

Virtual Museum of the History of Mineralogy

Newsletter 2007/1

On June 22, 2007 the Virtual Museum of the History of Mineralogy opened to the public.

The purpose of the Virtual Museum is to bring together photographs and descriptions of representative historical objects and books related to the early mineralogical and crystallographic sciences.

We personally experienced that the information in these fields is dispersed and therefore sometimes difficult to find and to access, particularly for the private collector. With this observation in mind, we started to assemble and eventually offer information regarding the history of mineralogy and crystallography.

Initially we contacted some nearby collectors who were willing to have their treasures photographed and described. Selections of these objects are presently organized into 5 major collections that serve to illustrate the history of mineralogy and crystallography in the pre x-ray diffraction era.

These collections include:

- crystallographic goniometers:
At present over 50 goniometers are photographed and described. Among them are 24 different contact goniometers illustrating the earliest models till the more recent types used for educational purposes (mainly for measuring crystal models)
- other instruments related to mineralogy and crystallography:
We presently show some 20 instruments that were mainly used in optical mineralogy and -crystallography (e.g. polarizing microscopes, polariscopes, etc.). Apart from optical instruments there are a few blowpipe sets and an areometer.
- crystal models:
The amount of crystal models surviving is pretty large. Initially we present only a small selection in order to give an idea of these interesting objects that were (and some still are) used for educational purposes.
- antique labels and their accompanying mineral specimens:
The presence of a label -or possibly of a set of labels- accompanying an early mineral specimen enhances the historical value of both. Some 20 labels together with their accompanying mineral specimen are presently shown in the collection.
- mineralogy and crystallography books:
A large amount of early mineralogy and crystallography books need to be described. As a start we have chosen the main works by René Just Haüy, one of the key persons in the development of the sciences of mineralogy and crystallography.

It is clear that the Virtual Museum will not be able to expand without the help of museums, institutes and collectors that are willing to participate in this project. May we also invite you to share information with us? You may read more about this in the section on "how to contribute".

Welcome to the Virtual Museum,

Paul Tambuyser Claude Hootelé