

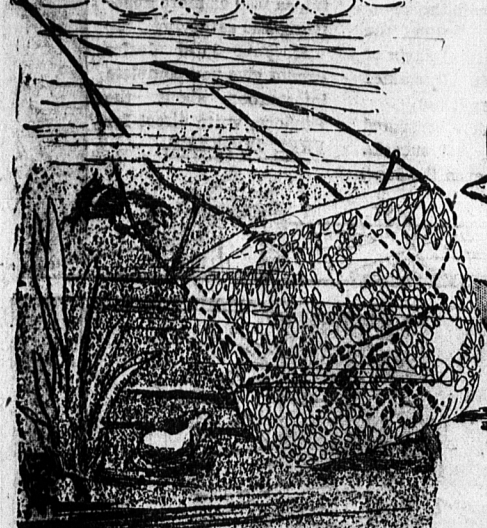
AUGUST 24, 1907

THE CHARLOTTETOWN GUARDIAN

PAGE NINE

# CRAB CATCHING

## Given Monopoly by Nature, a Maryland Town Supplies World's Market.



How the Dredge is Constructed



Photo in Which Crabs are Kept to Shed



Steaming 20 Barrels of Hard Crabs at a Time

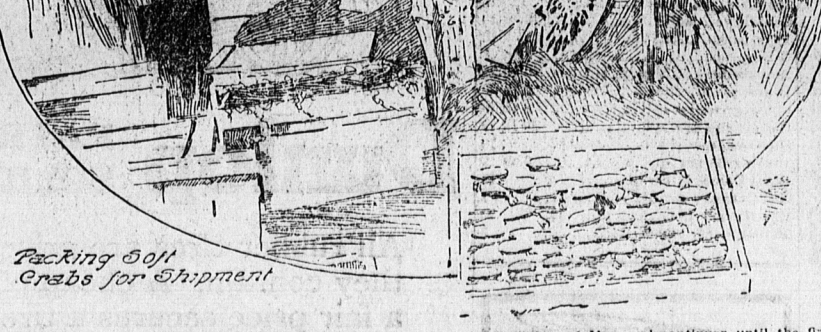
WHEN you drop into a restaurant for a midnight supper, after the theater, or when you arrange for your friend a pleasant little banquet at home, and include in the menu soft crabs, deviled crabs, crab cakes or crab served in any other style, do you know that you are encouraging one of the most remarkable industries of recent years?

Do you know that practically the nation is being supplied with this delicacy by one small but thriving town on the Chesapeake Bay—Crisfield, Md.?

It was Crisfield that discovered the edible value of the crab, and gave the world the benefit of that discovery. Since then Crisfield has been endeavoring, with might and main—and has thrived wonderfully upon its endeavors—to supply the enormous demand that resulted from its tickling of the national palate nearly thirty years ago.

waiting for the Baltimore boat

a profitable industry, the first box, containing fifty, created quite a demand in the northern markets, and the crab enterprise grew, slowly at first, but steadily.



Packing Soft Crabs for Shipment

advantage by frying, holding its natural flavor during the cooking. Then an old waterman of this place, Captain John Landon, who had been an oysterman since his boyhood days, decided to experiment with the newly-discovered sea food.

In the spring of 1878, Captain Landon caught fifty soft crabs, and packing them in an ordinary goods box, of small dimensions, with sea weed and cracked ice, shipped them to a commission firm in Philadelphia.

The crabs were, at first hard to dispose of, and brought only 21 cents a dozen. Although it was then feared by Captain Landon and the commission firm that the crabs were not salable to such an extent as to make

profitable, but they are not of a sufficient amount to be shipped. Hence, the law governing the season for catching.

While the crabs are buried in the mud they spawn and multiply faster than any known animal, insect or fish.

When the crabbing season begins, Crisfield, the center of this industry, presents a busy appearance. Hundreds of boatmen are to be seen repairing, remodeling and repainting their vessels, preparatory to the great season which awaits them, and the packers and shippers are equally as busily engaged in repairing their crab pounds and houses, building new floats and making other preparations necessary to handle the catch.

Then, armed with nets, scrapers and dredges, the boatmen, who number over 150 in Crisfield and vicinity, proceed to catch the delicious soft crab.

These are caught in three ways. The scrapers throw out a scraper, consisting of an iron framework covered with twine netting, allowing it to reach the bottom. It is then pulled in rapidly by means of a windlass, and, scraping the bottom as the boat sails, large numbers of crabs are caught into the net and hauled up to the boat.

Crab dredgers work in a similar manner, the only difference being in the construction of the dredge. The third way by which crabs are caught is known as trot lining. The trot liner generally crabs in a smaller boat, the "skip-jack," only one man being in each boat, the

A long line, which surrounds the boat, supported on the surface of the water by pieces of cork attached to the line, about two feet apart and having small pieces of bait tied to it less than a foot apart, is placed in the water.

The boat is kept still, and soon crabs, sighting the bait, come to the surface and are caught by hand with a small net. Then the line is rebaited and again thrown out to the crabs.

CAUGHT IN THE MORNING

The catching of crabs is always done in the morning, until a little after the noon hour. When the day's work is finished for the crabber, the boats come up to the wharves of the different crabs firms by which the men are employed, and the foreman of the firm counts out the catch.

Here the "skimmer" crabs are placed in crab floats, within a large "pound," situated in the water. The soft crabs are placed in certain floats, hard crabs in other floats and the "shredder" and other varieties at different stages of development placed in still other floats.

These floats are constructed of laths, nailed upright, about an eighth of an inch apart. Midway between the top and the bottom of the float a footboard is nailed edgewise all around, and this board rests on the surface of the water. The float is, therefore, about half in and half out of the water, the crabs in the float lying in the portion covered by the water.

In these floats the "shedding" process is gone through. Here the "shedder" crabs shed their hard shell and become a soft crab, the more developed soft crab develops into a hard crab and every stage of development takes place.

The floats are fished for hard and soft crabs six times every twenty-four hours. The packer or an expert in a yawl boat or "stiff" with a short-handled crab net, goes to each float, and catching each crab up

state, the first day of May and continues until the first day of November. Up to a year ago hard crabs were caught during the winter months. A law governing the catching of the hard-shell member of the crab tribe was passed by the last Maryland Legislature, fixing the season the same as for the soft crab.

During cold weather the crabs bury themselves in the mud flats along the low marshes and shores of the Chesapeake and its tributaries, where they remain until warmer weather comes. During the oyster season many boatmen, in scraping for oysters with dredges, which scrape the bottoms, catch a few of the warm-weather

Few persons know that the crab industry has made more rapid strides and attained larger proportions during the last twenty years than any other in this country.

This is, of course, comparatively. Steel making has made larger entries on industrial ledgers in that time; perhaps several other similarly favored enterprises have kept company.

To no special benefit, or favorable conditions, however, does the crab industry owe its rise and remarkable growth.

The soft crab, the deviled crab, the crab cake happened to hit the American palate in a vulnerable spot, and, once tasting the delicacy, the throats of the nation temporarily and positively demanded more.

So it fell to the lot of the little town of Crisfield, Md., to meet this sudden and growing demand.

Any other town, perhaps, could have met it, had its conditions been favorable, but it so happened that Crisfield had been planted at a spot where nature decreed that the crab harvest should be the most plentiful.

This was in the lower part of the Chesapeake Bay. Crabs are found in greater or less numbers, all along the Atlantic coast, in other parts of America and in every other part of the world. But nowhere do they thrive and multiply so freely; nowhere do they bring their delicacy, meat to such a pinnacle of epicurean perfection as in the lower Chesapeake.

The soft crab industry originated at Crisfield, now a thriving little city of some 600 inhabitants, about thirty years ago. For years prior to the commencement of the industry the people of Crisfield had viewed the soft crab as merely a water animal, of no use or value in any way.

On several occasions, however, residents of the little village, through a desire to ascertain the worth or worthlessness of the soft crab, caught a few, making them into a kind of soup for a trial at the dinner table.

It was found that the crab made a delicious dish, and during the months that followed, when crabs were to be caught, they were cooked in every style imaginable.

Through tests, other discoveries were made. It was found that the soft crab could be cooked to a greater

## More Puzzling than Ann's Age - the Coldest Spring



GOOD MORNING. Horrible weather!" "Sore throat? Oh, everybody is complaining."

"Some say it's the sun spots." "Oh, yes; just use menthol." "Others say it's the moon, you know."

"Died of pneumonia. Too bad. You say he went to work."

"In his summer underclothing." "And it snowed. Too bad."

Beginning about Easter such fragments of conversation as the above were strung all through the spring that forgot to be balmy, and then began to wend their irritating way through June—a June that promised rare days, indeed, from a weather standpoint.

Barometric pressure was unusually high all season in the northern latitudes and low in the southern latitudes. As a result, there was frost in May, and it snowed at places in the eastern part of the United States on June 1.

But what caused the cold spring? Official forecasters of the weather Bureau at Washington, thought the currents were possibly caused by unusually heavy snowfalls and an immense accumulation of ice in Siberia. Said he:

"We have an idea that an extraordinary amount of snow has fallen in Siberia during the last five or six months. All the heat has apparently radiated from it, leaving an intensely cold mass covering the earth."

"Arctic winds blowing over that mass of snow and ice do not have their temperature raised to any appreciable extent before they hit the American continent."

"The winds that blow across from Siberia apparently are without moisture. The result is a high pressure over the northern part of the American continent, while in the South there is a low pressure. Atmosphere, like water, flows to the lowest point."

"We get a daily cable report from Alaska, and know that there has been a regular procession of areas of high pressure moving from the West to the East."

"The only fact out of the ordinary is that the influence of these high pressure areas is felt so early south so late in the year. Ordinarily the effect of them is lost by the time the winds reach the northern boundary of the country in the region east of the Rocky Mountains. The only conclusion we can draw is that the areas of high pressure are much larger than usual."

"Of course, the cold spring called forth hordes of weather prophets and explainers. They spring up on such occasions and offer various explanations. The most ingenious reason for the cold spring was that propounded by Lewis Emery, of Atlantic City."

"The earth's simply off its axis," was Emery's authoritative and emphatic opinion. "Can't you see it? I sighted the cold snap long before the government officials do not place much credence on the change-of-axis explanation."

"That the sun or moon has caused the cold weather is disbelieved by a Washington expert. As to the actual cause, he declares, no one knows. He said: 'A good many people think that solar conditions may be responsible for the recent brand of weather. We have records of solar conditions for the last fifty or sixty years. They were taken after very accurate and painstaking comparisons made with terrestrial weather conditions. The results have been negative large part of the time.'"

"They teach us nothing that illuminates the present-day climatic puzzle. Among other things, it is recognized that the moon has a slight effect upon barometrical pressure. It is too slight, however, to effect any changes in the weather."

"A great many people know that the changes of seasons are due to astronomical causes, and, of course, they justly conclude that the explanation of the weather is simple."

"Were you against it good and hard, and when asked to tell all about present conditions, an reply that we can't do so, people want to know why in places Uncle Sam is paying \$1,000,000 a year to maintain a Weather Bureau."

"Goosebone prophets over seventy years ago predicted that the year 1897 would be a year of summer. John G. Markley, of Washington, D. C., recently received a letter from his daughter in Anderson, Ind., containing a clipping from an old almanac published in 1826 in which the prediction was made that the year 1897 would have no summer weather whatever."

"It is comforting to know that the spring of this year was not the 'worst.' Both the spring and summer of 1892 were worse than the conditions this year so far have been. The worst year in the history of meteorology was 1816. In that year there were frosts every month except August."

According to old chronicles, corn was killed in the month of May on the Fourth of July people cut ice from rivers and lakes. Ministers thought the end of the world had come, and made weather conditions the subject of their sermons.

The temperature on the mornings of June 6, 1872, and June 7, 1872, corresponded with the temperature in the mornings of June 6 and 7 this year. So you can tell the grumpy trolley passenger or the man in the elevator that the earth isn't off its axis after all. "Beatty," he'll begin. "Then you must slap him violently on the shoulder and shout, 'Cheer up! There's been worse weather before, and, perhaps, the worst is yet to come!'"