



THE AGATEER

The Newsletter of the Madison Gem and Mineral Club

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June 2006

June Meeting - Intarsia

Our program for June 27 will be a slide presentation on INTARSIA, on loan from the Midwest Federation. What is 'intarsia'? The American Heritage Dictionary defines intarsia as 'a mosaic worked in wood'. The word comes from the Italian *intarsio* and the Arabic *tarsi* meaning 'an inlaid mosaic work'. A web search for 'intarsia' turned up many sites featuring wood inlay. How is this different from intaglio, pietra dura, or other mosaics in general? Or, are these merely different names for the same art form? Wikipedia describes intarsia as: *a form of wood inlaying that is similar to marquetry. Intarsia denotes sections of wood (at times with contrasting ivory or bone) that is inlaid with the matrix, whereas marquetry assembled a pattern out of veneers. The technique of intarsia is believed to have developed in Sicily, and the art was widely practiced in Italy in the 15th and 16th centuries, after which marquetry tended to supplant intarsia in urbane work. Marble intarsia is similar to the above but replaces wood with colored marbles. Early examples in Florence date from the mid 15th century, later complex designs and refinement of the art developed in southern Italy circa the beginning of the 17th century. The floor of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is a particularly notable example of marble intarsia.*

DUES

Please send your 2006 dues to the club at the newsletter's return address, or pay at the June meeting. Adult: \$12; Family: \$16; Junior (ages 6 to 17) \$5. If the date on your address label is earlier than 2006, your dues are in arrears. Thanks for your continued support.

Pietra dura (Italian for "hard stone") is *marble inlaid with designs in precious or semi-precious stonework.*

History

Inlay work, particularly on marble, where it takes the name of pietra dura, generated a lot of debate as far as its origin is concerned. Many believe it to be typically Italian in origin but some contend it to be of Indian origin. The most accepted version, though, is that the form is Italian in origin but the accomplished Indian craftsmen adapted it to their needs, gave it an indigenous touch and used the technique to carve out traditional Indian motifs that are today the crown of Indian art.

When the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan commissioned the creation of the Taj Mahal in the 17th century, he mandated the monument to be created in white marble with semi precious stones inlaid in the marble slabs.

So if this is all confusing, perhaps our June program will be able to shed some light on this.

Next Meeting:

Tuesday, June 27, 7:00 PM

AB20 Weeks Hall

**UW Department of Geology and Geophysics
1215 West Dayton Street**

Weeks Hall is on the SW corner of Charter and Dayton Streets. Enter from the Charter Street side.

2006 Member Competition

All members are urged to bring specimens for the monthly competition. The category for June is

June - Lake Superior agate - cut or uncut

Coming months (so you can work ahead):

July - any type of obsidian, cut into cabs

September - petrified wood, cut or uncut

Questions may be directed to Metje Butler, Education Chairperson, at 244-3659.

Welcome New Members:

The following individuals have recently joined the Madison Gem and Mineral Club. We welcome you and hope you find your time and membership with us to be rewarding and fulfilling. Old members are encouraged to introduce themselves at our meetings and make our new members feel comfortable and welcome.

Tyrel Rouse

Megan & Ken Woodford

Calendar of Events:

June 27 Madison Gem and Mineral Club monthly meeting – Intarsia slide program

July 22-23 Lakeland Gem Club show, Minocqua, WI
Lakeland High School, 9 am-7pm Sat; 9am-4pm Sun

July 25 Madison Gem and Mineral Club monthly meeting
Peter Rodewald "Agates of the World"

August 12-13 Driftless Area Gem and Mineral Club show,
Tomah, WI, Masonic Center, 520 E. Saratoga St, 10am-
5pm Sat; 10am – 4 pm Sunday

August 6-12 Copper Country Mineral Retreat – Houghton,
Michigan

August 19-20 NW Wisconsin Gem and Mineral Society
show Rice Lake Campus, Rice Lake, WI; 10-5 Sat; 10-5
Sun

August 20 Madison Gem and Mineral Club picnic 1 pm.
Place TBD. Carpooling at noon, details TBD

Sept. 26 Madison Gem and Mineral Club monthly
meeting Jerry Gunderson "Field Trips Across North
America" slides and collected specimens

Club Competition:

The Story Behind the Winners – Metje Butler

In May, the Club's monthly competition was for member-collected minerals, and we had a number of nice entries.

The first prize (\$10.00) was won by Gabriella Farfan, for her large and gorgeous opal specimen, which she found at Rainbow Ridge, Virgin Valley, Nevada in 2005. There, her digging had turned up a watermelon sized mud glob... (of stuff in which Mother Nature packages up these particular opals.) The hard-packed, resistant mud matrix needed to be dug into, to find and free-up any opals it could hold, and while she was trying to dig it loose, she had also to keep wetting it down, as these opals are subject to crazing. But imagine the excitement of seeing that opal fire gleaming as you scrape away the gunk!

Carlos Peralta, Gabriella's Dad, told me about the site. You can hunt opals at Rainbow Ridge by either buying time for pouring over the "tailings" piles; or for a larger fee, a front-end-loader will scoop a fresh, 3-cubic-yard load of material off the quarry wall and dump it on a separate spot for your exclusive digging, although you must complete your digging within the day and only two may dig at a time. Three cubic yards is a lot of material!

Carlos also said that the opal is actually mineral material that deposited into cavities left in wood forms when they had rotted out, so that the opal pieces are actually fossil limb-casts and such. Gabriella would like to find a fossilized opal pine-cone! And she could... they plan to return again this year for their 6th visit.

The second prize (\$5.00) went to Jack Heabler, (our Field-Trip Chairman!) for his large and colorfully-twinkling iridescent pyrite specimen. He said in 2005 he had gone with the Monroe Gem Club to a quarry in La Farge, Iowa. And looking up the side of the quarry, he had spotted something glittering, about 15 feet up. Also up there, he saw there was a large boulder about 4 feet long sticking out of the earth.

With a ladder and the help of others, he got the boulder loose and found he had exposed a large pocket about 3 feet deep, and it was full of wonderful, glittering pyrite specimens... enough for everyone in the group. They even returned several times to remove all of it, to save its becoming destroyed, in the operation of the quarry business. Jack's specimen flashed considerable color, making it a very attractive piece. And such pyrites occur enough to have the special name of "iridescent pyrite" in the rock trade. But what do you suppose causes that color?

Thunder Bay Agate Mine By -Dr. Bill Cordua, U.Wisconsin-River Falls

Last Spring (2000) I lead a group of undergraduate geology students around Lake Superior. One of the best stops we had was at the Thunder Bay Agate Mine. As it is right on the way to the better known amethyst mines, I'd recommend all headed up that way stop for a visit. The mine is a dig-your-own fee area. It is located just a few miles north of Thunder Bay, just northeast of the Terry Fox Monument (another place that is worth a stop). A mile or so east of the monument on Hwy. 1 1-17, turn left on highway 527. There is an agate mine sign at the intersection, so it is hard to miss. The mine is about 1/2 mile up 527, on the left. That turn off is also well marked. There is a big parking area by their shop. You can walk or drive down a short distance down a well maintained dirt road to the mine from there.

We were greeted and given a tour of the shop and the deposit. The students then got to go to work. The fee is \$8 per pound, with the price prorated to reflect the poundage of agate rather than the surrounding matrix. There is a reduced rate for clubs. There was agate all over the place, and it could be collected without much in the way of tools. If you want to pound, well, there was opportunity for that too. The agate is a seam or vein agate, formed in brecciated iron carbonate of the Proterozoic Gunflint Formation. It isn't the classic Lake Superior agate, which formed in gas bubbles in Keweenaw basalt lavas extruded about 1.1 billion years ago, but it sure is pretty.

Agate had been collected from a nearby river and in gravel pits for years, but its bed rock source was unknown. In the early 1980's a new logging road uncovered the agate bearing bed rock. After some drilling and years of negotiating property rights, agate mining began in 1997.

The agate thickly veins the rock, with stalactitic growths giving nice patterns. There are open vugs with later quartz crystals (white to yellow, no amethyst though). Some pyrite, a black hydrocarbon and yellow micro sprays of goethite (?) were also seen in the cavities. The agate was well banded, with red, brown white and gray colors dominating.

The origin of the agate is a bit problematic. It occurs as open space filling in the Gunflint. It likely formed when this formation was close to the surface, being weathered and dissolved. Since the host rock is a carbonate rock, caves and sinkholes could develop and allow pore spaces for silica-rich solutions to penetrate. The fluids could have circulated through these fractures during faulting or spurred by the heat of later volcanic rocks. It could have formed from the same fluids that elsewhere in the area formed the amethyst veins and local silver deposits.

Once you have enough agate (it doesn't take long to get a bunch), you can stop by the shop. I could hardly get my students away from the shop, and they certainly learned a lot about lapidary in a short period of time. There is also a gift shop with items made from the agate. They have a nice web site too, at <http://www.agatamine.com/>

Keep this in mind if you are traveling north next summer. It's easy to get to find, with good hunting for all. What more could one want of a summer trip?

The above article appeared in "The Leaverite News" in 2001 (via The Drift)

Editor's Note: I tried the web site listed and discovered that [agatamine.com](http://www.agatamine.com/) is for sale – that is, the *name* is for sale. I don't know if that means the mine has been closed, sold, or still operating. It would be best to ascertain its status before driving to Thunder Bay.

For the Linguists in the Club:

As a beginner in this hobby, I was surprised to learn that 'lapidary' referred not only to the art form or hobby or endeavor, but also to the practitioner. One who does lapidary is a lapidary - not a lapidariist, or lapidarier, or lapidaryer. Can you think of any other activities/professions, where the practitioner and the practice are exactly the same term? A jeweler deals in jewelry; a baseball player plays baseball; a teacher teaches; a gardener gardens. In each case the word forms for the practice and practitioner are different. I'll publish any results that you can offer. Looking for enlightenment – ed.

The Agateer is the official publication of the Madison Gem and Mineral Club. It is published monthly, and mailed as a benefit of membership to all Madison Gem and Mineral Club members.

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Membership is open to all individuals, and applications for membership will be accepted upon payment of annual dues, which are \$12.00 for adults (18 and older), \$5.00 for junior members (ages 6-17), and \$16.00 for families.

Visit the official website of the Madison Gem and Mineral Club at www.madison.com/communities/madisonrockclub/contact.php for more information

Madison Gem and Mineral Club
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