SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20560

January 6, 1969

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

Dear Oscar:

Enjoyed your letter of December 18 addressed to the apartment. You were correct in assuming that the bobbing red blob was a rubber raft. There were two rubber boats in the party and we followed each other over the rapids so each could get a picture of a boat going through the "white water". We saw no meteorites but since Carlton Moore, Peter Busick, Bob Dietz and Walter Nichiporuk were in the party, we occasionally mentioned meteorites.

The Bells meteorite is taking on some real interest and it seems that the material we collected, and I accessioned as a meteorite, is terrestrial material.

I think I had better review the events related to our find in hopes we can determine what went wrong. I do not recall the day of the month we made the search, but it was the day of Rayburn's funeral. We saw that from the field. The fireball had been observed several days earlier, by perhaps 2 weeks, and our search followed a very heavy rain which flooded the country. I do not recall the name given to that storm.

I think you searched some of the areas a few days prior to that rain and got some black pieces, assumed to be the meteorite. It is possible that I saw your samples before going into the field but I did not remember seeing them until after the day in the field. Anyway, I recall that we were looking for a carbonaceous chondrite. We both agreed that the best procedure was to concentrate on the areas in the field which were essentially free from grass, because the dark material would be more conspicuous.

We walked over a number of fields that day and I feel confident that neither of us would have overlooked a meteorite, even if we were searching for a black one. We found our sample in or on a private lane leading in from the main highway to a farm house. The black material was in bits and pieces and confined to a rather small area, think it covered less than 1/3 or 1/2 the width of the road. It was scattered in a fashion similar to what a poorly consolidated meteorite would form on impact. Either prior to finding this stuff or just after, we talked with the lady whose teen age children said they found some dark specimens after the fireball was reported and they had looked at the pieces and had thrown them away. We asked them which way they tossed the pieces and I think we even found a small rock and had them toss it away to estimate how far the specimen might go from where they stood. I recall that part of the field on the south side of the land leading into the farm house had been plowed since they found the specimen.

We made this search about the time people began to talk about the fact that carbonaceous chondrites were frequently rather strongly magnetic. So it is possible some of the material we collected could have magnetite in it since we used a pocket magnet to gather it up. Hence we got terrestrial magnetite if any was present on that farm lane. Our find was made rather late in the day but we did make one more stop before returning to Fort Worth. The lady gave us instructions about another house, we drove over and talked with them but we found nothing there. I think I had dinner at your house that evening and also that we compared the newly collected material with what you had, but this comparison was not a critical examination. The two batches looked similar and we assumed all the differences were due to the fact my sample was collected after the rain and it was broken when it fell on the road. Am I correct in the next point? I have a recollection that you found your sample of the Bells was magnetic when you first obtained it. This raises the possibility that all the samples (the one you have, ours and the one in the American Museum which Mason collected) were gathered more or less with the same techniques. One thing that may or may not be important, if this black material we have is terrestrial, it must be rare, because there certainly was little of this in the areas we searched.

Now it is important that we relocated the teacher (?)who I recall had found a few pieces of the Bells prior to the storm and desired to retain it to show his students what a meteorite is like. If he selected the wrong thing, one mistake may be that we were too eager to give up the search of the area where the observers data indicated the end point of the fall occurred. We all explained that this carbonaceous chondrite broke up high above the earth, and high altitude winds caused the small pieces to be drifted to one side. Don't you agree that somebody should search the area where the material was to have fallen? This may be difficult to relocate. Who has the observations of the people who saw that fire ball? I hope that this investigation will establish that there is some real meteoritic material in what is now called the Bells meteorite.

I want to close this letter with a note that I am sure you will enjoy. Not too long ago we were out and there was present a couple with a small child. I recall that she spoke with a slight accent, like a person from the south, and I asked her where she was from, she mentioned Fort Worth. Then I said - "Tell me one thing that Fort Worth has that we don't have better examples of in this area". She brightened up and said, "You don't have a Monnig store up here, oh how I miss shopping in that store".

I asked her if she was on the store's payrole and she said no, but once you have shopped there no other store is any good. Boy oh boy, someone did a good job on selling this lady.

I will be interested in the outcome of the new investigation.

Cordially yours,

Ed /RSC

E. P. Henderson
Curator Emeritus
Division of Meteorites

Mr. Monnig:
Ed asked me to send this out for him. He is at the Lunar Meeting in Houston.

Roy Clarke