

Written in Stone: Remembering Master Faceter Art Grant

By Elise A. Skalwold

If ever a person's legacy could be said to be "written in stone" it may well be that of legendary gem cutter, Arthur Tracey Grant, Jr. who passed away on September 24, 2015, in Richmond, Kentucky at the age of 90 (Fig. 1). Even for those

who do not frequent the yearly shows and symposia of the mineral and gem community, a visit to the venerable Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. is hardly complete without wandering through the gem and mineral collections housed within its great halls.

Awestruck visitors, young and old, can gaze upon some of the largest and most magnificent gemstones in the world, including several record-holding stones faceted by Art Grant; nine by his own count. Perhaps the most famous of these on display as part of the National Gem Collection are the 3,965-carat blue fluorite known as "Big Blue" from Hardin, County, Illinois, and the 1,865-carat twinned calcite from Balmat, New York; both gifts from Art's most enthusiastic patrons, Harold and Doris Dibble (Fig. 2). These are notable not least of all for being the largest faceted examples of their species known today.

Many of Art's gems in the Smithsonian collections, as well as others of his which are held in prestigious museums and private collections around the world, have been immortalized by famous gem photographers such as Tino Hammid, Jeffrey



Fig. 1: Arthur Tracey Grant, Jr. 1925-2015 (Photo courtesy of Nancy Grant Pritchard)



Fig. 2A: A restored 1987 snapshot of Art at the Desert Inn, Tucson, Arizona holding the fluorite octahedron from which he cut the Big Blue (Photo courtesy of John Bradshaw).



Fig. 2B: In 1994, the Dibbles donated the 1,865-carat calcite from the **St Joe #2** mine, Balmat, New York (photo by Chip Clark, Courtesy of NMHN, Smithsonian Institution).

Correction: #3 Mine, see endnote.

Fig. 2: The 3,965.35-carat blue fluorite known as "Big Blue" from the Minerva #2 mine, Hardin County, Illinois resides in the Smithsonian's National Gem Collection, a gift of Harold and Doris Dibble in 1992 (Photo by Tino Hammid. Courtesy of Nancy Grant Pritchard).



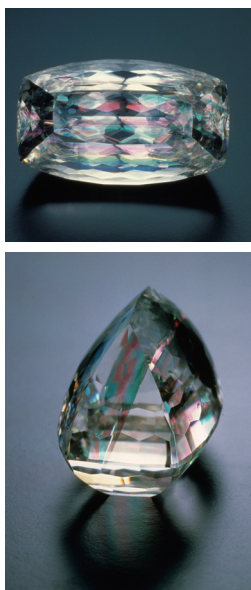
Scovil, Robert Weldon, Michael J. Bainbridge and Chip Clark; the latter's images appear in the Smithsonian's publications and on its website. It was through a photographer's eye and in the course of gemological studies that I first became aware of the astounding skill of this lapidary artist and of the beauty which he was capable of bringing forth from one of the most unlikely of gemstones: calcite, a soft and easily cleavable mineral which, along with other exotic fragile gems, he has helped bring to the attention of connoisseur collectors and museums worldwide.

Kaleidoscope of Colors

In 1984, the late Tino Hammid (1952-2015) photographed Art's 1,156-carat Ross calcite to illustrate a fascinating analysis of the optical phantasm exhibited by this gem (see Hurlbut and Francis 1984). I was utterly fascinated by Art's remarkable use of precise faceting,

optical orientation and placement of a twin plane to produce a kaleidoscope of colors in an otherwise colorless mineral which, along with quartz, is among my favorite mineral species

Fig. 3 (Upper right): The spectacular optical effects of the 1,156-carat Ross calcite were the subject of the 1984 *Gems & Gemology* paper "An Extraordinary Calcite Gemstone" by Cornelius S. Hurlbut, Jr. and Carl A. Francis. Lower right: A table-down view shows the diagonal twin plane which Art Grant carefully oriented within the gem to produce a kaleidoscope of colors in an otherwise colorless mineral (Photos by Tino Hammid. Copyright GIA and Tino Hammid).



(Fig. 3). Since discovering his work through that article, I followed Art's cutting, never dreaming that for less than the cost of a fancy dinner I would own not one, but two of his creations, acquired at the 2015 Tucson GJX show from the business he helped found and had since retired from, Coast-to-Coast Rarestones International (aka "the Coasters").

Art very kindly personalized a card for me to keep with the stones which formerly were in the collection of Harold Dibble (1915-2014). I later had them photographed by Jeff Scovil with the intention of featuring them in an article I'd been working on; a project which I was busily trying to finish the very night Art passed away (Skalwold and Bassett, 2015). It is with sadness that I will not be able to share with him where the inspiration of his cutting has taken me in the years between my first reading about the Ross calcite to the quartz gemstones which rest upon the desk before me now (Fig. 11).

While his magnificent gemstones will permanently reflect his accomplishments in the gem and mineral world even to those who would never meet him, he was so much more to those who knew him well. Art was a member of the so-called Greatest Generation; those who served in World War II and whose ranks are now diminishing each day at an alarming rate. By all accounts, Art embodied the spirit of that generation, living a long life devoted to family and those around him.

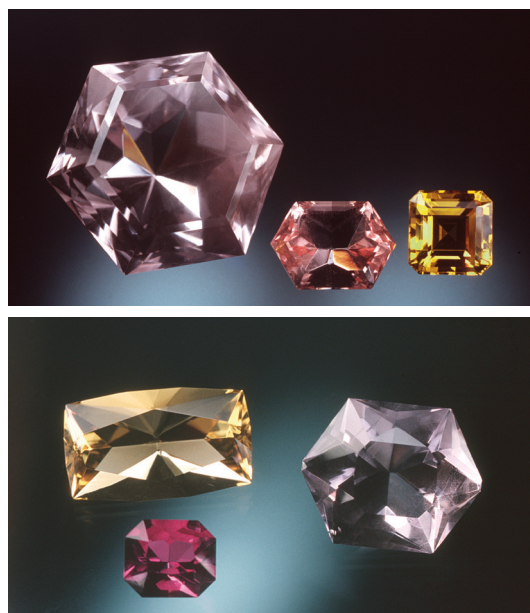


Fig. 4: Art was known as "Mr. Fluorite" for the many gems he faceted of this easily cleavable, soft mineral. Upper photo: 280 carat blue gem, Pyrenees Mountains; 25.3 carat pink gem, Chamonix; 18.7 carat yellow gem, Allevard, France. Lower photo: 85.7 carat yellow gem; 68.4 carat blue gem; ~15 carat purple gem; all from the Southern Illinois fluorite district (Photos by George Robinson. A. E. Seaman Mineral Museum Collection, Donor: Harold Dibble)

Born in Stamford, Connecticut on September 20, 1925 to the late Arthur Sr. and Marion Burns Grant, Art enlisted in the Air Force after graduating from high school and served as a tail gunner based in England. After the war, he enrolled in the State University of New York at Cortland and earned a degree in Physical Education. He taught and coached for 33 years, most of them at Hannibal Central School in Hannibal, New York, earning honors and becoming charter president of the New York State Elementary Physical Education Association (Stripp 1988).

Married in 1950, he and his beloved wife Jane Springston raised five children in the small upstate New York town of which he also served as mayor at one time.

In 1970 John Lenhard, another resident of Hannibal, taught him to cut his first stone, and not too long after that he was encouraged to attempt cutting exotic gem materials by Elvis "Buzz" Gray of California who provided him with rough with which to experiment (Stripp 1988).

Coast to Coast Rarestones

In 1987, Art helped found Coast to Coast Rarestones with fellow Rochester Mineralogical Symposium alumni John Bradshaw and Mike Gray, an enterprise which later grew to include Art's daughter Nancy Grant Pritchard and eventually, Brad Wilson. According to Nancy, her father was always affectionately known as "The Old Guy" by the rest of the Coasters and was their resident "schmooser," as he loved to talk to everyone.

He was also known as "Mr. Fluorite" not only for the "Big Blue," but also for the many fluorites sourced from numerous localities which he had faceted (Fig. 4).

Dr. John Medici, a field collector of over 50 years, roomed with Art at shows for many years before the time of the Coasters and shared many fond memories of his friend and their times together at the big mineral shows, in particular those held in Tucson, Denver and the Rochester Mineralogical Symposium (RMS).

John and his sons would often stay at Art's house after the RMS before heading up to Canada for field-collecting; enjoying the gracious hospitality, camaraderie and blueberry patch for which Art was well known. John told of how Art met and became friends with Kurt Nassau at Bell Laboratories in New Jersey. Dr. Nassau would provide him with exotic synthetics which after faceting became highly sought-after items by specialized collectors.

Of the Big Blue and other gems offered to the Smithsonian, he related how their friend Harold Dibble's stipulation for his gifts of Art's gems to museums included that attribution for this great faceter must be prominently displayed on the gems' labels in their exhibits. So it has come to be; a very rare thing but it speaks to the high regard Mr. Dibble felt for the artistry of a lapidary such as Art. As an example of Art's generosity and integrity, John also spoke of how Art would facet material which John had noticed at a show and then evenly split the proceeds from the sale of the faceted gem. In one instance, from a \$35 dark green fluorite crystal originating from West Moreland, New Hampshire Art produced 7-8 significant stones, including a 300+ carat gem which went to a museum in London, while others went to such places as the American Museum of Natural History, Smith College in Massachusetts and the New York State Museum in



Fig. 5 (Above): One of several very large gems cut from a 78-pound chunk of Iceland spar belonging to George Robinson and originating from the St. Joe Lead mine at Balmat, New York. This magnificent 1,017-carat gem is named "The Doris" for the wife of its donor, Harold Dibble. (Photo by George Robinson. A. E. Seaman Mineral Museum Collection, Donor: Harold Dibble)

Fig. 6 (Below): 1.48 carat carletonite; the largest faceted example known. Art was famous for successfully faceting the most unusual and most difficult minerals species; many also record-breaking in size. He once put together a display case featuring children's wooden alphabet blocks, matching a stone with every letter in the English language, A to Z (Photo by Michael J Bainbridge. Canadian Museum of Nature).



Albany. Art increased the value of that relatively inexpensive floater crystal many orders of magnitude larger than its original purchase price, and in the end he divided the profit of his work evenly with John as he was always wont to do.

But, far more valuable was the generous attention given to John's son Jay Medici to whom Art gave a test by asking: "Are you mechanically or artistically inclined?" To which Jay answered "some of both." This was the correct answer and opened the door to faceting for Jay, a professional chemical engineer by training, but soon

to become a highly respected cutter in his own right. Art taught him how to facet and to work with soft, fragile minerals, becoming his mentor and eventual colleague; ever willing to share experiences and techniques to the advancement of both artisans.

This generosity, enthusiasm and encouraging nature were universally admired by those who came to know Art. In her 1988 *Lapidary Journal* article, "The Soft Touch," author Dorothy M. Stripp writes that Art gave "full credit to prominent mineralogists like William Pinch, Charles Key and Paul Desautels for educating him in the field of mineralogy." She further relates from mineralogist Dr. Carl Francis, emeritus curator the Harvard Mineralogical Museum, "that one of Grant's finest traits is his willingness to share information. He has learned so much from others and feels that he should share the results of his experimentations" (Stripp 1988). Such traits changed the course of more than one person's life. Fellow Coaster, Brad Wilson, credits Art with inspiration in cutting soft gem materials, but also for significantly influencing him during a pivotal time in his life when he considered leaving the path of gem cutting altogether; sharing deeply personal reasons for continuing to pursue and perfect this rarified type of faceting. Years of mentorship and sharing

of ideas followed for which yet another gifted faceter will always be grateful.

All of the Coasters speak of the surprise 70th birthday party held for Art during the Denver show, a birthday he didn't imagine he would ever have as he had suffered heart troubles as a relatively young man in his 50s – a reason for early retirement. Faceting was a way he felt he could fill his time going forward; never imagining it would become an extremely lucrative second career. John Bradshaw and Brad Wilson were tasked with getting him to the event, but with enough delay not to ruin the surprise while arrangements were finalized. Coasters knew to get Art's keys from him, for though he deemed himself a good driver, others knew him for two speeds: *Fast and Brake!* With John Bradshaw at the wheel purposefully missing turns and opportunities to cross traffic, Art built up quite a head of steamy impatience, not to mention hunger given it was past dinner time. When they finally arrived, a visibly stunned Art was greeted by his wife who was inexplicably there along with other friends who had been flown in from around the country, as well as a host of friends from the mineral show itself. When he recovered from his shock, he was deeply moved by this outpouring of appreciation and recognition from all who were dear to him; all the woes and poutiness evaporated, melted in the poignancy of the moment.

The Coasters also speak of his inability to accurately fill out receipts and keep records. In a particularly memorable instance, he only recorded "scott" on a sales slip. When asked if that was a first or last name, he boomed: "Neither! He was Scottish!" The "Scott" was the famous gemologist Alan Hodgkinson!

The familial feeling of the Coasters perhaps centered around Art Grant. Less than two months before he passed away, this man who was Best Man

at John Bradshaw's 1998 wedding, embraced his friend in a bear-hug and uttered in his ear the words "I've been waiting to do this for 20 years." He and Brad would never see him alive again, but like others would have memories to fill their hearts with far into their futures.

Personal Testaments

The GIA's analytical microscopist John I. Koivula recalls: "One of my fondest memories of Art was when we put in a display of inclusions together for the main show in Tucson. We got a lot of positive feedback about it, and also a mention in *The Mineralogical Record*, which surprised us both since all of the host-minerals had polished surfaces, which mineral purists generally frown on. I first met Art in 1978 when Mike Gray brought him by our new apartment one morning to introduce him to my wife Kristi and me. Kristi was pregnant with our daughter, Erika at that time, and I was busy painting and improving our new apartment so it would be ready when Erika arrived. Art saw how much work I had to do, and so he decided to stay and help me for the whole day and late into the evening. We got the entire apartment painted that day thanks to Art and Mike. He was really a great guy and he will be missed." (Koivula, personal communication, 2015)

Of the many testaments contributed, I would like to share the following conveyed to me by fellow native Upstate New Yorkers, Susan and Dr. George Robinson, curator emeritus of the A. E. Seaman Mineral Museum: "We knew him for many

years, and were amazed that his worn, rounded fingers could create such beautiful cut gems (Figs. 4-10). George once had a 78-pound chunk of Iceland spar from the St. Joe Lead mine at Balmat, New York, that sat on the floor in his parents' basement for many years, collecting dust. Not knowing just what to do with it, he decided to give it to Art to see if he



Fig. 7: A 6.62-carat color-change remondite-(Ce); greenish yellow in fluorescent light and orange in incandescent light (Photos by Willow Wight, Canadian Museum of Nature)

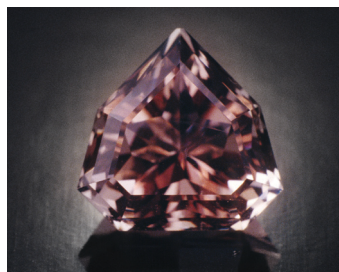


Fig. 8: A 3.32-carat tenebrescent hackmanite; shown at left, before exposure to longwave ultra-violet radiation, and afterwards, at right. (Photos by Robert Weldon. Copyright GIA)

could cut some big stones from it, since its interior appeared to be relatively free of fractures and inclusions. About a month later Art arrived in town with a smile on his face and a small box in his hand. Upon opening the box, the reason for the smile became evident: he had converted a portion of the big cleavage rhomb into a flawless 950-carat faceted calcite with dispersion unlike any other calcite we had ever seen. But this was just the beginning; over the following year, three more magnificent, large stones were created that today reside in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution, the New York State Museum in Albany, New York, and the A. E. Seaman Mineral Museum in Houghton, Michigan, the latter of which is a magnificent 1,017 carat stone named "The Doris" for the wife of its donor, Harold Dibble (Fig. 5).

"Another time, while we were self-employed as mineral dealers, we acquired a collection that contained a number of Mont-Saint-Hilaire specimens, among them a rather large but unfortunately damaged, yellow-green sphalerite crystal. Having no luck selling a damaged specimen, we gave it to Art just in case there might be a small clean area hidden inside. Little did we know that the entire interior of the crystal was fracture-free and in Art's magic hands was transformed into a superb 24-carat stone that is among the finest cut sphalerites known from that locality. Upon seeing it in person, we were speechless. In spite of generous purchase offers he had already received, we all agreed it really belonged in the National Gem Collection at the Canadian Museum of Nature. So Art donated his services, and we the stone, which is on exhibit today in the Vale Earth Gallery.

"Art could work his magic with nearly any mineral you gave him, and we always enjoyed seeing his displays of recently-cut stones at many of the larger mineral shows in the United States. He was a pioneer in developing new techniques for cutting and polishing soft, heat-sensitive stones. He never bragged about what he created and always was friendly and approachable. Art was a great guy to know and we have missed seeing him these many years after he stopped going to shows and moved from the

area." (Robinson, personal communication, 2015)

It is perhaps quite fitting that given Art's early participation with the prestigious annual Rochester Mineralogical Symposium where he met so many who would become his life-long friends and colleagues, the following remembrances of the Symposium's Master of Ceremonies, Dr. Steve Chamberlain, should close this tribute sent to me just days after Art's passing: "My wife Helen and I have known Art and his wife Jane since he was still the athletic director for the Hannibal schools and the Lakeshore Show was in the school gym. Every time we'd see Art, he'd have several gem papers in his pocket and would take them out and show them and ask if we could identify them. This was always a lot of fun because Art knew we mineralogists are terrible at identifying cut stones, but it was an excuse to show us some of his latest, most

interesting projects. One time he was in the midst of cutting a huge irradiated topaz. He had tried to find a local bank to store it for him when he wasn't actually working on it, but they all refused because it was too valuable. He invited us to stop by his house during the show and it was mounted on a big dop stick and hidden in his underwear drawer. I remember it as being the size of a grapefruit, but maybe it was slightly smaller.

Art thought at the time it might be the largest cut blue topaz, but that it would be surpassed because lots of large rough was becoming available.

"Art faceted two wollastonite stones for Helen and me from rough we'd collected at the Jeffrey Mine in Asbestos, Quebec. They were colorless and essentially flawless and not tiny. However, the optical properties of wollastonite don't make for a nice cut stone, but Art loved showing that he could actually do it given the cleavage!

"For a number of years, Art cut large stones for Harold Dibble, which were then brought to the Rochester Mineralogical Symposium and presented to curators Jeff Post or Mike Wise for the Smithsonian. The stone I most remember was a flawless, colorless calcite from Balmat, New York that was faceted so that the contact twin plane divided the crystal.

"One other story that involved Art centered around the Roebling euclase. Bill Pinch had swapped it out of the Smithsonian and given it to Art to cut. I happened to see Art while he was working on it and he mentioned that he



Fig. 9 (Above): A 270.06-carat anglesite (26 x 36 mm); purportedly one of the largest in the world. Origin: Morocco. (Photo: Jeff Scovill)



Fig. 10 (Below): Fluorapatite, 4.47 carats. Origin: Cerro Mercado, Durango, Mexico. (Photo: Jeff Scovill)

was cutting this large green euclase for Bill Pinch. I put two and two together and guessed it was the Roebling euclase. Some months later, Bill had the finished stone with him at the Syracuse, New York Gem and Mineral Show. Standing in the middle of George and Susan Robinson's mineral dealership, Bill got it out, unfolded the gem paper and asked several of us standing there if we had any guesses what this magnificent green gemstone was. Playing informed and authoritative, I blurted out, "Oh, that must be the Roebling euclase. It's a really nice example." Bill almost dropped the stone on the concrete floor. I just smiled and wandered away.

"Art Grant was a warm, very bright person with a great sense of humor and ultimate gem-cutting skills. He went out of his way to avoid cutting collectible crystals, preferring broken pieces as rough. We shall all miss him." (Chamberlain, personal communication, 2015)

Art Grant was indeed a living legend among his colleagues and in the wider gem world. Many personal stories were shared with me about this generous and remarkable man, too numerous to include all here, but giving me a deeper appreciation for a man whose legacy is written *not only in stone, but in the hearts of many.* ♦

Fig. 11: Art Grant coaxed beauty not only from such colorless minerals as twinned calcite, but also from optical quality quartz. Formerly part of the collection of Harold Dibble, now in that of the author's and part of her "Double Trouble: Navigating Birefringence" project (Skalwold and Bassett, 2015). The smaller 29.39 carat stone was cut from a left-handed crystal and the larger 71.49 carat stone is from a right-handed crystal (Photo: Jeff Scovil).



About the Author

Elise A. Skalwold, B.Sc., is an Accredited Senior Gemologist and author involved in curating and research at her alma mater, Cornell University.

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- Endnote: Source for the mine origin was the Smithsonian catalog which stated St. Joe #2 mine. (<http://collections.nmnh.si.edu/search/ms/?irn=1000044> accessed 11/13/15).
Correction by Dr. George Robinson and Dr. Steve Chamberlain 05/01/16: "We believe all the large faceted calcites from the Balmat Mining District came from the huge crystals of Iceland spar found in the #3 mine. Very few calcite crystals of any kind were found in the #2 mine."