

The Smithsonian gem collection unearthed: Surprising stories behind the jewels

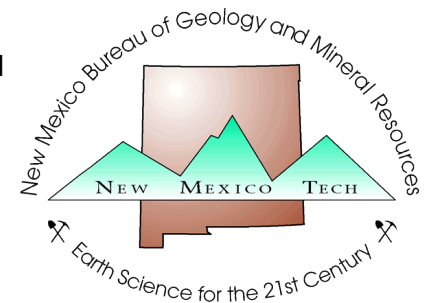
Jeffrey Post

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The annual [New Mexico Mineral Symposium](#) provides a forum for both professionals and amateurs interested in mineralogy. The meeting allows all to share their cumulative knowledge of mineral occurrences and provides stimulus for mineralogical studies and new mineral discoveries. In addition, the informal atmosphere encourages intimate discussions among all interested in mineralogy and associated fields.

The symposium is organized each year by the [Mineral Museum](#) at the [New Mexico Bureau of Geology & Mineral Resources](#).



Abstracts from all prior symposiums are also available: <https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/museum/minsymp/abstracts>

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The Smithsonian Gem Collection

Unearthed: Surprising Stories Behind the Jewels

Dr. Jeffrey E. Post

One of the world's greatest collection of gems is in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. It includes world famous stones such as the Hope Diamond, Star of Asia Sapphire, Carmen Lucia Ruby, Hooker Emerald, and Blue Heart Diamond. But the National Gem Collection is not one of just rare and beautiful gems, but also of the stories of the people who once owned, or were associated with them—kings, emperors, maharajas, movie stars, the rich and famous, and “ordinary” folks.

Gemstones are among Earth's rarest and most beautiful creations. They are history's preeminent symbols of wealth and power. They are valued because they are beautiful and rare, but also because their beauty is undiminished with time. Gems accumulate history, and in many cases that “provenance,” the story, contributes as much to the perceived value of a gem, as its rarity, size and beauty. Who owned them, donated them? Why were they donated? Where were they mined, cut and fashioned into jewelry? We currently share a “moment” with these gems, and we can research and document their pasts, but only speculate about their futures.

Dr. Jeffrey E. Post, curator of the National Gem Collection for more than 25 years, and author of the recently published book: “The Smithsonian Gem Collection—Unearthed: Surprising Stories Behind the Jewels” (Abrams, 2021), recounts the natural history and human stories of some of the world's greatest gemstones, separating fact from fiction, revealing new information, and sharing anecdotes and tales that result from the unique perspective of decades of studying and helping to build this great collection. Did you know that New York ad-man Rosser Reeves donated his great star ruby because he couldn't resist the alliteration “Rosser Reeves Ruby,” or that Polly Logan gave her huge sapphire in part because it reminded her of her unfaithful previous husband, or that the Napoleon Diamond Necklace was sold by swindlers for \$3,000, resulting in an Austrian Archduke being tried for the crime in New York City, and that the Countess Mona Bismarck, who gave the spectacular Burmese sapphire necklace, was the daughter of a Kentucky horse trainer? These stories and more will be explored as Dr. Post provides a special curator's choice tour of our Smithsonian's National Gem Collection.



The Bismarck sapphire necklace features an extraordinary 98.6 carat Burmese sapphire and was a gift to the Smithsonian National Gem Collection from the Countess Mona Bismarck.



The Napoleon Diamond necklace, with 262 carats of diamonds, was a gift from Napoleon I to the Empress Marie Louise in 1811 to celebrate the birth of their son.