

REMARKS AT OPENING OF THE CLAM FESTIVAL,
ANNAPOLIS

August 11, 1967

It gives me great pleasure to open Maryland's most succulent festival — a full weekend of fine food and excellent entertainment assembled solely to celebrate the soft-shell clam.

In the great tradition of Maryland hospitality, concerts and cruises, dramas and dances, exhibits and contests have been scheduled to honor the bounteous bivalve which flourishes along the shores of the Chesapeake Bay.

The clam, in fact, is no stranger to public admiration and acclaim. Certain tribes of American Indians counted clam shells among their forms of acceptable currency or wampum. Marylanders cannot question that with the advent of the hydraulic clam dredge patented by Fletcher Hanks of Oxford, Maryland, the soft-shell clam industry has injected much twentieth century wampum into the State's economy.

However, in many ways Marylanders have failed to enjoy and exploit the softshell clam's fullest potential, perhaps because the clam as a plentiful product is a relative newcomer and has had to bask in the reflected glory of its more celebrated seafood brethren — the crab and the oyster. Today the clam need not take the backseat to any other single source of our Bay's bounty. Today 75% of the soft-shelled clams harvested in the United States come from Maryland. Still statistics bear out the failure of Marylanders to appreciate the Crown Prince of the Chesapeake, for over 90% of the product is shipped out of state, primarily to New England, where the clam has traditionally been recognized as the outstanding seafood fare.

The festival was inaugurated to excite and enlist Maryland enthusiasm for the soft-shell clam. No longer can New England claim the clambake or the chowder as exclusively theirs. For the clam has left the rocky Northern coasts to spawn and thrive along our fair and gentle Tidewater shores. Now we of Maryland must respond with an admiration of clam cuisine which is as typical in Baltimore as it is in Boston.

Clams are as versatile as they are delectable — they are the mollusks of all seasons. Marylanders, I do not ask you to give up your crab, your rockfish, or your oyster. I ask only that you add the soft-shell clam to its rightful place on your menu and your market list.