

What Makes a Mineral Collection Valuable to a Museum?

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As a curator, I see the value of a mineral collection with a different set of eyes than that of a collector. There is more to a collection than a bunch of pretty "stones".

To elaborate, it is necessary to describe the mineral collection housed in the Museum of History and Science. The number of minerals in the six largest collections totals about 12,000. In the three years I have been Curator of Science at this museum, a complete numerical inventory of minerals has not been possible. The break down of collections (and years collected) is as follows: Gerard Troost (1811-50), J. Lawrence Smith (1870-82), Octavia Allen Shreve (1880's), William Tharp (1890-1960), Taylor (1970's), and M. W. Moore (1960's-1978). All have interesting specimens, including some uncommon species or localities. Of the six collections mentioned, only two stand out as being noteworthy: the Troost and Tharp collections. What distinguishes these two collections from the others? The answer: supporting documentation.

A collection of "grand" minerals will always have display qualities. A collection with documentation will have a number of important qualities, that 100 hundred years from now will exceed the value of the specimens alone.

I must return to the Troost and Tharp collections again to explain my position. The collection of Gerard Troost has significance because the collector was a pioneer scientist in the United States. Troost was a co-founder and the first president of the Academy of Natural Science in Philadelphia. He was a student of the fathers of geology and mineralogy — Abraham Gottlieb Werner and Abbey Haüy, respectively. Troost corresponded with virtually every eminent geologist and mineralogist in his day. Without the two volume catalogue (over 1,500 pages), his collection would be little more than a large number of (predominantly unattractive) minerals. His handwritten catalogue (and labels when available) provide an incredible amount of information. The basic data from his catalogue could keep mineral historians busy for years! His catalogue could provide the answers to many questions, such as, from which United States localities did Troost obtain specimens? How many specimens did he (probably) personally collect? How many were given to him (and from whom)? What crystal forms were described from a given locality? Did he have any species that we presently do not recognize? How were rocks organized in the mineralogical framework of his era? How much did he pay for specimens? The list of questions both relating to Troost's scientific background and social background can go on and on! Acquired in 1874, much of the Troost mineral collection has suffered from time, man, and nature; enough remains to provide some interesting scientific and historical studies.

The Tharp collection was acquired in 1986. There are a number of display-quality specimens, however, the bulk of the collection does not fall under this category. The documentation that accompanied this collection is the best that this writer has

ever encountered. The bulk of this collection belonged to William E. Greenaway. As far as I have been able to determine, Greenaway died in the mid 1950's. He sold his collection to William Tharp for \$1. Tharp died in 1981, and his son was interested in giving the collection to our museum. Greenaway kept meticulous notes. The collection is organized according to Dana's *System of Mineralogy*, 1892 edition. Over 1,500 specimens are numbered and accompanied by labels. The numbers are correlated with a seven volume notebook. Also significant are seven scrapbooks, dating from 1892 to 1934 with correspondence and newspaper clippings, relating to minerals or acquisitions for his collection. Books which accompanied the collection include the 1892 Dana (mentioned above), a set of Indiana Geological Survey books from 1881-1903, and books from the Georgia, Virginia, Kansas, Arkansas, and U.S. Geological Surveys. Other publications include general geology and mineralogy from the 1850's through 1945 and magazines, including *The Mineralogist* from 1938-1950. Catalogues from Ward's Natural Science Establishment (as old as 1892), the Foote Mineral Company, Geo. English minerals, and Schortmann's Minerals are part of the collection, many annotated with references to specimens in the collection.

In comparison, most of the other collections did not maintain any organized catalogue system. Those that did were on a simple format of a few pages, without the consistent use of a numerical system. The Taylor mineral collection's only information is the accession form — and there are no localities given!

To summarize, if you have an interest in donating (or selling) your collection to a museum, make an effort to keep as much supporting information as possible. This includes correspondence, catalogues, reference books, field notes, photographs, etc., anything that was used in organizing and developing your collection. It may be of little value to you now, but to someone studying your collection 100 years in the future, its value will be priceless.

Guide Book Change for Magnet Cove, Arkansas

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For years, U.S. Route 270 bisected Magnet Cove into north and south halves. It was easy to give directions with this situation. You had to wind up the west rim, then wind down it into the Cove, then cut across the low interior before winding up the east rim. It made for slow going on the two-lane highway. Eventually State Route 51 was constructed to the south and it completely by-passed Magnet Cove, so most of the traffic took it.

It was straight, faster and even a more direct route between Malvern and Hot Springs. This worked well, because only locals and rockhounds, and people not watching signs took this more scenic route. After years of this situation, now U.S. 270 no longer goes through Magnet Cove. Oh yes, the same two lane road is there, but the state flip-flopped the names and it is State Route 51 that bisects Magnet Cove. So change those road logs, guide books and highway maps, or you will miss one of the classic midcontinent mineral localities.