Guest Editorial:
Provenance:
Its importance in Mineral Collecting

The world of mineralogy and mineral collecting has an incredibly rich history, filled not only with kings and queens, nobles and czars, and some of the most brilliant scientists ever to have walked the earth, but also with miners, dealers, brokers, collectors and thieves. Anyone who has possessed a mineral specimen, whether for a few minutes or for decades, is part of that history. The memories of all such people, together with stories, labels, published references, and anything else recording the history of a particular specimen, all contribute to that specimen's *provenance*. These many memories of a specimen's history help the collector who treasures a specimen to appreciate it even more, and to understand its historical significance more deeply.

In many other fields of collecting, the world of fine arts for example, provenance can be a major determinant of an object's value, importance and desirability. In these worlds, reports on provenance are a standard tool used for evaluation: if an object has an elaborate history filled with colorful people and stories of intrigue, its desirability, and thus its value, can increase several fold. A provenance report, be it a simple sentence or a document filling many pages, brings a collectible object to life and ensures that that "life" will be fully appreciated.

Provenance reports also provide collectors and dealers with valuable documented information on previous ownership. With a list of previous owners, perhaps enhanced by stories about an object's history, the trail of ownership can be traced. If someone challenges the legitimacy of the current ownership of the object, a good provenance report can discourage all false claims. Of course, legal disputes over ownership happen more regularly in the world of fine art than in the world of mineral collecting, and consequently provenance reports are far more common in that world. But written records of provenance are becoming more valuable in mineral collecting, too. The finest mineral specimens are increasingly being regarded in the way that paintings, sculptures and antiquities have historically been regarded, and the demand for documentation of provenance is becoming ever more urgent as aggressive new collectors move from the world of the fine arts to that of fine minerals.

Unfortunately, most mineral specimens in collections today do not have well documented provenance. Much of the information about the provenance of a mineral specimen typically exists only in the memories of the collectors who have owned it or the dealers who have handled it. And it is a sad fact that when a mineral changes hands, much of its provenance is apt to be forgotten and forever lost.

During the last half decade or so, Fine Minerals International has collected provenance notes for many significant specimens we have handled, and for collectors who have acquired these specimens from us we have provided formal provenance reports. Certain specimens have had extensive and colorful recorded histories while for others there has only been, say, a five-word sentence to specify the last known owner. And naturally there have been many intermediate cases. But regardless of the volume of information available, it is highly worthwhile to document all relevant facts, first for one's own records and secondly, and more importantly, to preserve them for the specimen's future owners.

Logically, a mineral specimen's provenance begins with the miner who collected it and the locality where it was collected. Contemporary minerals reach collectors and dealers via a myriad of different routes. In some cases the dealer or the collector knows the miner who was the first person ever to have touched the specimen. Sometimes, indeed, these are actually the same person: the collector has (as the common term has it) "self-collected" the specimen. In any event, whoever has first taken the specimen from the earth is the first *component* of that specimen's provenance; other, later components may accumulate quickly. It is rare that a new owner is provided with *all* of the known history of a specimen, and even in such cases the information is most likely to be passed on verbally rather than formally documented. Sometimes a short note on the back of a label is available, and perhaps there may even exist a letter with pertinent information. However, even good information may be poorly recorded and may, anyway, be lost at the next change of ownership.

More commonly, minerals arrive at shows or make it onto dealers' shelves with no histories whatsoever. For many older specimens the provenance was never documented and is therefore lost permanently. If a particular dealer or collector is handling a specimen, that fact alone may give clues regarding the specimen's source or history, but this sort of information is of little use in the absence of any firm documentation. I have been engaged in collecting and trading fine minerals for over 25 years, and to date I have never seen a specimen come accompanied by an official provenance report (other than those reports we have recently begun providing ourselves to collectors). The best cases usually involve just a small stack of labels of previous owners. To be sure, contemporary mineral specimens cannot have very much "history," but whatever information is available should at least be documented, providing a foundation for future records of provenance.

In greatest contrast to contemporary specimens are those that the industry calls "classics," as well as those it calls "icons"—particular specimens recognized by everyone in the trade as treasures. Classics and icons can come with incredibly long, detailed histories which, beyond just documenting the ownership chain, also tell stories out of the specimens' pasts. And, even beyond lists of owners and collections of stories, the provenances of these venerable specimens may include old labels, published descriptions and studies, and published drawings, etchings or photographs of the specimens.

All provenance is worthy of documenting, but, obviously, a rich provenance enhances a specimen's value more than a meager one does. Of course, if the specimen itself is not especially desirable to the collector, its provenance has very little effect on its value and

desirability. But the correlative fact is that if the specimen is an icon—perhaps one of the finest known examples of its species—and has, in addition, a rich and well documented provenance, its desirability and financial value is substantially increased.

Some specimens of the "classic" type have wonderful provenances that can actually be more significant than the specimens themselves—I have encountered this phenomenon many times. Throughout history, mineral specimens have been available to fill the shelves of collectors, many of whom have amassed collections numbering into the thousands of specimens. And it seems to be true that many important collectors who were active before the 20th century maintained better documentation than later collectors have. A century ago, many collectors liked to acquire from 20 to 100 specimens of the same species from the same locality, and certainly not all of these were of equal distinction: typically, specimens which today's collectors would say are of "fine quality" are few in such older collections. So in a collection with, say, 50 Chessy or Bisbee azurites, all with well documented, detailed provenance, it is possible that only one or two specimens are on a level of quality equal to this rich history. Specimens that are *both* of exceedingly fine quality by today's standards *and* are possessed of a wonderfully rich history are beyond rare.

As minerals continue to climb in desirability to collectors worldwide, it is only logical that the documentation of provenance becomes more important as well. It is up to collectors and dealers to help document and transmit the history of important mineral specimens, and thus to preserve the valuable and fascinating "historical" aspect of mineral collecting for future generations.

Daniel Trinchillo

Notes from the Editors

Remember the Bum Steer?

Many long-time visitors to the Tucson Show, especially those old enough to fondly remember the Desert Inn days, will also remember a unique and quirky barn-like restaurant and saloon called The Bum Steer, located at 1910 North Stone. The high ceiling areas on several floors, connected by a maze of stairways, were jammed-packed with the most unlikely assortment of Western antiques, old signs and oddities, including the infamous pterodactyl "in heat"—most of it obtained from the back lot of an old Hollywood movie studio. The Bum Steer (they made great hamburgers) was opened in the early 1970s by a group of Tucson airline pilots who wanted a fun place to hang out, and was a college hotspot for several decades; it has been closed since 2010, and has recently gone on the auction block. The winning bidder paid $198,550 for the property, the 8,000-square-foot building, and all of the amazing memorabilia (including the pterodactyl!).

An "Excellent" Mineral Specimen

For those of us involved in reporting for publication on the quality of minerals we see, and just talking to our friends about them, the use of superlatives can become an interesting challenge. What words do you use (in English) to describe a really "excellent" mineral specimen? *Time* magazine recently published a list of historical synonyms for "excellent," along with the year in which each word was first used in that context. Not only does this list provide us with a wealth of options (I'm sure that Tom Moore will be cribbing from it in future show reports), but we can see what our mineral collecting brethren of previous centuries might have been saying about their favorite mineral specimens as well. Here is a selection:

Special	1225	Swell	1810	Sweet	1924
Golden	1400	Great	1818	Ace	1929
Fine	1440	Slick	1833	Cool	1933
Jolly	1548	Boss	1836	Solid	1935
Excellent	1604	Hot	1845	Groovy	1937
Fabulous	1609	Stunning	1849	Neato	1951
Nuts	1617	Spiffy	1853	Smoking	1964
Prime	1637	Nifty	1865	Radical	1964
Spanking	1666	Choice	1880	Bad	1971
Capital	1713	Stellar	1883	Bomb	1973
Immense	1762	Jim Dandy	1885	Killer	1979
Ripping	1776	Peachy	1900	Awesome	1980
Dandy	1794	Smashing	1911	Bangin'	1990
Neat	1806	Wicked	1920		

Historical Movie Trivia

Those of us having an interest in the history of mineralogy and geology sometimes can't help fixating, in our leisure hours, on bits of historical trivia that we come across. One such bit that has always intrigued me is something from the wonderful 1959 movie *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, starring James Mason and Pat Boone. Mineral collectors in particular will remember the fascinating scene in which the explorers break into an enormous crystal-lined grotto and collect a cluster of citrine crystals, resulting in a flood. But what caught my attention from an historical standpoint was the rousing school song that was sung in the movie (twice!) by geology students at the University of Edinburgh in 1880, honoring their Geology professor, Sir Oliver Lindenbrook. Here's how it goes:

James Mason as Sir Oliver Lindenbrook in the 1959 movie *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, having just collected what appears to be a pair of citrine quartz crystals.

Here's to the prof of Geology
Master of all Natural History
Rare boy he, and rare boys we
To know such a big curiosity.
To the prof, kai-yai-yai-yai
To the pick, kai-yai-yai-yai
To the nick, kai-yai-yai-yai-yai-yai-yai-yai

It sounds like one should have a beer in his hand while singing that song. Having been a geology student myself once, and having had great camaraderie with my professors, the spirit of the song resonates with me in a warmly nostalgic way. But where did it come from? It was not claimed by composer Bernard Herrmann, who wrote the musical score for the movie, and it does not appear in the original 1864 novel by Jules Verne, Voyage au Centre de la Terre. Actually, the scene in the movie was shot twice using different songs. The British and international version uses the song Gaudeamus Igitur in Latin—"So Let Us Rejoice," a popular academic commercium song in many European countries and South Africa, mainly sung or performed at university graduation ceremonies. For the American version they went with "Here's To the Prof of Geology."

One on-line reviewer (Groucho Reviews) thinks the song was written (uncredited) by Sammy Cahn and James Van Heusen, probably because they wrote other songs that were later cut from the film. But I don't believe it; after all, they didn't write *Gaudeamus Igitur*. From internal evidence it appears to me that this song had to have been written in the 19th century, and must therefore be an authentic school song from an early geology department. Consider: (1) No modern geologist would ever claim to be a "master" of all natural history, meaning geology, mineralogy, botany, mammology, entomology, paleontology, etc. etc., but in the 19th century it was possible. (2) And anyway, who uses the term "natural history" anymore? (3) The "boys club" that constituted the geology department when the song was written apparently had no concern for offending the female students, no doubt because there weren't any. (4) A "curiosity" in 19th-century usage was an interesting object of intellectual value—not a definition that is in use today. If Cahn and Van Heusen did write it, they showed a remarkable understanding of 19th-century idiom and cultural mind-set.

I once asked the British mineral historian Mick Cooper about this, and he found the question equally fascinating. The meaning of "the pick" to geologists is obvious, but what about "the nick"? Doing a little research, he learned that "nick" was a 19th-century term for a mine or open-cut in a hillside. What modern songwriter would know *that*? Although the word is clear on the soundtrack and if you watch the singers' lips, it is always incorrectly transcribed by Internet sources.

Mick had a friend at the University of Edinburgh who checked the school library for us and indeed did find a book of school songs, but "Here's to the Prof of Geology" was not among them. Perhaps the song originated at a different university? I even wrote to Pat Boone about it, since he was among those who sang it in the movie, but received no response. Unfortunately Mick passed away before we could pursue this question further, and no more research has been done. So: Can any reader contribute a new insight into the possible origin of this song?

The scene can be viewed online at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-9yeQP6n4o

Died, Sheikh Saud al-Thani, 48

Sheikh Saud bin Muhammad bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Jassim bin Muhammed al-Thani of Qatar, cousin of the current Emir of Qatar, was born in Qatar on February 28, 1966, and died suddenly from complications of a heart condition at his home in London on November 9, 2014. Sheikh Saud was an avid collector of high-end mineral specimens, and had purchased Keith Proctor's famous "Rose of Itatiaia" specimen some years ago (see the March–April 1981 cover and the article on the Jonas mine in the May–June 2012 issue).

He was schooled in Doha before studying law at Beirut University, then returned home to join the foreign ministry. His interest in the arts and cultural heritage was kindled by stamp collecting from the age of 13. When Sheikh Hamad appointed him to head up Qatar's artistic and cultural development as president of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage (1997–2005), the ruler backed Saud's eye with an almost unlimited checkbook. Saud became widely regarded as the richest and most powerful art collector in the world, driving up the art market and overseeing ambitious plans to build an extensive network of new museums (including a natural history museum), schools and libraries in the country's capitol city of Doha. He also spent over $1 billion on art during that period, which may stand as a record for one individual. "Sheikh Saud had

Sheikh Saud Al Thani. B. Pietro Filardo photo.

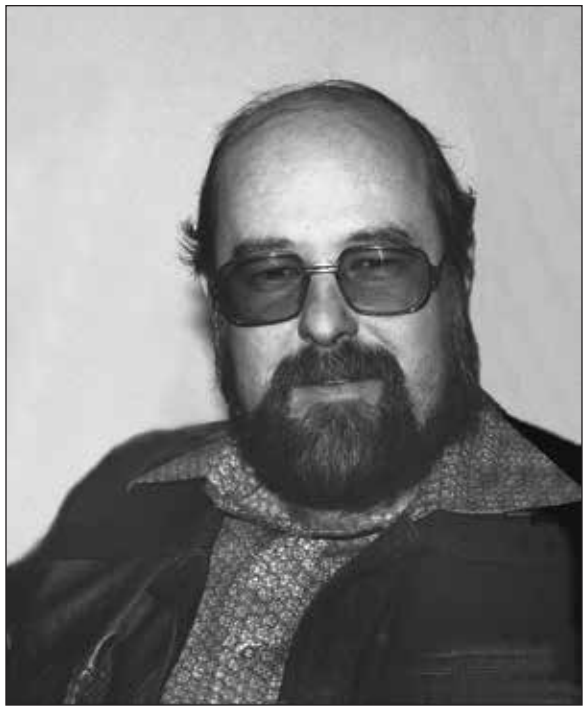
passion, vision and an eye for incredible things," said a statement by Sheikha al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the head of Qatar Museums and sister of Sheikh Tamim, the current emir.

Qatar's royal family is well-known for its voracious collecting habits. Polite yet distant, Saud often entertained visitors at his Al Wabra farm, a breeding and research center for endangered wildlife. Alongside the ornately furnished reception were barns holding dozens of luxury cars, hundreds of vintage bicycles, Roman rarities and even fossils. Over the past 20 years, Saud assembled a vast collection of art, rare coins, artifacts and mineral specimens, with a special concentration on historical artifacts and Islamic art—a collection which today comprises the bulk of the holdings of five existing and planned museums: the Natural History Museum, the Museum of Islamic Art, the National Library, a Photography Museum, and a museum for traditional textiles and clothing. He also built major collections of antique cars, bicycles, furniture, and Chinese artifacts. Two days after his death, his pocket watch, a unique 1930s Henry Graves Super Complication by Patek Philippe, sold at a Sotheby's auction in Geneva for $24 million, the highest price ever paid for a timepiece.

Died, Rick Smith, 75

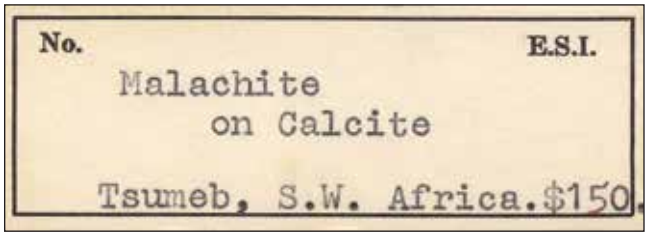
Frederick Ludlow Smith III, well-known New Jersey mineral dealer in the 1970s, was born August 13, 1939, in Short Hills, New Jersey, the son of Louise Francis and Augustus Whitehead Smith, a building contractor. Rick was named after his uncle and his grandfather, all Sons of the American Revolution. He graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1963, and married Shelagh D. Cann.

Smith entered the mineral business sometime in the mid to late 1960s. He is listed as "New Jersey Mineral Supply" in a 1966 directory, at the same address (1 Short Hills Ave., Short Hills, New Jersey) as he used in ads in the 1970s. Smith was among the early mineral dealers—including his older competitor Martin Ehrmann—to visit Tsumeb, South-West Africa after the second oxidation zone was discovered there. Smith specialized in expensive, very high-quality specimens for exclusive, elite clientele, often working in partnership



Frederick Ludlow "Rick" Smith III, 1939–2014

with his good friend Charles Key under the business name "Earth Science Industries" (noted on labels simply as "E.S.I."). The rare Tsumeb mineral *ludlockite* was named jointly for Frederick Ludlow Smith and Charles Locke Key in 1970, in recognition of their discovery of the mineral.

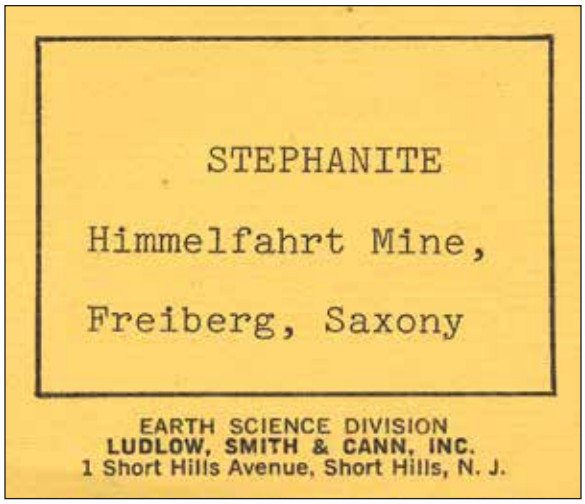


Mineral label from "E.S.I." ("Earth Science Industries"), the 1970s company of Rick Smith and Charlie Key.

He also advertised under the grandiose name of "Earth Science Division, Ludlow, Smith & Cann" (Cann referring to his wife) in the early 1970s. His January–February 1971 ad in the *Mineralogical Record*, giving the company address as 1 Short Hills Avenue in Short Hills, New Jersey, stated "Shop opens April 1." Of course, that could have been an April Fool's Day joke; the address in following ads through July-August did not change.

After a hiatus, ads for "F. L. Smith Minerals" appeared in the March-April 1974 through January–February 1975 issues. The first two were intended to be humorous, tongue-in-cheek ads written by Smith and Smithsonian curator John White, though not every reader got the joke, and some people were outraged. The ad was headed "Catering to your needs . . ." and offered:

> Minerals expertly repaired—Suitable matrix supplied for loose crystals—Old labels faithfully copied—Indistinguishable copies made of your favorite specimen—Broken crystals



Mineral label from "Ludlow, Smith & Cann," the 1970s company of Rick (Frederick Ludlow) Smith and his wife Shelagh (Cann) Smith.

artfully terminated—Pornographic and scatological specimens our specialty—Minerals for Zodiacs, anniversaries, Bar Mitzvahs.—We assemble "Famous old collections" to order. Reply in confidence.

In his November-December 1974 ad Smith boasted: "There may be an active mineral dealer who has supplied more fine display specimens to the U.S. National Museum and the British Museum (Natural History) than I have … it isn't likely. There may be an active mineral dealer who has supplied more really fine display specimens in the best U.S. private collections but that's not likely either . . ."

Ads for Ludlow, Smith & Cann resumed briefly in November-December 1977 and ran for three issues (giving only a post office box address), offering matrix diamonds from the Myr Pipe, Yakutsk, Russia. No further ads appeared.

Rick Smith retired from the mineral business in the late 1970s and lived in Spain for some years before returning to the U.S. and settling again in New Jersey. He died of lung cancer on December 20, 2014.

Major Specimen Theft!

Sixty world-class mineral specimens were stolen from the home of Desmond Sacco in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Sunday night, December 7, 2014. Some of these specimens have been photographed and published, including the afghanite on the cover of the Sar-e-Sang issue (May–June 2014) and the Jonas mine tourmaline pictured in September–October 2012 (page 631). See Mindat for a full set of images. If you see any of these specimens being offered for sale, please contact the appropriate authorities.