



Club History: George Frederick Kunz

By Leland Quick

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About a year ago the idea occurred to us that we should devote an entire issue to California gems and the memory of Dr. George F. Kunz whose name carries so much weight in Southern California particularly, because of his activity in the gem mines of San Diego County, and because the area is the hot bed of amateur gem cutting. When we began asking the amateurs "who was George Kunz?" few had any reply to offer except that occasionally someone would say that he was Vice President of Tiffany's.

When we attempted research on his life we were stymied in every direction. While he was Vice President of Tiffany's (for 53 years!) and we were attempting a dignified and deserved memorial to him Tiffany declined to cooperate in any way as it was "not their policy." They referred us to his daughter Mrs. Hans Zinsser, the widow of one of the greatest bacteriologists of all time who was author of the widely read biography "As I Remember Him." But Mrs. Zinsser merely referred us to "Who's Who", a book which gives cold facts about a person's life but tells nothing about a man as a human personality.

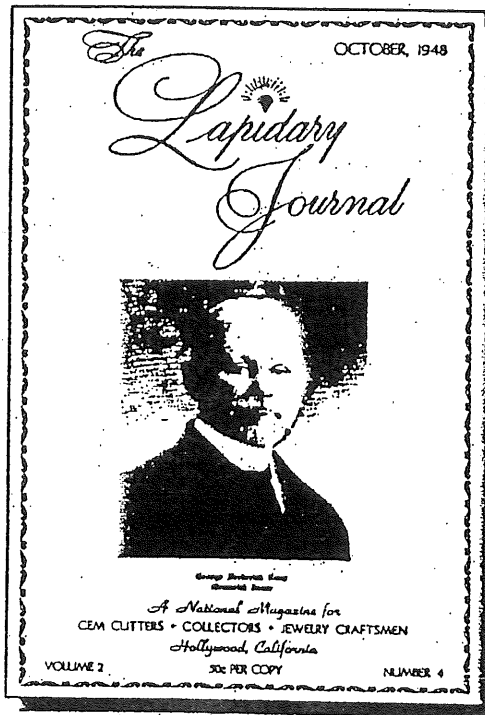
It hardly seems credible that a man decorated by four foreign powers, awarded honorary degrees by several universities, author of 531 books and magazine articles could so thoroughly cover the tracks of his private life that he is hardly remembered as an individual but only as a cold statistic and authority. In all of our research we uncovered but one photograph which indicated that Kunz looked like a cross between Andrew Carnegie and Ulysses Grant. After much treatment with positives,

negatives, retouching, etc., we have managed to achieve the best photograph and likeness of Kunz that has ever appeared in print. It is on our cover and it is a picture published about 1933, but we do not know when it was taken or at what age.

Most of the old associates who might have revealed something of the man's personality have passed on. One mutual friend who knew him well reports that about the only advice he can now remember that Kunz gave him was to "lie with his head down hill if he was overcome by high altitudes."

Another correspondent in the east, who knew him much better, writes that "it is hard for people to realize what a prominent place he had in the life of New York in the gay nineties, not only in the social

but in the scientific and cultural activity. No squab-fed deb considered herself really engaged, even when the proposal had been accompanied by the formal genuflection of the era, unless Dr. Kunz had selected the engagement ring. During business hours he could be found behind Tiffany's counter of colored gemstones but he had also put Tiffany in the mineral business. On an upper floor was a huge stock of fine mineral specimens which were used as the nucleus of displays at world fairs. That was the period of the great collectors of objets d'art and many financiers got the mineral bug there; notably J. Pierpont Morgan who later presented to the American Museum of Natural History the collection of Clarence Bement of Philadelphia. Some of the outstanding specimens in the collections of Roebbling and William Boyce Thompson came from there not to mention the various gem collections. Kunz himself



made many and sold no less than six mineral collections:

"He was affable and suave. When Charles Hoadley of the New York Mineral Club tried to needle him by referring to kunzite as pink spodumene whenever Dr. Kunz was around he ignored it completely. He was President of this club for many years until some young, Turks, knowing that he was always late for the meetings, began the annual meeting on time and elected their own nominating committee. But these superficialities do no justice to one of the most colorful figures of New York in the days of its prime."

The 29th of the month seemed to play a large part in Kunz' life for he was born, married and died on the 29th and this Memorial appears on his 92nd birthday. George Frederick Kunz was born on September 29th, 1856 in New York, the son of J.T. and Marie Ida (Widmer) Kunz. He was one of several children, the others believed all sisters, but this information is obscure. At the close of the war between the states the family moved across the Hudson River into New Jersey to the then very small community of Hoboken. The town was new and there was a lot of excavation. As a nine year old boy Kunz began digging in the excavations for pretty rocks and collecting them. When he would get to New York he would stop at Tiffany's to have them identify his finds. He worked so prodigiously and corresponded and traded abroad so much that by the time he was twenty years old he had attracted national attention for his collections. He then sold a complete mineral collection to the University of Minnesota and three years later he had built a new collection which he sold to the Rose Polytechnic Institute of Terre Haute, Indiana. Later he built and sold collections to Amherst College, the New York State Museum at Albany, the Field Museum at Chicago and Thomas A. Edison.

Kunz was self-taught and in the dedication of his book on rings he refers to the Cooper Union whose laboratories, lecture rooms and library he spent many "useful, profitable evening hours at a time when there were no other opportunities of a similar nature in the City of New York." His knowledge of minerals became so remarkable that he could identify by the eye alone all but the rarer minerals.

At the young age of 23 he joined the staff of Tiffany as a gem expert and immediately became Vice President, a position he held until his death. This was the first time that a mineralogist had been employed in this capacity in a jewelry store. He then began to travel extensively and collect intensively so that by the time he was 34 he was able to write his famed book "Gems And Precious Stones of North America."

In 1904 he was made Honorary Curator of Gems at the American Museum of Natural History, a position he held for fourteen years. At the same time he was offered and declined the Directorship of the National Museum. The year before that (1903) he was given a degree (Doctor of Philosophy) by the University of Marburg and this began his international recognition as a great figure in science. In 1898 he had been awarded an honorary degree of Master of Arts by Columbia University. In 1907 he was honored with the degree of Doctor of Science by Knox University. During these years he was decorated as an officer of the Legion of Honor by France, made a Knight of the Order of St. Olaf by Norway and an Officer of the Rising Sun by Japan. He was also made a Fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences and served as President in 1914.

Dr. Kunz founded the New York Mineralogical Club in 1888 (sic) and became its first Secretary. The club had no President at the beginning but Kunz served in that capacity from 1914 until 1926. He bequeathed his great collection of minerals of Manhattan Island to the Club. Other chairs he held were Vice President of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers from 1899 until 1901; President of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society and President of the Museum of Science and Industry in New York, of which he was one of the founders.

George Kunz married Sophia Hanforth on October 29th, 1879. She died in January, 1912. He had two daughters; Mary Elizabeth, killed by a runaway horse in 1921, and Ruby who married Dr. Hans Zinsser in 1905. He named this daughter after his favorite gem (?).

In the years immediately preceding and following 1900 Kunz became intensely interested in the gem activities of Southern California and the California

State Mining Bureau engaged his services to compile complete data about California gems. This was published in 1905 under the title "Gems, Jewelers' Materials And Ornamental Stones Of California." Given away free by the state, a copy in good condition now commands prices between \$50 and \$100. This was a bound book of 171 pages and it was an exhaustive but intensely interesting account of every gem location and gem find in the state and profusely illustrated. The Lapidary Journal has secured permission from the State of California to republish in its pages articles from Kunz' book it deems of interest to present gem cutters and collectors. There is nothing that could be written today that would supplement Kunz' account very much and it will be noted that the beginning installment of Kunz' report on Page 248 does not differ materially from the fine account Mr. Dawson presents on Page 208 of the gem mines in San Diego County. From time to time we shall offer more of Dr. Kunz' highly interesting account of "the nation's gem box."

It was Kunz who identified the new lilac gem found in San Diego County as a crystal form of spodumene and it was later named kunzite in his honor. It is the orchid of the gem world; one of the most difficult to cut. We present on Page 226 cutting methods of three great lapidaries and we have attempted to convey in the cover color the unusual shade of color of kunzite but this becomes a great problem with printer's ink.

Kunz was a prodigious writer. In 1883 he began to contribute a section on gems and precious stones to "The Mineral Resources of the United States" which he continued for twenty-three years until 1906. Then he began writing yearly chapters on gems for "Precious Stones," continuing this task until his death. His greatest book was the "Book of the Pearl," a monumental work which he wrote with Charles H. Stevenson in 1904. Among his best known works were "The Curious Lore of Precious Stones," "The Magic of Jewels and Charms" and "Rings for the Fingers," published in 1913, 1915 and 1917 respectively. Copies of any of these works bring between \$60 and \$150 each in the book markets depending upon their condition.

On June 29th, 1932 at 1 P.M. George Frederick Kunz passed on to the Marble Halls after a few days' illness from a cerebral hemorrhage. The New York Times commented editorially that no one approached the streets of gold and jasper and the jeweled cities of Heaven with greater knowledge of what he would see than Dr. Kunz. He was buried in Trinity Churchyard, New York, after a funeral at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine on July 1st, 1932 attended by more than 500 persons.

In all of his writing Kunz revealed nothing of his own philosophy or of himself, which is characteristic of scientific writing of course. But one cannot help, after reading the biography of his son-in-law, "As I Remember Him", wishing heartily the Kunz' prolific pen had set down accounts of the contemporaries he knew, of his travels with nabobs, his spending of other people's millions at the ends of the earth, his association with princes and kings. He was a star in the brightest skies of our nation's history and his account of his times would no doubt have been as precious as the gems he loved.

Precious Gems in the United States

(George F. Kunz, 1887)

One of the most prolific and popular American writers of mineralogical and gemmological subjects in the 19th century was George F. Kunz, sometime president and one of the founding fathers of the New York Mineralogical Club in 1886. In the year following the birth of our club, Kunz, working for Tiffany's in New York, wrote the following article which originally appeared in the very popular *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (Volume 76, No. 451, December 1887, pages 97-8, 101-106). The title was "Precious Stones in the United States."

According to the late John Sinkankas in *Gemology, An Annotated Bibliography* (1993), the Julius Bien color lithograph which was included with this article, is said to be the first color plate issued in this magazine, and is one of the first color plates to appear in any magazine up until that time.

Entitled "American Gems" and signed "Julius Bien & Co., Lith(ographer)". On the lower right of the image, it depicts both cut and rough specimens.

The plate was well-received and showed, full-size, the largest emerald crystal found in America up until that time – approximately eight inches long!

The size of the original chromolithograph was 6½ inches by 10 inches and is printed on one side of a heavier-than-average paper stock. It was clearly designed to be a special keepsake for the magazine subscribers of the time.

In the article, Kunz tells us that nearly all of the known varieties of gems have been found in the United States and some of them were exceptionally fine specimens. While this is not a major gem-producing country, Kunz goes on to say, many stones are peculiar to the United States.

The plate illustrates the following:

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| 1. | Diamond | Manchester, Virginia |
| 2. | Sapphire | Helena, Montana |
| 3. | Sapphire | Franklin, North Carolina |
| 4. | Topaz | Near Pike's Peak, Colorado |
| 5. | Emerald | Alexander County, North Carolina |
| 6. | Aquamarine | Stoneham, Maine |
| 7. | Yellow Beryl | Litchfield, Connecticut |
| 8. | Garnet (3) | Gallup, New Mexico, Fort Defiance, Arizona, & Helena, Montana |
| 9. | Peridot | Same areas as #8 |
| 10. | Tourmaline | Maine |
| 11. | Tourmaline | Maine |
| 12. | "Hiddenite" | North Carolina (probably) |
| 13. | Amethyst | Stow, Maine |
| 14. | Amethyst | Western USA |
| 15. | Turquoise | Nevada |
| 16. | Arrow points of Rock Crystal, Jasper and Chalcedony | Oregon |
| 17. | Pearls | Various States, USA |

The color chromolithograph was very popular with the public, and one may surmise that this popularity was an inducement for Kunz to produce his first mineralogical book in 1890 – *Gems and Precious Stones of North America*. This book contained eight Prang chromolithographs of gems and minerals and its first edition quickly sold out.

MEMORIAL OF GEORGE FREDERICK KUNZ

PAUL F. KERR, *Columbia University.*

George Frederick Kunz, known and respected in mineralogical circles for almost sixty years, noted for his wide and extended knowledge of precious stones from all parts of the world, prominent in the affairs of his city, broadly acquainted and versed in the field of general science, unselfish in his service to his fellow men, passed away in New York City, June 29, 1932.



GEORGE FREDERICK KUNZ
1856-1932

Dr. Kunz was born in New York on September 29, 1856, the son of J. G. and Marie Ida Widmar Kunz. At the time of his death he was seventy-six years of age.

The early boyhood of Dr. Kunz was spent in Hoboken where he became interested in collecting minerals from the trap rock ridges of the Palisades and the Watchung Mountains. It is reported that he started exchanging mineral specimens with collectors abroad at the age of fourteen. While still a boy he completed a collection

of 4,000 specimens, weighing two tons, which was sold to the University of Minnesota for \$400. This was the forerunner of several important collections largely assembled through his efforts, the most outstanding being the famous Morgan-Tiffany collection of gems in the American Museum of Natural History. He was also instrumental in interesting the elder Mr. Morgan in the purchase of the Bement Collection for the Museum, and arranged the collection of elements for Morgan Hall.

At the early age of twenty-three Dr. Kunz was made vice-president of Tiffany and Company. His rapid rise in the field of applied mineralogy was accomplished through continuous and devoted effort. He was educated in the public schools and received his more advanced training at Cooper Union. He was a wide and varied reader, however, and much of his practical education was acquired through his own efforts. As evidence of the success of his efforts, his scholarly achievements were recognized by honorary degrees from several institutions including Columbia University (A.M., 1898), University of Marburg (Ph.D., 1903), and Knox University (Sc.D., 1907).

He traveled extensively in his early years, and much of his knowledge was gained through first-hand contact with the leading mineral localities of the United States and Europe. Interest in minerals and gems was continued up to the very end, and many are the friends of the mineralogical clan who have had the pleasure, through his kindness, of holding the Tiffany diamond while visiting the famous store.

Few men have had as wide an acquaintance with precious stones, and particularly their occurrence and distribution, as Dr. Kunz. In addition to his store of knowledge, he assembled one of the best libraries on precious stones in existence. Along Maiden Lane and Fifth Avenue there were few tradesmen who did not have the utmost respect for his judgment concerning the merits of cut stones, particularly of the rarer types.

The varied interests of Dr. Kunz kept him involved in a wide field of activities. He took an active part in the entertainment of distinguished visitors to New York City, particularly scientists. Organizations claiming the honor of his membership included the Mineralogical Society of America, the Geological Society of America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, New York Academy of Sciences, New York Mineralogical

Club, the New York Bird and Tree Club, the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, the American Chemical Society, the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers, Société de Chimie Industrielle de France (American section), Century Association, City History Club, and Pilgrims of the United States. In spite of membership in numerous organizations, he was particularly interested in the New York Mineralogical Club. Together with a small group of mineral collectors he organized the club in 1886 and served for many years as its president.

Dr. Kunz was in charge of the department of mines at the Paris Exposition in 1889, the Kimberley (South Africa) exposition in 1892, and the Chicago exposition of 1893. He was honorary special agent of the department of mines at the Atlanta exposition of 1895 and the Omaha exposition of 1898. As a special investigator he served with the U. S. Fish Commission in its investigation of American pearls between 1892 and 1893.

In 1900 he was sent to the Paris Exposition as an honorary special agent to the U. S. Commission General, and served also in that year as United States delegate to the Paris International Congress. He was radium commissioner to the St. Louis exposition of 1904, and had charge of precious stones for the twelfth census.

Foreign honors bestowed upon Dr. Kunz included being elected an officer of the Legion of Honor of France, Knight of the Order of St. Olaf of Norway, and an officer of the Rising Sun of Japan. He was an honorary member of the *Chambre Syndicale Pierres Precieuses* of Paris.

Dr. Kunz was one of the founders and president of the Museum of Peaceful Arts, former vice-president of the New York Academy of Sciences and the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers. He was a member of the North American Indian Memorial Commission. He served as special agent for the U. S. Geological Survey from 1883 to 1909, and continued to write annual reports on precious stones until the time of his death. From 1904 to 1918 he served as research curator of gems and precious stones for the Museum of Natural History, and later was made research associate of gems.

Dr. Kunz was president of the association to introduce the metric system into the United States, and all jewelers owe him a debt of gratitude for his efforts in aiding the establishment of the international carat.

The gem kunzite found at Pala, San Diego County, California, and described by Professor Charles Baskerville in 1903 was named in his honor. He was instrumental in the naming of tiffanyite, moissanite, and morganite.

Dr. Kunz was a prolific writer. His contributions include a list of over three hundred articles on gems and minerals, aside from several well known books. Outstanding publications include "Gems and Precious Stones of North America," "The Book of the Pearl," "The Curious Lore of Precious Stones," "E. Roty and His Work," "Magic of Jewels," "Ivory and the Elephant," "Shakespeare and Precious Stones," and "The Ring."

Dr. Kunz married Miss Sophia Hanforth in 1879; she passed away in January 1912. He was married to Miss Opal Logan Giberson in May 1923. The marriage was later annulled, although Miss Giberson assisted in maintaining his household and helped in entertaining up to the time of his death.

Dr. Kunz entered the hospital for medical examination early in June when his health began to fail. He maintained close contact with business interests until June 28. He was stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage, and passed away on the morning of the 29th.

He is survived by a daughter, Mrs. Hans Zinsser, and by two sisters, Mrs. Millie Kunz Guttin and Mrs. Ida Kunz Taggart.

Among benefactions mentioned in the will of Dr. Kunz were gifts to the Mineralogical Society of America, the Mineralogical Collections of Columbia University, the New York Mineralogical Club, the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, the New York Academy of Sciences, and the United States Geological Survey. The gifts were directed essentially toward the collection and dissemination of scientific information.

In concluding, it seems fitting to offer the final paragraph of an editorial printed July 2nd in the New York Times in tribute to Dr. Kunz.

It cannot be irreverent to suggest that no one of all men of our day could be more interested in seeing the celestial city whose light is "like unto a very precious stone," or in inspecting the foundations of the wall of jasper adorned with all manner of precious stones: jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst.

George F. Kunz

- We see no need to re-invent the wheel! Click on the title above to learn more about Kunz!

