Letters from My Mentor #4 by Anthony J. Albini

October 23, 1984

Dear Tony,

Last week I got back to the Strickland quarry. On the remains of that old dump, bulldozed last summer, I found some excellent triplite, in masses up to an inch and a half. I suspect, now, that the secondary phosphates I collected there previously may be derived from triplite rather than lithiophilite. Well, the Seventh Edition of “Dana’s System” clearly states that the Strickland quarry is a triplite locality, though I’d never before been able to track it down. I guess a lot of the early reported oddities (uraninite crystals, altered cordierite, etc.) must have come from the portion of the pegmatite represented by the dump in question. The triplite, when completely unaltered, is red, garnet-like, fracture conchoidal, and almost gemmy. Most, however, is altered to one or several of the other minerals. No green foliated mineral but a tan or whitish one, commonly surrounding the triplite. [Specimens in the author’s collection are labeled by Dick as triplite altering to fluorapatite that is fluorescent, AJA]. In a few cases, the triplite, has been replaced by a microcrystallized reddish mineral, probably bermanite.

I got some good marcasite there too. I’ve seen material from the Strickland quarry before.

Now, hold your hat! In some skuzzy-looking cross-cutting vein I found little colorless crystals, vertically striated, with rhombohedral terminations, of phenakite. That’s new for a Connecticut pegmatite, though Gunnar Bjareby and I found tiny crystals on spessartine crystals in a few vugs at the Jail Hill quarry. Furthermore, I collected what looks to me like chrysoberyl. It’s essentially massive, and inconspicuous. It easily scratches quartz, though, being brittle, in crumbles in the process. What next?

When I get to Wesleyan, I mean to look up an old specimen of “microlite” crystals on “columbite”. It occurs to me that if the crystals are microlite, then the “columbite’ should be ferrotantalite (which I haven’t definitely pinned down from the area).[Ferrotantalite does occur in CT, AJA] If, however, the “columbite” is properly labeled the “microlite” should be pyrochlore, which also needs confirmation [Pyrochlore is very rare in CT, AJA]. I doubt that Nb and Ta minerals would be intergrown. Deductive mineralogy!

That was a fascinating article on the Jensen quarry, near Crestmore, California in the latest Mineralogical Record! Imagine a pegmatite, intruding marble, with elbaite, danburite, hambergite, stibiotantalite, vanadinite, clinobisvanite, beyerite, hellandite, xenotime, etc. The good localities “out west” seem to get written up, with illustrations,, etc. Also microprobe analysis. We should be so lucky!

Have you looked for Bi minerals at the Case quarry prospect? I found little, the last time up, but what a haul I made last spring, after Russ [Behnke, AJA] put me onto the locality!

I think you and I are dealing with the most remarkably mineralized area on the globe. Why it should be in Connecticut, not in Brazil or the Kola Pennisula or Namibia, I can’t say. I guess it’s just sheerest chance. There appears to be no limit to the range of minerals to be found in Glastonbury, Portland, East Hampton, Haddam, and Middletown (or just the parts of those townships which comprise the heart of the pegmatite district). As you well know, it’s not just the pegmatites which are mineralized either. Including things reported and things likely (though not absolutely verified), the list goes for over 300 species. Consider that Franklin-Sterling Hill [NJ, which now has > 300 species, AJA] with barely 300 is the prime locality on earth, and our area becomes dramatically unique. [The author thinks Mount St. Hilaire is now #1 in total species] True, it’s a much larger area; yet actually quite small. Furthermore, extending the Franklin-Sterling Hill area to match the size of the Middletown district would add very few species to their list. That the Middletown district is a distinct, a separate entity, is shown by the fact that extending it’s boundaries, for many miles, in all directions, would capture only a handful of other minerals (datolite, babbingtonite, pumpellyite)…which, as a matter of fact, may very well be discovered, one of these days, in the district.

So if our luck holds up, and we find people willing to do work for us, optical, probe, x-ray, etc., the list will get even more staggering.

I can’t keep wondering what unusual things are being blasted out and ground up at White Rocks! Thinking of the “lithium dike”, of many years ago, and that zone of molybdenite crystals, ferrimolybdite coatings, native bismuth, columbite “acorns”, etc., more recently (I saw that one, personally, thanks to the late Ben Hayes who worked there), I feel much regret. Does anyone get a chance to check up on the quarries, from time to time?

I think the Rock Landing and Hewitt pegmatites deserve to be studied in depth. No doubt, the State Forest Mine dump, [This is a separate pegmatite, not part of two quarries on state land off Woodchoppers Road, AJA] if it were extensively dug up, would reveal some rarities. Unfortunately, I’m just not a digger; a pounder, yes, and a chiseler; but not much of a shovel-man [Dick found many phosphates here, including one specimen of whitmoreite, now in the author’s collection].

I didn’t mean to ramble. But I know you share my enthusiasm for that wonderful area.

Cordially, Dick

P. S. Since writing the above, I’ve gone over several boxes of material in my shed. Many years ago, at the Strickland quarry, I collected rich specimens of a fibrous black or grayish-black mineral forming viens in skarn. At the time; I figured it was ludwigite, the Mg-Fe borate. But I sort of lost confidence in the identification, subsequently, for x-raying. I should be as lucky with the white and yellow efflorescences on pyrite-bearing sphalerite from the Tollgate mine! I have patience!

Going over old x-ray charts, I see no reason to question my Strickland quarry spurrite, larnite, melilite, from the those unique wollastonite pods, a few of which have turned up in that dump that drops off almost into the pit, at the southeastern end. You may recall that I’ve found traces of spinel and vesuvianite there, also; and the wollastonite is speckled with blue-fluorescing scheelite grains, otherwise invisible. In the ordinary spessartine-diopside (or fassalite) –hornblende-anorthite skarn, on the Schoonmaker dump, I’ve occasionally seen little cleavages (perhaps ¼ to ½ inch) of scheelite!

Tony, I’m running out of space! I hope I am not boring you with all of this! I just felt you’d like to know just how complex and inexhaustible the area is. And I’m sure we’ve missed all kinds of minerals.

Dick.