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Feasts in Oregon and Texas helped shape RCG history

The following is an update of an article that appeared in issue No. 67 of THE JOURNAL, dated Aug. 30, 2002. This article is the second in a series.

By John Warren

BIG SANDY, Texas—Last month we wrote about the growth of the Radio Church of God in East Texas from its beginnings in the early 1950s up until the early 1970s.

We chronicled the church in this area beginning with the 13 people who observed that first Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread at the Roy Hammer residence near Gladewater in 1951.

We saw the founding of Imperial Schools near Big Sandy in 1954 and the opening on the same property of Ambassador College in 1964.

Under the spreading oak tree

The college campus at Big Sandy had a major impact on church growth in East Texas, but an earlier major factor was Radio/Worldwide Church of God founder Herbert W. Armstrong's decision in 1952 to develop the church property as a Feast of Tabernacles site for the fall of 1953.



Buck Hammer

In this article we focus on what Sabbath and Feast services were like in those early days and the challenges that confronted church members.

Several people who attended festival and church services in the 1940s and '50s provided THE JOURNAL with their remembrances for this article in interviews in 2002.

Buck Hammer of Gladewater, who died in 2003, remembered the first church service on the property two miles east of Big Sandy on U.S. Highway 80. This was in 1952 during the spring feast, with services that year taking place at the Hammer home near Gladewater.

After discussions with Mr. Armstrong, founder of what was then called the Radio Church of God, about the need for a larger facility for observing the Feast of Tabernacles later that year, a group traveled from Gladewater to the unimproved Big Sandy property one afternoon during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Compared with services in later years in air-conditioned buildings, that first meeting was rather primitive. "Mr. Armstrong stood under an oak tree," remembered Mr. Hammer. "There was sort of a natural amphitheater on a hillside near the spring [a spring near the site on which Mr. Armstrong would later oversee the construction of the Redwood Building]. The audience

See **FEASTS IN OREGON**, page 4



2014 FEAST IN FLORIDA—Friends and relatives attended many Feast of Tabernacles sites in October. In this photo Pam Kurr of Mounds, Okla. (left), enjoys a Feast observance in Destin, Fla., sponsored by the Church of God Big Sandy with her daughter Brandi Cartwright of Nacogdoches, Texas, grandson Cater of Nacogdoches (right) and granddaughter Cara of Nashville, Tenn. See Feast reports and photos from readers beginning on this page of THE JOURNAL. [Photo by Dixon Cartwright]

Read this issue for history lesson No. 2

BIG SANDY, Texas—JOURNAL writer John Warren is hot on the history trail again.

The focus of his second monthly installment is a little softer. Much of the narrative does concern the Big Sandy area, but this time the anecdotes and photos also come from Oregon, California and England.



Dorothy Williams in 1978

Prominent in this month's installment are two more COG members with good memories Mr. Warren interviewed several years ago: Dorothy Williams and Ken Swisher. And Buck Hammer's remembrances are back.

See the photos on this page and pages 4-5. The article begins at left on this page.

Dwight Armstrong's daughter is releasing her father's unpublished hymns into public domain

By Edward Malone

Deborah L. Armstrong of Spokane, Wash., daughter of Worldwide Church of God (WCG) hymn writer Dwight Armstrong, recently announced her plans to place her late father's unpublished hymns into the public domain.

THE JOURNAL had previously heard that Ms. Armstrong would donate the hymns to the Philadelphia Church of God, based in Oklahoma.

More than 20 unpublished hymns

In a December 2013 online interview for the Secular Safe House podcast, Ms. Armstrong stated she had in her possession more than 20 of her father's unreleased hymns and that she had intended to donate all of them to the Edmond, Okla.-based Philadelphia Church of God (PCG) in consideration of that church's requests for them.

"[The Philadelphia Church] had long ago asked me for them," explained Ms. Armstrong to podcast host Troy Fitzgerald concerning her

father's unpublished hymns. "He [Dwight Armstrong] had a number of them."

Public domain

In a series of E-mail messages to this writer for THE JOURNAL on Oct. 29 and 30, 2014, Ms. Armstrong clarified the matter, stating that although PCG music director Ryan Malone (no relation to this article's writer) had her father's music in his possession and was currently attaching lyrics to them, the previously unpublished works would be released into the public domain for use and enjoyment of anyone, including all of the Churches of God.

"In my earlier discussions with PCG, one of the conditions I gave them was that my father's hymns must remain in the public domain and not be copyrighted, so really I never intended to give the hymns to just one group," pointed out Ms. Armstrong.

"I think that since the WCG, which my father was a member of, is now defunct, that the hymns should be

made freely available to all of the tribes of WCG, especially since, as I understand, there is some disagreement as to which of these groups is God's chosen.

"I believe we are all equal in the eyes of God or the universe or whatever you choose to believe in, so my father's hymns should be a gift for all of creation to enjoy."

Through the Internet

According to Ms. Armstrong, her father's hymns will soon be released and be available for interested persons to see on the Internet.

Concerning the titles of the forthcoming hymns or any samples of them, Ms. Armstrong said that she could not provide any samples until she met with her attorney.

"I will be putting scans of my father's hymns online soon," stated Ms. Armstrong. "Once they are scanned and online, I will edit my father's Wikipedia page and place a

See **PUBLIC-DOMAIN**, page 22

Feast reports in from Jamaica, Arroyo Grande and more

Feast of Tabernacles reports sent in by readers of THE JOURNAL begin below for Feast 2014. Many, but not all, 2014 observances started on the evening of Oct. 8 and ran through Oct. 16.

You're invited to send your Feast report for THE JOURNAL at info@thejournal.org or P.O. Box 1020, Big Sandy, Texas 75755, U.S.A.

BEST-EVER FEAST IN JAMAICA

KINGSTON, Jamaica—The dynamic Jamaican Church of God International (CGI) work held to its steady growth pattern as this year 442 persons attended the Feast of Tabernacles in the tropical Caribbean island.

The Jamaican work, spearheaded by 42-year Church of God veteran pastor Ian Boyne, also added eight newly baptized members on the Last Great Day.

Canadian contingent

It was an exciting and enriching Feast, with a refreshing international flavor, as 18 Canadians, led by Jamaican-born Toronto pastor Horane Smith, shared in the Jamaican Tabernacles experience.

Visitors from the United States also enhanced the fellowship.

It was an especially moving and memorable occasion for Pastor Smith and his wife, Beverly, as they

witnessed the baptisms of their twin sons Jody and Cody. Pastor Smith had the rare but undoubtedly delightful privilege—alongside Pastor Boyne—of baptizing his own sons.

Two Feast sites

Such has been the dynamism of the CGI Jamaican work that, for the first time, the island officially held two separate Feast sites. The northern coastal resort town of Ocho Rios hosted the main group, presided over by Pastor Boyne, which numbered 355 at the capacity-full Casa de Shalom meeting hall.

Ministerial Apprenticeship Programme (MAP) candidate and leader of the Spanish Town CGI congregation Pedro Hall presided over the second site, which hosted 87 persons in the historic town of Morant Bay, capital of the southeastern parish of St. Thomas.

Mr. Hall was supported in his Feast work by Pastor Smith and his Toronto copastor George Ramocan, who serves as Mr. Hall's MAP sponsor. (There was one baptism at this site.)

The exuberant praise and worship, led by deacon Chris Hendricks, was complemented by a variety of special items of music, dance, poetry and dramatic presentations throughout the festival.

See **REPORTS IN**, page 6

CGI Jamaica names winner of HWA contest

KINGSTON, Jamaica—Church of God International Jamaica pastor Ian Boyne announced the winner of his congregations' annual Herbert W. Armstrong Memorial Speaking Competition at the Feast of Tabernacles in October 2014.

CGI member Stephen Scale "upstaged the favorites and walked away with the coveted HWA trophy to wild applause from the crowd," announced CGI elder Glenford Smith.

Pastor Boyne, in commenting on the results, also mentioned that this year's competition for the first time included a non-Jamaican participant, Courtney Scarlett of Canada.

The theme of this year's event: "Why the Doctrine of the Immortal Soul Is False."

See also CGI Jamaica's Feast report beginning on page 1 of this issue of THE JOURNAL.

Pasadena reunion won't turn anyone away

PASADENA, Calif.—Anyone who wants to attend the reunion of Ambassador College students who studied on the Pasadena campus from 1947 to 1977 are welcome, say organizers Bob Gerringer and Cledece Decker.

THE JOURNAL had asked the two AC alumni if the reunion would welcome, for example, former students at Big Sandy and Bricket Wood, if they wanted to attend. "Our reunion is for students from the first 30 years at Pasadena," Mr. Gerringer said. "However, if any Pasadena student from outside of that period or any former Big Sandy or Bricket Wood students or any former AC Pasadena employee would really like to attend, they need only ask."

To ask, check in with Mr. Gerringer, Ms. Decker or Jean Updegraff at bob@acpasadenareunion.com, cledeck@att.net or jeanupde@sbcglobal.net.

See more information about the reunion in "Notes and Quotes" on page 24 of this issue of THE JOURNAL.

Public-domain transfer will add 20-some hymns to original 128

Continued from page 1

link to the hymns there. I will most likely be placing them at a Dropbox site."

However, in another twist to this news story, PCG music director Ryan Malone E-mailed *THE JOURNAL* on Dec. 2, 2014, and implied that his project with Ms. Armstrong had either been completed or aborted.

Wrote Mr. Malone, "I would rather not comment on this, since we are no longer working with her."

THE JOURNAL followed up with Ms. Armstrong that same day. She stated that she will be releasing her father's unpublished hymns to the public without the assistance of the PCG.

She also stated that she had given Ryan Malone of the PCG "only four hymns or so."

Growing impatient with incoming questions, Ms. Armstrong—without saying who, if anyone, in place of Mr. Malone would be attaching lyrics to her father's hymns—asked not to be "further bombarded with questions about this."

THE JOURNAL will update its readership as it learns more about the anticipated release of the hymns of Dwight Armstrong.

Violinist and composer

Dwight Armstrong (1904-1984) was a violinist and composer who wrote hymns—piano and congregational arrangements—for publication and distribution among congregations of the Radio/Worldwide Church of God.

He was the brother of WCG founder and longtime pastor general Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986).

Dwight Armstrong was baptized into the Church of God sometime between 1927 and 1930, and he remained a part of the church until his death, in 1984.

The Radio Church of God (founded in 1927 or, some say, 1934), which became the WCG in 1968, officially renounced the doctrines of its founder Herbert Armstrong in 1995 and renamed itself Grace Communion International (GCI) in 2009.

It has ceased for the most part to be a Sabbatarian denomination (although there are still GCI congregations and Feast sites that observe the Sabbath and traditional Feast dates), but Dwight Armstrong's hymns continue to be sung among fragments of the WCG.

These include denominations and groups such as the United Church of God, Living Church of God, Church of God International, Canadian Church of God and Philadelphia Church of God.

Even a few scattered congregations and Feast observances of Grace Communion International are said to continue to sing some of Mr. Armstrong's hymns.

Protestant tradition

During the early days of the Radio Church of God in the 1930s and '40s, congregants sang traditional English hymns by Protestant writers sung by earlier-established Sabbath-keeping churches such as the Seventh-day Adventists and the Church of God Seventh Day.

Herbert Armstrong, however, was a staunch critic of churches other than the WCG that he referred to as "Protestants," especially charismatic Pentecostalism.

Still, Protestant hymns appear in all the hymnals published by the RCG/WCG while Mr. Armstrong was alive.

During a Church of God evangelistic campaign in Eugene, Ore., an elderly attendee declined to participate in hymn singing, citing his belief that many of the Protestant hymns being used were not doctrinally and scripturally sound.

It's a sin to sing a lie

When Mr. Armstrong asked him why he did not sing, the man was quot-

ed by Armstrong as saying, "It is just as sinful to sing a lie as to tell one."

Mr. Armstrong grew to reject hymns that were personal testimonials and sentimental celebrations of the life, love and lordship of Jesus written by Protestant writers such as John Newton, Johnson Oatman, and Charles A. Tindley, preferring instead to sing simple metrical hymns strictly based on the Psalms and other scriptures.

Mr. Armstrong, therefore, commissioned his brother and fellow church member Dwight Armstrong to compose melodies for the churches around the world to sing that could be set to Scripture-friendly lyrics.

Dwight began this work for the church in 1947, and his songs appeared in the Radio Church of God hymnal (the thin gray paperback hymnal) and in the larger Worldwide Church of God hymnals beginning with the 1974 edition.

Special talent

In the introduction to the 1974 hymnal Mr. Armstrong described the moment that led him to ask his brother to compose hymns for the church: "One day I heard my youngest brother, Dwight, play on the piano a piece he had composed. It was not four-part harmony, but was in the style of a four-part harmony hymn."

"I was intrigued. It had quality and character. I had known from the time my brother was a small child that he had a special musical talent. I immediately asked him to compose two or three hymns, setting words from the Psalms to music. It took some little time, but they were good."

Although brother Dwight composed the melodies of his hymns, he was not a lyricist. It has recently been noted that the words of many of his songs were borrowed from metrical books of Psalms called psalters found in various Protestant sources.

'One day I heard my youngest brother, Dwight, play on the piano a piece he had composed,' Herbert Armstrong wrote. 'It was . . . in the style of a four-part-harmony hymn.'

According to Deborah Armstrong, the lyrics of her father's hymns were arranged by her mother, Karen Hill Armstrong, wife of Dwight.

The church's early hymnals contained a mixture of Dwight Armstrong hymns and a few popular Protestant hymns, with lyrics frequently edited to reflect the church's doctrines.

128 Dwight Armstrong hymns

Through the years, succeeding hymnals gradually contained fewer and fewer of the old Protestant hymns and more and more of those composed by Dwight Armstrong.

According to a website established by Church of God Ministry (cogtv.org) that features hymns sung by the old Radio/Worldwide Church of God, Dwight Armstrong wrote 128 hymns for publication.

His popular songs include "Blest and Happy Is The Man," "Trust in God and Stand in Awe," "O How Love I Thy Law," "In Thy Loving Kindness, Lord," "His Mercy Never Fails" and "How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings."

"I felt honored that people sang my father's hymns," Ms. Armstrong said in the podcast interview, "especially at the Feast, where there'd be 10,000 people."

She explained that her father kept writing hymns "until the day he died," but with the ascension of Ross Jutsum as the new featured composer for the Worldwide Church of God, the later hymns of Dwight Armstrong were not used.

Project abandoned

At the time of Dwight's death, in 1984, Pastor General Armstrong an-

nounced that the church would publish a new hymnal that would include the unreleased hymns of his brother. But, after Herbert Armstrong himself died two years later, the WCG aban-



ARMSTRONG FAMILY—Above: Deborah Armstrong on the air during her days as a television-news anchorwoman. Above right and right: Deborah Armstrong's parents, Dwight Armstrong and Karen Armstrong. Karen Armstrong was the sister of RCG/WCG elder David Jon Hill. See another picture of Dwight Armstrong on page 4 of this issue of *THE JOURNAL*. [Courtesy photos]

doned that project.

Deborah Armstrong however, retained the original, unpublished hymns of her father, and 30 years later she says they will now be released into the public's hands.

Concerning Dwight Armstrong's already-published works, the Worldwide Church of God placed those hymns into the public domain back in 2006.

Bronson James' vocal coach

Bronson James of Detroit, Mich., a professional singer and voice specialist, former minister in the WCG and current minister in the Church of God International who remembers Debo-

rah when she was a child during her father's music heyday, says he is pleased with Ms. Armstrong's donation and that many people within the Churches of God will appreciate her donation and enjoy singing and listening to the previously unpublished works of her father.

Mr. James has fond memories of Dwight and Karen (pronounced with the first syllable the same as "car") Armstrong.

"I knew him very well," said Mr. James of Mr. Armstrong. "I visited his house weekly. His wife was my vocal coach."

Mr. James was the bass singer in a mixed quartet in the WCG. The quartet sang many of Dwight Armstrong's compositions.

"I was blessed to be able to sing Dwight Armstrong's music so that his brother [Herbert Armstrong] could hear it before publication," he said.

Mr. James was familiar with the legend of the church member who confronted Herbert Armstrong about "singing a lie." But Mr. James said that it was a subsequent occurrence that led to the church's almost wholesale abandonment of Protestant hymns.

At a ministerial gathering in the early 1970s, a minister gave a sermonette that "disparaged hymns from the 18th and 19th centuries" as being too self-centered.

Fanny Crosby was outstanding

According to Mr. James, it was after this sermonette that Mr. Armstrong asked his brother Dwight to write even more hymns "based on the Psalms to supplement the ones he had written in the original hymnal."

Mr. James, who contributed to the editing and compilation of several of the hymnals of the Church of God International, however, contends that the WCG made a mistake in aban-



doning many of the 18th- and 19th-century hymns of Protestant writers.

"Fanny Crosby wrote outstanding music," he said. "So did Civilla Duffee, who wrote 'His Eye Is On the Sparrow.' Those who completely reject writers like these are limited in their view."

But Mr. James cautioned proponents of diversity of music in the Church of God not to blame Dwight

ly assembled with the brethren.

Doris Cole, wife of longtime Church of God elder Wayne Cole, said she and her husband were members of the same WCG congregation in Pasadena, Calif., and that there was hardly ever a Sabbath service at which Dwight Armstrong was not present.

A tribute to a father

Although Dwight faded into obscurity in the early 1980s, Deborah Armstrong insists that her father never left the WCG.

She said that in his final years he attended Sabbath services at a WCG congregation near his home in the state of Washington when his health permitted and that he made it a point to attend the church's annual festivals.

Although Deborah herself is no longer affiliated with the Churches of God, she said she is making her donation as a tribute to her father.

"I'm not connected to their church," said Ms. Armstrong in the December 2013 podcast interview. "But my father was loyal to [the WCG to the day he died], so I will honor him."

Mr. James summed up the life of Dwight Armstrong: "He was a gentle spirit."

Herbert Armstrong was a figure with many critics, but the anger often directed toward Mr. Armstrong has never transferred over to his brother Dwight.

Even those who may not like Dwight's music usually prefer other music merely as a matter of taste rather than as a matter of personal or moral objection.

Bitterness on the Internet

Dwight Armstrong's daughter Deborah agrees.

"There is so much bitterness on the Internet because of the WCG," she wrote on another blog in 2006. "It was very refreshing to see that, at least for some, my father's hymns are not a part of those bitter memories."

"He was a quiet, private man, unlike his outspoken brother Herbert. He was also a kind and gentle person. He took great pride in his music and continued to write hymns while he was dying of cancer."

Deborah Armstrong, 48, is the only daughter of Dwight and Karen Armstrong. She grew up in the WCG and attended Ambassador College in Pasadena, where she received a bachelor's degree in 1989.

Thereafter she worked as a scriptwriter for the church's television program, *The World Tomorrow*.

By 1992 Ms. Armstrong had stopped attending church services, and she and the WCG officially parted ways the same year.

A critic of the WCG and religion in general, Ms. Armstrong does not affiliate with any church.

After leaving the WCG Ms. Armstrong has worked as a television news reporter and anchorwoman for two CBS affiliates in the U.S. Northwest.

Armstrong for the limited selections of songs in the old WCG.

Wanted to contribute

He said Dwight himself would have been the first to acknowledge that writers other than himself and even writers outside the Church of God could effectively contribute to the Lord in song.

"Dwight never thought of himself as some superior songwriter at all," explained Mr. James. "He was commissioned by his brother to compose songs, and he complied. He simply wanted to contribute as he could to the work of God and leave it at that."

Although there have been rumors that Dwight Armstrong never actually joined the Church of God or that he left the church, Mr. Armstrong was indeed a baptized member who regu-



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