

UNIQUE PURPLE SHELL OF THE
PAPER NAUTILUS
(*ARGONAUTA ARGO* LINNAEUS)

BY RICHARD I. JOHNSON

On October 7, 1873, Dr. Augustine Shurtleff wrote the Museum of Comparative Zoology, offering for sale the collection of shells made by his late father, Dr. Samuel A. Shurtleff, who, before his death, was an active member of the Boston Society of Natural History.

"My late father left a very large and complete cabinet of shells. In the year 1840 it was one of the most extensive collections in New England."

J. G. Anthony, then in charge of conchology, but in ill health, turned the correspondence over to his young assistant, Charles E. Hamlin, who wrote on November 15:

"Mr. Anthony's long experience makes his opinion of the money value of your collection worth knowing, while mine is not. He has said to me, and would probably not object to my repeating to you, that he regards from \$800 to \$1000 as a fair valuation of your shells. They doubtless cost your Father more, but as you are aware all such collections are disposed of at a cruel sacrifice, if put to sale. The dispersion of private cabinets and libraries after the death of their gatherers is one of the saddest things in the world."

In a further letter, December 9, 1873, Hamlin wrote: "With regard to the purple Paper Nautilus, Messrs. Anthony, Jenks and myself conversed about it last week. Mr. A., who is familiar with all the tricks of dealers, pronounced the color to be artificial — the result of some dying process adopted to make it a rare specimen. As he is a very *positive* man he will probably adhere to his notion. But from your account of the shell it seems to me its color is probably genuine. The species is doubtless *Argonauta argo*, ordinarily white, as you are aware, but in this case colored by reason of some unusual conditions of its life or habitat."



Johnson, Richard Irwin. 1975. "Unique purple shell of the Paper Nautilus (Argonauta argo Linnaeus)." *Occasional papers on mollusks* 4(52), 103–104.

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