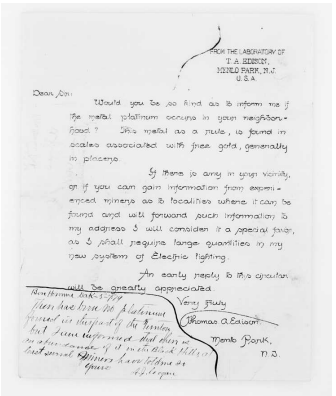
–1734–

Platinum Search Circular


FROM THE LABORATORY OF
T. A. EDISON,
MENLO PARK, N.J.
U.S.A.

Dear Sir:

Would you be so kind as to inform me if the metal platinum occurs in your neighborhood? This metal as a rule, is found in scales associated with free gold, generally in placers.

If there is any in your vicinity, or if you can gain information from experienced miners as to localities where it can be found and will forward such information to my address I will consider it a special favor, as I shall require large quantities in my new system of Electric lighting.

An early reply to this circular will be greatly appreciated.

Very truly

Thomas A. Edison.

Menlo Park, N.J.

MENLO PARK, N.J.[a] [c. May 1, 1879][1]

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ALS (electric pen copy), NjWOE, DF (*TAEM* 50:589; *TAED* D7928G). [a]Place from laboratory handstamp.

1. Although Edison had received by this date letters from two individuals responding to newspaper stories about his need for platinum, this circular letter marks the beginning of his intensive and highly public search for the mineral. He may have been prompted to write it by Doc. 1729, which he would have received at the end of April. The *New York Sun* subsequently reported that he sent approximately 2,000 copies to "Postmasters and other public men in mining regions" around 1 May, enclosing with them specimen cards sprinkled with platinum and iridosmine. Edison wrote the circular in his fine telegraphic hand and had it reproduced with the electric pen; the first extant reply to it, dated 7 May from the Dakota Territory, was addressed to Edison on the copy from which the text of this document is taken. William Ross to TAE, 3 Apr. 1879; Fred Gerhard to TAE, 8 Apr. 1879; A. J. Cogan to TAE, 7 May 1879; all DF (*TAEM* 50:581, 583, 589; *TAED* D7928A, D7928B, D7928H); "Wanted, A Platinum Mine," *New York Sun,* 7 July 1879, Cat. 1241, item 1224, Batchelor (*TAEM* 94:494; *TAED* MBSB21224X).

2. Edison received scores of letters about platinum throughout the late spring and summer, some replying to this circular and others to specific inquiries. On 14 May he instructed Stockton Griffin to "get a box marked Platina & keep all the correspondence etc in it." Many of the incoming letters include Edison's marginal comments, some of them extensive and illustrative of the extent of his search. Marginalia on A. R. C. Selwyn to Edwin Pope, 14 May 1879; DF (*TAEM* 50:593; *TAED* D7928L); for a sample of the replies see the folder "Mining–Platinum Search," DF (*TAEM* 50:580; *TAED* D7928).

Edison, who was familiar with existing sources of platinum (see Doc. 489), made numerous personal inquiries regarding as-yet-undeveloped supplies. He solicited help on 30 April from Wexel & De Gress, a munitions firm operating in Central and South America, and the next day from Edison Electric Light Co. secretary Calvin Goddard. He contacted other acquaintances, including A. E. Foote, a Philadelphia mineral dealer, James Dwight Dana, and George Barker. Barker replied that the amount of platinum produced from known sources "is very limited at least for general use," and cautioned that "An indiscriminate examination for it in all possible rocks, would therefore be a great waste of time." Wexel & De Gress to TAE, 3 May 1879; Goddard to TAE, 2 May 1879; Dana to TAE, 28 May 1879; Barker to TAE, 30 May 1879; all DF (*TAEM* 50:587, 586, 605; 49:252; *TAED* D7928E, D7928D, D7928U, D7903ZEM); TAE to Foote, 26 May 1879, Lbk. 4:358 (*TAEM* 80:80; *TAED* LB004358A).

Somewhat later, Edison contacted state officials concerning geological surveys. In July, after having turned his attention to ferrous black sands found in California and coastal Oregon and Washington (see Doc. 1767), he ordered detailed maps of those states as well as Nevada, Mexico, Canada, and other countries. He also wrote to the U.S. Minister to Russia in St. Petersburg that he was "endeavoring to collect statistics regarding the product of platinum from all parts of the world" and desired answers to four specific questions about the production, price, and export of it in Russia, "which at present is the only market in the world." TAE to G.W. & C.B. Colton & Co., 9 and 15 July 1879, Lbk. 4:456 and 482; TAE to U.S. Minister, Russia, 18 July 1879, Lbk. 5:2 (*TAEM* 80:93, 104,126; *TAED* LB004456, LB004482, LB005002); replies from state

officials and publishers concerning survey maps include Howard Chauncey to TAE, 4 June 1879; Joseph Miller to TAE, 5 June; E. H. Gove to TAE, 5 June; William Strong to TAE, 6 June; Frank Putney to TAE, 6 June; J. A. T. Hull to TAE, 6 June; George Martin to TAE, 6 June; W. E. Woodruff to TAE, 6 June; Bowen & Kingsbury to TAE, 7 June; John Collett to TAE, 7 June; James Galloway to TAE, 9 June; George Drew to TAE, 9 June; James Gaines to TAE, 9 June; A. M. Nelson to TAE, 10 June; John Proctor to TAE, 11 June; and F. P. Thompson to TAE, 11 June 1879; all DF (*TAEM* 50:628, 633–45, 651–52, 656–57, 661, 663–66; *TAED* D7928ZAJ, D7928ZAM, D7928ZAN, D7928ZAN1, D7928ZAO, D7928ZAP, D7928ZAQ, D7928ZAR, D7928ZAS, D7928ZAT, D7928ZAX, D7928ZAY, D7928ZAZ1, D7928ZBD, D7928ZBF, D7928ZBG).