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Followers of Utah farmer say time is nigh for Nephite riches to be revealed BY PHIL MILLER

SALEM -- The Nephites were the first to find the gold, tons and tons of it, riches that would humble all of the wealth of Bill Gates, the Sultan of Brunei and the Queen of England put together. But abundance made the Nephites in The Book of Mormon prideful and greedy, and their treasures finally were seized by a wrathful God more than 2,000 years ago, and collected in nine great caverns. The colossal vaults are supported by enormous golden columns and piled high with ornaments and artifacts and priceless records documenting the ancient roots of the Mormon Church and the Nephites.

And the bountiful chambers are surrounded by the richest lode of gold ore ever found on Earth, more gold than could be extracted in several generations. Of course, nothing has ever been found that remotely indicates such a fabulous stockpile ever existed, but that hasn't stopped some Utahns from believing in it.

They believe the gold still is sealed, untouched since biblical times, deep inside a nondescript Wasatch Range mountain two miles east of Salem in Utah County. Only one man has claimed to have seen the wondrous hoard in two millennia: A modest, stooped, soft-spoken dirt farmer who said he accompanied the Angel Moroni on a breathtaking tour of the cache during a spectacularly vivid dream in 1894.

That humble man, John Hyrum Koyle, died 50 years ago Monday at age 84. His followers -- and they still may number in the hundreds, perhaps thousands -- say he was guided by God. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints says he was a heretic. But the glorious day is approaching, with a speed both terrifying and thrilling, when the Nephites' treasure will be revealed to all humankind, the believers say.

That day, perhaps now only weeks or months away, will be the day when all civilization on Earth has collapsed into chaos and poverty. And that will be the day when Koyle's dream becomes the salvation for all who believe.

Picture of Humility

A large portrait of Jesus Christ in an intricately carved frame dominates one wall of Ogden Kraut's Midvale publishing office. Mounted next to it is a slightly smaller, slightly plainer rendering of Mormon Church founder Joseph Smith. And beside the two hangs a photo of John Koyle. The display accurately sums up Kraut's spiritual priorities. "Probably the only man I could ever say for sure was a prophet, seer and revelator," Kraut says of Koyle, using the title Mormons reserve for the LDS Church president. "He was the most humble man I ever met. There was not a shadow of vanity or pride about him, but when you were with him, you knew he was led by the Lord."

Those are dangerous words for a Mormon, since the church long ago branded Koyle a charlatan, but Kraut, a retired military photographer, was excommunicated in 1972 for his beliefs, including polygamy. Though he considers himself a follower of Joseph Smith's teachings, Kraut can speak without regard to the reaction of today's LDS general authorities. Other believers in Koyle's Dream Mine, as the real mine he founded and help dig is commonly called, cannot.

A knock on several doors in Salem, 60 miles south of Salt Lake City, recently produced polite but firm refusals to discuss the mine. A few would confirm that they own stock, but nothing more. Some suggested that Satan, trying to cause a rift between Salem's Latter-day Saints and Mormon leadership, had inspired the visit. But the mine exists, and the odd white step-shaped mill on the mountainside, visible for miles, proves it.

No serious mining has gone on inside the mountain for nearly 40 years, but the reorganized Relief Mine Co., the official name of the Dream Mine, still maintains the property and mining claims, conducts annual state-required assays, and calls a shareholder meeting every May. Relief Mine Co. owns more than 1,000 acres of land, worth about \$5 million today and more valuable every year as the expensive modern subdivision called Woodland Hills creeps closer. Tenant farmers work about 100 acres, and a gravel pit on the property produces just enough income to cover the company's \$9,000 tax bill.

Nearly 700,000 shares of stock have been issued, but nobody knows how many have been tucked away in attics, or sold to memorabilia collectors or thrown out by disbelieving descendants. About 150,000 shares were registered by current stockholders at last week's annual meeting, or 22 percent of the outstanding total. Everything is tidy and legal, but Relief Mine Co. isn't about gravel pits or dividends or the now-dead orchards on the land.

The company and its stockholders merely are marking time until a century-old prophecy comes true and the riches of the Nephites are brought forth to save the Earth. That day is not far off, Kraut says. "I have seen more signposts in the last six months than I have in the last 50 years combined," he says confidently. "Look at the signs -- Y2K, a war in the Balkans, a wicked president and an unstable economy that could fall apart at any moment.

"I've been waiting 52 years for the conditions to be right and the mine to come in. Now that it's almost here, it's a little frightening." The riches of the mine are close,

he says, and will take only one day to reach once the time is right. But until that time, he believes, 10 years of digging would not be enough to find the gold ore.

Kraut estimates a few thousand Mormons believe Koyle's dream, as he does, but says all will be convinced once the mine comes in. "It will bring more members to the church than all the missionaries who have gone out put together," he says.

Anyone who met Koyle more than five decades ago can have no doubt about the truthfulness of his vision, Kraut says. The small man with cataracts could talk with unequalled fervor and sincerity.

"Nobody could doubt that he spoke for the Lord. There was a reverence that I have never seen, before or since," says Kraut, who worked in Koyle's mine for two years in the late 1940s before serving an LDS mission. "I miss those days, those memories."

Reluctant Visionary John Koyle never fancied himself an oracle, and never showed off his gift for public amusement or entertainment. But stories of his ability to see the future through his dreams abound, from scholarly books on his life to anecdotes shared by friends.

He predicted the 1929 stock-market crash to the exact day, believers claim, and his 1940s prophecy that "muddy waters will run through the streets and cause disruptions the length of the state" has been interpreted as foretelling Utah's disastrous 1983 floods and mudslides.

After Herbert Hoover's election to the presidency in 1928, Koyle told friends that one man, a Democrat, would win the next four elections. Franklin Roosevelt did.

According to Kraut, in 1941, when dentist Albert Brooksby's son enlisted in the military, Brooksby anxiously asked Koyle how long World War II would last. The elderly miner didn't know. The next morning, Koyle contacted his friend. "I know now," he said, and predicted a four-year campaign that would end by September 1945. The news spread quickly in Utah County, and many people were confident of its validity.

Utah County resident Steve Woods, relying on Koyle's prediction, even assured Deseret News sports editor Les Goates in late July 1945 that the coming World Series and college football season would be played as scheduled because the

war nearly was over. This despite the fact that the Japanese still occupied much of Asia and the Pacific islands, and experts were predicting a long and bloody liberation campaign.

A skeptical Goates wrote a column mocking Woods' confidence. "Everything is going to be sweetness and light for traveling football, baseball and basketball teams by Sept. 1," his Deseret News column read July 27, 1945. "Steve Woods says so!" A month later, after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered.

If Koyle's dreams seemed an astonishing gift, it was one that he never sought. Actually, he resisted it at first. He grew up in Spanish Fork, a deeply religious son of pioneer parents. In 1886, the dreams began. Spirits visited the 22-year-old farmer one night, Koyle said, and instructed him that they would prove their righteousness with a vision. They showed him that his cow, missing for several days, could be found at a certain place on his farm, its right horn broken and interfering with its eye. When his cow stood at the exact spot the next day, broken horn and all, Koyle believed.

So devout did he become, in fact, that Koyle spent his life trying to fulfill the most splendid and important vision he ever received, the prophecy that came eight years later and gave him unbridled joy but eventually cost the anguished old man a place in his church: The Dream Mine.

Heavenly Messenger Koyle said the Angel Moroni visited him the night of Aug. 27, 1894. Latter-day Saints believe Moroni was the last Nephite prophet and that he delivered to Joseph Smith the records from which The Book of Mormon was translated. Moroni took Koyle to the top of nearby Loafer Mountain, and the earth opened up so the two could walk inside. Koyle said his guide pointed out where he was to dig, what signs to watch for, what formations he would have to overcome. Then he ushered Koyle into nine wondrous caverns the ancient Nephites had left behind, impressing him with riches he barely could comprehend. Even more overwhelming was the reason to dig for the lode: There is a coming calamity on Earth, Koyle was told, with financial collapse, starvation, natural disasters. Paper money would be worthless, and \$20 bills would blow like trash in the gutter, not worth the trouble of bending over to pick them up. A bushel of gold would buy a bushel of wheat. But the Nephite treasure would provide for all who needed its help. It would save the people who came to it, the greatest welfare program the world ever has seen. Thus Koyle called it the Relief Mine.

To prove the dream was true, the messenger said, a nearby dry well suddenly would flow with water the next day at noon. When Koyle returned home from farming the next evening, his wife, Emily, met him at the gate. She excitedly told him that their neighbors whooped with excitement when they stuck water that day -- at precisely noon.

Still, Koyle had to persuade his friends to believe his dream and join him in mining the mountain. He took one fellow farmer up the mountain to where he proposed to start digging, and predicted they would hit a cream-colored formation within three feet of the surface. They did, and soon people were showing up from all over the state to work in the Dream Mine. "It was the midst of a tremendous mining boom in this country, when you could seemingly turn over any rock and reveal some fabulous mineral," says Zeese Papanikolas, a historian who has written about Koyle and the Dream Mine. "The economy of mining was so hot, Koyle's story probably seemed very believable."

Koyle and his followers staked mining claims on the mountain and began digging Sept. 17, 1894. They incorporated as the Koyle Mining Co. and began selling stock to raise money. Miners were paid in stock as well, and soon more than a quarter-million shares had been issued. As word of Koyle's work spread, thousands of eager investors, nearly all of them Mormons, clamored to buy stock. Some sold possessions to buy more, convinced that, despite geologists' reports deeming its ore worthless, each \$1 investment someday would return \$1,000. "

The mine became a big part of everyday life in Utah County," says Papanikolas. "It was part social organization, part religious organization, part employment agency. Nearly everybody in the south county took part to some extent, by buying stock if nothing else." Mining continued for 20 years, with the path of each shaft directed by Koyle's dreams.

But in January 1914, when miners had burrowed 1,400 feet into the mountain, Koyle was visited by two mysterious men. They instructed him to shift his work to the other side of the mountain and downslope, to dig a tunnel that would intersect with the mine. Convinced that the visitors had been two of the three Nephites that the Book of Mormon says had been left on Earth by Jesus to spread his gospel, Koyle and his workers began boring a second entrance into the mountain.

Six months later, under pressure from the LDS Church, they abandoned the work, but Koyle was persuaded to continue mining in 1920. By that time, the timber

supports had become unsafe in the original shaft, so miners focused completely on the tunnel. Koyle kept the shaft perfectly straight without any modern sighting tools -- so straight that a worker can kneel at the tunnel's end, 3,400 feet into the mountain, and see light at the entrance, miners say.

In 1932, when the company had little money, Koyle announced it was time to build a mill to process the ore. The mine's board of directors turned him down, but Koyle raised the money himself and soon the modern-looking "white sentinel" building was erected on the northwest slope. Trouble was, the equipment necessary to pull any valuable minerals from the seemingly worthless rock had not been invented, so the mill remained empty.

When enthusiasm flagged, some event or timely prediction always reignited the fervor. His followers testified Koyle correctly predicted geologic formations in the mine -- a sudden reversal of the ore's pattern, or the discovery of a perfect outline of the United States embedded in the granite.

Miners followed Koyle's directions to start digging straight down again near the tunnel's end, and uncovered a "capstone," so solid it took two months just to bore through its 3-foot depth. They also dug a "winze," a declining shaft toward where Koyle said the caverns lie, but it filled with water a few years after his death.

Despite all the digging, nearly two miles of tunnels in the mountain, the mine never struck the rich golden ore Koyle had predicted. Though a patient man, Koyle was disappointed his vision never materialized, especially since he interpreted the Great Depression as one of the signs that financial chaos was near.

By the mid-1940s, Koyle, now an elderly man weathered by a lifetime of hard work, was convinced the mine was about to come in, and his belief sparked renewed enthusiasm among residents. They came out each Thursday night to his weekly mine conferences, which offered the electricity of a revival meeting, and the Dream Mine hit a fever pitch. Then, suddenly, the walls caved in on Koyle's spirit. His heart was broken.

Falling Away?

Mormon Church doctrine holds that members can receive guidance from spiritual powers, but revelations concerning the flock as a whole always are channeled through the ruling First Presidency. So while

Koyle was free to pursue his dream, the LDS leadership had warned him for decades against using church doctrine to persuade other Latter-day Saints to join him.

Mormon President Joseph F. Smith and his two counselors signed a statement published by the church-owned Deseret News that year, saying "when visions, dreams, tongues, prophecy, impressions or an extraordinary gift of inspiration conveys something out of harmony with the accepted revelations of the church . . . it is not of God, no matter how plausible it may appear. . . . It is our duty to warn against mining schemes which have no warrant for success."

Koyle, who had been appointed bishop of Salem's Leland Ward in 1908, was removed from the post. A year later, the church persuaded him to shut the mine. But Koyle, who continued to receive what he believed was divine guidance through his dreams, decided he must begin mining again in 1920. It was a conflict that beleaguered him all his life. "John didn't know what to do. He wanted to obey the authorities, yet he could not deny what had been revealed to him," Koyle's sister said shortly after his death. "We all felt sorry for him."

The previous warning against believing in the mine was published again in the Deseret News in 1945, this time signed by President George Albert Smith and his counselors. And, in 1947, when reports of Koyle's Thursday-night meetings persisted, the church held a formal trial before his stake's high council. According to Kraut's book on the Relief Mine, Koyle finally made a deal: He would sign a statement repudiating the mine and his angelic vision, which would be kept secret, and would cease the meetings, in exchange for a meeting with the LDS Church's First Presidency. Koyle believed he could change President Smith's mind about the mine, because he had been given information by Moroni that would convince the LDS leader. But as he rode home from the trial, Koyle burst into tears, Kraut recalls. He knew he had made a mistake by signing the document, because he had been warned in a dream

about ever signing any papers regarding the mine.

The next day, his statement was printed on the front page of the Deseret News. His followers were stunned. Koyle soon resumed his Thursday meetings, and assured his shaken followers that he had signed only to preserve his church membership. A year later, on April 1, 1948, a feeble Koyle was excommunicated. "He was as devout as they come. He couldn't believe the church would treat him that way," Kraut says. "It made him very sad, because he believed the general authorities just didn't understand. The mine was for the church's benefit. Its gold will be used to build the great temple in New Jerusalem someday," he says, referring to a Mormon prophecy about the church's future.

Distraught over his fate and weakened by heart trouble, Koyle died May 17, 1949, in a Payson hospital. His Deseret News obituary made no mention of the mine to which he had devoted his life. "He was inspired," Kraut insists. "Anyone who met him could tell instantly. And someday soon, the church will believe it, too."