

beds off Georges Bank brought an oversupply to the New Bedford auction room where prices plummeted.

The price of sea scallops fell to about 35 cents a pound this week; the price of bay scallops, when available, is usually more than triple that. Sea scallops are bringing 85 cents a pound in Worcester this week. Bay scallops last sold for \$2.25.

But it has been feast or famine for years with the New Bedford scallop men. So mysterious remain the habits of the sea scallop that even marine biologists cannot safely predict scallop crops from year to year. A scallop surplus may become a shortage almost as quickly as fog rises off the waters at Georges Bank.

Senator Saltonstall announced this week that the federal Bureau of Commercial Fisheries will spend \$150,000 for research and promotional studies to try to stabilize the scallop industry. Of this sum, \$100,000 will be spent for marine biological research, \$30,000 for market promotion, and \$20,000 to develop a code of standards for the industry.

Julius A. Posgay, a biologist at the Marine Laboratory of the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries at Woods Hole, is already making frequent trips to Georges Bank to try to wrest from the sea the last secrets of a scallop's private life.

Posgay, chief of Uncle Sam's sea scallop investigation, is considered to be the country's top authority on the sea scallop. But at Woods Hole the other day he said there remain great gaps in man's knowledge of scallops, and these gaps must be closed if ways are to be found to predict the size of future scallop yields.

Early Life Obscure

He knows, of course, that the sea scallop spawns in the fall, and then floats casually on the ocean surface for a spell before settling for his hoped-for long life deep under the water in the silt of millions of years. But he says he does not know what the scallop does in those first two or three years when he is attaining the meaty maturity that attracts the ruthless dredgermen.

Posgay says he wants to find out how fast the scallop grows, how many really die, and what they do down at the bottom of the sea, anyway. But Posgay says it is a myth that whole areas of scallops decide to leave home at once; when shortages develop it is most

likely they are caused by under-water turbulence, temperature changes, or unusual maraudings by the scallop's enemies.

Yet scallops are unique among bivalve mollusks. They can actually swim by snapping their shells together to make a form of undersea jet propulsion. They don't swim far, however.

Posgay says this year's surplus of sea scallops is the direct result of unusually dense concentrations at three Georges Bank areas. The New Bedford scallopers find dredging so easy there, he says, that they can practically shuttle back and forth with their scallops all shucked, tucked away in cotton bags, and covered with ice in the holds of their vessels.

Off Florida

The scallop picture is further muddled by the recent discovery of a huge new scallop bed off the Florida coast. The discovery loomed so large that some New England scallop vessels may head there.

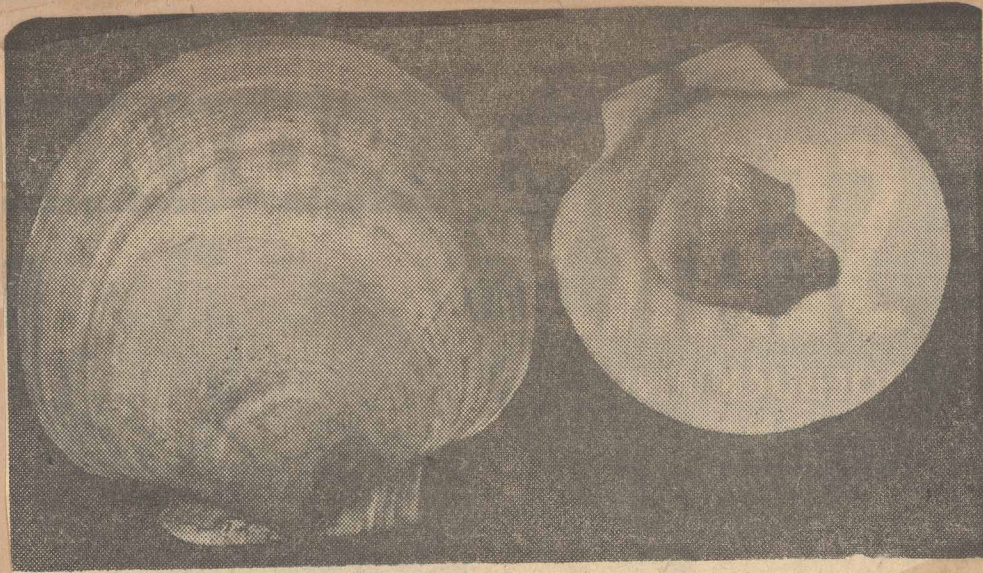
It's not surprising that the New Bedford Seafood Council hopes to encourage more scallop eating. Last year it even offered to sell sea scallop shells — four for a dollar — to use as salad plates or baking dishes. It is processing which takes much of the profit from scallop fishing — only one section of the scallop, its inductor muscle, is fit to eat, and this muscle must be removed by hand. A mechanical shucker might do for the scallop industry what the cotton gin did for cotton.

Sweet Capester

But there's no such problem with the bay — or Cape, as it is often called around here — scallop. Here the problem is to find ways to propagate, and to conserve the few now resting in the salt ponds and estuaries of the Cape area.

Frederick C. Wilbur, Jr., state Director of Marine Fisheries, says the tiny bay scallop is sweet in taste because it is protected from the heavy buffetings suffered by the deep-sea variety. Besides, he says, its feeding habits contribute to its subtle delicacy.

Each year on October 1, from Buzzards Bay to Chatham and Wellfleet, Cape Codders head for the salty inlets as the season opens for the bay scallops. Each town limits the number of bushels which may be taken by each person — a limit



What a deep sea scallop looks like from the outside — and the edible part inside.

ranging from five to six. Wilbur says the state itself imposes a 10-bushel limit on the bay scallops. The business is thus a relatively small one — only about a million dollars a year as compared to the multi-million dollar one of the sea scallop. The bay scallop season closes April 1.

Few Last Year

A year ago this fall, Cape Cod reported one of its worst scallop seasons in years. Bay scallops were found only near Chatham, and many scallopers didn't even bother to look for them. Willis S. Gould, Jr., a member of the Orleans Scallop Board, blamed it on a nine-year cycle of nature. Others said a severe Winter had killed the scallops as seedlings.

Both the federal government and the coastal states are seeking ways to foster the growth of bay scallops. Six years ago, for example, former state Conservation Commissioner Sargent ordered 100 bushels of bay scallop seed scooped from Lewis Bay in Barnstable for liberation in the west branch of the Westport river at Westport. Oldtime scallopers scoffed; scallops couldn't be transplanted, they said. But in five years the 100 bushels grew into a scallop field worth \$100,000 a year.

Transplanting

The Rhode Island Division of Fish and Game transplanted 120 bushels of bay seed scallops from the exposed mud flats of Point Judith Pond to other areas. They found that freezing weather often killed the little scallops on the tidal flats at "P'int Jude."

There is one thing that Director Wilbur wants to clear up about scallops: When you buy scallops in a fish market or in a restaurant, they are definitely scallops, and they are not chunks of skate or other fish cut to look like scallops.

After all, says Wilbur, why would anyone waste time cutting skate into scallops when the scallops themselves are so plentiful and cheap? Besides, any person caught doing that is liable to a \$500 fine imposed by the state of Massachusetts.

How about some scallops?

Another of the signs of the times displayed in the city is, "Cape Cod Scallops." Everything that is extra nice—eggs, cranberries, clams—is labelled Cape Cod, in order to give it the final stamp of excellence and superiority.

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February 14, 1891



Sir Thomas Lipton, Fisherman's Cup Race, 1908