

The Tourmalines of Maine

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The first discovery of the gem in the State dates back as far as 1820. In the summer of that year a transparent green crystal was found among the dull feldspar and quartz on a hill, afterward called Mt. Mica, in Paris, Oxford County, by two students attracted to the spot as being of mineralogical interest. Their first search, so historical authorities assert, rewarded them with thirty or more splendid pink and green crystals. And more than this, all up and down the hillside lay quantities of the associated minerals.

When the discovery was noised abroad people hastened to the hill and many valuable specimens were found but no one knew what they were. Some of the best crystals were sent to an eminent chemist and mineralogist, who pronounced them tourmalines, and informed them that a most important discovery had been made.

In a desultory way and with primitive methods, the ledge was mined up to 1865, when it was thought the deposit was exhausted, although the work had been extremely superficial, the excavation being only 15 feet square and 6 feet deep. However, investigations went on, for the subject had too many fascinations to be dropped, and with more scientific methods more pockets were opened, and crystals found lying loose in the decaying feldspar, or imbedded in the floor of the cavity.

Many of those found their way into public and private collections, and some were hoarded in the homes of the nearby inhabitants, but a few were secured by lapidaries and cut. The history of the tourmaline up to this time is woven with the folk-lore of the old town.

About this time Dr. A. C. Hamlin, a Maine man of scientific tastes and acquirements, became interested in the accounts of the mining of gems in Paris, and proceeded to make important explorations which added greatly to the knowledge of the capacities of the ledge. His excavations yielded him one of the most valuable collections of gems in the world.

The celebrated Hamlin necklace cut from the tourmaline crystals of Mt. Mica, and set by the best lapidaries, may truly be said without exaggeration, to be one of the gem wonders of the world. This is the superfine product of one of the "rock-ribbed and ancient" hills of Maine! Work is still being pushed there, with varying success in bringing to the light of day these wonderful creations of form and color. The rapidity with which the tourmaline has come into popularity is one of the marvels of the time, but it is not so much a matter of wonderment to those who are acquainted with the beauty of the gem. All who have been led by sentiment or other motives to invest in them are delighted. Says a Western lady, formerly of Maine, who recently received a birthday gift of one—"It is as handsome as an emerald in color and more brilliant in effect."

It is a significant fact that the production per year in the United States has grown from \$3,000 worth in 1896 to \$100,000 the past year. And it may be remarked in this connection that the average Maine tourmaline brings double the price of those of California.

Mt. Apatite, near Auburn, is named for the mineral found there in considerable quantities. Very valuable gems have been mined there of all colors in which the tourmaline revels. The finest of the associated minerals there are beryl and smoky quartz, or topaz crystals the last being found in varying shades from a clear amber to a rich, deep brown. The beryl is often clear enough to cut into gems called aquamarines, that rival the tourmaline in the estimation of some.

Two women of the neighborhood located a pocket of smoky quartz crystals after some miners had abandoned the situation. This find alone yielded \$1,000 worth of beautiful specimens, some of them of perfect tourmalines and very large.

Feldspar is mined in such quantities and of such quality that it is marketed to manufacture into some of the finest porcelain ware of the country. Other minerals found are black tourmaline, the curious curved mica, the Lithia mica of a purple tint or lepidolite, all of which are eagerly sought for by collectors.

Harvard museum has some of the Apatite crystals which are peerless of their kind! But the matchless tourmalines leads them all! It is especially interesting from having electrical qualities and from its strange and mysterious play of colors. In some of the gems two distinct and brilliant hues can be seen by a turn of the wrist.

Says a recent writer who has made them a study: "Some of the crystals show a splendid crimson hue, but when the gem is turned the red disappears and it becomes white of smoky to appearance.

"Another crystal presents a deep sea green color when seen transversely, but the shade vanishes when looked at from a different position, and the same stone is now yellow or brown. The gem is erratic in this respect for they do not all have this property.

"Now and then we find a crystal that presents the same shade of color no matter which way it may be turned to the light. Of course these are less valuable than those having the changeable hues, but all are valuable."

The same authority says that a fine green tourmaline readily commands from \$20 to \$30 per carat and the demand cannot be supplied at the price.

In its physical properties the tourmaline crystal is a three or six sided prism, with rhombohedral terminations, but often showing rounded or straight sides, due, say the scientists to a tendency in the forming crystal to make two planes at the same time. The crystal when heated exhibits electric polarity.

In variation of color the Maine tourmaline leads the world.

The greater part of the yield of gems is marketed for jewelry purposes, bringing from about \$8 to \$25 per carat, according to quality and color, and there is scarcely a large diamond or lapidary house in this country that has not handled some of the Maine product. There is a largely increased local demand for Maine gems, and for the last few years (1909) it has about equaled the supply, miners receiving better prices in the home markets than through shipments to wholesale dealers. The gems are also cut and set in Maine.

Norway has among its dealers in gems the well known firm Bickford Bros. They have their own lapidary and furnish gems like the tourmaline, beryls, amethyst, topaz, smoky topaz, etc., with their own special cutting.

Freeland Howe, Jr., is another Norway man who has made a success in dealing in gems and should you ask him he will take a case from his pocket that will make a lover of gems long to possess one.

J. H. Fletcher is another Norway lapidary and dealer in Maine gems.

George R. Howe has a fine collection of Maine gems and minerals.

It is said people who know, have little trouble in mining gems in this gem belt but don't think you can go out and pick up a handful, or will find them so plentiful that they will cease to be of interest.

Aside from the well known stones that have been found in the Maine gem belt, others new to science have been discovered, minerals which, as far as known, cannot be found anywhere

else in the world. Some of these have been given names that will forever identify them with the State. One of these has been called Hamlinite, after the Hamlins of Maine, who have for over 80 years been closely identified with this industry, about which comparatively very little is known.

Deposits of feldspar are commonly found, and have been worked at different times, and mica is becoming a well known product of the State, mines of which are being profitably worked in a few localities.

The rarer minerals associated with gems called the Lithia minerals, such as lepidoline, spodumene and amblygonite, are found abundantly in several mines and are a fundamental and profitable ore of the very expensive metal lithium, so extensively used in the famous curative Lithia waters. Some of these Lithia minerals and others found in the State contain large percentages of the metal aluminum. Many of the rarer and expensive metallic elements appear in sufficiently large percentages in these and other minerals to be an available source of supply for scientists.

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