LEGACIES PRESERVED

Mote collections offer portal into science and history

By Emily Leinfuss

The story of the Bass Biological Laboratory unfolds like a dramatic adventure film.

In 1988, a Mote marine biologist named Dr. Ernest D. Estevez learns that the archives from an old science lab are about to be bulldozed by developers. He investigates and finds an old barn full of everything from species identification cards to dangerous chemicals. Realizing he is in the presence of something very important, he saves what he can.

Movie aside, the significance and legacy of the Bass Biological Laboratory, established in Englewood between 1931-32 by John Foster Bass, Jr. (1897-1939) and his wife Else Bass (1898-1973), cannot be ignored. Its archives, now named the Bass Biological Laboratory Collection at the Arthur Vining Davis Library & Archives at Mote Marine Laboratory, have profound significance in several ways.

They serve as a chronicle of the history of science and scientific development of the time, including the use of new technologies.

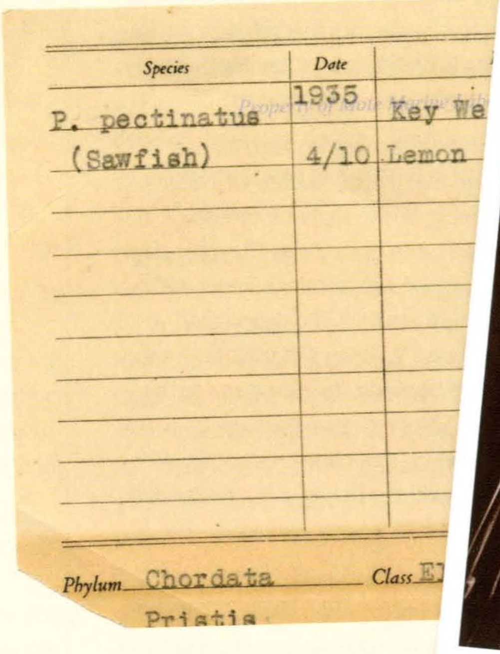
They provide a veritable 'who's who' of the leading naturalists, biologists and zoologists of the day, plus they show social and political testaments about the era.

The Bass Lab was the first full-time marine station on the Florida mainland and its mission was to promote scientific marine exploration in the Southwest Florida region.

Dr. Estevez, senior scientist emeritus at Mote, knew he was in the presence of something important from the moment he started looking through piles of stuff in that big barn on the Bass family land. After the archives were moved and safely ensconced on his front porch he started investigating. "At night I would go through a couple of inches worth of material. It was addicting. Some would crumble like dust, but slowly I started building a series of bank boxes with file folders. As I spent countless nights on the screened porch I realized more and more of these things were really substantial and significant."

He was right, said Erin Mahaney, Mote's archivist. "The strength of these collections lies in their duality," she said. "These records reflect not only concrete scientific research and data, but the history of scientific development, methodology and the scientific community itself."

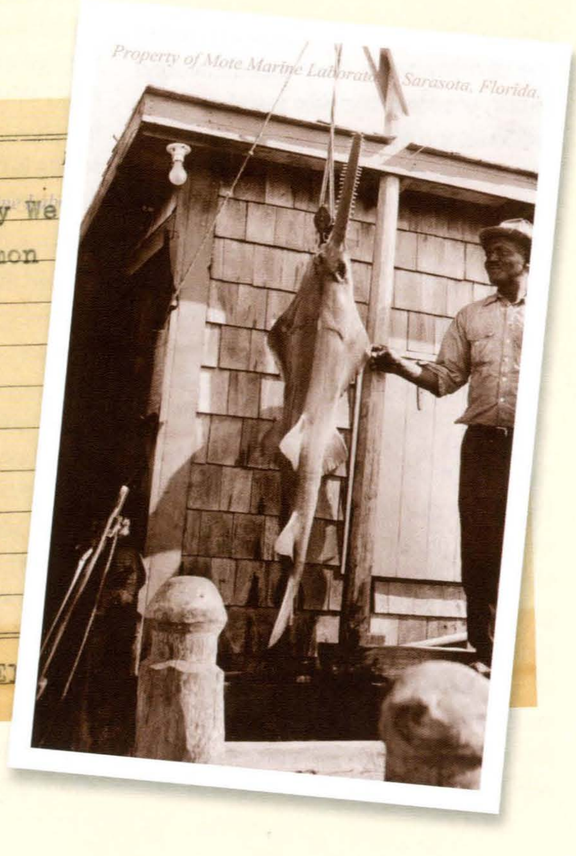
One of the highlights of the archives of the Bass Biological Laboratory – one of Florida's first biological and marine research facilities – is the first-hand documentation of at least 470 marine and terrestrial species. This and other data may help scientists to further understand and correct the evolution of damage that has occurred in Southwest Florida waters.



Species	Date	
P. pectinatus	1935	Key We
(Sawfish)	4/10	Lemon

Phylum Chordata Class El

Pristis



Mahaney is particularly fascinated by the correspondence in the collection. "It offers a rare look at the network of scientists scattered across America during the first half of the 20th century, all connected by their association with the Bass Biological Laboratory," she said. "The details cover everything from how these professionals sought work and obtained their credentials, to the love lives of employees, and the rationing rules that governed people during WWII."

The Library is currently working to process this collection and others in its holdings to increase their accessibility to the general public, in academia and to scientists working at Mote and other institutions by digitizing these important archives. The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations has provided a generous grant to allow Mote to preserve and promote the use of these archives.

"Creating virtual archival repositories facilitates the dissemination of information in unique, little-known collections to a greater number of people, and reveals the invaluable resources available for historical research and education," said Susan Stover, Mote's long-time Library & Archives director. She outlines a few ways digitization is particularly useful:

- By providing online access to these materials, researchers, educators and the general public can easily trace the past and assess current environmental and cultural issues.
- And reviewing these historical perspectives can increase understanding of environmental and cultural dynamics and provide reference for assessing contemporary patterns and processes. Present environmental events – for example, the potential effects of climate change and oil spill pollution – also show the relevance that historical ecological eresources have today.

"These historical collections tell us how things were at one period of time and we have current observations to know what things are like today," Stover said. "By comparing them we can see how things have changed – for better or worse – over time."

MOTE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The Bass Biological Laboratory Collection at the Arthur Vining Davis Library & Archives is not the only special collection Mote holds. Mote has a series of archives that serve as an irreplaceable collection of primary-source documentation about the coastal environment spanning the

The Bass Biological Laboratory was unique historically for its social aspects as well as scientific. As these photos show, John Bass Jr. encouraged women scientists to work at the Lab and and there is some indication of integration depicted in images of social activities.

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period from the 1920s to the present.

These first-hand accounts of Florida's pre-development marine environment provide scientifically valid data to positively impact the work of today's scientists, ecologists and researchers looking into areas such as biodiversity, system structure, the environment and much more.

Dr. Charles M. Breder, Jr.

The scientific field journals, photographs and hand-drawn illustrations of Dr. Charles M. Breder, Jr. — a prominent icthyologist — provide meticulous documentation of aquatic, marine and zoological research in Florida, parts of the Caribbean and Mexico, New York, New Jersey and North Carolina from the 1920s to the 1970s.

Dr. Perry Gilbert

The road to the movie "Jaws" passed right by the door of Dr. Perry W. Gilbert. This noted biologist — who corresponded with celebrities such as Jacques Cousteau, Lloyd Bridges and, of course, author Peter Benchley — was one of the world's foremost experts on shark anatomy and behavior, particularly shark attacks. His papers and correspondence are a valuable part of Mote's collections.

Dr. Eugenie Clark

The collection of books and published papers by Mote's founding director, known today as "The Shark Lady," provides an irreplaceable look at Mote's early years, as well as information about the earliest studies of shark associative learning. In the late 1950s, Clark and colleagues first demonstrated sharks' capacity to learn using an operant conditioning regime. (Dr. Clark was also mentored by Dr. Breder.)

Mote Technical Reports

The scientific and technical data collected by Mote scientists from 1964 to the present is another vital collection in its library. Important reports include research on the environmental health issues related to red tide and formative microbiology research on coral reefs.

Mina Walther Collection

This beloved journalist's newspaper columns and writing on Florida, most of which were originally published in the *Herald-Tribune*, cover nature and wildlife from 1977 to 2003. They include valuable descriptions of a variety of animals, birds, fish and endangered species such as sawfish, manatees and the Florida panther.

To learn more about these collections visit the Library at

http://www.mote.org/library
or view its online repository https://dspace.mote.org/dspace/

The archives of prominent ichthyologist, Dr. Charles M. Breder, Jr. hold a wealth of primary scientific data, including the discovery of at least five new genera and 23 new species. Dr. Breder, seen here, was also known for his use of new technology in pursuit of scientific information and documentation. The manuscripts also represent what might be the nation's most thoroughly documented interplay among institutions of science, private enterprise, philanthropy and government — one that helps to define features of contemporary research in marine and environmental examination and the role of science in 20th century America.

The Arthur Vining Davis Library & Archives at Mote Marine Laboratory are open to the public by appointment from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call (941)388-4441, ext. 333.

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