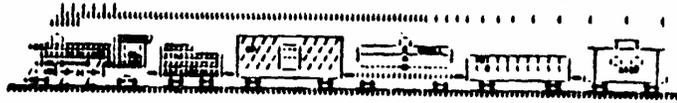




# The OPAL EXPRESS

Published monthly by the  
American Opal Society...



Vol. 18, No. 7  
July 1986

For those of you who missed the June meeting, you missed a "good one". Jean Zamot, G.G. of Gems, Etc. was there and gave us a very interesting talk with a lot of information on how to find treasures at yard sales, and other unlikely places. She brought along a part of her collection and did gem identification for those who had brought along their own "finds". She has furnished us with two of her published papers on a "Historical Overview Antique and Collectible Jewelry" and "Care and Cleaning of Antique, Collectable and Fine Jewelry". These are available to members for \$2.00 each, Post Paid. Thank you very much, Jean, for a most enjoyable meeting and your generous offer of material.

Todd Schowalter was also there. He is serving as assistant Supervisor of the Gem and Mineral Department of the Orange County Fair, and invited us to JUMP ON OVER to the fair to be held July 11th through the 20th, at the Costa Mesa Fairgrounds. Hours are Monday through Friday, noon to midnight, Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am to midnight. The Gem and Mineral Show has it's own building and in addition to displays and demonstrations, there will be dealers. Some of our members signed up for cases and demonstrations, and help is also needed in hosting at the entrance. You will receive free admission to the fair and a button to show off. So jump on over.

HELP WANTED COLUMN --- We need a new refreshment host or hostess, or both for the monthly meetings. Nancy Means and her husband Bill are developing some property up North and do not have the time to continue in this capacity. She has done a great job for the Chapter and always been there to assuage our hunger and slack our thirst. Thank you many times over, Nancy.

Unfortunately, if we do not find a volunteer between now and next meeting, I am afraid it will be foam cups and tap water at break-time. Chapter members, this is an emergency! Call me, Jewett, at 213-425-2426.

THE JULY HAPPENINGS ... Will happen on Thursday, July 10, 1986, at 7:30 p.m.  
THE PLACE TO BE ... is at the CAL-FED Building in Downey (See map) ...

I (Jewett) will demonstrate to the members how I cut, grind and polish opal on a Graves Cab-Mate machine. This is a single wheel machine; most of the opal capping machines seen at the local shows are of the multiple wheel variety.

I will show you why I feel this type of machine is more versatile than others. It can saw off the potch, grind, sand and polish. You can make triplets, carve your opal and even drill with it.

\* \* \* \* \*

I (Jewett again) just received a special tube of epoxy from Dag Johnson of Opex Opal. He says that this is the only type of epoxy used in Australia for the making of triplets; according to him it is superior to epoxy-330 which is used most often in the USA. At this time Mr. Johnson does not think it is available in the USA, however, if there is any demand for it he will try to get it imported here.

The name of the epoxy is UHU-Plus endfest 300. The directions seem to be in German or similar language. The Opal Society will test this bonding agent by making a group of triplets with it and let you know in a later newsletter our results.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Lapidary Journal June issue is almost exclusively devoted to opal. There are articles written by our members: "Fireworks at Midnight," by Irwan Holmes; also, "Opal from Magdalena," by Edgar Heylmun, PhD. June Culp Zeitner writes in her article, "Precious Opal in the United States," about some of the mines of our members: the Hodson's of Rainbow Ridge, Nevada, the Spencer Opal Mine of Idaho, managed by Claudia & Doyle Haight, the Nowak Opal Mine of California, co-owned by Larry Dobrin. Bill Vance, whom I recently met, has the cover picture and an article, "The Angel of Yowah." Marilyn Hendricks, another of our members, also has an article in the Lapidary Journal on Yowah Opal set into jewelry. She designed the settings herself and set the stones in 14K gold. If you don't subscribe, go to your nearest lapidary store and buy this issue.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Fireworks at Midnight on the Isle of Java**  
**Irwan Holmes, Jakarta, Indonesia**  
**(used with permission)**

It was the ancestors of the mighty volcano Krakatau that produced these gems and some people say you can still see the eruptions when you look at their fire — the newly discovered black opals of Indonesia. Not only black but from the most porcelain white of whites through the most limpid of jelly opals, to the most brilliant of crystal opals and including every type of semi-black to black opal imaginable right to the blackest jet black — Indonesia has them all.

The first recorded discovery of these opals was by a German geologist in the 1930's, but when the war broke out he was interned by the Dutch (who still occupied Indonesia at the time), presumably sent back to Europe and has never been heard from since.

From that time until the late 1960's, digging for opals was done as a hobby by farmers in the area and the local people would buy them because they were pretty. They often just kept them in bottles of water on their shelves as home decorations. In 1967, an American jewelry designer saw a few pieces in a shop in Pasar Baru, bought them and took them to the jewelry department manager of Duty Free Shoppers in Bong Kong who confirmed that these were indeed natural, solid, undyed and untreated black opals.

The American returned to Indonesia, later married an Indonesian girl who totally by chance turned out to be descended from royalty in the very area where the opals were found and thus was born Jakarta Hilton's Indonesian Opal Center.

They now have three retail shops (with two more soon to open) and export regularly in small quantities to Singapore and Malaysia. Outside Indonesia, the best collection of Indonesian opals can be seen at Selberan Jewelers (a sister company of Selangor Pewter) in Kuala Lumpur. The Indonesian Opal Center also owns some 11 hectares of opal bearing land and hopes to find mining investment in the near future. (An article on the potential of opal mining in Indonesia is presently being prepared by Asian Business magazine.)

As Australia (along with Mexico) produces most of the world's opal, the best way to describe the Indonesian material is in relation to these better known types. The rough is found in nodules in broken seams and not in slabs or solid seams like much of the Australian material, so it is not suitable for slicing up as is done for the making of calibrated stones and triplets. The white material most resembles that from the now-worked-out mines of Hungary, but stones that are identical to Australian whites are not unusual. The crystal opal is extremely gemmy and more than anything resembles the best Gilson synthetic opal — but it's natural of course! The jellies can be glassy and transparent like Mexican opal or misty somewhat like Mintabie (Australian) material. Most jewelers or stone dealers who sell Australian opal label any stone that is slightly greyish or brownish as "black opal" to enhance the value; whereas the IOC will only label a stone that has a background color well into the medium grey range as "semi-black" and the stone must really have a dusk or "nighttime" appearance before they call it "black opal". The very black stones they have given the name "JAVA BLACK" opal and although jet black opal does exist in Australia, it is exceedingly rare. These Java black opals have been described as "fireworks at midnight".

A few giant stones have been found in Indonesia (one 100+ carat stone was auctioned in Singapore recently, and a magnificent 30 carat round stone, jet black with red fire, set in diamonds as a brooch will be included in a forthcoming auction at Sotheby's Geneva) but the sizes tend to average three carats, on the whole smaller than Australian opal where six to 10 carat stones are not unusual. It is thought that large stones will be found more frequently when the mining is upgraded with earthmoving and boring equipment. At present all the work is done totally by hand with the miners descending barefoot on bamboo poles.

The differences in appearance between Indonesian and Australian opal are not easy to describe. One definite plus on the Indonesian side is that the majority of stones show a predominance of red "fire" (or play of color) whereas the majority of Australian material shows predominant blues, greens and purples. Red has always been considered the premiere hue for gem-quality opal, although most laymen think of opal as a blue-green gemstone, because there is so much of that quality around.

In the black opal range the Australian stones tend to be slightly brighter, but often the fire seems to float on the surface of the stone. When the Indonesian blacks are turned from side to side even the most opaque-appearing stones seem to jump to life and show a play and movement of colors that is quite astounding. For example, Australian stones with a "pinfire" pattern (tiny dots of color the size of pinpoints) are considered rather poorer than the larger patterned stones as they are less interesting to look at, but the Indonesian stones with a pinfire pattern when turned from side to side show tremendous movement like falling rain (the Indonesian term for "pinfire pattern" is indeed "falling rain").

No article on opals is complete without mentioning the stability factor. Like opals from any source some Indonesian opals crack and craze, and although it has recently been discovered why opals crack (by Australia's CSIRO) no real prevention has yet been found. It has been claimed that in Hungary they brought the stones up slowly from the wet ground step by step over a period of 20 years to avoid the sudden drying out which was felt to be a contributing factor to cracking; gossip from America has it that they can now stabilize the very cracky, crazy Nevada opal; some years ago a potential investor visited the Indonesian mines and claimed that he had discovered a way to stabilize opal in Brazil (the Brazilian mines have since been closed by the government) but there is no verification on any of these methods. Peter J. Darragh, considered to be one of the world's foremost experts on opal, and the CSIRO are working on the problem now, and his book on opal, due out in early 1985, may clarify and address the matter of stability in opal (it will also contain a section on Indonesian opal).

Plenty of Australian opal is also unstable, but the opal profession there is careful to avoid stones from those areas known to contain cracky opal — anyone found to have knowingly sold unstable stones is immediately blacklisted. Unfortunately in Indonesia no such ethical (and commercially sound) practices as yet prevail. Some years ago a collection of bad opal was sold in Germany by a Chinese Indonesian studying in Germany and from this Indonesian opal got a bad reputation in parts of Europe; the IOC, however, guarantee all their stones and complaints are rare.

In our meeting with Mr. Hary Sudhewo, one of the managing directors of IOC, he admitted that their first concern was now to find mining investment. He had often thought of showing at the Arizona Gem Show or at one of the European fairs, but with a stock of only 100-200 quality stones in hand at any one time he felt rather "malu" (embarrassed) to show among dealers with millions of dollars of stock — perhaps, he hoped, some company would invite him to show stones in their stand at one of the major fairs or even that a European or American manufacturer would be interested in marketing their goods in Indonesia through IOC and in turn introducing Indonesian opals abroad. Why not Japan or Hong Kong? Mr. Sudhewo said that in his travels through Asia he found jewelers to be extremely conservative. When they heard the opals were not from Australia or Mexico they were immediately put off. The only exception was Selberan of Kuala Lumpur, and in fact it was Selberan's Austrian partner who decided to market the opals.

Americans and Europeans, Mr. Sudhewo found, were on the other hand excited by new gems and were more prone to look ahead at the future potential. He then mentioned that some years ago IOC had offered Sotheby's Hong Kong office a large black opal for auction. The woman accepting items for auction finally looked at him and said she didn't believe it was really opal it looked like plastic to her.

On a fact-finding trip to Australia in 1974 one IOC salesman was told that the opal was variously plastic, glass, synthetic, and dyed. At one shop he was screamed at by the proprietor and thrown out for daring to show opal that was not Australian.

Bad there been any serious investors? Snickers and then outright guffaws as Mr. Sudhewo told us about Mad Mike and the Mormons who came to invest in opal mining. Mad Mike was a spry 70-year-old Australian opal miner of European origin who for some unexplained reason couldn't go back to Australia. He felt that Indonesian Opal was every bit as good as Australian opal and finally got a representative of a Mormon investment group to come to Jakarta to have a look. After much haggling an agreement was struck and the first payment was to be made to arrange for licenses etc. The investor suddenly realized he had "forgotten" his check book, and poor Mad Mike was prevailed on to write the check. He then sat down and clearly wrote it out for VS \$25,000 on a THAI BART CHECK I In the end an IOC representative had to fly to Bangkok to cash the check after which the opal land was tied up for three years. And of course the investors never returned, having taken \$40,000 worth of samples.

Anecdote #2: A certain Mr. Big in the opal world came to Indonesia, placed a deposit on some stones and said he would return with a syndicate of investors to discuss mining in Indonesia. The following month on schedule a Mr. X arrived from Europe and according to Mr. Big's instructions checked in at Jakarta's biggest and best hotel to await Mr. Big's arrival. Mr. Y then arrived from Australia, checked in at the same hotel, and a Mr. Z was also expected. The IOC people were of course on standby. Mr. X busied himself with a local masseur for his bad leg and with shopping, Mr. Y took full advantage of the hotel bar, and everyone waited. Day after day after day. Mr. Big never showed, of course, and Messrs. I, Y and Z went back home (presumably each paying his own considerable hotel bill). IOC later called Mr. Big's Hong Kong office to find that he hadn't been seen in six months. In a further

development a Sydney newspaper reported that Mr. Big's brother and partner had been found in a freezer murdered. The point of these stories being that Mr. Sudhewo is happy to meet serious investors but not "cowboys" (the Indonesian term for fly-by-night business types).

White opal is still considered a semi-precious stone in terms of value on a par with aquamarine and tourmaline, although very top quality crystal stones of large size are now fetching in the neighborhood of US \$1000 per carat. But black opal is a precious stone in the same category as diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires and catseyes — and it is the rarest of them all, coming almost entirely from the nine-square-mile area of Lightning Ridge in Australia. Whether it is a ploy on the part of opal dealers or actual fact, the word is that Lightning Ridge is being depleted and that this source of black opal will in the not-too-distant future be worked out. Indonesia has been blessed with opal rough that is more than 50% of the semi-black to black variety. This should be of considerable interest to the jewelry trade in the not-too-distant future.

At the recent Opal Fair at Tigress Department Store in Singapore it was noted that their finest black opal (a 2.9 carat nearly-jet-black stone showing a predominance of red fire) was retailing for US \$9000 per carat and they assured us they had more expensive stones in their stock in Australia. This represented an increase of 50% since the Opal Fair held by the same company two years previously at Robinsons, at which time the most expensive black was retailing for about, US \$6000 per carat. Yes, they agreed this was true — black opals just continue to go up in price because of their scarcity. They are in no way controlled by an opal cartel nor is any stock held back to keep prices up. Some dealers speculate that with the growing interest in opal all over the world (and with that nonsense bugaboo of opal being an "unlucky" stone dying a deserved death) it may someday surpass the diamond in value, considering the ever-increasing supply of diamonds these days just as it was in Cleopatra's day when opal was the King of Gems.

Enter Indonesia.

Enclosed in this issue is your copy of the Society's current roster. If you did not return your answer as to what information you wanted included we printed only your name(s), City and State.

Please remember these rosters are for the use of members only; they are not to be released to the public. If' you wish to contact someone in the Society who does not list his or her complete address, we will forward the mail if you send it to us in a stamped envelope.

If for any reason you want further information such as your mailing address or telephone number to reach other members just let us know and we will have it in the next newsletter.

Orange County Fair July 11-20

Jump on over to the Orange County Fair July 11th to the 20th at the Costa Mesa Fairground. The hours of operation are Monday to Friday noon to midnight and Saturday/Sunday 10 A.M. to midnight. The Gem and Mineral display will be in a separate building. There will be displays, demonstrations and dealers. Some of our members will be helping with the show. Todd Schowalter was at our June meeting to give a presentation and has invited all members to help at the fair as a host or hostess. You will receive free admission and a button. So Jump On Over!

DID YOU KNOW!

The first uniform postage rate took effect on July 1, 1885, at 2 cents each for letters. From then on, the price increased. Only on one occasion did it decrease.

1917.....3 cents	1919.....2 cents	1932.....3 cents
1958.....4 cents	1963.....5 cents	1968.....6 cents
1971.....8 cents	1974.....10 cents	1978.....15 cents
1981.....18 cents	1981.....20 cents	1984.....22 cents

(from the June 1986 Fedco Reporter)

Advertising rates

Full page	\$40 per month
Half page	\$20 per month
Quarter page	\$10 per month
Eighth page	\$ 5 per month
Business card	

Copy should reach the P.O. Box in Downey by the third Thursday of the month preceding issue.

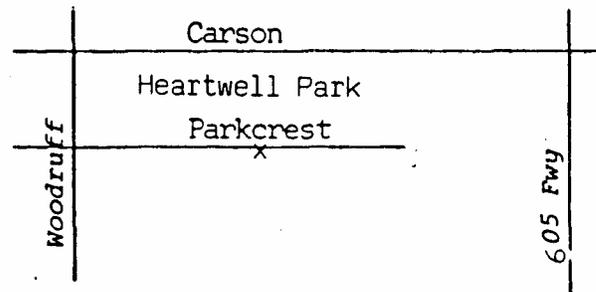
## SHOW BIZ 1986 --- PART 6

The deadline for returning signed show contracts was April 30th. I want to thank all of you who have cooperated with us in getting the show under way. To all of you who have NOT yet sent in your contract, do so immediately. We are starting to assign tables on July 5th and everyone who has a signed contract will be informed of their table assignments soon after that. Those who have not returned a signed contract by July 15th will be assigned tables on a first come basis as table space is available.

## COMING UP

Don't forget the invitation of the Faceters Guild of Southern California to a colored stone swap on July 23. Bring your rough or cut opal to trade. The members of the faceters guild do things with gemstone rough that is unbelievable to someone who is used to seeing Ho Hum standard of native cut stones from the Far East.

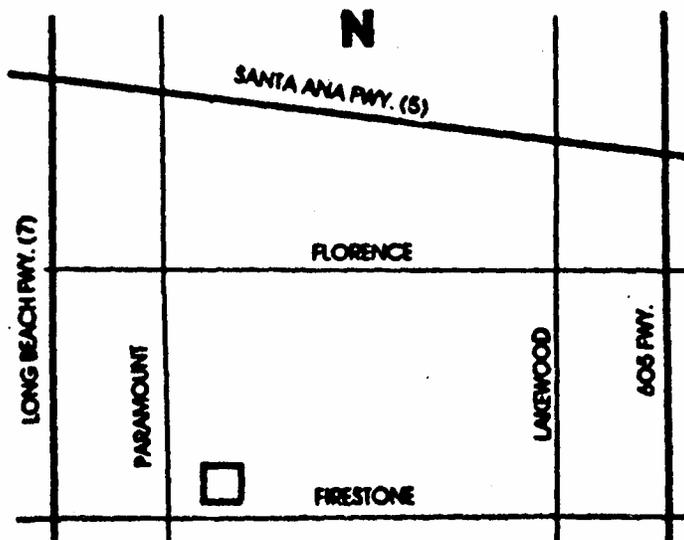
The address is 5938 Parkcrest Ave., Long Beach. •At the intersection of Carson & Woodruff, in the American Legion Hall.





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