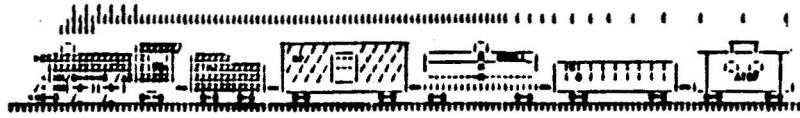




The OPAL EXPRESS

Published monthly by the
American Opal Society...



Volume 19
Number 7
July, 1987

Noel Lamkin, winner of last year's American Opal Society Jewelry Design Contest and a custom jeweler and designer, gave a very instructive lecture on the principles of jewelry design, complete with examples of her work embracing the fundamental she was describing. She gave her presentation at meetings of the Founding Chapter and the Orange County Chapter.

Noel has promised to write an article for our next newsletter for those of who who are not able to attend because of distance and/or disabilities. Watch for it in your August OPAL EXPRESS.

Designer jewelry and designer gemstones are the "in thing" in the jewelry world today. The most progressive of the independent and small chain jewelers are featuring designers and their exclusive lines at special showings and doing very well. The top awards at the most prestigious jewelry design contest are going to artists who incorporate fantasy cut gemstones such as are designed and cut by Munsteiner and others in West Germany or outstanding freeform cabachons of other stones.

When you are cutting, think about how your finished opal will look in a setting. Design your opal to a pleasing shape, with the least loss of good color. Freeform shapes are very acceptable to the artist as it gives one a chance to do more original and unusual pieces. Ask yourself if it will look better in a ring, pendant, or brooch? Can you use accent stones to complement the colors in the opal to enhance the beauty of the piece as well as add to it's value?

Most of all think quality of opal and design. The extra time spent in working your opal and designing and finishing it's setting will give you greater satisfaction over the years if you keep it, and increase it's saleability and your reputation as an artist-designer in opal jewelry if you sell it.

There is no Show Biz column this month, Andy is starting to pull things together, he's got the place, he's got the dealers (a very few tables are still available) now we need the support of all of you members, most especially those of you in the area. Talk up the show to members of other groups you may be involved with; place our flyers in as many places as you can; remember they are discount tickets as well; get the news before the public and the private too in any way you can. The show this year is being billed as "A TOUCH OF CLASS" and the classiest part of it will be our loyal members.

CHAPTER NEWS

THE FOUNDING CHAPTER-----President Harold Umberson, 213-693-7380

A few words from our President.....For those of you who haven't been able to attend our general meetings the last few months, you have missed some very interesting programs. Vince Jarrell, Master Carver and Noel Lamkin's jewelry designs, extraordinary....And our potluck was a gourmet delight.

So, make this date, JULY 9th, 7:30 PM at our regular place. We are going to have Leonard Goodsir, member of the Founding Chapter, showing us the structure of casting, and casting metals.

We are sorry to hear of the illness of Joyce Vezeau, also Bobbie Gledhill. Get better soon, we miss you.

The phone which we have been using at Bill Judd's has been disconnected as the workshop has been moved to Edith Ostrander's

We meet there every Tuesday at 7:00 pm and usually break up at 9:00 or 9:30.

TWO HANDS can lighten the load--can you help?

1. Greet members at the door (with a smile)

2. Escort at the stairway, when needed.

3. Set up room and help clean up afterwards.

4. Help with serving refreshments.

Thanks to everyone for the gifts that they have brought for the raffle. See you at the next meeting, July 9th, 1987 at 7:30 pm or earlier if you can help. (See map on outside cover), Harold

ORANGE COUNTY CHAPER--President Brian Franks, 714-857-2743.

Yes, the Orange County Chapter is finally organized. Following Noel Lamkin's presentation on jewelry design, members present elected officers and a Board of Directors. Board meetings, at present, will be held following the General meeting at the Clubhouse. The group meetis on the Third Tuesday of the month. The next meeting will be July 21st, 7:30 pm at the College Park Clubhouse in Irvine. (See map on back cover)

Program for the evening will be Stan and Ellen Bryn, telling of their experiences in Australia and displaying some of the opal which they brought back. For those of us who have seen the pendants Ellen has been wearing to the meetings this is a don't miss. Ellen has promised to furnish us with more of those delicious cookies. (got to find out which bakery those come from)

Officers and Directors of this Chapter are; Brian Franks, Pres. John Hall, 1st Vice-pres., Earl Churchill, 2nd Vice-pres., Ellen Bryn, Secretary, Mary Bridges, Treasurer. Directors: Frank Utick, Noel Lamkin, Stanley Bryn, Clyde McCurdy, Jim Meinhard,

Esther Churchill. Two other members were nominated to fill the last position, but have not been contacted to affirm their willingness to serve. We are looking forward to seeing all of you there, remember guests are welcome.

Welcome to our newest member Clyde McCurdy of Orange and a big welcome back to Victor Mayo who has rejoined after a few year's absence. Both of these gentlemen will be affiliated with the Orange County Chapter.

WHAT'S KUCHEN? Why Apple Kuchen of course!

At the potluck dinner in June, Sue Umberson brought a delicious scrumptious dish of Apple Kuchen. When asked for the recipe, she declined to give it up claiming it was an old family recipe. To make a long story short, we bribed her with a couple of free passes to the local International Show and were able to bring this recipe to you in it's entirety.

APPLE KUCHEN

- ½ c. Butter or margerine
- 1 pkge. Betty Crocker yellow cake mix
- ½ c. flaked coconut
- 1 can (20 oz.) pie- sliced apples, well drained
or 2½ c. sliced, pared baking apples.
- ½ c. sugar
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 c. dairy sour cream
- 2 egg yolks or one whole egg.

Heat oven to 350° Cut butter into cake mix (dry) until crumbly. Mix in coconut. Pat mixture lightly into ungreased oblong pan 13x9x2, building up edges. Bake 10 min.

Arrange apple slices on warm crust. Mix sugar and cinnamon; sprinkle on apples. Blend sour cream and egg yolks; drizzle over apples. (Topping will not completely cover apples) Bake 25 min. or until edges are light brown. (Do not over bake.) Serve warm, 12-15 servings.

Oh, did I forget to tell you Sue's maiden name was Crocker??

We would like to call your attention to the June issue of LAPIDARY JOURNAL. From it's front cover called Ole Opal to it's back page there are numerous articles about opal from various locations; Mexico, Virgin Valley, Nevada, Lightning Ridge. Also articles on doublet and triplet making, opal jewelry and carving.....Truly a don't miss issue. Also in the July issue of ROCK AND GEM there is a very informative article about Virgin Valley. One thing the author fails to mention that the Virgin Valley area is only one of the places in the United States that a person can dig for precious opal as witness our last two issues of the OPAL EXPRESS. It is a very interesting article and to paraphrase an old saying, "you can never read too much about opal and see too much opal."

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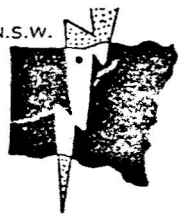
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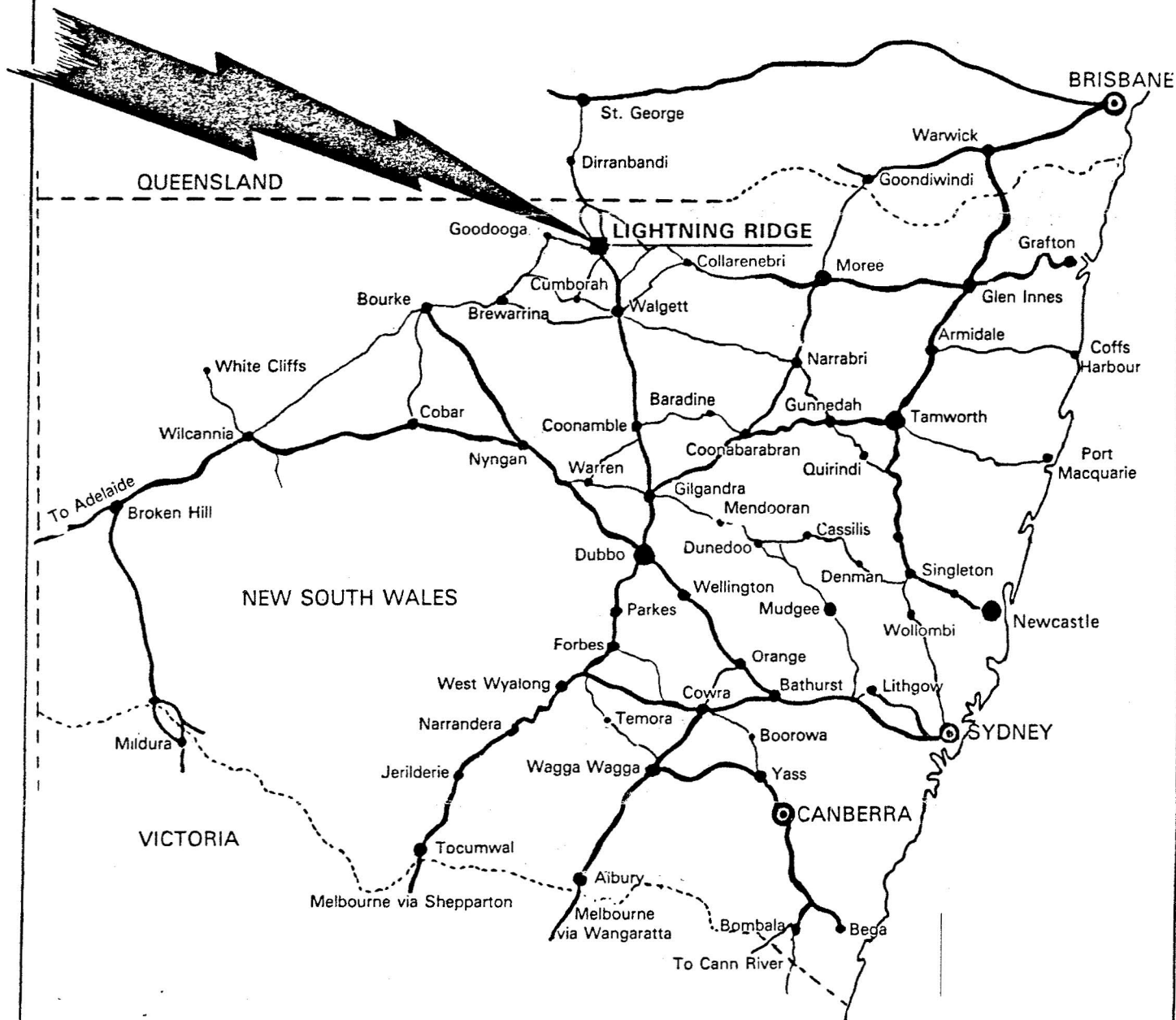


Lightning Ridge

5

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Consists of pure precious opal. Can be clear or opaque.



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Consists of precious opal adhered to a backing. Can be flat or domed.



TRIPLETS

Consists of a layer of precious opal adhered to a backing and protected by a glass or quartz crystal cap.

HAYRICKS OPAL MINE RICHEST IN WORLD!

It was a common belief among the miners of yesterday that opal would never be found in such a place as Mt. Canaway.

Mt. Canaway forms part of a large mesa chain stretching from the Queensland border some 500 miles to the north through dry and barren country. The mountain is located in the south east section of the ranges and known locally as the Hayricks. This is the great Queensland opal belt.

The opal gougles of the last century, hard workers as they were, had little knowledge of geology, believing that places like Mt. Canaway were islands of a great inland sea, and, though there may be opal at the base where the sea once lapped, there would never be up in the mountain for opal formed only in the presence of water. What these old timers did not know is that the inland sea has passed right over these mesas forming their flat tops.

It took a bright young prospector like Joe Knehr to break the myth. In 1929 he and an old mate, Bill Colman, who had been brought up on the time-worn argument that opal was never in the hills, were prospecting the flats of Mt. Canaway. Knehr refused to subscribe to the argument, believing that the ranges had been formed by subterranean pressures and therefore the traces they were finding must have fretted from the mountain.

I remember quite clearly the details as Joe described them to me back in 1954, how he had won an argument and made an agreement with his old mate for one try up on the mountain and in doing so he found the famous Hayricks mine. They went up the southern slope some 75 feet to a spot which Joe fancied. Summer had started early and the heat was merciless as they toiled sinking a shaft into the great bed of desert sandstone.

Bill, who was on top, kept calling down to Joe, "Give up mate, your'e wasting your time". After sinking about 14 feet, one day around 2 o'clock, Joe climbed from the shaft feeling dejected and quite upset not wanting to admit defeat and wondering if Bill would agree to another shaft. The heat of the day was not helping matters, and grabbing a pick, had made off along the slope in an easterly direction not really looking for anything, just tapping a stone here and there in a blind hope.

Some 300 feet away from the shaft, a small area of sandstone had become exposed and protruding from it was the tip of a boulder about the size of a man's fist. He casually gave it a tap and to his amazement it fell away in beautiful colour. In telling me, Joe could not find words to describe the brilliance of the "Jewellers shop" that lay in his trembling hands, being opal of a quality he never dreamt existed.

(By Mr. Len Cram, who lived on the Hayricks Opal Mine during the 1950's, and now lives at Lightning Ridge, N.S.W.)

He was so shaken by the sudden change in his fortune that he couldn't even dig into the soft sandstone to retrieve the boulder, but spent the rest of the afternoon on his bunk relaxing in the cool of the bower shed, unable to put the beautiful specimen down. Joe said, "Bill was happy to admit he was wrong. You know, I only missed the opal run in that first shaft by a few feet".

This was the discovery of the richest boulder opal mine the world has ever known. At the end of its life, there was approximately one mile of closely laced drives and tunnels.

The boulders in the Hayricks mine were of the sandstone variety being actually a type of iron oxide concretion, rather dark in colour and dotted with myriads of white specks which earned them the name of pepper and salt boulders. There were considerable variations within their shape, some spherical, others ellipsoidal, but the vast majority were elongated varying in size from a few inches to 10 feet with the odd one 50 feet.

Their occurrence was irregular throughout the vast deposit, the elongated ones being flattened with rounded ends not unlike a cigar which had been shaved to form two sides. This led Joe Knehr to believe they were a deposit of water washed logs.

Geologists believe, though not accepted by all, that contractions within the boulders resulted in development of numerous straight and radial cracks, particularly in the lower sections, which had been filled with a deposit of opal at a later date.

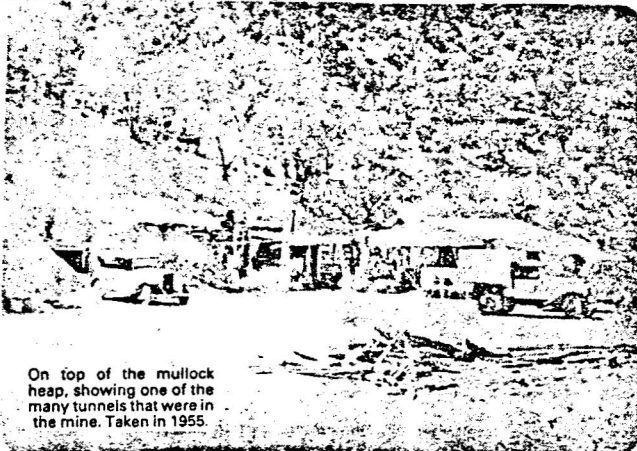
From the Hayricks was to flow a flood of magnificent black stones unlike the world had ever seen, ablaze with the hue of the rainbow and claimed to be the brightest opal ever to reach the London market. It should have been a fortune for Bill and Joe but unfortunately their discovery was made on the eve of the great depression.

At first they were frightened to tunnel into the soft sandstone where the boulders were lying in three levels, so mining began as an open cut across the face of the mountain about 125 feet from the top.

The mine was to have a colourful history. Their first parcel of opal was thirteen of the finest selected gems sent to a Brisbane dealer who returned them a mere £9 (\$18). Joe said, "We had to eat".

In those depression years, a well known Sydney jeweller was the only person prepared to buy their beautiful opals and the price he offered was £25 (\$50) a kerosene case delivered a distance of some 900 miles. Most of this opal found its way onto the world markets where it commanded prices out of all proportion to what the producers received for their toil.

Strange as it may seem, this great mine was not pegged until after World War II. Everyone knew who the owners were and respected it. During the early years of the depression, travelling miners were welcome to work with Joe and Bill. Most stayed long enough to get themselves a parcel of opal before moving on.



On top of the mullock heap, showing one of the many tunnels that were in the mine. Taken in 1955.

One such person whom they took into partnership convinced them he had a top market in America where they would be paid handsomely for their gems. A 44 gallon drum of the finest selected material was put together for him which at today's value would be worth millions of dollars, but he absconded with the lot to England.

By 1936 with Bill Colman dead and it being impossible to sell opal at any price, Knehr walked away from his mine. He went to Sydney hoping for work and was still there at the outbreak of war. After six years of army service and rising to a sergeant major, he returned to his mine in 1948 in partnership with two others and formed a syndicate. Opal was now booming. The old mullock dump alone held a fortune.

It was 75 feet high and full of opal they could not sell in the early days because it was either green or not of gem quality. Strangely, the syndicate did not dismantle the dump and retrieve its treasure, but employed a pensioner to pick over the surface while they went on mining. In a matter of weeks he had recovered about £10,000 (\$20,000) of fine opal, all by hand.

This was many times more than they were paid for the total production taken from the mine before the war. With the new enthusiasm the old mine was re-opened. A comfortable bungalow was erected into the side of the mountain. A large tool and cutting shed was installed; yet, with all this, Joe still preferred the old driving pick to compressor and jack hammer.

It was an experience of a lifetime to have worked with a man like Joe Knehr in such a famous mine. The boulders were only 4 foot apart on three levels with an amazing one in 10 carrying opal. It was very unusual for a boulder mine to be so rich; from gem to potch better than 60% of all opal mined was cuttable. Today it would be 90%, most top mines don't average 10%, which further demonstrates the greatness of this mine.

The longest face of opal I have ever seen was sitting in the wall of one tunnel, about shoulder high, left there for the sole purpose of display. The face of colour was three inches wide and 39 feet long, and as one walked along gazing at its splendour with the aid of a carbide lamp, it seemed endless in the dark. It was a big elongated boulder with a straight long vertical crack. The boulder had been split along the crack during mining leaving a portion containing opal imbedded in the wall.

The boulders were easy to mine and follow, as the majority were disposed with their axis lying in a north-south direction and tilting slightly downwards to the south. The desert sandstone in which they were embedded contained a heavy kaolinite content, possibly due to the fact that much of the silica had been leached out to form opal.

It is hard to find words to describe some of the fascinations of this great mine. One intriguing spectacle was the approach to a boulder containing opal, for within a foot of it, the surrounding sandstone would turn into indescribable beauty. For every grain of sand, there was a grain of beautiful opal. It would appear the boulder was unable to carry all the opal and overflowed. Unfortunately, where this occurred, the sandstone became as sand on the beach and when disturbed poured away. I can still see in my mind the beauty of that opalised sand.

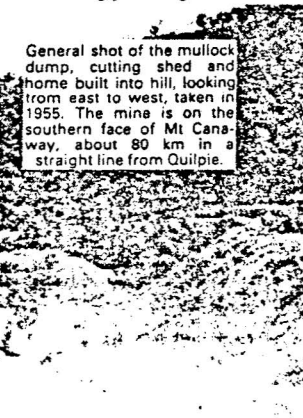
We would mine under the boulders leaving them about shoulder high, then wedge a long crowbar in above them breaking off sections.



Poetry could not describe the awesome beauty of such boulders as they fell to the floor releasing their splendour to the world for the first time.

I can assure you the following section of this story is true although it may appear to be incredible. With his voice, Joe Knehr could actually make the centre of this great mountain tremble and often did to the horror of visitors. His voice was not the type that broke mirrors but was of a deeper tone. He had a pleasant voice and liked to sing while he worked. After striking the right pitch it took some time to get the mountain trembling and he knew just when to stop to prevent burying himself and those who may be with him.

I will remember the first time I experienced this phenomenon. We were working side by side, hundreds of feet inside the mountain. He was singing away when he asked, "Would you like to feel the mountain tremble?" "Not really" I said, "But how?" "By singing" he replied. "Rubbish" I responded and went on working. Joe resumed his singing and before long I felt the first earth movement - then, the unbelievable happened. The mountain was "talking" whilst the earth shook. I looked across at Joe in amazement, mouth half open and pick suspended in the middle of a swing I had been making. Joe's blue eyes were twinkling in a way which I rarely said "What's the matter?" "Cut it out!" I yelled as he went on singing, "Joe the roof's moving, you'll bring the lot in on us."



General shot of the mullock dump, cutting shed and home built into hill, looking from east to west, taken in 1955. The mine is on the southern face of Mt. Canaway, about 80 km in a straight line from Quilpie.

It seemed that the whole mountain was beginning to tremble as small lumps of sandstone began to pop from the wall. There is always a limit to any young fellow's nerve and Joe had found mine. "Hurry" I said to my legs as I dropped my pick and ran. "Body's in danger" and I was out of that mine in a flash to the sound of Joe's deep bounding laughter.

Yet, the most interesting part of life at the mine was opal cutting. It was here that I learnt the art. Joe and one of the syndicate members were top cutters, and it was not long before they had taught me the tricks of the game, which have served me well through life as a professional.

The amount of opal from this mine, massive beyond description, bore a major percentage of gem grade. The different grades of opal are usually related to the position they are found in the boulder. Opal trapped in vertical seams usually forms a large part of second grade and poor material, normally banded or of a small pattern.

Where the Hayricks differed to most other mines was that these straight long vertical seams had a tendency to roll under a lot of the boulders at right angles to form horizontally. From these horizontal seams came the gems which were to make the Hayricks famous. They were gems of a quality suitable for any Queen's crown. They contained every pattern known to man. The harlequin was in abundance with its big broad flashy colours. There were picture stones of exceptional beauty which today would be near priceless. One such stone that comes to mind was of an Old English style hamlet in magnificent colour with three old witches across the sky.

The wonderful thing about the Hayricks opal was that most of the gem grade was black, sitting on a thin foundation of blue-black potch which gave the material its outstanding brilliance.

The greater percentage of opal had been won from this mine before the war when they received £25 (\$50) a kerosene box (eight imperial gallons). During the 1950's Joe told me he could now cut £10,000 (\$20,000) worth of opal from every one of those boxes. He estimated they would be worth £2,000,000 (\$4,000,000).

They must have contained a lot of opal when one considers this was around 1955 when he was averaging £6/4- (12.80) per carat. The same opal in 1984 mine run from low grade to gem quality, would range between \$20 to \$1500 per carat. If one strikes an average of these 1984 prices and projects them against production before the war, we get some idea of the monetary magnitude of this great mine by today's standards.

Add to this, the figure of post war production and there is no other opal mine on earth that could stand in its shadow. One place alone in the mine produced a patch of opal some 300 feet by 300 feet, a living garden of gems.

Like all great mines, they come to an end. The Hayricks, depleted of her hidden beauty, ceased production of any note about 1964 and with the death of Joe Knehr in the late 60's all work stopped.

I shall always be indebted to Joe Knehr for the knowledge he imparted to me over the years. It allowed me to successfully build my life around the opal industry in all spheres.

There is no doubt that Joe Knehr has left his mark upon history. Mt. Canaway will always be a memorial to him, though it was not the only great opal strike he made. He had found the Red Show before the Hayricks, some nine miles to the east. He also played a major role in developing many of the new techniques now used by the industry for cutting the difficult boulder opal.

LEN CRAM - P.O. BOX 2, LIGHTNING RIDGE, N.S.W. 2834, AUSTRALIA

May 21, 1987
 Greetings from Home of the Black Opal.
 My Camp was intact, though it's a
 spider and mouse had invaded, it's a
 thorough beating of everything with a
 bark stripped stick and the "Dylan"
 was as good as new. Two ranches
 on at present, the Sheepyards at
 Glengarry/Grewin and Billy Goats
 Hill on the Mehi field in Angl-
 dool and are 50 miles and 36 miles
 away from the Ridge respectively.

Steve had opportunity to view
 some 60,000 stones and have had
 my mind boggled and psyche
 titillated. — an opthalmic binge!

My sister made me the news-
 letter and I read Phil Pearl's letter
 in May issue. He has to make a
 point of meeting him.

My partner & I been gongin' &
 prospecting. Found our spot at old
 6 mile field but all drill rigs
 are tied up at the new ranches
 so will kick back & go fucking
 black fellow style along the
 riverbank in Collaredabri.

When you are through with
 the slides, please mail to
 my mother:

Stella Yurcick
 5802 W. Rosewood Lane
 Phoenix, Arizona
 85031

The rush at the new Wyoming field
 has slowed down a whole lot. Remember
 a "rush" is a lot of people pegging claims
 around a "find" and a number of holes
 being drilled, then a quantity of
 miners having a dig but only a
 relatively few striking it rich. There's
 still a mob of people around the Ridge
 with the ass out of their pants and
 on the "dole".

I have pitch & color, sunflesh, nothies
 and some amber nothies for faceters &
 small bits of Lightning Ridge Crystals
 to bring back already. Will be in A. middle
 of September. Sincerely, Cokino Hill

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