



Mineralogical Society of America



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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



As I look towards my retirement after 39 years at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, I clearly recall being hired as a research mineralogist—and "curator." Prior to my joining the Department of Mineral Sciences, my background had been conventionally academic, as a graduate student and postdoc. When applying for the Smithsonian job, I had some notion of the skills required as a research mineralogist, but curatorial work was not an experience offered by most academic graduate programs. Looking back, my career as a curator has turned out to be unexpectedly

fascinating; not surprisingly, museum mineral collections are critical to broad areas of mineralogical research.

A typical dictionary definition of "curator" is "a keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection," adding "their role is to acquire, care for and develop a collection, and to interpret the collection to inform and inspire the public." The Smithsonian's mineral collection consists of ~375,000 specimens, including about 10,000 gems. The bulk of the minerals make up our reference collection and are primarily used for research. One of the huge benefits for me and my colleagues is direct

and daily access to this incredible mineralogical resource; one truly feels like a kid in a candy store. A major part of my job, however, and that of my many skilled colleagues, is to facilitate access to the collection as a resource for the international scientific community. Specimens are available on loan to scientists at any recognized research facility in the world. As resident mineralogist and curator, I have served as an interface between the collection and researchers needing specimens—to interpret their needs, identify the most suitable samples, and negotiate the minimum quantity required for their study. Fortunately, most experiments these days require only a small amount of material, so most "loans" are as chips-to-be-consumed, <1 gram, and we assume that the sample will be used up during the study and not returned. We ask in return that the specimens be acknowledged in publications and that we receive copies of data collected from them.

One benefit of being a curator is the opportunity to interact with scientists working on myriads of important (since fascinating was used earlier) projects. My position at the Smithsonian has provided a unique overview of who is doing what with minerals. A sudden rush of interest in certain minerals or localities may highlight new topical areas, or perceived funding opportunities. In addition to mineralogists and petrologists, and, yes, geochemists and geomicrobiologists, we have provided specimens to meteorite scientists, chemists, physicists, environmental scientists, medical researchers, oceanographers, biologists of many flavors, etc. Of course, the common link among these researchers and projects is the essential role of minerals. Minerals are the building blocks of our Solar System, and their ubiquity in research should not be surprising. But I wonder, doesn't that make all of these scientists "mineralogists"?

Obviously, the Smithsonian collection is only one of many great museum mineral collections around the world that provide specimens for research. A critical role of these collections is not only to support science today, but to ensure continued access into the future. Inevitably, we will need to reinterrogate the same mineral specimens as they are approached with new techniques and different questions, and by smarter scientists. Well-curated and supported museum collections ensure that the mineral specimens used for seminal studies today will be available to future generations. Will all those well-studied minerals and rocks stored in your colleagues' offices be available for research in 5 or 50 years?

I am constantly amazed at the advances in instrumentation, computers, and software used to study minerals, just in my lifetime. It would be naïve to think this pace will abate. When I started my career, few mineral scientists would have anticipated the emergence of major research areas such as climate change, synchrotron-based science, nanomaterials, critical minerals, asteroid return missions, mineral evolution, etc. We routinely now receive requests not just for a specimen of a particular mineral, but rather for samples from various locations and deposits representing different ages in Earth's history, or from the generally unglamorous Critical Zone. These new directions inform curatorial priorities for growing the collection. Standards are being reanalyzed for more accurate and complete trace element information and in some cases, isotopic profiles. As studies are reported and databases grow, the mineral specimens remain the primary repository of all that, and future, information.

Every mineral specimen has a story. I anticipate an eternal partnership between museum mineral collections and researchers as they continue unraveling those tales. Long after I am gone, the mineral specimens will still be here.

Jeffrey Post

2023 President, Mineralogical Society of America

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On his retirement to Cyprus in 1986, he grew olive and fruit trees, built many drystone walls, and became a member of an archaeological group and a wild-flower photographer, as well as remaining a consultant to the Revolving Fund and to the Cyprus Geological Survey.

In 2001, he and Efrosini travelled to Australia to visit their son. Intending to live there, they moved to Toowomba, near Brisbane, but in 2005 decided to return to Cyprus, buying an old house in the village of Prastio, which they then restored. However, in 2010, John's health deteriorated and they consequently returned to England in 2012 to live in York, where he died on 2 December 2021. He is survived by his wife, their children, and by his children from his previous marriage.

When John was being considered for the job in Nepal, the Assistant Administrator and Regional Representative for UNDP in Ethiopia, Richard B. Stedman (1920–2013; who eventually retired as Assistant Secretary-General of the UN), wrote to his counterpart in Nepal "Tooms is hard-working, technically sound, and well motivated. He has done good work here. He is also a man of principle—he tells them the truth, whether they want to hear it or not. I have wished once or twice that he was a little more adept at "rolling with the punch," but I don't know many New Zealanders who are! I think he's a good, slightly tough supervisor. His staff is loyal to him. In short, if you want a good, technically sound, hard working character, and are prepared to accept slightly rough edges – which have shown themselves to be polishable in Ethiopia – you couldn't do better than John Tooms'.

The writer thanks Mrs. E. Tooms and Prof. D. Cronan for their assistance.

Richard J. Howarth

NOTES FROM CHANTILLY

Renewals

We are now in the new year, so please make sure that you have renewed your membership for 2023! You can renew on the home page of www.msaweb.org. If you need your username and password, please drop us a line in the Business Office at business@minsocam.org. Regular membership is \$85; Early Career is \$45; and Student membership is \$20. There is also a Sustaining Member category of \$235 (\$85 for membership and \$150 as a contribution toward MSA's programs). When renewing, you also have the opportunity to buy publications at 25 percent off the regular price and to make a donation to support MSA's programs and services. Consider sponsoring memberships for your students as well!

Subscriptions

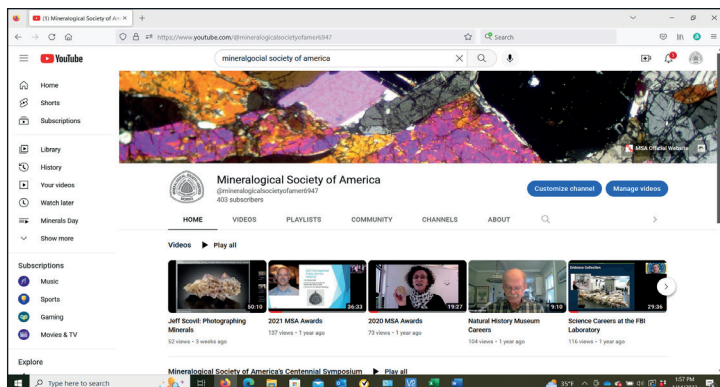
This is also the time of year for institutions and individuals to subscribe to MSA's publications for 2023. Subscription renewal notices have been sent out. If you or your institution have not received yours, please contact the MSA Business Office at business@minsocam.org.

Annual Fund – MSA Forward

Thanks to all MSA members who have so generously contributed thus far to the new *MSA Forward* Annual Fund. This fund supports our efforts to communicate most effectively to our membership and the wider public. These efforts include our new website, e-commerce system, proposed mentorship platform, and much more. To make a tax-deductible gift to the Fund, members can contact Ann Benbow, MSA Executive Director, at abenbow@minsocam.org, or call the MSA Business Office at 1-703-652-9950.

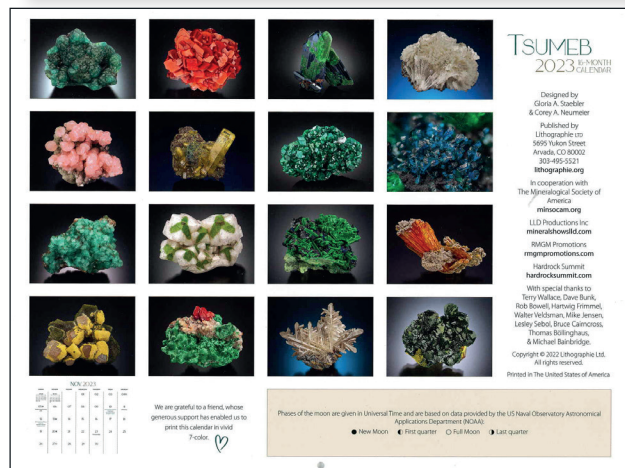
DID YOU KNOW?

If you haven't done so yet, please take some time to explore MSA's YouTube Channel. There, you will find videos on a variety of mineralogical topics, such as gemology, mineral photography, mineralogy and cultural heritage, mineral museum curation, diamonds, mineral collecting, space mineralogy, and much more. There is also a series of videos on careers that use mineralogy, including forensics, environmental science, materials science, jobs in federal science agencies, and a number of others. In addition, there are video recordings of the MSA Awards citations and acceptance speeches from 2020 and 2021. The link to the MSA YouTube Channel is <https://www.youtube.com/@mineralogicalsocietyofamer6947>.



2023 CALENDAR

Don't forget to order your 2023 calendar from the MSA Bookstore: <https://msa.minsocam.org/publications.html>. Created and published by Lithographie, this is a 16-month calendar with stunning images for each month. The price is \$12.



UPCOMING DEADLINES

March 1, 2023: Deadline to submit proposals for the Kraus Crystallography Research Grant and the Mineralogy/Petrology Research Grant. For more information about the proposal format and how to submit, visit <https://msaweb.org/awards-grants/>.

June 1, 2023: Deadline to submit nominations for three of MSA's Awards: Roebling Medal, Dana Medal, and MSA Award. For more information, visit <https://msaweb.org/awards-grants/>.