

ACCEPTANCE OF THE THIRD ROEBLING MEDAL OF
THE MINERALOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA
BY LEONARD JAMES SPENCER

The welcome news (first received through the British Foreign Office—a reliable source of information) that I had been selected for the award of the third Roebling Medal came to me as a great and very pleasant surprise on my seventieth birthday. This is indeed an honour that I deeply appreciate and I sincerely thank the Mineralogical Society of America for so signal an award. It is, I believe, the only medal in the whole world that can be awarded to a mineralogist. Although geological societies have a profusion of medals to bestow (personally I have two such medals), yours is the only mineralogical society that has instituted a medal. To be the third recipient, following the distinguished American mineralogists Professor Charles Palache and Dr. Waldemar T. Schaller, is a special gratification to one in a foreign country. Apart, however, from any personal satisfaction, it is a true indication of the international cooperation and good will that must and will prevail in all scientific work. That the first award outside the United States should come to Great Britain is a symbol of the close bond between our two English-speaking countries, and this will I am sure be much appreciated by British mineralogists.

My record, as I see it myself, scarcely seems to justify this award. I can only say that I have stuck at my job for a number of years; but having now been so rewarded I begin to feel that my efforts have not been altogether unsuccessful. The only way to become a mineralogist is to start when quite young collecting minerals for oneself in the field. At the age of seven my father gave me a geological hammer, partly perhaps with the idea that if superfluous energy was diverted to the breaking of rocks, other forms of destruction would be avoided. While still a school-boy, I had formed a collection of some thousand specimens of fossils, minerals, and rocks, mostly from Yorkshire localities, all methodically numbered, labelled, and catalogued. My first serious study of the subject was under a charming old Irish professor, J. P. O'Reilly, at the Royal College of Science in Dublin. Three years there gave further scope for collecting. Then four years at Cambridge University where geology and mineralogy were my principal subjects. Just at the end of the Cambridge course there fortunately happened to be one of the infrequent vacancies in the scientific staff of the Mineral Department of the British Museum, and then was my chance to become a real mineralogist. After appointment in 1893, I was allowed leave for a few months for further study in crystallography under Professor Paul Groth at the University of Munich.



LEONARD JAMES SPENCER, RECIPIENT OF THE ROEBLING
MEDAL OF THE MINERALOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

The British Museum offers wonderful and unique opportunities and a serious student who is willing to work overtime at home can scarcely help but make good. The Museum was established in 1753 and it absorbed several old collections. To the accumulation of collections there is apparently no end, and in 1881 the Natural History Collections were crowded out from the main British Museum building at Bloomsbury and removed to a new building, the British Museum of Natural History at South Kensington. Since then there has been a steady growth year by year in the collections. Curatorial work and the preservation of records are the first duties, but there are ample opportunities for research work on the accumulations of material. I have myself made some original contributions to mineralogical literature, and there may be one or two papers that I now regret having published. But I have always avoided hasty publication, and in some cases have waited twenty years or more before publishing uncertain and incomplete results.

Since my retirement from the Museum in 1935 under the Civil Service age limit, I have fortunately been able to continue my work, mainly in connexion with the *Mineralogical Magazine* and *Mineralogical Abstracts*. As editor of the *Magazine* since 1900, I have had no hesitation in inviting authors to reconsider their papers and if necessary to rewrite and curtail them. In this I have, with very few exceptions, found authors most reasonable and grateful for assistance. Points most obvious to the author himself (sometimes even his own name in the title) are often omitted, to the confusion of the chance reader. *Mineralogical Abstracts* were started systematically in 1920 as a sequel to the International Catalogue of Scientific Literature which terminated in 1914. Attempts have been made to select for abstracting only those papers of real value and importance, rather than blindly including all and every paper; and the indexing has been taken seriously. With regard to my own work, I regret to say that lately I have rather forsaken pure mineralogy for meteorites and natural glasses; but I keep a sharp lookout in the literature for new minerals.

Comparisons are often odious, but I think that some comparison of the British Mineralogical Society and the Mineralogical Society of America may be useful and to the advantage of the latter. Your society is to be congratulated this year on its coming of age, having been founded in December 1919. It is a very virile and live society—and it has instituted a medal. Your membership and subscription list (numbering 1042 in 1939) is just about double that of the much older British Society (founded in February 1876), and each year you publish a fat volume full of valuable data, as against one volume in three years of the *Mineralogical Magazine*. By a strange coincidence this December sees the completion

of the twenty-fifth volume of both the *American Mineralogist* and the *Mineralogical Magazine*. I am the proud possessor of complete bound sets of both of these periodicals. The *American Mineralogist* in twenty-four and one-half years has filled up shelf space of very nearly one metre (99 cm.), while the *Mineralogical Magazine* in sixty-five years runs to only 90 cm. In addition, however, there are now seven volumes of *Mineralogical Abstracts* running to 29 cm.

As a recipient of the Roebling Medal, which was founded in memory of Colonel Washington Augustus Roebling (1837–1926), I recall with pleasure my visit in August 1924 to him and Mrs. Roebling at their home in Trenton, New Jersey. He was a most affable and generous old gentleman, then aged 87, and I was much impressed by his fine and well-ordered collection of minerals. In addition to many fine show specimens, he had made a special effort to have represented in his collection every known variety of mineral—even mere names. It was remarkable how he knew and remembered every specimen; as a test I was invited to call for something quite obscure, which to his great joy and pride was immediately produced. Following my visit I had several interesting letters from him up to the time of his death. He was an excellent correspondent and wrote in a very small neat hand; he had no use for writing machines—nor for automobiles.

Again I express to the Mineralogical Society of America my sincere thanks for the generous award of the highest recognition that it is able to bestow. I feel highly honoured. My only regret is that under present circumstances it will be quite impossible for me to attend the meeting of the society and receive the medal in person. I should have much liked to have repeated my previous pleasant and profitable visit to the United States. I am grateful to the British Foreign Office for instructing His Majesty's Consul (to whom also my thanks are due) at Houston, Texas, to receive the medal on my behalf.