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Abstract Title: “A Perpetual Franchise to Cultivate Oysters”:
Corporate Oyster Gardens in Late 19 th Century North Carolina

Abstract Description: In the late 19 th century, North Carolina granted perpetual franchises to submerged lands for the purposes of artificial propagation of oysters. The State believed that the cultivation of oysters would provide a sustainable and valuable commercial fishery. Corporate interests quickly became involved and purchased thousands of acres of submerged lands in the State’s sounds and rivers. Oystermen, alarmed by corporate expansion into their local waters, believed that they were being robbed of their traditional oyster grounds. Controversies over property rights between corporations and oystermen erupted while the State struggled to assert its legal authority in eastern North Carolina. While the cultivation of oysters was a sustainable industry, the politics surrounding it were not and the practice waned. By the turn of the century, the State’s natural oyster beds were becoming over harvested and the fishery approached depletion.