

Mineral Spotlight: Vanadinite

This week's mineral is showing off maroon and gold to celebrate the first week of the semester! Vanadinite is a rare vanadate chlorite mineral. Vanadate means it contains an element called vanadium with oxygen (VO_4). The element vanadium can be extracted from vanadinite, and the element's history is quite interesting.

In 1801, Spanish-Mexican mineralogist Andrés Manuel del Río was sent samples of a new mineral from Mexican mines (vanadinite). He believed he had discovered a new element in the mineral, dubbing it "panchromium" for the wide range of colors its compounds could take. To confirm this new element, he sent samples to Europe for analytical testing. But a mistake was made in the analytical lab, and the chemists told him what he had sent was not a new element, but simply chromium. Del Río then retracted his claim, saying he was mistaken (he, of course, had not been).

It would take nearly thirty years for another scientist to rediscover vanadium – this time, a Swedish chemist, Nils Gabriel Sefström. The element was compared with del Río's samples, and they were proved a match. Del Río's name was cleared, and he was finally given the credit for discovering the element, though despite motions to change the element's name to del Río's original name (panchromium), it remained vanadium, the name given by Sefström as a tribute to the Scandinavian goddess of love and beauty. Del Río remained bitter about the mistake of the analytical lab in 1801, having been quoted near the end of his life saying he "could well have been [teaching] at the Polytechnic school in Paris".

This feature was posted on Dice Museum social media by Museum curator Jillian Herlinger on 7/12/2022.

