

Labels: Transmitting Information for Years to Come

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Mineral collectors should realize the importance of labeling. Consider the following scenario: You collect a mineral (it could be fluorite from a local quarry) which may or many not have a "dollar value". It may or may not be unusual, out of place, or rare. If you labelled your find, the scientific value may be retained long after the collector has retired from the hobby/profession.

What makes a label so important? A label transmits information — what the object is, where it came from or was collected, etc. The "et cetera" is useful additional information/notes about the environment from which the mineral was formed or collected, chemical composition, crystal form, method analyzed (if a rare or peculiar form of a more common mineral), and when it was collected. The amount of information above the basics depends on the size of the label you choose to use. Since micromounts, for example, are not displayed in the same manner cabinet or thumbnail specimens are shown, labels may be arranged differently. The type of display

you choose to make will effect the style you decide to use. This is a personal choice, so I will not delve into it in more detail, other than to say labels are meant to be read, therefore the type style should be large (especially if the lighting is not ideal).

Another factor in labeling is where and how the object is displayed. A label of an object on display should only mention the most basic information, otherwise the label might make the display look cluttered. Often, the story of how a specimen was obtained should be retained for the future. Any specimen with a story is surely more valuable.

In storage, mineral labels are ether loose (under the specimen) or attached to the box that the specimen rests in. Labels provide a back-up to a catalogue. If you do not have time to immediately catalogue each entry, a label will be useful to provide the information on a specimen months after it was obtained and your memory has clouded.

Labels can be as simple as a sheet of notebook paper or index card, or as expensive and ornate as custom-made parchment. The idea is to transmit as much information as possible.

When dealing with objects that have a story, there is a better way to transmit information. Unless the object must remain pristine, ideally one should enter a catalogue number (either using a standard nomenclature or with a personal method) onto the object itself. With most minerals, this is not a problem unless the specimen is extremely small. The catalogue will be the most important part of a collection. In time, its monetary or scientific value could exceed that of the collection

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itself!

A major mineral collection at the Museum of History & Science are the minerals of Gerard Troost (1776-1850). His collection began in 1811 (less than a year after he emigrated to the United States) and continued through 1849. At the beginning of June, 1986, we obtained, on permanent loan from the Louisville Free Public Library, the original two volume Troost catalogue (in Troost's own handwriting). We had been using a typewritten copy, riddled with typographic errors. We now know several things that apparently no one (except Troost himself) knew — his catalogue numbers 13, 582 specimens, but in reality, it is nearly 1,000 specimens less. There is a gap between 5,313 and 6,000 (the end of volume one and the beginning of volume two). There are repeated small gaps of minerals Troost had put in his catalogue, but never obtained. Troost's catalogue (volume two) follows the mineralogy of the second edition of Dana's *System of Mineralogy*. There would be a mineral name, beneath a number with a blank space — an entry awaiting to be filled. A peculiar method of cataloguing to say the least! Apparently, Troost was optimistic that he could obtain practically every species of mineral known in his day, and he came very close to meeting this goal!

Labels need not carry the same information that the catalogue does. Troost's labels were often slightly different. The label of specimen number 10,241 reads — "Red oxide of Iron assuming the form of the metastatique of Haüy - Iserlohn". The catalogue entry reads, "...pseudomorphous in the form of the metastatique of Calcareous Spar Haüy - Sundwig near Iserlohn". For a mineral collector, the difference is considerable. While both entries indicate red oxide of iron (today known as hematite), the "metastatique of Haüy" versus the "metastatique of Calcareous Spar Haüy" may have substantially different meanings. (Haüy means Abbé Haüy, Troost's teacher and the "father of crystallography".) Another comparison: Troost's specimen label 4,605 reads — "Earthy White lead, Mine la Motte, 2 miles from St. Michel, Madison C., Missouri". Entry 4,605 reads, "Indurated earthy carbonate of lead of a reddish brown, somewhat resinous, fractured, interspersed with sulphuret of lead on a gray earthy carbonate of lead, forming together a vein of one and two inches thick. The brown variety is covered with argillaceous oxide of iron - Mine la Motte - 2 miles from St. Michell, Madison Ct., Missouri". (Today, a similar label would read: Cerrusite with Galena and Limonite.) The difference between the label and catalogue entries are blatant and need not be further highlighted.

Reading through the catalogue, one gets an idea how the English language was written during the early 1800's. Troost was a learned man, in several languages (Dutch was his native language), one can learn sentence structure and spelling of that time period by someone who would use "proper" English of that era. Imagine the information one could glean from your labels and catalogue a hundred and fifty years from now!

Labelling is best done in a consistent manner, that is why many collectors have labels printed especially for their collection. This writer has seen no fewer than six different labels for the Troost minerals. They include; 1) the original label in Troost's own handwriting, 2/3) two different "Polytechnic Society" handwritten labels, 4) a cardboard printed "Polytechnic Society" label, 5) handwritten label, and 6) printed label on cardboard. The Polytechnic Society labels were written in the 1870's or 1880's. The numbers 5) and 6) are post-1937 flood. Very rarely, we find labels that pre-date the handwritten labels of Troost. They are frequently in German. Troost purchased

several collections from a "Baron von Turk, of Potsdam, Prussia", so German labels are not totally unexpected. (Does any reader know who Baron von Turk was?) I wish we had more of those labels!

Will labels in your collection be worth something? Assuming they last longer than you do, certainly someone somewhere, at sometime will look them over. They might wonder what ever became of the collection. (Unless donated to a museum, most do not survive long after the collector dies.) A museum is more likely to keep intact a collection that is well-documented. That includes labels!

What deserves labelling and cataloging? What do you collect? Is it a "curiosity" that might need explaining to someone not knowledgeable or a budding student? These are just a few good reasons to label specimens.

Tucson Shows, continued from page 2

sic sphalerite on amber fluorite. From the Anabel Lee mine, there were calcite and fluorite specimens.

Don Knowles, Golden Minerals (Golden, CO) had apophyllite, nearly tabular crystals, colorless to gray, on matrix from the Gaspe Copper mine, Murdochville, Quebec. Also some very fine specimens of the muscovite crystals from Conselheiro, Pena, M.G., Brazil that have been around for several months. He also had two specimens of galena ps. stibnite (x-rayed) from San Genaro mine, Havelcavelica Dept., Peru, and interesting specimens of gypsum (selenite) from Lake Gilles, S. Australia. These were 5-10 cm prismatic and twinned crystals with clay inclusions; many were unusual stacked twins.

Josef Vajdak, Pequá Rare Minerals (Massepequa, NY) had more old rare sulfosalts and other minerals from Czechoslovakia including stromeyerite crystals from Příbram, Central Bohemia, wire silver from Příbram, proustite with pyrostilpnite in nickeline from Jáchymov, Western Bohemia, dyscrasite from Příbram, and native gold from Jilove, near Prácheň, Central Bohemia (rare to see it coarse from this locality), and he had polybasite from Fresnillo, Zacatecas, Mexico. Josef also had specimens of *znucalite* ($\text{Zn}_{12}\text{CaUO}_2(\text{CO}_3)_3(\text{OH})_{22}\cdot 4(\text{H}_2\text{O})$), a new mineral from Příbram. It is white-yellow and has an intensive yellow-green fluorescence in ultraviolet light. It rarely occurs as very fine crystalline coatings of lamellar crystals. He also had specimens of another new mineral *efremonite* (not sure I have that spelling correct—I scribble too many notes with so much to cover in such little time.) which occurs as a white powdery mineral, from a coal mine at Kladno, Central Bohemia. From the same locality were specimens of native selenium crystals, terminated prisms and needles. These were fine quality for this rare mineral.

Scott Wereschky (14520 Mahogany, Reno, NV 89571) came into the room with some fine beta quartz as equant bipyramidal crystals with a reddish color (identification as beta quartz by one of his professors). These are .5-1 cm, and are from a locality 25 miles north of Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico. He also had micro to slightly larger crystalline wire gold specimens from the Green Hill mine, Olinghouse Dist., Washo Co., NV, at \$5-20 each.

Upstairs in the ballroom, which is mostly lapidary, gems, jewelry, and other stuff, I noted Zee's (Tucson, AZ) had some interesting pyrite on fluorite. Some collectors may like this as an unusual specimen material. The fluorite is in thick layers, partially transparent, green, sometimes purple, from China. The pyrite was about a 6-8 mm layer of tightly packed cubes