

Little Things Mean A Lot: Notes on the William T. Innes Bookmark

By Lee Finley

Note: All figures are from the author's collection.

“...Now and forever, that always and ever
little things mean a lot.”

The above lines are from a 1953 song written by E. Lindeman and C. Stutz. It works for many things including relationships and history. The history relating to any topic, including aquariums, has its “big” things (who invented the aquarium?), but there is also an almost unlimited plethora of smaller (little) topic for possible address. Herein I am looking at one of these smaller, and interesting, things that make up a part of aquarium history – the William T. Innes bookmark.

My primary interests in the history of the aquarium hobby are deeply rooted in the 19th Century, but I do digress on occasion. What follows is an obvious case of this.

When my long time friend Wayne Leibel passed away he, in his will, bequeathed to me his collection of aquarium books. Notable among these was a complete set of the William T. Innes masterwork *Exotic Aquarium Fishes* which consists of 20 books published between 1935 and 1964 (19 editions plus a 19th Revised Edition). Further down, references to these books will simply refer to the Leibel Collection. Though they are now a part of my library they will always have that definition for me. For completeness

I will note that later printings were also a part of the set (including the infamous 20th and 21st editions which are complete... Well enough said on this). Non-mention of these latter two editions is treating them as nice as I can.

William T(hornton) Innes (1874-1969) was the master aquarist of the 20th Century (Figure 1). Joe Ferdenzi (2007 in Addendum) labeled him a “Paragon Of the Aquarium Hobby” and noted that many aquarists consider him “...the Father of the American Aquarium Hobby.” The grandson of Innes, William Innes Homer, noted him to be “...a pathfinder for fishkeeping hobbyists (Homer 2011).



Figure 1: William T. Innes, circa 1934, tending his home aquariums

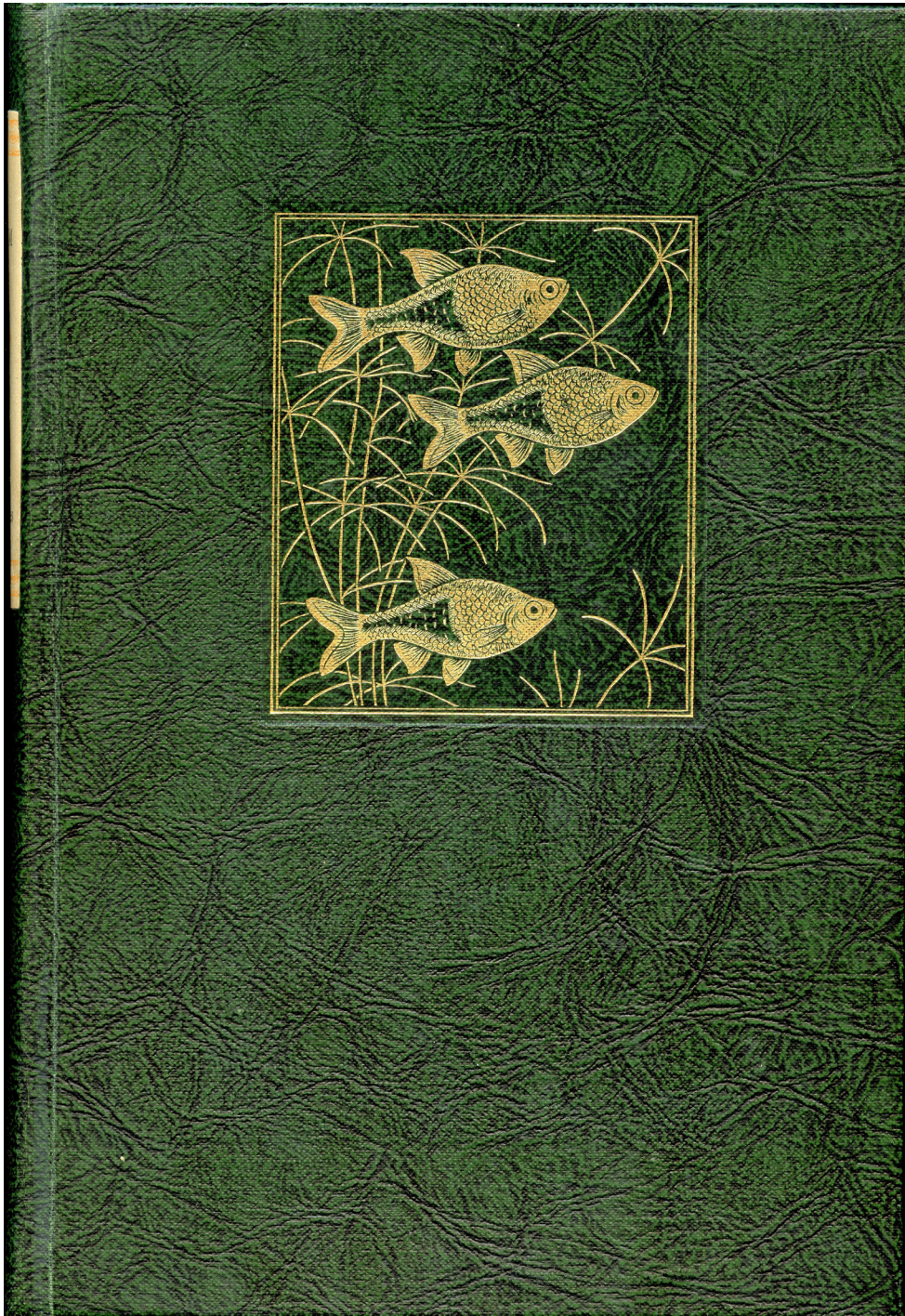


Figure 2: The iconic, and beautiful, cover of Exotic Aquarium Fishes

Innes published many books that he wrote or edited and - printed them - he was a life long printer. But the Exotic Aquarium Fishes was his pinnacle (Figure 2). Ichthyologist George S. Myers called his first edition (1935) of the book the "book-of-books." Al Klee, hobby historian, called the book(s) "the piece de resistance of all books" published within the same time frame. Lastly, in 1953 Herbert Axelrod, in his first published book, inscribed the following to Innes in a presentation copy "... without whose pioneering no book on tropical fishes could be a success...". Although many pages have been written about Innes, someday, some time, hopefully someone will do a full biography of this greatest of American aquarists.

I have attached to this article an Addendum of some work that has been done regarding the many editions of Exotic Aquarium Fishes. Hopefully you might explore some of these to get a better appreciation of this masterwork of aquarium titles.

But for this article I

am going to address one of the little things regarding this book. This is the Innes bookmark that was present in an unknown number of copies. Technically it could be called the Innes Publishing Company bookmark, but I prefer to stay with the simpler phrase. Advertising copy on the dust jacket of one of the variants of the 19th Revised Edition noted that "...over 400,000 copies sold!" Wow, a lot of books. I have, so far, never found any mention in advertising regarding the bookmark that shows up time to time. Were they in all copies!? Randomly inserted in some copies? No one seems to know. A friend, Ray Wetzel, remembers getting a new copy of the book in the early 1950's and a bookmark was not present. Definitely, more research is needed in this area. Bookmarks are often considered as ephemeral items and it certainly appears to be the case here.

The Bookmarks

Although there are noticeable variations discussed below, there are common features that exist with the bookmarks. The basic size of all is the same – approximately nine by two inches. Although, I will note that the width can show some minimal variation of two to four millimeters. The base color is white. Ferdenzi (1994 in Addendum), in the only article on the bookmark that I am aware of, noted a “buff” coloration, but in his supplemental comments in the CAL reprint he described the color as “white.” I agree with this modified latter description. The text on all bookmarks is the same and it clearly gives to the owner tips on how to take care of their book. Great advice! The illustration, of a then *Cichlasoma festivum* (now in the genus *Mesonauta*), is also consistent. So, what are the considered differences? I am creating a coding for the variants as noted below.

Variety 1 – This bookmark is in earlier editions and the large words “This Bookmark Says –“ are printed in black ink (Figure 3).

Variety 2 – On these bookmarks the large words “This Bookmark Says –“ are printed in green ink (Figure 4). This second variety may be further divided into two subgroups. The differences here is in the “squiggles” that appear below and above the green bars at the top and bottom of the paper.

Variety 2a shows approximately 10 raised areas in the wavy line (Figure 5).

Variety 2b shows approximately 19 to 20 raises in the wavy line (Figure 6).

Granted, the differences between 2a and 2b may not be earth shaking, but a difference is a difference, and these may help in identifying a edition/time span for a particular piece (see the listings below).

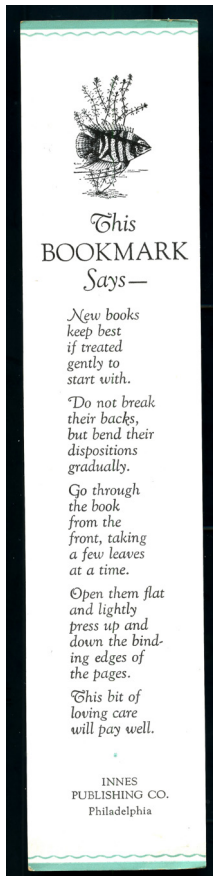


Figure 3: The Innes Bookmark, Variety 1. See text

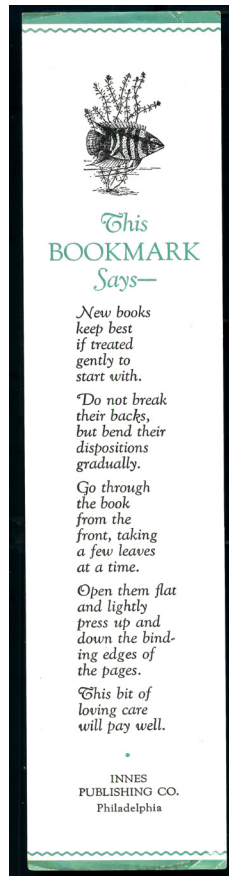


Figure 4: The Innes Bookmark, Variety 2. See text



Figure 5: Innes Bookmark, Variety 2a detail. See text

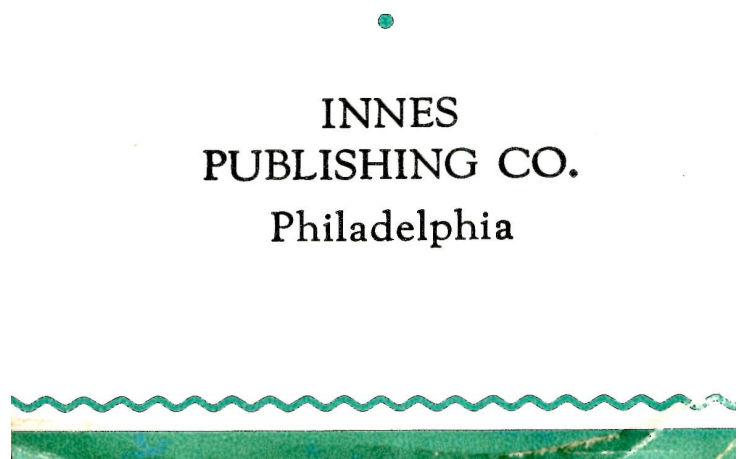


Figure 6: Innes Bookmark, Variety 2b detail. See text

The Bookmarks and Their Placement

Before moving on to the placement of bookmarks in various editions of Exotic Aquarium Fishes, mention should be made of their presence in other Innes publications. Two other Innes titles have been observed to contain the bookmark: The first of these is Goldfish Varieties and Water Gardens, Second Edition, 1949. This bookmark was noted on Etsy (seller PFTPAntiquesales). In that this bookmark was a Variety 2b, a question is raised regarding its originality to the source (see dating information below). The second book is Aquarium Highlights, First Edition, 1951. The bookmark present was Variety 2b and this was in my possession.

Now, for Exotic Aquarium Fishes placement. Only editions with bookmarks in place are covered. The following results are based on my personal observations over the years; bookmarks present in the Leibel collection; and information and scans provided by Joe Ferdenzi and Mark Soberman. Gary Bagnall, of MOAPH, also kindly provided some discussion and scans. Discussions on the topic with Ray Wetzel were also quite helpful. Additionally, observations on editions of the book with illustrated bookmarks available on various websites (eBay, Etsy, etc.) were also very useful.

1. First Edition, May 1935: In the Leibel collection is a first edition (in original shipping container) signed by Innes on May 20th to Eugenia Shorrock of the Boston Aquarium Society. There is no bookmark present with the copy. Hinshaw (2015b in Addendum) called this specific book "...truly a first 1st!" due to the date signed by Innes. This copy has a short, and known, provenance (Innes to Shorrock, to Lee Finley, to Wayne Leibel, and back to Lee Finley) and it is my assumption that no bookmark was provided with it.

The Leibel collection contains another first edition that does have a bookmark in place. But in that it is a Variety 2b (which was not available until at least 1951), I consider that it is not original to the book.

2. Second Edition, December 1935: In the Leibel collection there is a copy of this edition containing a Variety 1 bookmark. I therefore provisionally consider this as valid. A confirmation of this would be welcome.
3. Fifth Edition, 1944: A Variety 1 bookmark is known to have been found in a copy of this edition.
4. Eighth Edition, 1947: A Variety 1 bookmark is present in this edition of the Leibel collection. One has also been noted in an online copy (at Mercadolibre.com.ar).
5. Ninth Edition, 1948: This appears to have been a transitional year. A variety 1 bookmark was illustrated with this edition on eBay (seller attend). A Variety 2a bookmark contained in this edition was owned by myself.
6. Tenth Edition, 1949: A Variety 2a is in this edition in the Leibel collection. Of note is that this piece is on thinner paper than most of the others personally seen and handled. [In the Leibel collection is an equally thin Variety 1 bookmark, but there is no way to know it's edition origin].
7. Eleventh Edition, 1950: A copy of this edition contains a Variety 2a bookmark.
8. Twelfth Edition, 1951: A copy of this edition contains a Variety 2b bookmark. Also, I have had another copy containing the same bookmark.
9. Fourteenth Edition, 1952: A Variety 2b bookmark is known in a copy of this edition. This is the copy that Ferdenzi (1994 in Addendum) initially, and incorrectly, called a 1953 edition.
10. Fifteenth Edition, 1953: A Variety 2b bookmark is present in a copy of this edition.
11. Nineteenth Edition, 1956: A copy of this edition on eBay (seller roundmound) illustrated a Variety 2b bookmark.

So, to summarize the presence pattern of bookmark varieties in volumes of Exotic Aquarium Fishes:

- a. Variety 1 is found in earlier editions (somewhat of a question exists regarding the second edition). But it is definitely appears to be the variety found from the fifth edition to the ninth edition where it then apparently overlaps with Variety 2a.
- b. Variety 2a is found from the ninth edition (note overlap above) to the eleventh edition.

c. Variety 2b appears to most probably be contained in editions twelve through nineteen.

Of course, it must always be considered that a previous owner may have moved a bookmark around between editions. But that is the nature of the beast and increases the potential value of patterning.

Addendum

All of the below articles were published in “Modern Aquarium - Series 3”, which is the publication of The Greater City Aquarium Society of Queens, New York. This is one of, if not the, best aquarium society publications in the U.S. In addition to their hard copy run they have done the hobby a great service by having all the issues of this magazine from January 1994 to date published on the internet. This is the fine work of the club’s editor Dan Radebaugh. From a bibliographic point of view I have not gone into great detail in the articles below (skipping Volume and Issue numbers), but the presentation will make it easy for the reader to go to the club’s website (<https://greatercity.net/modern-aquarium.html>) and easily access the noted articles which are in chronological order. In addition to these articles, which are connected to this piece, I am sure that you will be able to find additional reading pleasure in just about any area of the hobby that interests you.

Joe Ferdenzi. February/March 1994. The Innes Bookmark. Page 13.

[Author’s note: This piece, with some important additional information, was reprinted in the publication “Collectors of Aquarium Literature”, Number 54, April 1994, pages 2-3.]

Susan Priest. November 2007a. Exotic Aquarium Fishes by Dr. Wm. T. Innes - A Seventy-Two Year Perspective. Part One: Introduction. Pages 11-12.

Susan Priest. November 2007b. Exotic Aquarium Fishes by Dr. Wm. T. Innes - A Seventy-Two Year Perspective. Part Two: Review of Editions One, Eight, and Thirteen. Pages 18-20.

Susan Priest. December 2007c. Exotic Aquarium Fishes by Dr. Wm. T. Innes - A Seventy-Two Year Perspective. Part Three: Review of Editions Nineteen, Twenty and Twenty-One. Pages 14-16.

Susan Priest. December 2007d. Exotic Aquarium Fishes by Dr. Wm. T. Innes - A Seventy-Two Year Perspective. Part Four: Summary. Page 30.

[Author’s note: Susan’s four articles provide a fantastic and pleasantly written overview of various editions of the book, including the good (those done by, or in cooperation with, Innes) and those not so good (the so-called 20th and 21st editions which many call just plain bad). I must also note here that immediately following Part Four is a great one-page article by Joe Ferdenzi entitled “Dr. William T. Innes – A Paragon of the Aquarium Hobby.” A fitting wrap-up to Susan’s series of articles.]

Steven Hinshaw. March 2012a. Exotic Aquarium Fishes. The Book, The Collection. Pages 23-28.

Steven Hinshaw. May 2012b. Exotic Aquarium Fishes. The Book, The Collection, the Update. Pages 9-12.

Steven Hinshaw. July 2012c. It Does Exist!!! Pages 21-22.

Steven Hinshaw. April 2014. Exotic Aquarium Fishes. The Prize Catch. Pages 18-20.

Steven Hinshaw. May 2015a. The Collector’s Obsession -or- Details of a Mystery Solved: The Final Chapter of the EAFs? Pages 10-17.

Steven Hinshaw. June 2015b. The Collector’s Obsession -or- Details of a Mystery Solved: Supplement to the Final Chapter. Pages 11-13.

[Author’s note: The collective all of Steven’s articles is nothing short of a beautifully illustrated and comprehensive review of the many physical aspects of the Innes book over the years. They are a must read for the serious fans of this author and his publication.]

There is one other article of interest regarding the Innes book that deserves mention herein. This is “Notes on Books 3 - Dust Jackets on Exotic Aquarium Fishes” which was written by Stu Wheeler and published in “Collectors of Aquarium Literature”, Number 22, February 1988. This two-and-a-half-page illustrated article was the earliest of such work and well deserving of a read for interested parties. The “Collectors of Aquarium Literature” series is being reprinted by the MOAPH, but it will be some time

before this issue becomes available on the site. If anyone might be interested in a copy, please feel free to contact me via this site and I will be happy to provide one for you.

References

- Homer, W.I. 2011. William T. Innes: The Aquarium Life. *Aquarium Fish International*, Vol. 23, No. 1. January: 40-47.
- Klee, A.J. 2003. *The Toy Fish – A History of the Aquarium Hobby in America – The First One-Hundred Years. Revised & Expanded Edition.* Finley Aquatic Books, Pascoag R.I. 204 pp.
- Myers, G.S. 1954. Fifty Years of Devotion to the Aquarium Hobby. *The Aquarium*, Vol. 23, No. 2 February: 35-39.

Afterward

I respectfully dedicate this article to the memory of Wayne Leibel, my longtime friend, mentor, and occasional co-author. May he rest in peace.

I will also note here that research on this topic will be continuing. I will greatly appreciate hearing from anyone regarding their having, or knowing about, any editions containing bookmarks that are not noted in the listing above. In addition, confirmation of varieties in editions that are noted above will also be valuable confirmatory information in that some of them are based on only one example. I can be contacted care of MOAPH and will hopefully look forward to hearing about such items. Thank you in advance!