



Showcasing SA Heritage Places

Dick Clark's Residence

Lot 174, Andamooka

SAHR 13075 – confirmed as a State Heritage Place 6 March 2008

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Dick Clark is one of the pioneers of the Andamooka Opal Fields. His home – a semi-dugout residence that he designed and built more than 60 years ago – is a rare surviving example of the early permanent dwellings built in this harsh environment.

The construction of these semi-dugouts employed skills and equipment typically associated with mining. The structures were economical with scarce building materials and resulted in an efficient thermally-insulated living space. Typically the dwellings incorporated a number of separate structures such as living, sleeping and work rooms, linked by paths.



Roof of original building, 2006

The style of construction, the harsh environment and the transient nature of miners makes it rare to find an original structure that has not fallen into disrepair. Dick Clark's Residence is one of only a handful of such structures remaining in Andamooka and is unique in that it is close to its original condition and still occupied by the original owner and builder.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ANDAMOOKA OPAL FIELDS:

Andamooka was named in 1858 by John McDouall Stuart, after an Aboriginal word meaning 'large waterhole'. Today it is one of the world's major sources of precious opal.

In 1930 two employees of Andamooka Station found exposed opal-bearing rock on a site within the present township. By August 1931 the first mining licence was taken out and, by the following year, a handful of other miners were working in the area. Activity was limited for the first decade or so as the small number of miners working the field kept their finds secret.

After World War Two the news of major opal finds at Andamooka was leaked and a substantial number of prospectors were attracted to the area.

The living conditions of these miners were rough and primitive. Many lived in tents, humpies or dugouts built into the sides of ridges and hills along the banks of the creek. Some left disappointed and others made large fortunes. A few, like the Clark family, made permanent homes for themselves amongst the mullock heaps, raised families and made a modest living.



Mr Clark in the kitchen & living room, 2004

DICK CLARK & FAMILY:

Like many of the early miners, Dick Clark came to Andamooka after the Second World War. Following his discharge at the end of 1945, he married Teresa Hemingway and early the following year decided to try mica mining in Alice Springs. On the train the couple met two miners heading to Andamooka and were convinced to try mining opal instead. At the time of the Clark's arrival, there were about 20 miners at Andamooka.

Dick lived in a tent while prospecting and staking his claim, but in between sinking shafts he also started building a one-room dugout for his family. It took him a month to complete the first structure, a combined kitchen/bedroom and living room. Teresa, who was pregnant with their first child, stayed in Port Augusta for several months, as there was no hospital in the town.

The Clark's settled in at Andamooka, becoming respected members of the close-knit community. Though still in his twenties, Dick's years as a prisoner-of-war in Java had damaged his health, making the heavy mining difficult. Instead he learnt to cut opal and made a living cutting and polishing stones for other miners. In later years he served as postmaster and built and ran the town's first picture theatre. During the 1950s Teresa was a nurse in the galvanised iron shed provided as a hospital for the indigenous inhabitants of the town. She also nursed other members of the community until the Australian Inland Mission opened a small hospital in 1965.

Mrs Clark died some years ago, but the couple's two sons remain nearby. Dick Clark, although in his late eighties is still active and independent and living comfortably in the home he built for his family more than 60 years ago. *[information current 2008]*

THE RESIDENCE:

The Clark's home is located within the Andamooka township boundary, on land granted to Dick in June 1982. He had leased and occupied the site for some 36 years before assuming formal ownership.

The residence comprises a cluster of small buildings – a main living room, containing cooking and sleeping areas, was constructed in 1946; two sleep-outs and a workroom were added between then and the mid-1950s. The living room and one of the sleep-outs were built in the typical semi-dugout style but the workroom and second sleep-out are free-standing. The SA Heritage Register listing includes the walls and roofs of the living room, the two sleep-outs and workshop, together with pathways and drystone walls.



Sleep-out No. 1, 2006

For the early structure, Mr Clark dug out a portion of a hill and built the living room in the excavation. He used native pine supports and sandstone as walling materials. Rendered kopi (a white or pale yellow sandy claystone found in the upper levels of the opal diggings) and sand mortar gave the walls a smooth finish. Lengths of native pine were also used in the roof construction. Hessian bags, soaked in mutton fat, were laid over the saplings to make it waterproof and excavated earth was placed on top for insulation. Pieces of broken glass were scattered over the roof (later replaced by a fence of stakes and chicken wire) to keep people and animals from clambering over it. The original floor was compacted earth hardened with mutton fat and gypsum ashes.



Entrance to living room – sleep-out No.1 on right, 2006

The building has since been renovated with the addition of concrete floors and walls, but the external structure remains largely unaltered.

ASSOCIATED STATE HERITAGE PLACES:

A precinct of five semi-dugout dwellings near the town centre, none of which are now occupied as residences, has been maintained by the Andamooka Progress and Opal Miners' Association as an informal museum and tourist attraction – namely the **Andamooka Historic Precinct (SAHR 12663)**.

Two dugouts in Coober Pedy – the **Coober Pedy Catholic Church (SAHR 10302)** and a **Three-roomed Dugout (SAHR 18213)** – as well as two **former Miners' Dugouts** in the creek at **Burra (SAHR 10050 & SAHR 11187)** are also entered in the South Australian Heritage Register.