Monterey-by-the-Smell: Odors and Social Conflict on the California Coastline

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In the first half of the twentieth century, fish odors created heated conflicts along the Monterey coastline. Few scholars in environmental history, however, have analyzed the significance of olfactory perceptions of the physical environment. This article examines two disputes in which odors became connected to larger power struggles over nature and society. The first conflict involved Chinese fishermen, whose squid-drying fields emitted unpleasant smells that precipitated a campaign to eliminate them. The second conflict emerged when the sardine factories along Cannery Row also created foul odors, prompting real estate developers and tourism-oriented politicians to take legal action. The debates over odors pitted tourism against fisheries and ultimately revealed Montereyans' divergent ideas about the types of people and activities that should shape the Pacific shoreline.

In January 1935, amid ongoing allegations that the sardine canneries were spreading offensive odors throughout the city, Monterey Mayor Walter L. Teaby presided over a dinner with local officials, cannery owners, and representatives of the Del Monte Properties Company, a Monterey Peninsula real estate developer. Odors from fish processing and rendering had become a source of considerable rancor, so Teaby's goal was to come up with a solution acceptable to all interests. While many canners agreed to help eliminate the odors, George Harper of the Monterey Canning Company refused to pledge his support. He declared, "Nobody has died of fish odor yet—in fact it's one of the healthiest things we have!" For Harper, odors were a sign of economic well-being, not a source of illness and discomfort.

In the early twentieth century, fish odors became a significant physical characteristic of the Monterey coastline, just as noteworthy as its rocky outcroppings, wind-swept cypress trees, and fecund waters. As Harper’s recalcitrance indicated, the presence of odors became so pronounced that heated conflicts erupted. However, few environmental historians have used odors as an analytical means to explore the battles that surrounded changes in nature. While scholars have explored smells associated with industrialization and sanitation, these studies have centered on urban areas and focused largely on either public health issues or political and legal themes of civic improvement, nuisance law, and infrastructure development. Historians have also demonstrated the social effects of visible and measurable irritants such as smoke, sewage, and hazardous waste. The social causes and consequences of hard-to-see and difficult-to-quantify smells have not, however, received as much attention.

It is not surprising that environmental historians have somewhat overlooked odors, as visual evidence remains essential for determining material changes in the natural world. But the smell of the air was an important environmental feature that did not escape human notice. In fact, historical descriptions of odors suggested the ways in which people understood, evaluated, and envisioned their physical surroundings. Because perceptions of odors were highly subjective—they could not be easily calculated, and some people found offense where others did not—smells have also had signifi-

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cant social implications, structuring and intensifying divisions between different groups. Those with superior resources and political authority were able to define odors and use them to exercise power over people and their environment.\textsuperscript{4} Historicizing odors, then, can illustrate the reciprocal links between social and environmental change. As Montereyans argued about the stench that hung over the city, they were also debating how the coastline should be developed and who should have the power to do so. More specifically, the odor disputes pitted tourism and fisheries—and the people associated with these industries—against one another.

This article explores the social and environmental dimensions of two odor conflicts that unfolded in Monterey. The first battle began in the 1890s, when odors emitted by Chinese squid-drying fields prompted many white residents and tourists to condemn Chinese fishers and their distasteful operations. Discourses of racial difference became linked to the ways in which the Chinese altered the natural environment. Their production of offensive smells intertwined with existing animosities to mark the Chinese as inherently repugnant in the minds of some white observers. Ultimately, the Pacific Improvement Company, owner of both the Chinese fishing village and the Hotel Del Monte, Monterey’s seaside resort, bowed to the sensibilities of affluent guests and forced the Chinese out. Thus, the company used odors to leverage its political influence and create an excuse for removing the Chinese and sanitizing the shoreline.

A few decades later, the sardine canneries along Ocean View Avenue, also known as Cannery Row, created odors so offensive that a popular saying dubbed the city “Monterey-by-the-Smell.”\textsuperscript{5} Real estate developers, hotel owners, and tourist-oriented politicians soon launched a vigorous drive to abate the nuisance and even pursued legal action. Similar to the squid conflict, the Del Monte Properties Company, which now owned the Hotel Del Monte, led the charge.


\textsuperscript{5} Stett Holbrook, “Return of the Sardine,” \textit{Monterey County Herald}, Aug. 4, 2002. The full saying was, “Carmel-by-the-Sea; Pacific Grove by God; and Monterey by the smell,” referring to the three major cities on the Monterey Peninsula. “Pacific Grove by God” was an allusion to the city’s origins as a Methodist summer retreat and later a Chautauqua camp.
against the odors. However, this second battle demonstrated the clout of the sardine industry and its supporters. They railed against the hypersensitive noses of tourists and other anti-odor residents, and they maintained that the elimination of fish smells would undermine Monterey’s major industry and threaten the livelihoods of numerous working-class families. In other words, stinking sardines became connected to economic and social stability.

As these two incidents suggest, odor tolerance and intolerance reflected conflicting constructions of nature and divergent ideas about the types of people and activities that should occupy Monterey’s shores. Those who favored tourism and residential development used odors to define extractive industry as an improper coastal operation and to ostracize fisheries workers and their employers. For the Chinese, this tactic meant that squid smells signified racial inferiority and the inappropriate use of nature, which ultimately justified their expulsion. Sardine industry leaders, on the other hand, deflected critiques by deploying class-based arguments that constructed fish odors as a symbol of a prosperous working waterfront. In both cases, odors became tied to larger struggles for power over Monterey’s nature and society. The smell of the air, then, prompted visceral responses and led to campaigns that polarized the community, heightening conflicts over the social and physical shape of the coastline.

The “abominable stench” of the Chinese squid fishery

The emergence of the Chinese squid fishery—and its related odors—dated back to the mid-nineteenth century, when Chinese fishers began to settle on the Monterey Peninsula. One of the first accounts came in April 1853, with news that six Chinese had set up camp near Monterey to harvest abalone. As the Chinese in San Francisco caught wind of the plentiful abalone supply, they made their way down to Monterey. Located about one and one-half miles northwest of Monterey in the town of Pacific Grove, Point Alones emerged in 1870 as the main Chinese fishing camp on the peninsula, with forty-seven residents.6 The Chinese fisheries enjoyed success, but not

without hostility from competing fishing groups and federal fishery officials. This animosity eventually nudged the Chinese toward focusing their efforts on the malodorous squid industry.

The Chinese faced competition primarily from Southern European fishers. Portuguese whalers settled in the area in 1855 and organized the Monterey Whaling Company. By 1880 the company employed twenty-three men, mostly Azorean Islanders, who joined other Portuguese fishermen to catch fish for local and San Francisco
markets during the off-season. Italians entered the Monterey fishing community soon thereafter. A company of Italian fishermen, originally from Genoa, left San Francisco and settled in Monterey in 1873. Two years later, a second group came to Monterey, making camp close to the railroad depot east of Point Alones to focus on catching mackerel, halibut, sardines, and salmon.8

Even though the ocean and its resources were, in theory, common property that many users shared, the ocean was not an open field in practice, and Monterey’s fishermen battled to establish their territories.9 Hoping to dominate the waters directly off Monterey, Italian fishermen pushed the Chinese west toward Point Pinos, Point Lobos, and Carmel Bay. This adjustment worked only when groups remained within their boundaries. When they did not, conflicts flared. In 1880 the Chinese sued the Monterey Whaling Company, accusing whalers of chasing them down and cutting their nets and lines. The whalers’ exact motives were unclear, but they likely sabotaged the Chinese because they were invading “their” territory or simply getting in the way. While the court discharged the complaint, the Monterey Californian lambasted the whalers for “tormenting their brother fisherman” and classed their actions as “no less than piracy.”10

Emergent ethnic and racial divisions reflected the unequal power relations typical of other Western industries. The Chinese were in an ineffectual position, commanding the fewest social and political resources. While Monterey did not experience the virulent

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10. Lydon, Chinese Gold, 47–48, 54; Monterey Californian, March 27, 1880.
anti-Chinese activities that erupted elsewhere during the late nineteenth century, observers routinely expressed conventional anti-Chinese sentiments. They described Monterey’s Chinese fishermen as filthy and inferior, much as they had described Chinese laborers who laid railroad tracks and toiled in mining camps.\textsuperscript{11} When J. W. Collins, writing in a U.S. Fish Commission report, noted that the Chinese lived in “miserable squalor . . . conditions that would be unbearable to white men, particularly those of American birth,” he made Chinese living conditions a corollary of their race. When he commented that a considerable percentage of Italian and Portuguese fishermen became naturalized citizens, while the Chinese “appear[ed] to have no desire for citizenship,” he implied that applying for citizenship made Italians and Portuguese superior. Collins did not mention that citizenship was not an option for Chinese immigrants at this time because of the Naturalization Law of 1790, which limited naturalized citizenship to “whites.”\textsuperscript{12}

Individuals who reported on the fisheries also ostracized the Chinese by accusing them of being destructive fishers. In particular, the Chinese use of trawl lines to take bottom fish became a source of criticism. While “white fishermen” used gillnets and hooks and lines to make their catch, the Chinese rigged trawls with 200 hooks each, uniting eight or nine sections to form one continuous line. They baited the hooks, left them at the ocean bottom, and checked them once or twice a day. An 1888 U.S. Fish Commission report noted that trawls were prohibited and that this infraction created “a very bitter feeling between the two classes” of white and non-white fishermen.\textsuperscript{13} The California Penal Code from this period did not include any explicit laws against trawls, although the taking of young


fish by any method was prohibited in state waters. Observers presumably believed that trawls—and the Chinese—were harmful because they took immature fish.

Attacks against Monterey's Chinese fishermen were not isolated events. Criticizing Chinese gear and methods reflected a statewide attempt to regulate the Chinese out of the fishing industry and reduce white fishermen's competition. In 1880 the California Legislature prohibited aliens incapable of voting—the Chinese—from fishing in the state's public waters. The U.S. Circuit Court, however, struck down this act because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection. Other legislation focused on removing the Chinese from the shrimp industry by banning their favored net, the Chinese bag net, and by instituting a closed season during the summer, the only time when they could air-dry their catch and then ship it to China.

Facing mounting criticism and competition, the Chinese retreated to a fishery that no other group cared to exploit: the squid fishery. They fished at night, as squid could be attracted to the surface of the water with a torch placed at the boat's bow. Two skiffs carrying the purse seine followed. Once the squid appeared, Chinese fishermen threw the purse seine into the water. They rowed their boats in opposite directions around the squid, pursed the two ends of the net together, and dragged the net to shore. On shore, men and women split the squid open and laid them on flakes (racks) to dry for two or three days. They then gathered and bundled the squid to be sent to San Francisco, where Chinese merchants distributed it to dealers in China and the Sandwich Islands (present-day Hawai'i). In 1892 the Chinese of Monterey County shipped 357,622 pounds of dried squid. Not only did squid find ready markets, the fishery allowed Chinese to escape their losing conflict over the fishing grounds with Europeans who worked during the day. Under the protective cover of darkness, the nocturnal

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14. The California Penal Code in the 1880s and 1890s prohibited the use of set or stationary nets. Trawl lines, however, were not outlawed until 1913. See Penal Code, sections 636 and 636½ in Statutes of California and Digest of Measures (Sacramento, 1883, 1913).


Figure 2. Chinese drying squid in a field at Chinese Village, Monterey, 1888. Courtesy the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
harvesting of squid created physical, temporal, and ecological separation from potentially hostile fishermen.\textsuperscript{17}

Nonetheless, observers maintained that the Chinese fisheries and their related odors reinforced the intrinsic inferiority and wastefulness of these non-white fishers. Writing in an 1888 booster publication entitled \textit{Picturesque California}, J. R. Fitch argued that the Chinese caught squid only because they had exhausted other species, such as flounder and halibut. While federal data indicated that they had not, in fact, depleted these fisheries, he maintained that the squid fishery was a sign of Chinese destructiveness, not resourcefulness. Moreover, a U.S. Fish Commission report pointed out the distasteful nature of the Chinese fishing operations, declaring that dried seafood possessed a “repulsive odor, and their appearance was anything but attractive as an article of food.” Fitch added that the Chinese fishing village was “unspeakably dirty and redolent with the odor of decaying fish.”\textsuperscript{18} Squid and other fish odors were revolting, and the Chinese production of such an unpleasant stench became a way to characterize Chinese themselves as inherently repugnant. In other words, environmental activities deemed distasteful indicated lower social status.\textsuperscript{19}

The position of Chinese fishermen became more insecure with the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Monterey Peninsula land baron David Jacks had owned the Pescadero and Point Pinos Ranchos, which contained the fishing villages, and rented the land to the Chinese.\textsuperscript{20} In 1880 he sold over 7,000 acres of his property,

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\textsuperscript{17} I am grateful to Ari Kelman for this insight.


\textsuperscript{20} For David Jacks’s dealings with the Chinese, see lease, David Jacks to China Man Hop Company, Dec. 8, 1868, box B14, Business Papers, and daily journal, 1874 and 1880, entries for Feb. 20, 21, May 1, 1874, Jan. 7, Feb. 24, March 29, and Aug. 2, 1880, Business Papers (bound volumes), all in David Jacks Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter Jacks Collection). For biographical information about Jacks, see Sondra L. Gould, "David Jacks: The Letter of the Law" (M.A. thesis, California State
including the ranchos, to the Southern Pacific's construction and real estate development arm, the Pacific Improvement Company. The Pacific Improvement Company decided to develop part of the land into a seaside resort, the Hotel Del Monte, as an outlet for the railroad's new branch line from Castroville to Monterey. Charles Crocker, an associate of the Central and Southern Pacific Railroad, oversaw the project. He envisioned a grand resort that would cater to an elite clientele and capitalize on Monterey's stunning scenery and pleasant climate. When the hotel opened on June 5, 1880, promoters called it "the handsomest watering-place hotel in America." The building featured elegant furnishings, spacious parlors, and ballrooms, while polo fields, lush gardens, and a bathing pavilion with heated pools graced the hotel grounds. The original hotel burned to the ground on April 1, 1887, but the company rebuilt it immediately.

Resort developers capitalized on the hotel's proximity to the fishing villages and transformed the Chinese into tourist attractions. The route of the Seventeen Mile Drive, a scenic road that wound

21. For the Pacific Improvement Company, see Stuart Daggett, *Chapters on the History of the Southern Pacific* (New York, 1922); Walton, *Storied Land*, 150–152; and Articles of Incorporation, Pacific Improvement Company, Oct. 31, 1878, box B10, Jacks Collection. For the company's acquisition of Jacks's land, see deed, David Jacks to Pacific Improvement Company, Jan. 22, 1880, and deed, David Jacks to Pacific Improvement Company, May 11, 1880, box 19/2, Pacific Improvement Company Records, JL17, Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California; Charles Crocker to Collis P. Huntington, Dec. 15, 1879, reel 18, Series I, Collis P. Huntington Papers, Department of Special Collections, Syracuse University Library, Syracuse, New York (hereafter Huntington Papers); and deed, David Jacks to Pacific Improvement Co. for Point Pinos and Pescadero Ranchos, May 3, 1880, box B12, Jacks Collection. The Pacific Improvement Company Records use dividers within boxes, rather than folders, to designate separations; hence, for instance, box 19/2 refers to items at divider 2 in box 19.


23. Raymond-Whitcomb, Inc., *Two Grand Winter Trips to California, With Sojourns at the Hotel Del Monte, Monterey, and The Other Famous Health Resorts of Central and Southern California* (Boston, 1883), 30. See also N. C. Carnall, *N. C. Carnall and Co.'s California Guide for Tourists and Settlers* (San Francisco, 1889); *Hotel Del Monte: Monterey, California, U.S.A.* (Monterey, 1899); *Monterey, California: The Most Charming Winter Resort in the World* (Monterey, 1881); and *Hotel Del Monte, Monterey, California, U.S.A.* (Del Monte, Calif., 1898).

along the Monterey Peninsula, purposely passed by Chinese villages near Pebble Beach, Stillwater Cove, and other immigrant fishing grounds. On her Monterey excursion, Boston abolitionist and feminist Caroline Dall observed a “Celestial village,” Portuguese sailors spying whales, and a Spanish fisherman and his wife. The Chinese were not simply ornaments, however, and soon after the drive opened, they took advantage of the influx of tourists and set up a roadside stand to sell shells and trinkets. This became a mutually beneficial situation. Tourists could take in exotic sights of the Chinese villages and buy souvenirs, while the Chinese profited from the by-products of their industry, empty abalone or sea urchin shells.25

Like the federal observers who bemoaned the squid fishery, some local residents did not see the Chinese as quaint and romantic. They complained that the odors emitted by Chinese squid-drying were a huge annoyance and a threat to their health. In 1892 Pacific Grove residents grew so disgusted that they submitted a petition to the city trustees. The Pacific Grove Review reported: “As the abominable stench from the decaying fish grows daily worse, we judge there are no active measures taken. Unless we wish to court diptheria [sic], typhoid and scarlet fever, this thing must cease, and at once.”26 Odors from the Chinese fishing village had become the harbinger of illness and possibly death.

The Pacific Grove petition reflected popular understandings of disease and disease transmission in the late nineteenth century. Despite the growing acceptance of germ theory, some medical authorities and many laypeople still associated typhoid, scarlet fever, and diphtheria with poor, densely settled urban tenements and foul-smelling vapors.27 Concerns about odors extended from a persistent belief that miasmas, or malevolent airs, “emanated from harmful or degraded places or things, infiltrating their surroundings with illness,” according to historian Convery Bolton Valenčius. Whereas “good airs” were pure and fresh and imparted health, miasmas, by contrast, conveyed harmful aspects of the environment into the hu-

26. Quoted in the Monterey New Era, May 26, 1892, p. 3.
man body. Odors were a sign of miasma, “an important diagnostic aid” in determining the health of people and places. Even as late nineteenth-century medical practitioners began to reject odors as a cause of disease, many Americans could not easily dissociate bad smells from poor health.  

Moreover, because harmful odors wafted from a specific place, disease was often associated with a particular neighborhood and a particular social group. The perceived unhealthfulness of the Point Alones village marked the Chinese as repulsive and harmful. This link between Chinese living quarters, disease, and social difference was not limited to Monterey. Nayan Shah’s study of San Francisco illustrates that health officials in the mid- to late nineteenth century saw Chinatown as an epidemic danger because the Chinese were “notoriously filthy” and lived in “dirty, filthy dens.” Chinese cultural behavior indicated “innate dispositions to illness.” As a result, Shah has argued, “Disease was conceived as organic to every Chinese racialized space.” Similarly, in Monterey, smelly squid indicated Chinese fishers’ lack of proper hygiene and sanitation, making their village the perfect breeding ground for infectious diseases.

With contaminated airs radiating from their living quarters, the Chinese threatened Monterey’s reputation as a destination for health seekers. In addition to luxurious facilities and beautiful scenery, Hotel Del Monte promoters touted Monterey’s salubrious atmosphere. They claimed that invalids could prolong their lives at Monterey, “for the pure oxyde [sic] contained in every atom of air, and snuffed in at every breath, has a most efficacious effect upon the system.” The late nineteenth-century American medical community corroborated these claims, noting that oceanic moisture was “highly beneficial to health and conducive to longevity.” In his 1884 address to the Middlesex County Medical Society in Connecticut, Dr. A. M. Shew even singled out the Hotel Del Monte as “the ideal hotel” for


invalids. But Monterey would drive away these visitors if diseases
spread from the Chinese village to white homes and bodies.

Despite the perceived dangers posed by the squid fishery, the
Chinese remained at Point Alones and continued to dry squid for
another decade. There was no concerted effort to stop operations
until May 1902, when a sudden rain shower spoiled a field of squid
and created an especially pungent odor. Nearby residents com-
plained again to local law enforcement and the Pacific Improve-
ment Company, which now owned the Point Alones village. The
stinking mounds of spoiled squid prompted Robert F. Johnson,
president of the Monterey Board of Trustees, to order an investiga-
tion by Assistant District Attorney Jesse Bryan, who concluded
that the Chinese were creating a nuisance. As a result, B. A. Eardley,
Pacific Improvement Company superintendent, issued an order that
forbade the Chinese from drying squid on company property. According to the rationale of nuisance law, their activities had created
smells that purportedly injured the property of others.

The Pacific Improvement Company recognized that the ban
on squid would end an ongoing nuisance and bolster tourism and
real estate development in the process. As the Monterey New Era ex-
plained, previous visitors “must surely have been kept away by the
smell of the squid drying in the fields and stored at the wharf await-
ing shipment by steamer.” The abolition of Chinatown would make
nearby building sites “immensely more valuable,” and “Chinatown
itself would in time form as beautiful and desirable villa sites as can be found in America.” Eardley did not know of another place where
the Chinese could dry squid and predicted that Chinatown “would
probably cease to exist.”

However, the Pacific Improvement Company’s efforts to cease

30. Monterey, California: The Most Charming Winter Resort in the World; P. C. Re-
mondino, Longevity and Climatic Relations of Climatic Conditions to Longevity, History, and Rel-
igion—Relations of Climate to National and Personal Habits—The Climate of California and Its
Effects in Relation to Longevity (San Francisco, 1890), 20–22; A. M. Shew, California as a
Health Resort (Boston, 1885), 4; emphasis in the original.

(manuscript transcribed by WPA workers from original newspaper); found in Work Proj-
ects Administration, Historical Survey of the Monterey Peninsula, Project No. 4080, file
40, June 15, 1937.

32. For a general description of nineteenth-century nuisance law, see Schultz, Con-

33. “Chinese Must Cease the Drying of Squid”; “Squid Drying Discontinued,” Pacific
squid drying were ineffective. In May 1904 the local board of health announced that it intended to take the matter up with the State Board of Health. One month later, local police arrested several Chinese drying squid and charged them with creating a nuisance. Finally, in 1905 the company announced that the Chinese would have to leave Point Alones when their lease expired in February 1906.\textsuperscript{34} When the deadline came and went without their departure, Pacific Improvement Company General Manager A. D. Shepard resisted forcible ejection and began to explore how he could move the Chinese to an isolated spot where they would not create a nuisance.\textsuperscript{35} Why Shepard took an interest in the future Chinese living situation was unclear.

The Chinese relocation never materialized because the Point Alones village went up in flames on May 16, 1906, in a fire of unknown origin. The fire destroyed about two-thirds of the village, leaving only sixteen buildings. The \textit{Pacific Grove Review} provided numerous theories about the fire, speculating that a carelessly discarded cigarette, arsonists, or inattentive Chinese burning garbage started the blaze. The Chinese themselves may have contributed to the disaster by building a flammable village of cramped wooden structures and fish-oil soaked drying racks. They tried to contain the fire, but their efforts were futile. As the blaze engulfed the village, spectators lined the railroad tracks, while others looted the buildings that remained.\textsuperscript{36}

Presumably, the near-destruction of the village ended the battle over Point Alones. As the \textit{Pacific Grove Review} concluded, “The question of the removal of Chinatown is now settled. . . . Now that the settlement is so nearly destroyed, [the Chinese] will not be allowed to rebuild.”\textsuperscript{37} However, keeping the Chinese away was not that simple. Led by village resident Tom Yuen, they refused to con-


35. Shepard to Pryor, May 7, 8, 1906, in \textit{ibid.}


37. “Picturesque Chinatown Only a Memory.” For a detailed overview of the fire’s aftermath, see also Lydon, \textit{Chinese Gold}, 369–377.
cede and attempted to rebuild on a portion of land above the railroad tracks. They also enlisted the services of Monterey law firm Sandholt and Shaw, which presented General Agent J. P. Pryor with a demand for the surrender of the former fishing village. For its part, the Pacific Improvement Company hired guards to watch the former village, shut off most of the water supply, and built a fence around the site. Company executives were not going to allow the Chinese to rebuild their village and threaten their efforts to attract tourists and homebuyers.

Pryor explained that Chinese resettlement would degrade the company’s land and cause unnecessary expenses. In a letter to Shepard, he wrote, “If they [the Chinese] should gain possession of this land for only a temporary period, they would at once erect their old shacks and accumulate considerable dirt and filth, all of which would have to be cleared up again after we had regained possession of the land.” Implicit in Pryor’s argument was that the Chinese would make the land unfit for the company’s well-heeled clientele; the property’s value would diminish if potential investors thought it was contaminated. Thus, the Chinese undermined Pryor’s vision of the Monterey coastline as a place of elite visitors and investors spending their leisure time on clean, valuable oceanfront property. In his mind, the Pacific Improvement Company was the best agent for improving Point Alones and developing Monterey into a premiere tourist and residential destination. But the persistence of Chinese fishermen was a reminder that property ownership did not automatically yield social control.

The battle drew to a close when the Chinese agreed to resettle at McAbee Beach, a parcel of land east of Point Alones. Shepard approved of this plan because it would allow the company to donate the former village site to the University of California for a marine station. Pryor, however, believed that the Chinese presence at McAbee Beach would continue to drive away “the class of citizens whom we are desirous of attracting.” Other residents were similarly

40. Pryor to Shepard, June 26, 1906, box 60/53, in ibid.
outraged and tried to raise money to buy the land from under the Chinese. Such protests came too late, and the Chinese settled at their new village. As the *Pacific Grove Review* concluded sarcastically, “Pungent odors from the new Chinese quarters mingled with the sea b[r]eizes ought to make a lively advance in the price of real estate.”

Even with their relocation, racially motivated policies still undercut Chinese fishing activities. Because they continued to harvest and dry squid, white citizens continued to complain about the odors. In 1907 the city of Monterey responded by passing an ordinance prohibiting the drying of squid within city limits. Despite the law, police records from 1907 and 1908 indicated that several Chinese—San Moy, Ah Tai, Ah Fook, Ah Shue, Yee Sing, Yee Hoe, Ah Wong, and Ah Hoe—risked fines and imprisonment to dry squid in Monterey. But such cases were rare. To avoid city authorities and possible punishment, the Chinese had to move their squid-drying fields to the outskirts of town. Since this was far from the shoreline, production declined, and the number of fishers dwindled. Out of a total of eighty-six Chinese at McAbee Beach in 1910, only eighteen were fishermen. One year later, the city directory recorded only seven Chinese fishermen.

The removal of the Chinese fishermen from Point Alones suggests how racial difference became naturalized through labor in nature. The Chinese had already faced racial animosity, but their production of offensive smells added fuel to the fire and further marked them as an undesirable presence in Monterey. In addition to their purportedly destructive fishing practices, odors became another indication of social inferiority. Their eviction reinforced the sensibilities of many residents and developers who believed that

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42. My analysis differs from the work of John Walton, who also details the Point Alones fire and its aftermath. While he maintains that group conflicts recurred, he also argues that the Chinese participated in a “negotiated accommodation” that created a “multicultural community” in which “people learned to live together in distinctive ways.” See Walton, *Storied Land,* 178–180.
43. Ordinance No. 140, June 27, 1907, and Ordinance No. 148, June 9, 1908, Ordinance Book 1, Monterey City Clerk’s Office. See also “Trustees Get Busy,” *Monterey Daily Cypress,* June 10, 1908, p. 1. For ordinance violations, see Monterey Recorders and Police Court, July 11, 1907 (vol. 1) and June 11, 1908 (vol. 2), Monterey City Clerk’s Office.
Chinese fishermen and the stench of squid damaged their property and undermined their leisure-driven visions for the coastline. In theory, removing the Chinese and their odors meant that future tourists and residents would not be deterred from coming to Monterey. But as long as fishermen and other entrepreneurs continued to capitalize on Monterey’s fisheries, the odors would persist.

“Nauseated and physically distressed” on Cannery Row

While odors may have subsided with the Chinese banishment from Point Alones, the fish stench only intensified in the following decades. With the inception and growth of the sardine industry, unpleasant smells returned with a vengeance and precipitated new struggles over nature. Much like the Chinese squid battle, these odor disputes involved a tug-of-war between tourism, residential development, and fisheries. Unlike the earlier conflict, however, the majority of Montereyans were now tolerant of smells. Since Monterey’s economy came to depend on Cannery Row’s fish plants, the number of people associated with and supportive of the fisheries multiplied. As a result, odors came to signify employment and prosperity, not the presence of a despised social group. Industry workers and their employers successfully deflected the issue by implicitly and explicitly accusing odor critics—real estate developers, hotel owners, and tourists—of harming the laboring class.45

Monterey’s industrial fishing era began in earnest in 1901, when San Franciscan H. R. Robbins built a fish cannery on the waterfront. He developed a spot next to Fisherman’s Wharf, east of Point Alones and McAbee Beach, specializing in processing sardines. Robbins also reduced fish offal, the fish heads and entrails that were canning by-products, into oil and fertilizer, which he sold to sugar beet farmers in the nearby Salinas and Pajaro valleys. Shortly thereafter, Frank E. Booth of the Sacramento River Packers Association in Black Diamond (present-day Pittsburg) also built a cannery. After his plant burned to the ground in 1903, he bought Robbins’s ailing operation, investing over $10,000 and doubling the size of the original cannery. Booth soon benefited from growing

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45. Walton also explores cannery odors in Storied Land, 173–176. While he uses the conflicts to show the growth of the fishing industry and the emergence of an ethnic working class, I continue to examine the social and environmental tensions between labor and leisure.
markets for canned sardines. Many Americans favored French sardines, but Robert Dollar, a San Francisco merchant, began marketing California sardines in Asia in 1902. Soon, foreign markets all over Asia, Cuba, and parts of Europe absorbed the majority of the California canned sardine supply.46

While canned sardines found their way into viable markets, Monterey canners also followed Robbins’s lead and began to reduce fish waste into meal and oil to feed California’s burgeoning agricultural sector. In Booth’s plant, workers collected fish offal in bins and put it into an agitating cooker, a revolving cylinder heated by steam. Once the offal was cooked, presses removed the liquid, which went to settling tanks to separate oil from water. Other machinery then pulverized, dried, and sized the solid material before curing and sacking it. Booth installed a dryer in 1912, and he operated a floating reduction unit the following year, equipping a lime-kiln barge with a cooker, dryer, and hydraulic press and anchoring it at sea.47

Odors were the inevitable by-product of the canning and reduction processes, but they did not become a major problem until after World War I. With increased demand for canned sardines for domestic markets and war troops, new canneries cropped up along Cannery Row. By 1917 the city had five fish plants.48 The immediate postwar years, however, could not sustain this growth. Only when the California State Legislature permitted canneries to take large amounts of sardines specifically for reduction did the industry come out of its slump. California’s Fish Conservation Act of 1919 allowed canners in Monterey and San Pedro, California’s other major sardine port, to reduce an amount of whole fish equal to 25 percent of their monthly canning capacity. The Murphy-Youngman Bill of 1929 increased this figure to 32.5 percent. With profitable agricul-


tural markets and minimal labor requirements, most plants were willing to take a loss in their canning business and make up for it with reduction.49

The incredible incentives to reduce fish and fish waste prompted more canners to install reduction equipment, but this machinery often malfunctioned and created pungent fumes. According to Monterey City Engineer Howard D. Severance, cannery odors became particularly acute when high-temperature fish meal dryers burned the offal. Even though a 1918 city ordinance prohibited canneries and fertilizer plants from emitting “unwholesome, offensive, disagreeable, nauseous, and obnoxious smells, odors, and gases,” the problem did not stop. Several canneries operated in close proximity along Cannery Row, so it was difficult to pinpoint the blame to a specific plant.50

Much like the Chinese squid odors, cannery fumes raised the ire of local residents and developers. Concerned that the pollution and odors hurt Hotel Del Monte business, the Del Monte Properties Company, which took over the Pacific Improvement Company’s holdings in 1919, hired University of California sanitary and hydraulic engineer Charles Gilman Hyde to conduct a preliminary study in 1925. After his inspection, Hyde called attention to the “foul condition” of the water caused by the canneries’ discharge of sewage and waste. This pollution had rendered the Hotel Del Monte bathhouse, which pumped saltwater directly from the ocean, unsanitary. Hyde concluded that these damages demanded a comprehensive investigation in order to protect the “fullest enjoyable use of the Hotel property” and to prepare data for future legal action against the canneries. He recommended collecting water samples and hiring a “reliable observer” to record odors at the hotel and the beach at various intervals throughout the day. The company could


then use these data to correlate water quality and odors with changing currents, winds, and industrial operations.\textsuperscript{51}

It is unclear if the Del Monte Properties Company carried out Hyde's proposals, but the company continued to drive the opposition to cannery odors in the following years. In October 1926 Monterey hosted the California State Real Estate Convention, an event that local developers hoped would bring more investors to the region. Del Monte Properties Company President Samuel Morse, however, complained that the cannery odors would damage the city's reputation as a residential community because conference attendees "will be greeted with the smell of dead fish." He continued, "It is impossible to estimate in dollars and cents just how much damage we will receive as a result. What should have been estimable advertising benefit will result in serious and permanent damage." In response, the canners voluntarily agreed to restrict production during the convention in order to eliminate offensive odors.\textsuperscript{52}

The abatement of odors was only temporary, as the smells continued to drift into residential neighborhoods and hotels after the convention left town. In October 1928 several local residents called the city manager's office to complain about an especially pungent stench emanating from Cannery Row. One year later Monterey hotel owners protested that the odors scared away patrons. Jean Juillard of the San Carlos Hotel in downtown Monterey noted that one of his guests cut his visit short, complaining "that he could not sleep all night and that he had been poisoned by the odor of fish." Carl Stanley of the Hotel Del Monte concurred and added that many visitors commented on the "beautiful surroundings made uninhabitable by such a terrible stench." He concluded, "There is not the slightest doubt that guests cut short their stay because of it, with resulting loss, not only to the hotel but to the community as a whole."\textsuperscript{53}

The debate over odors exposed a fundamental class conflict be-


tween labor and leisure, much like disputes in other locales. In Monterey and elsewhere, middle- and upper-class residents and tourists complained that industrial pollution threatened their homes and lifestyles. For instance, in early twentieth-century Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, business leaders campaigned against smoke as a way to turn the city into a beautiful residential community and steer the economy away from heavy industry. Similarly, in the 1950s and 1960s, middle-class residents of suburban Gary, Indiana, grumbled that steel emissions and industrial wastes had made Lake Michigan unfit for recreational activities, such as fishing and swimming.\textsuperscript{54} In all of these places, industry was not easily reconciled with the aesthetic sensibilities of more affluent people. Monterey's tourism industry relied on the absence of unpleasant odors, but the pungent smell of fish was an inevitable result of the thriving sardine industry.

In response to mounting complaints, the city intensified its odor abatement programs, creating the Office of Cannery Inspector in 1929. The inspector visited the canneries and checked that they had installed thermostatic controls on all meal-drying equipment to prevent burned fish meal. The city passed another ordinance in 1931, administered by the Monterey County Health Department, making it mandatory for fertilizer plants to obtain operating permits. Health department inspectors could revoke permits if machinery did not function properly, and obnoxious odors could bring a fine, imprisonment, or both.\textsuperscript{55} For their part, some plants tested new drying equipment that was supposed to mitigate odors, often without success.\textsuperscript{56}

Improved regulation and monitoring did not seem to improve odors, and by 1934 the Del Monte Properties Company had become so frustrated that it filed for an injunction against all twelve Monterey canneries in Monterey County Superior Court. Even in the midst of the Great Depression, the Monterey sardine industry was operating at normal capacity and producing odors. Foreign trade


\textsuperscript{55} Ordinance No. 296 C.S., Oct. 22, 1929; Ordinance No. 297 C.S., Nov. 19, 1929; and Ordinance No. 337, July 7, 1931, all in Ordinance Book 3, Monterey City Clerk's Office. The fine was a maximum of $500, and the prison term was a maximum of six months.

\textsuperscript{56} Severance, "Control of Cannery Odors," 154–155; "Interesting Solution of Reduction Problems by F. E. Booth Co.,” \textit{Pacific Fisherman}, 26 (June 1928), 21–22.
and domestic markets for canned fish had declined, but sardine processors weathered the economic crisis by producing fish meal, still in demand in the agricultural sector. As canners intensified their reduction operations, Del Monte Properties Company lawyers argued that canners had permitted “large quantities of decayed and putrefied fish” to remain in and about their plants and allowed offensive odors to escape into the air. The odors created a public nuisance and caused “great annoyance” and distress to those who encountered them.

The bulk of the Del Monte Properties Company’s complaints focused on how odors interfered with tourism and its long-standing efforts to attract homebuyers to the region. During the sardine season, which ran from August to February, the prevailing winds blew from west to east, sending odors directly to the Hotel Del Monte. These offensive odors polluted the atmosphere in and about the hotel and its recreational facilities. The stench was often so strong that guests and employees became “nauseated and physically distressed.” As a result, the company had lost patronage, and it expected “the value of its said hotel and resort property will be greatly depreciated.” Even though the canneries operated during only part of the peak tourist season, company lawyers argued that odors had to cease so that tourists would continue to regard Monterey as a desirable vacation destination. Maintaining this reputation was all the more important, as tourism actually experienced growth during the Depression. Even at a time of economic decline, vacation spending, in relation to national income, increased. Employers and politicians believed that expanding paid vacation benefits and increasing tourism promotion would squelch industrial rancor, encourage consumption, and revitalize the economy.

59. Ibid.
In defending the canneries, attorney John Milton Thompson deployed class-based rhetoric that implicitly pointed to the economic anxieties of the Depression. He argued that any injury suffered by the Del Monte Properties Company was slight in comparison to the impact that plant closures would have on the public welfare. The sardine industry employed hundreds of workers and paid out large sums of money for labor, fish, materials, merchandise, supplies, equipment, taxes, fees, and assessments. The sale of canned fish and reduction products also brought money into the region and helped to support the local economy. The sardine plants, therefore, directly and indirectly benefited most of the 15,000 residents of the Monterey Peninsula.61

Thompson did not offer any concrete statistics to support his claims, but data from the 1930 Census suggest that the fishing industry was an important regional employer. Out of a total population of 9,141 in Monterey, there were 397 cannery workers and 563 fishermen. The canneries also employed 180 residents of Pacific Grove, which had a total population of 5,558.62 However, the census probably underreported the number of sardine industry workers. Since the census-takers canvassed Monterey and Pacific Grove in April and May, after the end of the season, it is likely that many residents did not report their cannery employment. During the 1936–1937 season, the Monterey Peninsula Herald estimated that the canneries employed 2,000 people daily.63 Even when one subtracts the numerous migrant laborers who worked in the plants, the number of local cannery workers in the 1930s far exceeded the census figures.

Thompson drew clear social distinctions between these local residents, who depended on the sardine industry, and the visitors, who had no vested interest in the community. He noted that the


62. For population statistics, see Work Projects Administration, Monterey Peninsula: American Guide Series (Berkeley, 1941), 190. I compiled the data on cannery workers and fishermen through an analysis of the 1930 Manuscript Census Schedules for Monterey County. My figures exclude Japanese abalone fishermen and other fishermen and laborers who reported employment in the market fishery. My figures include residents who were employed at the local can factory, which supplied the local canneries.

odors were a “mere matter of aesthetics affecting only the olfactory organs of super sensitive persons seeking pleasure at the pleasure resort conducted by the plaintiff.” Any odors created by the defendants had caused “little, if any, financial loss to said Peninsula and little, if any, real discomfort or distress but rather a fanciful annoyance to . . . persons having no true relation to the public welfare of said community.”64 In other words, it was absurd to force the canneries to eliminate odors and undermine the economy for the benefit of effete interlopers. Visitors might turn their noses up at the fish plants, but the stench signified jobs and paychecks for locals.

Indeed, not only did tourists’ delicate noses threaten the fishing industry and the many residents who depended on it, but Thompson also claimed that visitors created the very odors that they found so offensive. The hotel’s sewer outfall was slightly west of the hotel, and the sewage flowed “for several hundred feet across the beach sands near the Del Monte Bathhouse and near said Hotel causing a very unpleasant, disagreeable and obnoxious odor and stench, greater in extent than that from any of the defendants’ plants.” Thus, the hotel itself was causing “much of the discomfort and distress alleged in the complaint and attributed to these defendants.”65 In other words, tourists caused odors, Thompson alleged, not the residents who worked for the canneries.

Although Thompson played upon class consciousness, it is important to remember that he too represented wealthy and powerful corporations with minimal community ties. Local citizens who had personal connections to the region operated several canneries, such as the San Carlos Canning Company and the Howden Food Products Company, but outside interests ran some of the other plants. For instance, Booth’s company was based in San Francisco, while the California Packing Corporation had extensive operations throughout the West.66 Even though Thompson adeptly emphasized the importance of fishing to the economy and the community as a whole, this

64. *Del Monte Properties Co. v. F. E. Booth et al.*
66. For Booth, Knut Howden, who opened his cannery in 1916, and the San Carlos cannery, established by Pietro Ferrante, Angelo Lucido, and Orazio Enea in 1926, see Mangelsdorf, *A History of Steinbeck’s Cannery Row*, 24–26, 56. For the California Packing Corporation, see *Tenth Annual Report of the California Packing Corporation for the Fiscal Year ended February 28, 1926* (San Francisco, 1926).
strategy was ultimately intended to protect the economic interests of more affluent canners. His clients’ actual concern for Monterey’s working-class citizens likely varied.

The defense concluded by pointing to the difficulties of measuring and quantifying odors and their effects. According to the Booth cannery, the Del Monte Properties Company simply did not have evidence to support its allegations. It could not prove definitively that gases and odors coming from the plants polluted the hotel grounds. It could not ascertain if the equipment was obsolete or if it was even possible to operate without any odors escaping into the atmosphere. It could not determine how much patronage had been lost due to any odors. And it could not demonstrate that the odors constituted a public nuisance. In short, canners argued that the Del Monte Properties Company’s allegations were baseless and purely subjective.67

Nonetheless, the canners and the Del Monte Properties Company agreed to a settlement that mandated the elimination and mitigation of odors. Beginning August 1, 1934, the plants had to meet stringent new provisions. All reduction equipment had to be installed with temperature regulatory devices and hoods to catch vapors. These gases, in turn, had to be heated and conveyed through a system that supposedly eliminated odors before discharge into the atmosphere. Any water left over from reduction had to be free of solids before release, and the plants could not process or keep any spoiled fish or fish that had been caught more than forty-eight hours prior. In case of future complaints, the court placed the burden of proof on the canners to demonstrate that odors did not originate from their plants. All of the canners signed the agreement, except the Hovden cannery, which signed a separate order.68

The plants experimented with odor abatement equipment, but the smells persisted and caused more community outrage.69 An October 1934 editorial in the Monterey Peninsula Herald proclaimed that residents had been deprived “of the right to breathe clean air.” The writer went on to challenge Thompson’s class-based arguments in support of the canners: “what is good for the guests at Hotel Del

67. Del Monte Properties Co. v. F. E. Booth et al.
69. For odor abatement efforts, see “Believe Monterey Plant Odor Problem Solved by New Installations,” Pacific Fisherman, 32 (Oct. 1934), 63.
Monte and the other hotels of Monterey and Pacific Grove IS NOT TOO GOOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF MONTEREY AND PACIFIC GROVE. Why should the people of this region be treated with contempt and be made to suffer ignominy because of conscienceless greed? In other words, residents and tourists alike deserved to inhale fresh air, and the canners had no right to foul the atmosphere simply because they supplied jobs and revenues to the city. Rather than accusing the Del Monte Properties Company of attacking the economy, canners needed to be held accountable for the odors. And to some extent, they were. In November 1934 the Del Monte Properties Company filed a complaint against the E. B. Gross and Del Mar canneries for purportedly violating the settlement. Gross paid $250, while Del Mar dodged the fines. Local residents also formed the Peninsula Health and Welfare League to act as a watchdog over cannyod odors.

Pacific Grove Mayor Sheldon Gilmer jumped on the anti-odor bandwagon, but he was concerned about tourism, not his constituents’ potential discomfort. Much like Pacific Improvement Company executive J. P. Pryor thirty years earlier, Gilmer argued that the fish smells prevented the region from becoming a tourist mecca. He noted, “The Monterey Peninsula was intended by nature as a place of scenic beauty suitable for fine homes and vacation attractions. The canning industry is an enemy to this pre-destined purpose . . . . There is no question that the shoreline from China Point to Pt. Pinos is the most attractive of any portion of the Peninsula but through the oppressive stench, for which the canneries are responsible, it has depreciated greatly in value.” Gilmer, like Pryor, envisioned the coastline as a place for recreation and tourism, and the elimination of fish odors would allow Pacific Grove to achieve its full potential.

Facing pressure from numerous fronts, the City of Monterey passed another ordinance in May 1935 to mitigate “offensive” or “obnoxious” odors. Similar to the previous ordinance, all plants were re-

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71. Ibid., Nov. 21, 1934, pp. 1, 2; Mangelsdorf, A History of Steinbeck’s Cannery Row, 101.
72. “Cannery Payroll Poor Argument for Problems to City, Says Gilmer,” Pacific Grove Tribune, Jan. 11, 1935 (manuscript transcribed by WPA workers from original newspaper); found in Work Projects Administration, Historical Survey of the Monterey Peninsula, File 28, 1937.
quired to pay $200 for a license to reduce fish materials. It also set up numerous provisions, many of them identical to the Superior Court settlement. Floors, gutters, walls, ceiling, and doors had to be made of a material, such as concrete, that could be cleaned easily. Plants could not allow fish or vegetable matter to accumulate and decompose, nor could plants discharge this material from their buildings. Gases created by drying fish meal had to pass through an incinerator, or they had to be disposed of or dissolved to prevent the escape of odors. The cannery inspector could revoke licenses for failure to comply with these provisions, and violation would be considered a misdemeanor.73

The odor ordinances were well-intentioned, but they did not noticeably reduce smells or eliminate the growing tensions between Pacific Grove and Monterey. While Monterey cannery inspector Maj. W. H. Landers insisted that the canners had made “real progress” toward odor abatement and wanted to “remedy the abuses of the past,” Pacific Grove residents continued to complain. At a city council meeting in February 1936, the city clerk read letters from eight people reporting noxious odors, allegedly caused by reduction activity. Residents explained that the smells had devalued their property and compelled five families to leave Pacific Grove and move south to Carmel, well beyond the reach of foul offshore breezes. City council members agreed that the problem had become particularly acute and decided to consider taking legal action against the City of Monterey.74

Although Pacific Grove’s lawsuit appeared imminent by September 1936, support for legal action dwindled the following year. The city council ordered city attorney Reginald Foster to file the lawsuit in November and allocated $2000 to cover legal costs, but several Pacific Grove residents began circulating a petition in March 1937, asking the city to drop the complaint. In a curious turnabout, they claimed that the canneries were important to Pacific Grove commerce and employed roughly 600 residents.75 Against the

73. Ordinance No. 416 C.S., May 20, 1935, Ordinance Book 3, Monterey City Clerk’s Office.
75. “City May File Suit to Abate Cannery Odors as Plants Run at Capacity,” in ibid., Sept. 25, 1936, p. 1; “Mayor Gilmer Instructs Attorney to Bring Suit to Abate Cannery
backdrop of the Depression, odors probably seemed less offensive than unemployment. Canners also agreed to help purchase a machine that chlorinated cannery waste, and they participated in an anti-pollution campaign during the 1938–1939 season.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, Landers assured Gilmer that all fish odors, except for a slight odor at low tide, could be eliminated during the next season.\textsuperscript{77}

Ultimately, efforts to placate cannery detractors and harmonize tourism and residential development with the fisheries found limited success, and the sardine industry, odors and all, benefited from widespread local support. When Samuel Morse made another complaint to the Monterey city council in 1939, alleging that Del Monte Properties Company continued to lose valuable real estate sales, city officials seemed unwilling to budge. They insisted that they had taken active measures to abate the nuisance and that it would be impossible to eliminate all smells associated with the fishing industry.\textsuperscript{78} Indeed, many Montereyans believed that the odors boded well for the local economy. As one self-proclaimed “Proud Fish Packer” wrote in the Monterey Peninsula Herald in 1941, “I am proud of my job as a fish packer and only wish that it was a year-around job . . . . I don’t see why you should complain about a little fish smell.”\textsuperscript{79} Canneries provided jobs, and the odors, this worker implied, were a minor inconvenience.

While the conflict over odors seemed to diminish after this point, the smells, in all likelihood, probably worsened. World War II prompted another period of rapid expansion in the sardine industry, and by 1946 there were twenty-three plants on Cannery Row. Tourism, on the other hand, faded in importance, and Morse even leased the Hotel Del Monte to the Navy for use as a training facility. But the dominance of the fisheries would not last forever. The of-

\textsuperscript{76} Contract between Monterey Canneries and the City of Monterey, Dec. 15, 1937, box F3735:707, Administrative and Subject Files, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Game, Bureau of Marine Fisheries, California State Archives, Sacramento, California; “Anti-Pollution Program Features Preparation for Season at Monterey,” Pacific Fisherman, 36 (Aug. 1938), 24.


\textsuperscript{78} “Morse Protests Cannery Odors,” in \textit{ibid.}, Nov. 29, 1939.

fensive fish odors would come to a definitive end when the sardine fishery collapsed in the late 1940s and the canneries began to shut down in the 1950s. 80

Conclusion

As these two disputes illustrate, Montereyans constructed odors to support or attack certain environmental activities and certain social groups. In the first conflict, Chinese squid fishers wielded little power. Their production of offensive stenches became further evidence of their purported racial inferiority and provided grounds for their eviction. Fearing damage to tourism and real estate sales, the Pacific Improvement Company used odors to eliminate what it saw as undesirable people and inappropriate uses of the coastline. With the problem of cannery odors, however, power shifted back to the fisheries. As the sardine industry expanded in the 1920s and 1930s, so too did its influence over the community. Although similar groups of developers protested the squid odors and the cannery smells, they did not achieve the same results in the latter case. Sardine leaders defined the odors as a sign of economic prosperity, solidifying an industrial, working-class vision for the coastline. Olfactory sensitivity became construed as an assault on the local economy.

While odors often carried a negative connotation, the divergent outcomes of these disputes suggested that fish smells were not always interpreted as a distasteful phenomenon, as was the case with the Chinese. During the height of Monterey's sardine era, odors became ubiquitous, and most residents learned to turn their noses away from the noxious fumes, an unthinkable adaptation just a few decades earlier. Perceptions of odors, then, shifted in response to changing social and economic conditions. Ultimately, the persistence or absence of odors indicated which industry—tourism or fisheries—and which groups exerted greater influence over the development of Monterey's shores.

Impossible to recreate and difficult to imagine, “Monterey-by-the-Smell” survives only in the vivid descriptions of the residents.

and observers who once lived there. Yet examining odors offers another way to follow the historical connections between environmental and social change. Because odors were subjective and defied an easy method of measurement, groups with a vested interest in the Monterey coastline had considerable latitude to interpret smells and construct them to suit their particular needs and desires. The process of defining odors became a tool to exert control over nature and society. Thus, by paying closer attention to the smells that filled the air, historians can literally sniff out the complex social conflicts that surrounded the ever-shifting shores of California.