

THE Pacific
Northwest
SHELL CLUB

The Pacific Northwest Shell Club was established in 1960 with its purpose to promote the study of molluscs, the hobby of shell collecting, and the preservation of molluscan species.

MEETINGS

Meetings feature educational presentations and are held on the third Sunday of each month at the Lake City Christian Church, 1933 NE 125th, Seattle, Washington (see exceptions below). Meetings begin at 2 pm, but many members arrive shortly after 1 pm to talk, trade, and buy shells. Visitors are welcome. Special regular meetings are:
May .. Of Sea and Shore Museum
August Shell Auction
December Christmas Party

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Profile of a Sheller:

Thomas C. Rice

By Aretta McClure

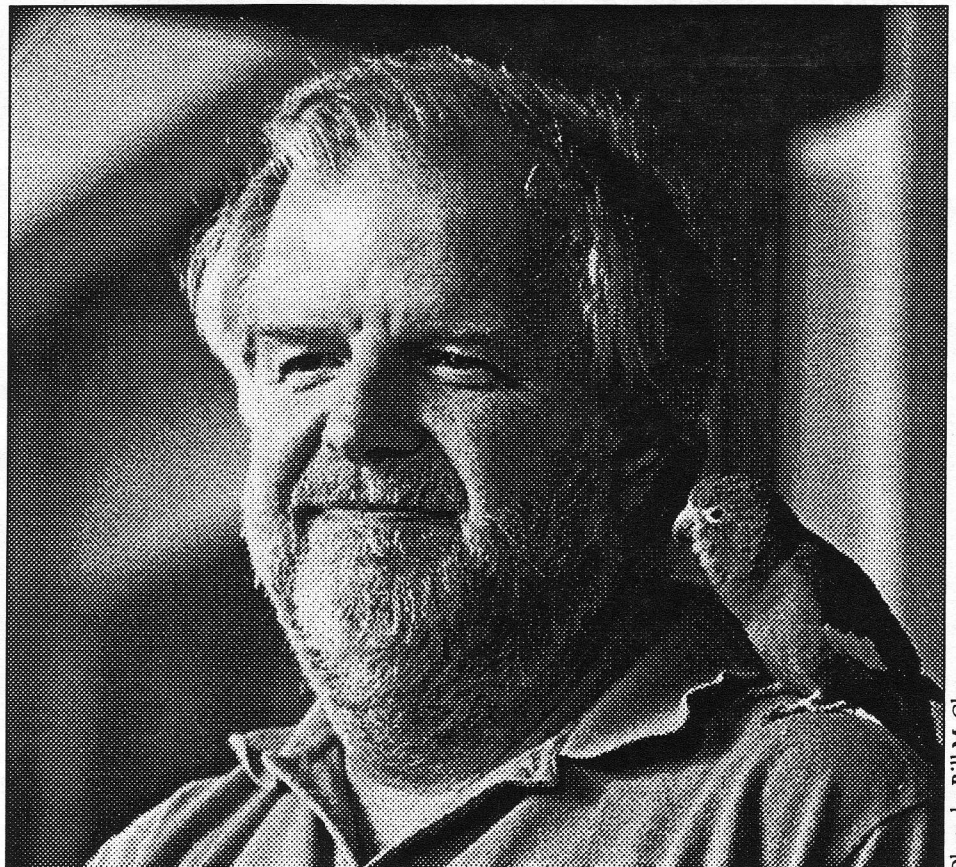


Photo by Bill McClure

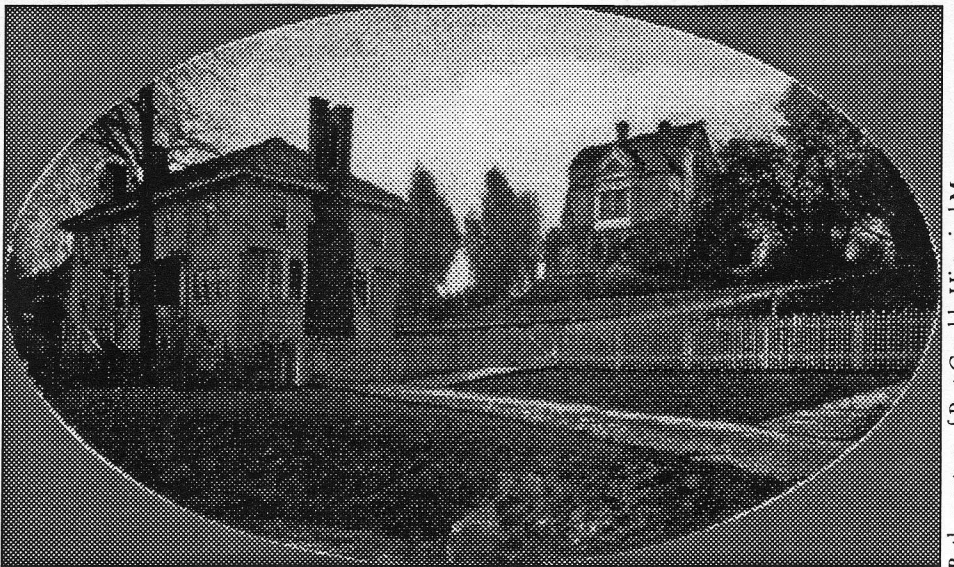
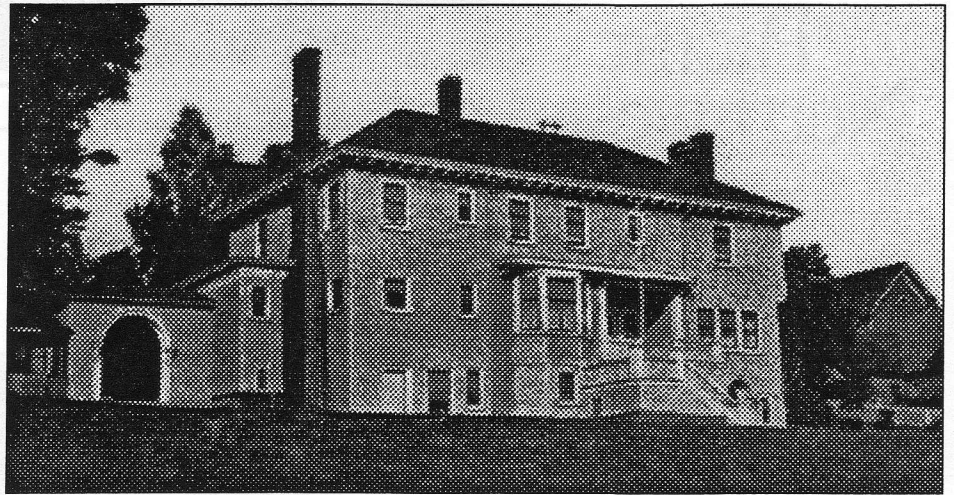
On the October afternoon Tom and I had arranged for me to interview him, I drove across the Hood Canal Bridge in slashing rain and, a mile further north, slowed to accommodate the 25 M.P.H. sign at the entrance to Port Gamble. Nearby, another sign reads:

*Established Sept. 1853
Historic Northwest Lumber Town*

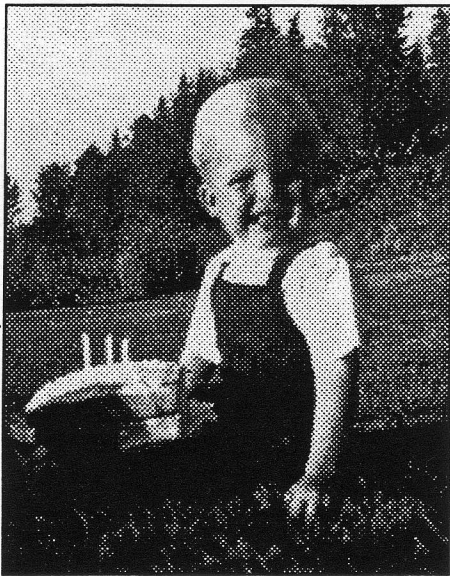
Autumn leaves, tattered tongues of flame, danced on wet branches of trees tossed by a fresh wind. Once again, I felt transported back one

hundred years or more to a slower and quieter time. The town, too, seems transported from an early New England site. Wood-framed houses rise, beautifully proportioned and mellow, from spacious parks of green. Those in the cemetery sleep up on the hill. Tourists had departed and I seemed to have the town to myself. There was a choice of parking places in front of the General Store, and when I turned off the engine, I could hear the rain falling. I tucked a writing tablet under my jacket and made a dash for the door.

As many of us shell enthusiasts know, from having been there chatting with him, Tom's office is on the second floor of the old Port Gamble General Store and is located at the back of the building behind his Shell Museum displays. It was there that we met to begin this interview. Tom was working at his computer but immediately stopped and with his usual gentle courtesy made sure I was comfortable before we began. And, having begun with the customary question, "Where were you born?", I was brought up short when Tom replied, "Oh, about 150 feet from here." Tom was born at the old Port Gamble hospital. The interview immediately veered into reminiscence, because my father helped raze the old hospital which, before it was a hospital, had been the home of A.G. Ames who succeeded Cyrus Walker, the first manager of the mill.



Above: The Manager's House became Port Gamble Hospital where Tom was born.
Left: Thomas C. Rice—probably before most of us knew him.



Courtesy of Tom Rice family

Whether the story is apocryphal or not, I do not know, but my father told me that when clipper ships sailed around the Horn to pick up lumber, they often carried as ballast bricks made in New England. This brick was used in the foundation of the home that later became the hospital.

As part payment for his labors in dismantling the old building, my father had been given loads of these bricks. Years later, I helped unearth hundreds of them from my parent's field where they had become covered with turf and wild and rangy blackberry bushes. I cleaned one thousand five hundred of them for the two fireplaces in our home in the San Juan Islands and for the fireplace in our present home on the Toandos Peninsula. Though I had never seen it, I felt I knew that old hospital—intimately.

Tom's mother's grandparents came to Washington Territory from

East Machias, Maine, the town from which also came Pope and Talbot founders of the oldest continually operating lumber mill in North America (sadly closed this year of 1996 and even now in the process being razed). Tom's great grandfather, Thomas Pierce, sailed around Cape Horn in 1859 on the sailing vessel *Toander*. It was a trip of months. In 1860, Mary Ellen Pierce Thomas's wife, with their son, Cotton, followed her husband west; sailed to the Isthmus of Panama, crossed the Isthmus in a covered wagon, and then sailed to San Francisco and up the coast to Seabeck



Courtesy of Tom Rice family

Above: Tom's first day of school. *Below, right:* Tom with a real Indian princess.

Thomas had taken up logging. He was considered to be wealthy, having arrived on Hood Canal with \$2,000! Mary Ellen was the sixth white woman in Seabeck, home to many Indian people who must have seemed strange to her since they still wore blankets and had feathers in their hair. The Pierces later moved to the Duckabush area across Hood Canal from Seabeck where they bought old Mr. Brinnon's 200 acre homestead. Here, with the help of oxen which he shod himself, Thomas continued logging and sold the logs to mills on the Canal, including Pope and Talbot which, in those early days, was known as the Puget Mill Company. Thomas Pierce's logging camp on the Duckabush had the dubious distinction, when two workmen had a falling out, of being the first murder on Hood Canal.

Thomas and Mary Ellen had eight children; one of them, Mamie

Edith Pierce, on May 8, 1901, married Henry Cotter, a man who had come to the region from Birkenhead, England, and they in turn parented seven children, one of whom was Edith, who would become Tom's mother. Edith had a brother also named Thomas. He was killed in a tragic accident in the lumber mill, and Tom was named for this uncle and hence only indirectly honored his great grandfather.

Tom's paternal grandfather came from Missouri and his paternal

grandmother was born in Canada and raised in Minnesota. The two met in Bremerton. Both his grandfathers, on his mother's and father's side, worked in the Port Gamble General Store, and everyone in Tom's family, on both sides, until his generation, worked at one time for Pope and Talbot.

The first shells Tom ever really saw were in a curio cabinet in his maternal grandparent's home, and this cabinet is now in his own home. Pope and Talbot had their own ships



which put in at Port Gamble and were provisioned through the General Store. Henry Cotter, Tom's mother's father, often received exotic gifts brought from far away places by the ships' captains. Among these were shells and even an ostrich egg from Africa with designs painted on it.

A memorable family acquisition came to them through one of the more colorful episodes of Port Gamble history. A group of Russian Alaska Indians attacked the settlers at Port Gamble and the *USS Massachusetts* arrived in their defense. When conciliation failed, the ship's howitzer fired several cannon balls at the Indian encampment and the Indians surrendered and returned north. Later, a local Indian, friendly to the town, found a cannon ball embedded in a cedar log he was sawing, and he brought it to Henry Cotter whose daughters, Tom's aunts, subsequently gave it to a local museum.

Henry Cotter was later to serve on the school board and became a justice of the peace. He purchased a twenty-acre ranch near Lofall, about four miles south of Port Gamble, at a place called "Four Corners" (from which a short road also leads to my own family's property). This is where the family home was still located when Tom attended grade school in Port Gamble. He lived next door to his paternal grandparents and, as he puts it, within "spitting distance" from his

maternal grandparents.

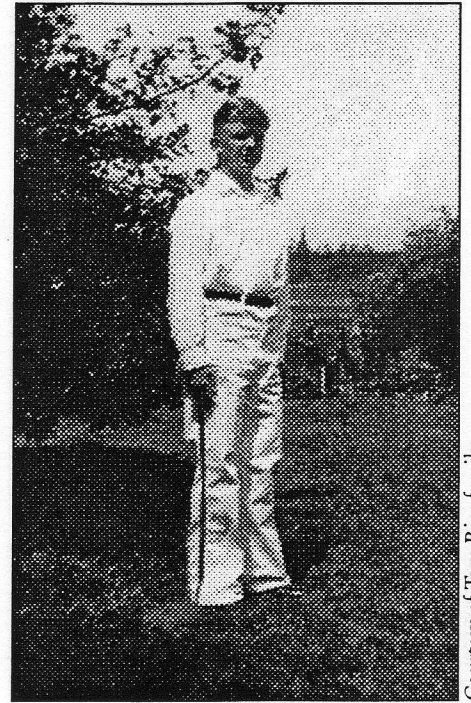
Tom's paternal grandmother was named Tillie, and he remembers helping her weed the garden, gather eggs, and pick berries, all the while listening to "Stella Dallas" and "One Man's Family" on the radio. It was with Tillie that he first started walking on the beach. She belonged to a Garden Club and would go in search of driftwood for flower arrangements, and Tom would gather shells. He had a particular penchant for the small *Littorina scutulata* Gould, 1849 — the checkered periwinkle — which were found on rocks high in the intertidal zone. He would glue in geometric designs on the bottoms of empty greeting card boxes and attach his littorinas. This, Tom explains, is his one claim to artistic fame.

He attended high school at North Kitsap in Poulsbo.

Tom's parents were in the school's first freshman class and Tom's class was the last to go all the way through to graduation.

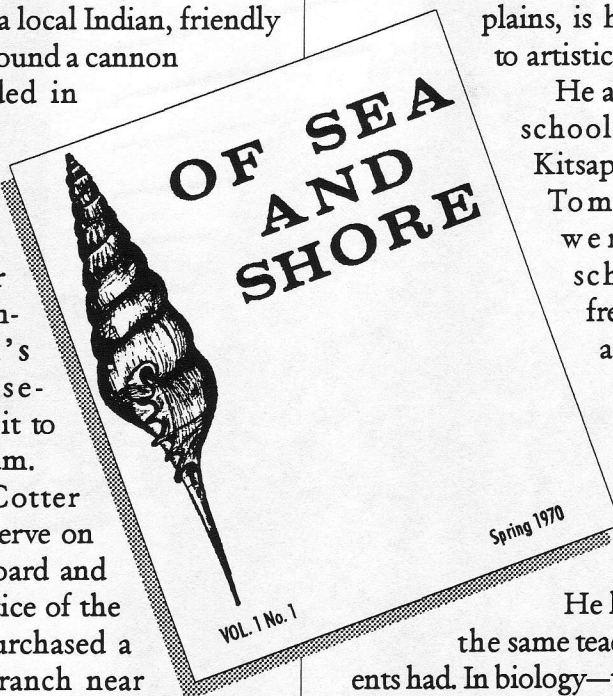
He had some of the same teachers his parents had. In biology — taught by the basketball coach — everyone had to have a project. Tom's first project was "Leaves," an arranging and naming of them. His second project, however, was on "Preserved Marine Life," a project on which he worked with his friend Bernie Hamlin, and this was to rekindle his interest in shells.

After graduation, Tom went to Olympic College where a major in-



The high school student—as drum major.

Courtesy of Tom Rice family



terest was zoology, and his adviser was Lynnwood Smith. Lynnwood lent Tom a copy of Oldroyd's *Marine Shells of Puget Sound*, and Tom proceeded to make a copy by typing the entire book! Lynnwood's father, Mr. Stephen J. Smith, is a valued member of the Pacific Northwest Shell Club, and he visits Tom at his Museum several times a year to obtain shells with which he makes up collections for children as part of a program in which Senior Volunteers help in schools.

Tom and his friend Bernie later entered their "Preserved Marine Life" project in a contest in Tacoma and won a prize. In 1957, Tom had a car and, filled with enthusiasm, the two friends headed for Makah where, as Tom states simply, they went "crazy" over the number of shells. They must have been keen, because it snowed while they were there and they were camped under plastic wrapped around a tree. While reflecting on it all, Tom comments with a

touch of nostalgia that is was “very primitive.”

He is not altogether sure how he began to get in touch with other shell collectors, but he does remember his first shell exchange with a man who worked at a resort on Captiva Island, Florida. Even today, he feels the ex-

citement of opening the package and seeing the variety of shell shapes and colors. He also remembers joining a group at this time, but it was not in the Washington area.

Tom came into contact with W. Jackson (Jack) Sallee and Joan Shields in Seattle and together they went

collecting to Neah Bay. The three of them decided they needed to form a club, and it was with them that the Pacific Northwest Shell Club originated, the first meeting being held on September 18, 1960 at Sallee’s apartment on Capitol Hill. The second meeting took place in Tacoma at the old aquarium (no longer extant) by the boat house. The Smileys, long time Pacific Northwest Shell Club members, traveled from Ridgefield, Washington for this meeting. The Club actually formed as the Northwest Shell Club, but this posed a problem because clubs in the east thought of the old northwest and envisioned the new club in some place like Minnesota. Sally Snyder (now Sally Crittenden) had a lawyer friend who made up the papers of incorporation and this problem was solved when the club incorporated as the Pacific Northwest Shell Club.

Within a year after the club was formed, the need for a newsletter was felt and, with Tom as its first editor, a newsletter at that time untitled, was produced on the ditto machine in the Pope and Talbot office. Production was then moved to the ditto machine in Cookie Wingard’s living room. Tom later mimeographed the paper and then bought a Linotype machine and printing press. (After seeing the Linotype in the basement of Tom’s home and hearing his explanation of how it functioned, I felt enormous relief at seeing the computer in his office.)

During the 1962 World’s Fair, the Shell Club was asked to place a display in the Jonas Brothers’ taxidermy store. Jonas Brothers had display cases that the club used, and, after the Fair, Tom purchased two of these cases and arranged shell displays in the basement of his home where Scout groups were invited to come and view the shells.

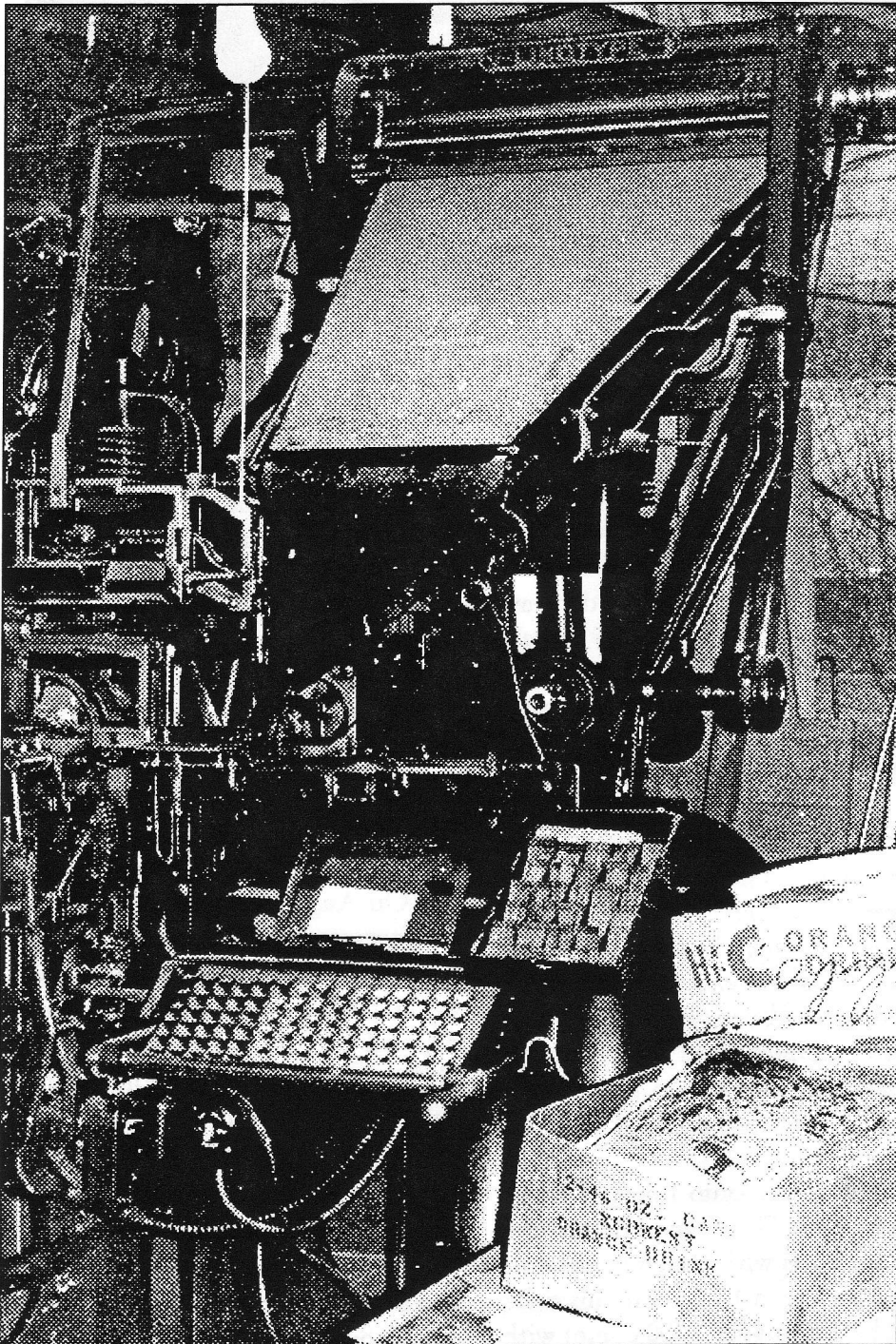


Photo by Aretta McClure

The Linotype machine on which early issues of the *Northwest Shell News* (forerunner of *The Dredgings*) were published. It’s now stored in the basement of Tom’s home.

Tom's editorship of the club's early newsletter was a modest but fertile beginning for the many publications he has produced. The first of these was *The Catalog of Dealer's Prices for Marine Shells* published in 1965. When Abbott and Wagner came out with the *Standard Catalog of Shells*, they included values. Tom noted that some Pacific northwest shells which were uncommon to rare were only priced at about 10 cents each whereas common shells from elsewhere were priced much higher, and he wished to rectify this. His catalog is now in its 14th edition and is published annually. Worldwide, it has become known familiarly as "Rice's Prices."

His next project was the *Marine Gastropods from the Puget Sound Region* which appeared in 1968. It was a record from members of the club stating where they had found certain species. Also in 1968, Tom edited *Additions and Revisions to A. Myra Keen's Sea Shells of Tropical West America*. He did not further pursue updating this list, however, when he learned that Dr. Keen herself was working on a greatly expanded and revised second edition. In close succession followed *A Sheller's Directory of Clubs, Books, Periodicals and Dealers* first published in 1969. The publication resulted from people's inquiries about shell clubs in their areas and available books as well as where to buy shells. The *Sheller's Directory* is now in its 20th edition and, like the *Catalog of Dealer's Prices*, is published annually.

At this same time, Tom was continuing his collecting trips to Mexico — trips which he started making in 1964 — and there he was meeting collectors from other parts of the country. Repeatedly, he heard them express the need for a magazine

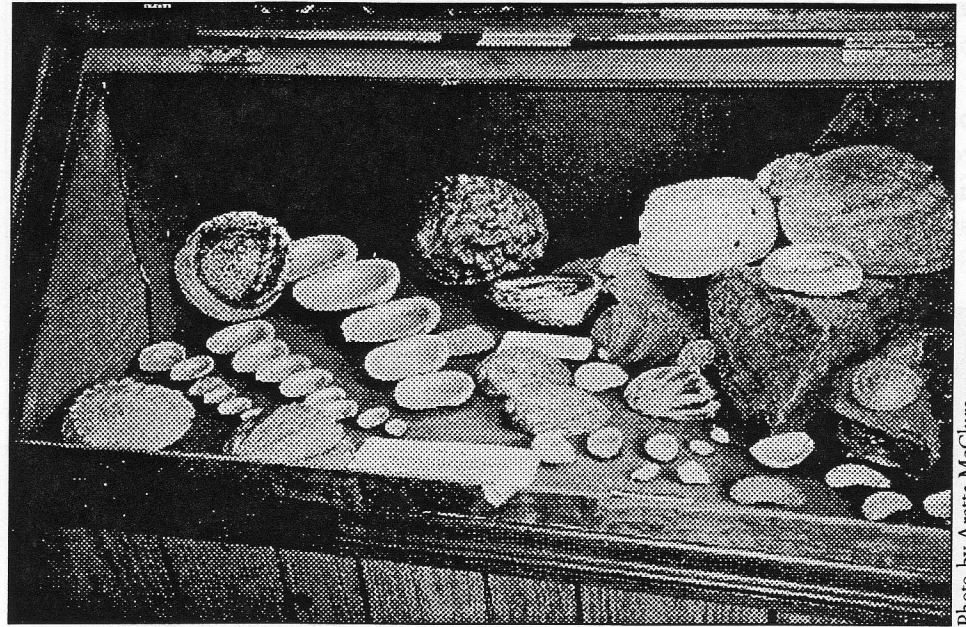


Photo by Aretta McClure

A display of abalones, one of many displays in Tom's Of Sea and Shore Museum.

devoted to shells. There had been an attempt with a publication entitled "Shells and Their Neighbors" by a woman in California and, of course, many clubs had their newsletters. During his 1968 trip to Mexico, Tom was with Everet and Mabel Stiles, and they wrote up an idea of how to start a magazine. When Tom returned home, he contacted people to submit articles, and he also contacted prospective advertisers.

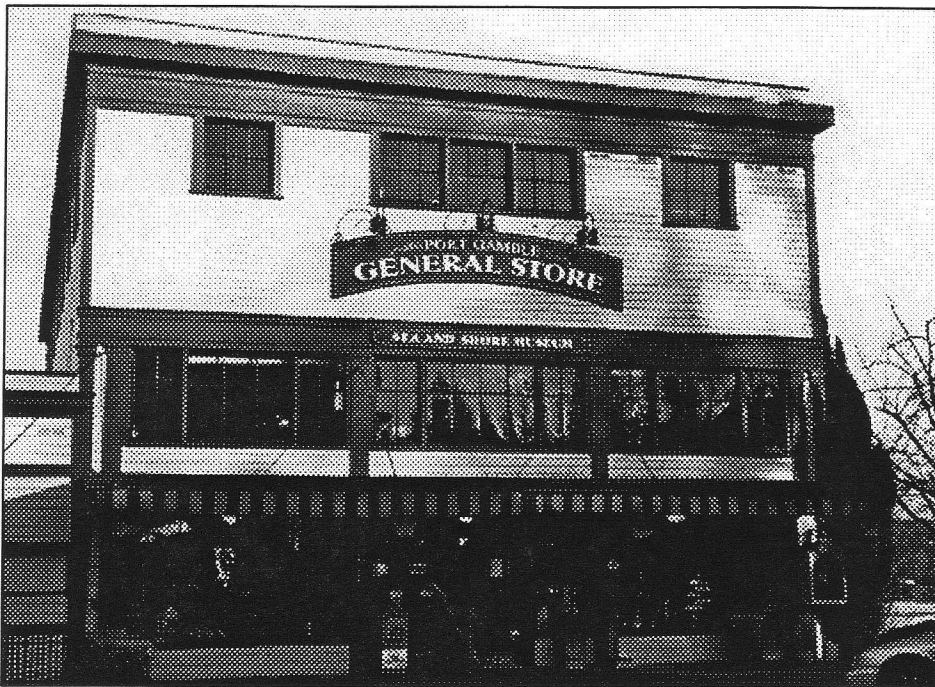
Spring of 1970 saw the first issue of *Of Sea and Shore* magazine. This first issue was mailed free to anyone interested in shells for whom Tom had an address. He soon discovered that costs far exceeded available funds, so he borrowed Jerry Ward's electric mimeograph which, unfortunately, proved not to be practical from an electrical point of view, because it fed too fast and caused the transfer of ink onto finished pages. Undaunted, Tom hand cranked the mimeograph with his left hand while hand feeding each page with his right, and he did this for 2,000 copies with 52 pages in each copy! If that wasn't enough, he had to place a blank sheet

between each page as it came from the machine to ensure that no ink transferred onto the clean pages and therefore, later, had to separate the printed sheets from the blanks—also by hand. This first effort, however, did bring 500 subscriptions. Tom recalls that he received the munificent sum of \$3.50 a year for each subscription. The magazine peaked in the early 80's with 1,500 subscribers.

Also in 1970, Tom ventured briefly into the world of shell dealers. On August 1, 1970, he issued a 53 page catalog of *Specimen Shells*. The shells were from the west coast of the United States and from Mexico, and the catalog cost 50 cents. Today, his shell selling effort is relegated to specimens offered at the Museum.

Ellis Robinson of Edmonds, Washington had developed a three-color separation process for printing, and he and his wife, Gayle, had done a book on Pacific northwest wildflowers and Gayle's parents had produced one on rocks and minerals of the

Photo by Aretta McClure



Above: Of Sea and Shore Museum is located in historic Port Gamble's old General Store. Below: The museum displays: the General Store's old shelves were used and fitted with glass doors to protect the shells.

Pacific northwest. Gayle was from Poulsbo, a town situated only a few miles from Port Gamble, and knew Tom. She and her husband Ellis approached him with the request that he do a book on seashells for their series. Also in this series was a book on starfish by Virginia Pill and Marjorie Fulong — the Furlongs had an aquarium and a gift shop at Hoodport where they also displayed shells; their shells, and other marine specimens, are now part of Bert and Dorothy Harrison's Shellflair Shell and Marine Museum in Westport. Tom's book in this series was published in 1971 as *Marine Shells of the Pacific Northwest*. In 1972, Robinson also published Tom's book on *What Is A Shell?* This same year, Ellis Robinson sold his book line to another



Photo by Bill McClure

company who changed the title of Tom's book to *Marine Shells of the Pacific Coast* to include California and increase the book's marketing base. Unfortunately out of print, it is still of tremendous help in identifying shells in the field, and second hand copies are quickly purchased.

Again, from the relatively humble beginnings of two shell display cases which scout groups came to view, Tom began to think about a Shell Museum. He did not originally think of Port Gamble but began to look for a locale in Port Townsend. Pope and Talbot was planning to put a museum in the upper floors of the General Store. When they decided instead to place it in the basement of the building, Tom began considering these upper floors — actually, at that time, just the second floor. Pope and Talbot thought he would be placing only a few cases. When the mill manager's son and his wife, Larry and Judy Peck, became interested in helping, they started extending the exhibits. The General Store had open shelves on which merchandise had been stored and displayed; originally, these shelves were used to display the shells, and heavy plastic was placed over them for protection. Judy Peck painted two murals for the Museum, one of a Puget Sound beach and another of a coral reef. With the help of Jerry and Agnes Ward, Tom was later able to enclose the displays in glass with interior lighting. The Wards and Herb and Wilma Young with their son and his wife helped lay carpet in the museum section. The Shell Museum opened near Memorial Day of 1973.

Tom has kept a guest book over the years and continues to be amazed to find that people visit from all parts of the world. He mentioned, by way of example, visitors from Saudi Ara-

bia, the Galapagos, French Polynesia and Chile. Actor John Wayne and Chuck Connors of "The Rifleman" T.V. series have come to view the shells. Raymond Burr of the "Perry Mason" T.V. series was an avid collector and he and Tom visited by phone; it was he who advised Tom to make the Museum a non-profit corporation, advice which Tom immediately put into effect.

By the mid 80's, the Museum dis-

poses his two interests and limits his earlier collection to stamps with shells pictured on them. This interest led to his publication of *A Checklist of Mollusks on Postage Stamps*, first published in *Of Sea and Shore* magazine and now in its 5th edition which came out in September of this year, 1996. Tom currently writes a column for the Italian shell journal *La Conchiglia* on this same subject of shells on stamps.

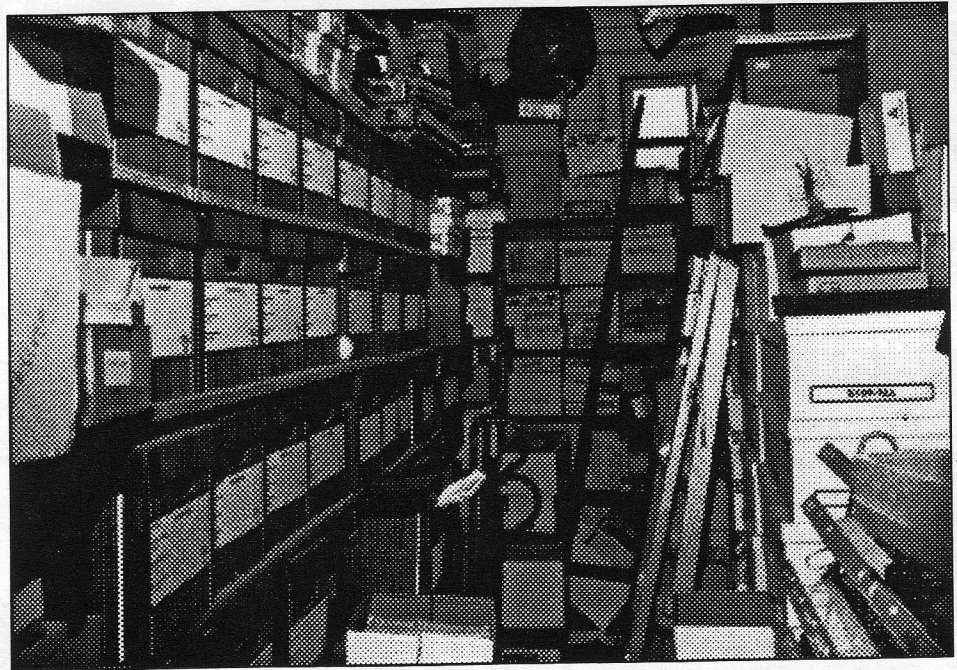


Photo by Aretta McClure

The Museum's storeroom: shells not currently on display are kept in banker's boxes.

plays had extended to the third floor. Also on the third floor is a room directly over Tom's office which contains copies of his publications and is chockablock from floor to ceiling, wall to wall with books and magazines. One has visions of its massive weight all caving in on Tom and leaving him pressed flat as a character in a Bugs Bunny cartoon. Tom allays this fear by pointing to the beam across the ceiling of his office, a beam that would prove the mettle of any worthwhile lumber mill.

Before Tom was a shell collector, he collected stamps and now com-

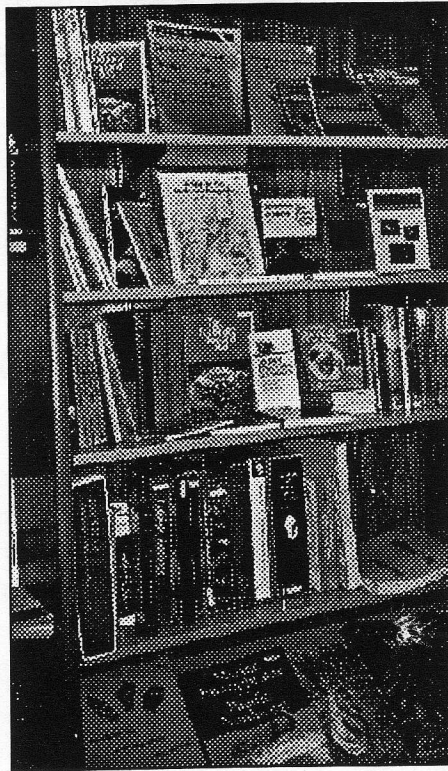
Many shellers who subscribed to *Of Sea and Shore* magazine have wondered about the hiatus in its continuity. It all has to do with bridges. Tom was a bridge tender on the Hood Canal Bridge from 1961 when it opened to 1964 when he became the toll collector on the bridge. In 1969, he returned to bridge tending and held this position until February of 1979 when the bridge blew down in winds which neared 100 miles an hour. After the bridge sank, there were plans within the year to replace it with a Bailey bridge, a temporary floating pontoon bridge,

which would later be replaced by a permanent bridge. Because this proposed waiting period was not long, Tom decided to decline a position with the ferry system. Before the temporary bridge was built, however, a lawsuit was brought over the bidding procedure, and this resulted in Tom being unemployed for four years instead of one, four years which he bore at his own expense. When the rebuilt bridge opened in November of 1982, the position of permanent bridge tender had been replaced by a part time position which Tom resumed. Without full time income to help support the magazine and with increased printing costs, Tom was forced to suspend publication in 1983. In January of 1984, Tom was again assigned to be toll collector; this position lasted but a short time when another lawsuit resulted in the removal of tolls, and Tom was transferred as bridge tender to the Blair Bridge in Tacoma. In the fall of 1990, Tom was able to once again resume publication of the magazine, and the current issue, as we write, is Volume 19, number 3. The magazine has always been a quarterly and has usually averaged about 60 pages in length.

The international Sheller's Directory was first published by John Q. Burch and later by M. E. Young, but it ceased publication with her death in the early 90's. The directory listed shellers worldwide and also listed their areas of interest. After a lapse of time, Tom felt there was a need for a similar publication and hence was born the *Directory of Conchologists/Malacologists* in 1993. The 3rd edition will be out in 1997.

Tom's experiences as tour director for shelling trips is a story in itself. In 1972, he led his first tour to Costa Rica with members mostly

from Florida and the east coast. He became involved when a man in Florida gave the trip to him if he would be the tour leader. This same person who, Tom decided with good reason, shall remain nameless, organized the next trip to New Zealand and Australia. He sent only enough money for the first week's expenses and said he would then meet the group — which he did not do. He did send enough money for another week of hotels in New Zealand. The group was supposed to visit the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, but, when they checked with airline personnel in New Zealand, they discovered that by the time they reached the reef they could spend only a half day before they had to turn around and return home. The tour was somewhat rescued when the group turned in their tickets for refunds which covered a four day stay in Tahiti. After this experience, Tom decided



The bookstore section of the Museum. Above, right: Tom and "B.C."

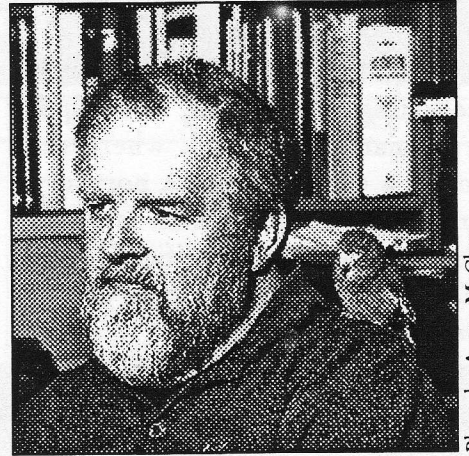


Photo by Aretta McClure

he could do a better job of organizing and resolved to do his own tours.

Subsequent tours have taken Tom to Australia, Senegal, Costa Rica (again), Palau, Mauritius, Kenya, Egypt, the Comoro Islands, Madagascar, Bonaire, Fiji, Tahiti (again), Philippines, Thailand, Hawaii, Majuro, Guam, Bora Bora, Huahine, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Alaska and western Canada. The thrill of exotic places is sometimes not without its down side. Tom remembers the 16 mile trek back to town when the car he was in broke down while he was in Alaska, and the flight on 'Air Madagascar' across the Mozambique Channel to Kenya when the plane flew from cool to warm air and suddenly shot up several hundred feet. On the same trip, the group was also to fly 'Air Ethiopia,' and it was just after the last Arab-Israeli war. It was far from calming to notice, as the plane lifted on take off, that along the sides of the runways were wrecked hulks of Arab planes shot down by Israelis. Tom's tour group was completely surrounded by Arab passengers. The plane suddenly veered off course and over the intercom came the theme from "Exodus." Tom's immediate thought was, "This is it — we're being hijacked by Israelis!" As things turned out, how-

ever, the plane changed course only to avoid a storm. In '72, while night collecting in Costa Rica, Tom helped a woman turn a rock where she found a *Conus ebraeus*, a normally Indo-Pacific shell which is rarely found in the eastern Pacific. Tom did not collect one until 7 trips and 20 years later.

The Pacific Northwest Shell Club has traveled vicariously on many of these tours. Tom hosts the May meeting in Port Gamble and speaks about his travels while illustrating them with excellent slides. He also serves platter-sized cookies. Understandably, it is usually one of the best attended meetings of the year.

Tom belongs to several organizations dedicated to the study of shells. He is a charter member and first president of the Pacific Northwest Shell Club — he also served a second time as president; he is a charter member and was president of the Marine Science Society that meets in Poulsbo; he is a charter member of the Western Society of Malacologists; he is a member since 1970 of the Conchological Society of Great Britain and Ireland and is also a member of the Malacological Society of Australasia (formerly Australia).

On the third floor of the Museum, as well as the hundreds of shells on display, there is, opposite the storage room for books and periodicals, a large room filled with banker's boxes which are, in turn, filled with shells. Tom has some 20,000 species and over a million shells. He has no favorite families but has a particular fondness for micro mollusks. He claims that for him, the best part of his interest in shells has been the people he has been privileged to know. The number is legion, but the names

that come to the fore during this day's memories are Walter Eyerdam, 'Mr. Northwest Naturalist,' publisher of many articles who had a mountain as well as shells named for him; Trevor Kincaid, University of Washington professor who started the Friday Harbor labs; Frank Bernard, deep water bivalve specialist from the Biological Station at Nanaimo; Lola Griffith, who wrote about intertidal univalves of British Columbia; Ian McT. Cowan, professor at the University of British Columbia who described the chiton *Mopalia spectabilis*; Allyn G. Smith of the California Academy of Sciences; G Dallas Hanna, who studied introduced mollusks of the west coast; A. Myra Keen, author of *Sea Shells of Tropical West America*; Rudolph Stohler, initiator and editor of *The Veliger* for many years; Tucker Abbott, probably the most famous U.S. shell specialist and author; William Clench, Curator of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard; Bill Old of the American Museum of Natural History in New York city; and Gary Rosenberg, presently at the Academy of Sciences in Philadelphia and also an author— Tom remembers with pleasure that when Gary was in college he was a member of one of Tom's tours.

Last year (1995), in addition to the magazine and the work he brings out annually, Tom published a whimsical little recipe book entitled *Beach Banquet*, a work that was conceived as early as 1978. He also invited to the Museum, where they meet for informal discussion, a group of people interested in shells and marine life. The group meets at 1:00 pm on the first Saturday of the month, and anyone who is interested is welcome to attend.

Despite the impressive, almost overwhelming, impact of Tom's record of achievements, it is a record that is far from closed. He is working on a revised and updated version of his book which first appeared as *Marine Shells of the Pacific Northwest*. He is also working on a *Checklist of the Shelled Marine Mollusca of the Oregonian Faunal Province* which would cover Cape Mendocino, California to Queen Charlotte Strait, British Columbia. In his plans is a *Sheller's Almanac*, a general reference on shell collecting — where to go, what to take, how to start a club, put on a show, do a newsletter, etc. — and a book with the intriguing title of *Down East, Out West: Story of Port Gamble, Washington*.

My note taking to an end, and my farewells also, I returned to the car. The rain had lessened, but the wind had strengthened and already divested the trees of some of their autumnal glory. I felt tired but extremely gratified at Tom's generous efforts to be helpful and informative. As I drove away, I thought I should have wished him long life. He's going to need it to finish all that work. ❖

* * *

In addition to the information given me by Tom Rice, some facts were obtained from the section on the family's history in *Kitsap County History: A Story of Kitsap County and Its Pioneers*, Book II, "North Kitsap County," ed. Rangvald Kvelstad (Seattle, 1977), p. 143.

I wish also to thank Tom's parents, Frank and Edith Rice for welcoming me to their home to take photographs — especially of the monolithic Linotype.