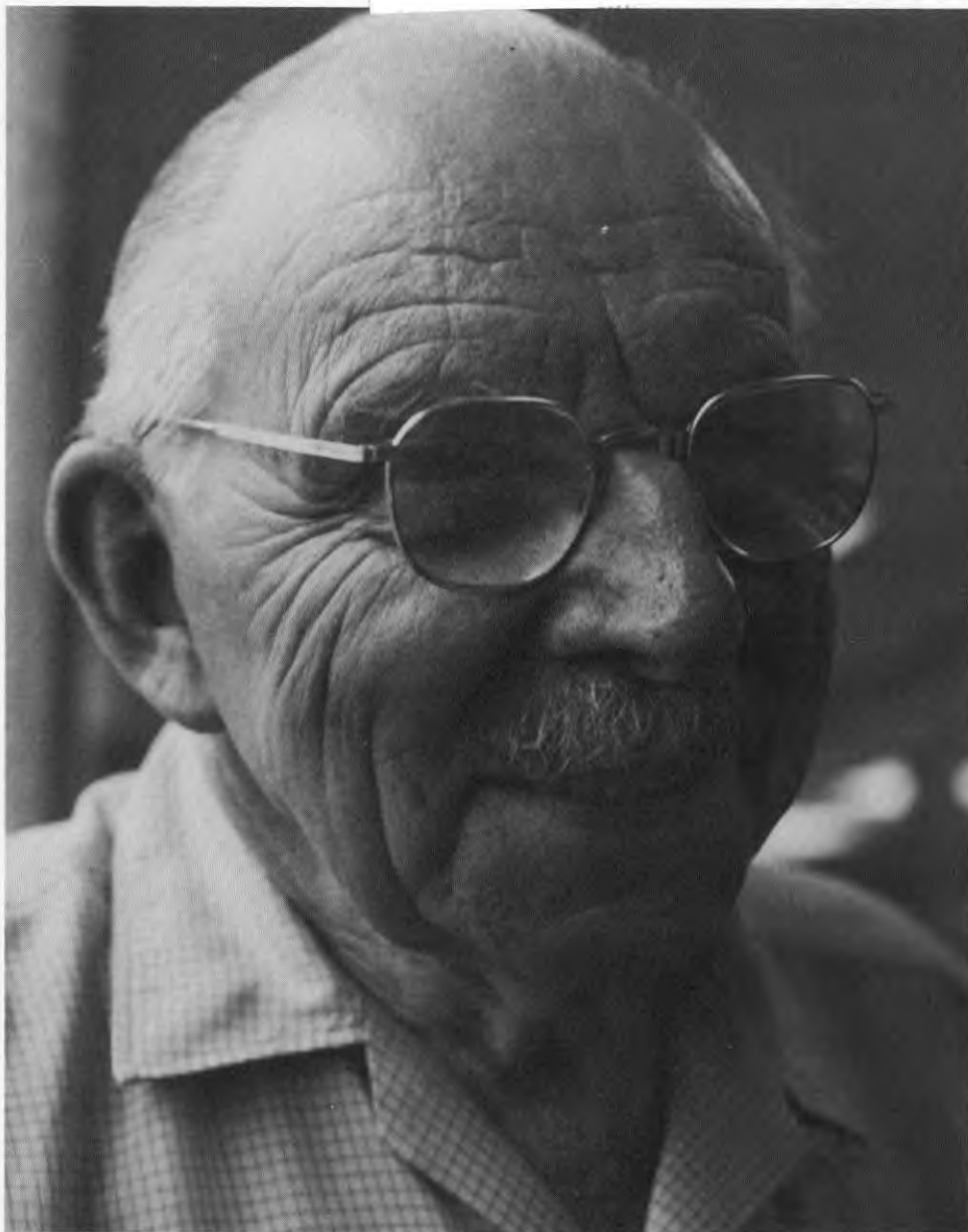




Vlaams Instituut voor de Zee
Flanders Marine Institute



WILLIAM J. CLENCH (1897-1984)

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A FAREWELL TO BILL CLENCH

In our relatively small field of malacology no man made a greater personal impact over the last 60 years than did Bill Clench. He had not the knowledge of Pilsbry, nor the brilliance of H. B. Baker, not the cleverness of Bartsch, nor the precision of Myra Keen, yet he produced dozens of successful students, set modern standards for curatorial procedures, gave birth to new

mollusk journals, made over 2,500 collecting stations, and inspired three generations of amateurs to contribute their time and energies to helping our science.

Bill was a gregarious, but thoughtful, extrovert. He loved people and he loved his students whom he instructed on a one-to-one basis. He had a friendly charisma that drew most people within his spell. Bill was a fatherly

hero to many budding malacologists, but human enough to have feet of clay. He often said that if a student could not go beyond the capabilities of his teacher, the student was not worth his weight in salt.

Bill himself had several heros—Charles W. Johnson, Bryant Walker, Henry Pilsbry and Matt Dillon of "Gunsmoke." As a young boy, he roamed the area around Blue Hill, south of Boston, where he collected insects and mollusks. The first mollusk he ever collected was a *Triodopsis albolabris* (curiously, also the first species ever collected by C. R. Orcutt, and the first species ever described by Thomas Say). Bill took his unidentified treasures into the Boston Society of Natural History where kindly and patient Johnson schooled Bill in natural history.

Their association was a long and close one, and during the last years of Johnson's life, Bill assisted him in the business managing of *The Nautilus*, and after Johnson's death, he edited and sent to the printer Johnson's famous, *Marine Mollusca of the Atlantic Coast from Labrador to Texas*. By a quick coup by Pilsbry, the business managership of *The Nautilus* returned to Philadelphia. Seven years later, Bill launched a new monographic series and named it *Johnsonia* after his boyhood idol.



Bill Clench, at the age of 35, on a *Liguus* hunt with Henry A. Pilsbry, age 70, at Hammock no. 38, Long Pine Key, Florida Everglades, on March 13, 1931. For an account of this trip, see *The Nautilus*, vol. 45, pp. 10-15, July 1931.



Bill Clench, at age 49, in Cambridge, Mass., in December 1946. *Johnsonia* was in its second volume, *Occasional Papers on Mollusks* had just been launched, and his two students at the time were Ruth D. Turner and Isabel Farfante.

Bill Clench entered Michigan State College in East Lansing just as America was about to enter World War I. Years later he would regale his friends and students with boisterous tales of fraternity life at a mid-West cow college. He broke his nose showing off to the girls while ice-skating with his hands in his pockets; earned extra money by playing saxophone with his own college group; and met and married his college sweetheart, Julia V. Helmick. She was a main stay in his life and tolerated his consuming passion for malacology. She was the only person who repeatedly listened to Bill's famous old jokes and stories as if each telling was new. Julia kept the home fires burning during lonely vigils while Bill was on field trips, and she was a second mother to some of Bill's students.

It was during his graduate days in Ann Arbor that Bill came under the beneficial influence of another idol of his—Bryant Walker, a well-to-do lawyer in Detroit who was an accomplished

malacologist. Walker lit the malacological fires within Bill and was largely responsible for his first love, the freshwater mollusks.

As a field director, Clench had few rivals. *The Nautilus* abounds with his accounts of early trips to the rivers of the Southeast and the Everglades of Florida. Many of his early students received their baptism of fire on Clench's expeditions to the Bahamas, Santo Domingo and Cuba. Nearly every one of his students spent some time in the field with him. The collection at Harvard grew tenfold under his curatorship from 1926 to 1966. He made his 2,500th field station in Florida at the age of 85. He was an omnivorous collector, but took greatest delight in collecting *Cerion*, *Liguus*, pleurocerids and unios.

Bill had a great appreciation of the history of malacology and felt a personal closeness with the earlier workers. Many of the numbers in his *Occasional Papers on Mollusks* were devoted to the biographies of the malacologists that had gone down the same science trails. He took delight in telling his students about the lives and foibles of his early associates, such as William Morton Wheeler, Arthur F. Gray, Norman Lermont and Tom Barbour. He often recalled his visit with the South Carolina malacologist, William Mazyck, in the 1930's. Elderly Mazyck had corresponded with other malacologists for years, but Bill was his first mollusk visitor in 50 years. When Mazyck heard the malacological terms and names rolling off Clench's tongue, the tears ran down the old man's cheeks.

If the many students gained much from Bill, it was certainly true that he, in turn, received a great deal of support through the years from those around him. Dick Foster made it possible to launch *Johnsonia* and also financed a number of Bill's projects; "Uncle Joe" Bequaert, a colleague, supplied him with translations of foreign languages; Ruth Turner, with her great talents in dissecting and illustrating, co-authored many of his better papers; Dave Stansbery and Henry Russell often went out of their way to furnish transportation for many of Bill's trips; and Dr. Merrill Champion proofread and created indexes for his publications.

Bill was a great correspondent. During World War II he wrote over 2,500 letters to his students serving in the Armed Forces. It would

be impossible to innumerate the number of friends to whom he sent postcards and letters during his lifetime. On field trips, long after other expedition members had turned in, Bill could be found sipping on beer and scratching out postcards in the light of a lantern. At home, after he had finished a nighttime project, he would sometimes write letters until two in the morning.

Three tragedies occurred in Bill's later life that seemed to slow him down. His wife, Julia, died in 1969 after minor surgery, while she was in her late sixties. It created a void that was never filled. A few years later his eldest son, Harry, the well-known lepidopterist at the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, died of a heart attack. He lost a fellow naturalist, as well as a kindly son. About the age of 82, Bill experienced a minor stroke. His handwriting and grammar took a turn for the worse. His memory for cer-



"It's more fun snaking out unios by the mitful in a place like Lake Waccamaw!," was the typical comment made by Bill Clench while collecting, at age 73, in North Carolina. Photo by Paul Jennewein, July 1970.

tain words failed him. After a throat operation in 1983, he was placed in a rest home in California near his son, Carleton.

We must all cross that River Styx someday. Most malacologists will be destined forever to an eternity of measuring shells, re-working their own synonymies, or color-coding their electrophoresis test tubes, but Bill Clench will be criss-crossing those sunny Elysian fields collecting new species of unbelievable abundance and beauty. And at his feet will gather a new and eager parade of mollusk students.

On a frosty February morning, in 1984, the boatman came for William James Clench. Across the River Styx they slowly poled the boat, and by the time they were half way across, Bill had already lost his aged stoop, he was once more in his youthful collecting duds, and eager to join his old friends. On top of the far bank six figures beckoned him on—Charlie Johnson and Bryant Walker, "Uncle Joe" Bequaert, Harry Clench with butterfly net in hand, Dick Foster who had leased a whole steam engine train for the occasion, and finally his wife Julia, thoughtful as ever with a picnic basket and case of beer at hand.

I can report that Bill gave a last farewell

wave, like Matt Dillon riding into the sunset. Bill drew a huge arrow in the sand pointing up the bank. It was for his other students due someday to follow—Harald Rehder, Alan Archer, Henry Russell, Dick McLean, Tucker Abbott, Dick Johnson, Ruth Turner, Yoshio Kondo, Isabel Farfante, Joe Rosewater, Tom Pulley, Arthur Merrill, J. Lockwood Chamberlin, Joseph Vagvolgyi, Ed Michelson, Bob Bullock, Ken Boss, Robert Robertson, Arthur Clarke, Don McMichael, Sam Fuller, Vida Kenk, and Barry Wilson.

The train was packed with his old friends. They had all been waiting a long time, and were all impatient to set off with Bill for an endless day of collecting *Cerion*, *Liguus*, *Io*, and foot-long, spiny unios.

On the following day his son, Carleton, sent the news from California:

William J. Clench, 1897-1984

Early in the morning of February 22nd the world lost a fine person, the scientific community lost an eminent malacologist and I lost my dad. His passing was calm and dignified.

*R. Tucker Abbott
Melbourne, Florida*