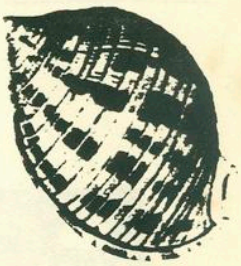
NORTH CAROLINA SHELL CLUB


Scotch Bonnet



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WELCOME TO 1994 - SHELL CLUB'S 38th YEAR

Wilmington and Wrightsville Beach NC — **November 18th / 19th / 20th, 1994**

ANNUAL SHELL SHOW AND BANQUET MEETING

Friday, 18 November 1994

Meeting place:	Cape Fear Museum, Market St at 8th St in Wilmington (Route 17B)
9:00am-5:00pm	**North Carolina Shell Show** (second floor)
Meeting place:	St Matthew's Lutheran Church, 612 South College Rd (Rt 132), Wlmington
7:30pm	Registration; refreshments; socializing; sale of chances for the Glory-of-the-Sea cone
8:00pm	**Awards Ceremony** for Shell Show winners
	"**Mostly for Beginners**" with **Vicky Wall** on carrier shells
	"**Growing up Afloat**" with **Anne McCrary**
	Business meeting, including election of officers for 1995
	Door prizes

Saturday, 19 November 1994

Meeting place:	Cape Fear Museum, Market St at 8th St in Wilmington (Route 17B)
9:00am-5:00pm	**North Carolina Shell Show** (second floor)
Meeting place:	The Oceanic Restaurant, 703 S Lumina Ave, Wrightsville Beach (3rd floor)
	Annual Banquet (**reservation required**, see enclosed card)
6:15pm	Social time with cash bar just outside our meeting room
7:00pm	Dinner; see page **2** for details
Afterward:	"**Conchological Textiles --- A Selection from the Sage Collection**" with **Walter Sage**
	Drawing for the **Glory-of-the-Sea** cone
	Door prizes

Sunday, 20 November 1994

Meeting place:	Cape Fear Museum Market St at 8th St in Wilmington (Route 17B)
2:00pm-5:00pm	**North Carolina Shell Show . . . "thanks for coming, have a safe trip home !"**

PROGRAM NOTES

Our Friday speaker is **Dr Anne B McCrary**, retired Professor of Biology at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW). Her specialty has been **zooplanktonology**, the study of the ocean's tiny animals without backbones. She will show us how some of our shells and other creatures start out in life and develop in the early stages.

Vicky Wall opens with a brief review of carrier shells.


Walter Sage

On Saturday, it's world-renowned **Walter Sage** from the American Museum of Natural History in New York, who doubles as our Shell Show principal judge and triples as the Treasurer and Advertising Manager for the Conchologists of America.

This superb conchologist, who is a consultant on major shell books published around the world (most recently, Australian Marine Shells) will talk to us about a subject on which he is the world's leading authority. What else but shell shirts and the cloth that they come from ?! Those who attended the auction saw two examples that he had donated.

BANQUET MENU

We expect to get back to a buffet next year, but this time we are doing it differently, asking you to select one of the entrées below:

GRILLED CHICKEN TERIYAKI
Boneless Breast of Chicken Grilled with Teriyaki Sauce
and Served over Seasoned Vegetables and Rice
$13.40

CAPE FEAR SEAFOOD LASAGNA
Shrimp, Scallops and Fish in a Tomato Creole Sauce and
Baked with Monterey Jack Cheese
Garlic Bread Sticks
$15.80

ROAST PRIME RIB OF BEEF
With Fresh Horseradish Sauce and Au Jus
Baked Potato and Seasoned Vegetables
$20.70

For all three, there will be Hushpuppies and you have a choice of Seafood Gumbo or a House Salad.

The price includes tax and service charge. Coffee, tea and soft drinks, with unlimited refills, are offered at $1.25 from the cash bar.

You may not be reckless enough for one of these desserts but, should one prove irresistible, it will be billed separately to your table:

PEANUT BUTTER BASH — BANANAS FOSTER
CHOCOLATE INDULGENCE — KEY LIME PIE
NY STYLE CHEESECAKE with Fresh Fruit Topping

Before you mail your reservation card, please make a note of which entrée you have ordered. Your waitperson will thank you.

MOTELS

All rates are without tax. Area Code 1-910. Same street as Museum.

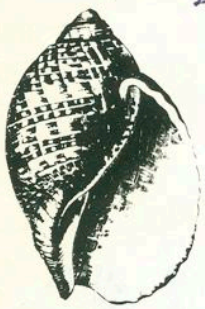
first floor

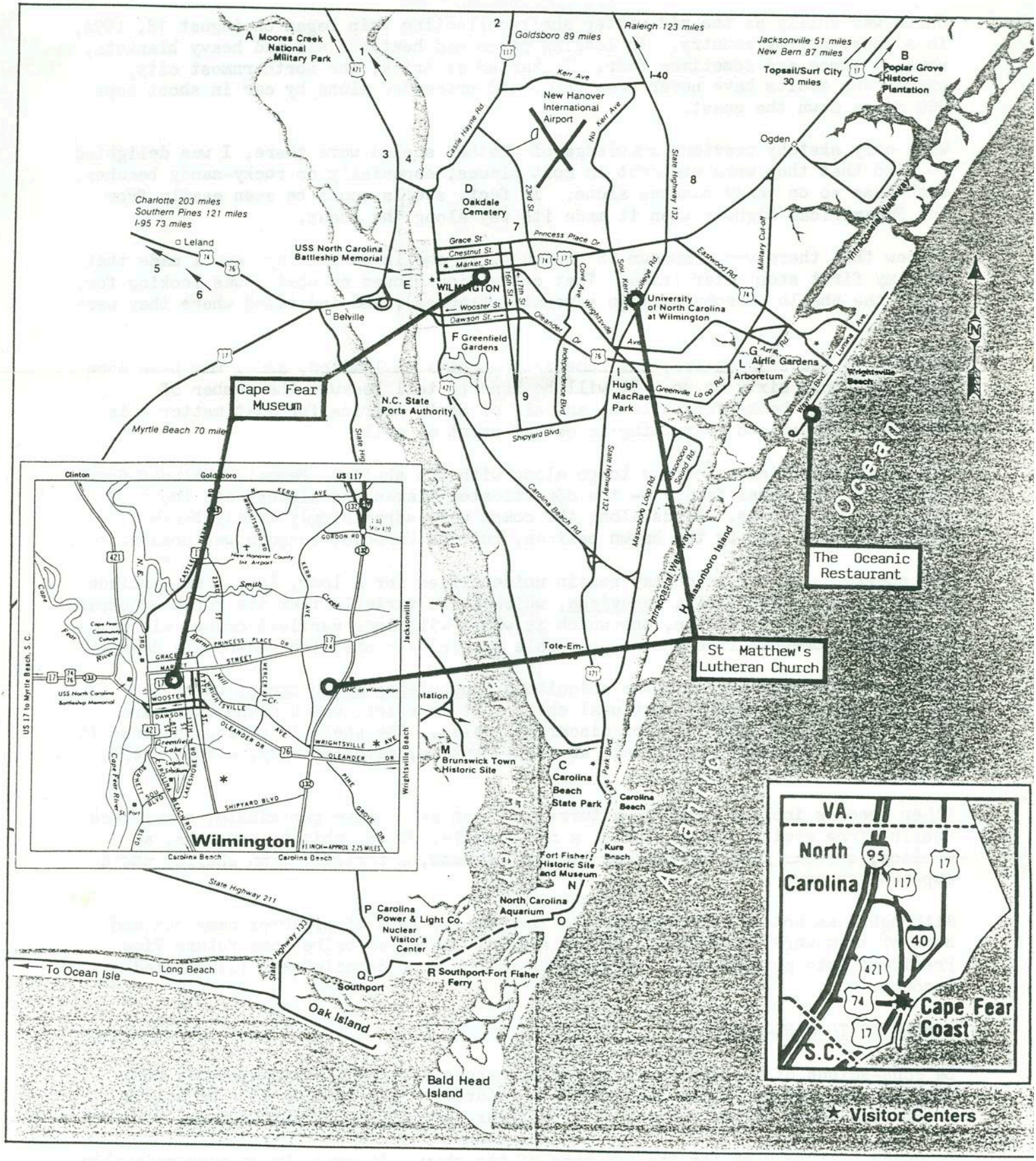
Days Inn — 5040 Market Street (near New Center Drive), Wilmington 28405; tel 799-6300; one or two persons $38.88
2 rooms adjoining

Ramada Inn — 5001 Market Street (at New Center Drive), Wilmington 28405; tel 799-1730; single $45.00, double $49.00

Super 8 Motel — 3604 Market Street (at Covil Street), Wilmington 28403; tel 343-9778; two persons one bed $36.88, two persons two beds $38.88, senior single $33.19, senior double $34.99

Best Western Carolinian — 2916 Market Street (at 30th Street), Wilmington 28403; tel 763-4653; all with two persons: two doubles or king bed $47.00, queen bed $43.00, double w/refrigerator $50.00.




A Moores Creek National Military Park
Goldsboro 89 miles
Raleigh 123 miles
Jacksonville 51 miles
New Bern 87 miles
B Poplar Grove Historic Plantation
Topsail/Surf City 30 miles
Kerr Ave
I-40
New Hanover International Airport
Ogden
Castle Hayne Rd
D Oakdale Cemetery
State Highway 132
Charlotte 203 miles
Southern Pines 121 miles
I-95 73 miles
Leland
USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial
Grace St
Chestnut St
Market St
WILMINGTON
Princess Place Dr
Eastwood Rd
Military Cut-off
Intracoastal Waterway
Wooster St
Dawson St
Oleander Dr
University of North Carolina at Wilmington
Belville
F Greenfield Gardens
G Airlie Gardens
L Arboretum
Wrightsville Beach
Cape Fear Museum
N.C. State Ports Authority
Hugh MacRae Park
Greenville Loop Rd
Myrtle Beach 70 miles
Shipyard Blvd
Masonboro Loop Rd
Carolina Beach Rd
Masonboro Island
The Oceanic Restaurant
St Matthew's Lutheran Church
Tote-Em-
M Brunswick Town Historic Site
C Carolina Beach State Park
Carolina Beach
Fort Fisher Historic Site and Museum
Kure Beach
North Carolina Aquarium
P Carolina Power & Light Co. Nuclear Visitor's Center
State Highway 211
State Highway 133
To Ocean Isle
Long Beach
Q Southport
R Southport-Fort Fisher Ferry
Oak Island
Bald Head Island
Clinton
Goldsboro
US 117
US 17 to Myrtle Beach, S.C.
Jacksonville
Wilmington
11 INCH = APPROX. 2.25 MILES
VA.
North Carolina
S.C.
Cape Fear Coast
★ Visitor Centers

WILMINGTON

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PAD

Chile was chilly as the mid-winter shell-collecting trip began on August 18, 1994, in a long, narrow country. No lodging place had heat but all had heavy blankets, usually three and sometimes four. I started at Arica, the northernmost city, where many adults have never seen rain, and proceeded alone by car in short hops 900 miles down the coast.

With only sketchy previous knowledge of whether shells were there, I was delighted to find that they were abundant in most places, especially on rocky-sandy beaches, much less so on sandy beaches alone. In fact, shells could be seen easily from the Panamerican Highway when it made its way along the coast.

I knew that there was a museum in Iquique with shells on display, and I made that city my first stop after Arica. That collection showed me what I was looking for, named the shells (erroneously in several instances), and indicated where they were found.

Because of the cold waters, the number of species is limited, and I may have come back with only sixty or so. It will be hard to tell because the number of identification books for Chile -- and all of South America for that matter - is severely limited and everything is out of print as well.

Chile has magnificent scenery to go along with the shells. Mammals included four members of the camel family -- the domesticated llamas and alpacas and the wild guanacos and vicuñas. Birds along the coast were surprisingly mostly North Carolina birds, led by the brown pelican, but the Humboldt penguin was present too.

The shells, a lot of which may remain unidentified for a long, long time, include an attractive olive, Oliva peruviana, which is so variable that its forms encompass a solid dark brown version, one which is white with long vertical orange zig zags, one shaped somewhat like a cone, one pale purple, and one with red-orange dashes.

The most prominent shell is the ubiquitous Concholepas concholepas, which I consider to be the Chilean national shell. It is eaten, which means there are universally large quantities of discarded shells. The shell is curious because it looks like a bivalve -- say, half an ark -- but is, astonishingly, a rock shell, a thaid.

Other species include tegulas, a turritella, an attractive periwinkle, other rock shells, frog shells, venus shells, a nice semele, donax, chitons, mussels, a scallop, several limpets, several keyhole limpets, a tagelus, moon shells, and a cup-and-saucer.

Although I am not the photographer in the family, lots of pictures came out and some of them were in focus. I may be able to coerce or bribe some future Vice President into putting me on the program with a more detailed and illustrated account.

SOMETHING TO CONE-SIDER

Be cone-scious of the fact that sales of chances for the Glory-of-the-Sea cone will end at 5:00 pm at the Shell Show on Saturday. The drawing will be held a short time later at the banquet after we hear the program by Walter Sage.

Proceeds will be used for the expenses of the show. It would be un-cone-scionable not to invest in a chance and invest in the show.

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT EAST COAST SHELLING

by Steve Rosenthal

In May of 1991 we took a short family vacation to the Delmarva Peninsula. We had done no shelling, even though we had spent a few days at Chincoteague Island, Virginia, not a bad place to find shells. Traveling with an infant was something of an obstacle to mucking around on the tidal flats. The weather had been quite good, but on the way home to New York things abruptly changed, and we encountered miserable conditions (temperature in the 40's, cloudy, wind gusting over 40 MPH). We made a brief rest stop at Delaware Seashore State Park — there was a parking area right on the bay side of the barrier island on Rehoboth Bay. It being mid-May, there were many horseshoe crabs on the beach — start of the breeding season. Some of the dead ones had big *Crepidula fornicata* on their undersides, and I took a couple of 50mm specimens, and one dead *Tagelus plebeius* which was on the beach. After about 5 minutes it was just too cold to continue, so I got back in the car and we returned to New York.

About a week later it occurred to me that, with the above-mentioned episode, I had now collected shells in every state on the east coast, from Maine to Florida. This is really not a big deal, since most shell collectors I know can run off travelogues infinitely more awesome than my own. However, since I have at times referred to myself as a "specialized collector of shells from the east coast of the U.S." (even though I do collect just about anything from anywhere), at least now I could say I had been to all of it! And as a result, I mused about the states where I had my best (and worst) results — keep in mind that the following is extremely subjective commentary!

So what are my favorite states to collect in?

Florida is the first, of course — no need for further discussion, really. Its few pitfalls (densely populated coastal areas, especially in the winter; coastal overdevelopment and reduced populations of molluscs; and now, of course, violent crimes against tourists) will have to get a lot worse before I cross it off my list of destinations.

Second on my list is North Carolina. Now my subjective bias really comes into play, because I lived there for 10 years and got to know it fairly well. There is a nice diversity of habitats and species, warm air and water (you can swim in the ocean through October; one year we were collecting on Christmas Day — the temperature was in the 70's!), relatively easy coastal access, and relatively unspoiled, not too crowded beaches (see my article in ***American Conchologist*** 16:2). And, if you dive, you can get lots of Florida-Caribbean species on the wrecks offshore (as noted in ***American Conchologist*** 20:1). It was amazing how many "Florida" shells you could find in North Carolina, especially since they brought in Calico Scallops from Florida to North Carolina for processing, resulting in scaled-down versions of the famous Florida scallop piles showing up in North Carolina. We even found one place where piles of *Placopecten magellanicus* occurred regularly, reminding us that just north of Cape Hatteras we are out of the Carolinian Province, with a very different assemblage of mollusc species.

Next is Massachusetts. Like North Carolina there's the good diversity of habitats and species, fairly easy coastal access, and unspoiled beaches. Forget about warm air and water though, unless you are there from, say, May to September. And, if you are anywhere on Cape Cod during the summer season, be prepared for big crowds. Since Cape Cod is a major biogeographical barrier for many species, the way we used to shell in Massachusetts was as follows: first we'd shell along the southeastern side of the state, visiting sites like Harbor Beach in Mattapoisett where we could beachcomb, or explore the sandy/muddy flats and shallows at low tide. There were lots of sand- and mud-loving species which were quite uncommon elsewhere in the northeast U.S., such as *Solemya velum*, *Tagelus divisus*, and *Nassarius vibex*. Then we'd drive northeast, foregoing Cape Cod for the Plymouth-Manomet area. There we'd find a vast rocky intertidal zone with a whole different assemblage of species such as *Nucella lapillus*, *Hiatella arctica*, and *Modiolus modiolus*, all of which live on, under, or between the rocks. Now that we were north of Cape Cod, we were in truly Boreal territory, and shells like *Solemya borealis* or *Aporrhais occidentalis* might even be found washed up on the beach. Furthermore, due to the influence of the Cape, the times of low tides differ from the north to the south, and we could even catch low tide at both places, with time to spare for plenty of collecting at each site.

Heading further north, I could extend the discussion about Boreal species and rocky coast collecting to Maine. I have only been there twice — those two short trips produced enough of a look and a few shells to make a return worth considering. While shoreline collecting is good for things like *Acmaea testudinalis* and *Nucella lapillus*, the real goodies are the shells like *Buccinum undatum* or *Neptunea decemcostata* that wind up in lobster traps. If you can find people fishing for lobster anywhere from Massachusetts northward, you stand a good chance of being able to cull some of the shells that also enter the traps in search of the bait. Just ask before you start poking in the traps! And where there are sandy or muddy coves and beaches, other boreal species can be found washed up.

After this, my excitement begins to wane. Since South Carolina is so close to North Carolina, we went there several times to shell, but we never found very much. We found areas with nice sand flats extending out miles at low tide, but where were the shells? Areas like Huntington Inlet State Park had nice marshes and beaches (and cute little alligators), but we never found many shells. The Sea Islands of Georgia had nice beaches, and on a few quick stops there we found some nice stuff. There were some big resort areas there (and in South Carolina too) where we felt a bit like intruders, and once we were so close to Florida it was hard to get motivated to stop where we were!

And back to the north, the stretch from Connecticut to Virginia gets less exciting as time goes by. Biogeographically speaking, it is again north of Cape Hatteras and south of Cape Cod. The Boreal species don't really make it south of Cape Cod (although some occur in deep water offshore down to Cape Hatteras). This is the so-called Virginian Subprovince, infamous for its relatively depauperate fauna. It is, of course, too cold for the tropical species, and too warm for the boreal ones. Richard Kirk gave a good background on this, with a paleontological perspective, in the ***American Conchologist*** (15:2). The knowledge that many of the species that we find here are the hardy survivors of climatic changes through the years, and widely tolerant of all kinds of environmental stresses goes only so far when we realize there really aren't all that many of them to look for.

I will put in a good word for Virginia and Maryland though —as Rich Kirk notes, you can find some really amazing fossil shells there, including cones, cowries and other

12140 Merokee Drive, Merrick, NY 11566-3603

EAST COAST SHELLING

(Continued from page 5)

tropical families. We visited one quarry near Hampton, Virginia repeatedly while we were living in North Carolina, and found new and amazing stuff at each visit. Also, the Eastern Oyster, *Crassostrea virginica*, is very plentiful in Maryland and Virginia, and in areas like Chincoteague and Assateague Islands you can find the large forms of the two oyster drills, *Urosalpinx cinerea follyensis*, and *Eupleura caudata etterae*. I presume they get that big in part from their abundant food supply.

New Jersey is really not that bad either, at least from a sheller's perspective. I spent a summer on the shore of Delaware Bay, in Cape May Courthouse, and regular beachcombing turned up lots of interesting species on the flats, while in the beach drift I was able to find lots of *Epitonium rupicola*. I wondered where the live ones were, but then in August they suddenly began showing up live on the flats, perhaps to breed. Unfortunately, I did not get to stay late enough in the season to look for evidence of eggs or juveniles. New York has a similar diversity of species and habitats, and once you go further out on Long Island you find rocky areas with *Nucella lapillus* and *Acmaea testudinalis*, both reaching the southern limit of their distribution

So I don't really mean to put down the mid-Atlantic states —they have their charms; it is just an indisputable fact that I can find the same shells, and more, elsewhere. SO now I find myself collecting locally a little bit less, and dreaming about trips to other localities more and more. COA 9/94

Modern Fable For Shell Collectors

Could shell collecting be good for the health? Read on.

At the urging of his family, a middle-aged collector went to his physician for a check-up. After the usual poking and prodding, the doctor remarked, "You are in pretty good shape for a man of 40."

"Forty; did I say I was forty?" asked the man. "Actually, I'm 55, but I live a healthy lifestyle as a shell collector. I'm out in the sun, breathing the clean ocean breeze, lifting rocks, raking in mud and sand, snorkeling, and generally having a good time! And then back home, the cataloguing and research exercises my mind, too."

"That may be," replied the doctor, "but I think your family genetics may also have something to do with it. How old were your parents when they passed away?"

"Did I say my parents were dead? They taught me shell collecting, and they are both over 80 and still thriving."

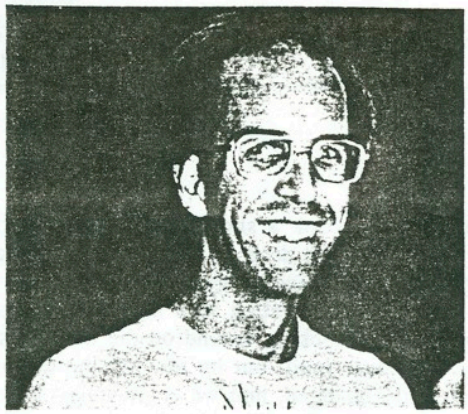
Not persuaded the doctor continued: "Well then, how old were your grandparents when they died?"

"Did I say my grandparents were dead? My mother's father is now 105 years old and still going strong! Of course, he's a shell collector too. He had to cut back though --- only collects on the beach due to his age, but he is still healthy. In fact, he is getting married next week."

"Getting married? Your 105 year old grandfather wants to get married?" asked the astonished M.D.

The shell collector replied: "Did I say he **wanted** to get married?"

Reprinted from Naples Shell News, Feb.-Mar., 1993. Originally published in the Oregon Shell Club Newsletter. **The Shell-O-Gram**



MEET JOHN TIMMERMAN

by Mary Ruth Foglino

If you've ever wondered about the talented person responsible for so many of the exquisite pen-and-ink and watercolor shell drawings that adorn the **American Conchologist**, often signed with a fish logo, let me introduce you to John R. Timmerman, a member of the COA for four years, and art director of this publication for nearly two years.

John is a tall, slender, handsome young man with a calm and self-assured manner. His clear-gazed serenity camouflages the tremendous enthusiasm that seethes within him, excitement about so many interests that one wonders how one person can encompass so wide a range.

Born in Charleston, West Virginia, John has lived, with his family, in Belle Mead, New Jersey, midway between New York and Philadelphia, for eighteen years. In 1978 he graduated from Franklin Pierce College with a biology major and a minor in Fine Arts. His course work since then has centered on art, but his true vocation, his wood carving skill, is largely self-taught. He has been carving since he received his first penknife as a young boy.

Although John works in many media, including pen-and-ink, watercolor, wood sculpture, wood relief, ivory sculpture and Japanese brush-and-ink, he now focuses commercially on large wood-relief panels, mantels, doors and facings, usually incorporating nature motifs. Combining the cabinetry skills learned from his father with his own carving talents, experimenting with traditional and modern tools, and incorporating woodburning techniques to highlight details, John has been producing large scaled architectural masterpieces with natural wood finishes and intricate detailing. In addition to his commissioned works, John has had several one-man and group shows. His in-the-round nature sculptures carved from whole black walnut or cherry logs are favorites.

John's shells are but one facet of his natural history collections. He began as a boy gathering whelk and cockle fragments during family vacations at Myrtle Beach, and he is still an inveterate beach-comber. Of marine shells, his self-collected *Busycon* specimens are still his favorites. He will purchase individual shells for their beauty, avoiding the "legend shells." He has volutes, Hawaiian Tiger Cowries, West Mexican murex, cones, moon snails, and fresh water Naiads, mostly self-collected.

This shell collection must share space with John's other nature specimens. Whole skeletons, bones and skulls are fascinating to John and he acquires any he can get, including those of fish, birds, mammals and reptiles. He also has a collection of big teeth and horns. A set of elephant tusks, weighing 65 pounds apiece and mounted in carved snakes, adorns his home, as does a replica of a Mountain Gorilla. John grows many varieties of tropical plants, and enjoys gardening, especially with perennials. In his "spare time" he is a devoted swimmer and bicyclist.

Now you have met this multi-talented young man. Our **American Conchologist** is a fortunate recipient of his versatility and generosity. In his soft-spoken manner, he offered to help out with the publication in any way he could, and with his quiet enthusiasm he has continued dependably to do so. COA 9/88

WE WONDER IF YOU KNEW .....

- that **Walt** and **Elsa Wenzel**, long-time active and dedicated club members, who have served the club in many ways, have had to leave the club and will be desperately missed. Walt wrote "We have become involved in too many activities and accepted too many responsibilities that take up too much of our time. Because of this, we have not been able to attend the Shell Club functions as regularly as we would like".
- that president **Dean Weber** saw that you weren't looking and slipped away on a three-week shell-collecting trip to northern **Chile** in the Peruvian Shell Province. A brief report is in this newsletter. An ailing **Dorothy** was left behind for the first time but was well enough in late September to become the croquet champion of North Carolina **and** bronze medal table tennis winner at the Raleigh Senior Games.
- that **Doris C Ferguson**, wife of the beloved **"Doctor John"**, passed away on October 2nd after a brief illness. She was 86, having grown up in the Boston area and moving to Chapel Hill with her husband in 1942. Doctor John and a daughter survive her.
- also, that **Bonnie Hine** of Morehead City, a Shell Belle, and **Ruth Darden** of Fayetteville have been lost through death. We send our sympathies to these three families.
- that **Karlynn Morgan** in Florida misses our meetings. She works nights and can't get to the meetings of the Naples Shell Club, either.
- that last year's banquet restaurant at the Holiday Inn in Wrightsville Beach is not available to us this year due to its closing for probable remodelling.
- that door prizes (which we skipped at the fall meeting) are back in style and will be more than welcome contributions on both Friday and Saturday nights.
- that the deadline for the Shell Show entries is October 31st, 1994; if you have late thoughts of entering the show, please telephone **John Timmerman** at 1-910/452-0943 for an application and information.
- that the club is very grateful for your contributions to the auction and for your participation in the bidding and thanks you very much. The **great** sum of **$682.00** resulted !

Dixon: Retiring at 80 not so bad

by Linda D. Powell

It's not unusual for someone to retire after 34 years of service, but it is a little surprising for a person to do it at the age of 80.

But that's what Ruth Dixon did. On July 29, her 80th birthday, she retired from her job as a medical secretary in the department of surgery.

The reason Dixon retired so late in life is because she didn't begin working until she was 46 years old.

"My husband, Bryan, didn't want me to work," said Dixon, who married at age 19. "So I stayed home, did lots of volunteer work and had two sons, the first one at age 27 and the second one at age 33.

"I began thinking about entering the workforce when my oldest son started college. He didn't want me to go to work either. He told me I should stay home with his younger brother."

But Dixon said she was determined to get a job. In 1960, she began working at Duke for Dr. Keith Grimson, formerly of the department of surgery. Ironically, her husband was the one responsible for getting her the position.

"Dr. Grimson and Bryan knew each other and one day he told Bryan that he needed a secretary and asked if he knew of anyone," Dixon said. "Bryan told Dr. Grimson that I was looking for a job and Dr. Grimson told him to bring me by his office. I was hired on the spot and worked for him for three months."

After leaving the department of surgery, Dixon worked for three months for Dr. James P. Hendricks, a former physician in the department of medicine. Once the temporary assignment ended, she was hired as a permanent employee in the department of psychiatry, where she worked for 11 1/2 years. In 1971, she transferred back to the department of surgery where she worked until retirement.

Dixon said she decided to go to work because something kept nagging at her to do so. It was a good thing she did, she said, because 10 years after starting work her husband died from cancer.

"I guess you can say the Lord directed me," she said.

The years she worked as a medical secretary were rewarding ones, Dixon said.

"I worked for Dr. Will C. Sealy in the department of surgery for 7 1/2 years, and then I worked hand-in-hand with surgical residents for 17 years," she said. "The residents were like my sons and treated me like a mother or grandmother. Sometimes, they would give me hugs for things I did for them and I would tell them, 'You have made a little gray-haired lady feel wonderful.'"

Dixon is a spry, energetic woman who looks more like she is 10 years younger, something she credits to always staying busy.

"I enjoy traveling all over the world snorkeling for shells," said Dixon, who has an extensive shell collection and who is a life member of the North Carolina Shell Club. "I have been to Egypt, the Caribbean, the West Indies, Italy, Belize and all across the United States in search of shells."

In addition to snorkeling for shells, Dixon plans to do more volunteer work for her church, Temple Baptist. She also is going to continue taking a water aerobics class at Live for Life.

Dixon said she would enter the workforce at a later age all over again if she had the chance. Why, you ask?

"The problem with today's young people is that they can't afford not to work," Dixon said, "and one of the reasons is because they want too many material things. When I was at home, my husband and I didn't have the fancy cars, expensive furniture and other material things. It was more important for me to stay at home with my children. I'm really glad of how things turned out because I have two fine sons."

Ruth Dixon, center, gives a farewell hug to friends Kaye Jackson, left, and Cheryl Lucker, during a recent retirement party held in her honor. A medical secretary in the department of surgery, Dixon retired from Duke after 34 years of service.

On remote Bear Island, nature is the allure

THE NEWS & OBSERVER
BY CAROLINE DOPYERA
STAFF WRITER
OCTOBER 9, 1994

BEAR ISLAND

No bridge fords the salt marsh between Bear Island and mainland North Carolina, but there are a variety of ways to make the crossing. For five months each year, a ferry will take you to this pristine beach. You can also navigate in a small motor boat — or you can hitch a ride on the tides.

As we packed our canoes one late September Saturday, we were aware that our choice had linked us instantly to the coastal creatures. For the moment we, too, were dependent on the ocean's constant restlessness — the tides. The steady movement of the Earth would either carry us out to the island or drive us ashore, and we would have no power to fight it.

Luckily, some people still care enough about the tides to time them. The charts told us to begin paddling after high tide, a time when the water is rushing out to sea.

After a hearty breakfast at Yana's, a splendid diner in historic Swansboro, the closest town, we paddled into the fresh, meandering salt marsh.

A carnival of sea birds — white flashes amid the bright-green salt marsh cordgrass — lifted off as we glided past them. From the stealthily hunting osprey to the reclusive, wading clapper rail who chomps sea worms, we saw great birds because of the pace and silence of canoe travel.

THREE-DAY WONDERS

The ocean was our motor, and even if we had only steered, we would have arrived at the island within two hours. With a little paddling, we made the one-mile trip, following the marked canoe trail, in an hour.

There are 14 campsites and a bathhouse on Bear Island. On summer weekends, all the campsites are taken by Friday morning. We arrived at 8 a.m. Saturday morning and there were six sites left.

"It's a special treat if you do get to camp there," said Sam Bland, superintendent of Hammocks Beach State Park, which encompasses Bear Island and some mainland property. "Its allure is its remoteness."

We camped at the edge of the maritime forest, on the marsh side of the island. The other campsites are scattered along the beachfront. Our site offered shade and limited human contact, but whenever the wind stopped blowing, we were attacked by an army of gnats. The only relief from the onslaught came from military surplus DEET, a potent insect repellent.

Bear Island was once called "Bare Island" because it was barren. The maritime forest that now holds the island together had not grown then, and the island looked like a clump of desert set down on the coast. Now, gnarled, wind-sculpted live oak and wax myrtle anchor the sand on the marsh side of the island, and sea oats and other grasses hold the ocean side dunes in place. In the 1930s, a mapmaker mistakenly labeled it Bear Island after the nearby Bear Inlet, and the name stuck.

The maritime forest shelters deer, who swam across the marsh fleeing autumn hunters and found an island paradise; raccoons; foxes and a variety of reptiles, all of which remain out of sight. When we were there, cicadas flitted among the trees, each screaming for a mate.

The park prohibits campers nine nights a summer — in June, July and August the night of a full moon, the night before and the night after. This policy protects the park's most precious commodity — loggerhead sea turtles that surf in to lay their eggs in the sand of the moonlit beach. Flashlights on the beach would scare the turtles and prevent them from laying their eggs, Bland reasoned.

On Saturday night, a waning moon lit up the barren beach. We needed no flashlights. Every so often, a round, white object that could have been sea foam dashed past us. When we flicked on a light, the ghost crabs would stop, raise their eyes on stalks and stare back at us. They are used to being kings of their territory, and they challenged us like broad-shouldered bad guys ready for a fight.

Crabs were our constant companions. During the day, fiddler crabs — with one large claw and one small — paraded around us, ebbing and flowing in response to us. In the evening, a piece of ham on a string brought an aggressive, young blue crab splashing out of the water. And hermit crabs, disguised as snails or other mollusks, made intermittent appearances.

The beach stretches out for 3½ miles, and the ocean is warm and clean.

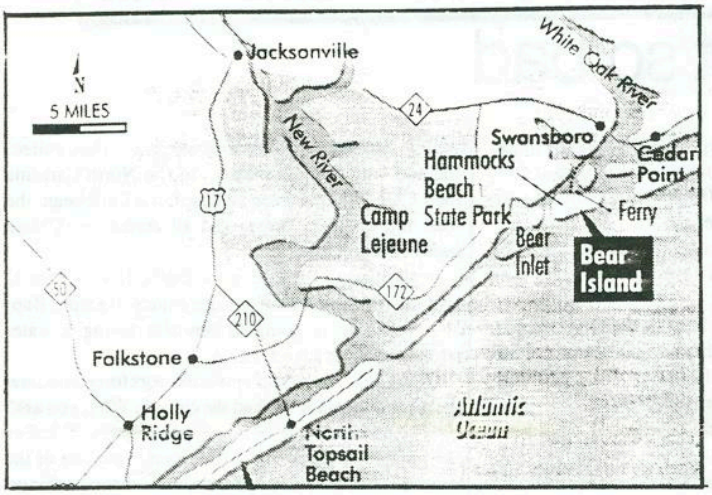
There is a mystery to this island haven: Why didn't someone snatch it up and scatter mansions along its shore?

The answer lies with Dr. William Sharpe, a New York neurosurgeon who bought the island in 1914 as a hunting ground. For his hunting and fishing trips, Sharpe always consulted the same local guide, John Hurst.

In 1950, out of respect for Hurst and his wife Gertrude, who was a teacher, Sharpe gave the land to the N.C. Black Teacher's Association. The association didn't have money to develop the park and later asked the state to turn it into an all-black state park. In 1961, the state consented, but in 1964, the Civil Rights Act opened the park to people of all races.

In a nice nod to history, Hurst's grandson, Jesse Hines, is the park's head ranger.

After two days mingling with the ocean's creatures, we were ready to be carried ashore. At 3 p.m., after an incoming tide covered most of the marsh's sand bars, we caught a ride and left our bare island.



"Look! We're not far from civilization!"