

*National Museum of Natural History · Smithsonian Institution*

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20560 • TEL. 202-628-1810

May 25, 1971

AIRMAIL

Mr. Oscar E. Monnig  
29 Chelsea Drive  
Fort Worth, Texas 76134

Dear Oscar:

In reply to your strong appeal in your letter dated May 22, I shall make the following final comments which you will find of real interest:

This Museum is a very large place as you know and has countless catalogued specimens, they are classified and put away in drawers according to a system, which for a long time has proven to be a good one. So, when your first letter arrived about the missing Tishomingo specimen I looked where the meteorite should have been placed (in the drawers with the collection and on the display). I even searched the drawer above and below thinking that it could have been placed in the wrong drawer, but it was not to be found.

With the aid of Mrs Scott, we searched the records of loans and all we could find was the one case where it was loaned and returned. I even searched the photographic files thinking that a picture of the specimen may have been made which would make it easier to locate, but the darn thing was never photographed as a specimen. Thus, I again wrote you it was not here.

Perhaps you are familiar enough with our setup to recall that in the room where the meteorites are kept there is a glass wall case. This large case is both locked and lighted. There on a shelf, at my eye level, I saw two trays (but not the specimens in the trays), in which I found two specimens, one weighing 1390 gms., the other 1171 gms. and under both specimens were labels on which was written, in my hand writing, "Monnig's sample". I was the one who wanted to find a place where nobody going through the collection would find these and get permission from somebody who happened to be handy, to cut off a piece for his own use. Then to make the security even better, I forgot the entire incident completely.



Oscar, the gold in Fort Knox is well locked up and safe against petty thieves yet another part of the Federal Government has managed to let foreign governments get claims on more gold than there is in Fort Knox. So all the protection they built around that gold did not save it. Thus, the gold in Fort Knox is far less secure than a meteorite sample, my thought was only to put it away where it would be preserved against humidity, dust and the covetous eye of visiting curators and investigators. It was labeled for all to read that it was the Tishomingo sample and the property of Monnig. Then, when I let it slip from my mind and there were no official papers about it, the security of the specimen increased appreciably.

Somehow I feel that as long as you live, which I hope will be for many scores of years, you will find occasions to tell this yarn. Also I have a feeling that you will find places to tell this where it will be appreciated. I realize I have provided you with supporting evidence that it was not here, but thanks to your persistence, for which you get a "cum laud" grade, this Tishomingo sample is about to start home to Texas and to you.

Although I have seen many meteorites in various collections that I would have loved to get for this collection, thus far I have never done any "shop lifting". It seems odd that I came darn near doing just that from someone I have known for so long and have had such good relations with. Oscar, I sort of feel that as a merchant you know how to deal with shop lifters.

My Lord, I don't know how to close this letter. I shall stop and personally pack the samples for shipment to you. Since there are two specimens (and so valuable) it might be best to pack them in separate packages and let them go in different mailings, anyway this is what I am going to do right now.


I know they are your samples and you are proposing to loan them to the lad in Oklahoma, but I still feel that material of this quality truly belongs in the National Collection. So Oscar since you have more of this meteorite than any two men can lift, I ask you with a very red face to show your Texas sized statue and present one to the Smithsonian.

I am glad to become an honest man, and it troubles me to think I would have said I was honest two weeks ago - but you knew better.

Since you will be receiving two packages I am enclosing two sets of shipping papers, you know to mail the white copies back to us for our records - and please - don't write me off as totally impossible.

Best of luck to you.

Cordially yours,

  
E. P. Henderson  
Curator Emeritus  
Division of Meteorites

Enclosures