

Meteorite Discovered in Valley Is Presented to Pan Am College

Stone Found On Wade Farm Near La Villa

By MRS. J. R. WADE
LA VILLA, May 10 — Possibly the first meteorite to be found in the Valley was discovered recently near La Villa.

Last year, while cultivating a field of cotton on land of the J. R. Wade Farms, Inc., about 3 miles southeast of La Villa, one of the farm employes, Alfonso Robles, plowed up what he supposed to be an ordinary stone which he placed on his tractor and carried to the end of the row. There he placed it on the top bank of a drainage ditch.

Later he showed it to the farm foreman, Carlos Gonzalez, and possibly one or two other farm workers, but none suspected anything other than that they plowed up an ordinary stone. They did think it was an extremely heavy one. Time passed with the stone lying almost in plain view and the owners and employes passed by dozens of times without noticing it.

Recently, Robles was sent to the same field to plant seed. Gonzalez and Elmo Wade, the farm manager, while assisting Robles in getting his job started, "rediscovered" the stone. Young Wade parked his car near it and almost stepped on it when he got out.

Brought to Headquarters

He stopped to examine it more closely and noticed that it seemed far too heavy for its size. He and Gonzalez brought it to the farm headquarters where young Wade's mother, Mrs. J. R. Wade Sr. resides. They unloaded it near one of the barns, intending to use it for a door stop and forgot the matter until the next day. As soon as Elmo told his mother about the stone they weighed it, and found it tipped the scales at 43½ pounds.

The stone is 11½ inches long, and has a circumference of 26 inches at its widest point. It is oval with one flat end.

Both suspected that it might be a meteorite. Mrs. Wade had seen some once in a museum in Mexico City while vacationing with her husband, the late J. R. Wade Sr.

Opinion Sought

Knowing of the observatory at Pan American college at Edinburg, and of the outstanding work of Dr. J. Dell Elliott in science, Mrs. Wade immediately called the college to ask their opinion. Dr. Elliott, director of science and mathematics, and Paul R. Engle, instructor of astronomy, tentatively identified the "rock" as being a meteorite. As soon as possible, Oscar Monnig of Fort Worth confirmed the identification after he came to the Valley. He is listed as one of the four outstanding meteorite experts in the United States, having been doing this type of work for over 30 years.

It is now fairly well agreed that meteorites originate in the space between the planets Mars and Jupiter. There are two major theories about how they are formed.

Several Theories

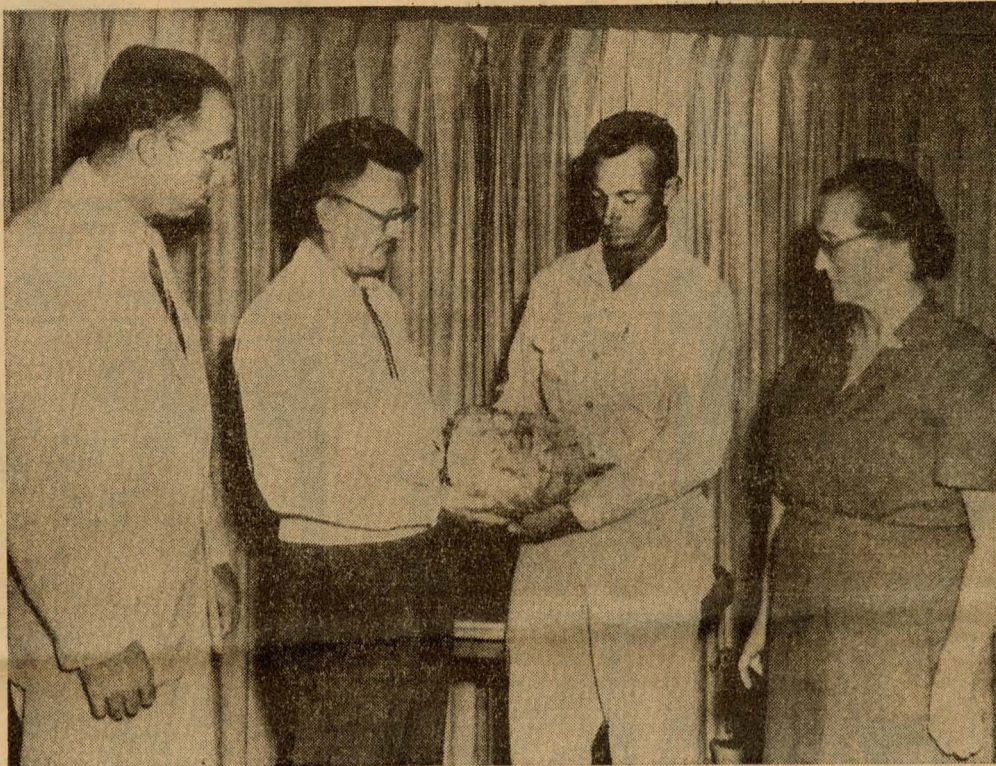
One theory is that a "Lost Planet" broke up to form meteorites and asteroids — small planets with orbits between Mars and Jupiter. The other is that meteorites and asteroids are products of collisions between a number of smaller bodies.

Investigators in several sciences — astronomy, chemistry, geology, metallurgy, and physics — study meteorites for information on conditions which existed at the time meteorites were made, changes since that time and the make-up of objects outside the world's realm.

Since the meteorites are thought to be the ancient materials of other planets — perhaps similar to our own — scientists also study them to learn about the interior of this planet. Those who have made a study of this claim that before entering our atmosphere, a meteorite is a non-luminous object in space. Occasionally one of these dark objects makes a spectacular display when it collides with the earth's atmosphere. The meteorites either explode, pass on through the atmosphere and vanish or fall to the earth, as was the case of the one found here in the Rio Grande Valley.

Old Meteorite

As to the age of the meteorite,



GIFT TO COLLEGE — A meteorite, possibly the first ever found in the Valley, was discovered recently in the Wade farm near La Villa and has been presented to Pan American college, Edinburg. Shown here presenting the meteorite are Mrs. J. R. Wade Sr. (right) and her son Elmo Wade (holding the stone). Accepting it for the college are Paul Engle (left) and Dr. J. Dell Elliott.

This is an old meteorite, as indicated by the amount of lime deposit on the outside and the amount of oxidation of the iron by the rust color. The natural color of a meteorite is black. It could even have fallen as much as a hundred years or more previous to the time it was discovered.

However the rapidity with which the above named effects could be produced on a freshly fallen meteorite by alkaline salts and frequent irrigations with water high in salt content is unknown. The field where the meteorite was found has been in cultivation approximately 15 years. The field is entirely free from surface stones — in fact none of the 985 acres owned by the farm in the north floodway has any surface stones. This particular field is made up mostly of sand and sandy loam.

Buried Many Years

About a year before the meteorite was plowed up this field was subsoiled to a depth of almost two feet. From the different markings on the meteorite it would appear they were made by a hard or sharp implement such as a chisel point. These markings also furnish adequate proof that the meteorite had been deeply buried in the ground for many years but finally in the process of subsoiling the land (the third time over a period of 8 years) the sharp chisel points loosened the meteorite.

All of the many operations involved in growing cotton — disking, light chiseling, laying up rows, planting and cultivating could have brought the meteorite near enough to the surface to be plowed out with a cultivator. It is entirely possible that it could have been struck many times with the heavy machinery without being noticed by the tractor drivers.

Many Found in Texas

This newly discovered meteorite — one of the three newest to be found in Texas — now brings the total number of meteorite locations in the state to over 80. Texas has the largest number of meteorite locations of any state in the United States, according to statistics on meteorites.

This one, however, is the first reported south of San Antonio according to Mr. Monnig.

The specimen, which is the stony type of meteorite, has been officially designated as the "La Villa Meteorite of Hidalgo County, Texas" by Mr. Monnig.

Given to College

The Wade family, consisting of Mrs. J. R. Wade Sr., La Villa; Howard of Mercedes; Mrs. Ben F. Freasier, Lubbock; J. R. Wade Jr., Mercedes; Mrs. Martin Gaiser, Harlingen; Elmo of Mercedes; and Mrs. Bob Free, Savannah, Ga., and their respective families, have presented the meteorite to Pan American college where it can be used for educational purposes. Dr. Elliott and Mr. Engle were chosen by the donors to accept the gift on behalf of the college. It will be placed on public display at Pan American college.

Dr. Elliott, in accepting the gift for the college, stated that he hopes they will be able to acquire a collection of meteorites for the college. If anyone in the Valley thinks he might have found or owns a stone that could be a meteorite, he is urged to examine the surfaces of the stone and compare it with surrounding stones, especially as to weight. Meteorites are much heavier than stones of comparable size. If the specimen passes these tests the owner or finder is urged to contact Dr. Elliott or Mr. Engle of Pan American college.

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