

Mexican officials could force the owner of the land to show them where the stone was buried.

Collinson's reply was unexpected. "Some time ago," Collinson began, Colonel Churchward came to him, "asking to give him the lowest estimate for me to proceed to Mexico and superintend the taking out of the big stone . . ."

"Three hundred dollars," Collinson replied. Churchward said that his backer, a rich woman presently in Europe, would arrange to have the stone brought to the United States by plane. He had already paid Niven a lot of money for the removal of the stone, Churchward had told Collinson, but with no results. Given the underhanded character of Churchward's request, Collinson was unsure what to make of the colonel's intentions. "I am just growing to place a great discount on all he plans." Collinson concluded. He reassured Niven, "Unless it was with your co-operation or O.K. I would not—could not in fact—butt in on the stone." When Churchward made his proposal, Collinson thought it was a case of Niven leaving it for him to remove. He could certainly use the money. Still, Collinson was insistent. "I certainly would not move to do anything unless with your full knowledge and consent . . . It is yours and yours only by right of discovery . . . Keep this to yourself and see what his next move may be."

"Few things in life," Niven wrote in response to Collinson's report, "have so depressed me than this behaviour of Col. Churchward." He was greatly concerned that Churchward was upset at him. Niven was perfectly willing to let Collinson handle the removal of the stone, he said. He had done all in his power, and through the proper channels, to unearth the stone, even to donate all of his carved stone tablets to the National Museum in exchange for the single stone.

Over the next few months Collinson settled matters with Churchward and arranged for Niven to return to Mexico in March of 1932. Accompanied by his son Kingsley, he arrived at the site, now overgrown with corn and maguey cactus. Niven instructed the diggers where to excavate, and they uncovered the troublesome stone. As it was exposed to the air, Niven could see that it would be impossible to transport to the United States or to the National Museum. The stone had been "badly destroyed by the rains of years past, with little trace left of the coloring." Niven ordered the men to cover it up again. The proposed monument to his life's work was not to be. In great disappointment, he returned home to Austin.