

P & J's History

On a historic corner on the edge of the French Quarter, a family-owned business has been cultivating and harvesting oysters for more than 130 years. P & J Oyster Company is the oldest business of its kind in the United States, and no institution has played a larger role in the advancement of south Louisiana's oyster industry.

P & J's story began thousands of miles away in Sicily and Austria, along the coast of the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas, when cousins came together in New Orleans to build a successful oyster farming, processing and distribution business.

In the 1860s, the three Sunseri brothers came to this country from Sicily. The oldest brother worked in the French Market, buying and selling seafood, fruit and vegetables, along with his brothers Philipo and Antonio, who worked as shipping clerks, unloading and cleaning the vessels to prepare them for their next voyage.

In 1870, two Austrian brothers named Jurisich brought their friend Antonio Popich to New Orleans to start an oyster farming business in the town of Olga, at the mouth of the Mississippi River in Plaquemines Parish. In 1876, the Jurisiches and Popiches would open an oyster shucking house on Royal Street called Popich and Jurisich, or P & J Brand Oyster Company.



Illustrated by
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Oyster shuckers on Toulouse Street, New Orleans



South Louisiana Oyster Beds



P & J Oyster Company grew rapidly through 1900. The bedding grounds included those on the Westside of the Mississippi River in Taylor Pass, Grand Bay, Little Bay, Yankee and Small Bayou, Sandy Point, Bay Jacque, Bay Coquette, Bastian Bay, Bayou Ferren, Bayou Cook, Bay Adams, Grand Bayou, and Four Bayous; and on the Eastside of the Mississippi River in California Bay, American Bay, Bay Crabbe, Cox Bay, Treasure Pass, Blind Bay, Lake of Two Trees, Christmas Camp Lake, and Lake Machias.

In 1921, Alfred Sunseri came to work for his cousin Joe Jurisich and his partner John Popich, bringing with him a list of his customers from United Fruit Company. They would use Railway Express to deliver fresh oysters - shucked for cooking and in the shell for raw consumption - to all the major

cities in America. P & J quickly grew to be the largest shipper of oysters in the South. In 1937, Sunseri became an equal partner with Popich and Jurisich.

The rest is culinary history, as the consistent quality and taste of their oysters ensured them a place on the tables of the city's most famous restaurants, in dishes like Oysters Rockefeller, invented in the 1880s at Antoine's.

P & J settled at its current location on Toulouse Street in the French Quarter. Behind these quiet doors, a 139-year-old business has weathered three economic depressions, two World Wars, catastrophic hurricanes, including Katrina, and the

Deepwater Horizon oil disaster.

But generations of Sunseris have persevered, dedicated to selling the finest quality cultivated oysters available on the market today, and operating on the principle that the "Customer is King."

