

SURPRISING FACTS ABOUT PEARLS

January 12, 2026, 7:30 PM at the Gloya Kaufman Community Center

The community center is right next to the Scout House and our lapidary workshop. For your GPS, use the address of the Scout House, [10866 Culver Boulevard](#). Park in the parking lot by the Scout House. We will arrange for the door from the parking lot to the Kaufman building to be open.

At our first meeting there, we are delighted to have Renee Newman return, this time to give a presentation on “Surprising Facts About Pearls.”

Some of the world’s most colorful pearls are found in Mexico. Pteria sterna pearls found there may re-

semble Tahitian cultured pearls, and some are so colorful that they have been nicknamed “rainbow pearls” (see above). Mexico is also famous for being the source of the world’s oldest pearls, which were found on Espiritu Santo Island in the Gulf of California, also known as the Sea of Cortez. Radiocarbon dating indicates they were at least 8,500 years old. Evidence for the historical importance of pearls in Mexico was also provided by the 1932 discovery of pearls at the Monté Albán archeological site in the present-day state of Oaxaca, which was inhabited from 500 BCE to 850 CE.

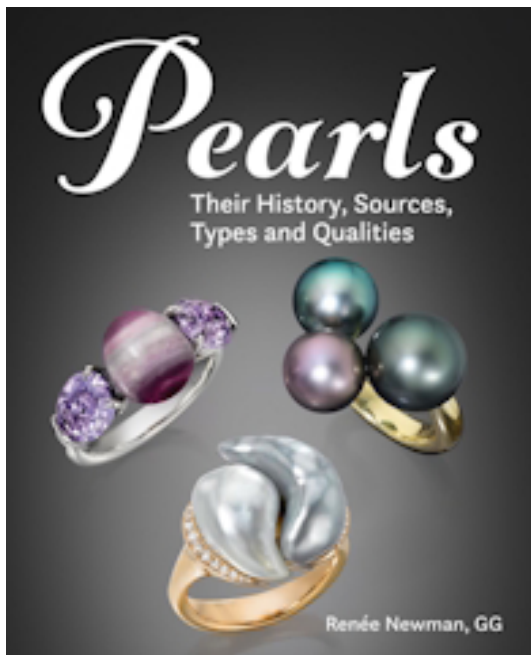
More recently, Mexico has been noted for its wide variety of natural pearls, including pearls from abalone, scallops, pen shell clams, and Pteria sterna (rainbow-lipped) oysters. Besides showing photos of these pearls, Renée’s PowerPoint presentation will also discuss other topics such as

The Culver City Rock & Mineral Club brings together persons interested in the Earth Sciences to engage in research and study, to assist members in the collection and preservation of rocks and minerals, and in the study and practice of lapidary and related arts.



- * The highest priced pearls
 - * The American pearl rush
 - * South Sea pearls that resemble Chinese freshwater baroque pearls
 - * How Australia became the first country to produce cultured saltwater round pearls
 - * How pearl oysters improve our atmosphere and the oceans.
- And more.

Renee Newman GG (GIA) developed her interest in pearls when she was an international tour director and visited Japan, China, Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and French Polynesia. After obtaining her Graduate Gemologist diploma from GIA, she became a gemologist and jewelry control manager at the Josam Diamond Trading Corporation in downtown Los Angeles. Even though their focus was on diamonds, they realized that mounting diamonds with colored gems and pearls gave them a wider variety of jewelry to sell and higher profit margins. Armed with trade experience and gemological credentials, Newman decided to create books that helped readers visually evaluate the quality of gems. Since 1989, she has written sixteen books on gems and jewelry. Her latest book is *Pearls: Their History, Sources, Types & Qualities*. The books will be available for sale at the meeting for a discounted price. Bring cash or check.



For more information about Renée and her books, go to www.reneenewman.com. You can connect with her on Instagram [@reneenewmangg](https://www.instagram.com/reneenewmangg) and Facebook at www.facebook.com/renee.newman.5648



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear All:



Our end-of-the-year holiday party was a delightful gathering of new and old members, delicious food, and too many desserts. The Bad Santa game revealed the many tricksters amongst us, and a wide range of useful, useless, and actually very thoughtful gifts.

Our first meeting of 2026 will be held at the beautiful Glorja Kaufman building, 10858 Culver Blvd., about 6 yards east of our shop. Hopefully, a lot of you members will come to this meeting and give feedback about what you think of this new location for meetings. We will also be holding February's Silent Auction at this site, in their ground-floor theatre space.

Hopefully, this year will yield great new specimens, new jewelry, new growth for our club, and of course, good health, and good healthcare for all.

Happy New Year!

— Alexa Hunter, President



IN MEMORIAM: VIRGINIA HOLLIS

It is with tremendous sadness that we share the passing of Virginia Hollis, less than two months after the passing of her husband, Frank. The two of them were members for over 50 years. Many of you will remember Virginia for always volunteering for the plants area at the Fiesta of Gems. Virginia loved the many plants and flowers she grew in her garden. She always donated many of those plants for sale at the show.



Don't bring your own stone(s), save that until you know the equipment.

Workshop fee: \$20 payable in advance. Limited to four members.

Email [Jette Sorensen](mailto:jette@ccrhc.com) for registration and payment information.

BEGINNING METALSMITHING

January 17, 11 AM – 3 PM
In the Scout House – Instructor, Monica Moreno



Description: Discover how to create metal adornments using tools and materials that you can easily utilize at home. During the workshop, these are some of the things you will be doing:

- Cut metal with a jeweler's saw
- Pierce metals to saw out an interior design
- Sand and clean metal
- Add a polish sealer

You'll be working with copper. The techniques you will learn can also easily be applied to working with brass and sterling silver. By the end of the session, you'll have a good understanding of the tools and supplies needed for your own workspace, should you decide to continue exploring metalwork on your own.

These are some of the items you can create with the skills you'll learn: earrings, pendants, key chains, mobile phone charms, decorative hooks, ornaments, and more.

Things you could bring with you to the workshop: If you have them, please bring a lead pencil and a permanent marker, your prescription eyeglasses and/or safety glasses, and an apron if you prefer your clothing not get dirty.

Safety Notes: Please wear closed-toe shoes and long pants. Long hair should be tied back away from your face. Refrain from wearing long dangling jewelry and loose long sleeves.

CCRMC Members \$60 including materials,

DECEMBER WORKSHOPS

LAPIDARY 101

Sunday, January 11,
2026 9 AM – 12
PM

In the Lapidary
Shop – Instructor
Jette Sorensen



Description: Get to know the equipment at the club's lapidary workshop. Use a trim saw to cut the outline for a cabochon. Shape the stone on the grinding wheels and use the Expando wheels to polish it. Use the arbor with a leather wheel to get a high polish. Go home with a cabochon you can use for a pendant.

Safety Notes: Wear old clothes, you will get wet. Wear closed-toe shoes. Long hair should be tied back away from your face. Refrain from wearing long dangling jewelry and loose long sleeves. Bring eye and ear protection.

Non-Members \$70 including materials

To make a reservation and get payment information for this workshop, send an email to: MM@Desviado.com or visit www.desviado.com/event-list
Workshop size is limited, so we recommend early registration.

SKINNY RING EMBELLISHMENTS

January 25, 9 AM to 12 PM
- SOLD OUT

February 1, overflow from
1/25/26, 9 AM – 12 PM, 2
spots available

In the Lapidary Shop – In-
structor Jette Sorensen



Description: Learn to solder using solder chips and paste solder to attach an embellishment to a skinny ring. Make your own embellishment by making a sphere or other embellishment.

Then, solder it to a skinny ring you make. This will all be done with Argentium Silver, a form of sterling with a higher fine-silver content than Sterling Silver, as well as other differences.

Things you should bring with you to the workshop: a butane torch (Creme Brulé torch), jewelry needle files, jewelry flat nose pliers, jewelry flush cutter, and skinny rings from the Beginning Silversmithing class.

The workshop fee is \$85, including materials, and is payable in advance.

The workshop is limited to 4 members. Email Jette to reserve a spot and get payment information. Email jetsorensen@gmail.com.



BENCH TIPS



FOREDOM MAINTENANCE

If you have a Foredom flexshaft, it makes sense to check it over every so often to be sure it's running properly. But how to do that? You've probably lost the little booklet that came with the unit. Well, being the good company it is, Foredom has put together an extensive set of instructions on how to do everything.

The series covers set-up, lubrication, replacing a sheath, motor maintenance, and handpiece maintenance. Few, if any, special tools are needed. You can access it at <https://www.foredom.net/product-category/maintenance-and-replacement-parts/>. Any repair parts needed are available from the Foredom site or from many jewelry supply catalogs. If you have any questions about their products, a phone call or an email will get you quick answers.

JUST A DROP

Hobby shops and model airplane stores carry small plastic dispenser bottles that are handy for putting a drop of flux, oil, or glue just where you want



it. They have a length of small metal tubing coming out the top that lets you squeeze out very small drops.

I use one with a short length of tubing for oil when I'm sawing or when drilling harder metals like steel. Another bottle I found in a plastics store has a longer length of metal tubing on it. Plastics people use them for dispensing fast-drying glues to join pieces of acrylic. The long metal tube lets you reach into tight places. Either of these is handy for flux at the

soldering station.

Get more of Brad's tips and tricks in his book [Smart Solutions for Jewelry Making](#).

— Brad Smith



MINERAL REPORT: NORTH AMERICA'S PEARLS

I have been spending a lot of time back home in Wisconsin lately. Home for me is a unique and wonderful geological setting in its own right, known as the Driftless Area, but only recently have I come to realize that here, along the banks of the Mississippi River, deep in the mud, is another hidden mineralogical jewel. In this place—continuously inhabited for over 10,000 years—freshwater mussels once filled the waters. They were harvested, traded, and refined, their shells and pearls moving through complex human and ecological systems. The variety of colors, textures, and lusters found in these shells is astounding.

Long before European contact, the Mississippi River and its tributaries supported one of the most diverse freshwater mussel assemblages on Earth. Indigenous peoples living along these rivers developed an intimate knowledge of mussel species, seasonal cycles, and river conditions. Archaeological sites throughout the Mississippi Valley contain extensive shell middens—some thousands of years old—composed primarily of freshwater mussels. These are not refuse piles in the casual sense, but records of sustained material engagement with the river.

Mussel shells were worked into beads, pendants, tools, scrapers, and inlay, while pearls—rare and unpredictable—held special value. Freshwater pearls differ markedly from their marine counterparts. Rather than perfectly spherical, they are often baroque: asymmetrical, ridged, or irregular,



with subtle hues ranging from white and silver to rose, lavender, and bronze. Their appeal lies less in uniformity than in individuality. For Indigenous cultures, these pearls and shells carried social, ceremonial, and trade significance, circulating through networks that extended far beyond the river itself.

With the arrival of European settlers in the 17th and 18th centuries, these same rivers were reimagined



as extractive resources. By the mid-19th century, reports of valuable pearls found in common river mussels sparked localized “pearl rushes” throughout the Midwest. Farmers, laborers, and entire families



waded into streams, prying open shells in hopes of a valuable find. While a few spectacular pearls did fetch high prices, the vast majority of mussels were destroyed without yielding anything of value. The ecological consequences were immediate, even if poorly understood at the time.

A more systematic industry soon followed: pearl buttons. In the late 19th century, advances in manufacturing revealed freshwater mussel shell as an ideal industrial material—thick, durable, and capable of taking a high polish. Towns like Muscatine, Iowa became global centers of button production. At its peak in the early 20th century, the American freshwater mussel industry supplied the majority of the world’s pearl buttons. Riverbanks were lined with factories, and millions of mussels were harvested annually.

This industrial success came at a steep cost. Mussels were removed faster than they could reproduce, and their decline was compounded by dam construction, dredging, pollution, and river channelization. Freshwater mussels have complex life cycles, often relying on specific host fish species for their larvae. When rivers are altered, these relationships collapse. By the 1920s and 1930s, many once-common species had declined dramatically, and some vanished altogether.

The end of the button industry did not come from conservation, but from chemistry. The introduction of plastic buttons after World War II made shell buttons economically obsolete almost overnight. Factories closed, harvesting ceased, and pressure on wild mussel populations eased. Ironically, this shift allowed some mussel populations to stabilize and, in certain areas, begin a slow recovery.

Today, freshwater mussels remain among the most endangered animals in North America, yet they are also increasingly recognized for their ecological importance as water filters and indicators of river health. For rock and mineral enthusiasts, freshwater mussel pearls and shells offer a compelling reminder that beautiful materials are not confined to deep time or hard stone. Sometimes they lie just beneath the surface of familiar landscapes—formed slowly, shaped by water, biology, and human history, and carrying stories that are still unfolding.

– Joel Kuennen, Mineral Chair. Images by the author, mussel specimens provided by the Genoa National Fish Hatchery.



UPCOMING SHOWS:

TULE GEM AND MINERAL SOCIETY - JANUARY GEMBOREE!

January 17-18, 2026, Exeter, CA
Exeter Mineral Building, 324 N. Kaweah Ave., Exeter, CA // Hours: Saturday 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM

2026 Gemboree Rock and Mineral Show. Free Admission, Free Parking, Jewelry, Gems and Minerals, Beads, Fossils, Rough Rock, Grab Bags, Wheel of Fortune, Paint Fossils,

Mining, Demonstrations of gem faceting and rock polishing, Door Prizes every half hour, Raffle Tickets, Treasure Hunt,

Showcases featuring the talents of our Tule Gem Club members, Food and Snacks.

Contact: ebcalpoly@aol.com

Website: <http://www.tulegem.com/gem-show.html>



DECEMBER NEW MEMBERS

Courtney Chan
Dan Hyslop
Ilana Lutz
Erika Morris
Samuel Ordonez

JANUARY MEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Callie Herf
Valeria Hernandez
Paul Huston
Steven Kruse
Alexandra Lawson
Brianna Peoples
Karie Schroder
Dasha Slavina
Jaymi Smith
Stefanie Sprester
April Sugarman
Yongjian Zhang

The Nugget – Submissions

The submission deadline is on the 15th of every month. Articles or notes without a byline are written by the Editor. Photographs without credits are shot by a CCRMC member. Email the Nugget submissions to the Editor: nugget@culvercityrocks.org

The Nugget – Advertisements

The Nugget accepts paid advertisements. The cost for an eighth of a page is \$7 per insertion, payable in advance. Size is about 2" high x 3.5" wide. Ad location is at the discretion of the Editor.`` Ads, copy, or business cards must be received by the 10th of the month. Email submissions to the Editor: nugget@culvercityrocks.org

Mailing Address

Culver City Rock & Mineral Club
PO Box 3324
Culver City, CA 90231
info@culvercityrocks.org
310-836-4611

See local field trips posted on LA-Rocks at [facebook.com/groups/411978609512229](https://www.facebook.com/groups/411978609512229)

More field trips are posted on SoCal Rocks www.facebook.com/groups/2605376056257691

Zoom Address

<https://zoom.us/j/3108364611?pwd=WnRTclZTS-3RJMEdWdlV2c01mQWxqdz09>
Meeting ID: 310 836 4611
Password: rocks

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2026 Elected Officers

President - Alexa Hunter
Vice President - Steven Dover
Treasurer - Darrell Robb
Recording Secretary - Stephanie Dangott
Corresponding Secretary: Ellen Moe
Parliamentarian - Ana Maria Strambi Guimaraes

2026 Committee Chairs

Education - Merrilee Marks
Federation Director - Ellen Moe
Field Trips - Harvey Schwartz
Librarian - Joannie Rippner
Membership - Regina Lozano
Minerals - Joel Kuennen
Photography - Brit Smith
Programs - Jette Sorensen
Publications - Jette Sorensen,
Joel Kuennen
Publicity - Janice Metz
Social - Co-Chairs Peggy Oberg, Steve Dover
Sunshine – Stephanie Dangott
Trading Post - Gary Mitchell
Zoom Host - Darren Cokin

Board of Directors

2026 + 2027

TBD