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# The Rockhound's Bark

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The Nova Scotia Mineral and Gem Society Newsletter

February 2008



## ABOUT THE SOCIETY

Meetings are held the last Saturday of each month, September-November and January-May, 7:30 - 10:00 p.m. in the auditorium (Lower Level) of the N.S. Museum of Natural History, 1747 Summer St., Halifax. Dues are \$20/year, payable in January of each year.

## 2007 EXECUTIVE

President:	Ronnie Van Dommelen
Vice President:	Fred Walsh
Secretary:	Imelda O'Toole
Treasurer:	Terry Collett
Bark Editor:	Ken McKenzie
Librarian:	Doug Bowes

## SOCIETY'S MAILING ADDRESS

The Nova Scotia Mineral and Gem Society  
c/o NS Museum of Natural History  
1747 Summer Street, Halifax, N.S., B3H 3A6

## NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION DEADLINE

March 22, 2008.

## NEXT MEETING

By Ken McKenzie

February 23 is our next scheduled meeting night. No program information is available at this time.

## OUR FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

By Ken McKenzie

As we've been discussing over the past few years, the Nova Scotia Mineral and Gem Society is at the end of its fifth decade. By some measures, 2008 is the fiftieth anniversary of the Society. To help celebrate this fact and nail down many others, Gordon Stewart has been painstakingly researching the Society's history and has recently completed an 18-page document on the subject. Paper copies will be available for members at the next meeting. In the mean time, *The Rockhound's Bark* will be reproducing sections of the history throughout the year. The full document will be posted on the web site at some time in the future.



## **OF ROCKS, ROCKHOUNDS AND LAPIDARIES – A Historical Sketch Of The Nova Scotia Mineral And Gem Society**

### **Part 1**

**by Gordon K. Stewart**

#### **Origins And Great Dreams - The Story To 1961**

To most of us a rock, whether it is a pebble or a boulder is essentially just a rock but to those who came together to form the Nova Scotia Mineral And Gem Society some fifty years ago rocks were also much more. Even before the Society was formed these folk were already "rockhounds", that is to say hobbyists who looked more closely at rocks and who had already developed a range of special interests as they collected, studied and worked with them. Not many rockhounds, then or now, could be considered professional geologists but many have acquired extensive geological knowledge and have built up personal collections of rocks and minerals, and often also of fossils, relating to their individual interests. In addition many have developed special skills as lapidaries who cut and polish or facet particular types of minerals for use in jewellery making or in other craft work and a few have transformed their hobby into a commercial enterprise and have become dealers in rock, mineral and fossil specimens fashioned into art objects or simply in their natural state.

By the 1950's there were already at least three places in Nova Scotia where rockhounds would naturally meet and get to know one another. One was the Parrsboro Rock And Mineral Shop And Museum, a private undertaking newly opened in 1948 by Eldon George. A second was the workshop and store of "Acadia Gems" on Main Street in Yarmouth owned and operated by S. Clifford Hood who had followed his father and grandfather as a jeweller in the same area. The third was the wider ranging, very much older and publicly supported Nova Scotia Museum Of Science, then situated on Spring Garden

Road in Halifax. That Museum had a history going back to the foundation of the Halifax Mechanics' Institute in 1831. Its many interests had always intertwined with those of earnest amateurs in the geological area, as in many others. In 1868 materials assembled over the years by the Mechanics' Institute were added to others from the Nova Scotian Institute of Science, a new body formed in 1862, and together they became the foundation of collections housed in a newly created Provincial Museum. Subsequently, however, in 1947, after many intermediate changes in the patterns and management of the Museum, the geological materials passed to the Nova Scotia Museum of Science on Spring Garden Road and from there in 1970 to the present Nova Scotia Museum Of Natural History on Summer Street which serves also as headquarters for a whole network of museums and related activities across the province.

The earliest documentary reference which I have seen to the Nova Scotia Mineral And Gem Society is a photocopy of a clipping from an unidentified newspaper of February 1959 which appeared in the "Rockhounds' Bark" of November 1996. The clipping tells of the organization of the Society "recently" at a meeting in Halifax when "S. C. Hood, Yarmouth, jeweller, was elected president", when other listed officers were named, when a constitution was adopted and when, "Provision was made for the first annual meeting to be held next April."

There is no further detail given in the clipping but a fuller account of the same events was prepared for the tenth Annual Meeting of the Society in 1969. That account was quoted at length in the Society's newsletter, "The Rockhound's Bark", in May 1978 and the same events were reviewed yet again

in the "Bark" of November 1979 in an article written by Ted Harrington just before his death in September of that year. As told in the May 1978 "Bark" the story reads in part as follows: "During the latter part of October 1958 Mr. Clifford Hood called on Mr. John George and Mr. Ted Harrington and these three went into a huddle in Mr. Hood's station wagon at the back of the Forum. They took their project" [i.e. of organizing the Society] "to the Nova Scotia Museum and with the help of Mr. Don Crowdis, the Director, and Mr. Bill Take, a preliminary meeting was held on 7 November 1958 with a view to setting up a 'Mineral and Lapidary Society'. On 11 November 1958 Mr. Crowdis chaired a meeting in the Museum at which time this Society took form". Then, as the account goes on to report, a "Provisional Council" was named which in due course met on February 28" 1959 and arranged for the first Annual Meeting to be convened on April 11'b.

Unfortunately no minutes of these meetings and no copy of the Society's constitution as then adopted appear to have survived so that the earliest days of the Society are difficult to trace, are probably not fully recoverable and were soon obscured by the fading of unrealistic early hopes. The picture of that "huddle" in a station wagon, however, has become firmly entrenched in the popular memories of the Society and seems to reflect a real incident although it was probably not the only occasion on which some of its future members consulted together before the Society was actually called into being and there were certainly others than the three persons named who were active then and were later considered to be founding members of the group.

At the beginning there were great dreams of a large organization on a province wide scale, dreams which, for the most part, were never realized. Writing twenty years later in July, 1979, Ted Harrington remembered plans for separate "Chapters" of the Society in Yarmouth, Cornwallis and Wolfville as well as Halifax and provision for others to be added. All these groups were to meet

separately but with a common Annual Meeting in Halifax, the first of which was set to take place, as it actually did, on April 11, 1959. In practice, however, the Halifax based group which was active as "The Halifax Mineral and Gem Club" was the only identifiable functioning separate "Chapter" of the broader Society ever to exist and became in effect the whole Society with which it merged formally in May 1961.

### **The Interplay Of Realities, Hopes And Activities - The Society's Role In Its Stable Years**

#### Relationships To Government And To Other Groups

The Society has never been directly related to Government at any level whether Municipal, Provincial or Federal. On the other hand it has, of course, benefitted indirectly from some Government programmes and especially from assistance given to it by the Nova Scotia Museum and from a few grants made to it by the Nova Scotia Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness to assist with certain of its public shows. In addition the group has corresponded periodically with relevant provincial government departments in relation to a few specific issues. From its very early days, for example, it has expressed concern about the unlimited export of certain minerals and especially agate to the United States and over the years has pressed for the formal designation of Agate as the official gem and Stilbite as the official mineral of Nova Scotia and attempted also to keep in touch with developments affecting the conservation of specific areas in the Province of special geological, mineralogical and palaeological interest and questions of access to them. .

In "The Rockbounds' Bark", of November 1979 the Society is termed an "Affiliate of the Nova Scotia Museum" and there is no doubt of its frequent dependence on the Museum for use of its facilities and for the generous support of the Museum staff and espe-

cially of Bob Grantham and Brenda MacBournie (later Brenda Roscoe) while they were active as Museum staff members. Except for a two year period from February, 1989 to January, 1991 when regular business meetings were moved to the Nova Scotia Public Archives on University Avenue, the monthly meetings of the Society have always been held in the Museum's facilities, first on Spring Garden Road where the Museum was housed in the same building with the Nova Scotia Technical College, and, from 1970 onwards, in the Museum's own present building on Summer Street. In spite of all this, however, there has never been an official link of the Society to the Museum while there has been such a link successively to The Eastern Federation Of Mineralogical And Lapidary Societies based in the U.S.A. and, since 1982, to The Gem And Mineral Federation Of Canada which came into being in 1976.

The link of the Society to the Eastern Federation Of Mineralogical And Lapidary Societies was forged in 1978 after a poll of the Society's membership supported that move as preferable to joining the Canadian body or remaining unattached to either the Canadian or the American group. At that time the Society was in the midst of a whirlwind of activity leading up to the International Earth Science Exhibition which was to be held on the campus of Saint Mary's University in August of that year, a fact which may have had some influence on the decision for in practice the American link did not continue long. In any case when the local Society was given an opportunity to host the convention and show of the Canadian body in 1982 it became a member of that group also and soon quietly dropped altogether the American affiliation into which it had entered only a few years earlier.

The tie of the local Society to the Gem And Mineral Federation Of Canada still remains and is regularly renewed. Events sponsored by the Federation are locally promoted and the local Society has been represented among its directors while the necessary liability insurance coverage for the Soci-

ety has been and continues to be arranged through the same body.

### The Numbers Game - The Ups And Downs Of Membership

The Society, despite its initial hopes, has never been large. Mr. Harrington recalled the paid up membership at the end of its first year as about 75 (and annual membership dues were then only \$1.60 for adults and 50 cents for "Junior Members") with perhaps a similar number who might be considered "interested persons" while Mr. Clifford Hood, the Society's first President, speaking to the Society's annual meeting in 1987 and looking back to 1960, remembered the membership then as 78, a figure which is in close accord with a listing made by Mr. Clifford Hood himself at the time and which survives in a loose leaf notebook still in the possession of his son, Mr. John Hood. Such numbers fall far short of those implied as anticipated in the dreams of 1958 but increased to considerably over 100 at their peak in the late 1970's but unfortunately only to fall again rapidly thereafter. While it is often difficult to determine exact figures year by year due to the inclusion of varying numbers in membership lists under the rubric "..and family", numbers in the mid 1980's seem to have hovered between 40 and 50 with somewhat of a rise in the 90's and a new apparent drop in the new millennium.

