

# POCOMOKE VERSUS JAMES.

## Oyster Conditions in A Territory That Could Swallow the James Beds and Forget It.

The Richmond and Newport News papers that are making such an ado over the little strip on the James that failed to furnish seed-oysters at ten cents a bushel to hungry planters who want the earth and the waters under the earth, might well look into it and see how small a part of our oyster territory they are kicking up about. Here is a letter in the Times-Dispatch from Capt. John Drewer, of Saxis Island, who for years was the leader of the Eastern Shore people that helped gut the James, and who knows as much about oysters in the James, Pocomoke and Tangier as any man living:

**MORE LIGHT ON THE OYSTER QUESTION.**

"Editor Times-Dispatch:

"Sir,—It is really amusing to read after the newspaper men of Richmond, Newport News and Norfolk on the oyster situation in Virginia. They talk as though the oysters are gone from the State. The cry goes out, there are no oysters.

"Now, Mr. Editor, the reading public should know what is the trouble in Virginia, if any, and other sections of the country. Virginia people today have more oysters than they can sell. Why? One reason is because last season the most of our planters had poor oysters, the demand was not so great at the fancy prices as they were the previous season, and so the planter held his oysters for this season, expecting better prices and fatter oysters. Now it looks as though they will be no better off this season, and they want to place the blame somewhere, on one man. No set of men can make either fat oysters or produce a "strike" of seed oysters. Any reasonable man should know that nature itself has the constructing and handling of such. Take the ocean side of Accomac and Northampton counties. Such a "strike" of seed oysters has never been known there. Plenty of oysters on the seaside for seed.

"One trouble, Mr. Editor, is just this—a large percentage of the planters who invest their money in the business have all they possess there, and they have no more to put in. The natural rocks of Virginia (exclusive of a little sphere on the James) have replenished themselves so that there is an overproduction of oysters. In Tangier Sound, for instance, the cry is "plenty of young oysters"—more than has been for years. For the benefit of those kid-glove newspaper men who seem to know it all on the oyster and fish questions, we will tell them also about Pocomoke Sound. With the exception of a few wind leads, there run rocks twenty miles in length and thirteen in width with more young oysters on them than have been for twenty-five years. This does not look as if all the oysters are gone.

"In Pocomoke and Tangier Sounds we are observing the cull law; our oystermen have seen the mistake they have made in the past by violating the oyster laws, and now are helping the police by reporting any one they see violating the law. In reference to the James river, the people of Saxis and other sections who are reliable and have experience say they do not think and never thought at the time they went to the James river, that there had been any violations through the closed season. Their argument is a true, plain and simple one. They say last season was an open weather one; people worked in the river all season, and worked the rocks well down. The closed season was a very wet season, which, of course, meant no strike in the upper James. Our people left the James for their homes on Pocomoke Sound because they could make good money at home. To show you and the public why they came home, last week only the oystermen here realized from \$40 to \$60 to the boat, two men and a cull boy, for five days work, and having to sell their oysters at from 60 to 80 cents per bushel. The same class of oysters sold last season at \$1 and \$1.20 per bushel. Does any reasonable man blame those people for coming back home? There are today in Pocomoke Sound over 500 boats tonging oysters, with 1,000 people employed on said boats—something not seen in the past twenty-five years. That does not look as though the oysters are all gone.

"We extend an invitation to the editors of these critical papers to come down where the business is going on and spend a few days where they can see for themselves what revenue we people are paying from the oyster industry, direct and indirect, and learn the condition of our rocks as compared with only a short while ago.

"We are really glad that the Legislature was wise enough to allow an appropriation sufficient to give better protection to the oyster industry. No Commission of Fisheries should be criticized by the public—and especially by those who know nothing about the industry except what they hear some one else say—for we believe that every Board of Fisheries has done and will still continue to do what they think is best for the public and for the State.

"I hope this may give some light on the conditions of things.

"Respectfully,

"J. R. DREWER.

"Saxis, Va., November 6, 1908."