..... 317.54	July, 1908..... 2,657.76
August, 1908..... 926.94	August, 1908.... 2,847.07
September, 1908.. 4,157.96	September, 1908.. 3,613.25
October, 1908.... 11,071.33	October, 1908.... 3,049.55
November, 1908... 4,798.91	November, 1908... 3,962.18
December, 1908... 4,510.28	December, 1908... 3,966.87
January, 1909.... 5,490.91	January, 1909.... 3,699.89
February, 1909... 5,422.61	February, 1909... 3,213.91
March, 1909..... 3,664.05	March, 1909..... 2,814.01
April, 1909..... 4,352.71	April, 1909..... 2,758.58
May, 1909..... 1,191.46	May, 1909..... 3,164.05
June, 1909..... 294.45	June, 1909..... 2,666.43
July, 1909..... 84.51	July, 1909..... 4,262.67
August, 1909..... 1,371.61	August, 1909..... 2,488.17
September, 1909.. 3,422.52	September, 1909.. 3,836.43
October, 1909.... 6,006.03	October, 1909.... 3,534.71
November, 1909... 6,583.26	November, 1909... 3,809.34
December, 1909... 3,812.05	December, 1909... 2,887.22
January, 1910.... 4,402.47	January, 1910.... 4,930.32
February, 1910... 2,481.73	February, 1910... 3,622.08
March, 1910..... 3,105.80	March, 1910..... 3,206.04
Total\$85,315.67	Total\$79,921.80
Total receipts from April 1st, 1908 to April 1st, 1910	\$85,315.67
Total disbursements from April 1st, 1908, to April	
1st, 1910	79,921.80
Total receipts over disbursements	\$5,393.87

PATROL FLEET.

The fleet used for patrol purposes by this Commission consists of the following vessels:

“Louisiana,” 40 H. P. Gasoline Launch, 61 ft. long, cost \$7,993.61.

“Baton Rouge,” 35 H. P. Gasoline Launch, 51 ft. long, cost \$3,200.00.

“Opelousas,” 25 H. P. Gasoline Launch, 46 ft. long, cost \$3,000.00.

The Launch “New Orleans” was wrecked during the storm of September last. This boat was fully insured and an adjustment for her loss was made with the insurance company that was satisfactory to this Commission.

LOUISIANA-MISSISSIPPI BOUNDARY.

Messrs. Dymond and Zacharie have been paid in full the balance due them as Attorneys in the Louisiana-Mississippi Boundary suit.

The boundary line, in conformity with the decision of the United States Supreme Court, and with Act No. 137 of 1908 of the General Assembly of Louisiana, has been established. The work was done under the direction of Major F. M. Kerr, Chief, State Board of Engineers and Officials of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey.

The Commission has paid \$4,000.00 to this work.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

The coast line of Louisiana, bordering the Gulf of Mexico, comprises the parishes of Orleans, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, Terrebonne, St. Mary, Iberia, Vermillion and Cameron. Their shores are largely indented with lakes, bayous and bays, where the tide ebbs and flows daily, mixing the salt water of the Gulf of Mexico with the fresh water of the Mississippi River and the bayous and small rivers leading therefrom. The area of this water surface, susceptible to oyster culture, is calculated to be 4,720,502 acres.

There are now under cultivation 14,301.24 acres producing about 200 barrels per acre per year, and 62,740 calculated acres of natural reefs where oysters grow wild and unaided.

Deducting the leased bottoms and the natural oyster reefs from the total area above mentioned would leave 4,625,460.76 acres of barren bottoms, at present unproductive, but which with the expenditure of money and labor could be made to produce millions of dollars through the oyster business, and thereby yield to the State an enormous revenue.

The Bureau of Fisheries of Washington, through its representatives, have been making extensive examinations and researches in connection with our oyster industry and the following extract is taken from a recent report (Baylor):

“The State of Louisiana has at present an extremely valuable and comparatively unproductive asset in the ownership of her estimated oyster territory of 4,631,152 square acres. It is the property of the people of the whole State. The highest acre of land in your State has to be taxed to protect your lowlands. Your extensive levee system will have to be strengthened and enlarged. Your common school system will demand larger State expenditures, if your State hopes to compete with the great manufacturing States. Your highways must be improved if you would build up the remote sections of your State. Large sections of your oyster area can only be utilized in one or two ways. Either, under a community of interest, the State must authorize large sums of money to be spent in the oyster culture for the benefit of those of her citizens who live adjacent to them, or else she must rent or sell these barren oyster areas to individuals or companies.”

This Commission would recommend, however, as the most advantageous procedure, that the leasing of water bottoms be encouraged, and in order to accomplish this the law defining a natural reef should be repealed. No definition of a natural reef could be formulated by any man or body of men which would meet with the approval of all parties concerned. Oystermen, as a rule, hold that all bottoms where oysters grow or have

grown naturally, even though now practically barren of oysters, should be considered natural reefs. Other citizens of the State who are not directly interested in the oyster business, but are interested in the oyster industry from the standpoint of revenue, hold, as a rule, that no bottoms should be excluded from leasing for oyster culture which, by methods known to oyster culturists, may be made to yield a greater number of oysters than they now produce.

It should be evident to every one that neither of these definitions could be adopted by the Commission as a basis for determining which of the two are natural reefs. Hence the present law should be repealed and the Commission should be allowed to exercise its judgment liberally in favor of leasing water bottoms suitable for the cultivation of oysters. It would be a palpable absurdity for the State to attempt to promote the propagation and growth of oysters and encourage its citizens, by lease of land, to engage in their culture, if the lands authorized to be leased were only those upon which oysters do not and cannot be made to grow.

That there are lands covered by water in this State where no oysters can be found, but where, if planted, they could be cultivated successfully, is true, but their extent is very limited.

In no part of the State can natural conditions more favorable for the oyster culture be found than in the parishes of Jefferson, Lafourche, Terrebonne and St. Mary, where large and numerous tracts of water bottoms are located with oysters naturally growing thereon in moderate numbers, but not in quantities sufficient to make it profitable to catch them.

But under our present law the Commission is not permitted to lease the same. Although every foot of land capable of oyster propagation and culture, is the absolute property of the State and under the supervision of the Oyster Commission, yet when this Commission attempts to lease these lands, hundreds of men are found setting up the violent protest to what they consider an invasion of their inalienable rights—men who are slowly, but surely, wiping out one of the healthiest and most

promising of the State's assets, and an industry that should yield an estimated income of five hundred thousand dollars a year.

We must ignore criticism, and work zealously to obtain legislation that will enhance the value of the industry in our State, and conserve the natural resources to future generations.

We realize that the natural reefs as dealt with in this report have long been under process of exhaustion. These reefs were heretofore open to the entire public upon which to dredge or tong as they pleased. Under that condition the oyster supply became nearly exhausted in many localities in this State, and the same is true of other States.

The oyster business has had the same history as have all enterprises connected with the gathering of natural wealth. Men have always been eager to secure the largest possible amount of nature's stores in the quickest time possible, and in their greed have too often destroyed the sources of supply and reproduction. They have wantonly destroyed the forests without providing for their rehabilitation. They exterminated the wild game in most sections of this country and depleted the rivers of food fish. The oyster beds tell the same story.

The history of oyster legislation since 1871, when the first law was passed, up to the present, has been one of restrictive legislation. That is, it has placed restriction about the leasing of oyster bottoms that have resulted in a detriment to the industry and loss to the State. By this legislation, the Commission has been prohibited from leasing bottoms that could readily have been leased and that would soon be built up and made profit producing.

Legislation along this line should be liberal and on a parallel with legislation enacted by the State as it relates to the man who tills the soil for agricultural purposes. It is immaterial whether the land is below high tide mark or is in the valley or on the hillside. If it is productive in its nature when properly cultivated, it should be made to produce. The State does not plant a farmer's crop of corn or other produce, and

no more should it plant the oyster farms that the public may reap the crop indiscriminately.

The law should provide that all bottoms be leased as they are considered suitable for cultivation and production in the estimation of the Oyster Commission and that the lessees shall plant the same, reaping the profits therefrom as the fruit of his industry.

The State of Louisiana has a princely inheritance in her more than four million acres of tidal bottoms. It will require persistent labor, intelligence and capital to properly utilize and develop this area, and, more than all, wise laws, judiciously administered.

L. J. DOSSMANN,
President.
CLEMENT STORY,
HORACE H. HARVEY,
A. E. HOFFMAN,
F. E. GUIDRY,
Commissioners.

