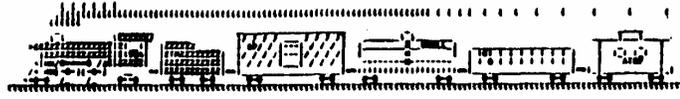




The OPAL EXPRESS

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THE OPAL BIRTHSTONE FOR APRIL IS CRYSTAL OPAL: the alternate is Idaho Star Triplet Opal.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

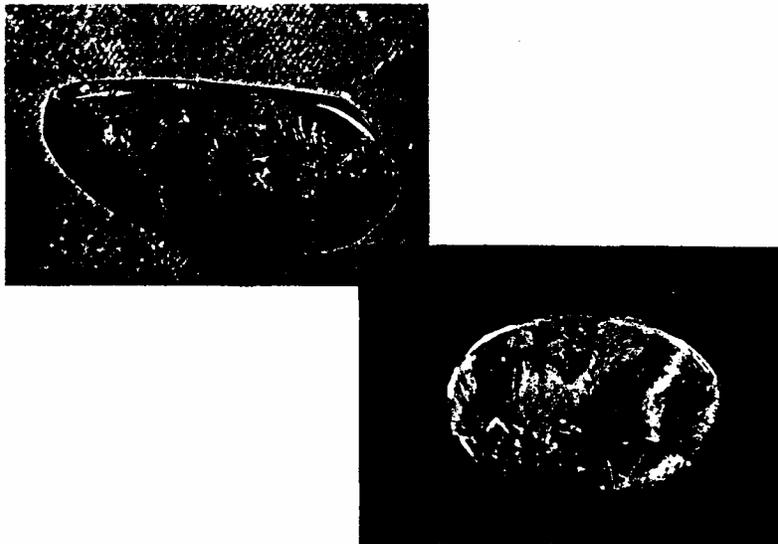
Opal, the Queen of Gems, is an old and a new gemstone. Mention was made of opal in ancient Sanskrit writings, but it was rare. Only a few people of high rank in the world owned an opal. In the western world the main supply was from the mines of Hungary where supplies were small and the brilliance and color patterns were inferior to the better opals we are seeing today. It was not until comparatively recently that large discoveries of opal gave the world not only an increased supply, but in the top qualities, magnificent gems that had never before unveiled their beauty to the light of day. Only in the late 1800s and early 20th century, did vast opal fields of Australia begin to affect the world market of gemstones.

Today opal is within reach of everyone's budget, from inexpensive commercial quality to some nicer material with better color patterns and more brilliance. Today, anyone can afford an opal, or several opals that would have been the prized possession of a member of royalty several hundred years ago. If you have cutting equipment, you can purchase rough from a few dollars a bottle to thousands of dollars an ounce. Dealers at gem shows have all qualities to sell. In no other stone can you find this variety of quality rough offered for sale. The better rough of other gemstones was bought up at the mine sites and cut and polished before being sold here. With the exception of German finished stones, the cut and polish is atrocious and YOU have to re-cut the material to get a decent stone.

Unfortunately, due to the strange way of valuing gemstones in the Jewelry world, this is usually economically unfeasible. We Opalphiles have it the best of all. You are not going to find bob-tie size opal, nor a gallon bottle of rough for \$60.00 any more, but your gemstone is the best buy of any today.

The next meeting of the Society's Board of Directors will be Thursday April 28th, 7:30 PM at 3303 Charlemagne Ave. Anyone is welcome to attend.

INCLUSION OF THE MONTH



FLASHES IN BLACK OPAL

BY TED THEMELIS, A.G.
President, GEMLAB, INC.
P.O. Box 6333
Clearwater, FL 33518

Black opal is characterized by vivid flashes of various colors against its black or dark-colored substance. These flashes, observed only by reflected light, may appear in any spectral color or combination of such colors in various hues and intensities.

The opal substance consists of a multitude of homogenous ultra-minute amorphous silica spherical particles, referred to simply as spheres, and voids. The arrangement of the spheres and voids varies in shape and pattern, but invariably occurs in a regular manner that forms a three-dimensional, cubic lattice. When oblique white light illuminates the opal substance, it causes light diffraction, reflecting various spectral colors at different angles.

The smallest silica spheres may diffract only the violet light, having

the longest wavelengths of the electromagnetic spectrum (390nm—430nm); larger spheres may diffract only the blue (430nm—490nm) and violet light; spheres larger still may diffract only blue-green (490nm—510nm) or the blue and violet light. As the wavelengths become progressively shorter, analogous light diffraction takes place, till it reaches the red portion of the spectrum (650nm - 700nm), where all the colors are visible in vivid flashes.

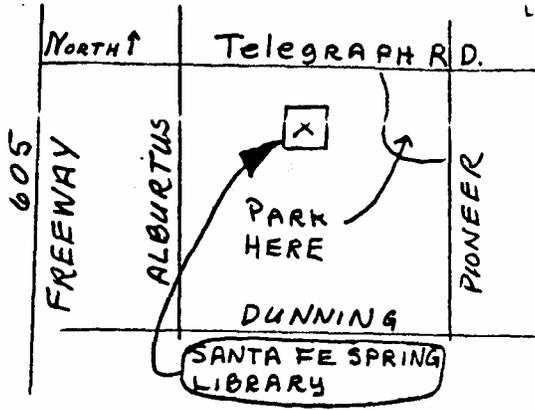
The size of the spheres varies from about 0.1 micron, being the smallest and diffracting only violet light, to 0.2, being the largest, and thus diffracting red and all other colors. In all cases, the spheres are suitable to diffract light through a 180° angle.

Left: Black opal, 28.66 carats, characterized primarily by red and green flashes (Lightning Ridge, Australia).

Right: Black opal, 22.45 Carats. with pronounced violet, blue, and green flashes (Coober Pedy, Australia).

!!!! NEWS FROM THE FOUNDING CHAPTER !!!!!

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P.O. Box 3895
Downey, CA 90242



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Edith Ostrander, Harold Umberson, Sue Umberson
Honorary Lifetime Members, Bill and Della Judd

General Meetings held on the 2nd Thursday at 7:30 PM in the Santa Fe Springs Library, 11700 Telegraph Rd., Santa Fe Springs. See Map.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: I would like to thank Jo Snyder and Florence Plas for bringing the lovely cakes to our last meeting. I also brought my special "better than _____" cake, so we had lots to eat that night! We had a good raffle and an interesting program. We have more interesting programs lined up for April and May, hope you come and bring several friends. Hope to see you there!
Joe Vezeau, President of Founding Chapter.

Our Founding Chapter at the March meeting, finished the Opal Cutting movie with the star himself in attendance -- Jewett Pattee was there to answer specific questions tendered by the members.

In addition to this, various members had brought beautiful jewelry and opal carvings to round out a "Show and Tell session. We had Dick Kotch demonstrating opal evaluation -- end by the way Dick is so right when he tells us, Spread the word -- a Person can have FUN with opals" With (1)15 in mind, Dick is planning newspaper and radio methods to spread that good word.

Joe Vezeau gave us the good news that he expects to get the ever-popular Vince Jarrell to give another one of his informative and entertaining talks on gem carving at the April meeting. You have missed a goodie if you haven't seen Vince in action. It promises to be a special evening.

We held our drawing, and enjoyed refreshments which practically everyone brought!

The February Issue of Jewelers' Circular Keystone has an article of interest to all of us opal cutters who use diamond accents in the setting of our opal jewelry. The new and huge Australian diamond mine, the "Argyle" is producing an enormous amount of colored diamonds. It's almost as if Mother Nature decided to create complimentary stones of diamond and opal in her Australian gemstone crucible. Most notable are the pink, cognac, Champaign and cinnamon shades.

And speaking of diamond setting, have you tried the latest plastic parts? The latest thing in precise, clean setting designs to add to your custom wax parts. They burn out like wax, but give a sharper result. The Custom Gold Art Company, P.O. Box 5429, San Diego, Ca 92105 (619-262-7368) has a catalog of these designs. Send them \$2.50 for it. You might find them useful when setting your special opals.

!!!! BULLETIN !!!!!

Something incredibly new has burst onto the opal gemstone scene. We have just received information that an opal substitute has been developed. It is called "Urchin Opal". It is made from parts of conch shells found in the deepest waters off Bore Bore. It gets its name because only the shells which have had excretions deposited on them by a rare species of sea urchins are left with the peculiar opal-like residue.

The secret process of using this raw material to mimic opal was developed by Senor Aprille' Fuller in April, 1988. It will be marketed by the Shellgame Company, when they feel like it. April Fool!

Weighing The Factors

Now that I have listed the factors which are likely to influence the market value of a stone, it is necessary to discuss how much weight to give each. This is where the fun begins. While most opal experts would agree with the list of factors presented above, none would agree completely on the degree to which each influences market value. Furthermore, the influence will depend upon what market you are assessing. For example, red multicolor is the most preferred and thus most valued in the U.S. while green/blue is most preferred in Japan.

In the following discussion I will present my experience for the U.S. market and compare it with two other sources. These sources are Barrie O'Leary's book A Field Guide to Australian Opal and the American Opal Society's (AOS) Opal Appraisal Kit. The former is an Australian market perspective but is still very useful. The latter is a new system for appraising opal which includes a set of 15 standard stones used to calibrate the three most important factors in market value: base color, fire color, and fire intensity. I will devote another section completely to this most important contribution to the art of determining market value. There is another booklet published in the U.S. which offers guidance to valuing opal but the author refuses to allow any quotation from it for any purpose. (Registered letter from Darlene Munroe responding to a draft of proposed article. Actually, Mrs. Munroe's opinions follow Barrie O'Leary's closely, so this discussion is not altered by its omission.)

BASE COLOR – Everybody agrees that a black base color is more preferred than any other. But beyond that opinions differ as you can see below. Value is listed from highest to lowest.

AOS	O'Leary	Downing
Black	Black	Black
Crystal	Black Crystal	Top Crystal
Semi-Crystal	Semi-Black	Semi-Black
Semi-Black	Crystal, Fire	Crystal, Semi-Crystal,
Grey	(Mexican?), Top White	Top White, Boulder
White, Orange,	Grey, Light, Boulder	White, Grey
Jelly		

O'Leary rates black at 30 points and crystal at 10 points in his system (Maximum points 93 as I read his system). In my opinion it is at least twice as valuable as equivalent top crystal and may be ten times as valuable or more in special cases. By top crystal I mean a clear crystal stone that is so full of color that you cannot see through it to your hand when it is laid on top of the space between two fingers. Crystal which can be seen through will tend to wash out on your hand. Hence it is less valuable. In my opinion it is

not until base color gets to semi-black that greyness is more valuable. Boulder opal used to be inexpensive but as supply has dwindled and demand increased, prices have shot u~. O'Leary's lower rating here may reflect the fact that his book was published in 1977.

FIRE COLOR – The American market prefers reds about 2 to 1 over green/blue stones. All three sources seem to agree fairly closely here. The listing below is just an order of preference in each case. I do not intend to imply that colors on the same line across have the same value in each system.

AOS	O'Leary	Downing
Red Multicolor	Red/Blue	Red/Blue
Multicolor	Red/Multicolor	Red/Multicolor
Orange/Green	Orange/Green	Multicolor,
Green/Blue	Green/Blue	Orange/Green,
Blue	Green	Red/Green
Red/Green	Blue	Blue
	Indigo	
	Purple	

I have had to interpret O'Leary and there is some inconsistency in his ordering (p. 117 and 119). In general, I find people like red/green in a loose stone but it does sometimes wash out when set in yellow gold. One of my good friends, a GIA appraiser, agrees with the AOS.

INTENSITY – Everybody agrees that brighter color is more valuable. The AOS Kit is the only way to consistently estimate the intensity of fire in a stone. O'Leary gives extra points to what he calls a "night stone", one that holds its colors even in very poor light, but only gives 4 of 93 points to intensity. I believe it is more important than that.

FIRE PATTERN – All agree that Harlequin is most valuable.

AOS	O'Leary	Downing
Harlequin	Harlequin	Harlequin and
Rolling Flashfire	Pinfire	Other Fancy
Flashfire	Flashfire	Patterns
Pinfire		Rolling Flashfire
		Broad Flashfire
		Flashfire
		Pinfire

The AOS Kit does not actually mention flashfire so this is my interpretation of their meaning.

WEIGHT – All agree that a small stone is less valuable than an equivalent larger stone, but there is no factor given by O'Leary or AOS. It is my experience that stones over 1 carat are about 20–30% more valuable per carat than smaller stones and that large stones (10 carats) are about twice as

valuable per carat as equivalent one carat stones. How the largest stones reduce in value is a case by case thing.

CUT – While I personally prefer baroque stones (stones of irregular shape) I have to agree that ovals are more easily sold when loose, especially if they are a standard size. In my experience, baroques are hard to sell unset but sell faster than ovals when set. I think this is because most people cannot imagine how a baroque stone will look when set and do not have a custom jeweler in whom they have confidence. O'Leary gives a flat topped stone 1/3 the value of a high dome. I think this is quite excessive but I agree flat is less valuable. Again a flat stone is easier to sell if set. This is especially true of a patch and color stone with color only on the top of the stone. The AOS states that such a stone cannot be given a high rating (above 4 in their appeal factor) no matter how bright it is. I don't entirely agree with this assessment. In fact, many of the well-known, highly valuable Lightning Ridge stones are flat-topped. Some flexibility is required here. All agree that imperfections on the face seriously detract from value but imperfections on the back of the stone are not very objectionable.

CONSISTENCY OF FIRE – This factor is important, all agree. Most stones are brighter and/or of better pattern from one direction. This is why I spend so much time on orienting the fire in my book "Opal Cutting Made Easy". A direction stone is less valuable, perhaps as much as half as valuable in some cases. O'Leary calls this factor trueness and gives it 6 points if very true and none if it has no color from at least one direction.

continued

We received a letter from Ed and Karen Rockafellor. Some of you already know they have relocated in San Diego County. "Rocky" expressed regrets that he would not be able to be active in the Founding Chapter or as a member of the Society's Board; he is retaining his Member-at-large status.

The Rockafellors have invited Society members to keep in touch and drop by to visit if they are in the area. The address is:

13379 Via Mark, Poway, CA 92064, phone 619-486-1939. We are going to miss you. Good luck in your new home.

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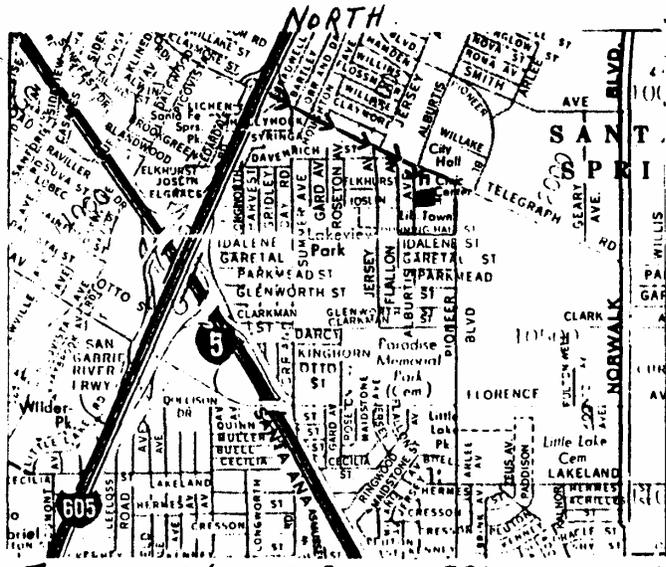
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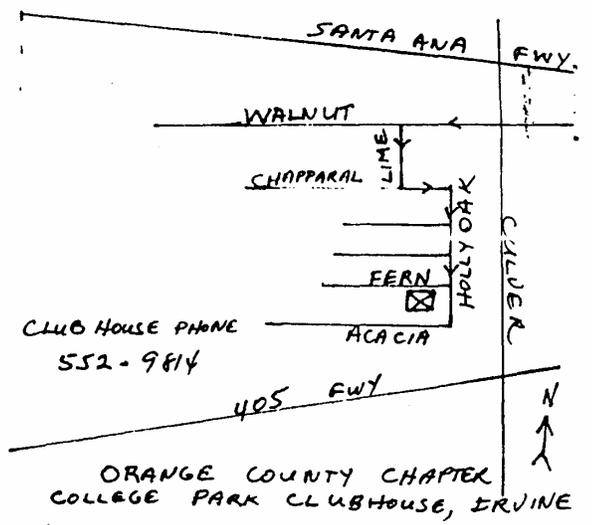
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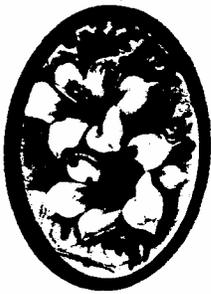
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