



Transcript
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Michigan Radio Stateside Interview with Rachel Clark | Michigan's Moon Rock

Lester Graham: Let me tell you about this. On July 24th, 1969, Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Buzz Aldrin of the Apollo 11 mission splashed down in the Pacific Ocean after first landing on the moon. The astronauts brought gifts back: moon rocks. The crew also took small state flags to the moon and back. President Richard Nixon decided to give moon rocks to all 50 states, along with each state's flag. Today, many of those rocks are missing. They've been stolen or they've been lost. Michigan's Apollo 11 moon rock was with Governor William Milliken until his family gave that rock to the History Center in the late 1980s. Michigan History Center's Rachel Clark joins us now. So, what does that Michigan moon rock look like? How big is it?

Rachel Clark: It is very, very tiny. It is, um, I think it weighs less than a gram, and it is encased in an acrylic ball. So, it is actually mounted on a little podium that has some words from NASA, as well as the state flag. But the rock itself is incredibly tiny.

Lester Graham: An it is on exhibit at the center?

Rachel: It is, it is on exhibit. It's in our 1950s and 1960s gallery, and it's in a giant rocket ship we have in our gallery. So, it is on display.

Lester Graham: Is that Michigan state flag that went on the Apollo 11 trip to the moon still around?

Rachel Clark: It is. It is actually with the moon rock. The entire display that was presented to Governor Milliken is intact. He and his wife actually held on to it and kept it intact before they donated it to the museum.

Lester Graham: I can just imagine it was in a shoe box some place at the governor's house, just waiting to be presented to you guys. Now, this was not the only lunar mission to bring back gifts. I understand that Apollo 14 in 1971 also took state flags up and back. No rocks, I guess. So, I can see the t-shirt now: Apollo 14 went to the moon, and all we got was this flag. What became of that flag?

Rachel Clark: We have that flag as well. The Apollo 14 flag is in a frame with a patch that also says Apollo 14, and that we have. It is not on display, but it is in our collection.

Lester Graham: Apollo 17 was our last mission to the moon. There were good will rocks, moon rocks, that were presented to the states once again. Do we know what became of the Apollo 17 rock for Michigan?

Rachel Clark: We don't know. There's no record that it ever came to us at the museum, so we really do not know where our Apollo 17 rock is. It apparently looked very similar to the Apollo 11 display. So, it was on a wooden plaque, it was encased in acrylic, it was a larger rock, still very small, but larger than the Apollo 11 rock, but we don't know where it is.

Lester Graham: We'll have to ask Governor Milliken if he's got another shoebox or something. One of those good will rocks, the one given to Arkansas, went missing for 30 years, kind of like ours is, but it was found last year. What was the story there?

Rachel Clark: It was actually found amongst then-Governor Clinton's things, when he let the governorship to become President eventually.

Lester Graham: So Bill Clinton hid his in a shoebox too, or something?

Rachel: He did. (Laughter) I think that it's not an unusual thing. When things like this are presented to governors, or they sort of sit around in the governor's office, they then turn up years later. And if the moon rock has been removed from the plaque, there's no way you would ever know what it is. It's very tiny. And, if the plaque itself is by its own, there isn't anything very unique about it. But, the two together are fantastic artifacts.

Lester Graham: I saw an article that indicated that the Arkansas moon rock might be worth \$10 million. How typical is that price for a moon rock? Is there a black market for moon rocks?

Rachel Clark: Apparently there is, which I didn't know until I started looking into this. So, there are people out there who, you know, they pay lots of money for purported moon rocks. Ours is on display for the people of Michigan, so there's no value to it other than it just being really great, and we are one of the states that kept ours.

Lester Graham: The Apollo mission's space capsule, that's the first one that landed on the moon, is named Columbia and has been at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum for some time now. I understand that it's going on tour starting this fall. Where will it be exhibited?

Rachel Clark: It is actually going on tour to a few of the largest cities in the nation. It went on tour in 1971, to all capitals of all 50 states, and apparently Michigan's display was one of the best. It was behind the capitol on the west side of the capitol, in what is today the capitol complex. Apparently ours was very fancy and people really enjoyed it. So, it is going on tour again in the next year!

Lester Graham: This fall, it's going to the Houston Space Center in Houston, then the next year St. Louis Science Center, then the Senator John Hines History Center in Pittsburgh,

and the final stop will be the Museum of Flight in Seattle in 2019, and then back to the Smithsonian. So, are you going to make a trip to one of these places to see the capsule?

Rachel Clark: I think that would be a fantastic road trip to go maybe to St. Louis to see the capsule.

Lester Graham: St. Louis is a fine town, I worked there for many years. That's Rachel Clark with the Michigan History Center. Thanks for talking with us!

Rachel Clark: Thank you very much!