

# Marbles From The Sky

Chips From the Pocahontas Meteorite Proved Virtually Indestructible Taws, and Became Popular After One Thoughtful Player Tried Them Out.

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By Tom Shiras.

Early one July night, in 1859, the residents of Pocahontas observed a bright light in the night sky, accompanied by explosions like thunder or heavy cannonading. It was approaching swiftly, in a wide arc. Some thought it might be a tornado, whirling high in the air, accompanied by its attendant electricity; others held that it was a meteorite, while others, saying that it was too large for a meteorite, held to the opinion that it was a falling star or planet approaching the earth. As it came closer it became larger and threw the town into a panic, for it appeared as though some heavenly body was about to collide with and destroy the earth, or at least that part on which they lived.

Drawing nearer, the great exploding fire ball from the skies lighted up the Black river, the bottoms and the surrounding hills with a dazzling brilliancy, much brighter than the noonday sunlight. It was an eerie light, like none in the town had ever seen before. It sent people scurrying for cellars and other places of safety. It cut down through the town toward the earth like a comet, with loud hissing noises. Those who were watching the phenomenon heard a tremendous thud, like a gigantic cannon ball striking the earth. Darkness enveloped the town again, there was a peculiar sulphuric smell in the air, and all was quiet.

This is about the substance of the story that Sam Brown, one of the first residents of Pocahontas, and a Confederate soldier, told A. H. Keith, now of Pocahontas, when the latter moved there in his boyhood. It is the story of probably the largest meteorite that ever fell in north Arkansas, and it is not hard to believe, for a huge piece of it, weighing at least 1,000 pounds, still is lying within a few feet of where it fell, a short distance from the front door of the Pocahontas Grocer Company, on the bank of Black river. It wasn't the bank of the Black river then, but the bank of a lake, formed from an old channel of the river, into which the river has moved back.

Mr. Keith is 78. He was about eight when he first saw the meteorite and heard Sam Brown's story. Mr. Brown lived only a few hundred feet from where the monster from the skies buried itself in the alluvial soil of the lake's bank, the next day, with other residents, of the town, he started to dig it up. They struck the top part of the huge stone about three feet from the surface and it took them several days to get to the bottom of it and get it in shape to be lifted out. It was removed with the assistance of several yoke of oxen and has been lying close to where it was snaked out, for 78 years.

Many years later relatives of Mr. Keith erected a flour and grist mill on the site where the big meteorite fell. The big stone was in the way of construction. It was so heavy, that rather than move it, they built the front porch of the mill over it. The mill building has been gone for years, but the meteorite remains where it was put when removed from the ground.

Mr. Keith said the meteorite, when he first saw it, 70 years ago, was about nine feet long, tapering to one end, and three feet in diameter in the thickest place. At that time it must have weighed somewhere near two tons. Samples have been continually chipped from it, reducing its size about two-thirds. It is now about three feet in diameter in the shape of a rough, irregular ball.

Two kinds of meteorites are known to science. One metallic, has an iron base; the other, stone, has a silicon base. Silicon is a dark, nut brown elementary substance, resembling crystallized sandstone, of close texture, with no metallic luster. The Pocahontas meteorite is of this type, and a light brown or tan color. The exterior color has probably been changed by the ravages



Mr. Keith standing beside all that remains of Pocahontas meteorite

of the elements. The material is a very fine abrasive. The writer sharpened his knife on it to a razor edge with a few strokes. It is heavy, probably twice as heavy as limestone, and its great weight has probably saved it from being carried away.

The history of the meteorite since it fell is fully as interesting as its fall. It has furnished many specimens for private mineral collections, as well as for other purposes. Cletus Price, bookkeeper for the Pocahontas Grocer Company, says that every few days someone comes down and knocks a chip off it with a chisel. Its irregular ball shape has been caused by chipping. Corners are easier to knock a chip from than its smooth surface. Hundreds of persons have looked upon this stone with greedy eyes, thinking that it contained gold or other precious metals, but they have been disappointed. It is said that some assays of the meteorite have shown small values in gold, but nothing of commercial value. This, however, is rather doubtful, for the reason that hundreds of samples taken from both the metallic and stone type meteorites have been analyzed in the hope of finding sudden riches, but no gold or other precious metals have been found and no new elements. So if you find a meteorite and believe that it contains hidden values of great worth, don't waste your money on an analysis, for you will find nothing that has not been found before.

Mineral elements in meteorites are lithium, antimony, iron, magnesium, silicon, oxygen, nickel, cobalt, chromium, manganese, titanium, tin, copper, aluminum, potassium, sodium, calcium, arsenic, phosphorous, nitrogen, sulphur, chlorine, carbon and hydrogen. Some chemists add a few more derivatives from the above list, but no gold, silver or diamonds. A nice assortment of elements for a heavy chemical business or a smelter, but nothing that a man could sell to the United States mint for enough cash to encourage him

to go into meteorite collecting as a steady business.

Material from this huge rock has played its part in one of the greatest recreational games in the nation. Early day Pocahontas marble players, who played the game when it was a popular pastime with adults, say that many marbles have been made from pieces chipped from it.

The favorite marble ground in Pocahontas during the adult marble days was next to a stone wall in the courtyard. Marbles used for taws sometimes would break when shot hard against this wall. One player knowing of the extreme hardness of the meteorite, took a hammer and chisel, knocked off a corner, took it to the town marble cutter and had him shape a taw from it. He had the one taw in town that would take any kind of punishment. After that the marble cutter was kept busy until every marble player in town, who could afford it, was supplied with one. Mr. Keith said that he believed that some of these old meteorite marbles still are in existence, but the writer could not locate them.

There was some talk recently of a Missouri college wanting the meteorite for its museum. It should not be taken from the state, but should be preserved in some museum in Arkansas, or placed on exhibition in the courthouse at Pocahontas.