



RANDY PILAND/Macon News
8-11-81

Christy built a special backyard building to house his collection

Just call him 'rock hound'

By Cindy Sams

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A coin collector is called a numismatist. A stamp collector is called a philatelist.

Rock collector W.A. Christy says he is called a rock hound.

Since the age of 17, Christy has been collecting and researching rocks, minerals, gems and fossils. Housed in a building in his backyard are specimens ranging from whale fossils found in Georgia to rocks and stones from Arizona, California and Mexico.

"I started collecting and researching rocks when I was in the Civilian Conservation Corp. I had to take a break along the way because I couldn't collect while I was in the Navy," Christy said.

But he began collecting in earnest when he married and moved to Macon in 1947.

The 58-year-old rock hound now has so many items in his collection that he has run out of display room, and stores some of his rocks in cardboard boxes.

"I need some more space. I have so many things in my collection that I need help cataloging them. Until I get all of my minerals and fossil materials cataloged, I won't know how much I have," Christy said.

"It will take forever to put names on everything," he added.

While the yard foreman for Southern Railway may not have all of his collection labeled, he has researched the items in his collection from books, and is knowledgeable about his minerals and fossils.

"I have sulfur from Sicily, agate from Brazil, whale fossils from Georgia and boxite from Huber, Ga. I learn about the material as I collect," he said.

A member of the Middle Georgia Mineral and Gem Society, Christy says none of the other members have "anything like I have. Some members may come close, but I've got more in boxes than some have in their collections," he boasted.

Christy is credited with finding the whale fossil and other minerals that have been on display at the Museum of Arts and Sciences. "I found that whale fossil in Georgia through luck. You would be surprised at the material you can find in Georgia," he said.

"I have traveled to many places to get things, but I have also bought, swapped and traded with other members of the society. We swap things as much as we can," he said.

Christy says his favorite rock is the red-colored mineral Rutile, a form of titanium that has been used in the

space programs because of its ability to withstand heat.

"That's my favorite because it cost so much. You're looking at a lot of money in this collection. The minerals are what cost the money," he said.

Christy passed along his love of minerals and gems to his son Billy, a geologist in Texas.

"He learned a lot of what he knows right here. He grew up around rocks," Christy said.

Some of his spare time is spent taking parts of his collection to area schools, helping educate children about minerals and fossils.

"I take some of my collection to the schools, but I wish I could get more people out here to look at it," he said.

Christy says that while he does have some gold and silver in his collection, "I don't have a diamond yet."