

Anaheim couple spending retirement romancing the stones

By Joe Buchanan
Bulletin Staff Writer

ANAHEIM — As the railroads were built to the Pacific, workers threw aside rocks containing green variscite to make way for the tracks.

"But the Chinese workers in those crews recognized the value of the stones, collected them and sent them back to China, where they were processed, then made into jewelry and sold on the world market as items made of jade," veteran rockhound Henry Freedman said. "It was thought to be jade for many years."

With the development of increasingly sophisticated identification equipment, the differences eventually were spotted, he said.

Freedman and his wife Mae have been rockhounds for more than 20 years, starting from the days after his second retirement (U.S. Navy and Bank of America), when he began attending classes on gem and mineral identification at Anaheim High School.

There were no particular hints in his previous occupations to suggest that he and Mae would spend so many years "romancing the stones."

He was involved in ordinance and fire control in the Navy and was a business development executive with the bank.

"What do you do after you retire?" he asked. "You have to find something to do and this seemed like an interesting and all-consuming subject," he said.

He still works part time at the Southern California Bank.

"When I'm involved in this hobby, there is no room for the worries of the bank," he said with a smile. "As a result, my mind is sharp and clear when I go back to work."

Mae developed an interest in the hobby after Henry started and both have been members

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of the non-profit Anaheim Searchers Gem and Mineral Society since 1972. She represents the society as a member of the Anaheim Cultural Arts Council.

One of founding members is Orange resident Jessie Vance, who has been a guiding spirit for the society since it started 27 years ago.

The society meets at 7:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of every month at the Cultural Arts Center on Harbor Boulevard, near La Palma Avenue, where a modern lapidary workshop is operated.

The garage at the Freedmans' house in Anaheim is crammed with machinery, compounds and books used in grinding, shaping and polishing gems-in-the-rough into beautiful jewelry and objects of art, such as the ones that will be on display 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday at Brookhurst Community Center during the 27th annual Searchers Gem Roundup.

On their patio is a large glass case that houses several prized items, including petrified wood, dinosaur bones, a heavy sphere containing silver and quartz and Septaria nodules from the South Dakota Badlands.

Their large collection includes some beautiful stones, such as blue and gold tiger eyes from petrified asbestos, fire agate, carnelian and various colored tourmalines (green, peach, black and pink), extracted from ore found on field trips to Fallbrook and Pala Mesa.

"We are interested in getting

more young people into the hobby," said Mae Freedman. "That's one reason why we have free admission and parking for the show." Henry Freedman said that since most schools no longer offer classes in gem and mineral identification, society members speak and hold demonstrations before public and private school classes to stimulate interest.

They also visit and serve as the primary supplier of lapidary equipment, supplies, rocks and slabs for the lapidary section of the Veterans Administration Hospital.

Among the society's more interesting monthly field trips was one three years ago to the famed Sutter's Mill 1849 gold strike site, northeast of Sacramento.

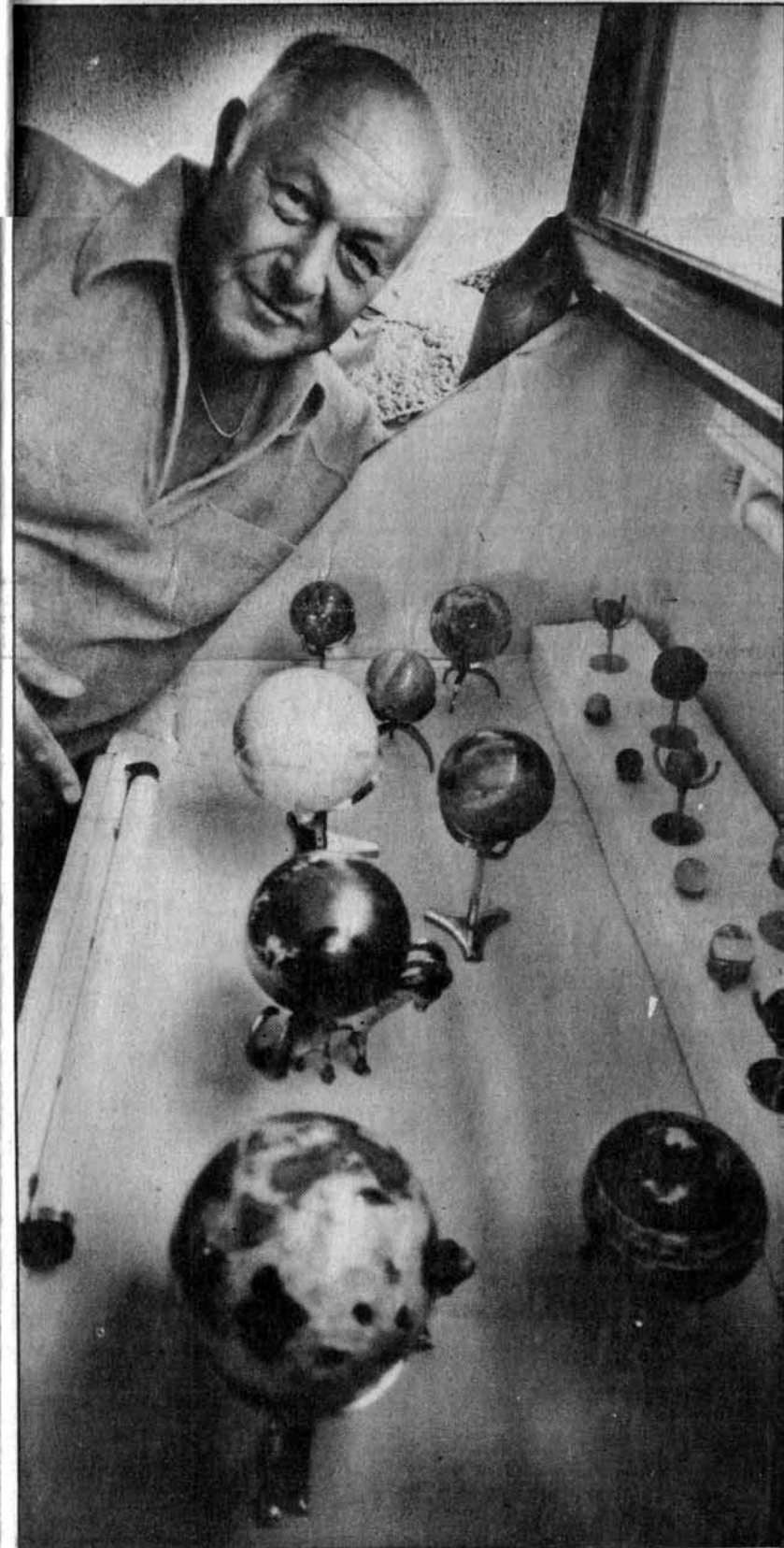
"We spent some time there panning for gold in the stream," she said. "God, it's exciting when you find some gold in the pan."

The field trip schedule includes visits to the mountains, deserts and beaches.

The weekend show will include demonstrations of gold wire wrapping, faceting and grinding of stones and more than 50 exhibits of gems, minerals and jewelry created by members and guests.

Door prizes will be awarded and food will be available.

"This is our main show of the year, designed to raise funds for various projects and contributions to the Anaheim Cultural Arts Council and the Veterans Administration Lapidary Society," she said.



Bulletin photo by Mike Pilgrim
Henry Freedman looks over his collection of spheres.