

Science Notes.

Facts About Black Lead Pencils.

It is difficult to determine the exact period in which "black lead" was first utilized as an instrument for writing or drawing, as it has been confused with other mineral bodies to which it bears no relation. The ancients used lead, but the metal was formed into flat plates, and the edges of these plates used to make the mark. If an ornamental design was desired, the transcriber drew parallel lines, and traced their illuminated designs, usually with a hard point but also with soft lead. That lead was known to the ancients is also proven by the fact that it is mentioned in the Book of Job.

During the year 1615 there was a description of the black lead pencil written by Conrad Gesner. He says that pieces of plumbago were fastened in a wooden handle and a mixture of fossil substance, sometimes covered with wood, was used for writing and drawing. About half a century later a very good account of this mineral was given, and it was then used in Italy for drawing and mixed with clay for manufacturing crucibles. We are informed in Beckman's "History of Inventions" that the pencils first used in Italy for drawing were composed of a mixture of lead and tin, nothing more than pewter. This pencil was called a stile. Michael Angelo mentions this stile, and in fact it seems that such pencils were long used in common over the whole continent of Europe. At this period the name Pulmbago or graphite was not in use, but instead the name molybdena or molybdoids, which is now applied to an entirely different mineral.

Graphite or black lead is formed in the primary rocks. In the United States it occurs in felspar and quartz, in Great Britain in greenstone rock and gneiss, and in Norway in quartz. The mine at Borrowdale, Eng., has supplied some of the finest black lead in the world, but the quantity varies, owing to the irregularity with which the mineral occurs.

The Jews were for a while the only manufacturers of pencils. It required great skill to perfect the manufacture, according to the degree of hardness or softness required. Of recent years the manufacture of pencils has increased to such an extent that the price of these articles has decreased proportionately. Graphite and pure clay are combined and used in the manufac-