

# CRAB CATCHING IN THE CHESAPEAKE

## Given Monopoly by Nature, a Maryland Town Supplies World's Market.



How the Dredge is Constructed



Steamship 20 Barrels of Hard Crabs at a Time

When you drop into a restaurant for a midday supper, after the theatre, or when you arrange for your friend's pleasant little banquet at home, and include in the menu soft crabs, deviled crabs, crab cakes or crab served in any other style, do you know that you are encouraging one of the most remarkable industries of recent years?

Do you know that practically the nation is being supplied with this delicacy by one small but thriving town on the Chesapeake Bay—Crusfield, Md.?

It was Crusfield that discovered the edible value of the crab, and gave the world the benefit of this discovery. Since then, Crusfield has been endeavoring, with might and main, and has thrived wonderfully upon its crabs.

Few persons know that the crab industry has made more rapid strides and attained larger proportions during the last twenty years than any other in this country.

This is, of course, comparatively a new industry in that time perhaps several other similarly favored enterprises have kept company.

To no special benefits or favorable conditions, however, does the crab industry owe its rise and remarkable growth.

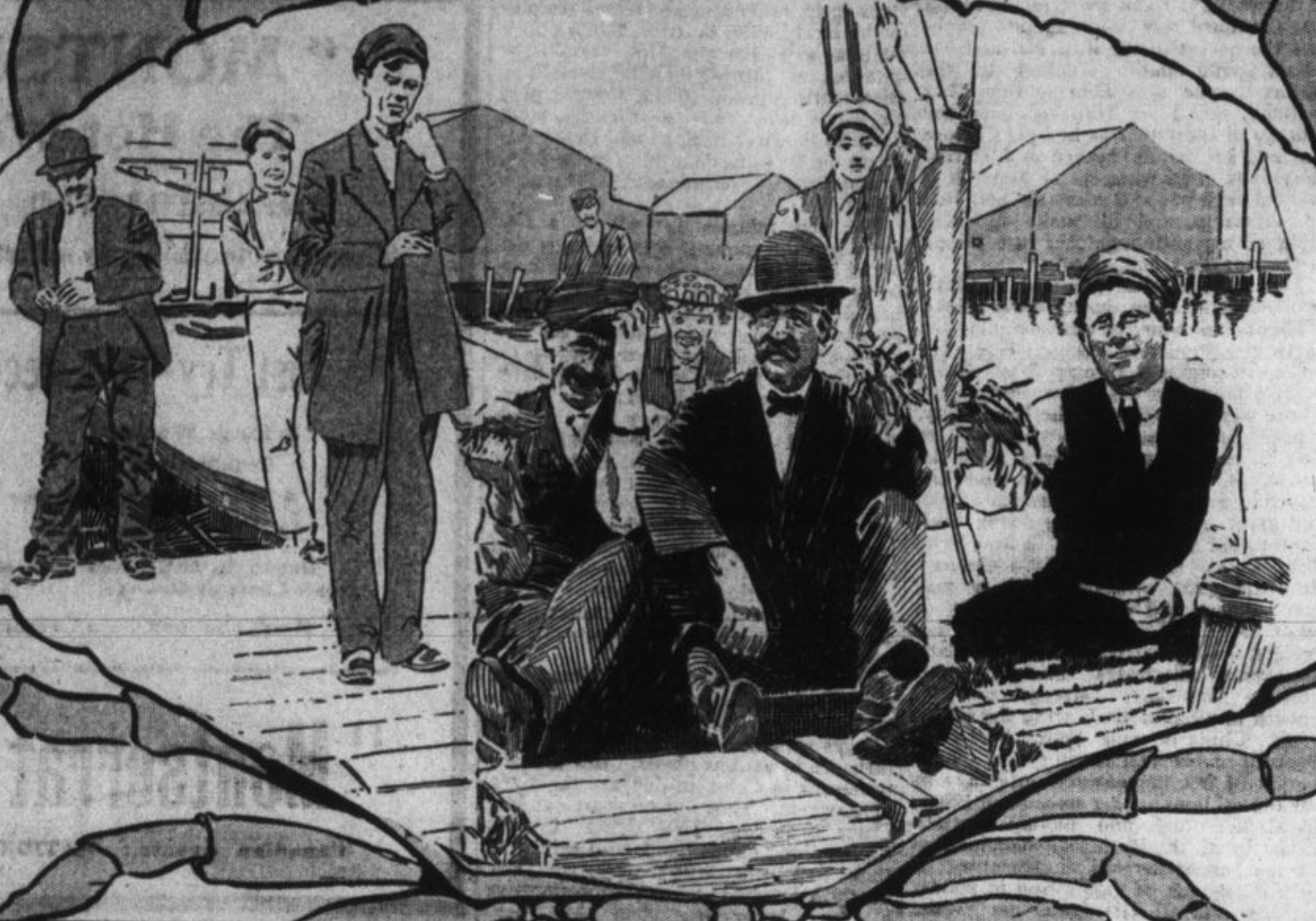
The soft crab, the deviled crab, the crab cake, has made larger entries on the palates in a palatable way. And once tasting the delicacy, the throats of the nation perpetually and positively demand more.

So it fell to the lot of the little town of Crusfield, Md., to meet this sudden and growing demand.

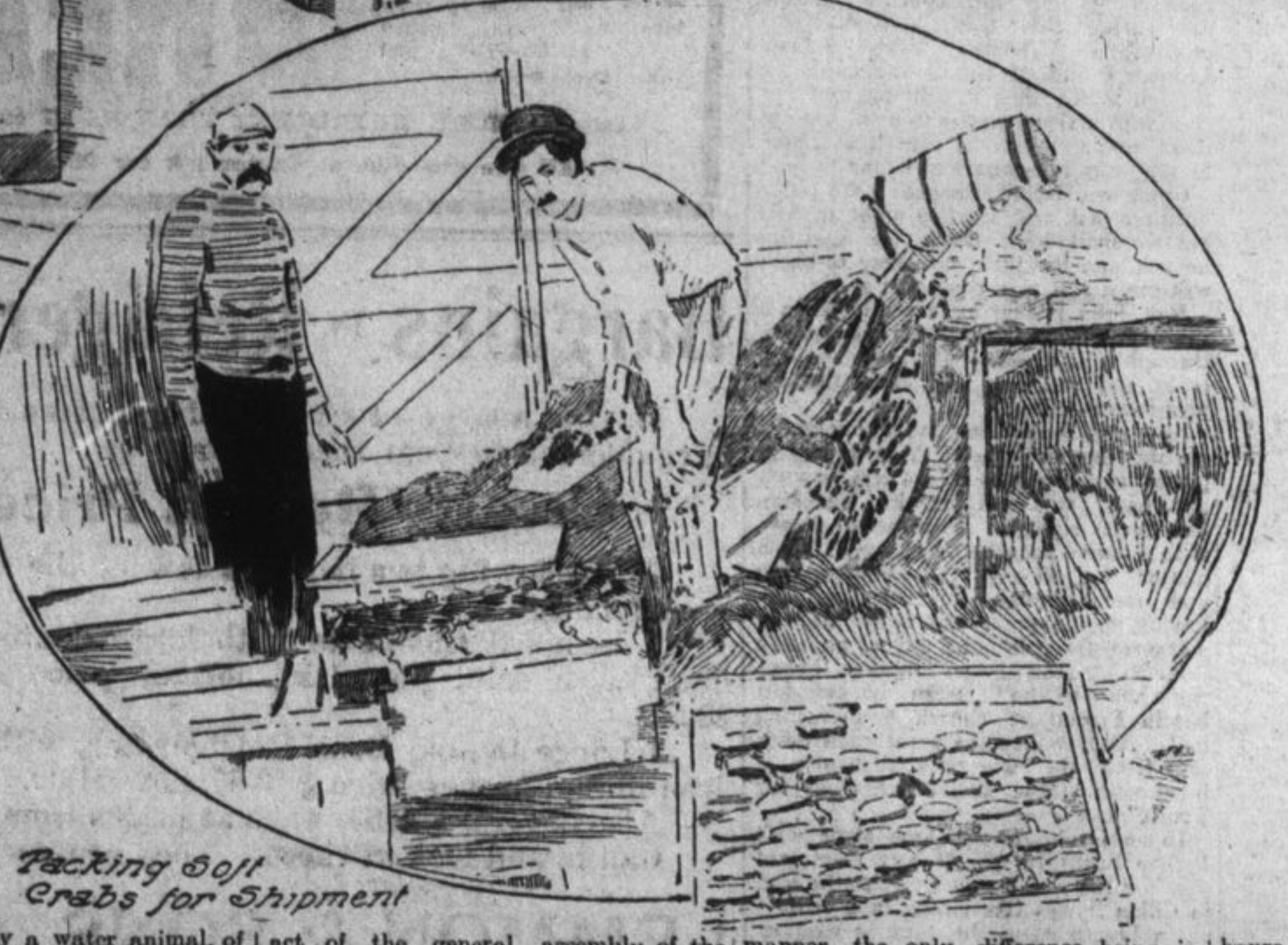
Any other town, perhaps, could have met it, but it so happened that Crusfield had been planted at a spot where nature decreed that the crab harvest should be the most plentiful.

This was in the lower part of the Chesapeake Bay. Crabs are found in greater or less numbers all along the Atlantic coast, in other parts of America and in other parts of the world. But nowhere do they thrive and multiply so freely, nowhere do they bring their delicate meat to such a pinnacle of epicurean perfection as in the lower Chesapeake.

The soft crab industry originated at Crusfield, now a thriving little city of some 6000 inhabitants, about thirty years ago. For years prior to the commencement of the industry the people of Crusfield had viewed the



Waiting for the Baltimore Boat



Packing Soft Crabs for Shipment

soft crab as merely a water animal, of no use or value in any way.

On several occasions, however, residents of the village, through a desire to ascertain the worth or worthlessness of the soft crab, caught a few, making them into a kind of soup, for a trial at the dinner table. It was found that the crab made a delicious food, and during the months that followed, when crabs were to be caught, they were cooked in every style imaginable.

Through tests, other discoveries were made. It was found that the soft crab could be cooked to a greater advantage by frying, holding its natural flavor during the cooking. Then an old waterman of the place, Capt. John London, who had been an oysterman since his boyhood days, decided to experiment with the newly-discovered sea food.

In the spring of 1879, Capt. London caught fifty soft crabs, and packing them in an ordinary goods box, of small dimensions, with sea weed and cracked ice, shipped them to a commission firm in Philadelphia.

The crabs were at first hard to dispose of, and brought only twenty-one cents a dozen. Although it was then feared by Capt. London and the commission firm that the crabs were not saleable to such an extent as to make a profitable industry, the first box, containing fifty, created quite a demand in the northern markets, and the crab enterprise grew, slowly at first, but steadily.

When the demand proved such that a profitable business was sighted by a few pioneer residents of the town, and the facilities for shipping the crabs were greatly increased by the building of the New York, Philadelphia, and Norfolk railroad, which had entered the lower part of Somerset county, a few months previously, what is now one of the greatest natural industries in the country began.

The hard and soft crab season begin in Maryland, by provision of an

manner, the only difference being in the construction of the dredge. The third way by which crabs are caught is known as 'trap lining'. The trap line is generally crabs in a smaller boat, the 'skip-jack', only one man being in each boat.

A long line, which surrounds the boat, supported on the surface of the water by pieces of cork attached to the line, about two feet apart and having small pieces of bait tied to it less than a foot apart, is placed in the water.

The boat is kept still, and soon crabs, sighting the bait, come to the surface and are caught by hand with a small net. Then the line is rebaited and again thrown out to the crabs.

The catching of crabs is always done in the morning, until a little after the noon hour. When the day's work is finished for the crabbler, the boats come up to the wharves of the different crab firms by which the men are employed, and the foreman of the firm counts out the catch.

The day's catch is then placed in crab floats, within a large 'boom', situated in the water. The soft crabs are placed in certain floats, hard crabs in other floats and the 'shell-dredgers' and other varieties at different stages of development placed in still other floats.

These floats are constructed of laths, nailed upright, about an inch or two apart, midway between the top and the bottom of the float a footboard is nailed edgewise all around, and this board rests on the surface of the water. The float is, therefore, about half in and half out of the water, the crabs in the float lying in the portion covered by the water.

In these floats the 'shedding' process is gone through. Here the 'shedding' crab sheds his hard shell and becomes a soft crab and every stage of development takes place.

The floats are fished for hard and soft crabs six times every twenty-four

hours. The packer or an employee, in a yawl boat or 'skiff', with a short-handled crab net, goes to each float, and catching each crab up separately examines it to see what stage of development it is.

All soft crabs have to be fished out and shipped as soon as they shed their hard shell, for, if allowed to remain in the float over twenty-four hours, they will generally turn hard crabs. The hard crabs are allowed to remain in the floats and fished out and shipped as needed.

Many persons, unfamiliar with the habits of the crab, are confused by the terms 'hard' and 'soft', referring to the same creature. The 'soft' condition of the 'hard' crab is a provision of nature which allows the shellfish to grow.

The shell of the hard crab is almost as rigid as steel, and, of course, as long as it increases the body, growth is not possible.

At certain periods—from twelve to fifteen times in its life—the crab sheds its hard shell and emerges from it with a skin as soft and pliable almost as that of an infant.

It is during this 'soft' state that the crab takes advantage of opportunity to grow. Gradually its soft skin hardens again into this flinty shell, and when this stage is reached once more the crab ceases to grow until it again becomes soft.

While it remains in its natural habitat, on the bottom of river or bay, the skin of the soft crab hardens rapidly to its usual condition—a couple of tides, or half a day, carrying it to a condition that removes it from the best class of the soft-shell variety.

The packing for shipping of the soft crab is one of the most important parts of the crab business. Regular crab boxes are manufactured, containing six trays made of laths. The crabs are packed side by side, with claws and fins folded up, one layer to a tray, then covered with a burlap netting the size of the trays.

the country and occupies a prominent place on the tables of the largest hotels, cafes and restaurants, being made up in crab croquettes, deviled crabs and many other delicious dishes. Despite many discouragements, the people of this little Maryland town have forced from the world a hearty acknowledgment of the value of the sea food they have to offer. Millions of dollars each season are spent for crabs in various forms, and the supply, although heavily drawn upon, does not seem to grow less.

Men who boast of their victims would probably have more to say if they enumerated their vices.

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IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF REBECCA SAUNDERS, CEASED.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT all persons having claims against the estate of Rebecca Saunders, late of the City of Kingston, deceased, are required to file the same with me forthwith, to the same effect, with the undersigned.

KIRKPATRICK, ROGERS & NICHOLSON, 22nd July, 1907.

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BLAKE TO QUIT.

He is About to Resign His Seat.

Dublin, July 19.—Edward Blaine, member of parliament for the division of Londonderry, is about to resign his seat, owing to ill-health. Blake, who left Canada to travel in England and to enter parliament in London in 1892, and has continuously represented the constituency. He was seriously ill, some months ago, for a time, it was feared he might never recover. His health has greatly improved, but not sufficiently to permit of his undertaking his parliamentary duties.

H. Cunningham, piano tuner, Chickering's, 708 at McCaul book store. Phone 778.

The question making money is so much the conversation these days. 'How to save'—Most everybody make money, but pay our way, save something in the desire of a 'thrifty' individual. Merchants who realize this, the merchants who are daily vertising their goods and showing the public the advantage of buying in their stores. It therefore follows the merchant who does not advertise has no reason in inducement to offer.