



Diablo Diggins

Monthly Newsletter of the Contra Costa Mineral & Gem Society

**"We Dig Rocks"
Since 1950**

June VOL. 70 NO 6

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President's Message

June is going to be a critical month for the Contra Costa Mineral and Gem Society. It is the last month that we have our meeting space at Centre Concord contracted for other than our show date in November. It will be prohibitively expensive to renew the contract even if the Centre will even offer us one. We are in desperate need of a meeting space, preferably one that already has a sound system, flag and projector screen. If you know of a senior Center, Church meeting room, Community Center or other venue please send the contact information to any board member. We will get in touch with them about price and accommodations. At this point I have a speaker for July, Rick Kennedy, who is involved in the Benitoite mine and Hallelujah Junction Quartz Crystal mine, but no meeting place.



Speaking of Speakers, June is going to be very exciting. Our speaker is going to be Gary Collier of the Mount Diablo Metal detectors club. He will be talking about, and showing off, a selection of the things that he has found while metal detecting. That includes everything from bottle caps to gold and jewelry. He has promised to show us how to set up a metal detector so that we neophytes can also enjoy the hobby.

For Jade enthusiasts the Monterey Jade Festival will be held from 1pm – 7pm Friday June 10 10am – 6pm Saturday June 11 10am – 4pm Sunday June 12. Free Admission. I will be there working with one of my favorite Jade dealers, Bob Carmen. Most of your favorite jade dealers will be there too.

Kelly

Up Coming Shows

June 4-5 Summer San Francisco Crystal Fair Fort Mason

[Summer San Francisco Crystal Fair - Fort Mason](#)

June 11-12 Palomar Gem and Mineral Show

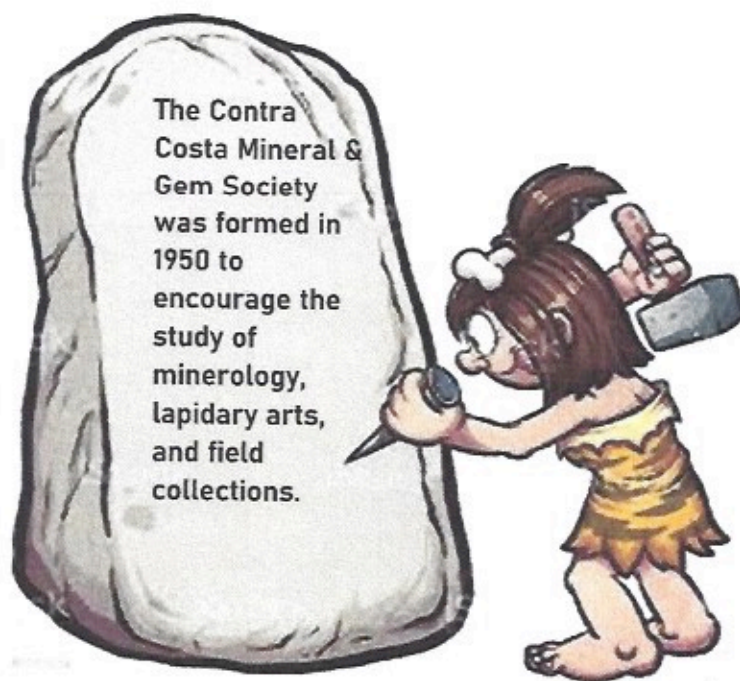
[Palomar Gem & Mineral Show](#)

July 8-10 International Gem and Mineral Show San Mateo

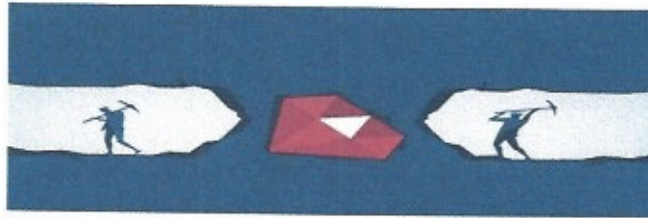
[International Gem & Jewelry Show San Mateo \(July\)](#)

Member Spotlight

Due to conflicting schedules this month we do not have a member spotlight. We are trying but we can use member input on this subject...please if you have any stories about the club, or want any stories published; write them down and send them to me @ cherylmorgan09@yahoo.com. I will edit for correct grammar and publish. Become a famous author TODAY!



Diamonds..... in California???



Part 1

The rush for gold that began in California in 1848 and for silver in Nevada in 1859 filled the West with people hooked on the Next Big Thing. From grubby prospectors washing dirt in a thousand Western streams to bankers and speculators in San Francisco, New York and London, everyone, it seems, embraced the idea that the West's mountains and riverbeds held an abundance of mineral wealth there for the taking.

At about the same time came news of a diamond rush in South Africa, the third major diamond find known to the world after one near the city of Golconda, India, and an 18th century site discovered by the Portuguese in Brazil. Stoked by the tall tales of early 19th-century trapper-guides like Jim Bridger and Kit Carson about diamonds, rubies and other gems that could be scooped right off the ground, avaricious dreamers were soon looking for precious stones in Arizona and New Mexico, where the terrain was said to resemble South Africa's. An odd diamond or two had actually turned up during the gold rush, especially near Placerville, California. In a report on the phenomenon, a state geologist helpfully recommended that "though it may not pay to hunt for diamonds, yet it always pays to pick them up when you do happen to see them."

And so the stage was set for the Great Diamond Hoax, a brilliantly acted scam by two Kentucky grifters that would embroil, among others, some of California's biggest bankers and businessmen, a former commander of the Union Army, a U.S. representative, leading lawyers on both coasts, and the founder of Tiffany & Co. Accurately described by the San Francisco Chronicle in 1872 as "the most gigantic and barefaced swindle of the age," the scheme was also noteworthy for the manner of its unraveling and its colorful characters. Not only did it propel to prominence a geologist later befriended and admired by Theodore Roosevelt, it also gave a fed-

up American public some hope that honest science could triumph, at least occasionally, over hucksterism and greed.

Swelled by the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the San Francisco of 1870 was a city of some 150,000 souls. One of them was Philip Arnold, a Kentuckian born in the same county as Abraham Lincoln. A poorly educated former hatter's apprentice, Mexican War veteran and gold rush forty-niner, Arnold had spent two decades working in mining operations in the West, making enough money to pay for periodic visits back to Kentucky, where he bought a farm, married, started a family and perhaps stashed a little cash. In 1870, he was working as an assistant bookkeeper for the Diamond Drill Co., a San Francisco drill maker that used diamond-headed bits. For a bookkeeper, Arnold, then just past 40, showed a surprising interest in the industrial-grade diamonds that kept the drills running. He even plowed through learned works on the subject. By November of that year, Arnold had acquired a bag of uncut diamonds, presumably taken from his employer, and mixed them with garnets, rubies and sapphires that he likely bought from Indians in Arizona. He also had acquired a partner, John Slack, an aptly named older cousin from Kentucky who, like Arnold, had fought in the Mexican War and had gone after gold in 1849. Indeed, in the months ahead, as the two men hatched their scheme, Slack played the listless, taciturn foil to the voluble and cunning Arnold.

The first person the pair approached was George D. Roberts, the sort of businessman described in newspapers as prominent, but his was a prominence earned by moving fast and not asking too many questions. Arnold and Slack turned up one night at Roberts' San Francisco office, looking weather-beaten and clutching a small leather bag. Inside was something of great value, they said, which they would have deposited in the Bank of California except for the late hour. The two men feigned a reluctance to talk about what was in the sack until Arnold allowed himself to let slip the words "rough diamonds." But Arnold and Slack were more circumspect about where they'd found the jewels, mumbling something about Indian territory, an answer that carried a certain truth, but not in the way Roberts took it.

The bag of diamonds sank the hook deep. "Roberts was very much elated by our discovery," Arnold told the *Louisville Courier-Journal* in December 1872, soon after their scheme had been exposed, "and promised Slack and myself to keep it a profound secret until we could explore the country further and ascertain more fully the extent of our discoveries." Like many able liars, Arnold had an intuitive sense of how others would react to his fictions. What better way to get Roberts to spread the word than to make him swear an oath of silence?

Almost before his office door banged shut behind the two miners, Roberts broke his promise. First, he told the founder of the Bank of California, William C. Ralston, a legendary financier who built hotels and mills and invested in almost everything else, including the Comstock Lode and the completion of the transcontinental railroad when the so-called Big Four—Collis Huntington, Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins and Charles Crocker—came up a little short. The banker had also put money into the Mountains of Silver venture, and in return, the nearby town of Grant had been courteously restyled Ralston, New Mexico. Then Roberts got word to the theatrically named Asbury Harpending, who was in London trying to float a stock offering for the Mountains of Silver. Harpending swallowed the bait as hungrily as Roberts had. As Harpending, an even shadier businessman than Roberts, recalled 45 years later in *The Great Diamond Hoax and Other Stirring Incidents in the Life of Asbury Harpending*, his colorful and mendaciously self-serving memoir, he knew that “they had got something that would astonish the world.” He made his way to San Francisco “as fast as steamships and railroads would carry us,” arriving back home in May 1871.

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Part 2 will be at the June Meeting



Bubbles of Nacre, Queen of Gems

Pearls are the famous birthstone of June, the only gemstone created by a living creature, the choice of most royalty as a sign of nobility, and perhaps the oldest gem treasured by humans. Pearls are formed when the mollusk secretes thousands of very thin concentric layers of nacre, a secretion of calcium carbonate (aragonite and conchyolin) in a matrix that eventually coats an irritant, either man made or natural. The thin circumferential lamellae of nacre intersect the external surface of the pearl to create a 'thumbprint pattern' that characterizes the surface of nacre. Every pearl is unique.

The name "pearl" comes from the Old French *perle*, from the Latin *perna* meaning "leg," referencing the leg-of-mutton shape of an open mollusk shell. Because perfectly round, smooth, natural pearls are so uncommon, the word "pearl" can refer to anything rare and valuable.

Pearls are the world's oldest gem. They have been treasured long before written history. For this reason, their discovery cannot be attributed to one person in particular, but it is believed that they were first discovered by people searching for food along the seashore. We know that they have been worn as a form of adornment for millennia thanks to a fragment of pearl jewellery found in the sarcophagus of a Persian princess that dates back to 420 BC, which is now on display at the Louvre in Paris.

Pearls were presented as gifts to Chinese royalty as early as 2300 BC, while in ancient Rome, pearl jewellery was considered the ultimate status symbol. So precious were the spherical gems that in the 1st century BC, Julius Caesar passed a law limiting the wearing of pearls only to the ruling classes.

With such a long and ancient history, it is no wonder that, over time, the pearl became shrouded in myth and legend. In ancient China, pearl jewellery was said to symbolize the purity of the wearer while, in the Dark Ages, knights often wore pearls on the

So how does a Rockhound find a pearl?

Many pearl producing mollusks are in California and are available to the hobbyist. Pearls in oysters found in both fresh and salt water oysters and some of the most valuable and most colorful pearls are in abalones. In California harvesting mollusks for food and harvesting them for shells/pearls is considered the same activity; there are limits and you need a license.

Details and restriction change often so to obtain a license or find out the current limits, please check <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Fishing/Ocean/Regulations/Sport-Fishing/Invertebrate-Fishing-Regs> . For a more complete history of pearls please check out <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/history-pearls/>.

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CULTURED PEARLS

