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A. MYRA KEEN, 1905-1986: A TRIBUTE



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In 1955, Myra Keen wrote Henry Pilsbry about a nomenclatural problem in the gastropod family Trochidae, concerning something he had done in his *Manual*. In reply, Pilsbry said, "It is over sixty years since I wrote that *Manual of Conchology* review of the group. This was so long before they bought a high chair for you that you can hardly appreciate the fact that in 1890 there was no official or even customary method of selecting type species. . . . Those were dark but carefree days. We little knew of the brambles and pitfalls concealed in the thickets of nomenclature we have to fight our way through nowadays."

Few workers have made as much headway as did Myra Keen in clearing away the brambles and filling in the nomenclatural pitfalls. It became her forte.

Angeline Myra Keen was born May 23, 1905, in Colorado Springs, Colorado. (She never liked her first name, and as the years went by, her name evolved to A. Myra Keen and finally to just Myra Keen.) An only child, her family lived on a ranch of 1,200 acres situated 20 miles south of town. She attended a one-room school, and went through eight grades in five years. As a result, she was out of school and on the ranch for three years, riding horses and herding cattle. She then had ambitions of becoming a rodeo queen!

She went to high school in Colorado Springs, where she graduated in 1923. Then followed more years in the country, during which she became interested in nature photography. Several of her pictures and an article were published in photography journals.

Her family then moved back into Colorado Springs. There, her father started a chicken farm and also earned money by landscape gardening. Here, Myra attended Colorado College, with the intent of majoring in biology. Unfortunately, distaste for having to dissect a cat and her shock at finding insects awakening on pins in her collection turned her from biology to psychology. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1930.

Myra and her mother came to California to allow her to attend graduate school at Stanford University, and she received a master's degree there in 1931. She next attended the University of California at Berkeley, where she earned her PhD in 1934 with a thesis project on the reasoning of children. It was never published. She said that her father's "chicken money" had put her through college.

After graduation, she found that it wasn't that easy to find a job in psychology, so she was out of work. During a stay at Monterey, Myra picked up

some shells on the beach. Later, she visited a hobby shop in Berkeley that sold shells along with coins, stamps and used books, and she got a little information about her beach finds. Nettie Falkenthal, a Monterey collector, told her about Mrs. Ida Oldroyd, who had become established with her collection in the Geology Department at Stanford University and later introduced the two. Still without employment but with a home base in Palo Alto, she became a volunteer at Stanford, helping Mrs. Oldroyd with her collection and that of Henry Hemphill, which had been acquired by Stanford several years earlier. She didn't get along with Mrs. Oldroyd very well, and her loyalties gravitated to Stanford Geology Prof. Hubert Schenck, who introduced her to the fossil faunas of the Pacific Coast. She began to audit geology and paleontology courses. After two years as an unpaid volunteer, she was appointed Curator of Paleontology.

Schenck encouraged her to apply the skills she had gained in statistics (during her work in psychology) to the distribution of Recent and fossil faunas. Two key papers resulted that analyzed fossil faunas based on the distributions of Recent taxa.

During World War II, Schenck went into the Army, and Dr. Keen started teaching courses at Stanford in historical geology and paleontology. This opened a career path, and without formal post-graduate training in geology or paleontology, and in spite of being a woman in a male-dominated environment, she was named Assistant Professor of Paleontology in 1954, Associate Professor in 1960, and full Professor in 1965.

In addition to her work with Prof. Schenck on statistical biogeography, her other important early papers concerned the Miocene fossils of the southern Central Valley in California, and nomenclatural questions.

Major influences on her approach to malacology in addition to Schenck were Emery and Elsie Chace, John and Rose Burch, Fred Baker, Paul Bartsch, and Junius Henderson.

A key turning point was reached when a wealthy collector from southern California decided to fund a book on the fauna of the Panamic province. The project began with a committee, but soon Myra Keen was on her own. The result was the 1958 edition of *Sea Shells of Tropical West America*. A second, much larger and enhanced edition was published in 1971.

She never did extensive collecting herself. Noteworthy trips include one up the Pacific Coast in 1935, collecting every 100 miles or so to further her bio-

geographic studies; to southern California two years later; and to the Gulf of California on several occasions starting in 1941. She also traveled to Europe four times, in search of type specimens of eastern Pacific species, visiting marine stations to compile information for her course in biological oceanography, or attending meetings.

Her key accomplishments were of three sorts. The first involved major compilations that stimulated much other work and public interest. In addition to the two editions of the *Sea Shells of Tropical West America*, these included her work with Herdis Bentson listing all the records of Tertiary species in California; her field guide with Hubert Schenck to California Tertiary fossils; the keys to the molluscan genera of the northeastern Pacific; and her bibliography and checklist of the fauna of the northeastern Pacific.

The second main focus of her publications was the nomenclatural revisions she prepared for the *Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology*, together with many related petitions to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature. These revisions included many on groups of bivalves and archaeogastropods in addition to those of special interest to her. Unfortunately, her extensive work on mesogastropods and neogastropods for the *Treatise*, the Nassariidae, and the Assmineidae, resulting in substantial manuscripts, now seems destined never to be published. Also belonging in this category are her papers on the type specimens of eastern Pacific species in European museums.

Her third focus was taxonomic publications in various journal and museum serials on groups such as the Vermetidae, the Muricidae, the Cardiidae, the Veneridae, and the Sacoglossa.

Myra Keen was AMU President in 1948, AMU Pacific Division Chairman in 1964, WSM President in 1970, a Fellow of the California Academy of Sciences and of the Geological Society of America, chairman of the Nomenclature Committee of the Society of Systematic Zoology, and recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship to facilitate her work in Europe.

Her students included Carole Hickman, Judy Smith, James McLean, Robert Robertson, and me.

In other aspects of her life, she was a deeply religious Quaker, enjoyed classical music, read widely on a variety of subjects, and carried on unusually extensive correspondence, both in her field and with friends and others.

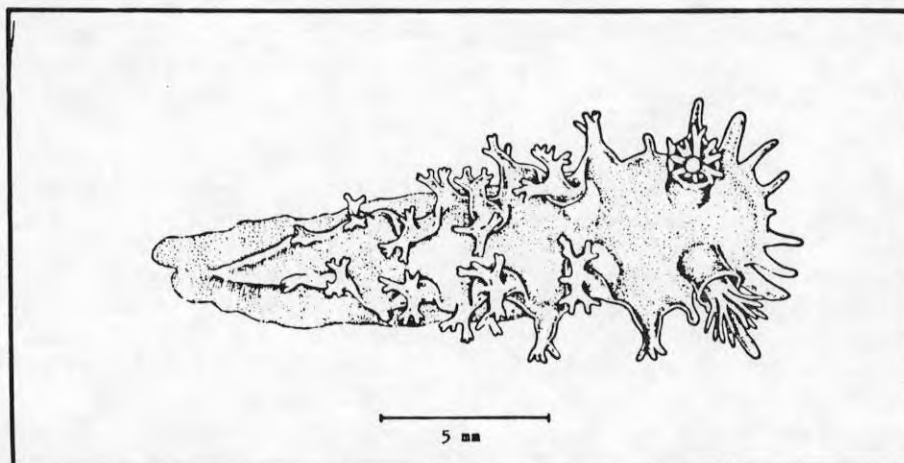
In describing the highlights of her career, she pointed to her discovery of the first known bivalved gastropod in the eastern Pacific and her personal audience with Emperor Hirohito during his visit to San Francisco in 1975.

A full biography, bibliography, and list of taxa will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Malacologia*. The bibliography, which I prepared, lists 281 titles in malacology. These include everything from abstracts and book reviews (both of which sometimes contain original taxonomic points) to the entire archaeogastropod volume of the *Treatise*. She described 93 taxa, including a number of family-group names.

In spite of the fact that her nomenclatural work was exhaustive and precise, she never made a complete list of her own publications or taxa. She was too modest, I expect. In any event, this made preparing a bibliography and taxonomic list far more difficult and time-consuming than it ought to have been.

Her own small collection, made before she received a formal appointment at Stanford, is now at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. The Stanford University Collection is now on permanent loan to the California Academy of Sciences. Remaining at Stanford is the Myra Keen Exhibit of Modern and Fossil Shells. Her scientific correspondence and notes are in the Smithsonian Archives. Reprints of many of her own papers are still available through the Mollusk Division at the National Museum of Natural History.

Myra Keen will remain with us over the years and decades -- as we use her many publications and as we remember her quiet, unassuming way of shaping our field, our institutions, and our work.



Tritonia myrakeenae Bertsch & Mozqueira, 1986