

**Remembering Tom Rice 1939-2022**  
by George Holm, photos by George Holm except as noted

Tom Rice, founder of our club, passed away in Thailand on January 8 of this year at the the age of 83. Tom had moved to Thailand in 2008 after he retired.



Tom was born in Port Gamble, WA. When I met him in 1967 he was living in Poulsbo, WA within view of the Hood Canal Bridge floating bridge that connects the Kitsap Peninsula with the Olympic Peninsula. He worked on the bridge as a bridge tender, raising and lowering the bridge span for vessels to pass through. The photo [right] is Tom standing on the bridge in 1972.

He had a passion for shell collecting, and even as a teen, he had a gift for organizing and for writing, both of which would lead to his becoming a museum owner and operator, an author, editor and publisher, and shell dealer - both by mail and at his museum. He frequently traveled to shell shows and conventions around the world. He also became a shell trip organizer and guide for paying guests. I find it amazing to think of all that he did, knowing he juggled more than one project at any one time.

Tom formed our club in 1960, and from a first gathering of about 16, *The Northwest Shell Club*, was born. By the second year there were 186 members on the mailing list with a dozen foreign members among them, spread across the globe. He started *The Northwest Shell News*, forerunner to *The Dredgings*, in 1961.

He would compile information about shells, authors and dealers on many thousands of file cards, and in 1965 he published a *Catalog of Dealers' Prices for Shells: Marine, land & freshwater*, that would become internationally known as "Rice's Prices". He produced 23 editions of it. That same year he also published *A Sheller's Directory of Clubs, Books, Periodicals and Dealers* and it was issued in 27 editions. Both publications ended in 2007 as the internet had replaced the need for printed catalogs.

In the early years, shell books were scarce, photos were in black and white, and most dealt with tropical shells. Just a few hard-to-find titles dealt with shells from the Pacific Northwest. In 1968 Tom published his first guide, *A checklist of the marine gastropods from the Puget Sound region: From the mouth of the Columbia River to the northern tip of Vancouver Island*. It contained the known species of shells for our area and locations where they had been found. It contained no pictures, but was gold to club members for planning field trips or family vacations.

In 1970 he launched the highly successful journal *Of Sea and Shore*. It ended in 2007 after 108 issues. Other publications followed. In 1972 he published *Marine Shells of the Pacific Northwest*, a guide book illustrating local shells in color. A year later came *What is a Shell*, another guide book, also in color. Also a stamp collector, he published 6 issues of *Checklist of Mollusks on Postage Stamps*. In 2000 he produced *A Checklist of the Shelled Marine Molluscs of the Oregonian Faunal Province*. These were his most popular publications, but there were many others.

Tom's collection occupied the basement of his home and he displayed it as if it were a mini-museum and would invite groups and individuals to come view it. "Mini" became "Major" in 1973 when he moved the collection into the building that houses the Port Gamble General Store and established the *Of Sea and Shore Museum* which he operated until 2005. The collection is still there but it is now maintained by the store owners and the museum has been renamed *The Sea and Shore Museum*.



Photo on the left by Susanne Jeffrey

After he opened his museum, Tom's visits to our club meetings became infrequent since Sundays were his busiest day and he was unable to leave. A solution was found when Tom arranged for the club to hold its May meetings in Port Gamble on the long holiday weekend. Members could bring a picnic lunch and Tom would arrange for the meeting to be held in the community hall.



Two photos of Tom at the museum. On the left he is behind the counter in the gift shop during the May club meeting in 1995. The photo on the right was when members visited with Tom for the last time before he moved to Thailand.

Tom was awarded many honours in his lifetime. Among them, there are three marine species that bear his name: *Haliotis tomricei* Patamakanthin 2002 from the Philippines and Indonesia; *Nematopagurus ricei* McLaughlin, 2004 from New Caledonia; and *Cuspidaria tomricei* Poppe & Tagaro 2016 from the Philippines.

He was also a founding member of COA (Conchologists of America) in 1972 and served as their president in 1974. He was instrumental in hosting two of their conventions, in 1974 and 2003. Tom was awarded their prestigious *Neptunea Award* in 2014.

A special issue of *The Dredgings* was published in 1997 highlighting Tom and his life. "Profile of a Sheller" by Aretta McClure, *The Dredgings* Vol. 37, 1997 Special Edition.

The photo on the right is how I like to remember Tom. We were with Drew Skinner on a collecting trip to Port Hardy, BC in 1996 and visited Graham and Sue Jeffrey. Shown below are some names of people Tom had recently met. He had them sign his walking stick.



Hiroimi Yoshimoto photo

Tom did not slow down when he retired to Thailand but that has to be for others to write about.

