Our Amazing Universe

IOWA METEORS

From the dawn of civilization man has endeavored to fathom the mystery of the universe around him. While theologians have speculated on their heavenly home, scientists from many lands have contributed to our knowledge over the centuries. It remained for the advent of *Sputnik,* closely followed by our own *Explorer* and *Vanguard* during the International Geophysical Year (1957-1958), to catapult men's minds into such exciting exploits as space travel, journeys to the moon, and the thousand and one other amazing things normally associated with the realm of fantasy that heretofore had been reserved for such men as "Buck Rogers" and "Flash Gordon."

One of the problems facing both satellites and space-traveling man is the danger of collision with comets, those irresponsible vagabonds of space that weave among the stars like drunken drivers. More than a million comets infest the solar system, the larger ones with heads a million miles in diameter and tails a hundred million miles long. Some of these gaseous space travelers come into view only once in a thousand years, while others

(like Halley's Comet) return at rather frequent intervals.

Meteors, or shooting stars, are far more numerous than comets, since they represent the cosmic rubbish that fills the universe. Meteors constantly pelt the earth, although most of them are burned up upon entering the earth's atmosphere and never hit the ground. The great meteor craters in Arizona and Canada are among the most awe-inspiring natural phenomena to confront man. The largest meteoric fall of historic times occurred in northern Siberia in 1914. When visited thirteen years later, more than two hundred craters were found, some over seventy-five feet across. The devastation covered an area thirty-five miles square, an area equal to that of greater New York.

Between 1927 and 1944 Ben Hur Wilson contributed five meteor articles to THE PALIMPSEST which we are reprinting herein. The original interest elicited in these strange visitors from outer space has been accentuated in this important Geophysical Year. During the next decade many of the mysteries of the universe are destined to unfold before our wondering eyes. A study of the meteors that fell in Iowa during the past 111 years will give Iowans a better understanding of the universe around them.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

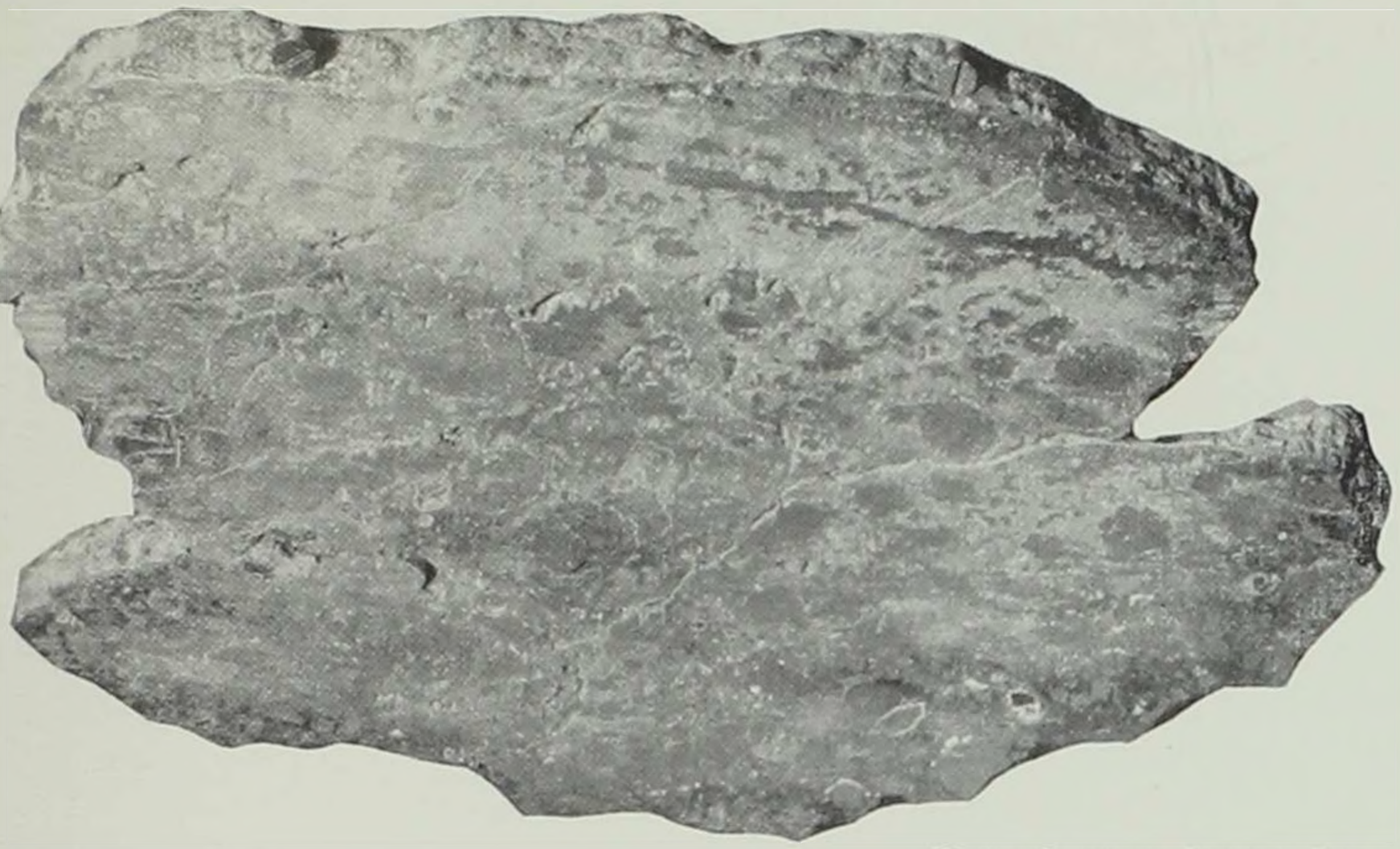

Photo Courtesy Deemer Lee

Cross-section of Estherville Meteor in Estherville Public Library

From Proceedings of the United States National Museum

Polished Slice of Estherville Meteorite at the University of Minnesota

Explanation: 1 and 2, pebble-form masses of enstatite; 3, pebble-form mass of peckhamite; 4, metal; 5, cavities