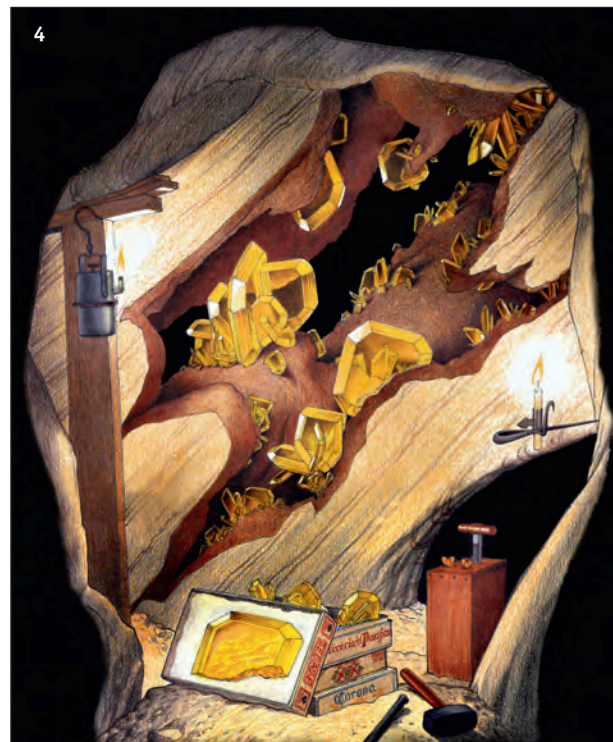


1. Fantasy collecting scene (watercolor and Prismacolor), "Montezuma's Emerald Mine" (2001).
2. Fantasy collecting scene (watercolor and Prismacolor), "Manganese Ore at the Sweet Home Mine, 1898" (1994), Martin Zinn collection.



3. Fantasy collecting scene (watercolor and Prismacolor), "Why Chinese Cinnabar is So Expensive" (2004), Martin Zinn collection.
4. Fantasy underground scene (ink, watercolor and Prismacolor pencil) in the San Pedro Corralitos mine, Mexico (1991).

## HIGHLIGHTS OF A LIFE IN MINERALS

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5. Wendell E. Wilson at the Tucson Show, 2009.  
Gail Spann photo.

Since the *Mineralogical Record* is familiar to most people in the mineral world, the *Mineralogical Almanac* invited editor Wendell Wilson to provide some autobiographical background; similar notes by *Mineralogical Record* founding editor John S. White have appeared in the previous issue.

**T**he idea of becoming a magazine editor never occurred to me while growing up — it doesn't seem to be an occupation that young people daydream about. Most people don't really understand what editors do anyway. But through happenstance, that is what I became, and in the end it proved to be a good fit for me, combining my interests in minerals, art, historical research and writing, not to mention mineral collecting.

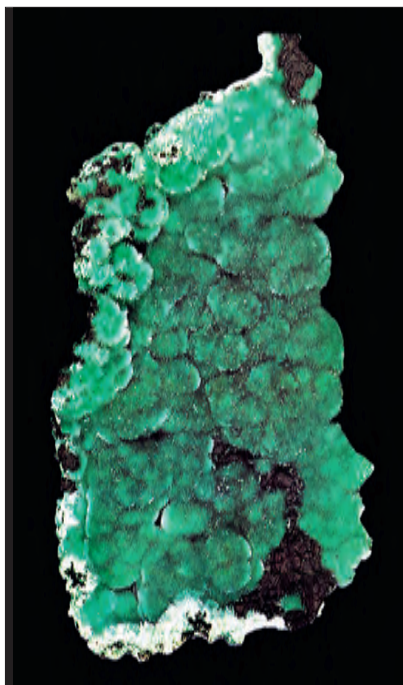
The sprawling glacial plains of east-central Minnesota are not the best environment for discovering minerals: most of the state was scraped flat by glaciers and covered by a layer of pulverized gravel and sand many meters deep. However, I became imprinted with mineral collecting at a very early age when I saw the Disney movie *Snow White*, specifically the underground scene of the seven dwarfs digging in their fabulous gemstone mine, with gorgeous crystals coming out of the walls; I was overwhelmed with a desire to do the same, and to *draw* it as well. But mining for gems had to wait. Art became my first focus, and I spent a great deal of my time drawing; my secret aspiration was to become an artist for Walt Disney.

It turned out that I was a “born collector”: I collected everything that I found interesting, from butterflies to postage stamps, matchbooks, comic books, coins, telephone pole insulators, etc. ...As an elderly collector once said to me, “I can like anything there is two of”. But my exposure to real (rather than cartoon) minerals did not take place until I was about ten years old. A bothersome allergy to pollen (known as hay fever) was especially severe around August, so my parents decided to make Duluth, Minnesota, on the north shore of Lake Superior, our summer vacation spot for a couple of weeks at the height of the hay fever season. Air coming in off the lake was cool and relatively pollen-free. Collecting agates along the shore was a popular pastime among the locals, so we gave it a try and I found my first real specimens.

It also turned out that in downtown Duluth there was a small lapidary and mineral shop run by a woman named Adeline Hector, and there I got my first exposure to real crystal specimens. Driving northeastward up the shore for an outing, we discovered another one: the Beaver Bay Agate Shop, run by a character named Leo “Rocky” Quinn, who had lots of minerals for sale, the finest personal collection in Minnesota (on display!), and an unending supply of field-collecting stories. During the off-season Rocky and his wife would travel through the southern and southwestern states collecting minerals with which to stock their tourist shop. They had everything from Illinois fluorite to Arkansas wavellite, Apache mine vanadinite from Arizona, and even yellow apatite crystals from Cerro Mercado in Mexico. It was all intensely interesting to me, and my slim allowance (usually just a few dollars) went immediately for specimens.

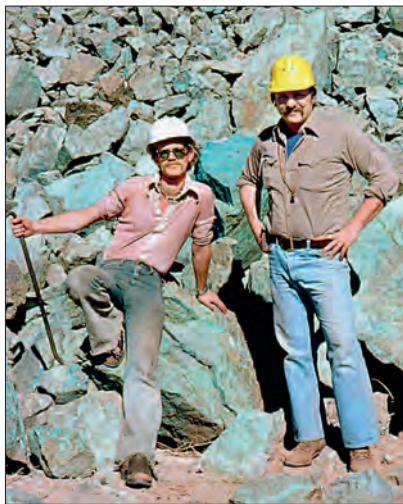
In no time I became a big pain-in-the-neck to travel with, scanning the passing scenery and crying out “rock shop!” whenever we passed one. And in those post-war





12. The world's finest aurichalcite, 12 cm, collected at the 79 mine in 1971; now in the collection of the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum.

13. At the Ray mine in Arizona with Wayne Thompson, 1984.



in the shadow of Meteor Crater, where we had been searching for meteorites with a metal detector. My main claim to fame as a field collector: finding what is still the world's finest specimen of aurichalcite at the 79 mine in 1971.

Somehow I never felt in danger underground in those old mines, though I probably should have; the delusion of invulnerability is common in the young. And it was all so fascinating that I simply didn't have time to worry about my physical safety. The main stope in the Apache mine had walls thickly covered with sparkling red vanadinite crystals, calling up memories of the mine of the seven dwarfs, and blinding me to more mundane concerns. But I did have my share of adventures and close calls. Naturally, like all experienced underground collectors, I have a lot of stories and tall tales best told over beers in front of a warm and safe fireplace.

I had one other important experience before leaving Arizona: my first visit to the Tucson Show. I had heard that a good mineral show was taking place in Tucson, so I drove down for the day. It was February 1971, the last year that the show was held at the Rodeo Grounds, in a big steel Quonset hut with a dirt floor. There was Bill Larson selling a recent find of benitoite and neptunite (I bought a nice miniature for \$20); Dave Wilber had set up a big display of about 200 fine miniatures; and Peter Bancroft's display contained a specimen that snapped my head around from 30 feet away: the blazing-red "Bancroft Rhodochrosite" from the Sweet Home mine!

In June of 1971, with a freshly minted Master's Degree in Mineralogy under my arm, I returned to the University of Minnesota and enrolled in a PhD program at the Minneapolis Campus. Still thinking about the *Mineralogical Record* (I had become a subscriber), I wondered whether editor John White would like an article from me on the Apache mine. So before classes began I gathered together a group of photos, wrote up some text, and was delighted by John's eager acceptance. My article was published in volume 2, the November-December 1971 issue. It was the first of many to be published in the following years.

My PhD program required a "minor field" which was typically a foreign language. Since I already had some German, I thought I might study Russian, but that didn't sound very exciting. Being a collector at heart, what I really wanted to study was Museum Science, even though there was no such program or even any classes in that subject at the university. Perhaps I could get a summer internship at a major museum, like the Smithsonian, and do a Museum Studies program consisting entirely of self-directed independent study? My advisory committee was open-minded about my unusual suggestion. If I could obtain such an internship and write a mini-thesis about what I learned, they had no objection. Thanks to lobbying on my behalf by my new friend at the Smithsonian, John White, the Mineral Sciences Department Chairman, Brian Mason, took me on as a part-time intern to study some of the new lunar samples each morning. This left me the second half of each day to nose around throughout the museum interviewing staff and studying procedures.

My summer at the Smithsonian carried one more huge benefit: After hours I was free to set up my camera and photograph any of the minerals in the back room storage area and in the famous "blue room" where treasures destined for eventual public display were held. I shot hundreds of pieces, borrowing techniques from master photographers such as Lee Boltin, Joel Arem and others. It was a unique privilege to develop my mineral photography skills using some of the finest minerals in the country!

Back at the university, my dissertation involved mass spectrometer analyses for isotopic age dating of some of the oldest rocks in North America, over 3.55 billion years old. But this involved many months of tedious lab work extracting the necessary



34. With award-winning showcase at the Tucson Show, 2013.

35. Receiving the Friends of Mineralogy Award for Best Article of the Year in the *Mineralogical Record* (on Montepioni, Sardinia) with coauthor Renato Pagano, 2013.

36. Oil painting of a crystal of tanzanite in the collection of Daniel Trinchillo (2009).

37. Oil painting of a Red Cloud wulfenite specimen in the collection of Grant Richards (1975).

38. Watercolor and Prismacolor painting of a Red Cloud wulfenite in the collection of Dick Morris (2000).



tion) in 1974 and started anew on higher quality specimens. This second collection I sold in 1991 and, after a diversion into gold coin collecting (I owned the best surviving example of the 1838 Ecuador 8-escudos, the “Moby Dick coin” that Captain Ahab nailed to the mast), started a third mineral collection that continues today. It currently numbers about 350 specimens, primarily high-quality thumbnails but also including many fine miniatures and a few small-cabinet-size specimens. There is no particular specialty, other than what is pleasing to me on an individual basis. A showcase of my specimens won the Desautels Trophy (considered to be the highest award in mineral collecting) at the 2013 Tucson Gem and Mineral Show, and my phosphophyllite thumbnail won the Lidstrom Award at the same event.

In the end, getting the most satisfaction out of mineral collecting, or out of producing art or literature for that matter, comes from sharing one’s creations, interests and passions with other kindred souls. The magazine has allowed me to do that. The many great people I have had the good fortune to meet in the mineral world over the years have made it all worthwhile by sharing their enthusiasm with me in return. Having a passion for something (or for many subjects), I firmly believe, is what makes life worth living.

