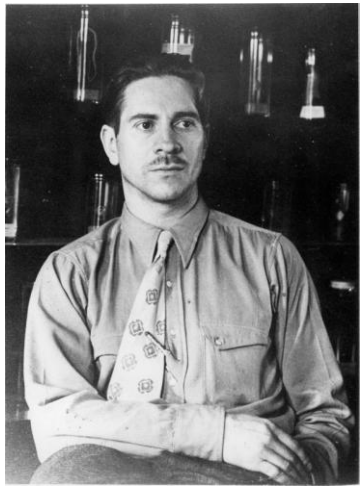
Pacific Biological Laboratories (Ed Ricketts' Lab)

Ed Ricketts

(May 14, 1897 – May 11, 1948), born Edward Flanders Robb Ricketts, in Chicago, was a marine biologist, an early promoter of ecology, a philosophical writer, and owner-operator of Pacific Biological Laboratories, a marine biological supply company on Cannery Row.



Ed Ricketts, circa 1936

Ricketts wrote the classic study of intertidal communities, Between Pacific Tides (1939) with his co-author and friend Jack Calvin, and was John Steinbeck's best friend until Ricketts' death in a train accident at Drake Avenue in 1948. Ricketts also collaborated with Steinbeck on the Sea of Cortez, later named the Log from the Sea of Cortez (1951), the account of their biological collecting expedition to the Gulf of California. The Log from the Sea of Cortez is considered one of the great literary travel exploration books.

Ricketts at Lab with Humboldt squid

Ed Ricketts provided Steinbeck with the model – along with Steinbeck's own vivid imagination – for the fictional character of "Doc," operator of Western Biological Laboratory, located across the street from Lee Chong's grocery (real Wing Chong Co.) and a house of prostitution in Steinbeck's novel Cannery Row (1945) and its sequel, Sweet Thursday. Ricketts also formed the basis for other "Doctor" characters in Steinbeck's fiction.

The real Ricketts was an early proponent of ecology, an avid student of literature, philosophy, and poetry. Along with Fish & Game scientist Frances Clark, Ricketts predicted the collapse of the sardine industry. Ricketts started the Lab on Cannery Row (then named Ocean View Avenue) in 1928. Although the building burned in 1936, he returned to the rebuilt Lab to pursue his biological supply business and research. The Lab served as his home, becoming the forum for writers and artists.

Ricketts with Toni Jackson, and John and Rich Lovejoy, circa 1945

Monterey Jazz Festival

After Ricketts' death in 1948, the Lab was rented by Harlan Watkins, a literature teacher. In 1956 Watkins bought the building and a group of friends, including several nationally famous cartoonists, gathered together to form the Pacific Biological Laboratory group. As jazz enthusiasts, they invited jazz promoter Jimmy Lyons to the Lab in 1957, and the idea for the Monterey Jazz Festival was born. In 1993, the building transferred to the City of Monterey to insure the preservation and interpretation of this unique scientific, literary and cultural resource.

Cartoonists Gus Arriola, Hank Ketchum, and Eldon Dedini at Lab. circa 1984

City Tours of PBL

The City of Monterey schedules free public tours of the PBL during the year. Tours also feature a scale model of the Lab in the 1940s, created by artist and model maker Bill Johnk. The City of Monterey also provides special opportunities for educational and cultural groups to tour and visit the Lab.

For more information on tours or to apply for special group visits, call 831-646-5648.

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Limited scheduled tours throughout the year

www.monterey.org

Photographs courtesy of Monterey Public Library – California History Room,
Ed Ricketts, Jr., and Vicki Pearse
(Ralph Bauschbaum squid photo)

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800 Cannery Row
Monterey, CA 93940

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1946