

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

WASHINGTON
September 30, 1935.

Dr. H. B. Stenzel,
Bureau of Economic Geology,
Austin, Texas.

Dear Doctor Stenzel:

In reply to your letter of September 18:

The shell on which Lamarck based his species Planospirites ostreacina, and which is the type of his genus Planospirites, appears from the figure to be the upper valve of an Exogyra, although characters on which to base a specific description are not afforded by the specimen. Indeed, Lamarck seems to have regarded it as a gastropod for he refers to it as univalve.

This is one of those unfortunate cases in which a later name has become widely used for a very long period (more than 100 years), whereas the earlier name was entirely overlooked until attention was called to it by Jourdy (1924). In such cases the discarding of the later name in favor of the earlier name results in more confusion than would result if the later name were retained. Some cases of this kind have been submitted to the International Commission and have been given a special ruling validating the later name. I understand that the brachiopod genus Spirifer is an example in which the rules have been waived because of long usage.

I hope that in calling attention to the older name Planospirites in the article you are preparing you will take this view of the matter, and will suggest that the Commission should be given an opportunity to rule on the merits of the two names.

Personally I feel that it would be very unfortunate, indeed, to attempt to give up our old name Exogyra. It has been used in hundreds of papers in many languages, pertaining to localities scattered over the whole world. So far as I know Planospirites has not been used for any except the type specimen. The concept of Exogyra is widespread. If we make the change few would know for years to come what was meant by Planospirites.

After all, the object of the rules is to establish universal nomenclature and in the case of Exogyra we already have that universal nomenclature. As you doubtless know, many of the European workers do not take the rules quite as seriously as we do. Since they have failed to make this change, although they have known the facts in the case, it is not likely that they will be willing to do so now. If you agree that the object of the rules is the establishment of a universal nomenclature, I am sure you will also agree that in this

case the proposed change would have the opposite effect. The case does seem to be one which will require the waiving of the rules in order to validate Exogyra.

Generally speaking, I am in favor of adhering to the rule of priority, because experience has shown that, in most cases, that is the surest and fairest way of arriving at a universal nomenclature. But when blind adherence to the rule produces an effect exactly the opposite of that intended, it would seem that the reasonable thing to do would be to make an exception to the rule. I feel confident that when all the facts are laid before the Commission they will rule in favor of Exogyra.

There seems to be a growing tendency on the part of present-day paleontologists to admit the reasonableness of waiving the rules in certain special cases, of which Exogyra versus Planospirites appears to be an exceptionally good example.

With kind personal regards,

Yours sincerely,

L. H. Stephenson
Chief, Section of Coastal Plain
Investigations.