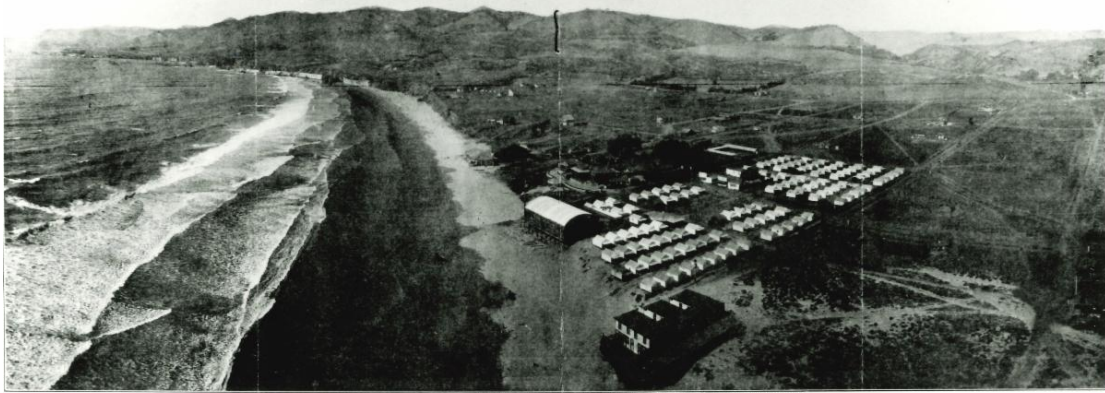


HISTORY CENTER

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Oaks was king of canned clams



BIRDSEYE VIEW OF THE FAMOUS EL PIZMO BEACH TAKEN FROM CAPTIVE BALLOON

This 1906 photo of Pismo shows a beach that was then bulging with bivalves

In 1899, former sheriff saw big bucks in bivalves

Pismo clams have long drawn visitors to Pismo Beach. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, no visit to Pismo was complete without clam chowder, or a clambake on the beach.

In 1899, William Jason Oaks, former sheriff of our county, decided to open a clam canning factory at Pismo Beach. The number and popularity of the clams available at the beach seemed nearly endless. Oaks noted in an article in the Semi-Weekly Breeze of Oct. 17, 1899:

"There is great prospect for a large business to develop from a small start at Pismo. There are clams in abundance. So far as is known the supply is inexhaustible. That there is a market for the clams is shown by the fact that California merchants are now selling eastern clams by the can...

"Clam juice is in demand and sells at a good price. Plenty of the juice is going to waste at Pismo all the time and it could be easily put up. In addition to the clams and the juice, it is my idea to put up chowder."

From 1877 to 1883, Oaks served as sheriff and tax collector of our county. By 1886, Oaks, no longer sheriff, was running the Fashion Saloon in San Luis Obispo. In 1887, he became involved with the Templeton Hotel, though I have not been able to ascertain whether he ever actually ran the hotel.

In 1890, Mrs. Oaks is noted as renting tents at Pismo Beach. This is the first mention of the family in connection with the community. Later that year, the family moved to San Francisco, but by 1893, Oaks was back in our county as Health Officer. The following year, Oaks moved to Los Angeles and became a Deputy U.S. Marshal, a position he held for

a few years before again returning to our county.

The Clam Cannery proposed by Oaks took a while to get started. By January of 1900 Oaks was beginning to can clams, though he had to send to Los Angeles for a skilled solderer to seal the cans once they were filled.

February found the cannery off and running. An outing by the County Board of Supervisors to Pismo that month was reported by the Breeze. In the article, the Breeze reporter noted that the Supervisors were presented with a gallon of clam juice at the cannery, and drank it before returning to San Luis Obispo.

The canned clams were apparently popular, being widely advertised in the local papers by S.D. Ballou, who carried them in his store in Higuera Street in San Luis Obispo. The business was doing well enough as the year progressed to file papers of incorporation in August.



A clamming fork and Pismo clams as seen in a 1960s postcard. Clams less than 4.5 inches must be reburied.

The Best may cost you a trifle more in cents, but the satisfaction of being gratified when using, more than pays the difference in price. All goods sold by me are guaranteed pure and first class.

Pismo Clam Juice
and
Canned Clams
are unequaled.

S. D. Ballou,
712 Higuera Street.
Telephone 266.

By December, the factory was doing well, canning clams and clam juice.

In the December 14, 1900 Breeze, there was a note that the cannery had just hauled 20,000 cans from the Pacific Coast Railway depot to Pismo Beach. Shipments were being sent throughout California, as well as to Arizona and Texas. The business was catching on.

The clams were gathered along the beach by men using clamming forks. apparently no mechanical means were necessary to provide enough clams for the operation.

The cannery continued to run for at least a few years, though I have found no references to it after 1904 and Oaks is listed as retired by 1910.

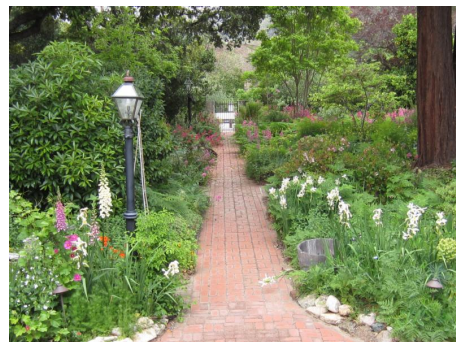
Sadly, we now know that the supply of Pismo clams was anything but inexhaustible. Numbers bottomed out in the early 1990s, though populations are slowly recovering. Finding clams of legal size to take are extremely rare, and you must have a saltwater fishing license to do so.

We were happy to hear that several of you disagreed with our tongue-in-cheek comment about being "tired of Louisiana Clayton Dart." The truth is, we're running short on her published vignettes and will be highlighting fellow History Center Director Mark Hall-Patton's work for a while. This article was originally published in 1991.

Mindfulness in the Gardens

We are very excited to announce the return of guided meditation to the Dallidet Gardens. Engage your senses - sound, sight, touch - by sitting, walking and exploring in silent contemplation

Starting August 18th and continuing weekly through the end of September, your skilled guides will help you to enjoy this 1½ hour fresh, yet timeless, approach.



Safety protocols for Covid will be observed, which includes a limited number of spaces.

To learn more or to register, [please visit our website](#).



The Dallidet Family enjoy their garden with some, ahem, minor alterations

Dallidet Gardens Open

Have you ever seen a Mongolian Sunflower? Or a 130-year old Avocado tree? Are you looking for some outdoor tranquility? Then you should visit the Dallidet Gardens.

Every Sunday through Labor Day, the gardens will be open from 11 am to 3 pm. The State's [guidelines for Outdoor Museums](#) will be strictly followed, so please bring your mask.

1185 Pacific Street, San Luis Obispo

Tour the Dallidet Adobe

Even as we open the Gardens, the house is still closed for now. That doesn't mean you can't tour the Adobe: we're giving virtual tours every Thursday at 1:00 pm.

The Dallidet family lived in San Luis Obispo from the 1850s through the 1950s. Hear their stories while visiting the family home.

Please register by noon on Thursday, and we will email you a Zoom invitation to join that week's tour.

[Click here for more information or to register](#)



Tour with an expert

Have you ever wanted to walk through the Musée d'Orsay with Degas, or Fallingwater with Wright? You can get a taste of that experience with our latest video of Professor Dave Hannings walking through the Dallidet Gardens.

[Check it out here.](#)

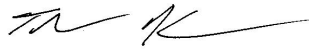
Looking for more to do?

- Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#). With posts like Mystery Monday and Throwback Thursday, we'll be sharing photos from our collection.
- Take a [virtual walking tour](#) of historic San Luis Obispo. These video series feature short vignettes about significant local landmarks.

If you have any ideas of content you'd like to see, share it with us! And if you enjoy what we share with you, and if you are able to, would you please consider [supporting us](#)?

Thank you for being a part of our community. Everybody stay healthy and safe.

Sincerely,



Thomas Kessler
Executive Director

History Center of San Luis Obispo County
696 Monterey Street, SLO | (805) 543-0638 | historycenterslo.org
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