



John Sutton's Testimonial

My dad, John Batson, was a local of Wrightsville Beach; he grew up in a house near where Summer Sands is now. When I was little he would take me out into the creek to collect clams, oysters, and blue crabs for dinner. We would wade out into the creek to gather oysters and every once in a while he would find one that particularly caught his eye. He would dig it out of the mud and rinse it off saying "Oh, now that's going to be a good one!" He would look at it for a moment, then pop it open with his knife and slurp it down. I swear I could hear the oyster scream as he swallowed it.

My dad was a waterman his whole life, but when he was 80 or so he stopped fishing altogether; the number of shellfish had dropped off so much that it stopped being worth the effort. There used to be an abundance of crabs in Banks Channel and the local creeks, flounder too. About 20 years ago there was a noticeable decline in the populations; I'm not sure people crab in Banks Channel anymore. As more and more people took an interest in this area, the decline in water quality became pretty obvious.

Our neighbor had an oyster steaming set-up that was built over a wood fire. After a morning of gathering oysters from the local creeks a big metal sheet was placed a couple feet over the fire as it was stoked and tended. Once the metal was about glowing red, the oysters were dumped on top and then covered in burlap sacks soaked in water. We would sit back in a lawn chair with cold beers and watch the burlap sacks as they dried out. Every once in a while someone would get up and peek under the burlap to see if the oysters had started to open up. The setup is different now, propane and metal steamers, but I think the old way of steaming them tasted better. Of course, you always ended up smelling like a campfire.

