

**A Tale of Two Members:
Noble V. Witt and Wes Gannaway
*A Synopsis of the Presentation of the 2010 Noble Witt Award***

I would like to talk a bit about two of our members. I'll talk first about one of our past members, and then we'll get around to the other member.

The past member I am talking about has been gone from us for 20 years now, as he passed away in 1990.

His name was Noble Witt.



Noble Witt's Card and Mineral Label

Most of you have heard of Noble because of the award we give that bears his name, but I wonder how many of you knew him. It is my thought that a good many of you did not know him, after all, he has been gone from us for a long while now.

So, let me tell you a bit about Noble Witt. He was a mineral collector; an advanced collector really. He rose up from what I guess was rockhound status to the level of an amateur scientist who field collected extensively and ultimately co-authored articles for the *American Mineralogist*. His largest claim to fame in the mineral realm was his discovery of the rare mineral species Weddellite in the Biggs jaspers of North Central Oregon. Before that discovery, Weddellite was known only from core samples taken from the Weddell Sea, near Antarctica.

So far as Friends of Mineralogy goes, Noble was a regular attendee of the symposium each year—and he took part in things. He often put in a display, usually a case of unbelievable clunkers that he self-collected in South Dakota. Huge things, bigger than these things had any right to be. I am talking about cassiterites and columbites that were a foot long. Ugly as sin, but foot long cassiterites? Where do you see those?

Noble was a staunch supporter of the minerals dealers at the symposium. He has a decent mineral budget, and I have seen in lay down hundreds of dollars on a single piece. Remember, we're talking over 20 years ago, before inflation and crazy prices.

Noble was a generous contributor to the auction. He would typically donate three or four very nice specimens, and they would often garner the top prices at the auction.

I was a bit younger, really still a kid, when I met Noble at my first symposium. I remember that through the eyes of youth he seemed to be ancient. He had a bit of a tremor in his hands, and I wondered if he was going to keel over or something. However, despite his little tremor, Noble was a sturdy guy, and had done extensive field collecting in his day. For an advanced collector, Noble was unusual—he liked young people, those new to mineral collecting. Perhaps most of us can remember being young collectors and the old guard was not so welcoming. Not so with Noble. He and I traded specimens at my first symposium, and it became a tradition with us. I would spend time before the symposium trying to figure out what I could part with in hopes of getting one of his nice pieces, and one year I had an eye on his Weddellite specimens.

Although Noble would sometimes give me the benefit of the doubt, he taught me about specimens and what would appeal to a collector interested in trading. Usually, I ended up with what I wanted, but sometimes I had to sacrifice something I really did not want to part with.

Then news came one year that Noble had tragically perished in a car wreck. While Noble had been a mentor to me, he had been even more so to PNWFM's then president, Carl Harris. Carl had the idea, possibly his most lasting contribution to FM, of giving an award in honor of Noble. Thus, it was in 1993 that we gave the first of our Noble Witt Awards to Mike Groben.

Now, let's come back to the present. When I considered running for president a bit over a year ago, I gave some thought to many things pertaining to PNWFM. One of the things that crossed my mind was the Noble Witt Award. My initial thoughts were that the award had lost its relevance. First, we have not been giving it out regularly. Second, I wondered how many of the members would even remember who Noble was or what he was about. Third, I wondered about an award named for Noble Witt.

Let me explain this last point, while Noble was a mentor to Carl Harris and I, and while Noble did attend and participate in the symposium each year, to my knowledge he never served FM in any official fashion. He was never an officer; he never chaired any committees, or took part in putting on the symposium. At this point, I had decided to table the Noble Witt Award.

It was sometime after this that one FM member, in this case a past Noble Witt Award winner, asked me what I was going to do about the award. I explained my views, but this member objected, telling me that the award meant more than just Noble, and that it was still important.

I gave the matter some thought. I looked over the list of past winners and found the list impressive. I noticed that about one-half of the past winners had never served as officers of PNWFM, but in almost all cases, the winners had been active in FM functions, and had volunteered for various committee positions, often for years on end. Additionally, a good number of the recipients had made contributions to mineralogy, to mineral collecting, or to the mineral collecting community, particularly in the Pacific Northwest. I would say that about half

of the Noble Witt Award winners have contributed predominantly to FM in some official fashion, and the other half are more recognizable as significant figures in the Pacific Northwestern mineral community.

Then, I spoke with a number of other past Noble Witt Award winners, and asked them about their experience of winning the award. In every case, I heard that it had indeed been very important to the member in question, that they had really appreciated receiving the award and being recognized for their contributions.

Finally, I remembered when I was president of PNWFM once before some ten years ago. It has been my pleasure to both nominate and present two earlier Noble Witt Awards. In one case, the recipient was so overjoyed that we both burst into tears. Let me remind you of the saying that it is better to give than to receive. How often does the opportunity in life come to make a significant difference for someone? How often can we give recognition to someone for years of service? Such opportunities are actually quite rare, and they are to be treasured. I realized then, that the experience of presenting those awards was among of the top moments in my life.

Then I thought about our members and the collecting community in the Pacific Northwest, and wondered if anyone deserved the award. That took about a nanosecond. Many FM members deserve to be recognized, and I realized that we have been remiss in not presenting the Noble Witt Award each year.

As I thought about potential recipients, one person was clearly in the front. This person exemplifies the dual nature of the award, as a person who has contributed in many ways to PNWFM, and as a person who has in a unique way contributed to the mineral collecting community of the Pacific Northwest.

That person is Wes Gannaway.

Wes' direct contributions to PNWFM are numerous and quite visible. Wes has served as the president of PNWFM for three two-year terms. He has been our newsletter editor. Wes has been in charge of layout and for obtaining our display cases for the past about 15 years, to my reckoning. Wes has helped with the auction, and in innumerable other ways. For example, at our meeting this past Spring, I couldn't help but notice that Wes volunteered to personally attend to three of the four action items that arose. This was after his four years as president had recently expired, when most members would be thinking about taking a bit of a break.

While Wes' contributions to PNWFM are obvious, it is my thought that his contributions to the mineral collecting community as a whole outweigh his direct contributions to our organization. Wes is active in promoting the mineral hobby as a driving force in his local club, in supporting geological education by making generous contributions of specimens to Western Washington University, and to promoting field collecting by leading trips and sharing knowledge of localities with others. Wes is well-known and well-respected in the mineral collecting community outside

of the Pacific Northwest, particularly in the Western United States and British Columbia, Canada.

—Bob Meyer



Wes Gannaway, the 2010 recipient of the Noble Witt Award for Outstanding Service, posing underground in the Arsenate Drift, Silver Coin Mine, near Valmy, Nevada on September 24, 2010