

1950, May 8.

Dr. E. P. Henderson,  
U. S. National Museum,  
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Dr. Henderson:

You may think I have repeatedly side-stepped your query about the history and exact locale of our Harriman iron, but the acquisition of it was a hectic and involved affair which I have just now found <sup>time</sup> to dig thru an old file and review.

Mr. Sterling Bunch, one of the original "Texas Observers", our little local group of amateur astronomers back in the '20's and '30's, was working for the U. S. Weather Bureau, stationed at Knoxville, where he became friendly with various persons at the University of Tennessee thru a wide interest in matters scientific which he possessed. I had repeatedly urged him to try to get on the trail of some meteorites in that region, and he found that Prof. H. C. Amick of the University mentioned had tested material from a "splinter" shaped mass said to be of about 75 pounds weight, which Amick definitely identified as a meteorite. Bunch got this information in the spring of 1933 and Amick was said to have made the test about two years before, from which we may date the find as prior to 1931. I believe that Amick understood W. F. Gallaher of Wheat, Tenn., was the owner, but he asked an unreasonable price for it. My original card states "three letters to Gallaher unanswered", but I don't know whether I wrote these, or whether Bunch wrote them, or whether Amick wrote them--I suspect the last.

I finally got Bunch to make his first move towards getting the meteorite on May 25, 1935, when he went to Wheat and found Gallaher, who turned out not to be the owner. Gallaher sent them 10 miles on down the road from Wheat to Harriman to a Dr. Cross, Sr. He located some other parties for Bunch. "The finder of the meteorite is a guard at Petros, state prison farm, and he lives near Harriman. The name of the meteorite will have to be changed to the Harriman iron, to be correct."

"We found our parties at Harriman, all but the real owner. It's a partnership affair. The man who found it was working for a tenant. He took it to the tenant farmer who in turn took it to the owner of the land. They didn't know just where they stood nor the value of the thing, so they decided to incorporate. A fourth man got in on the deal somehow..but I could tell from the faint leers on the faces of the two I talked

to that they figured on beating this fourth man out of his share."

"Anyway, after having reposed in the vault of the local bank and acted as doorstop for the past two years, some fellow wanted to take it to Chattanooga to show off down there and that's where it is now. They promised to have it back and in Knoxville next week."

"Besides Amick's test, they had sent small samples to Field Museum and to the Smithsonian(sic!) . All agree it is an iron meteorite."

The rest of Bunch's original report is mainly on the question of price, which had these fellows much worried. He suggested \$1 a pound. He told me he would probably make the payment to S. H. Hembree, A. R. Davis, or R. M. Dodd, but neglected to tell me which was which, so that I don't know which was finder, which the tenant, which the owner, or who the fourth man was. He did state that "one of these old fellows out there is a rock collector and says he knows where he can get another meteorite or two..." This is significant to me because I think it may refer to Davis. I note you say in your letter of August 30, 1948 that your Harriman specimen originally came from a "Mr. Davis of Harriman", and I judge there is a good chance that these are identical.

From this point on, the meteorite chase became an involved intrigue and price battle. Most of the following doesn't concern the historical record, but I can't resist typing a resume because I know you'll enjoy it. On May 31, a holiday, Bunch phoned Davis and it was agreed that Bunch should go to Chattanooga to see one John Parks with the City Board of Education about the meteorite. It seems from this and later developments that definitely Davis and probably Dodd were the ones who let the meteorite go to Chattanooga, and I am guessing from this that Davis was not the original finder nor the tenant farmer. At any rate, Bunch got an appointment with the Mr. Parks by phone, but when he got to Chattanooga Parks politely insisted he didn't know anything about the meteorite or Davis! Bunch wired this distressing turn to Davis and waited over 3 hours for an answer that didn't come till next day: "Have Parks take you to E. L. Kenyon who has meteorite."

That did no good, for by that time Bunch was back at work in Knoxville and couldn't leave. He wrote a protest to Davis, asking for the meteorite and definite proof of ownership to be brought to Knoxville. The following Saturday, a Dr. Cross, Jr., son of the Dr. Cross at Harriman, called on Bunch as a sort of friendly emissary with the message that the group now had an offer of \$150 for the meteorite. This was contrary to all previous representations that they had never had any offer on it! Bunch chiefly asked to see the meteorite and for the refusal of it.

A month elapsed and Bunch had another visit from the young Dr. Cross telling him on behalf of his father, the elder Dr. Cross, to lay low for a while--that they were trying to get the meteorite back from Chattanooga. Time dragged on till Aug. 22, when Cross, Sr., sent word by his son that they had located the meteorite in Chattanooga and were going to get an attorney to sue for possession of it. More time elapsed and nothing developed; I was all along directing the show from the background. I had written Gallaher at least once, and Bunch had told him of our connection, but I don't think any one else ever knew of the Texas relationship and I stayed out of direct negotiations for fear of further complicating the mess.

Finally, in October, I told Bunch to push the thing to a conclusion, as I feared he was to be transferred. He phoned Dr. Cross, Sr., and Cross finally told him that Cross and Hembree were going to sue Davis and Dodd for letting the meteorite get away from them, but had not done so. It seems that Hembree had owed Cross money and had more or less given him an assignment of his interest in the meteorite. At this time Cross told Bunch that Hembree was the actual finder of the iron, but Bunch writes that he had previously understood Hembree was the land owner. Bunch at this point apologizes profusely for various contradictions in his accounts, saying that the parties involved gave him different details each time so that he could not help but be confused. Cross at this time claimed they hadn't actually located the meteorite. Bunch told Cross he was planning a trip to Chattanooga; I had instructed him to cut the Gordian knot and go down there to try to get the meteorite.

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Bunch spent a day at Chattanooga and/time we got an amateur astronomer friend of ours there, an architect and old citizen of the town, to "front" for us and help. This Mr. Clarence Jones got Parks on the phone, without mentioning Bunch, and Parks admitted freely that he had once been to Harriman with Kenyon when Kenyon got the meteorite, but disclaimed any further knowledge or interest except that Kenyon had the meteorite and it was for sale. He gave them information on Kenyon's office and home, but after an entire afternoon and part of the next morning spent in an effort to find Kenyon, Bunch had to return to Knoxville. That night near midnight he had a wire from Kenyon asking him to call! Next day he wired me Kenyon wanted \$160 and suggested I let Jones negotiate with Kenyon. Poor Bunch thus retired from the matter and never saw the meteorite until he visited me several years later!

Jones got the price down to \$125 for me but at that time he had never even seen the meteorite or tested it, so it was arranged that it be sent to me express collect for that sum with the privilege of examination. It arrived here in a burlap sack with a weight tag of 67 pounds on Oct. 24, 1935. I had had little experience with meteorites but had enough confidence in this article to pay out my money at once-- and \$125 wasn't hay in 1935! Just two days before it got here I had my only direct contact with the parties in the form of a wire from Kenyon wanting confirmation of the deal.

You will now understand why I have so little precise history on the matter and why it has been awkward if not embarrassing to try to write or go back to Harriman in an effort to get such information. However, I have today addressed some letters to some of the parties named, and I will try to get the exact location of the find for you. Could you hold up publication a few weeks to see what I can accomplish in this direction?

If I contact the Mr. Davis in question, I'll try to see if he is the same one your specimen comes from. Meanwhile, have you any way of checking their statement that a sample of "our" Harriman was once sent to you for a test?

Yours sincerely,