



**IN MEMORIAM
R. TUCKER ABBOTT
1919–1995**

Figure 1. Photograph of R. Tucker Abbott, circa the early 1970s, measuring gastropod shells at the Delaware Museum of Natural History.

Picture a likable, enthusiastic biologist surrounded by an admiring group of graduate marine biology students, on the sand flats at low tide near Indian River, DE. Repeatedly plunging his arm deep into siphonal holes in the loose sand, the fit biologist repeatedly comes up with a squirming, squirting razor clam—to the delight of the students who have been digging unsuccessfully for them with shovels and forks, the impact of each thrust merely stimulating the reactive burrowers to bury more deeply!

This was Dr. R. Tucker Abbott, a friendly, energetic, scholarly, highly productive systematic malacologist. He was as much at home in the field collecting and studying mollusks as curating them in museum collections, writing scientific papers and monographs, editing exquisitely illustrated books and popular manuals about them, and associating with students and amateur and professional malacologists alike.

Tucker died of pulmonary fibrosis illness on November 3, 1995, at the age of 76, at his home on Sanibel Island, FL. He was Founding-Director of the new Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum. Tucker was survived by his charming wife, Cecelia White, who

for many years enthusiastically supported him in his professional malacological activities.

Tucker was born September 28, 1919, in Watertown, MA. Little could he have anticipated the full, fruitful, satisfying professional life that would unfold in the years ahead. These are some of the highlights of his career:

1938–42. Research Assistant in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, MA.

1942. Received a B.S. degree at Harvard College.

1942–44. Was a United States Naval Aviator (Lt., USNR) working as a dive bomber pilot.

1944–46. Malacologist with the United States Naval Medical Research Unit 2 (Lt., USNR); the first medical malacologist in history to attempt to control schistosomiasis, the fatal blood fluke parasite. Studies took him to Guam, Marianas, and finally to China's Yangtze Valley, where he discovered the life cycle of the schistosome in a small freshwater snail.

1946–49. Assistant Curator in the Division of Mollusks, U.S. National Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

1949. Received an M.S. degree from nearby George Washington University, Washington, D.C.
- 1949–54. Associate Curator in the Division of Mollusks, U.S. National Museum. While there, he prepared the first edition of his *American Seashells*.
1955. Obtained the Ph.D. degree from George Washington University.
- 1954–69. Held the Pilsbry Chair of Malacology and the Chairmanship of the Department of Mollusks, Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia. During this period, he was actively writing, editing, and publishing (see Partial Bibliography). Many of his works have been translated into several other languages.
- 1969–76. Held the du Pont Chair of Malacology and Chairmanship of the Department of Mollusks, as well as the Assistant Directorship of the Delaware Museum of Natural History, Wilmington. There he continued writing actively and increased the number of speaking engagements, especially to shell collectors and shell clubs, in many regions of the United States.
1972. Became president of his company, American Malacologists, Inc. Publishers of *Distinctive Books on Mollusks*.
1973. Accepted the active honorary position of Adjunct Professor in the College of Marine Studies, University of Delaware.
1979. Resigned as Adjunct Professor in the College of Marine Studies when he moved to Florida to continue writing, publishing books, and consulting in malacology. There his literary pursuits continued actively, and in addition, he began publishing the systematic malacological works of other scholars. At the time, he was also involved with the Conchologists of America, but his overriding interest became the development of the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum on Sanibel Island. Subsequently he was honored as the Founding Director of the Museum, a facility of the Shell Museum and Education Foundation, Inc. Tucker remained active in this capacity until his death.

Tucker's research emphasis was distinctly systematic malacology, and in this field, he had few peers. This attention was strongly complemented by his intense and rewarding interest in collecting for and building museum collections. His work often took him far afield. The museums that benefitted most from these missions were the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, the Delaware Museum of Natural History, and the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum. Tucker listed his principal expeditions as follows (Abbott 1987):

- 1934–76. Many trips to Bermuda.
- 1939–40. Harvard-Archbold Expedition to Melanesia and Polynesia.
- 1939, 1944, 1958. Philippines.
- 1939, 1945. China.
- 1942, 1944, 1946. Cuba.
- 1944–45. Marianas.
1952. National Research Council Expedition to East Africa.
1963. Anton Bruun Cruise to Bay of Bengal.
1970. Grand Cayman.
1972. Solomons.
1983. Bahamas, Senegal, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, Tahiti.
1984. New Guinea and Admiralty Islands.

Tucker's outstanding international reputation is well deserved. In addition to his many other accomplishments, he published over 200 major and lesser works, of which 14 were major books (see Partial Bibliography); wrote dozens of books reviews;

edited and published many books by other writers; and described one new family, 10 new genera or subgenera, and 70 new species of mollusks, many of these probably resulting from new discoveries during oceanic expeditions.

Tucker was widely recognized as an eminent malacological systematist. He received five major awards for his literary efforts between 1953 and 1978, was listed in some 15 . . . Who's Who . . . directories, was associated with some 17 shell clubs, and was a member of malacological societies as far away as Australia and Uruguay. But of the latter, he was probably most committed to the American Malacological Union, serving in several offices and finally as president in 1959.

My long friendship with Tucker began in 1954 when we corresponded on the taxonomy of the large ecologic form of oyster drills (*Urosalpinx cinerea follyensis*) from the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia. He was then with the United States National Museum. During his subsequent tenures at the Academy of Natural Sciences, at the Delaware Museum of Natural History, and finally, in Melbourne and Sanibel Island, we continued to discuss systematic problems most frequently at meetings of the American Malacological Union. Ours was a long and extremely cordial association, especially during Tucker's stint at the Delaware Museum of Natural History, 1969–1977. Understandably, I was delighted by the presence of a close malacological colleague so near at hand.

In the fall of 1973, shortly after I joined the College of Marine Studies, University of Delaware, in Lewes, and on my recommendation, Dean William Gaither of the College of Marine Studies invited Tucker to join the College of Marine Studies as an Adjunct Professor. He was to co-teach with me a graduate course in malacology, instruct a course of his choosing, and serve on graduate committees. Tucker graciously accepted our invitation, and the faculty welcomed him cordially, proud to have him on our faculty.

Tucker co-taught a course in malacology with me in the spring of 1974 and the falls of 1975, 1976, 1977, and 1978. Among the graduate students who assisted us in the malacology course were M. G. (Jerry) Harasewych and Robert Prezant. Enrollment in the different classes ranged from a half dozen to 20 students.

Classes in the systematic aspects of the malacology course were held in the Mollusk Department of the Delaware Museum of Natural History, about 100 miles north of Lewes. Tucker illustrated his lectures with molluscan specimens from the impressively large collections of the museum (in excess of one million) and his professional color transparencies of living mollusks and their habitats. Classes were informal, attentively relaxed, and often punctuated by animated discussions. During lunch we gathered around a large table in free space surrounded by some 500 museum shell cabinets, munched sandwiches, related experiences, and enjoyed hearing about Tucker's lively shell-collecting adventures around the world. Students were outspokenly impressed by the diversity of the specimens displayed, the wide range of habitats and geographic regions represented, and the intricacy of the nomenclature and classification of some of the taxa.

The remainder of the malacology course was held at the College of Marine Studies on the Delaware coast in Lewes. Ecologic field trips were taken by car to representative sand and mud flats, ocean beaches, and salt marshes and by boat on Delaware Bay. These trips, taken early during each course, not only "broke the ice" between students and professors, but they also provided experiences in the earthy exercise of slopping over mud flats and marshes, collecting live marsh snails, burrowing bivalves from sand, mud, or peat substrata, and dredging mollusks from the

bottom of the Delaware Bay. Even on cool, rainy days, students bantered among themselves as they pulled an occasional class member out of a marsh ditch or hole or prevented another from sliding overboard in a rough sea. Collected live animals were maintained in running seawater in the Lewes laboratory for later functional studies.

Using the systematic parts of the course as a foundation, we concentrated on the anatomical, behavioral, and functional biology of live mollusks in representative local taxa. Teachers, the teaching assistant, and students all participated in the lectures, discussions, and laboratory work. To all of this Tucker contributed substantially, not only by his fine reputation as a scientist, but also by his broad knowledge, experience, wit, warmth, and empathy for the students. Students still comment to me how much they appreciate the opportunity of having studied with Tucker. My gain likewise has been great. The favorite laboratory for students was a SEM study of a hard part of a mollusk of their choice.

For his own course, Tucker chose to teach a Winterim Course in Evolutionary Biology on the main campus of the University of Delaware in Newark. The course was taught during the years 1975, 1976, and 1977, with the same success that greeted Tucker during the instruction of our joint course in malacology.

Tucker was especially helpful to graduate students while serving on their graduate committees. He made available the very large molluscan collections of the Delaware Museum of Natural History and provided especially helpful advice on biosystematics and its application in thesis and dissertation research. Students on whose graduate committees Tucker served were Margaret Carter, Clement Counts II, G. M. (Jerry) Harasewych, Peter Kinner, and Robert Prezant. He was quick to discuss molluscan systematics with other students and faculty who sought his advice.

Reminiscing, Clem Counts once noted that Tucker was fond of autographing copies of his many books on mollusks. This practice was well known to his peers, and Tucker himself laughed about his "inability to refuse to sign" a cover page. At the 1990 meeting of the American Malacological Union in Woods Hole, MA, Clem was standing in the back of the lecture hall with Tucker during the book and shell auction. After a time, a copy of Tucker's classic *American Seashells* was brought out. The copy, coming directly from the publisher, was wrapped in plastic, which prompted Richard Petit, the auctioneer, to quip that the wrapper was significant

because it indicated that the book was "untouched by the pen of R. Tucker Abbott." Chuckling, Tucker turned to Clem and counter-quipped that "The book should fetch a very high price since there were fewer unsigned, than autographed copies!"

In the summer of 1979, Tucker resigned as Adjunct Professor in the College of Marine Studies in preparation for his permanent move to Florida. He had terminated his position with the Delaware Museum of Natural History late in 1977. On Tucker's departure, Dean William Gaither, College of Marine Studies, and I wrote Tucker expressing our deep regret for his departure, but gratitude for his many contributions to the University of Delaware during his tenure as Adjunct Professor.

Going to Florida permitted Tucker to concentrate on his writing and to continue building his successful publishing company, American Malacologists, Inc. Now his earlier wish to more seriously pursue writing could be fully realized. Tucker spent the remainder of his life collecting and studying mollusks, writing, and publishing, among other literature, a remarkable series of enthusiastically received books for amateur naturalists and collectors.

The formal opening of the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum took place on November 18, 1995, just 2 weeks after Tucker's death. The museum was the materialization of his vision of a "monument to shells for people, not just a museum full of shells" (Scheu 1995). Although Tucker did not live to see the formal opening of the museum, he did take pleasure in seeing paying visitors pass through the halls of the museum earlier that year.

"On November 3, 1995, the world lost an extraordinarily respected man of science and a godfather to shellers everywhere!" (Hallstead 1995); and I would add, an extraordinarily gifted man of letters who had the natural talent of bridging between amateur and professional malacologists to the benefit of both as well as to the benefit of the field of malacology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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