

Hoffman's Meteorite, 1955

In 1955, Henry J. Hoffman of Egremont, gave a "meteorite" to the Southern Berkshire Regional School District. The district had adopted a five-point star, representing the towns of Alford, Egremont, Monterey, New Marlborough, and Sheffield, and the five-star constellation Auriga came to be part of the symbolism. Thus, a meteorite on the school premises must have seemed appropriate.

How does one determine that a rock or boulder is a meteorite? Major indicators are as follows: (1) a true meteorite will be very dense and heavy, (2) a magnet will stick to more than 99% of meteorites, (3) the meteorite will likely have something of a burned look, (4) it will not have sharp edges, and (5) a "window" on the meteorite, created by an abrasive tool, will likely show flecks of metal. The problem with these criteria is that some earth rocks (probably less than 1%) might have one or more of these qualities. The best bet for authenticating a meteorite is to have a specialized geologist check it out.

Henry Hoffman lived on Rt. 41 (Undermountain Road) in Egremont in 1955. He paid property taxes in Egremont between 1952 and 1964. Then from 1965 through 1976, he lived on Salisbury Road in Sheffield. He and his wife, Agnes, had an adopted daughter, Linda, who attended Mount Everett Regional School, was a good student, and graduated in 1964. Agnes died in 1973 and Henry moved from Sheffield in 1976.

How did Henry determine that his "meteorite" was a meteorite? With a distance of fifty-eight years from the gift event, people with precise recall of details are hard to find.

Hoffman's meteorite was placed on the Mount Everett lawn between the building and driveway, sixty feet or so from the school's main entrance. During the 1966-1967 school year, the meteorite mysteriously disappeared. No evidence was found that heavy equipment had been used to remove the 300 pound (more or less) meteorite.

Mount Everett's Assistant Principal James Shiminski deduced that because of the meteorite's considerable weight, seniors probably did not move it very far and most likely buried it. After a school committee meeting, Principal Albert Trocchi and Shiminski got themselves a slender, metal tool, poked the area where the meteorite had been, struck something solid, and found the meteorite. It was late at night and some school committee members were still present to help get the meteorite out of the hole. They moved it into the school and secured it inside a closet. The hole was filled after acquiring a volume of sand, gravel, or dirt; stones or chips were replaced, and all agreed (supposedly) to say nothing about finding the meteorite.

The next morning an assembly was called at which Mr. Trocchi asked several senior boys to come down from the bleachers and line up on the gym floor. He then described a "seniors' challenge" to the assembled students, and on signal Custodian John Rooney and others pushed a flat-bed dolly carrying the meteorite into the gymnasium. It was a satisfying triumph for administrators, and Trocchi concluded the assembly saying something like, "We just wanted the senior class to know that they cannot outsmart the administration."

Lined-up seniors went into a huddle, such as football players do, and, when the huddle broke, they shouted something together that sounded like, "We're thinking!"—implying "We're plotting!"

Identity of the person or persons who buried the meteorite remained a mystery and the suspect list varied depending on who told the story. By the late 1980's, information purportedly provided by Ted Shmulsky, Class of 1967, turned up in a spring edition of a school newsletter. It implied that Bill Dodge, Class of 1967, buried the meteorite or had something to do with it. Dodge counter-implied that the deed was done by a classmate who lived next to the school, and possibly that classmate's name was Ted Shmulsky. Both Dodge and Shmulsky

have steadfastly denied any involvement. Everyone agrees, however, that the event raised interest in better security for the meteorite.

The administration *wisely* maintained better security for the meteorite by leaving it in a locked (?) closet somewhere in the school. Trocchi and Shiminski left the school district in the early 1970's, and the out-of-sight and out-of-mind meteorite, in effect, disappeared again.

A positive result of the 1967 episode was a story that came to be told over and over. Al Trocchi loved to tell it. Truly as we grow older we relish telling our glory stories.

A negative result was that subsequent classes, after 1967, felt need to perform their own senior pranks—and make them better than previous pranks. The trouble with such a mind-set is that while some pranks might be well-conceived and even ingenious, the likelihood is that they will be badly conceived, foolish, destructive, and even dangerous.

Understand that pranks had to be rendered in the dark of night and without attracting attention of custodians working and/or living nearby.

One year the prank was placing a sports car on the Room 21 stage. Seniors did that prank well. They gained access into the building, maneuvered the car around tight corridor corners, and lifted it up a couple steps onto the stage. A tarpaulin was placed underneath the car to catch possible oil drips.

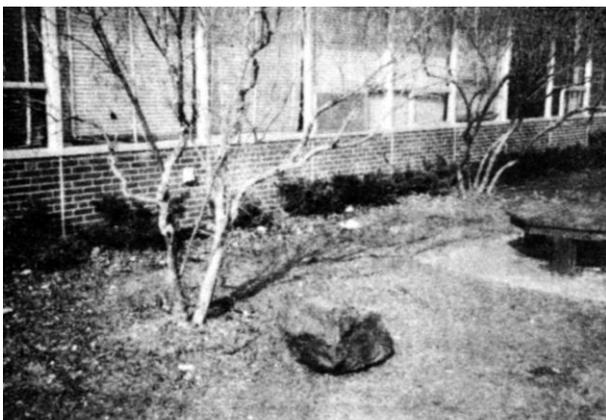
The Class of 1977's prank was placing a motorcycle on top of the school chimney. There it was forty feet up, more or less. Although spectacular, it was a wonder that someone was not injured or killed getting the machine up there in the middle of the night, and miraculous that one or more people didn't die getting it down.

In 1979 seniors got into the building late at night and moved lots of classroom desks into the library where they were stacked up to the ceiling. In Room 20, someone had written on the chalkboard, "Disruptive, not destructive." In fact it *was* disruptive for custodians. They had to scurry and sweat to get desks back into classrooms before teachers and students arrived in the morning. A prank that is never seen except by custodians is mostly a disappointing, wasted prank.

Another year's seniors acquired (i.e., stole) a full-sized, sculptured, plastic or fiberglass horse and put it in the girls' room door off the main foyer. This wasn't dangerous, but the owner reportedly threw a tantrum when he found his horse gone.

For a few years, during the seventies and into the eighties, "Class of 19..." was painted on the building's brick walls, the chimney, and the asphalt driveway. Because a little administrative sleuthing zeroed in on the vandals (paint on bricks is vandalism, for sure), some seniors found themselves scrubbing their night efforts with steel brushes and paint thinner/remover. Putting paint on bricks and asphalt demonstrated a pitiful lack of imagination.

It was a short transition from senior pranks to deliberate destruction of the old Mount



Hoffman's meteorite outside the Home-Ec room--1983

Everett's doors, plastered walls, and ceiling tiles. There came to be a flagrant disrespect of the building and the school process by a small number of students, and vandalism continued until the new facility was completed.

To some extent the pranks and evolved vandalism can be seen as stemming from Hoffman's "meteorite."

In 1983, after the "meteorite" had been kept secure some way or other for sixteen years, the meteorite was "found" again. Principal Ray Chamberland displayed it in

the foyer for a short time and then returned it to its original location out front between the building and driveway. Some people recalled seeing a black plaque displayed with it.

By 1992 the new Mount Everett facility was built and the meteorite was moved to the eastern “doughnut hole”/courtyard where it was probably more secure than previously but also less readily viewed.



Principal Glenn Devoti, Hoffman's meteorite, and Dean of Students Kurt Degrenier--November, 2013

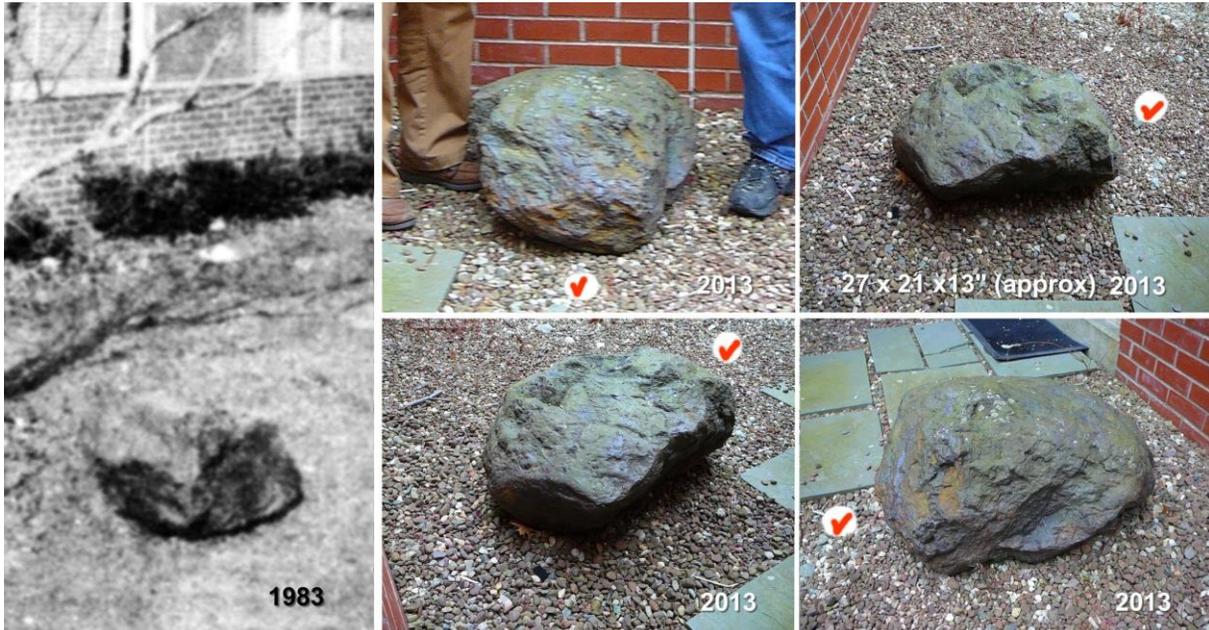
In November, 2013, a magnet test was performed on Hoffman's meteorite.

Over 99% of true meteorites pass the magnet test.

The supposed meteorite did not pass the magnet test.

Unless the meteorite is among less than 1% of true meteorites that do not attract magnets, the rock in the courtyard that we were looking at was just a rock.

When Hoffman's meteorite did not pass the magnet test, positive identification of the rock that we were looking at became an issue.



Checkmarks in the four rightmost pictures indicate orientation.

In fact, we do not know whether Hoffman's gift, what the 1967 seniors buried, and the rock that was outside next to the driveway was the same rock that was moved into the doughnut hole/courtyard. People who remembered Hoffman's "meteorite" from seeing it in the 1960's, etc., tended to think it was the courtyard rock, but not with 100% certainty.

Hoffman's "meteorite" loses some of its prestige if it is not a meteorite, but its presence at Mount Everett Regional School gives it value in its own right. How many of the trillions of rocks on earth are as well-storied as Hoffman's?

BILL DODGE'S ACCOUNT—CONFIRMED AND ADDED TO BY TED SHMULSKY

On September 18, 2014, forty-seven years after the 1967 meteorite episode, Bill Dodge provided an account that eliminated a good number of unknowns.

Suspected in the year of the meteorite event was that several Class of 1967 members, probably from the male athlete group, buried the meteorite, and when Principal Trocchi called several seniors down from the bleachers during assembly, the intention was to publicly recognize all or most of the culprits.

In fact, kidnapping of the meteorite was managed by *two* seniors, Bill Dodge and Ted Shmulsky.

In 1967, the meteorite was sitting on peastones or wood chips.

Finding that the rock was too heavy to lift and move, Bill and Ted elected to dig a hole, necessarily in the dark of evening when no one was around. Inconveniently, custodians were still working inside the building, and there was light from windows illuminating the meteorite site except where shadows were cast. Bill and Ted had the hole partly dug when they heard a door open. They had no time to conceal themselves except in shadows, but luckily (for them) Custodian Bob Ball walked past the dim-lighted, half-dug hole without noticing anything unusual.

After that the lads quickly finished the hole, moved excess dirt to a grassy area, spread it out, and replaced the peastones or chips.

With the deed done, subsequently Bill and Ted began worrying about what could, might, and would happen next—especially when they saw, from a classroom, Mr. Trocchi and Mr. Shiminski out at the meteorite site looking around. *On their watch*, from budgets to meteorites,

administrators *hate* to lose things. The principal looked annoyed and ready to punish to the full extent of the law—and maybe a little further.

Bill and Ted did not challenge the administration face-to-face, or in any other way, to find the meteorite; they knew better than to push their luck. Thus, probably the “seniors’ challenge” that Al Trocchi mentioned during the assembly was hypothesized, based on likelihood.

Graduation came in June, and as Bill and Ted received diplomas, Principal Trocchi murmured to them, “Check your diplomas.” Back in their seats they looked to find magic-marker-scrawled, fake diplomas signed with phony names—Joseph Meteorite, Thomas Satellite, and Abe Lincoln. For Bill and Ted, it was a serious, over-the-top payback. After the ceremony they accosted the principal, “Where are our diplomas?” Trocchi pointed at the building, “Buried in there somewhere.”

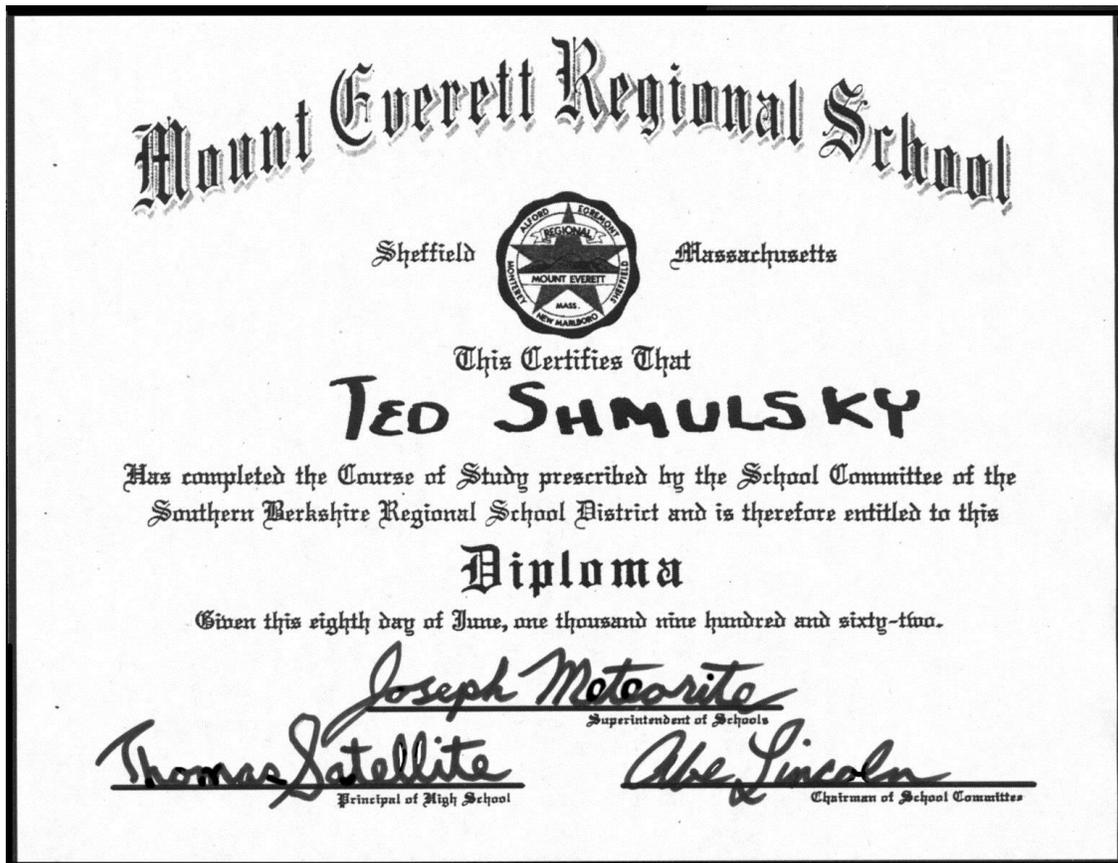
Later Bill and Ted found their official diplomas (buried) under the phony ones.

In the Old Testament, there is an eye for an eye principle.

At Mount Everett there was a prank for a prank principle.

Since there were only two such diplomas, the conclusion has to be that the administrators knew, by graduation time, exactly who had buried the meteorite.

To this day, after forty-seven years and counting, Bill Dodge and Ted Shmulsky *admit nothing* in connection with the buried and exhumed meteorite.



Ted Shmulsky received this fake diploma. Bill Dodge received one, also--June, 1967

(This write-up is by Ed Davis (Sheffield, MA) with details provided by Dr. James Shiminski (Keller, Texas), Ted Shmulsky (New Marlborough, MA), and Bill Dodge (Shrewsbury, NJ). Bill wrote or edited four paragraphs.— November, 2013 / September, 2014)