

1954, Dec.19.

Dear Mr. Pinckney:

I was astounded and delighted to read of your 15 pound iron meteorite recovery. I have a lot of ideas about it; let me recite them and then you can give me your frank reactions.

First, let me say that I feel primarily a pride and sense of accomplishment in your locating this. While you are entitled to the full credit, let me bask in a little satisfaction by feeling that maybe I helped stir you to the realization that meteorites can be found if one will only try. No matter what becomes of it, I'm pleased.

Now the next thing that intrigues me greatly is the possibility of establishing this as an observed iron fall, which are very few. If there are school records available, we can perhaps get the class roster of the year when Mrs. Whitwood got the object, and then it would certainly take no Sherlock Holmes to find a boy whose family had at about that time moved to Arkansas. If the family could be traced, and I believe it can, we can get the story first hand. I am sufficiently intrigued by this to say that I will come to Alabama to help unearth these facts, if necessary, and if we get the meteorite. I have always felt I owe a certain moral obligation to find out everything I can about a meteorite I retrieve.

Now, I have been speaking as tho the meteorite were mine, and I don't want you to feel I am unduly presumptuous in that respect. But I do say that the first and most important order of business is to get a legal title to the object before someone else beats us to it. I appreciate your most generous attitude, and have given the matter full thought. This is my suggested approach.

It would be much better if you would negotiate directly with Mrs. Chitwood than for me to intervene. My suggestion is to offer her either \$75 or \$100, and be prepared to go up to double the amount. This is poor trading in a way, but I find you have to use about that approach. Nininger frequently paid only a dollar a pound for his pre-war field finds, but they were mostly old stones. In rarer cases of small or unusual fresh stones, I know of his going to \$7 a pound or even 50¢ to \$1.00 an ounce for tiny pieces of a few ounces.

- Since the war, considering inflation, I have often paid up to \$2 a pound for even unattractive old stony meteorites. I know the Smithsonian has often gone on a \$2 to \$5 a pound basis. Of course you can't go by a per pound price always; in the case of a great big rock, like the Norton, Kansas, fall of some 2,200 pounds, a rare desirable meteorite brought only about \$2,600 or a little over \$1 a pound. However, a fresh stone in east Texas of only 5 pounds, beautifully preserved, brought \$100 from the Smithsonian six years after it fell.

If you think it would not irritate Mrs. Chitwood, you can point out that we are taking a little chance on the title. She holds it only by gift or abandonment, and if we eventually run down the family or the land owner, might conceivably have to buy some one else off. But don't go into this if she is co-operative. In other words, the thing to do is to buy the meteorite--buy if for some kind of a price, but buy it and as soon as possible. I will send a cashier's check upon receipt of a letter or wire from you.

Now, I suggest this procedure if all the above is agreeable to you and we get it. I will have you ship it at my expense to Dr. E.H. Henderson of the U. S. National Museum. Your diamond saw would not cut it; the diamonds lodge in the iron and cut back on the saw disk, stripping it. I would get him to cut several slices; they can experiment with a little grinding and etching at one corner to get a desirable orientation for the cutting. I would make a deal with him to let them keep a slice so the fall would be represented in our National Museum. (Frankly, I expect to try to trade him out of a slice of some other iron.) I would have him send a slice to you personally. Then if you wish I would have a slice given to the school, tho here I have a still different suggestion.

I find local schools do not appreciate a meteorite, and there is really no connection in this case since it did not fall in Alabama. I would rather give them a typical collection of three moderate sized objects in their natural fall state: an iron, an old stone and a fresh stone. These would be more truly educational.

I shall anxiously await hearing from you. If you think it advisable or have any doubt about the object being a meteorite--it sounds exactly like one-- you can see if an arrangement can be made to ship it to me for inspection. But I hate that delay, and if you're fairly sure, I'd buy it. That's the important thing to do now.

Sincerely,