Letters from My Mentor by Anthony J. Albini

Editor’s Note: This is the first of a series of letters from the late Richard Schooner, the person who knew more about central Connecticut mineralogy than anyone else. The letters date back to 1979. Richard Schooner was Tony Albini’s mentor and they went field collecting with each other over 200 times. Tony has typed Dick’s letters to make them easily readable.

January 5, 1984

Dear Tony,

I received a letter from Bob [Brandenberger, AJA] too, with the same suggested visit. The real problem is that I’m way up here, in the extreme northeastern corner of the state, and it’s therefore not practical to make dates or appointments. Lately, I haven’t been in East Hampton. My finances, always very shaky, keep me off the road, most of the time. In addition to the cost of fuel, there’s always the fear of major breakdowns. I’d have to walk away and leave the car…and that’s just not my style at all! Aside from the sale of parts of my collection, plus gifts from several friends, the past few years, I wouldn’t even have a car registered.

I’m sure I’ll get to Bob’s and certainly I’d like to get to your place but I don’t think it’s very imminent. I’m truly sorry.

I haven’t managed to get to Wesleyan since last June (early June)!

Pete Dunn studied my railroad cut “danalite” and concluded it’s spessartine! However, I went over the X-ray pattern of the pink mineral from the Strickland quarry, mentioned the day we met, and it appears to be genthelvite (all the right peaks). I must stop coming up with oddities at the Strickland quarry. I doubt there’s another pegmatite in the world with such a long list of species (well over a hundred), and the country rock is also rich in species.

Also, the Pelton quarry, source of magnificent beryl crystals, chunks of bismutite, deep red samarskite crystals (spectrographic analysis says, yes) fergusonite, etc., has been defunct for twenty years. A house was built right over it. The fergusonite crystals were found, loose, when the dumps were being bulldozed. It was “around the corner” from the Strickland quarry: cross Carr Brook, turn right, go for a mile or a mile and a half, almost to the junction with the road over Penfield Hill, and it was on the bank on the right. A riding stable used to be located there. Sorry! It was in the Glastonbury Gneiss, like the Hale-Walker, Gotta-Walden, Spinelli, and Hollister locations…yes, and the Case quarries.

I sure do miss the Hollister quarry! I know the other pegmatite you mean, near the pipeline. At the bottom of the hill, where the pipeline came off that loop, some superb epidote crystals were found, loose, in the dirt, long ago. Also some excellent matrix yellow titanites. I once saw a trace of red fluorite at the Hollister quarry (also at White Rocks). Gillette quarry was the place for that! But it was so fragile that large pieces were rare.

Anything on the museum job? I did write.

I had a nice little letter from the Governor [Bill O’Neill, AJA] (on a “Dick” and “Bill’ level), but it didn’t concern mineralogy. I don’t blame Bill for the situation on a State mineralogy; the fault is with Stanley Pac and Sid Quarrier [ironic name, AJA].

Russ [Behnke, AJA] says he’ll get the pictures we need. What an ordeal it’s been! I’m an experienced photographer, myself, but not with the least experience with close-ups, no equipment either.

I got my information on South Glastonbury quarries from Bobby Ulm’s mother. Maybe she’d help you out. She came from the Andrews family who were in the feldspar business. I think the Wiarda Quarry has a house almost on it. But it’s certainly in the right location, more or less. If superb rose quartz had been present would they have left big chunks lying around? Doubtful! Could the Simpson quarry be the one I found the quarter-inch brown euxenite crystals, long ago? I walked into the woods, heading toward Glastonbury, across from the entrance to the Hale Quarry property. The quarry was in the side of a knoll: an opening into the knoll, as I remember.

David Seaman’s old article on the Walden gem mine mentioned yellow and black zoning which he said were microlite on pyrochlore. I don’t know if he was sure. I thought Brian Mason, then curator at the American Musuem, had checked it out. Yes, I could have John Gillespie check the Swanson mine manganowhatever [analyses by Petr Cerny of the University of Manitoba showed that both columbite-(Mn) and tantalite-(Mn) occur there, AJA] Not right now though! I just recently sent him a half a dozen samples. He’s a very nice guy, sincerely in cleaning up problems; rare metals are his great love. I hated to see him move from New York to California…though he’s in Hemet, right in the monazite-allanite belt.

Sorry to hear about the access problem in the Larsen Pond area. I figured it would be in your backyard. A syenite, composed of microcline and arfvedsonite, could have some rare mineral potential, you know. Geologists wouldn’t necessarily see rare accessories. Look at the Rt. 9 cut south of Higganum: a nepheline dike, somewhat altered, and they never spotted its rare Na-rich nature. Thank God I collected so many specimens, back in the late 60s!

The only time I was at the Bordonaro quarry, long ago, I followed the road in from the back of the Hale quarry (the Wannerstrom quarry, I Think). It’s between there and Cotton Hill Road. I didn’t spend long there. I did find small uraninite crystals in manganapatite [fluorapatite with managanese, AJA]. Have you looked over the Gotta-Walden quarry? In the contact zone, again long ago, I dug out a six-inch mass of crude intergrown allanite crystals superficially altered to cerite (x-ray).

Cordially, Dick.