



The Epitonium

FEBRUARY PROGRAM

Club President Leslie Crnkovic is our program presenter for our meeting **Tuesday February 21, 2017, at 7:00 p.m.** at the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

A Celebration of the Emperor's Slit Shell



BENI-OKINA-EBISU

ベニオキナエビス



Mikadotrochus hirasei (Pilsbry, 1903)

A Long and Wonderful History

— A Melding of Collecting Passions —
Sea Shells and Shells-on-Stamps

Leslie has been researching the Slit-Shell *Mikadotrochus hirasei* for several years to put together an exhibit. Last May he took the exhibit to the San Diego Shell Show, winning the "Festivus" award for the most beautiful exhibit. Since that time, he has been working on revisions and a program related to his research and has now refined it to show us at our meeting!

Please join us for Part 1 of: "The Emperor's Slit Shell, a Long and Interesting History." I am sure we will be enthralled with the interesting facts that Les has uncovered about this shell! There is so much to learn that he will bring us Part 2 in the fall.

Important Banquet Date Change

Please change the HCS Banquet date on your calendar. **The date has been changed from May 6 to May 20.**

Sea Shell Searchers Shell Show

Mark your calendars – the SSS of Brazoria County will be hosting a shell show **May 5-7, 2017**. It will be held at the Center for the Arts and Sciences in Clute, TX. The Center will have several other events that weekend, so display space will be limited. When you are planning your exhibit, think small. More details will be available soon.

President's Message

By Leslie Crnkovic

It is that time of year again where a lot of things are happening, officer nominations, meetings, and the auction.

For the last 3 years I have enjoyed serving the club, and now this month, I will be able to share a program with you.

With that said, we look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

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Vice President:
Rusti Stover
713-614-4882

Treasurer:
Sandy Clark
713-926-6797

Recording Secretary:
Tina Petway
713-436-4052

Corresponding Secretary:
Jerry Clampit
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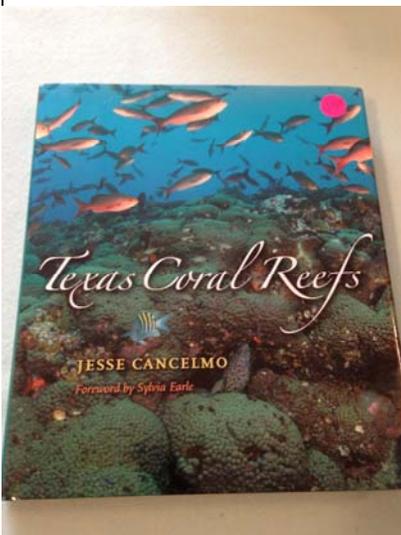
Visit HCS online at
www.houstonshellclub.com

CALENDAR

2-21	HCS Meeting
3-18	HCS Auction
4-18	HCS Meeting
5-5to7	SSS Shell Show
5-20	HCS Banquet

Auction Item

Book on Texas coral reefs.



January Minutes

Submitted by Tina Petway

The meeting was called to order by President Leslie Crnkovic at 7:31 p.m. The minutes from November were approved, and Darwin Alder made the treasurer's report in the absence of Treasurer Sandy Clark.

The annual May banquet was discussed, and it was decided that it would be held again at Monument Inn. Tickets will be available for \$20.00 each at the March auction and at the April meeting.

Rusti reported that the February program will be given by Leslie Crnkovic about the Emperor's Slit Shell *Pleurotomaria hirasei*. Our annual auction will be held in March, and the April program will be presented by Lucy Clampit on their recent travels that included two science museums.

Frank Petway reported that there may be a field trip to St. Joseph Island. Tides will be checked and a report will be made at the next meeting.

Leslie asked for volunteers to serve on the Nominating Committee. No one volunteered, so Leslie said he would contact members about serving.

Tina Petway showed the club members several photos of some of the most important shells being purchased by the Houston Museum of Natural Science from the personal collection of Don Pisor, and asked if the HCS members would like to provide funds for the purchase of one of them. This would then be sited in an exhibit as donated by the Houston Conchology Society. It was agreed to donate \$1,000.00 toward the purchase of an extremely large, true albino specimen of *Syrinx aruanus*. Tina also asked the club to purchase the book *Conus of the Southeastern USA & Caribbean* by Alan Kohn. Nancy and Dave Barziza offered to purchase the book for the Museum, and Lucy Clampit will order it.

It was suggested by Lucy that individual members of the HCS might like to provide some funds to purchase something special from the Pisor collection in honor of long time member Barbara Hudson, who recently passed away.

There being no further business, Nancy Mustachio moved to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Frank Petway. Rusti introduced Alison McHenry who gave a program on the uses of shells by Indian Tribes of the United States. Darwin completed the raffle and gave out door prizes.

Election of Officers

The Nominating Committee (consisting of Leslie Crnkovic, Rusti Stover, and Tina Petway) present the following slate of officers for 2017-18::

Angela Doucette, President

Darwin Alder, Vice-President

Sandy Clark, Treasurer

Rusti Stover, Recording Secretary

Jerry Clampit, Corresponding Secretary

The election will be at the March auction.

Sargassum Seaweed

A few years ago, a representative of the Sargassum Early Advisory System (SEAS) presented an interesting program to the club about a predictive model developed at Texas A&M Galveston. This link has recent information:

http://www.tamug.edu/news/2017/articles/Remote_Sensing_of_Seaweed.html

Thanks to Cheryl Hood for alerting the editor.



Auction Items

Coral

Murex Alabaster



In Memory of Barbara Hudson

By Lucy Clampit

A few members plan to donate money to the HMNS to purchase a shell or shells in Barbara Hudson's memory. When the shell is displayed, the plaque will state that it was donated by "Friends of Barbara Hudson." No donation would be too small to help buy something spectacular in her name. If you wish to participate, make your check out to the Houston Conchology Society and mail it to me: 10532 Hammerly; Houston, TX 77043. I will turn the checks over to Sandy Clark who will write one check for the total to the HMNS, and I will inform Barbara's family about the donation.

In Memoriam

Mary Harris' son Kelby Martin lost his fight with cancer on February 7. He will be cremated and a service will be held at **11:00 Saturday, February 18** at the Bridge Fellowship 802 Brooks St. Sugar Land, TX 77478. In lieu of flowers, donations are being accepted for the family at: https://www.youcaring.com/colleenmartin-749697?utm_source=mandrill&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Link&utm_campaign=Organize. Mary thanks everyone for their support during this difficult time.

When Kelby was a youngster, he participated in club activities with his mother and helped her with the newsletter when she was editor.

Shells and the Spiro Mounds

Submitted by Allison McHenry (Source: excerpts from Wikipedia)



Spiro Mounds is an important Mississippian archaeological site located in what is now Eastern Oklahoma. It lies near the Arkansas River seven miles north of the town of Spiro. Between the 9th and 15th centuries, the Spiro people created a powerful religious and political center based on the model of Mississippian Culture that thrived along the Mississippi River and its tributaries at that period. Spiro is considered the western-most outpost of Mississippian culture. Spiro Mounds is under the protection of the Oklahoma Historical Society, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Spiro has been the site of human activity for at least 8000 years. It was a major Mississippian settlement from 800 to 1450. Archaeologists have shown that Spiro had a large resident population until about 1250. After that, most of the population moved to other towns nearby. Spiro continued to be used as a regional ceremonial center and burial ground until about 1450. Its ceremonial and mortuary functions continued and seem to have grown after the main population moved away.

Craig Mound – also called "The Spiro Mound" – is the second-largest mound on the site and the only burial mound. It is located about 1,500 feet southeast of the plaza. A cavity created within the mound, about 10 feet high and 15 feet wide, allowed for almost perfect preservation of fragile artifacts made of wood, conch shell, and copper.

Between 1933 and 1935, Craig Mound was excavated by an enterprise that had bought the rights to excavate, and to keep or sell the artifacts they recovered. Tunneling into the mound and breaking through the Great Mortuary's log wall, they found many human burials, together with their associated grave goods. They discarded the human remains and the fragile artifacts—made of textile, basketry, and even feathers—that were preserved in these extremely unusual conditions. Most of these rare and historically priceless objects disintegrated before scholars could reach the site, although some were sold to collectors. When the commercial excavators finished, they dynamited the burial chamber and sold the commercially valuable artifacts, made of stone, pottery, copper, and conch shell, to collectors in the United States and overseas. Most of these valuable objects are probably lost, but some have been returned through donation and documented by scholars.

Spiro Mounds people participated in what archaeologists call the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (SECC), a network of ceremonial centers sharing the Mississippian culture and similar spiritual beliefs, cosmology, ritual practices, and cult objects. The SECC was a vast trading network that distributed exotic materials for making ritual objects from all across North America. These included colored flint from New Mexico, copper from the Great Lakes, conch (or lightning whelk) shells from the Gulf Coast, and mica from the Carolinas.

When commercial excavators dug into Craig Mound, they found many beautifully crafted ritual artifacts, including stone effigy pipes, polished stone maces, finely made flint knives and arrow-points, polished chunky stones, copper effigy axes, Mississippian copper plates (Spiro plates), mica effigy cut outs, elaborately engraved conch shell ornaments, pearl bead necklaces, stone earspools, wood carvings inlaid with shell, and specially made mortuary pottery. The conch shells were fashioned into gorgets and drinking cups engraved with intricate designs representing costumed men, real and mythical animals, and geometric motifs, all of which had profound

symbolic significance. Spiro Mounds' ceremonial objects are among the finest examples of pre-Columbian art in North America.

Mississippian art (also) features the cedar tree or striped-center-pole motifs, which archaeologists have interpreted as the *axis mundi*, the point at which the three parts of the Mississippian spiritual universe come together: the Upper World, the Under World, and the Middle World where humans dwell. The cedar tree or the striped-center-pole is often found on engraved conch shell gorgets, with human or animal figures positioned on either side. The concept of an axis mundi — the point where different cosmic domains converge — is found in many cultures around the world. It is frequently represented as a tree (including the Tree of Life), since trees pass through the surface of the earth to link the subsurface and the sky. The fact that the Great Mortuary at Spiro was built with cedar (or cedar elm) posts suggests that the burial chamber was meant to be a point of departure from one spiritual domain to another, as cedar was a sacred wood.



Archaeologists found that one of the conch shell cups from Craig Mound had a black residue in the bottom. This suggests that the Spiro people may have practiced a version of the Black Drink Ceremony, a purification ritual that was also performed in historic times by their descendants - the Southeastern tribes. Participants drank a tea made from the Yaupon Holly from conch shell cups. The Black Drink Ceremony was performed by men only. The highest-ranking members drank first, followed in turn by those of lesser rank. The men often drank until they vomited this powerful caffeine-rich brew, which they used in a ritual of spiritual cleansing and renewal.

Under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma and the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes (Wichita, Keechi, Waco and Tawakonie) are recognized by the US Federal government and archaeologists as the cultural descendants of the builders of Spiro Mounds.

I encourage you to go on Wikipedia and other sources to read more about this fascinating culture!

2017 Auction



Strombus gigas

The Auction Committee hopes that you are saving your money. They are busy organizing another great auction for **Saturday, March 18**. A few pictures of oral auction items are in this newsletter. More pictures, an oral auction list, and a map will be in the March newsletter.



Voluta imperialis