



Foster A. Sondley
(1857 - 1930)

The Sondley Gem Collection

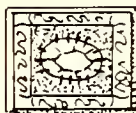
EXHIBIT CATALOG

The Colburn Gem & Mineral Museum
presents

The Sondley Gem Collection

An exhibit of North Carolina gems from the collections of
Foster Alexander Sondley

April 23 - December 31, 1996



Text by Katherine Douglas & Rebecca Lamb
Consulting Scholar, Dr. Bruce Greenawalt
Illustrations by Katherine Douglas

This publication was made possible by a grant from the
North Carolina Humanities Council

FOSTER A. SONDLEY

A brief biography

Foster Alexander Sondley (1857 - 1931), prominent lawyer, historian, and author, was an important citizen of turn-of-the-century Asheville. An avid collector and bibliophile, he amassed a library of 30,000 volumes and acquired a variety of collections which included antique furniture, Confederate memorabilia, bird eggs, English and German porcelains, firearms, Japanese and Chinese vases and temple pieces, Native American relics, North Carolina coins, phonograph records and North Carolina gemstones.

Sondley's father Richard was the son of a prominent Columbia, South Carolina, family. His mother Harriet Alexander Ray was a native of Buncombe County and was a descendant of the first pioneers to settle the area. A widow with five children when she married Sondley, Harriet moved to Columbia with her new husband. At Richard's death two years later, Harriet returned to North Carolina with the infant Foster. Foster grew up on his maternal family's farm, Montrealla, in the Alexander community north of Asheville.

A story is told that explains many aspects of Sondley's personality. During the Civil War, members of the 101st Ohio Infantry raided the Alexander's home and took all the horses, including Foster's Shetland pony. When the pony could not keep up the pace, it was shot. This greatly distressed Foster, shaping his dislike for the North and his lifelong attachment to the South and the Confederacy.

Not long after the pony's death, young Foster visited the site of a nearby battle where he gathered vestiges of the clash. This simple beginning ignited his collector's instinct, starting what became one of the finest private collections of Civil War memorabilia in the South.

In 1876, Sondley earned his Bachelors Degree from Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. He studied law, probably as a clerk in an

attorney's office, becoming licensed and opening his own office in 1879. Over the years he built a reputation in legal circles as one of the ablest civil lawyers in Western North Carolina. Sondley numbered Asheville's elite among his clients, including George Vanderbilt. For his expertise, he was awarded honorary Doctor of Law degrees by Wofford College in 1909 and by the University of North Carolina in 1928.

With the exception of one trip to argue a case before the United States Supreme Court, Sondley never left the State of North Carolina after he returned from college. He remained a bachelor and lived with his mother in her Asheville home until her death in 1897. Sondley took his mother's death hard and fell into a decline. While only 45 and at what was perhaps the zenith of his career, he decided to retire.

Desiring solitude, he bought 400 acres of land at the head of Haw Creek and built his home, *Finis Viae*, which means "End of the Road." It was designed by Richard Sharp Smith, the supervising architect of Biltmore House. Built to house his ever-expanding collections, *Finis Viae* included a two-story, seventy-foot-long wing for his library. Sondley landscaped the grounds himself, protected the wildlife on his land, and even selected trees for firewood with an eye to how the view would look without them.

Tall and erect, fastidious in his personal habits and dress, Sondley was considered to be aloof and eccentric by most. While widely respected, he had few close friends. Strong willed and opinionated, Sondley was said to live in the past. He wrote over 20 articles and books on the history of North Carolina, tracing its political developments, its early beginnings in England, Scotland or Ireland, and the history of the Native Americans. Sondley was published and a respected author in his day. But according to biographer James Daniel Lee, "His writings on history reveal a provincialism unusual in one as widely read and scholarly as he, and a defensive sensitivity toward any criticism of North Carolina, the South or the Confederacy."

In later life, Sondley was visited by many scholars who used his library that included rare volumes from North Carolina's early years. Wofford College and the University of North Carolina were among the universities that wanted to acquire the outstanding library. However, after his death from pneumonia on April 17, 1931, it was discovered that Sondley had bequeathed his collections to the City of Asheville, citing his appreciation of the community's support after his mother's death. Although Sondley's will stated his desire that the books and collections be included as part of Pack Memorial Library, they were first housed in a public reading room on the seventh floor of City Hall. It was not until World War II, when City Hall was commandeered by the military, that the books and collections were transferred to Pack Library.

Today, Pack Memorial Library and the Asheville-Buncombe Library System are largely responsible for the safe keeping of Sondley's collections. Besides providing public access to his books, Pack Library maintains many of Sondley's collections in storage. Because the Library does not have appropriate facilities for the display of these collections, several have been loaned to appropriate local organizations: the bird egg collection to the Western North Carolina Nature Center and the Native American relics to the NC Department of Cultural Resources' Western Office. Recently, the Sondley Gemstone Collection was placed under the protection of the Colburn Gem & Mineral Museum.

Information on the life of Sondley was taken from *Foster A. Sondley and the Sondley Reference Library*, a master's thesis by James Daniel Lee, 1968, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and clippings from the Asheville Citizen-Times, 1926 - 1935, Pack Memorial Library North Carolina History Collection.

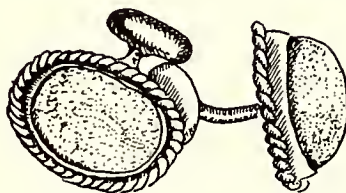
EXHIBITION GUIDE

BROOCHES

		Museum Reference
1	Rose Quartz	CGMM 2280
2	Amazonite	CGMM 2281
3	Aquamarine crystal with silver snake	CGMM 2282

CUFF LINKS

		Museum Reference
1	Emerald in matrix (pair)	CGMM 2283
2	Feldspar (pair)	CGMM 2284
3	Rhodolite Garnet (pair)	CGMM 2285
4	Chrysoprase (single)	CGMM 2286
5	Agate (pair)	CGMM 2287
6	Garnet (pair)	CGMM 2288
7	Sapphire (single)	CGMM 2289
8	Sapphire (pair)	CGMM 2290



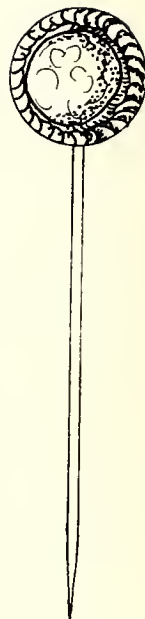
Emerald in matrix cufflinks
CGMM 2283

WATCH FOBS

		Museum Reference
1	Ruby crystal in matrix	CGMM 2291
2	Corundum in matrix	CGMM 2292
3	Emerald in matrix	CGMM 2294
4	Beryl crystal	CGMM 2293
5	Smoky Quartz	CGMM 2295

STICKPINS set in gold

		Museum Reference
1	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2297
2	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2296
3	Rhodolite Garnet and Beryl	CGMM 2298
4	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2299
5	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2300
6	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2301
7	Native Gold Nugget with Sapphire and Emerald	CGMM 2316
8	Gold Nugget with Emerald	CGMM 2317
9	Gold Nugget with Aquamarine	CGMM 2319
10	Gold Nugget with Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2318
11	Gold Nugget with Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2320
12	Amethyst	CGMM 2323
13	Amethyst	CGMM 2324
14	Kunzite (Spodumene)	CGMM 2325
15	Amethyst	CGMM 2326
16	Kunzite (Spodumene)	CGMM 2327
17	Amethyst	CGMM 2328
18	Oriental Amethyst (Corundum)	CGMM 2329
19	Garnet	CGMM 2302
20	Moonstone	CGMM 2303
21	Labradorite	CGMM 2304
22	Citrine (Quartz)	CGMM 2305
23	Golden Beryl	CGMM 2307
24	Tourmaline	CGMM 2306
25	Aquamarine	CGMM 2308

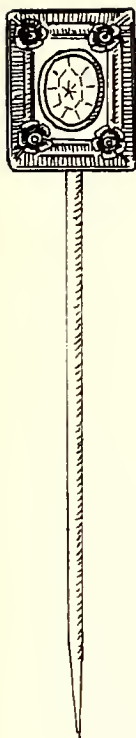


Emerald in matrix stickpin
CGMM 2375

STICKPINS set in gold

Museum Reference

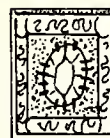
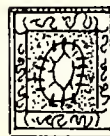
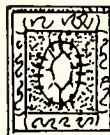
26	Rubellite Tourmaline	CGMM 2309
27	Tourmaline	CGMM 2310
28	Sapphire	CGMM 2311
29	Sapphire	CGMM 2312
30	Sapphire	CGMM 2313
31	Sapphire	CGMM 2314
32	Sapphire	CGMM 2362
33	Sapphire	CGMM 2363
34	Pink Sapphire	CGMM 2364
35	Ruby	CGMM 2366
36	Pink Sapphire	CGMM 2365
37	Sapphire and Chrysoberyl	CGMM 2367
38	Sapphire	CGMM 2368
39	Sapphire	CGMM 2369
40	Sapphire	CGMM 2370
41	Ruby	CGMM 2371
42	Emerald	CGMM 2372
43	Emerald in matrix	CGMM 2373
44	Emerald with Rhodolite Garnets	CGMM 2374
45	Emerald in matrix	CGMM 2375
46	Emerald with Brown Zircon	CGMM 2376
47	Emerald in matrix	CGMM 2377
48	Emerald with Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2378
49	Emerald	CGMM 2379



Sapphire stickpin
CGMM 2313

SHIRT STUDS

		Museum Reference
1	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2330
2	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2331
3	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2332
4	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2333
5	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2334
6	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2335
7	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2336
8	Rhodolite Garnet	CGMM 2341
9	Aquamarine (untreated)	CGMM 2337
10	Aquamarine (untreated)	CGMM 2338
11	Tourmaline	CGMM 2347
12	Demantoid Garnet	CGMM 2349
13	Demantoid Garnet	CGMM 2346
14	Demantoid Garnet	CGMM 2348
15	Synthetic Rutile	CGMM 2339
16	Synthetic Rutile	CGMM 2340
17	Citrine (Quartz)	CGMM 2342
18	Oriental Amethyst (Corundum)	CGMM 2343
19	Sapphire and Tourmaline	CGMM 2345



Rhodolite Garnet
Shirt Studs
CGMM 2330 - 2332

SHIRT STUDS

		Museum Reference
20	Sapphire	CGMM 2344
21	Sapphire	CGMM 2350
22	Sapphire	CGMM 2352
23	Sapphire	CGMM 2351
24	Ruby	CGMM 2353
25	Ruby	CGMM 2354
26	Ruby	CGMM 2355
27	Ruby	CGMM 2356
28	Ruby	CGMM 2357
29	Ruby	CGMM 2360
30	Ruby	CGMM 2358
31	Ruby	CGMM 2359
32	Ruby	CGMM 2361



Rhodolite Garnet Shirt Stud
CGMM 2336

Sondley's original collection also included rings, which were stolen from a case in Pack Library some years ago, and loose stones. Most of the loose stones are small ones, appropriate only for mounting in jewelry and difficult to display to their best advantage.

NORTH CAROLINA GEMSTONES

The diversity of gemstones found within North Carolina is truly amazing. The old timers say that the best stones were the early ones. These stones were often found free from their original host rock, in streams or soil. As those finds diminished, the search for gems led to mining in hard rock which is more costly. Small quantities of superior quality stones and the relatively high cost of labor closed North Carolina's commercial gem mines in favor of foreign locations.

Today recreational mining keeps the spirit of gem collecting alive, but historically the potential for commercial mining attracted the likes of Tiffany & Company to the region. Most gems were sent to New York and elsewhere to be cut and sold. Eventually Western North Carolina had its own skilled craftsmen who could facet the gemstones and set them in jewelry. It is these early lapidaries who probably created the pieces in the Sondley Gemstone Collection.

Sondley's gem collection offers a unique look at some of the "early" North Carolina finds. The rarity of such a complete collection may be overshadowed by the beauty of the stones and jewelry. We certainly owe our thanks to Foster Sondley and his collecting instinct for the preservation of an important piece of North Carolina's natural heritage.

The Gems and Their Histories

The mineral **corundum**, along with its gem varieties **ruby** and **sapphire**, has been mined in western North Carolina since its discovery in 1847 at Corundum Hill in Macon County. Color determines whether gem corundum is called ruby or sapphire. Ruby is only red, while sapphire may be the well-known blue, lavender (**oriental amethyst**), pink, yellow or white. The majority of the State's corundum mines are in Clay and Macon Counties, but corundum has been found in at least thirteen

counties. The value of North Carolina's ruby fields was not realized until 1893 when George Frederick Kunz of Tiffany & Company described them in a report. Several mining companies began searching for rubies to sell to Tiffany's. As with most of North Carolina's gems, the percentage of marketable stones found were too low to cover the high labor costs. Today, these sites still produce small quantities of gemstones. While Cowee rubies are small, they have all the characteristics of those from the Mogok Valley in Burma, the world's premier ruby field. Manmade or synthetic corundum made its appearance in around 1904. In an effort to create blue sapphires, experiments were made with titanium oxide, the chemical composition of rutile. Sondley probably acquired his samples of **synthetic rutile** through his connections with a local corundum dealer.

Emerald localities are rare in North America; the best of these are in North Carolina. The first discovery of emeralds in North Carolina was reported in 1875 near Stony Point in Alexander County. A second locality was discovered in 1894 on Big Crabtree Mountain just southwest of Spruce Pine in Mitchell County. Here a pegmatite carries mostly smaller hexagonal crystals with quartz, feldspar, biotite, and tourmaline. This matrix has been cut into cabochons and marketed as "emerald in matrix." Examples of this are included in the Sondley Collection. Although emerald is the most valued gem variety of the mineral beryl, blue-green **aquamarine** and **golden beryl** (heliodore) are also found in North Carolina.

First found in North Carolina's Cowee Valley near Franklin in 1893, **rhodolite garnets** get their name from their rose-red color that resembles native rhododendrons. From the Cowee Creek finds, rhodolite was traced to the nearby stream, Mason Branch, and from there to Mason Mountain. There it was found mixed with quartz in solid metamorphic rock. Rhodolite is a combination of two species of garnet -- pyrope and almandite, consisting of roughly two parts pyrope and one part almandite. Although similar garnets have been discovered in Brazil, Ceylon, and Africa, North Carolina is usually thought of as the source of this beautiful gem. Other species of garnets are also found in North Carolina in colors

ranging from deep red to a brownish orange. The green **demantoid garnets**, while not found in North Carolina, were popularized by Tiffany & Company in Sondley's day.

Zircon was mined commercially in the Zirconia area of Henderson County in the nineteenth century and is also found in Burke, Caldwell, McDowell, Polk, and Rutherford Counties. While gem quality stones are virtually nonexistent today, Sondley's contemporary George Kunz of Tiffany & Company describes facet grade zircon from Burke County. Similarly, Kunz described small quantities of gem quality **chrysoberyl**, an elusive gem which commands a high value. **Kunzite**, which was named after George Kunz, has been found in North Carolina in limited quantities. Usually thought of as medium to light pink, kunzite is notorious for its tendency to fade when exposed to light.

The mineral quartz is readily found across the State in its gem forms of **amethyst** (purple to lavender), **smoky quartz** (gray to black) and, less commonly, **citrine** (yellow to brown). **Agate** and **chrysoprase** are microcrystalline forms of quartz. **Feldspar** is perhaps the most common mineral found in North Carolina. **Amazonite**, **labradorite**, **moonstone** are some of the gem varieties of feldspar. Though relatively rare, gem quality pink and green **tourmaline** crystals are found in North Carolina's mountain stream deposits. Pink tourmaline is called **rubellite**.

The first authenticated **gold** find was in North Carolina in 1799. That discovery led to the first extensive mining operation and the Nation's first gold rush. For a number of years, North Carolina supplied all domestic gold and was home to a U. S. Mint. In the late 1820s, gold mining employed more North Carolinians than any occupation other than farming. Until 1848, the state produced over a million dollars in gold a year. North Carolina also yielded a twenty-eight pound nugget, the largest gold nugget found in North America. It is only fitting that Sondley chose native North Carolina gold and silver to enhance his North Carolina gem collection.

©1996, Colburn Gem & Mineral Museum
2 South Pack Square
Asheville, North Carolina 28801

The Colburn Gem & Mineral Museum is funded in part by a grant from
the Arts Alliance with funds raised through the annual Arts Alliance Fund Drive.

Cover photo from the collection of Pack Memorial Library,
Asheville-Buncombe Library System.