

# George Frederick Kunz (1856-1932).

## *Non-obvious life*

George Frederick Kunz was (as perfectly described him Lee Hadden) one of the greatest self-made prominent Americans. He was born in 1856 as oldest child of six in poor immigrant family. His father was a German baker, mother was Swiss. So he became to natural native to three languages: German, French and English. He attended public school, but his father took him from school to work as a clerk in some office.

When he was about eleven years old, he visited with his father the Barnum's Museum in New York. George was impressed by the mineral collection of Bailey – NY lawyer – so much. The visit determined his whole life. He began to collect minerals himself and identify them. He started to exchange some double or triple specimens with others American collectors. He even exchanged with those from abroad since he was fourteen. When George was 19, he sold his first huge collection of minerals to Minnesota University for \$400. It weighed two tons. A new mineral collector was born in that moment.

He used to educate himself due to the lack of formal education. This habit lasted a lifetime. He attended evening classes in chemistry and physics at Cooper Union school as well. His first meeting with very prominent and rich founder of Tiffany & Co. and very successful business man Charles Tiffany took place when Kunz turned 21. He tried then to sell tourmaline stones to Charles. George was absolutely crazy about minerals, especially of gems. Had natural ability to identify gem stones properly. Tiffany hired him as gem's expert. George became a vice president of the company only two years later.

He took a position in United States Geology Survey meanwhile. He was responsible on behalf of USGS for gems production and gems market as well. Thanks to exceptional sales ability he was able to sell almost everything related to stones. Kunz traveled permanently through America and Europe looking for the best specimens. He used to complete gems collection, sell it and begin to complete next one immediately. The most famous of them were Morgan-Tiffany Collection, Morgan II Collection and collection prepared for the Columbian Exposition 1893. Morgan-Tiffany Collection was presented in 1889 during the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, Morgan II Collection at the next French exhibition in 1900. Each

collection was awarded with a gold medal. George Kunz started to write articles, essays and at least books. About 500 publications belong to his artistic output. The most famous book of him is *The book of pearl*, first edited in 1906. Many of his books are still up-to-date and still published. New sort of spodumene – the pink one – was named after him kunzite. He received international appreciation and couple of honorary degrees. He used to name himself Dr. Kunz.

Although George was famous, prolific author and successful in business, his private life wasn't happy. He was married in the age of 23. His wife Sophie Handforth was the same age. The children were born and family of Kunz consisted of 5 people: him, his wife Sophie Handforth, two daughters Ruby and Elisabeth and one son.

A girl was his first baby born in 1881. It happened two years after the wedding. Father called his daughter after gem Ruby, like a red corundum. A boy named George after his father was born next. The youngest daughter Elisabeth was born fifteen years after getting married. Her mother was 38 years old at the time.

Any information about George Kunz Junior is hardly available today. Only fact is known, that he was died as a young male, at the age of 24, in summer house of family in Lake Mahogen. The cause of death was cardiovascular disease. It was the first death in family of Kunz.

Sophie died within four years of her only son. She was 56. The cause of her death was the same as that of her son. The most dramatic event has just happened in Kunz's life. The two dearest family members have passed away. But he did not remain lonely. The oldest child Ruby and the youngest Elisabeth named Betsy became alive. Unfortunately death of wife did not end the successive tragic incidents. Next tragedy happened to the youngest daughter Elisabeth. She died in carriage's accident caused by suffered horse.

Surprisingly not only to family, but for everyone else, Kunz got married once again. His second wedding was the most famous and most closely watched in New York throughout the year 1923. His bride came from an old and wealthy Dutch family. Age difference between groom and bride was huge and shocking even then: close to forty years. Opal Kunz had an extraordinary passion for aviation and become one of the first American female pilot. She outlived her husband by 35 years.

Ruby Handforth Kunz, the only living child, got married to fantastic scientist Hans Zinnser. He was a medical doctor. George Kunz was very proud of his son-in-law. Zinnser was very prolific author of articles and books as well, like himself. Hans was repeatedly awarded and gained international fame.

Dr. Kunz died in 1932 at the age of 76. He is completely forgotten and almost no one has any knowledge of him at present.

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