

XXXVIII.—REPORT OF OPERATIONS AT SAINT JEROME STATION,  
IN LAYING OUT OYSTER PONDS, BY THE STEAMER FISH HAWK,  
IN 1883.

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By Lieut. W. M. WOOD, U. S. N<sup>r</sup>, Commanding.

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In obedience to your instructions, I left Washington in this vessel on the afternoon of Monday, 12th instant, bound for Saint Jerome Creek, to carry out, as far as possible, certain work, a memorandum of which was furnished me by Mr. Ferguson.

It was, briefly, to lay out the oyster ponds into small rectangles, sound out the various channels, plot the results on the charts, and afterwards fill the ponds with oysters taken from the bay.

We arrived off Saint Jerome's early Tuesday afternoon, and I at once arranged with W. C. Foxwell to cut and haul the necessary stakes to mark the ponds.

The weather was too bad to permit any dredging until Thursday, the 15th, and in the mean time I employed myself in laying out the ponds. The divisions were made 100 feet square, pond A containing forty-three whole and nine fractional ones; pond B, six whole and six fractional squares; and pond C, three squares near its head and one opposite the wharf.

In pond B all but 4, 5, and 6 are dry at low-water, and oysters planted on them will freeze during cold weather. The squares at head of pond C, numbered 1, 2, and 3, have a bottom of soft mud to the depth of 6 feet, except very near the shore, and therefore are not suitable for planting over their whole surface. The same is true to a less extent of the square opposite the wharf, numbered 4.

The squares are all marked by a stake at each corner, and in the center a stake bearing the number of the square. The positions of all three stakes are plotted on the tracing furnished, as well as the depth of the center of channel at low water.

Having been obliged to seek shelter in Cornfield Harbor on Wednesday night, I commenced dredging there on Thursday morning, and worked with indifferent success until noon, when I ran around to Saint Jerome's, and while the ship continued dredging there I went ashore and carried on the work above alluded to. During the night it came on to blow a gale from the northward and westward, which continued during the whole of Friday, the 16th.

It being necessary to leave our anchorage on account of the heavy swell setting in, I went on up the bay to Baltimore to coal, arriving there late Friday evening. Finished coaling Monday afternoon, and started down the bay, anchoring below Thomas Point at 10 p. m. with the intention of dredging there in the morning, but until late the next day we were shut in by a thick fog. When it lifted we found the schooner *Louis Taulane*, Capt. R. L. Shelton, of Crisfield, loaded with oysters, had run ashore on the point during the fog, and the captain at once applied to me for assistance. I did what I could at the time, but as the tide had fallen since he went ashore, could not pull him off until it rose again.

We dredged in his vicinity until just before dark, and then ran a line to him and set him afloat without difficulty. We got very few oysters here, as the ground, notwithstanding it is forbidden to the dredgers, is thoroughly worked out. I was told it was a favorite place to work secretly at night. As soon as we let go the schooner I ran to the mouth of Eastern Bay and anchored for the night, intending to dredge the following day off Poplar Island.

Again we were shut in by fog during all the first half of Wednesday, the 21st. The fog lifted at noon and we at once got under way and tried the Poplar Island bed, but found it so poor and stony that I gave it up after an hour's work and ran down to Parker's Creek, on the west side of the bay, and finished the day dredging there, catching but few oysters, but plenty of shells. Anchored that night off Governor's Run.

Dredged the whole of Thursday, the 22d, off Governor's Run; the oysters were scarce, but very fine.

Stopped work at 5 p. m. and ran down to the mouth of the Patuxent for a harbor for the night. Got under way at 6.30 next morning and ran down to Saint Jerome, which our experience so far taught us to be the best dredging-ground.

We commenced dredging on our arrival there at 8.30 a. m., and at the same time the launch brought out the scow, and the oysters previously caught were put on it, and I accompanied them in and personally supervised the planting, the ship in the mean time continuing her work.

Worked in the same way during the next day, Saturday, the 24th, except that twice we were obliged to stop and anchor for two hours each time on account of thick fog. The oysters caught on Saturday afternoon I landed on Sunday morning with great difficulty on account of a rapidly increasing wind from the northeast, and, as soon as it was done, got under way and steamed into the Potomac on our way to Washington.

The *Fish Hawk* is not adapted for taking oysters in the great quantities that will be required for planting in ponds. She can operate but

one dredge at a time, is obliged to land it on a covered deck, cannot work well among a crowded fleet of dredgers, to whom she, as a steamer, is obliged to give the right of way, and has to transship her catch to a scow and tow them ashore, which can only be done in smooth water and with a fair tide up the cut. Under the most favorable circumstances, on a good bed and with plenty of room, she can take about 50 bushels per day, but probably cannot average more than 30.

The oysters run about 250 to the bushel, and 40 bushels is the least that will properly cover a square, and it will take five times that number to cover it thickly.

A small oyster dredger of 40 tons will take from 75 to 125 bushels a day. Some of these vessels are of light draft, and a few even flat-bottomed. One of them could be towed right up the cut and the oysters carried from its deck across the dike to the scow and then distributed. Therefore, as I understand that plant oysters can be put down at from 25 to 30 cents per bushel, I would suggest this as the quickest, best, and decidedly cheapest method of doing it.

On Saturday night we were boarded by boats from the schooners *N. B. Anderson*, Capt. J. W. Carew, *Crisfield*, and *Ella Trigs*, Capt. Thomas Mills, Baltimore. The former were without lights, their lanterns having both exploded, and the latter in need of provisions, which they had been unable to get. I loaned the *Anderson* a lantern, with directions to return it to Saint Jerome's station, and gave the *Ella Trigs* 25 pounds of flour and six cans of preserved meat.

Mr. Ferguson asked me to see what could be done with the artesian well they have attempted to sink at the station. I found that nothing had been done further to it by the *Lookout's* crew, as Walter Sauerhoff was afraid to get steam on the old boiler, which he was to have used for that purpose. I had Mr. Bailie examine the boiler, and he reports it as decidedly unsafe in its present condition, and it is so far gone that it is doubtful if it will be worth repairing.

I think the trouble with the well arises from the fact that it was sunk to its present depth and then left for some time, during which the earth packed tightly around the pipe, especially at the joints, where there are abrupt shoulders, and that corrosion took place over its whole surface. Now it will be difficult to move it either way.

While dredging off Governor's Run I sent a boat in and collected a number of fossil mollusca and crustacea, which are abundant in the clay bluffs bordering the bay at that point, and if they are of sufficient interest will send them to the Smithsonian Institution.

Accompanying please find results of work in tabular form.

We arrived at the Washington navy-yard on Monday, the 26th instant, at 12.30 p. m.

## Oyster-dredging table.

| Date.   | Locality.                  | Average number per bushel. | Per cent. of shells. | Total amount taken. | Remarks.                               |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|--|
| Nov. 15 | Cornfield Harbor.....      | 300                        | .75                  | 13                  | Worked a half day.                     |
| —       | Off Saint Jerome Creek ... | 275                        | .50                  | 15                  | Do.                                    |
| 20      | Off Thomas Point .....     | 250                        | .75                  | 8                   | Foggy. Worked three hours.             |
| 21      | Off Poplar Island .....    | 250                        | .50                  | 2                   | Foggy. Worked one hour.                |
| 21      | Off Parker's Creek .....   | 200                        | .90                  | 2                   | Do.                                    |
| 22      | Off Governor's Run.....    | 200                        | .40                  | 15                  | Worked all day. Oysters scarce.        |
| 23      | Off Saint Jerome Creek ... | 250                        | .50                  | 53                  | Worked all day.                        |
| 24      | .....do.....               | 250                        | .50                  | 35                  | Foggy three hours. Worked rest of day. |

Table showing subdivision of ponds and the record of the 100-foot squares.

## POND A, 43 WHOLE SQUARES.

| No. of square. | Number bushels per square. | Average per bushel. | Locality taken from.     | Character of bottom. |
|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 4              | 24                         | 250                 | Saint Jerome Creek ..... | Hard.                |

## POND B, 6 SQUARES.

|   |    |     |  |                   |
|---|----|-----|--|-------------------|
| 1 |    |     | .....  | Dry at low water. |
| 2 |    |     | .....  | Do.               |
| 3 |    |     | .....  | Do.               |
| 4 | 20 | 250 | Parker's Creek, Governor's Run, Thomas Point, Poplar Island. | Hard bottom.      |
| 5 | 30 | 250 | Off Saint Jerome Creek .....                                 | Slightly muddy.   |
| 6 | 35 | 250 | .....do.....   | Do.               |

## POND C, 4 SQUARES.

|   |    |     |                          |                  |
|---|----|-----|--------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | 10 | 300 | Cornfield Harbor.....    | Deep mud.        |
| 2 | 10 | 300 | .....do.....             | Do.              |
| 3 |    |     | .....                    | Do.              |
| 4 | 20 | 275 | Saint Jerome Creek ..... | Hard near shore. |

U. S. FISH COMMISSION STEAMER FISH HAWK,  
Washington, D. C., November 26, 1883.