

Memorial to Ellen James Moore

1925–2017

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Ellen J. Moore was well-respected and admired by science colleagues and fossil club members alike; she shared scientific knowledge over a 37-year career with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) as a research geologist specializing in Cenozoic marine mollusks from Washington and Oregon to California and Baja California, México. She wrote classic papers on Neogene fossils from the Astoria, Pittsburg Bluff, and Lincoln Creek Formations of Oregon, and described 27 new molluscan taxa in the course of her career (Kennedy, G.L., 2009, “Ellen J. Moore, Tertiary Marine Mollusks, and the U.S. Geological Survey,” published in the Western Society of Malacologists Annual Report for 2008, vol. 41, p. 63–67, and available on the Biodiversity Heritage Library website). In the years before the Internet, her USGS Professional Paper 1228 facilitated taxonomic and systematic studies by providing original descriptions of Tertiary marine pelecypods of California and Baja California together with new images of type specimens. Curators and collection managers of west coast invertebrate collections use her papers “all the time.” Today, her USGS papers are available at <https://pubs.er.usgs.gov/>.



Born the middle of three children to Thomas W. and Mildred (Partridge) James in Portland, Oregon, Ellen collected her first fossils at age 13 on a field trip organized by the Geological Society of the Oregon Country, a club with which she remained associated her whole life. She earned a B.A. degree at Oregon State University (then Oregon State College) in 1946, where her mentor was Earl L. Packard, and an M.S. in paleontology at the University of Oregon in 1950 working under the direction of Ewart M. Baldwin. Her thesis title was “A new Miocene marine invertebrate fauna from Coos Bay, Oregon.” In 1950, her first job as a research geologist took her to the USGS housed at the U.S. National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. There she assisted Wendell P. Woodring, internationally known for his Caribbean molluscan studies. He became a mentor as well as a life-long friend; although he did not form friendships easily, he and Ellen shared a sense of humor and giggled over jokes about stuffy society dinners that featured mashed potatoes and peas, among other subjects. A National Science Foundation Visiting Scientist grant in 1958 took Ellen to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, where she painstakingly relocated and catalogued many type specimens described by Timothy A. Conrad but scattered in the general collection for almost 100 years (Moore, 1962).

In 1959 she transferred to the western headquarters of the USGS in Menlo Park, California, as a research geologist, joining an active, stimulating band of paleontologists that included Warren O. Addicott, Louie Marincovich and others. After she married fellow USGS geologist George W. Moore, the couple moved in the mid-1960s to San Diego for his assignment with the Survey’s Marine Geology Branch. There the Moores enjoyed a supportive, collegial partnership while raising their two children, going to the field, attending meetings, and preparing popular

guidebooks. For several years in San Diego, Ellen followed the kind of “portfolio career” many professional mothers of young children pursue: she consulted on San Diego School District science programs, was associate curator in the Department of Invertebrate Paleontology at the San Diego Museum of Natural History, served on the museum’s editorial board, and was curatorial science advisor to the Deep Sea Drilling Project, Scripps Institution of Oceanography. When the Moores moved back to Menlo Park, she continued research on Tertiary marine mollusks and used her considerable organizational and people skills as assistant branch chief of the Paleontology and Stratigraphy (“P & S”) Branch from 1979 to 1982. She advised students, provided geology mothers who worked full time with tips on child rearing, and with George hosted festive holiday parties at their Palo Alto home. She exhibited fossils at USGS open houses and was the P & S Branch coordinator for Minority Participation in the Earth Sciences.

The Moores retired to Corvallis, Oregon, in 1987, where Ellen returned to her early interests. She was a courtesy research associate of the Department of Geosciences at Oregon State University and remained a USGS scientist emerita until 2005. Other activities included volunteer work, leading field trips, serving on organizing committees for the Geological Society of America, and collaborating on publications with George until his death in 2007. She was a long-time member of the Geological Society of the Oregon Country, the Paleontological Research Institution, the Paleontological Society, American Geological Institute, and the Western Society of Malacologists, among other organizations. Honors included a dedicated 2002 Geological Society of America Cordilleran Section session and in 2008 an Award of Honor and Honorary Life Membership in the Western Society of Malacologists in recognition of her lifetime achievements and contributions to the study of Pacific Coast marine mollusks.

Ellen is survived by a daughter, Leslie Coray of Lowell, Oregon, and a son, Geoffrey Moore (Terry Palmer) of Palm Springs, California, with whom she made her home from 2013 to 2017. She is remembered as charming, funny, and terrific in the field by a large number of her colleagues, including Carole S. Hickman and Elizabeth A. Nesbitt, who assisted with this memorial.

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