

Oysters

Oysters became an important industry in the Bay Area during the Gold Rush when prospectors from the East brought with them a taste and desire for the slippery morsel. San Francisco Bay oysters were smaller than East Coast oysters and were quickly depleted.

Merchants in the 1850s began importing larger oysters from Washington State. Once the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869 the industry was transformed by the import of live East Coast oysters that fattened in Bay waters.

Oysters were popular with both the working class and the wealthy. They were believed to be a health food and even a cure for certain illnesses. Whatever their motives, visitors to the oyster and chop house concession stand at Merrie Way definitely enjoyed the shellfish. Tens of thousands of oyster shells were found during excavation of the Merrie Way Stands site and the construction of the Lands End Lookout visitor center.

Today, oyster shells are part of an art piece displayed outside of the Lands End Lookout visitor center that also incorporates a statuary stag modeled from a Sutro Heights original.

Top: Oyster shell artifacts and Tabasco bottle from Merrie Way excavations, 2008;
Bottom: Oyster shells used in Lookout Center display, 2012.



Anthropological Studies Center



Praetzelis 2012