

# MEMO

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**Date:** May 2, 2022

**To:** Johnstown Town Council

**From:** JHS Board of Directors

**CC:** Billie DeLancey, Richard Binzel

**Subject:** 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Johnstown Meteorite – work session topics

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We're looking forward to discussing the opportunity for a town celebration of the 1924 meteorite fall at Elwell.

At this point we're starting with a blank page and a handful of ideas and would like your input at this initial stage. The event can be as big or as small as a special event committee determines, based on volunteer manpower, funding, etc., and most importantly – what's best for Johnstown.

The following list is offered to help facilitate our discussion on May 9, 2022. In addition to the Letter of Engagement dated March 11, 2022 (attached for reference), we offer the following principles as a foundation for forming a meteorite committee. The JHS would like to serve as the committee lead and manage the overall anniversary event, and we want to include representatives from the sectors of our community that would likely have a role in staging events and activities:

- The current JHS board should oversee and approve any activities.
- The event and its proceedings should reflect the Town's local fabric, culture, and community.
- The activities related to this event should be simple but effective and designed for a variety of local audiences.
- We should take this opportunity to involve people in our Town to help carry out the activities.
- We establish a tentative budget over the coming months and stay in communication with the Town.

Topics in addition to those listed in the Letter of Engagement:

- Purchase of an authentic piece of the meteorite (if we can find one available) to be purchased by the community for the community.
- Owners of the original meteorite pieces, several from other countries, could be interested in attending.
- Design and purchase a plaque to be placed as a sign or perhaps adhered to a large boulder or rock structure to be installed permanently near the entrance to the cemetery to memorialize the meteorite fall.
- Fireworks.
- Look into a possible interagency loan from the Denver Museum of Nature of the meteorite piece that fell at Elwell (~12 lbs). Security would need to be part of the loan terms.



March 11, 2022

Matt LeCerf  
Town Manager  
Town of Johnstown  
450 S. Parish Avenue  
Johnstown, Colorado 80534

Subject: Letter of Engagement and Request for Support  
100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the Johnstown Meteorite Fall, July 6, 2024

Dear Matt and Town Council Members,

Johnstown has had its share of remarkable weather events over the past 120 years since its founding – numerous snowstorms and floods, a devastating tornado, and a meteorite fall that put Johnstown on the map in scientific and academic circles. The latter is the focus of this letter.

### **The Johnstown Meteorite Fall**

It was just after 4:00 P.M. on July 6, 1924 when a funeral procession was nearing the entrance to the Elwell cemetery. From out of nowhere came a sonic boom-like noise, a sound that likely none of the witnesses had ever heard before since jet engines had not yet been invented. The horrific noise ushered in the ellipse that carried the meteorite shower overhead, bringing with it fire and smoke and a chunk of rock that slammed into the ground in front of the pall bearers' car. There's more to the story, and we'd like to share it with the world in two years for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall.

The Johnstown Historical Society requests the Town's support to assist and engage in the planning and hosting of a world-class event to celebrate and memorialize this rare celestial occurrence.

### **Next Steps**

The JHS imagines a whole-town celebration, much like the community involvement that took place for the 2002 Johnstown Centennial, with numerous activities for residents and neighboring communities to come and enjoy. These activities could start as early as April 2024 before the end of the school year to engage our youngest residents in project-based learning programs that foster awareness of the Johnstown Meteorite. Additional events could follow for BBQ Day, with a final program to occur on Saturday July 6<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary date of the meteorite fall. The possibilities are endless for drawing attendance from neighboring communities across the northern Front Range and by meteorite enthusiasts from everywhere.

A larger centennial celebration also presents an opportunity for Johnstown businesses to capitalize on the volume of visitors that would attend such an event. With new residential subdivisions already underway and planned commercial development at the I-25 and Hwy 60 corridor, as well as the continued growth at 2534, Johnstown could benefit greatly from its small claim to fame.

### **Initial Ideas for Meteorite Event Committee Consideration:**

- Re-enactment of the meteorite fall at the cemetery in a living history by experienced actors, possibly from regional playhouses and other live theaters.
- Parish Avenue closure – vendors, music, food trucks and restaurant participation, presentations, demonstrations, contests.
- Educational programs in the YMCA's multi-purpose rooms.
- Authentic facsimile of the meteorite rock to give away as prizes.
- Fundraising opportunities for local non-profits.
- Gem and Rock show.
- Potential authentication opportunity for people who think the rock they found is a piece of the meteorite.

### **A Unique Advantage**

In January 2020, the JHS received an email from Richard Binzel, PhD who, at that time, was the Professor of Planetary Science and Joint Professor of Aerospace Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was in Colorado and hoped to visit the Parish House during his vacation, noting that he was knowledgeable of the Johnstown Meteorite. He arrived with a palm-sized piece of the meteorite, explaining that he had been a meteorite and asteroid researcher for close to 50 years and that he had been studying the Johnstown Meteorite for most of that time. We sat and learned the other part of the meteorite's story – before it entered the Earth's atmosphere.

We also learned that day that Professor Binzel was planning to retire in Lafayette, Colorado, just 30 miles from Johnstown, and he did so this past January. He has committed to serve as an integral part of this project and will be invaluable in the educational draw by fellow scientists and meteorite enthusiasts from across the U.S. and potentially from abroad.

This event is yet to be defined. By starting the conversation now, we have time to plan and prepare for a great event that will be talked about for years to come. In order to stage this type and size of a centennial celebration, it would require the support of the Town of Johnstown and the participation of local businesses and organizations.

We suggest kicking the discussion off with an initial meeting in mid-April. We welcome the Town's input and ideas.

Respectfully submitted,



Billie DeLancey  
Museum Director  
Historic Parish House and Museum