

PERLOFF AND YEDLIN - THEIR EARLY YEARS

Lou Perloff's account of the friendship of two young boys and their growing up with minerals to become leaders in the micromount field gives a unique look at collecting in the 1930's. It is reprinted by permission from "Neal Yedlin - A Memorial," written by Ron Bentley and "a few of Neal's many friends", published in the Mineralogical Record, 10:231-233, 1979. Lou was our Northeast Meeting speaker in 1988.

"When I was about five years old, my family moved from the east side of Manhattan to Howard Avenue in Brooklyn. Having assured myself that my own treasures had survived the shipping intact, I headed for the street to see what the neighborhood had in the way of kids my own age. I didn't have to go far. Right outside the door was a fellow who lived a few doors down the street - that was Neal.

"In the age-old manner of boys at first encounter, we made a wary appraisal of each other, asked the first few questions and exchanged names. He showed me where he lived and we decided we could get along together. That simplified things for our mothers because finding two kids was easier than finding one. From that time on we attended school together and were virtually inseparable.

"Why we both developed an interest in minerals simultaneously I can't say. Perhaps it was just because we had grown so accustomed to doing everything together. We knew nothing about minerals at that time. We only knew that there were pretty things to be found in the hillsides, and we squirreled them away in boxes and drawers. We had no conception of crystals and had never found anything but glacially polished pebbles of quartz in all shapes and colors, plus the occasional stray pebble of hematite, pyrite, or other "exotic" minerals which became treasured bragging pieces.

"We first began to learn about minerals when we discovered the Brooklyn Children's Museum around the age of 12. We were well along in Public School No. 144 and had taken some science courses by the time someone told us about the museum. And imagine, it was only about a mile from where we lived! We ran there that afternoon, after school let out (kids walk only when forced out on errands). The museum was in an old mansion in a block-square park. There were many wonders inside the door, but most of them had to wait until later; we homed in on the mineral room. For the first time in our lives we knew the enchantment of a real mineral collection. It was quite a good one, filling glass and wooden cases which lined the wall of one room. As we learned later, many of the specimens came from the Brooklyn Museum when it had removed minerals to make room for other things that were to become its specialties.

"A game was in progress in the mineral room when we entered. A handsome lady, Mrs. Seldner, was handing out cards with questions typed on them. You took a card and scurried around the room until you located a specimen and label that provided the answer, then you rushed back and called out your answer (earning

a check mark by your name), and took another card. It was a day of triumph for both of us; we beat the regulars who lived nearby and had played the game before. As prizes I received a chunk of pumice and Neal received something more colorful (but I've forgotten what it was).

"That first sight of a room full of minerals, most of them well crystallized, was an eye-opener for us both and we were hooked from that day on. We went to the museum anytime we didn't have errands at home or a heavy load of homework. Saturdays were the best of all. We were usually there before the doors opened, prepared to spend the whole day among the mineral wonders. The museum contained a good deal more than the exhibit rooms; the real treasures were in storage in the basement. Down there were drawers full of minerals that we could handle, and break, and scratch, and weigh. There were hammers and streak plates, magnets and balance, and, best of all, there was Jack Boyle.

"Jack came to the museum a year or two after we discovered it. We had been learning about minerals (and trees, shells, butterflies, etc.) from a group of wonderfully dedicated women who were wise enough to introduce us to knowledge as if we were adults, not kids. Jack was a Philadelphia Irishman whose knowledge and wit were, to us at least, dazzling. Learning about minerals from him and being gloriously entertained at the same time was an experience to be treasured forever. There was so much sheer fun in having him for a teacher that we sopped up knowledge at a rate that would have staggered our teachers back at P.S. 144 and later at Boy's High School. (Neal and I attended both schools, in the same classes most of the time, and got our law degrees from Brooklyn Law School in the same year).

"Before meeting Jack we had gone on occasional field trips to places like the Palisades or the limestone caves of upper Manhattan. But with Jack we really began to hit the collecting localities around New York. We had a copy of Manchester's "Minerals of New York and its Environs" (1931) which contained a map showing the localities within a 50 mile radius of the Battery of Manhattan (that map is reproduced in the Record, vol. 9, page 157). Neal and I collected at every locality indicated on the map, many of them dozens of times in the years before and after the war. In New York there were Valhalla, Tilly Foster, Mahopac, the Kinkel and Baylis quarries at Bedford, Glen Cove and Staten Island. In New Jersey there were the Arlington copper mine, the traprock quarries of Paterson, Snake Hill, Bound Brook, Great Notch, Summit and Somerville, as well as limestones of the Franklin-Sterling area. In Connecticut there were Haddam, Portland, Trumbull, Roxbury, Redding and Danbury, and as we grew older, the upper New England localities.

"One of Jack Boyle's maxims was 'never take no for an answer'. Of course those were simpler times and there were fewer collectors to drive quarry operators crazy. But there were rules and restrictions on collecting even then. Many such restrictions were in force at the Lower New Street quarry, the source of more zeolites of spectacular quality than have ever been found in any other American quarry. Individual collecting was forbidden at New Street. Periodically there were group visits by the New York

and Newark mineral clubs, but those always brought out mobs to rival those in the notions department at Macy's just before Christmas; not the best of collecting conditions. Neal and I were in our late teens when we decided to test the rules at New Street. We set out for the quarry one Saturday afternoon in the fall. Bob Mercer, the quarry manager, was alone in his office at the roadside listening to a football game on the radio. We had come prepared to be turned down, and Mercer said the expected words: 'Sorry fellows, I'd like to say yes. But if I let you in today I'd have half of New York here by next Saturday'. We looked a little disappointed, said nothing. Neal, who knew a good deal about football, both as a player and a fan, sensed that the football game on the radio might be the key. Lowering our eyes bashfully and scraping one foot behind the other, we asked Mercer if he minded if we stayed around and listened to the game. He said he was glad to have us. It took only a few plays, with Neal's correct guesses about what would happen next, to impress Mercer. (I limited myself to noncommittal comments that wouldn't reveal my ignorance, such as 'Wow' and 'Whee!'). Before the game was over we were in solid! It was dusk by then and there was no time for collecting that day, but Bob opened up drawers in his desk that were filled with choice pieces and invited us to take what we wanted. Even better, the two of us could come and collect whenever we wanted as long as we didn't tell anybody! It was a privilege we had until the quarry ceased operations well into the 1930's. The surrounding area had become too thickly settled and blasting was finally outlawed. But during those years, even when Neal and I were serving our clerkships in the same law office in Manhattan, Bob would sometimes call Neal to tell him about a blast that was going to be set off. Many times we would grab some legal envelopes in which to put specimens (Bob had the tools) and set off for New Street.

"Franklin, New Jersey was a tougher nut to crack. There were no club trips to the picking table where all the ore of the mine was hoisted to and laid out. You had to be a Very Important Person or a close friend of the chief chemist, Bauer, in order to have a whiff of a chance of getting an invitation to visit the picking table. For several years Neal had been head counselor at a camp near Bear Mountain Park, not far from Franklin. One day he composed a letter to the Franklin mine manager that, for lucid persuasiveness, Metternichian guile and consummate chutzpah would have done credit to Henry Kissinger! Neal laid great stress on how such a visit to the fabled mine would assist him in imparting to his charges the great mining history of the region. We discussed the phrasing in detail, fearful that some of it might sound a bit fulsome. But the letter worked! Very shortly after sending the letter we received an invitation. As Neal's colleague I was, of course, to accompany him. Not wanting to be hogs, we invited Jack Boyle, Ivan Lee, and Mary Whelleck. There was one sticky moment at the gate when it seemed that someone objected to letting a woman into the mine, but then the gates opened and the picking table was before us.

"In the early 1930's Neal and I became members of the New York Mineralogical Club. In those years the club had an awesome

membership composed of some of the best amateur and professional mineralogists in the country. Their mineralogical knowledge was deep, their opinions strong, and all were fiercely disputatious. Neal and I eagerly looked forward to the monthly meetings, for each meeting was certain to see its share of verbal fireworks. We soon realized that these mineralogical Donnybrooks had an almost ritual quality in which the contestants welcomed the verbal testing of themselves and each other. Over the years we became friends with many of them.

"Neal moved to Maine in the late 1930's and we didn't meet again until after the war. Both of us were out of uniform at the end of 1945 and Neal had returned to New York. His stored mineral collection had been left in Maine at the home of a friend. At once we were gripped by the fever to get out into the field again and see the old collecting sites. The fever, as we found out, was pandemic among mineralogists and collectors after the war. The crowds at club trips were enormous. It was at this time that our interest in micromounts began to develop. Jack Boyle had introduced us to the microscope many years earlier, and we had seen some of John Grenzig's mounts in his home. But it was during the post-war sessions with a microscope in Ivan Lee's home in Jersey City that we were sold on micromounting as the True Faith. We had never seen anything to match Ivan's suite of uranium minerals from Shinkolobwe. We began to think seriously of converting entirely to micromounting.

"Around this time we met a young priest who lived in a room behind a church in Times Square. In his small room there was a large grand piano for his work with sacred music, a work bench where he worked on stained glass window panels, and a table for his microscope and micromount collection. His collection, which seemed enormous to us, was in about 1000 rakestraw boxes. Loose micromount material overflowed the space below the table and every odd corner of the room. A small cot occupied one side, so that one had to move sideways to get through. It was evident that something would have to go. Reluctantly our friend decided that it would have to be the minerals in order to leave room for his more vital religious activities. When he told us of his decision I bought his microscope. Neal, who already had a microscope, bought the boxed micromounts which were to form the nucleus of his collection. We happily hauled away and shared the mounds of loose micromount material from the room. We were in the micromount business at last."

