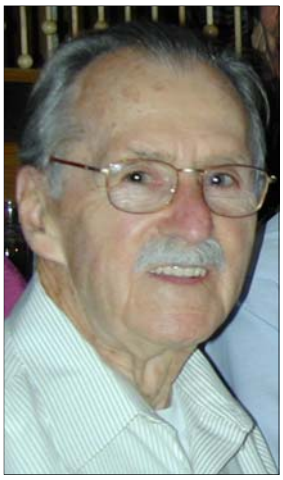
Shellfish Pioneers

Melbourne R. Carriker



Melbourne R. Carriker (1915-2007)

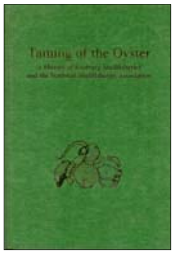
Melbourne Romaine Carriker, or “Mel” as he was known to his many students, colleagues, and friends was a world recognized authority on Malacology and other marine subjects as diverse as functional morphology, biomineralization, larval ecology and predator-prey interactions. Mel’s interest in shellfisheries extended from his intense interest in ecology, biology and morphology. Scientist, scholar, husband, father, mentor and friend - his career and his extraordinary life were punctuated by transition and achievement.

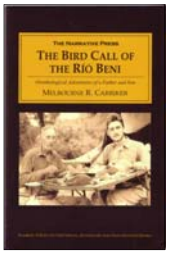
Mel’s fascinating life story began on February 25th, 1915 when he was born in Santa Marta, Colombia. For the first twelve years of his life, Mel lived on a coffee plantation (called Vista Nieve) that his parents developed and managed in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains. When he was ten Mel began accompanying his father, an accomplished amateur naturalist and ornithologist, on short field trips to collect birds, birds’ eggs and small mammals. These experiences sparked his interest in the natural world and the seemingly secret lives that animals lead. In 1927 Mel’s parents sold the coffee plantation and moved the family to southern New Jersey. In the fall of 1935 Mel entered Rutgers University majoring in agricultural research and minoring in zoology. It was at Rutgers that Mel also met Thurlow C. Nelson, his undergraduate adviser and mentor, who offered him an opportunity that shaped his scientific career. Through Nelson’s urging, Mel began working on the Rutgers College of Agriculture’s houseboat “Cynthia” in Barnegat Bay, New Jersey in the summer of 1938, studying the life history of oyster larvae. In subsequent summers of 1939 to 1941, he continued broadening his studies to include the general biology and ecology of oysters.

In 1939 Mel began graduate work at the University of Wisconsin completing his studies in 1943 with a doctoral degree in invertebrate zoology and physiological chemistry and with the rank of ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserve. Immediately after graduation, Mel entered the Naval Training School and during the remainder of World War II he served aboard ship in the Aleutian and Hawaiian Islands as communications officer.

After the War he accepted a position in the Department of Zoology at Rutgers in 1946 attaining the rank of assistant professor before leaving in 1954 to become an associate professor at the University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill. In 1962, Mel was recruited to direct a new Systematics-Ecology Program at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. One of the most recognized accomplishments of the program was the publication of “Keys to Marine Invertebrates of the Woods Hole Region” a set of keys and check lists of the common invertebrates of, the waters of southeastern New England. Subsequently in 1972 Mel was offered a full professorship at the newly established College of Marine Studies (CMS), University of Delaware in Lewes where he taught malacology, conducted research, and helped shape the CMS graduate program for thirteen years. Mel officially retired in February, 1985 at the age of 70, receiving the title of Professor Emeritus. In retirement he continued his scholarly contributions and published several books recounting the fascinating history of his family, their coffee plantation “Vista Nieve” in Colombia and his early experiences as a naturalist.

During his prolific career Mel published over 160 scientific papers and coined well known malacological terms such as the “accessory boring organ” (ABO) of muricids, and the “pediveliger” stage of bivalve molluscs. For more than 50 years he served the NSA in various capacities, including: Secretary-Treasurer, Vice President and President. He was instrumental in formalizing the regular publication of the Association’s meeting notes as the “Proceedings of the National Shellfisheries Association (PNSA)”, serving as its first Editor from 1954 to 1957. In 1978 Mel was presented with the Honored Life Member award by NSA and in 1998 he was recognized for his years of dedication and scientific achievement in shellfish research when the first (annual) NSA student research award was named in his honor. His most recent contribution to the NSA was as it’s Historian where he researched and compiled a chronological account of the Association from it’s inception in 1908 entitled “Taming of the Oyster”.





Throughout his career Mel was a teacher, researcher, editor and mentor. The scientific fields of malacology, shellfish biology and marine ecology have benefited from his life’s work and those who had the pleasure of knowing him also benefited from his wisdom, poise, and grace.

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