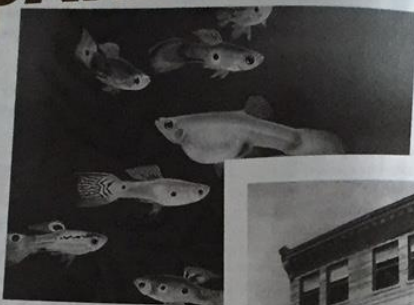
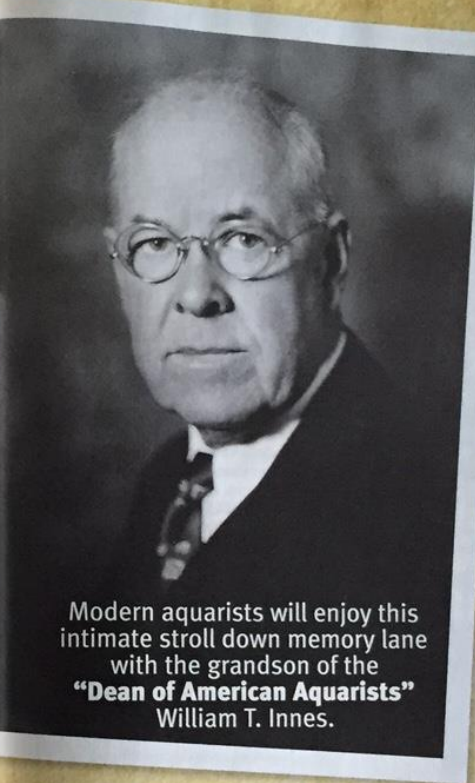
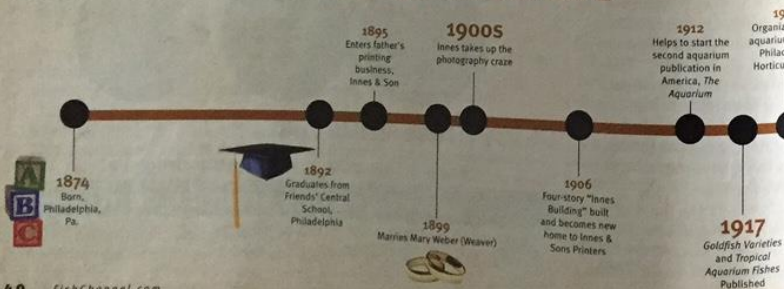


WILLIAM T. INNES: THE AQUARIUM LIFE



From left to right: This family portrait circa 1900 shows, left to right: William T. Innes, his daughter Evelyn B. Innes (the author's mother), William T. Innes's grandmother and mother; this is a 1935 "Innes plate" of guppies; the "Innes Building" was built in 1906 to house Innes & Sons Printers; this dignified portrait shows William T. Innes, who did so much to advance the aquarium hobby; here Innes holds his first-born grandson, William Innes Homer.

WILLIAM T. INNES: AN AQUARIUM LIFE



Modern aquarists will enjoy this intimate stroll down memory lane with the grandson of the "Dean of American Aquarists" William T. Innes.

By William Innes Homer, Ph.D.

William T. Innes, a name respected and admired by most aquarists, young and old, was a pathfinder for fishkeeping hobbyists. He almost singlehandedly opened up the mysteries of the aquarium field to a wide public. Innes did this by writing, editing, and publishing books and articles on exotic aquarium fish that have since become standard guides to the subject. Moreover, in 1932 he founded an authoritative monthly fish periodical, *The Aquarium*.

A GRANDSON LOOKS BACK

I am William T. Innes's grandson and can speak with authority on "Beep," as the younger



PHOTOS COURTESY WILLIAM INNES HOMER

members of the family called him. I lived in his household as a young boy, ages 3 to 6, and maintained a very close relationship to him, the rest of his life. As I matured, we also corresponded on the fine points of aquarium history and his role therein.

I was born in 1929 in Merion, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. My father, Austin Homer, was a buyer at the J.E. Caldwell Company in Philadelphia, an elegant store specializing in jewelry, silver and antiques.

At the time of my birth, my parents were living in a small house in Merion. They had married in 1927, a euphoric time when the American economy seemed to be continually improving and prosperity grew greater every year. In the 1920s, Beep was considered quite a wealthy man, and there was always an expectation that his four daughters, including my mother, Evelyn, could look

Pictured is the author William Innes Homer, age 5, on a *Daphnia*-collecting expedition with his grandfather William T. Innes (not pictured).

forward to financial support if ever they needed it. Then came a great shock: the disastrous stock market crash of 1929.

When the market failed, Grandfather Innes lost large amounts of money, and the family was reduced to a much more modest way of life. My father was given the choice of leaving his job at J.E. Caldwell or accepting half-salary. He chose the latter. Because my parents were strapped financially during the Depression, they decided to rent out their home in Merion in 1933 and move in with my grandparents, the



COURTESY WILLIAM INNES HOMER

Inneses, at 1824 North Park Avenue in Philadelphia. The Innes residence was virtually on the campus of Temple University, just off North Broad Street. We lived there for three years, until the worst of the Depression was over.

THE HOUSE THAT BEEP BUILT

The old Victorian row house had four stories and a full basement and seemed to possess an infinite number of rooms, at least 14, as I recall. It was a wonderful place of mystery and antiquity, of mood and atmosphere, with heavy oriental carpets, a grandfather clock and rich walnut woodwork.

Of special appeal was the attic on the fourth floor. That level consisted of two rooms, one large and one small. The latter served as an office, the former as a workshop with running water and a photographic studio — Grandfather Innes's retreat. It was in this room that I found workbenches, tools, fish tanks and photographic gear. To me this was pure enchantment, a place of intimacy where I would watch him shave his face, photograph and putter at his various chores.

Grandfather Innes took a great interest in me, perhaps because he had four daughters of his own, and I was his first-born grandson. I was very much valued by him, and in many ways he was like a father to me. I remember him telling me stories, teaching me all sorts of things, and taking me on outings to the Navy Yard and other interesting places in Philadelphia. He may, indeed, have viewed me as a future business

FEEDING THE FISHES WITH "BEEP"

My cousin, Meade Fasciano, was a second-grader when her family lived with our grandparents for six months. She recounts the following in her memoirs:

There were fish tanks on all four floors of the house. With care, Beep would go from each area to the next to feed his little babies. Some got worms, some Pabulum, some bugs; the variety was amazing and he knew just what to feed each species. He then went on to the kitchen where he would take a large piece of meat out of the refrigerator and from there cross Watts Street, the small back alley, to the greenhouse that was owned by Temple University. They had given its use to Beep, as by this time he had become a famous aquarist. There were huge bins made from cement, all containing fish — with the exception of one large cement enclosure. We would feed the fish as on the four floors, tend the plants, and then my favorite was the creature in the large compartment. Here, lying peacefully was a 6-foot alligator. Beep would attach the meat taken from the refrigerator to a long pole which he would then hold over this animal. It didn't take long for the alligator to grab it and in no time the meat was gone. This was terrifying to me and on the other hand a very exciting event. I always felt safe as I was with my grandfather!

Our last stop was back to the kitchen where, for breakfast, we would share a bowl of Pabulum. I guess if it was good enough for the fish, it was good enough for us!

(In his many letters to his grandson, William I. Homer, William T. Innes almost always signed off with "Beep," which he credited his grandson, who was very young at the time, as the originator of. — Eds.)



COURTESY WILLIAM INNES HOMER

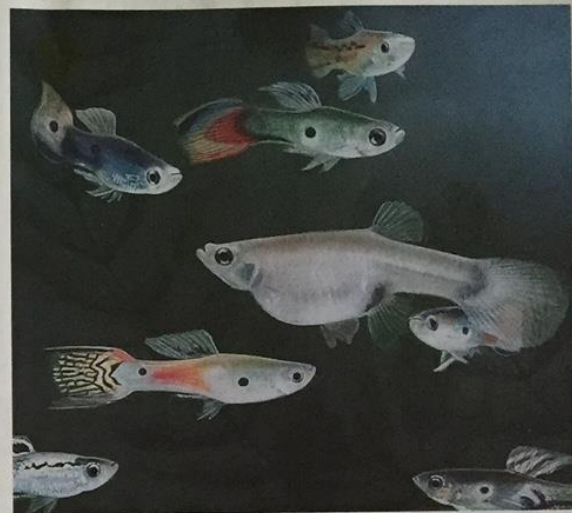
This is the Temple University greenhouse where "Beep" would take his grandchildren to feed the fish and a 6-foot alligator.

successor (I never developed in that direction, despite many trips with him to fish dealers, collectors, public aquariums and "how-to" sessions to make "Innes" color plates).

THE RISE OF AN AQUARIST ICON

Let me jump backwards in time to the origins of William T. Innes, the main subject of this article. He was born in Philadelphia in 1874. His mother was a school teacher and his father a newspaper compositor who set type slowly by hand. Linotype machines were soon replacing hand-set type for newspapers, so Innes senior opened a print shop on Sansom Street and brought in his two sons, William and then Edward, as partners, forming Innes & Sons Printers. It was this entity which ultimately became Beep's publisher.

In addition to the books on fish culture, the most important volume published by Innes & Sons was Richard Maurice Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*, issued in 1901. The type was set by hand by my great-grandfather, and the presswork was executed mostly by my



This is a 1935 color plate of guppies (then *Lebistes reticulatus*, now *Poecilia reticulatus*) taken by William T. Innes. Innes became well-known for his beautiful color images of fish. These color photos became known as "Innes plates."

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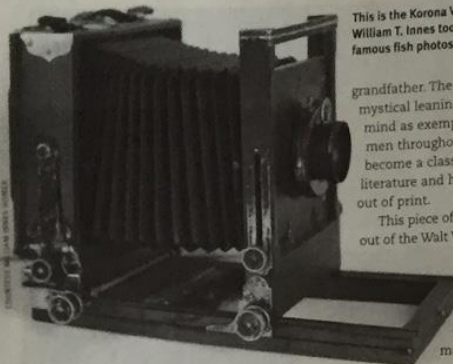
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This is the Korona View camera that William T. Innes took most of his famous fish photos with.

grandfather. The subject was the mystical leanings of the human mind as exemplified by great men throughout history. It has become a classic in spiritual literature and has never been out of print.

This piece of writing came out of the Walt Whitman circle in Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey, as did the Whitman-oriented

liberal periodical, *The Conservator* (1890 to 1919), also printed by Innes & Sons and edited by poet and critic Horace Traubel. A smaller but jewel-like Innes press effort was the *Arts & Crafts* periodical *The Artsman* (1903 to 1907), also edited by Traubel, who incidentally was my grandfather's best friend. It is perhaps no accident that Innes became a prominent Whitman collector and enthusiast, possessing one of the few copies in private hands of Whitman's celebrated first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

DUAL PASSIONS: PHOTOGRAPHY AND FISH

About this time, at the turn of the century, William T. Innes was swept along by the amateurs' wild enthusiasm

FIRST EDITORIAL IN THE AQUARIUM 1932

Below is William T. Innes's inaugural editorial in the first issue of his magazine, *The Aquarium*. This version (there was another with the same name from 1912 to 1914) of *The Aquarium* was published from 1932 until 1967. As inaugural editorials are prone to do, this one

sheds some light on Innes's philosophical approach to publishing, the hobby and the merging of the two. Reading the lines below one quickly realizes what a godsend Innes was to the aquarists of his day and for those yet to come.

THE AQUARIUM

Editors
WILLIAM T. INNES ALLEN S. MOORE
GEORGE S. MYERS
PROF. JOHN A. TIGHE

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Editorial

EVEN though many of us have met before, I am wearing a new costume (an Editor in short-sleeves), and so an introduction seems to be in order.

Introductions are essentially personal. I want this one to be so, not only for the pleasure of being friends with our readers, but also because I can, for this once, speak without restraint of the hopes and purposes of my associates and myself in launching still another periodical on a world already suffering from magazine indigestion.

Oddly enough the enormous overproduction of the printing press has never invaded the aquarium hobby. We writers and publishers have never yet caught up with the demand for good literature and truthful illustrations desired by the rapidly increasing class of fish fanciers. Most dependable well-informed subscribers to all the magazines, buy all the books available and will waste none.

In proof of this, many, many correspondents have urged us to conduct a magazine of our own—something to augment our other writings—and particular requests have been made for at least some pictures in color. We cannot these well-meant suggestions for a long time, for no matter how well

May 1932

THE AQUARIUM

one loves a hobby, it is a task to make the publication date every month. This cannot be even fractionally approximated without having tried it.

As you will observe, the arguments for proved greater than those against, so here we see. We want this periodical to be a help to everybody connected with the hobby, from the Guppy beginner to the big dealer. We hope to make these pages reflect the fascination of aquarium study so clearly that many will join with us and share our pleasure. "Pleasure is doubled by sharing it."

I want this effort to be something more than a business arrangement between subscriber and publisher. To be really successful the partnership must go further than that. We will need both your indulgence and your cooperation. In the limited space available it is impossible to always have the kind of articles that you will want. Bear with us at times, but not for too long! If we persist in emitting something of consequence, let us know about it. I believe I am a good listener. And give others the benefit of your experience and observations. Write about them. It doesn't need to be in literary form. We have an editor who will attend to that, if need be.

The field we wish to cover is too broad to be encompassed in any one issue, yet there are certain major lines where we shall try to maintain an unbroken continuity. For example, the descriptions of some new important among the tropics, a section for the goldfish fancier, a page for the beginner, something about diseases and their treatment; a section on foods of different kinds, an article on one or more of the leading popular tropicals; the microscope and chemical study of aquarium water; translations from leading foreign magazines; some space to active aquarium fishes, an attention to aquatic plant life, something on mechanical or heating devices, and seasonal articles on outdoor pools. Lastly a calendar page making practical suggestions of things to do or prepare for the month.

A rather ambitious program, but as someone has said, "Not failures, but low aim, is tragic."

As publishers we have certain fixed ideas, particularly as to the kind of advertisements we will accept, but as an editor I will always be open to argument.

This magazine, with the help of its readers, will be just as useful to them as my associates and I are able to make it. So we make a low bow and promise never again to devote so much editorial space to ourselves.

Wm. T. Innes

for pictorial photography, a gentleman's preoccupation with camera work as a mode of aesthetic expression. They wished to separate photography from its descriptive purposes and place it in the service of art. Innes was active in several Philadelphia camera clubs and exhibited in some of the more prominent salons, the most important of which were organized or inspired by master photographer Alfred Stieglitz, a New Yorker.

From these models, Innes learned the craft of photographing all subjects, including fish, and this experience gave him the necessary background to create his authoritative "Innes plates." These were, in effect, retouched color photographs of fish that incorporated sensitive human perceptions that could not be captured by the color film of Innes's day. He also learned to photograph the fish not only singly but also in pairs. Those plates, reproduced in Innes's books and articles, became world standards.

When asked how he arrived at his emphasis on the fish hobby, he wrote in a letter to me:

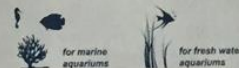
I had also become interested in photography. At that time amateur photographers had become interested in covering unusual subjects. Naturally mine was fishes and aquatic plants, not dreaming of publishing the results.

It was not long that I determined to



This is the cover of Innes's most influential aquarium book: *Exotic Aquarium Fishes* (1935). This classic work went through 19 updates through the years.

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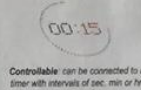
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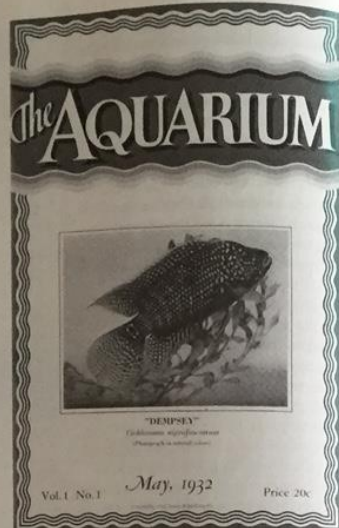
concentrate on tropicals and publish them under the title "Exotic Aquarium Fishes," combining all my studies, photographs, and love of writing." (Letter to W.I.H., April 7, 1965)

I do not know where grandfather Innes got his talent for clear writing, but I suspect it was partly from his plain-talking Quaker teachers at Friends' Central School in Philadelphia (class of 1892). As for his enthusiasm for fish, that was a gradual process. It began with his mother's example: a passionate dedication to nature study. This included her raising common goldfish in a 13-gallon aquarium, which she kept for 17 years.

Innes also owed much to a Columbia Photographic Society friend who introduced him to the Aquarium Society of Philadelphia. (Innes was later to become president.) He wrote that he "became an instant convert to the fancy Goldfish and its enthusiastic breeders... They had a cult that was quite clear." (Letter to W.I.H., April 7, 1965)

His interest in fish broadened rapidly. Innes began to investigate tropicals, "mainly studying the rather helpful catalogs of the German dealers, and also associates and members of the N.Y. Aquarium Society, whose interest lay almost exclusively in imported 'tropicals.'" (Letter to W.I.H., April 7, 1965)

This was the start of a love affair between Innes and "exotic" aquarium fish that lasted until his death in 1969. The early stages in this evolution of interest were given focus by Innes & Sons' publication of Herman T. Wolf's book, *Goldfish Breeds and Other Aquarium Fishes*. A member of the Aquarium Society of Philadelphia, Wolf had looked in vain for a publisher. Beep finally took the plunge and had my great-grandfather hand-set the type of the 385-page book. The press issued the volume in 1908. Owing to misunderstandings and a conflict of interest over the merits of goldfish versus "tropicals," Beep bought the rights to Wolf's text and then brought out a new book, *Goldfish Varieties and Tropical Aquarium Fishes* in 1917. Dr. George S.



Pictured is the 1932 debut cover of *The Aquarium*. The *Aquarium* paved the way for all aquarium publications to follow, including *Freshwater and Marine Aquarium* (FAMA) and *Aquarium Fish International*.

Myers, a younger ichthyologist, began to collaborate with Beep in the third edition of 1926; there were 15 revised editions up to and including 1932.

THE AQUARIUM

In 1932, my grandfather started his own periodical, *The Aquarium*. In each monthly issue, he demonstrated his unified knowledge of fish photography, printing and marketing in a seamless whole welded together by a writing style that reduced complicated matters to simple statements. (To this day, when I need to clear up my prose style I reach for *The Aquarium* magazine or any Innes book and read a couple of pages to get on course again.)

He challenged the Depression, achieving remarkably high circulation figures for a specialized magazine of this kind. He broke ground in aquarium

WANT MORE INFO?

Do you want aquarium history before your very eyes? Download your own "Innes Timeline" poster at FishChannel.com/InnesTimeline.

publishing by furnishing his own intensified color plates for the cover, as well as text illustrations and personally answering questions of writers whose letters to the editor were not selected for publication.

EXOTIC AQUARIUM FISHES

The book *Exotic Aquarium Fishes* (1935) was my grandfather's crowning achievement. It was illustrated mainly with his color plates, handsomely bound in a waterproof jacket with elegance and care. The book was designed to go through periodic updates, or editions, and it experienced 19 of these under Innes's direction. It quickly became the definitive handbook for "exotic" lovers and defined Innes as the dean of American aquarists. His close friend Myers assisted in this effort, but O.D.M. (Ole Doc Myers, as he was called) modestly took a back seat and let Innes's light shine. There were other books from Innes, but none — including *The Modern Aquarium*, *Aquarium Highlights*, *Your Aquarium*, *Goldfish Varieties* and *Water Gardens* — rivaled *Exotic Aquarium Fishes* in popularity.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

On his 80th birthday, February 2, 1954, Innes's friend, Myers (O.D.M.) wrote:

He is one of the least assuming of men. He has never pretended to be a scientific authority of this or that, as many in his position might have a tendency to do. He is still a learner in the aquarium and fish

WANT MORE INFO?

Witness more of the friends, family, places and accomplishments of the Dean of American Aquarists, William T. Innes!

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