

# THE MACOVICH COLLECTION

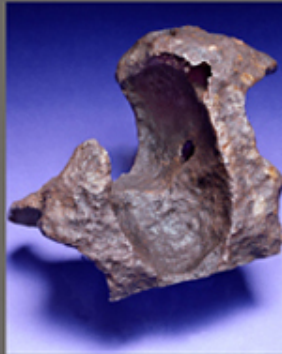
The largest and most celebrated collection of aesthetic iron meteorites in the world

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LOT 51





### **Willamette Meteorite – Crown Section of the Most Famous Meteorite in the World**

*Iron, medium octahedrite; shocked and recrystallized  
Clackamas County, Oregon*

The sale of the crown section of the world's most famous meteorite transcends meteorites and provides the rarest of collecting opportunities: the ability to acquire a conspicuously missing portion of a centerpiece exhibit at a world-renowned museum.

The Willamette meteorite is the largest meteorite recovered in North America. As it was discovered at the surface of Oregon woods, it is believed the meteorite fell in Canada and was deposited in Oregon by glaciers or floods during the last Ice Age. According to Clackamas Indian tradition, however, the meteorite called "Tomanowos," or "Heavenly Visitor," was delivered from the Moon to the Clackamas, and healed and empowered the Native American community in the Willamette Valley since the beginning of time. The Willamette meteorite was "discovered" in 1902 when a miner named Ellis Hughes noticed the meteorite on property adjacent to his own, which belonged to Oregon Iron & Steel. Seeing an opportunity for profits, Hughes ingeniously moved the meteorite onto a wagon, and using a horse, cables and capstan Hughes moved the 15.5 ton mass of nickel-iron over a period of months onto his land—whereupon he charged the curious a nominal fee to view it.

On October 24, 1903 the *Portland Oregonian* reported the discovery of the meteorite and the crowds on Hughes' front yard swelled. Unfortunately for Hughes, one of his customers—an attorney from Oregon Iron & Steel—noticed the path leading from the meteorite to his employer's land. The company subsequently sued for and, after several court cases, won possession. The meteorite was exhibited at the 1905 World's Fair in Portland, Oregon where it was seen by more than one million attendees. Among the viewers was Dr. Henry Ward, the founder of Ward Scientifics, who provided the first scientific abstract on the meteorite. (An original copy of the 1907 Ward Catalog featuring the Willamette meteorite on its cover is included in this offering.) While the final resting place of the meteorite in Oregon was being debated among civic leaders, Oregon Iron and Steel sold the meteorite to Mrs. William E. Dodge, who then gifted the meteorite to the American Museum of Natural History.

The Willamette meteorite has been on display at the Museum for 99 years—and its tenure has not been a quiet one. It has been a centerpiece in two major exhibit halls and has been seen or touched by an estimated 50 million people. There have also been two additional custody disputes. In 1990, tens of thousands of schoolchildren signed petitions to have the meteorite returned to Oregon. A bill was proposed in support of the schoolchildren's ambitions in the U.S. Senate and an Oregon congressman advanced the notion of withholding federal funding earmarked for the museum until the meteorite was returned. A concerted effort was made to convince the childrens' mentors to discontinue their effort—and the childrens' campaign was suddenly dropped.

In 1999, a coalition of tribes of Oregonian Native Americans, The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, filed a claim to have the meteorite returned to Oregon by invoking the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)—typically used to retrieve burial remains and crafted artifacts. In response to the Grand Ronde's invocation of NAGPRA, the museum filed a lawsuit in federal court in which the Grand Ronde's claims were contested. The parties eventually settled out-of-court and requested a declaratory judgment that the meteorite was museum property.

The Willamette meteorite remains the centerpiece of the Rose Center where there is now signage indicating the meteorite's spiritual connection to the Grand Ronde's predecessors. There is also an agreement it can never again be cut.

The crown section offered here in a custom pedestal was removed from the meteorite in 1997 to complete an exchange between the Museum and the Macovich Collection, for which the Museum received an exotic piece of Mars. The specimen is characterized by two swooping flanges, one of which contains a naturally formed hole, which curve and meet above the specimen's cut surface. Two large *troilite* (iron sulfide) inclusions further punctuate this highly aesthetic end piece. Once removed, this segment was prepared and polished in the old fashioned institutional manner in which the outermost edge of the interior face is highly polished, providing a "frame" around the sparkling crystalline matrix.

While there has been media uproar regarding the supposed "defacing" of the meteorite, such claims are unfounded. As indicated in the *Introduction* of this auction, when a single meteorite is recovered and there are no additional specimens from the same event, the meteorite necessarily undergoes subdivision by scientists for analysis. If one looks closely at the mass on exhibition at the museum, the viewer will note that other specimens have been removed of which only some of the material is accounted for today. Science was again served when this meteorite was cut. The curator of the Macovich Collection, Darryl Pitt, noticed unusual bubbling at the margin of one of the sulfide inclusions after the meteorite was polished and contacted iron meteorites expert Dr. John Wasson of UCLA, who wrote in part, "These bubbles are fascinating. We cannot remember having seen angular FeS fragments entrained into a eutectic melt before."

This is unquestionably the most important meteorite specimen in a private collection--and as a prominent section of a centerpiece museum exhibit, it presents the rarest of collecting opportunities.

*246 x 279 x 158mm (9.5 x 11 x 6.25in and 13.399 kilos (29.5 pounds)*

*Estimate: \$1,100,000 - 1,300,000*

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For more information please contact:  
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