



**1960 - 2010  
Happy New Year  
and  
Happy Birthday**  
by George P. Holm

This year we shall be celebrating fifty years as a club. It was 1960 when Tom Rice, Jackson (Jack) Sallee and Joan Shields decided that they needed to form a club while they were on a collecting trip to Neah Bay. The first meeting of the Northwest Shell Club was held on September 18, 1960 at Sallee's apartment on Capitol Hill and the second, the following month at the old aquarium in Tacoma. Members who attended those two meetings became charter members. Tom Rice was elected the club's first president and membership dues were set at \$2 for adults and \$1 for junior members.

1961 became a year of many firsts for the club. In January our club newsletter, the Northwest Shell News, began with Tom Rice as its first editor. In June, a week-long field trip to San Juan Island was held and twenty people, members and family, attended. When the trip was first planned, a one dollar nonrefundable deposit was required to secure a place on the trip. By November, membership had grown to 145. The club was incorporated and the name changed to what it is today, the Pacific Northwest Shell Club.

The club promoted itself wherever an opportunity arose. An Exhibit was placed in the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle and during the 1962 World's Fair, the Shell Club was asked to place a display in the Jonas Brothers' taxidermy store. After months of planning, the club held its first shell show in October 1962, again in the Jonas Brother's store.

While looking for a place to hold meetings, the Seattle City Council had offered to give the club the old waterfront firehouse as a permanent meeting place, if we got it moved from its location. Ralph Jones and Walter Eyerdam looked into ways of moving it and placing it on a barge. Regrettably that was a good idea that did not work, since fifty years later, we still, occasionally, must look for a new location to hold our meetings.

These historical bits of our club's early beginnings came from the pages of the club's newsletter. The Northwest Shell News changed to the Pacific Northwest Shell News when the club was incorporated and to our current name, the Dredgings, in 1972. During the year we shall use these resources to glean further items of interest about our club and its members.

All issues of the newsletter are being transferred to PDF files and when completed, they will be available to members through the club library.

*The Dredgings* Volume 50 No.1, 2010



**The Beginnings of the Pacific Northwest Shell Club**

by Tom Rice

As a brash upstart in the "shell game", at the "ripe old age of 20", I thought nothing about contacting those people who had been in "the game" for more years than I had been on earth. It didn't occur to me that I should "stay in my place" – so I started correspondence with people like Dr. William J. Clench (Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University), Dr. R. Tucker Abbott (Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia), Prof. Trevor Kincaid (University of Washington) and Prof. Masao Azuma (National Museum, Tokyo). All responded kindly and with advice or answers to this amateur's many questions. At the same time I tried to build up an address file of people in the Pacific Northwest who had an interest in mollusks.

In late 1959 I became acquainted with a couple from Seattle (W. Jackson Sallee and Joan Shields) who came across the Sound for a visit and to "talk shells". We talked about people and places concerning shells and I mentioned that, during my Senior year of high school's spring break, a friend and I had traveled along the coast of Washington State looking

for marine specimens for a science project. We had found Makah Bay, on the southern shore of Cape Flattery, near Neah Bay to be a great collecting spot. There and then a plan was formed to go to Neah Bay during the year's lowest tides in June.

We had a great time collecting, in both Makah Bay and along the shoreline and breakwater in Neah Bay itself. Besides the excitement of finding many species new to our collections (illustrating the differences between an open coast environment and the protected Puget Sound habitats we were used to), we enjoyed the atmosphere of the Makah tribe's village. One evening we decided to see the movie playing in the town's small movie theatre. Those who knew Jack remember his ever-present crew cut and he sat in an aisle seat. A very large stern-looking tribal member walking down to his seat nearer the front stopped beside Jack, ran his fingers through Jack's crew cut and stated loudly, "nice scalp!", which brought a laugh from not only Jack, Joan and myself, but the other tribal members awaiting the film's start and "broke the ice" between we three, who were the only non-tribal members there, and the rest of the crowd. For the duration of our stay in Neah Bay we were met with smiles and giggles.

Anyway, it was during our evenings in Neah Bay that we got to wondering if there was enough interest amongst shell collectors in the Pacific Northwest to start a shell club. We felt the only way to find out was to attempt it. So, upon returning home I made up a form letter which was sent to all for whom I had an address, advancing the idea of starting a shell club and asking that those interested show up at Jack's Capitol Hill apartment on a Sunday in September of 1960. I think the letter went out to several dozen people in an area ranging from Vancouver, British Columbia in the north to Salem, Oregon in the south and east to Ellensburg and Pullman.

On the prescribed Sunday, Joan, Jack and I waited anxiously to see just who would come and how many – Jack's apartment was quite small. In the end we had, I believe, something like sixteen attendees. It was a mix of those who had built up reputations in the field, like Walter J. Eyerdam (who had traveled the world collecting) and Phil Spicer (who had co-authored a number of new molluscan species back in the 1930's thru 1950's) to those of us just getting a serious start in this fascinating hobby. Through the mutual interest in shells we all quickly bonded and friendships that would last decades were formed that day. Those attending besides Walter and Phil and his wife Amzel, were Elsie Marshall, Salle Snyder, the Jones, Col. Harvey Johnson, Effie Forthun, Cookie Wingard, Lola Elford, and Peggy Olsen.

For some reason – maybe as payback for me starting the organization – I was voted in as the first President of the Northwest Shell Club (name was later changed to Pacific Northwest Shell club to avoid confusion as easterners seemed to think the "northwest" was Minnesota, North Dakota, etc.) Phil Spicer was elected Vice-president. A second meeting was scheduled for the Point Defiance Aquarium in Tacoma in November.

Now I am aghast that it is 50 YEARS later. The Club is still going strong with interesting monthly meetings, programs, and field trips.

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## **The Club's Beginnings**

by Ann Smiley

In 1960 we received a letter from Tom Rice asking if we were interested in forming a shell club. He also asked other questions, among them, what month would work for the organizing meeting.

My mother, my cousin and I were all interested so we wrote back saying that any month except September would work for us. Disappointingly, that first meeting was held in September. I spent the month of September in New Zealand meeting local collectors and shelling with them and Madge and my mother decided to wait for the next meeting when we could all go together.

At that time the club was only meeting every other month, so we set off in November for Peggy Olsen's home in Tacoma, to attend the second meeting of the club. It was great to meet the other members, before then the only local collectors we had met were Cookie Wingard, Lola Elford and their small group from Gig Harbor.

In the early days of the club our programs were often talks on collecting trips by members who had traveled out of the local area and were mostly illustrated with slides. As I recall most of the programs were on shelling in Mexico as a number of people went to Mexico in the winter.

Our first shell auction was a lot of fun as many of us had smaller collections which grew over the years as we had more opportunities to add to them through auctions and trades with other members as well as shells that were brought to the club to be sold.

One of the first organized trips that the club made was to Lonesome Cove Resort on San Juan Island. Elsie Marshall and her family and my mother and I planned to camp at the county park instead of staying at the resort. As I had 2 or 3 days of vacation before the trip my mother and I went first to Mukkaw Bay, shelling there for a couple of days. The night

before we were to travel to San Juan Island we called home to find that my grandmother had died. I said we had to go home. My mother said she did but I didn't and she was taking me to Lonesome Cove. I said I wouldn't have a place to stay but she insisted that if nothing else someone would let me throw my sleeping bag on the floor of their cottage if there wasn't an extra bed. And that is pretty much how it worked. As soon as we got to Lonesome Cove, talked to some of the other members and unloaded my things she headed back to the ferry to go home to the funeral arriving back to pick me up with a little time for collecting the last day before everyone headed home. The collecting was great. Some of us hired a boat to take us to Little Cactus Island which was uninhabited as it is little. The collecting there was excellent since it was not easily accessible. We even came back with *Haliotis kamschatkana* which none of us had found previously. I think everyone added new species to their collections. Also on this trip we had a chance to get acquainted with Bill Old from the American Museum of Natural History. He had come from New York to join us on this collecting trip.



Our first shell show was held at the Lake City Community Center and included an aquarium which we never tried again as something happened during the night and we had water on the floor and some water damage to worry about. It didn't seem to be practical to risk having more water damage to have to pay for. We have had a lot of successful shows without live shells. This has also been a good way to find other people who are interested in shells and to gain new members.

I doubt that any of us at those first meetings realized how long lasting and important the shell club would become not only to us but to the students we helped attain higher degrees with our scholarships and authors that we helped with research both physically and financially. Our members have found new species, have had shells named for them and have named shells. We have donated specimens to museums and have willingly shared our knowledge and experiences.

Over the years we have had speakers not only from the Pacific Northwest and California but also from the east coast and even from Australia. We have been the host club for national meetings of the AMU-PD and COA.

We have formed long lasting friendships that have been important to us. We have gone on collecting trips together both near and far. We have visited members in their new homes. We have attended weddings and funerals as we have gained and lost members of our extended shell club family, because that is what it has become.

We have always been able to reach out to the shell club for moral support and comfort in good times and bad. I hope it will continue in this way for many years to come.

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### **How I found the club**

by George Holm

With this issue of *The Dredgings*, our club will have existed as a club for fifty years. Fifty years, five decades or half a century, no matter how it is written, it doesn't seem as if it is possible that it could be that long. However, the calendar and the bones of those of us that have been in the club for all, or most of, that time tell us it is not an illusion.

I first heard about the club in May of 1969. I had just returned to my car after my first collecting trip to the Ogden Point Breakwater in Victoria when a man, who was also carrying a bucket of shells, returned to his car just a couple of spaces from mine. That person was Hal Scheidt. We chatted about what we each had found and he told me of a new shell club that had been formed of which he was a member. Prior to that time I had no idea that a club even existed. I wanted to go and see for myself, but since summer activities had already been planned, the meeting at the Tacoma Aquarium in September would be the earliest one I could attend.

The drive to Tacoma turned out to be exactly two hundred miles from my home in North Vancouver. The I-5 was still only a gleam in some engineer's eye, and I drove the entire distance on old Highway 99, which wound its way through every town and city. There was also the border, but back then there was not the volume nor the security there is today.

I was made welcome when I arrived, and after introductions, I learned that the meeting was the Annual Auction. Money was a limited resource for me back then, but I still managed to come home with some nice shells. I paid my \$2 dues and became a member of the club that day. I had found what I had been looking for, a club where members were willing to share their experience with a young, novice collector such as myself and I was very eager to learn. I have been a member since. There were a few years when I did not attend meetings, but I kept up with happenings through the newsletter. My earliest mentors were people I met at that first meeting. They were Elsie Marshall, Ann Smiley, Nancy Brown, and of course, Hal Scheidt, the person who, by fortune or chance, I had met on the breakwater in Victoria, and who was responsible for my finding the club.

My interest in collecting, and ultimately joining the club, I credit entirely to my viewing the Newcombe Shell Collection which was on display back then at the Royal British Columbia Museum. Following information I read on the labels, I went to the

breakwater to see what I could find. There I met Hal Scheidt, learned about the club, and became a member. Last year, forty years later, I attended the club's field trip to the museum in Victoria where, as a special treat, that same collection was brought out of storage for us to see. How is that for coming full circle?

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