

## THOMAS ALVA EDISON, MINERAL COLLECTOR?

by Darryl Powell

When people hear the name “Thomas Edison” they think about the electric light bulb. Thomas Edison didn’t actually invent the light bulb, but he did invent one that was long lasting, practical and inexpensive enough for people to buy and use to light their homes. Thomas Edison actually invented more devices than most people know: he had over 1,000 patents for different inventions. One of his most famous inventions was a machine that he called the phonograph. His phonograph (which literally means “sound writing”) was the first machine that recorded sounds. Because the ability for a machine to record sound seemed almost magical, people called Edison “The Wizard of Menlo Park.”

You may be asking, “What is ‘Menlo Park?’” Menlo Park is a place in Raritan Township in the state of New Jersey where Edison set up the world’s first laboratory that was devoted to studying materials and inventions that could be used in industry. Some people claim that Edison’s Menlo Park laboratory was his most important “invention.” In order to do hundreds of different experiments, Edison filled his laboratory with many different items. In 1887 a newspaper article said that Edison’s laboratory contained *“eight thousand kinds of chemicals, every kind of screw made, every size of needle, every kind of cord or wire, hair of humans, horses, hogs, cows, rabbits goats, minx, camels...silk in every texture, cocoons, various kinds of hoofs, shark’s teeth, deer horns, tortoise shell...cork, resin, varnish and oil, ostrich feathers, a peacock’s tail, jet, amber, rubber, all ores and minerals...”* Yes, Thomas Edison had a very large collection of minerals at his laboratory!

A writer from Edison’s day described his mineral collection this way: *“The shelves on the remainder of the upper gallery and part of those on the first gallery are filled with countless thousands of specimens of ores and minerals of every conceivable kind gathered from all parts of the world, and all tagged and numbered.”* This impressive mineral collection was put together by the famous gemologist and mineral collector George F. Kunz.

Thomas Edison may have had thousands of mineral specimens, but he was not really a mineral collector. He was not really interested in mineral forms or colors or crystallography. He didn’t collect minerals from a specific locality or of a specific group. He didn’t collect minerals because they are beautiful. He paid a great deal of money so he could use the minerals in his various experiments. After his death in 1931 (at the age of 84), Edison’s minerals went to the Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.



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# WHAT IS YOUR MINERAL NAME?

At the time of this writing, the soccer World Cup is taking place in Brazil. Did you know that there is a website which will tell you your "Brazilian soccer nickname"? Another website will help you determine your Kentucky Derby Horse name. Yet another website will help you figure out your Indy 500 driver name. We think it's time for mineral collectors to have a way to determine their official mineral name.

## Here's how it works.

My name is Darryl Powell

Take the **third letter of your first name**. Your first name is any mineral of your choice that begins with the third letter of your first name.

For me, it is "R."

So, I choose Rhodochrosite for the first name of my "mineral name."

Now, take the **second letter of your last name**. This is your middle initial. You can attach another mineral name to it if you want to be creative.

My middle initial then is "O."

The last step is to take the **third letter of your last name**. Your last name is any mineral of your choice that begins with the third letter of your last name. In front of that name, add one of the following prefixes: O', Mc, Mac, d' or de. For me, it is "W" and I choose Willemite for my last name.

Therefore, my mineral name is . . .

wait for it . . .

**Rhodochrosite O. McWillemite**

(Yeah, this whole thing is kind of goofy, but it can be a lot of fun!)

# FIND A MINERAL CLUB NEAR YOU!

One of the very best ways to build a really good mineral collection is to belong to a local mineral club. You will meet wonderful people. They will teach you about minerals, take you digging for minerals, show their collections, trade specimens with you, and help you become a successful mineral collector. In the summer months mineral clubs and societies usually go to local mines and quarries to dig for specimens. In most cases you will not be able to get into mines and quarries unless you are a member of a mineral club or society. Therefore...you need to join a mineral club. You can find the mineral club or society that is closest to you at the following link:

<http://www.amfed.org/region.htm>

On the map (a copy of which is pictured below, used from the AMFED.org website), click the region in which you can find your home state. Then, look through the list to discover the club or clubs nearest your home.



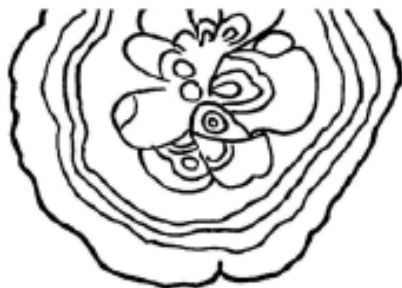
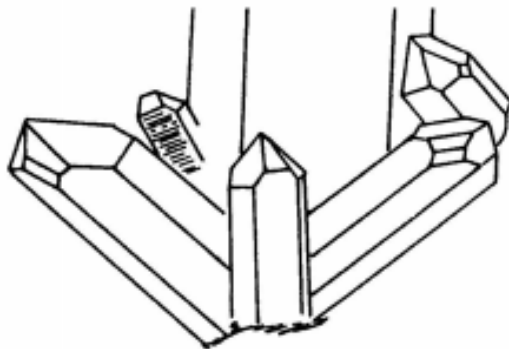
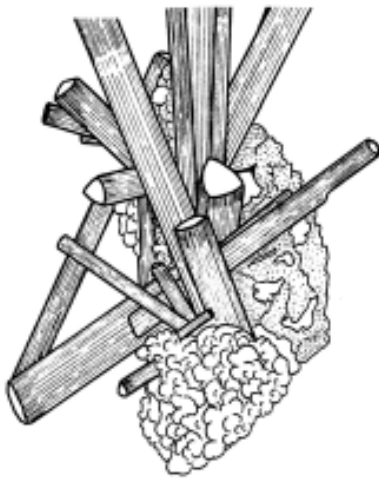
The purpose of the American Federation of Mineralogical Societies:

*To promote popular interest and education in the various Earth Sciences, and in particular the subjects of Geology, Mineralogy, Paleontology, Lapidary and other related subjects, and to sponsor and provide means of coordinating the work and efforts of all persons and groups interested therein; to sponsor and encourage the formation and international development of Societies and Regional Federations and by and through such means to strive toward greater international good will and fellowship.*



# FINISH THE DRAWING

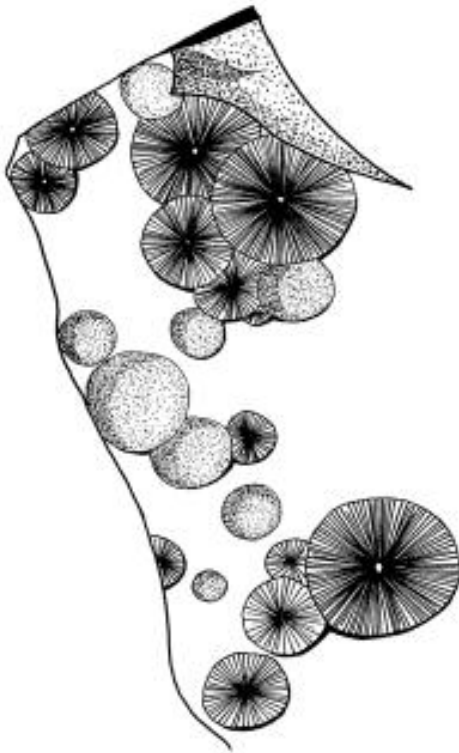
Below are some mineral drawings that are not complete. Your challenge is to finish the mineral drawing. You can finish the crystals the way they might look in nature. Or...you can be creative and finish them any artistic way you wish. It's all up to you!



Above Left: Tourmaline  
Above Center: Quartz  
Above Right: Wire Silver  
Left: Malachite

# FINISH THE DRAWING

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Top: Purple Fluorite on white matrix from Mexico.  
Bottom: Green Wavellite on tan matrix from Arkansas, USA.