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## Stranger than fiction

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RODNEY DOHERTY | Fosters Daily Democrat

EAST WAKEFIELD — He seems to be a magnet for things that fall out of the sky.

Nearly 32 years ago, on January 10, 1977, William (Bill) McCarthy, of Ballard's Ridge Road, set the media world in a tizzy.

Through no fault of his own, word leaked out two days after the investigation started that something appeared to have fallen from the sky and melted a perfectly shaped round hole in the ice in the top of his horse pond. The roundness turned to square as the object melted into the 14-inch thick ice of the pond and sank into the mud. The melting occurred, oddly enough, during a blizzard.

The mystery of the melting pond in East Wakefield was thought by state, local and military authorities to be settled quickly. It's really much ado about nothing, they told everyone. Maybe, they said, a spring came up through the pond. That happens to ponds and lakes sometimes in the dead of winter and melts the ice, they said. Some people just plain said it was a "farce." And some dismissed the high radioactive readings at the site — perhaps a cause of the response from state and military officials — to be a defective Geiger counter, which was later found not to be defective.

Two days later, on Wednesday, Jan. 12, only the word "mob" describes the media on the scene.

Bill and his wife, Dot, and daughter Cathy — as well as some of the media who visited the scene on that cold day in January — can't accept this was a happenstance of nature. The pond was frozen except for a near perfect circle of melting that, on close observation, seemed to fall into the shape of a square at lower depths of the ice. And, despite two days of freezing weather, the hole, at best, only had a thin skim of ice.

For all these years conversation and speculation on the mystery of the pond has persisted.

And now Bill McCarthy has a new mystery.

"It's a rock," he told this reporter late last week in a phone call, "but it's nothing like any rock I've seen before."

Well, it is not a rock.

Bill McCarthy thinks it might be "space junk."

What a coincidence that this could happen twice in one man's life?

McCarthy, in addition to the tack store his wife and daughter manage out of the basement of their home, collects and sells old bottles as a business.

Wakefield of a hundred or more years ago, he noted in an interview earlier this week, had a lot of farms and homesteads that just went away with time,

His new home on Ballard's Ridge Road — he sold the farm with the infamous horse pond twenty years ago and moved across and a bit down the road — is still in a very wooded and unpopulated area. Well, for that matter, so is Wakefield.

He takes long walks in the woods, visiting the remains and cellar holes of the long-gone homes looking for trash heaps or other sites that might hide some good bottles to sell or trade.

About three or more weeks ago now, walking through a bit of a clearing surrounded by tall pines he estimated to be at least 100 years old, a black object looking like a rough-edged rock was in his path.

He says finding it was easy because it was right on top of the forest floor. And it was black and had shiny spots reflecting light "like a prism." He said he knew it hadn't been there long because it was not covered in any mulch.

Still thinking it was a rock — although oddly shaped with some rounded areas and some sharp, jagged, angles — he was surprised when he picked it up. Despite being more than seven inches long and few inches high and looking heavy, it was very light. The lack of weight and the common sense of the feel of the material lead McCarthy to think there is no geology involved in the "rock".

On examination it seems to be a creation of molten plastic — and even that suggestion has its own oddities.

Part of the material, which appears to flow as if was molten when it hit the ground, has the imprint, much like a fossil find, of leaves. Although the material must have been soft enough to register the imprints of leaves, it was clearly not hot enough to either create burn marks or envelop the actual leaves into the material. Yet, just beside the imprints, the material would seem to have been hot enough to sit on the forest debris and absorb it as it cooled. That part is rough and pocked with bits of mulch and other small debris easily found on a forest floor. The side of the material facing upward, that McCarthy first spied, is jagged with sharp points, ridges and angled indentations. Yet, inside some of those indentations there are rounded pieces of the material, seeming to represent part of the shape of whatever it was.

While the "rock" is light, as noted, and the material a kind of plastic, some parts are extremely thick and hard, while other parts are thin and brittle.

But most curious is the bright red stripe on one side. It looks like paint. At first viewing one would think the bright color on the black, melted material would have come from a scrape against something that was red. But Bill McCarthy says differently. "It's something built right into the material," he says, offering the reporter an experiment. Handing over his small, single-blade jackknife, he says, "Go ahead, see if you can scrape the red off."

Admittedly tentative for fear of causing some damage to an as-yet-unidentified find, the blade in the hands of the reporter does not scrape off any of the red.

"It won't come off," McCarthy says, "it is integrated into the side." He points out there are other spots in the "rock" where the red can be seen.

So what is this new mystery found by Bill McCarthy? Could it be as simple as a melted container for fireworks? McCarthy notes the area in which the piece was found was not frequented by anyone. There were no signs of a party and the attendant bonfire.

Could it be space junk? It doesn't take much searching on the Internet to find references to purposely destroyed missiles or satellites or accidents that scatter space junk. Some of those events presented light shows in the night sky and scattered space debris from Nova Scotia to the West Coast. One recent Chinese anti-satellite weapons test spread more than 150,000 pieces of debris — some larger than baseballs and others as small as a half-inch across — in orbit around the earth. And that was just one incident.

Bill McCarthy isn't sure what he'll do with his "rock". He wasn't about to let this reporter take it along with him. But maybe someone who knows about such things will contact him.

It would be good to put to rest at least one of the mysteries of Bill McCarthy's time in Wakefield.

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