

THE OPAL EXPRESS

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Table of Contents

President's Message	1
Members Only Website Password	1
In Remembrance	1
The Million Dollar Hat of Opals from Around Australia	2
57,000 Carat Emerald	3
Abalone Mabe Pearl - Gem Profile	4
Drop of Water Test for Topaz	5
Bench Tips	6
Check This Out!	7
Upcoming Events	8

President's Message

Happy Valentine's Day Opalholics! 

With the recent storms we've been having, I hope everyone is staying warm and dry!

How are your projects coming along? If you have a project or story you'd like to share, please let our editor know. We would love to know what everyone is working on.

In the meantime, please stay safe, stay healthy and keep busy. And please continue to social distance and wear your masks!

Stan McCall
AOS President
Custom Creative Gem Cutting

Member area access is available only to members in good standing. Any other entry is unauthorized.

USER NAME: member
PASSWORD: Freeform27 (case sensitive)

In Remembrance

It is with great sadness that I tell you David Walblom passed away on December 30, 2020 from COVID-19. He leaves behind his wife Susan Chaisson-Walblom, who also contracted COVID-19. She is at home and making progress in overcoming the virus.

To those of us who knew David, he was a great friend and a wonderful source of information when it came to tools and how they were used. If you frequented the various gem and mineral shows around California and Arizona, you may have visited the booth he shared with his wife Susan. Together they had a wonderful selection of tools, gemstone beads and findings. Everything from small lapidary tools to jewelry making tools. David would answer any questions you had and would happily show you how a particular tool is used. I bought many of my first jewelry making tools from David when I started going to gem and mineral shows.

David will be greatly missed by his family, friends and the gem and mineral community. Please keep his family in your prayers and remember him the next time you visit a gem and mineral show.

AOS Editor

The Million Dollar Hat of Opals from Around Australia

by Mary Aracic

as told to AOS editor, Kathleen James



It all began when we set up our opal book stall in some of the very interesting Outback towns of Queensland, such as Winton, Quilpie and Yowah.

It was so fascinating to see men and women wear colourful hats, that by the time I got to the street stall, I was lucky to get the last hat for \$10.00. It was so popular in colours of blue, green and blends of dazzling gold that when I was offered \$1,000 at the Tucson Gem Show in Arizona, I declined the offer.

Back home Mary was so impressed by the offer that she wanted to create a million dollar hat of opals - so colourful that it would dazzle the flies. The hat of opals became so popular that it went on show at the Entertainment Centre in Dubbo during "Opal Extravaganza" organised by Sue White.

The hat of opals was worn by Dame Marie Bashir, former Governor of N.S.W. at the opening of the show. So when the Lightning Ridge ladies were about to model opals during the evening events, Mary expected one of them to model the hat of opals! But Sue White had other ideas and told Mary, she was the model, and duly took her to the dressing room, not for a dress up, but to await her turn!

When it was time for her to go on stage, wearing the hat of opals, Mary was so amused to be shunted from the end of the line to the stage front, that it calmed her nerves. She was instructed to go to the right, but not to centre front as there was a big drop off!!

The curtains parted, a lively tune played and out stepped Mary doing an Irish jig followed by the models who joined in the fun of doing an Irish jig that Michael Flatley would be so proud of. And much to the delight of the diners. They got a standing ovation!



Mary, wearing her hat of opals, leading the models onto the stage.



The cameraman was quite amused with Mary's Irish jig!

As AOS Editor, I would like to thank Mary and Stephen Aracic once again for allowing us to share their wonderful stories from Lightning Ridge. I look forward to sharing more opal stories from Stephen and Mary in future newsletters!

Special thanks to Shibaun Aitchison (Mary and Stephen's daughter) for sending me the photos of Mary in the Million Dollar Opal Hat.

57,000 Carat Emerald, Called “World’s Largest,” Up for Auction

by Rob Bates, Senior Editor, JCK
January 18, 2012



What is being described as the “world’s largest cut emerald” is being auctioned in Canada by Kelowna-based Western Star Auctions on January. 25.

The 57,500 ct. oval stone weighs around 25 pounds and is the “size of a watermelon,” Western Star Auctions owner Mike Odenbach tells JCK.

The stone, named Teodora (or “God’s Gift”), has been appraised at \$1.15 million, but Odenbach thinks it will sell for far more. The company plans to post a grading report later today, Odenbach says.

Regan Reaney, the Calgary gem wholesaler who brought the gem to the auction house, says it was found in somewhere in Brazil and cut in India. A gemologist, Jeff Nechka, owner of Premier Gems, who examined the “forest green” stone dubbed it natural but “slightly treated.”

“We are sure it is of the beryl family,” Nechka says. “It has definitely been treated but we are not sure how much it has been treated. It’s impressive someone was even able to cut something like that.”

Reaney says the stone has a “stunning” aura. “I wish it were translucent—then it would be a billion-dollar stone,” he says. “But we took it to a jewelry store and they were just blown away by this. Even the gemologist, when he picked this up, he was like a kid at Christmas. His eyes just lit up. There aren’t enough words in the English language to describe this.”

Reaney says that while there have been bigger rough emeralds, this is thought to be the largest cut stone. “It’s a real showpiece,” he says. “Just a wow.”

From <http://www.jckonline.com>

Did you know?

The oldest emeralds are about 2.97 billion years old. The first known emeralds were mined in Egypt around 1500 BC.

One of Cleopatra’s favorite stones was emerald, and her passion for the stone was well documented.

Emeralds were discovered in South America in the 16th century by the Spanish. They were used by the Incas well before this discovery.

The Spanish traded emeralds across Europe and Asia for precious metals, which opened up the emerald trade to the rest of the world.

Emeralds were first discovered in North America in the Yukon Territory in 1997, though large emerald deposits in the United States and further north are very rare.

Synthetic sapphire and ruby were created in 1907, but synthetic emeralds were not created until 1935 when American chemist Carroll Chatham successfully grew his first 1-carat Chatham emerald. This stone is now on display at the Smithsonian Institute.

<https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/emerald-facts-2042967>

Abalone Mabe Pearl Gem Profile

January 12, 2011



New Zealand Blue Abalone Mabe Pearl

Innovation makes recall of the time before it a nearly impossible feat. Try to remember pre-fax and pre-cell phone living. Similarly, jeweler Bob Fisher has a difficult time recalling his professional life before revolutionary changes in April 2001. That's when he became the first jeweler in the U.S. to stock cultured abalone pearls from New Zealand

That's also when he became living proof that in a Wal-Mart world big things can still happen to very small businesses. For the past 20 years, Fisher has run a tiny 700-square-foot store in Hendersonville, North Carolina, all by his skillful lonesome.

Without intending to do so, Fisher launched the American market for farm-raised abalone pearls. "I never dreamed I'd be getting e-mail inquiries from as far away as California and Arizona," he says.

If you lived in the continental U.S. or Canada and you somehow found out about these newcomers and went to the web site of their sole producer, Eyris Blue Pearls, you were sent to Fisher. This is why 60 percent of his abalone pearl sales are made over the Internet. Many other customers are web walk-ins who decide to drive to the southern end of North Carolina for live rather than screen viewings of the pearls.

"From the moment I put them out, I knew I had something that set me apart from every store in my state, if not the nation," Fisher says proudly. And with prices for most of his custom-design abalone earrings and pendants between \$600 and \$1,200, he knew he had an exclusive that combined his customer's intense desire for rarity and beauty with

their pronounced need for budget pricing. "I had the best of both worlds: an affordable gem that looked like it cost a bundle."

That Fisher remained king of the abalone pearl market for nearly five years is almost as great a marvel as the still little-known South Sea marvels that he sells. Now he will have to share his once-exclusive domain with other jewelers. Eyris Pearls, the abalone pearl producer headquartered at Whangamoe Inlet, on New Zealand's Chatham Islands, recently named Imperial-Deltah, East Providence, Rhode Island, its sole U.S. distributor. Company head Peter Bazar intends to make Eyris Blue Pearls a thriving pearl brand. Already Bazar has invited noted designers to create pieces for an abalone pearl line.

Pleasure Domes

There's something I neglected to tell you about New Zealand cultured abalone pearls. They're mabes, a pearl grown affixed to the inside of a shell and not completely enclosed in nacre. Because they usually form as nacre domes, they were victimized with the name of half-pearls. Unfortunately, such bad-taste semantics conjures up an image of a pearl that is incomplete.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. A mabe pearl is a wholly complete cultured pearl. However, because it grows attached to the inside of a shell, its base cannot be covered with nacre. So, instead, it must be cut away from the shell and sealed with mother-of-pearl. But the rest of the pearl is encased in nacre.

No doubt you have seen beautiful South Sea and Tahitian mabe pearls. These dome pearls look identical to full pearls in terms of color, luster, and surface. But, of course, they are usually much less expensive.

In the case of abalone mabes, there are no round, oval, pear, or baroque shaped counterparts. Not yet anyway. The Eyris Company has chosen not to attempt to grow conventional pearls because the abalone mussel does not lend itself to the kind of nucleation that would lend itself to production of self-contained, entirely nacre-enclosed pearls. It is much more efficient and effective to grow mabes.

Continued on page 5

Nevertheless, growing mabes in abalone takes tender loving care and flawless surgical precision. "Abalone," says Eyris' founder Roger Beattie, "are hemophiliacs that can bleed to death from a single nick."

Don't confuse abalone with the hardy oysters used for most pearl culturing. Abalone are sea snails with a large central muscular foot. The main reason to use them for pearl farming is the fact that they tend to create vibrant, lustrous nacre that takes on the spectacular color play for which their shells are famous. There is nothing comparable in appearance to an abalone pearl except very fine opal. No wonder Eyris is just the most successful of several farms who have attempted to grow abalone pearls in the last two decades. Although there are more than 100 varieties of abalone throughout the world, Beattie uses the paua variety native to New Zealand because it possesses the highest degree of iridescence of any abalone shell. As the creature swaddles the nucleus in nacre, it exhibits swirling multi-colors that remind one of an object that has been encased in an opalizing substance.

Most New Zealand mabes are either deep aqua blues or lively teal greens, usually with wisps of pink. But predominantly pink pearls are known to occur.

Understandably, Beattie is reluctant to disclose the secrets of pearl culturing he has developed since starting his venture in 1989. Eyris Pearls is a vertically-integrated company that grows its own paua shells and nucleates them using proprietary techniques. Beattie now has five farms and usually harvests at each after three years growing time. Asked why he named his company Eyris, he answers, "I saw a connection between the iris of the human eye with its layers that act as light absorbers and reflectors and the colorful layers of the abalone pearl which give it its unique light reflecting qualities."

From <http://www.modernjeweler.com>
Reprinted for educational purposes under the "fair use" provision of the U.S. Copyright Act.

Drop of Water Test for Topaz

Quartz and topaz are not easy to separate by eye, and sometimes it is impossible when the quartz is a true topaz color. There is a big difference in price between the two, and anyone describing quartz as "topaz," however innocently, may well be in trouble.

Topaz is quite a different mineral and is harder than quartz. Because of this, a drop of water will not spread on topaz but will spread on quartz.

Clean the stone as effectively as possible with a cloth or handkerchief to remove all traces of grease. It must be dry before the test. Then place a spot of clean water on it with a thin glass or metal rod. On stones with a hardness of less than 7 on the Mohs scale, the water is dispersed. On harder stones it will remain a globule. The harder the stone, the more rounded will be the globule.

From *The Backbender's Gazette* July 2011,
<http://www.hgms.org/>

Topaz Fun Facts

The origin of the Topaz gemstone's name comes from the Sanskrit tapas for fire.

Topaz crystal represents the months of November and December and is the birthstone of both the astrological signs of Scorpio and Sagittarius. Topaz is the birthstone of the Chinese zodiac sign of the Horse.

In fact, the topaz birthstone's most common color is colorless — and as such topaz was often mistaken for a diamond — but it might also come in warm brown, purple, honey yellow and green colors.

Topaz colors come in all shades of the rainbow. Topaz colors include various tones and saturations of dazzling blue, green, yellow, orange, red, pink, purple, brown, etc.

<https://bonheurjewelry.com/blogs/bonneurs-world/fun-facts-about-november-s-birthstone-topaz>

~ Bench Tips ~

This page will be dedicated to bench tips and techniques from our readers. If you have bench tips you'd like to share, let us know! Bench tips can be anything - metal work, lapidary, wirework - anything creative that you would like to share. Send your tips to: aos.editor.02@gmail.com

BEZEL CLOSER

by Brad Smith

A bezel closer is a steel punch that makes quick work out of pushing the metal down over a round stone and burnishing it. It works with regular bezels, with tube settings, and with prong settings. Stones can be set in as little as 30 seconds.

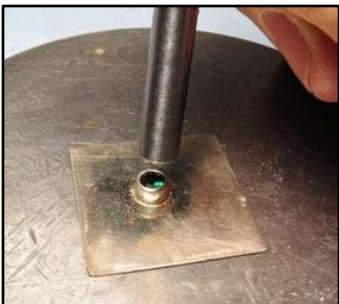
The working end is a concave cavity that fits over the bezel or prong setting and is pushed and twisted to capture the stone. Sets can be purchased but are expensive and contain many sizes you will probably never use. If all you need is one or two sizes, here's how you can make them yourself.

Find a round steel rod or bolt a little larger in diameter than your bezel cup or prong setting. Cut a 5 inch length. File both ends flat. Locate the center of one end, center punch a divot, and drill a small pilot hole about 5 mm deep. Remember to use a little oil as lubricant when cutting steel.

Select a ball bur a bit larger than the bezel. Enlarge the pilot hole to a full hemispherical cavity. Test for proper fit with your bezel. Bezel should first contact the cavity about a third of the way in. When the size is correct, polish the cavity using Zam on a length of chopstick in your flexshaft. If the tool is not polished, it will leave scratches on your bezel or prongs.

When using the tool, the first step is to capture the stone correctly. I usually work by hand and push the punch straight down over the bezel or prongs. This causes the metal to start bending over the stone. Next, if it's a small stone, I inspect with a lens to be sure the stone is staying level. This is repeated until the stone is seated on its bearing and can't move anymore.

Next you want to force the metal down onto the stone uniformly all the way around. While this can be done by hand, I often gently tap the punch with a hammer. Finally, I burnish the bezel by twisting the punch around.



BENCH SHEARS

by Brad Smith

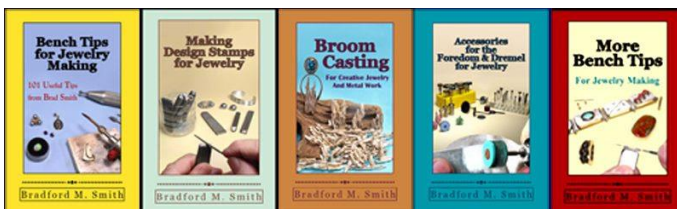
When cutting sheet metal, it's quicker and easier to use a set of shop shears as compared with using a hand saw. The cut is not as precise, but many times you don't need that. Shears will easily cut up to 24 gauge sheet, and some will cut 22 or even 20 gauge.

Current prices for shears run from \$13 - \$36 in jewelry catalogs, and the Joyce Chen scissors recommended on some jewelry blogs run more than \$20. But we found a cheaper alternative at the 99 Cent Store - some gardening utility scissors that were only \$1.07

I buy a half dozen of them at a time for use in my jewelry classes. They're great for cutting bezels, trimming around a bezel cup and cutting a piece off a larger sheet.



Work Smarter & Be More Productive with Brad's "How To" Jewelry Books on [Amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith](https://www.amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith)



Check this out!

Rock & Gem Magazine is excited to announce a new digital series entitled, “Glorious Gemstones” which will accompany “Illustrious Opals” in our free digital series library housed on the Rock & Gem website:

<https://www.rockngem.com>

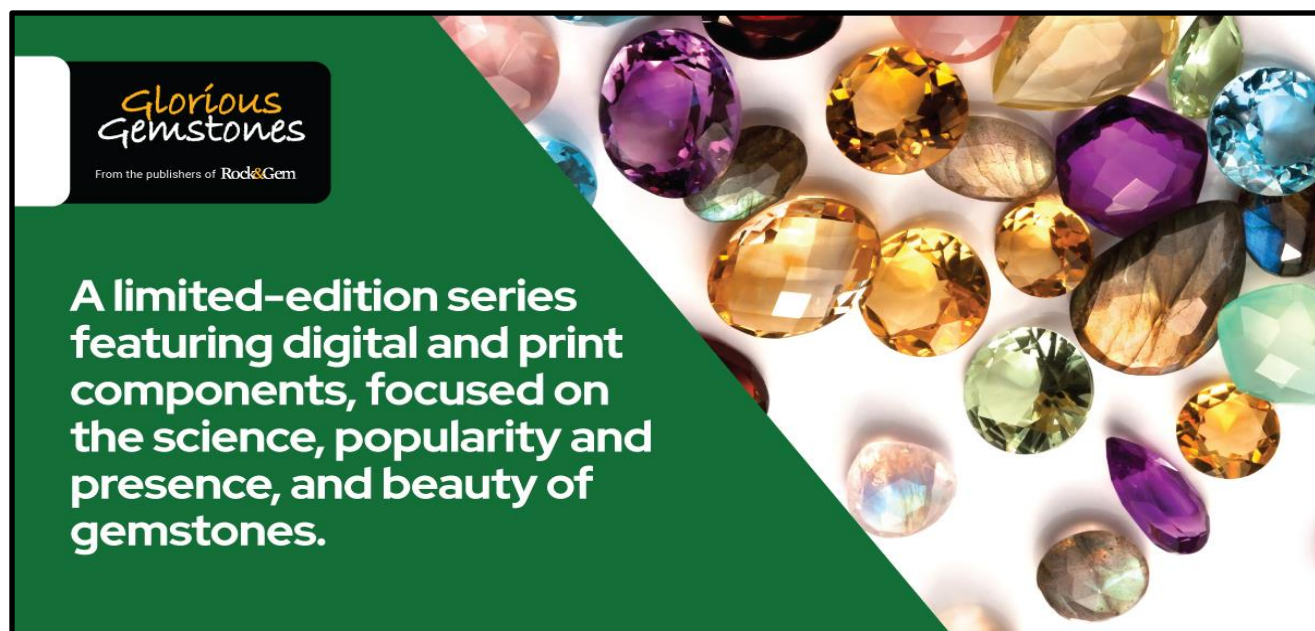
Glorious Gemstones:

Concept: A limited-edition series featuring digital and print components, focused on the science, popularity and presence, and beauty of gemstones.

Topics and Featured Elements: The science behind gemstones, review tools and gear for studying, cutting and displaying gemstones, examine the market for gemstones and learn about resources devoted to the appreciation of gemstones.

Timeframe: Launch series with two-page Sneak Peek: Glorious Gemstones column in the following 2021 issues of Rock & Gem (April, May, June, July, August). Publish three digital issues of Glorious Gemstones, 32 pages each in 2021: March, May, and July.

If you are interested in sponsorship information for this next limited-edition series, please go to: <https://www.rockngem.com/Glorious-Gemstones-Sponsorship-Opportunity-Final.pdf>



Glorious Gemstones
From the publishers of Rock & Gem

A limited-edition series featuring digital and print components, focused on the science, popularity and presence, and beauty of gemstones.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Reader: If your organization has an opal or rockhound-related event, please email particulars to info@opalsociety.org. Upcoming Event listings will be included at the discretion of The Opal Express editor as space and scheduling permit.

February 20-21, Antioch **CANCELLED!**

Antioch Lapidary Club
Jewelry, Gem & Rock Show
Contra Costa County Fairgrounds, 1201 West
10th St., Antioch
Hours: 10 am – 5 pm daily
Admission \$6, Children 12 and under/Scouts in
uniform – Free
Active Military with ID – Free
Contact: (925) 301-6957,
brenda.miguel@yahoo.com

February 27-28, Vallejo **CANCELLED!**

Valejo Gem & Mineral Society
56th Annual Gem & Mineral Show
Solano County Fairgrounds, McCormack Hall,
900 Fairgrounds Dr.
Hours 10 am-5pm
Contact: (415) 254-1506,
dduhonvgms@gmail.com

March 6 – Ventura, CA **CANCELLED!**

Ventura Gem & Mineral Society
Ventura County Fairgrounds, 10 W. Harbor Blvd, Ventura
93001
Saturday 10 am-5 pm, Sunday 10 am-4 pm
A So-Cal tradition for 59 years! (Note: this listing is
tentative and is conditioned upon conditions of the
moment at the Ventura County Fairgrounds due to the
COVID-19 pandemic.)
50+ exhibits of gems, fossils & lapidary arts; demos;
raffle silent auctions; flea market & plant sale; 15 dealers;
kids booth & free resources for teachers.
Contact: (805) 312-8467, info@vgms.org

April 10-11, 2021, Mariposa, CA

Mariposa Gem and Mineral Club
Mountains of Minerals Show
Mariposa County Fairgrounds, 5007 Fairgrounds Rd.
Saturday 10 AM-5 PM, Sunday 10 AM-4 PM
Website: <http://mariposagemclub.org>

May 1-2, 2021 – Jackson, CA

Amador County Gem & Mineral Society
Kennedy Mine Gem and Craft Show
Hwy 49 in Jackson CA
Saturday – 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday – 10 AM – 4 PM
Contact: (209) 296-4061, blackwolf@vgolcano.net

June 12-13, 2021, Escondido CA

Palomar Gem and Mineral Club
340 N. Escondido Blvd., Escondido CA 92025
Saturday – 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM-4PM
Palomar Gem and Mineral Show – presented by the Palomar
Gem and Mineral Club. Held in the California Arts Centers
museum and ballroom. A beautiful indoor facility. Secure for
vendors and comfortable for attendees. 30-35 dealers.
Website: pgmcshow@palomargem.org

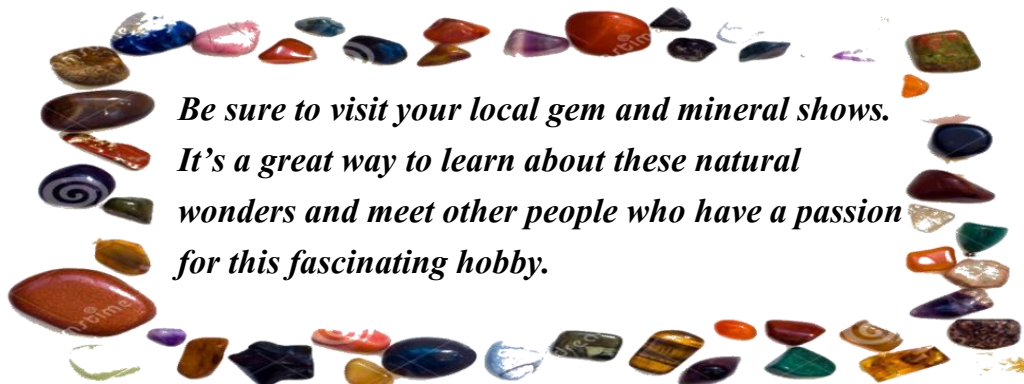
August 14-15, 2021 – Arcadia CA

Pasadena Lapidary Society
“Inspiration Unearth”, 62nd Annual Tournament of Gems
Arcadia Masonic Center, 50 W. Duarte Rd., Arcadia
Hours: 10-5 Daily
Contact: Ellen Ferrell 1-727-512-0381
Email: ellenbf207@aol.com
Website: pasadenalapidary.org

September 18-19, 2021 – Chico, CA

Feather River Lapidary and Mineral Society Silver Dollar
Fairgrounds
2357 Fair St., Chico, CA 95928
Saturday 9 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 9 AM – 4 PM
Contact: 1 530 586-7052; Website: <http://featherriverrocks.org>

As information becomes available, we will
post updates to these and upcoming shows
in future newsletters.



*Be sure to visit your local gem and mineral shows.
It's a great way to learn about these natural
wonders and meet other people who have a passion
for this fascinating hobby.*

American Opal Society Membership Application

FILL IN APPLICABLE INFORMATION		DUES / FEES	AMOUNT PAID
DUES:	RENEWING MEMBERS	\$35.00	
SELECT ONE	NEW MEMBERS	\$45.00	
INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP FEE (All addresses <u>outside</u> of USA)		\$15.00	
PRINTED NEWSLETTER FEE (Paper copy postal mailed instead of PDF file by e-mail)		\$10.00	
ADDITIONAL BADGES (Your first badge is <u>free</u> when joining)		\$15.00	
TOTAL PAID DUES plus International, Print or Badge Fees if Applicable:			

Please make check or money order payable to "American Opal Society". Mail payment and application to:

American Opal Society: PO Box 4875, Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875

An optional quicker method of payment is via the internet. To pay via PayPal, please visit the membership page on our website at http://opalsociety.org/aos_application_by_web.htm to complete the form and make your PayPal payment. You may pay with a credit card or via PayPal account. The transaction is completely secure and the AOS never sees your credit card number. The AOS PayPal account is membership@opalsociety.org.

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ADDRESS	APT # or PO BOX
CITY	STATE
ZIP OR POSTAL CODE	COUNTRY (IF OUTSIDE USA)
PHONE - Home ()	PHONE - Business ()
E-MAIL	
WEBSITE	
OCCUPATION	HOBBIES and INTERESTS

NAME BADGE ORDER FORM:

PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname, or name of your opal related business.

MEMBERSHIP ROSTER: The AOS publishes a membership roster once per year in its newsletter, The Opal Express. Your name will be included. Please check what additional personal information you listed for other members. If it is different from the information above, please note that on the application.

☐ Address ☐ Phone-landline ☐ Phone-cell ☐ E-mail ☐ Website

Please sign here: _____

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Are Your Dues Due Now?

PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL OR NEWSLETTER E-MAIL.

There will be a date that shows the current month/year of your membership. If the date is older than the current date, your dues are overdue.

A Renewal Grace Period of two months will be provided. Please note, that as the system is set up, if your renewal is not received you will be AUTOMATICALLY dropped from membership thereafter. It is your responsibility to assure your dues are current.

Thank you.

The Editor

(revised 11/27/19)

The Opal Express

American Opal Society
P.O. Box 4875
Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875

Volume 54, Issue 2

— GENERAL MEETINGS —

4th Wednesday of the Month
7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Anaheim Community Center
250 E. Center Street
Anaheim, CA 92805



TO:



**No General Meeting
for February**



General Meeting Location at:

Anaheim Downtown Community Center

**250 E. Center Street
Anaheim, CA 92805**

Due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and Governor Newsom's stay-at-home mandate, we are cancelling Board Meetings and General Meetings. If we find that using Zoom is a feasible alternative for our meetings, we will let members know the details.

American Opal Society

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Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/opalsociety>
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCegTIH1IEyO7y8wdqvRfyUA?view_as=subscriber

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