SHELLFISH REMAINS

by

Karen J. Davis

Sonoma State University
INTRODUCTION

The man had sure a palate covered o'er
With brass or steel, that on the rocky shore
First broke the oozy oyster's pearly coat,
And risked the living morsel down his throat.

- John Gay

Molluscan remains analyzed in this report result from the Sonoma State University excavation of the Golden Eagle Hotel site located in Sacramento's J/K/6/7 block. Most of the excavated soil was sifted through 1/4-inch screen, although 1/8-inch screen was used for half of the material from Feature 15. All shell remains were saved except for oyster; oyster was present in such quantity that time would not allow for its complete recovery, and only approximately 10 percent was retained. Following excavation, all material retrieved was brought to Sonoma State University's Anthropology Laboratory, where it was sorted according to provenience and species, and counted. Species identification was corroborated by reference to a variety of shell manuals (Abbott 1968; Morris 1966; Ricketts and Calvin 1952; Smith and Carlton 1975), a shell typology available at the Cultural Resources Facility, and consultation with Dr. James Bennyhoff, Sonoma State University. Historical literature pertaining to the shell species recovered from the site was then examined to determine the significance of these species in the Sacramento area during the 19th century. Table 4.1 presents a list of shell species recovered from the site.

Shell was recovered from six of the nine areas excavated: areas I, II, IV, VI, VII, and VIII (see table 4.2). Most of the recovered shell came from features 6 and 15, associated with the Golden Eagle Oyster Saloon. These materials will be used for a more intensive analysis, because of the undisturbed state of the features. Feature 6, also associated with a boot manufacturer, has been given a glass terminus post quem of 1873. This deposit was built up under a floor and could not be completely excavated. Feature 15, a brick-lined pit at the rear of the lot with an 1867 glass terminus post quem, was completely excavated. This feature may have been a privy or trash pit; it is possible that a portion of the fill represents a cleanup of items left by the previous occupants prior to the opening of the oyster saloon in 1874, while some of the remains are clearly from the saloon itself.

Fewer amounts of shell were found in features 4 and 10 and in non-feature areas I, II, and VII. Features 4 and 10 were both late 19th-century construction trenches, placing them out of context of the present study. Of the non-feature areas, Area I is of interest because it yielded the only bent-nosed clam (Macoma nasuta) remains (see table 4.2), but it is possible that these fill layers were deposited during the 1963 demolition. The absence of shell remains from the features (features 8 and 20) associated with the Golden Eagle Hotel and restaurant is also noteworthy.
SHELL SPECIES DESCRIPTIONS

CLAM

*Protothaca staminea* was the most abundant clam species represented. This hard-shelled clam, commonly found in bays on the ocean coast, was one of the few native varieties regularly sold in San Francisco markets (Morris 1966; Skinner 1962:106). By 1931, the *Protothaca* population had been severely depleted (Ricketts and Calvin 1952:210). The 23 complete valves collected are small, from 1 to 2 inches in width.

A limited number of bent-nosed clam shell (*Macoma nasuta*) was collected (see table 4.1). This clam was once the most common edible species found in the San Francisco Bay and was highly favored by Native American populations. The specimens recovered were small in size, from 1 to 2 inches in width. Prior to the 1870s, Chinese shrimp fishermen dug these clams to be marketed (Ricketts and Calvin 1952:305; Skinner 1962:106). Since only 12 complete valves were retrieved, it is uncertain whether they signified consumption.

One other clam species was represented in the collection: the Washington clam, *Saxidomus nuttalli*, a common coastal bay form. Beads made from the shell of this clam were used as money among central California Indians; a single bead was worth about $.50 in the early 1900s (Skinner 1962:109).

MUSSEL

*Mytilus edulis* was the only species of mussel recovered. Although few in number, this mussel was found in three of the areas of the site from which shell was retrieved (see tables 4.1 and 4.2). Recovered shells ranged from 1 to 2 inches in length. This species lives in quiet, shallow bay waters. Great quantities of this species are sold for food in northern Europe (Abbott 1968:198), and it was one of the few mussels found for sale on the San Francisco market (Keep 1904:32).

The Clam and Mussel Industry

One to 3 million pounds of clams and mussels were taken annually from California waters between 1880 and 1900, while as much as 15 million pounds of oysters were taken each year (Skinner 1962:42, 106). One reason for the lesser retrieval of clam and mussel was the greater time and effort required to remove these shellfish from their natural habitats. A cheap labor force, no longer available in the late 1800s, was necessary in order to make the clam and mussel industry a financially feasible enterprise. The resource itself, by this time, had also become depleted (Skinner 1962:107, 108).

OYSTER

Oyster shells comprised the largest category of molluscan remains at the Golden Eagle site. Unlike the clam, the two valves of the oyster shell are unequal in size and shape. The left, or lower, valve is
thicker and more convex (Bolitho 1961:100-101). None of the shell valves recovered were connected. It is difficult to determine from the collection, therefore, if smaller valves represent smaller specimens or if they are the lower half of the oyster's shell. The Pacific oyster, Ostrea lurida, was the more abundant of the two species recovered from the Golden Eagle site. O. lurida is a small oyster native to the western coastal bays of North America. Specimens collected averaged about 7 inches in diameter. The Olympia oyster of this species from the state of Washington was more commercially successful in California than was the San Francisco Bay oyster, and it is likely that the specimens found on the site were from Washington and Oregon and not from local bays. Commercially, they were often sold in sacks containing about 1-1/2 bushels of oysters (Barrett 1963:77).

The other species recovered was the eastern oyster, Crassostrea virginica. This species is much larger than O. lurida, those in the collection averaging about 11 inches. C. virginica's larger size can be attributed to the fact that "An adult eastern oyster will pump from two to seven gallons of water per hour and if not exposed at low tide will feed more than twenty-two hours out of every twenty-four" (Fitch 1953 cited in Skinner 1962:102). Although Ostrea lurida was of an excellent flavor, and people "often pronounced it more delicious than the large eastern oyster...." (Ricketts and Calvin 1952:216), during the 19th century the eastern oyster was preferred, probably because most Californians at this time had recently immigrated from the east. Eastern oysters were packed in boxes containing 150 large, or 250 standard-sized, oysters (Barrett 1963:76).

The Oyster Industry

The Early Oyster Industry: 1850-1869. Shoalwater Bay (now Willapa Bay) in Washington was the principal source of fresh, native oysters for California markets during the 1850s and 1860s (Barrett 1963:22). These oysters were either sold for immediate wholesale and retail marketing or were laid out in baskets in the San Francisco Bay. Although most of these oysters were consumed in San Francisco, some firms shipped them to Sacramento; Sacramento, in turn, was the locus for shipment of oysters to the gold-mining camps in the Sierra foothills (Barrett 1963:26). During the 1850s, the Shoalwater Bay trade apparently met California's oyster demand, although Sacramento newspaper menu ads advertising Oregon oysters indicate that the Oregon coast was another source for the Sacramento markets (Sacramento Bee 3 June 1857, 20 October 1857, 11 February 1862, 17 March 1862).

The native oyster industry suffered losses in the 1860s: In 1861-62 most of the oysters bedded in the San Francisco Bay had been destroyed as a result of flooding of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers (Barrett 1963:22), while the severe winter in Washington had decimated the supply in Shoalwater Bay. Although the Northwest coast trade was again supplying the desired number of oysters in the 1860s, eastern oysters were still in demand. The completion of the transcontinental Pacific Railroad in 1869 (Barrett 1963:26) allowed the importation of the
preferred eastern oyster and opened up a new era in the oyster industry. Oysters of marketable size could not be profitably imported from the east, but seed oysters brought in by the railroad were successfully bedded in San Francisco Bay for later use.

The Eastern Oyster Industry: 1869-1910. The most commercially successful oyster species in California between 1869 and 1910 was the eastern oyster, which played a dominant and relatively stable role in the oyster industry for over 30 years. Between 1888 and 1908, this species constituted 85 percent of the oysters produced in California each year, with the native oyster making up the remaining 15 percent. By 1908, imports from the east declined sharply, as eastern oyster seeds failed in the San Francisco Bay due to unknown factors (Barrett 1963:28) possibly related to increasing bay pollution.

Market Variation in the Oyster Industry: 1850-1910. Prior to eastern oyster production, from 1850 to 1869, native oysters were priced at $16.00 per sack of 1,000, but after the 1870s when eastern oysters had become available, the price was forced down to $4.00 per sack. Sharp competition among native oyster suppliers prior to 1885 also brought prices down, although oysters were still considered a luxury food. After 1885, the oyster market was relatively stable due to a non-competitive market. When eastern oysters were first available, they were sold to the local market for $15.00 per 100, but by 1889 they were selling from $1.00 to $2.50 per 100, according to grade (Barrett 1963:91).

In 1898, it cost $100.00 per acre to clear and prepare beds for oyster cultivation (San Francisco Chronicle 6 February 1898 cited in Barrett 1963:76) and 12-1/2 cents each, plus upkeep, to purchase the redwood scantlings placed in the ground around oyster beds to prevent stingray raids (Collins 1892:156, cited in Barrett 1963:76). The seedlings cost $9.25 per packing case of unbroken shell, requiring a considerable investment. The two oyster monopolies, Morgan and Moreaghian, had an average annual outlay for seed and freight of about $72,000 each (Barrett 1963:35, 56). In the 1890s, 3,000 to 4,000 acres were used to produce 10 to 15 million pounds of oysters annually (Skinner 1962:104). Between 1888 and 1904, the annual value of oyster production in California was $500,000 (Barrett 1963:28).

Sacramento menu ads in 1857 and 1862 advertise oysters at $.50 a serving, with oyster soup priced at $.25. Oysters were the most expensive serving listed in the 1862 menus (Sacramento Bee 3 June 1857:1, 11 February 1862:3, and 17 March 1862:1).

ADVENTITIOUS SPECIES

One representative of a non-edible shellfish species, Urosalpinx cinerea, was found at the Golden Eagle site. This oyster drill is not native to the west coast; a natural predator of C. virginica, it probably was introduced when this oyster was first planted in California (Carlton 1977).
One claw fragment of crab, unidentified as to species, is present in the collection. Although some crab species were a food source, others were considered pests, preying on clams in Humboldt Bay, Tomales Bay, and Drake's Estero (Barrett 1963:19). Without proper identification, it is not possible to determine whether this fragment represented the leavings of a meal. Crab is not mentioned in the 1860s Sacramento menu ads; after 1870, the crab, *Cancer magister*, became a major constituent of the San Francisco fishery (Skinner 1962:118).

**DISCUSSION**

Approximately 1,600 shell specimens were recovered from the Golden Eagle excavations (see table 4.1). All were possible food species except for the oyster drill. There may be a question as to whether the clam and mussel were indeed indicative of a food source at this site, since their remains were so few in number compared to the oyster. *M. nasuta*, *P. staminea*, and *M. edulis*, however, were all marketable species. Since the available menus do not list clams or mussels, these shellfish may have been only occasionally served.

Only 8 species are represented in this collection, in marked contrast to the 25 species recovered from the K Street excavation (Carlton 1977: table 2). Because of the incomplete molluscan recovery, the percent of each species in the collection is not presented. The most abundant shell species found was oyster, both *Ostrea lurida* and *Crassostrea virginica*. Oyster remains most frequently occurred in features 6 and 15 associated with Cronin's oyster saloon. Almost equal amounts of *C. virginica* and *O. lurida* were recovered from Feature 6, Layer 27. In Layer 35 of Feature 6, as in Feature 15, however, *C. virginica* remains are considerably fewer than those of *O. lurida*. Of the clams, *Protothaca staminea* were found only in features 6 and 15 and *Macoma nasuta* appeared only in Area I. The *Macoma* were not recovered from layers which contained *C. virginica*, and *P. staminea* were not found in any areas where there were *Macoma* (table 4.2).

**CHRONOLOGY**

Conceivably, it might have been possible to date Area I to an earlier time period than the other deposits, since *M. nasuta*, a species indicative of an earlier time, was present and no *C. virginica*, indicative of a later period, was found. Unfortunately, the original stratigraphy in Area I had been destroyed. In Feature 6, the nearly equal amounts of native and eastern oyster in Layer 27 and the considerably greater amount of the native oyster in Layer 35 would suggest that Layer 35 is the older deposit. Feature 15 appears to have been deposited during the same period as Layer 35, Feature 6, since it yielded a similar ratio of native and eastern oyster (see table 4.2).

It is not surprising that there was so much oyster in Feature 6, since it was associated with an oyster saloon. What is odd is that equal amounts of both oyster species occur together. According to
the historical record, commercial use of native oysters fell off markedly after 1870, while the preferred eastern oyster became the more commercially successful species. Cronin's oyster saloon was in operation at this location from 1874 to 1878, well after the introduction of the eastern oyster. The disparity of dates does not necessarily refute the historical record. It could mean that commercial outlets for the eastern oyster were not well established inland until after the 1870s. Until more comparative data are available, using the historical record to date a site from shell alone must be done with caution.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Differences between shell recovered from the Golden Eagle excavations and that recovered from the K Street Privy 1 may reflect the contrast between "dinner out" and "dinner in": luxury food when dining out; ordinary food when eating at home. Since oysters were considered a luxury item, people treated themselves to oysters when "out on the town," while clams were probably more frequently eaten in the home. For example, at K Street's Privy 1, associated with a business and residence, except for one native oyster, only clam, *P. staminea*, was present (Carlton 1977:table 2).

These differences may instead reflect marketing practices. The presence of whole shells at Cronin's oyster saloon suggests that oysters were served directly out of the shell. In California, oyster was much more often sold to the retailer "shucked" (with shell removed) (Barrett 1963:91). Thus, the people responsible for K Street's Privy 1 may have bought their oysters "shucked"--leaving no archaeological evidence. Given the number of variables, it is unlikely that shell remains alone can be used to determine economic differences between the two establishments.

It is clear that oysters were a very popular item in Sacramento during the second half of the 19th century. Appendix 4.1 contains information, gathered mainly from newspaper advertisements and menus, on oyster prices and the social context in which oysters were served.
**TABLE 4.1**

Molluscan Remains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Species</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>*Urosalpinx cinerea</td>
<td>Atlantic Oyster Drill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ 960</td>
<td>Ostrea lurida</td>
<td>Native Pacific Oyster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>without hinge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 448</td>
<td>*Crassostrea virginica</td>
<td>Eastern Oyster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Protula staminea</td>
<td>Pacific Littleneck Clam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>without hinge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Macoma nasuta</td>
<td>Bent-nosed Clam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>without hinge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ 57</td>
<td>Mytilus edulis</td>
<td>Common Blue Mussel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>without hinge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ 13</td>
<td>Saxidomus nuttalli</td>
<td>Common Washington Clam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>without hinge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Undetermined bivalve fragment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Crab claw (undetermined species)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not native to Pacific coast*
### TABLE 4.2

Molluscan Remains by Provenience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provenience</th>
<th>Macoma</th>
<th>Mytilus</th>
<th>Ostrea</th>
<th>Crassostrea</th>
<th>Protothaca</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area/Feature/Layer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>15/5</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>15/5</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>15/5</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69/7</td>
<td>9/4</td>
<td></td>
<td>41/16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6/4</td>
<td>±375/±373</td>
<td>±405/±402</td>
<td>26/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>141/112</td>
<td>7/7</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8/6</td>
<td>±516/±485</td>
<td>±412/±409</td>
<td>27/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2/1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7/1</td>
<td>2/1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9/2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>±481/±438</td>
<td>38/38</td>
<td>4/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4-8
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APPENDIX 4.1

Excerpts from Menus and Newspaper Ads
Showing Cost and Social Context of Oysters*

Date: 1854
Railroad Saloon
No. 87 Clay Street, San Francisco

Oyster Soup...25¢
Beef Soup.....12¢
Reference: Daily Alta California 1854

Date: 1854
Express Saloon
2nd Street, Sacramento

Ice cream and confections
Strawberries and other fruits
Oysters in every style
Mesdames Levi & Wells
Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 1 July 1854

Date: 1854
Refreshment Saloon
107 J Street, Sacramento

...Breakfast and Tea
...Game, Oysters
Burr & McGregor
Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 22 August 1854

Date: 1854
Capitol Saloon
2nd Street, Sacramento

Madame Josephine - fresh oysters served up in every
style on shortest notice....also Game, Suppers,
Chickens
Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 22 September 1854

Date: 1854
Capitol Saloon
2nd Street, Sacramento

FRESH OYSTERS, ALL PRIME
To be served in quick time,
Either roasted or fryed,
Stewed, pickled or pied,

*Collected by Jeanette Schulz

4-10
Appendix 4.1, continued

As gentlemen wish
Who call for a dish
Whigs, Democrats, Know-nothings and all,
Please give us a call.
Madame Josephine

Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 8 December 1854

Date: 1857

Fresh Oysters
at the Lunch House next to the
Sazerac on J and 2nd Sts.

Fresh oysters in every style and in every quantity
Orders from the country promptly filled at the
lowest prices. Families supplied at all times
with oysters and other shell fish.

Reference: Sacramento Daily Bee: 1 August 1857

Date: 1857

Oysters at the Sazerac
in every style
Fried, Stewed and on the shell
25 cents

Reference: Sacramento Daily Bee: 31 December 1857

Date: 1860

New York Restaurant
45 & 46 J Street, Sacramento

Oyster Stew.......50¢ /The most expensive item/
Porterhouse Steak...37¢
Quail, broiled.....37¢

Reference: Sacramento City Directory 1859-1860: 38

Date: 1860

Fashion Restaurant
2nd Street, Sacramento

Oyster Stew.......50¢ /The most expensive item/
Porterhouse Steak...37¢
Quail, broiled.....37¢

Reference: Sacramento City Directory 1859-1860: 9 /Same menu as for the New York Restaurant/

Date: 1862

Cincinnati Restaurant
25 K Street, Sacramento

Oyster soup.............25¢
Oregon Oysters, stewed...50¢
Oregon Oysters, fried....50¢
Oregon Oysters, raw......50¢
Oregon Oysters, fritters..50¢
Oyster Stew..................50¢ [one of most expensive items]
Porterhouse steak..........38¢
Quail, broiled............38¢
Chicken, half...........50¢

Reference: Sacramento Bee: 3 February 1862

Date: 1874
Sacramento Confectionery and Lunch and Restaurant Saloon
250 J Street, Sacramento

Fresh oysters
Fruit and Ornamental cakes
Candies

Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 11 February 1874

Date: 1874
Antelope Restaurant and Oyster Rooms
80 J Street, Sacramento

...Oysters served in every style, day and
night - Prices to suit the times
Cuisine Francaise

Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 11 February 1874

Date: 1874
Fashion Restaurant
2nd Street, Sacramento

Depot of Shoalwater Bay Oyster Co.
The best flavored oysters 25¢ per plate
Families supplied in any part of the City at 75¢
per hundred.

Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 11 February 1874

Date: 1874
State Capitol Confectionery
148 J Street, Sacramento

...Dining, Ice Cream, and Oyster Saloon

Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 30 May 1874

Date: 1874
The Golden State
182 J Street, Sacramento

Ice Cream, Oyster and Dining Saloon (also candy
manufacturer)

Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 30 May 1874
Appendix 4.1, continued

Date: 1876  Restaurant Francais
          2nd Street, Sacramento
          Eastern Oysters 50¢
          Private rooms for families and private parties
          Regular French breakfast and dinner with one-half
          bottle of wine - 50¢
Reference: Sacramento Daily Record Union: 5 August 1876

Date: 1876  Removal of Antona Mauretich's Oyster and Chop House
          from 54 K St. to 54 3rd
          Eastern and California Oysters 25¢
Reference: Sacramento Daily Record Union: 2 September 1876

Date: 1876  Railroad Exchange Oyster and Chop House
          corner 3rd and K Streets
          Open Day & Night
          ...traveler's lunch - 10 minutes complete
Reference: Sacramento Daily Record Union: 12 October 1876

Date: 1876  San Francisco Exchange
          K between 5th and 6th
          Shoalwater Bay and Eastern Oysters 25¢ plate
          Nice cool Lager Beer 5¢ glass
Reference: Sacramento Daily Record Union: 12 October 1876

Date: 1876  Restaurant Francais
          2nd Street, Sacramento
          Open day and night
          California oysters in every style 25¢
          Eastern oysters 50¢
Reference: Sacramento Daily Bee: 4 January 1876

Date: 1876  Pacific Oyster House
          197 J Street, Sacramento
          Oysters in every style 25 cents
          Eastern oysters always on hand. Steaks, chops, etc. at
          all hours. House open all night.
Reference: Sacramento Daily Bee: 22 January 1876
Appendix 4.1, continued

Date: 1876       Santa Rosa Oyster and Chop House
                 7th near K Street, Sacramento

                 ...oysters served in fifteen different styles
                 Meats served to order
                 Sheep's tongue, pig's feet and everything desired.
Reference: Sacramento Daily Bee: 30 March 1876

Date: 1877       Toney's Oyster and Chop House
                 54 3rd Street, Sacramento

                 Eastern and California Oysters 25¢
Reference: Sacramento Daily Union: 1 January 1877

Date: 1871-1885 Clipper Restaurant
                 nos. 311 & 313 Pacific Street, San Francisco

                 Oyster stew........20¢ /one of the most expensive items/
                 Porterhouse Steak...20¢
Reference: Menu on file, California State Library California Room