



# Conglomerate

APRIL 2009 • Vol. 5, No. 4 <http://edisk.fandm.edu/mike.seeds/BMS.htm>

## • Upcoming Shows

For the latest information, check out the web site of the Eastern Federation of Mineral and Lapidary Societies:

<http://www.amfed.org/efmls>.

### APRIL 2009

**18-19: Pittsburgh, PA** - Gem, Mineral & Fossil Show sponsored by the Monongahela Rockhounds. *West Mifflin Volunteer Fire Co #4, Skyview Hall, Pittsburgh, PA*

**25-26: Franklin, NJ** - Franklin (NJ) Gem & Mineral Show sponsored by the Franklin-Ogdensburg Mineralogical Society and others. *Franklin School, Washington Av; Franklin, NJ*

### MAY 2009

**2-3: Topsfield, MA** - 46th Annual Mineral Show sponsored by the North Shore Rock & Mineral Club. *Topsfield Fair Grounds, Rt 1; Topsfield, MA.*

**23: Towson, MD** - Chesapeake Gem & Mineral Show hosted by the Chesapeake Gem & Mineral Society. *Ruhl Armory, 1035 York Rd (MD 45 just off I-695), Towson, MD.*

**30-31: Monroe, NY** - Annual Mineral, Gem, Jewelry & Fossil Show sponsored by the Orange County Mineral Society. *Museum Village, Rt. 17M; Monroe, NY.*

## April BMS Meeting: WED., APRIL 15

The next meeting of BMS will be held April 15th, 2009 at the Cockeysville Public Library Meeting room. The program will be “Why (I) Collect Minerals?,” presented by Mike Seeds. He promises lots of nice digital slides and some challenging ideas. Think it over. Why do you collect minerals? The meeting will be hosted by Brad and Patty Grant. Doors open at 6:30, and a short business meeting will begin at 7:15.

## Minutes: BMS Meeting on March 18, 2009

President Mike Seeds called the March 18th meeting to order at 7:16. Minutes of the February meeting were approved as printed in the *Conglomerate*. Treasurer Bob Hudgins reported that we remain solvent and that there were several new members added to our roster.

There was no Unfinished Business, but Steve Weinberger indicated that he had reviewed the club books for 2008 and had found them to be in order.

Under New Business, Mike was authorized to reserve the Cockeysville Library room for the upcoming year, except for May, August, October and December, when the club would not be meeting there. He also asked for members to volunteer to host the May picnic at their home.

### Announcements:

- Upcoming field trips were announced via the *Conglomerate* and members were urged to call Ed Goldberg to reserve a spot
- Mike urged members to write and submit articles for the *Conglomerate*.
- Al Pribula mentioned a program “Saturday Morning Science at Towson” which might be of interest to members. Topics covered vary by week.
- Members were reminded of the upcoming Atlantic Micromounters Conference at MHA the last weekend in March.

The business portion of the meeting was adjourned at 7:36 and was followed by a show and tell program on “Favorite Maryland Collecting Sites” given by Bob Eberle.

—Submitted by Carolyn Weinberger, Secretary

## Spring Picnic!: Sunday, May 24 at 5 pm

Our annual BMS Picnic will be held on Sunday, May 24 at 5 p.m. at the home of Larry Krause and his wife Alice. BMS will supply the hot dogs, hamburgers, and beverages, while members will be asked to supply salads, vegetables and desserts. This is always a fun event—and there are plenty of minerals to look at in the basement, plus you’ll have a chance to browse the grounds of the Hampton National Historic Site. Address is 1106 Gypsy Lane West (one mile east of the intersection of Dulaney Valley Rd. and Hampton Lane, just north of the Beltway interchange). Call 410-828-0024 with questions. See you there!

## Marriottsville Quarry Collecting Trip

BMS will be collecting in the Marriottsville Quarry on April 18th. Full safety gear is required. Notify Ed Goldberg if you intend to come. Time, place, and directions are available from Ed.

## The Rochester Mineralogical Symposium

The 36th Annual Rochester Mineralogical Symposium, to be held this year from April 23-26 at the Radisson Inn near Rochester Airport (175 Jefferson Road Rochester, NY 14623), is Valhalla to mineral aficionados.

This year's program includes such talks and workshops as "Recent Mineral Collecting in Brazil" (Frank Melanson), "Microphotography of Agates" (Doug Moore), "Field Collecting in Upper Michigan" (Robert Barron), "Women in Mineral Collecting" (Gail Spann), "Minerals of New York City" (John Betts), and "Around the World in 18 Years" (Jeff Scovil). Not to mention technical sessions, presentations of papers in specimen mineralogy, lots of opportunities to socialize, mineral dealers, a silent auction and a voice auction, a "Micromounter's Playroom," and much more. Visit <http://www.amfed.org/efmls/registrationltr.pdf> for more details.

Tucson may have cactus and warm winter weather, but Rochester's got the heavy-hitter mineral program. And given that it's in late April, there *might not* be snow!

### Baltimore Mineral Society

Mike Seeds, *president*, 717-285-3745; Al Pribula, *vice president*; Bob Hudgins, *treasurer*; Carolyn Weinberger, *secretary*; Larry Krause, *newsletter*, 410/828-0024.

E-mail news or questions to: [mseeds@fandm.edu](mailto:mseeds@fandm.edu) or [managingeditor@verizon.net](mailto:managingeditor@verizon.net)  
Write c/o 1106 Gypsy Lane West  
Baltimore, MD 21286.

### FIELD TRIP INFO:

E-mail [Edmund.A.Goldberg@usdoj.gov](mailto:Edmund.A.Goldberg@usdoj.gov) to learn about upcoming mineral field trips.

## The Rock Dump

- The **March BMS meeting** was the best attended in quite a few years. We had 26 people present including at least 6 visitors who signed up as new members. Welcome to all.
- **Bob Eberle** spoke at the March BMS meeting on "Some Unusual Collecting Localities in Maryland," and his talk was both entertaining and enlightening. He showed off specimens he has collected in the area and described how he came to dig them up. The unstated lesson is that the number and quality of what you find is proportional to the time you spend digging. But you also have to know where to dig, and a number of audience members were taking notes as Bob described his explorations. It is entertaining to think of him on a lunch break in a business suit digging rocks out of a mud bank with a big screwdriver. That kind of dedication is why he had so many interesting specimens to show off.
- **Carolyn and Steve Weinberger** and **Jake Slagle** went to the Tucson Show and they will tell us, perhaps in June, what they saw and what they brought home. We will all look forward to that Tucson program.
- **The Silver Mine** at Silver Mine County Park in Lancaster County will be open for tours (but no collecting in the park) on May 16 and 17th. Ask John Coolidge for details.
- The **Atlantic Micromounters Conference** took place on March 27-29 sponsored by the Micromineralogists of the National Capital Area and administered and planned largely by Steve and Carolyn Weinberger. It was a great success, with at least 45 collectors, an auction, dealers and a giveaway table. The guest lecturer was Ron Gibbs, mining engineer, field collector, dealer, and author in New Mexico. His talks about exploring old gold mines were fascinating and a bit creepy.
- The **Rochester Mineralogical Symposium** (<http://www.rasny.org/MineralSymp.htm>) is approaching April 23-25, 2009. It is guaranteed mineral excitement.

—Mike Seeds

## The Merkers Triple-Treasure Mine

**O**n April 6, 1945, Allied forces, meaning mostly American GIs, reached the potash mine near Merkers in east central Germany. What they found there was so stunning that General Dwight David Eisenhower flew in to see it with his own eyes. They thought they had found a treasure. A mineral collector would understand there were three treasures.

Potash is potassium carbonate, and the ore that came out of the Merkers mine was a treasure to the German people because it is used in a number of industrial processes including glass and soap making. It is also an important component in fertilizer. But that mineral treasure isn't what Eisenhower came to see.

The Nazi government was criminal, and it isn't hard to think of some dreadful crimes they committed, but one of the less horrifying was simple theft. They looted treasure at every opportunity from national vaults, banks, museums, libraries, schools, private homes and churches. Carefully tabulated in accounting books, the stolen art, gems, and gold were transported back to Germany, and, as the war turned against them, the Nazis began hiding their treasure. Some of it went into the Merkers potash mine. In fact, it was piled meters deep in places.

Some of the art, gold and currency actually belonged to the German people and had been moved into the mine to avoid Allied bombing. The majority of the treasure, however, was loot, and the Allied teams known as Monuments Men began removing the treasure with the ultimate goal of returning it to its rightful owners. But they had to work fast at Merkers because the Soviet Army was approaching. It took two days to load 56 10-ton trucks to move the treasure to safety. As the last of the Allies withdrew, and the iron curtain slammed down trapping the mine

*see next page*

### BMS MEETINGS:

3rd Wednesday of the month at 7:00 P.M. Cockeysville Public Library *except Oct. (Micromount Symposium); December (BMS holiday party), May (BMS annual BBQ) & August*

## Other Local Clubs

### Chesapeake Gem And Mineral Society, Inc.

(<http://chesapeake.rockclub.us/>) meets the 2nd Friday of each month except August at 7:30 P.M. Women's Club of Catonsville, St. Timothy's Lane & Old Frederick Rd; Catonsville, MD.

### Gem Cutters Guild of Baltimore, Inc.

(<http://www.gemcuttersguild.com>) meets the 1st Tuesday of each month except January, July and August at 7:30 P.M. at Meadow Mill at Woodberry, 3600 Clipper Mill Rd., Suite 116; Baltimore, MD

## It's time to renew your BMS Membership!

Individual memberships \$10; family memberships \$15. Send payment along with your name, list of family members, address, phone and e-mail to: **Bob Hudgins, 6713 Balmoral Overlook, New Market, MD 21774.** Or: renew at the next BMS meeting!

## Write for "The Conglomerate"!

Send your observations to [octahedron1@mac.com](mailto:octahedron1@mac.com) or [mseeds@fandm.edu](mailto:mseeds@fandm.edu) for inclusion in *The Conglomerate*. Don't have email? Hand in your submissions at a meeting or by snail mail.

in what became East Germany, the second treasure of the Merkers mine was gone.

You may know of other Nazi loot that ended up in mines. The Amber Room, built in Catherine's Palace near St. Petersburg contained 6 tons of amber in panels that completely lined a room. Nazi looters took the panels and The Amber Room has never been found. One of many theories is that the panels were hidden in a deep mine in the Ore Mountains that flooded in the chaos of war's end. In the potash mine in Heringen, Allied Monuments Men found a huge collection of books, maps and reports looted from schools and libraries. Those related to geology were sent to the USGS, where they are today part of the US Geological Survey Library.

Then what is the third treasure in the Merker's potash mine? Only a mineral collector would understand. Deep in the mine there are huge rooms lined with halite—salt. That's not so unusual; many mines contain salt, but at Merkers the salt has crystallized in cubes ranging from small grains to cubic crystals over a meter on an edge. Floors and ceilings are decorated with huge, water-clear cubes of salt. This is surprising because halite is not strong and can flow under pressure. A stope in an old salt mine may close up completely in just 100 years. Some say the largest rooms are closing up at about 1 cm a year, but the cubes are still there, and with the fall of Communism, the mine has been turned into a public museum with tourists riding in wagons through the depths.

Of course, there's potash in the potash mine. The name comes from the old method of making the substance. Wood ashes were washed with water, and the results were left to evaporate in iron pots. The white residue was mostly potassium carbonate—"Pot Ash." Potash mines produce a mixture of potassium salts all referred to as potash. The Merkers mine contains a few other interesting minerals. Carnallite ( $\text{KMgCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ) is deliquescent, meaning it will absorb water from the air and dissolve itself. Rinneite ( $\text{K}_3\text{Na}[\text{FeCl}_6]$ ) and Bischofite ( $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ) are both water-soluble. All three minerals must be stored away from air and moisture.

Giant salt crystals have been found in other mines as well including the Allertal potash mines in northern Germany and those near Detroit, Michigan. Giant "golden" salt cubes have also been found in New Mexico.

The Merkers triple treasure mine is part of a sad episode in human history, but nature has given it a special place in natural history that only mineral collectors can fully appreciate.

- You can find photos of the Merkers giant halite crystals at <http://giantcrystals.strahlen.org/Europe/merkers.htm>.
- Read more about the Nazi treasure at Merkers at <http://everything2.com/title/The%2520Merkers%2520Mine%2520Treasure>.

## Ed Goldberg's Maryland Minerals Exhibit



Sharon Lyon and Jennifer Stott, two professors of physical science at Howard Community College, in collaboration with Ed Goldberg of BMS, have created a public display of Maryland Minerals, housed in the ground floor of the Science and Technology Building on the Columbia, MD campus. The exhibit contains specimens from Ed's collection gathered during many field trips and mineral collecting forays with his partner, Phil Greenberg. The exhibit honors the late Herb Corbett and Jack Nelson. A photo of Jack panning

gold in Rock Run can be seen in the case.

Howard Community College can be found off I-29, to Md. 175 West, to Governor Warfield Parkway, to 10901 Little Patuxent Parkway. The Science and Technology Building (designated as ST on the campus map) can be located using this link: [www.howardcc.edu/about\\_hcc/getting\\_around/maps\\_and\\_directions](http://www.howardcc.edu/about_hcc/getting_around/maps_and_directions).

## **EFMLS Offers On-line Library**

The Eastern Federation of Mineralogical & Lapidary Societies (EFMLS) offers an on-line library of mineral-related articles. Visitors are permitted to republish the information, so long as proper credit is given. Visit <http://www.amfed.org/efmls/library.htm>.

## **Wildacres Sessions**

The EFMLS sponsors two annual lapidary and jewelry-making workshops at Wildacres, a retreat in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. Sessions last one week. Spring Dates are: April 17-23, 2009; Fall Dates are: September 7-13, 2009. Visit <http://www.amfed.org/efmls/wildacres.htm>.

## **Looking Ahead:**

**MAY 23:** Towson, MD - Chesapeake Gem & Mineral Show hosted by the Chesapeake Gem & Mineral Society. Ruhl Armory, 1035 York Rd (MD 45 just off I-695), Towson, MD. See Bernie Emery for details.

**APRIL 23-26:** 36th Rochester Mineralogical Symposium. Educational sessions will include "Recent Mineral Collecting in Brazil" (Frank Melanson); "Microphotography of Agates" (Doug Moore); "What's New in Minerals" (Jeff Scovil); "Field Collecting in Upper Michigan" (Robert Barron); "Women in Mineral Collecting" (Gail Spann); "Around the World in 18 Years" (Jeff Scovil). For more details, visit: <http://www.rasny.org/MineralSymp.htm>