

# 50 years

Denver Church History

## ***SCHEDULE***

- 12:30 p.m. Finger foods, sharing of pictures, memorabilia, and memories—seniors center, lobby
- 2 p.m. Services—split sermons by Mr. Doug Horchak and Mr. Burk McNair—theatre
- 4-5:30 p.m. More sharing of pictures, memorabilia, and memories—lobby, seniors center
- 5:30-7 p.m. Dinner, toast, cake cutting—seniors center
- 7-9 p.m. special presentations, projected pictures, speakers—theatre

# History of the Denver Church and the Early Circuit

The first Sabbath Services of the Radio Church of God in the front range of Colorado were held in the home of Dwight and Marguerite Webster in Longmont in the summer of 1953. In fact they were the first in the entire state. Mr. Herbert Armstrong and his son Dick conducted these first-ever services in Colorado. (The Websters wrote a five-page history of the early years and we are making that available to all who would like a copy.) We are not considering that service in the summer of '53 as the official beginning of the church, although there were several more occasional services before a full-time minister, Raymond Cole, was assigned in April of 1956. In 1955 a few of the brethren were planning to get together in Laramie, Wyoming, for Passover at the home of the Mattixes. Mr. Armstrong got wind of it, told them they shouldn't meet without a minister, and sent Dick Armstrong to hold services for Passover, the Night to be Observed, and the First Day of Unleavened Bread. Roy and Vivian Sampson, from Denver, took Dick to dinner one night. Roy is now a member of UCG living in Prescott, Arizona.

The Passover date in 1956 was March 26 and the Last Day of Unleavened Bread was April 2. Raymond Cole was in the area by then and conducted Passover services and the Night to be Observed in downtown Longmont. This year there were not seven full days of meetings. Since regular Sabbath services began right afterward, the first regular Sabbath service may have been April 7, 1956. Essentially we could call this spring Holy Day season the beginning of the congregation. Jim Windom recalled in a remembrance on the 15th anniversary of the Wheatland, Wyoming, church, "Mr. Raymond Cole started the church at Longmont on Passover 1956." It's not clear when services were first held in a tent on the Websters' property, but recollections indicate it was right after Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread that year. Certainly by the summer of 1956 that was the location. Jack Elliott came out from Ambassador College for a month or so during that summer to help Mr. Cole with services and to go on short tours to visit people in neighboring states.

People came from very long distances for services in those days. Brethren from Wyoming, Nebraska and Kansas attended in those early years, along with a few from other states noted in the Websters' history. Interestingly, there were more brethren from Wyoming than Colorado, and very few from Denver. "Satellite" churches developed, some in rather short order, as will be explained later. Following the Feast of Tabernacles in Big Sandy in 1953, the Leroy Neff family stopped on their way home to Oregon to see property near Lyons that the Websters had purchased. Included in the family was this author, then nine years of age. I have a vague recollection of the stop and remember meeting the Websters. One of their sons (also named Larry) was a little older than me and the other (Stephen) a little younger. Another example of the occasional services was the Day of Atonement in 1955. Roderick C. Meredith came to conduct the service, and along with him were Carlton Smith, Bryce Clark and Leon Walker. Bryce and Carlton were to be future pastors of Denver. Around the same time Mr. Armstrong also came to Lyons to investigate the Websters' property as a possible Feast site. The location was between Lyons and Estes Park, north of Boulder and about 50 miles from Denver. The Websters had donated 70 acres to the church and it made sense to hold services on the property during the warmer months; hence, the tent. Later, more homes were

built, some evidently by Mr. Webster, and the little town of Pinewood Springs came to be.

As recorded in the Websters' history, when fall of 1956 arrived the church relocated to Montgomery School, east of Lyons. The tent was used as late as Pentecost, 1958. Eugene Lamb was baptized there that Pentecost and remembers meeting in the tent. It's hard to be sure, but as best we've been able to determine, those who were at the tent in Lyons during the summer of 1956, and/or at Longmont before the move to Lyons, are as follows:

- ♦ Helen Denison & son Dan
- ♦ Charlie & Angie Harnden (parents of Elmer) from Laramie
- ♦ Elmer & Wilma Harnden, and children Kathy & Ken from Laramie
- ♦ Mr. & Mrs Helm from Laramie
- ♦ Myrtle Kaiser from Denver (later married Mr. Hale, who was no relation to Dave Hale, UCG elder)
- ♦ Mr. & Mrs. Cecil Mattix from Laramie
- ♦ Charlie and Marie Roemer and children from Red River, NM (see also under Pueblo beginning)
- ♦ Rudy & Mary Skufca & daughter Shirley (Schmidt) from near Hayden. Shirley's daughter is Denise Ransom, a member of UCG.
- ♦ Dwight & Marguerite Webster & children Larry, Stephen and Sherry; also Marguerite's mother, Mrs. H.A. Scott, and her sisters, Wilma Scott and Alpha Arnsbarger (daughters were Janice and Connie, who is married to WCG pastor Gerald Schnarrenberger)
- ♦ Joseph & Mary Wendzel & children Elaine (Ferdig), Joan and Dan (Mrs. Wendzel was a member of UCG until she died in the faith about seven years ago.)
- ♦ Wesley & Louise Winant & children Louis, Ralph, and Peggy. Louise is currently a member of UCG in Dallas. Mr. & Mrs. Winant were baptized in Big Sandy at the Feast in 1953 by Mr. Armstrong.
- ♦ Donald ("Jim") & Frances Windom & children Jarvis, Sally and Nancy Mrs. Edith Wurl (husband Willie, grandson Steve Grabowski, who was evidently at the tent as a youngster—five generations of this family have attended church, with four generations of members)
- ♦ Dr. & Mrs. Clint Zimmerman & three children (Chuck, Kamie and Susie) from Torrington, Wyoming, where Dr. Zimmerman maintained a chiropractic practice

Since the congregation began full-time just after that Feast of Unleavened Bread, it was a very short time until Pentecost arrived. A special guest was present in Lyons for that Pentecost—Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, who really seemed to have a keen interest in getting the congregation off to a good start. Since many brethren came hundreds of miles for Holy Days, quite a number stayed in tents, a few in vehicles, and the Roemers in a converted school bus. Other names in the first few years, many of whom came to Lyons for the Holy Days and quite possibly for some weekly Sabbaths, were Delmer and Iris Pancake from Kansas; Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hoops and son Bob (later to be a WCG pastor) with wife Dorothy; Mrs. Henry Hoops' daughter Madeline with husband Jess Schumaker; Mr. and Mrs. Gentry and children Gerry and Judy (later to become wife of Jeff McGowan, WCG pastor) from Lodgepole, Nebraska; Herb Schrader from Cheyenne (who

relocated to Pasadena before the church was started); Tom Pickerell Sr. and Tom Pickerell Jr. from rugged surroundings on Laramie Mountain near Wheatland; Cledice Decker and her mother; the Bill Suttons; the Essens; the Picketts from Littleton; Harold and Lily Reini, parents of Inga Stahl, from Parshall, CO (Harold was baptized in 1959 by George Meeker and Cecil Battles); Mr. and Mrs. Welton Wenger and six or eight children from Laramie (began listening to The World Tomorrow in 1944 or 1945); Mrs. Leta Devereaux from Laramie; Mrs. Thies from Laramie; Mr. Fox; Glen and Frances Weber and children Glen Jr. (later to be a WCG pastor), Gary, David, Joe, Karen and Lois from Wheatland (a very large family and a mainstay among the Wyoming brethren); Mr. and Mrs. Stan Norton from western Kansas and children Leonard, Leland, Loren and Loretta; Willie and Zelma Foster from Idaho (parents of Roger Foster, later to be a WCG and UCG pastor) with Darryl, Judy, Sharon and Edie. The Fosters were baptized in 1956 in Big Sandy and attended Passover at least one year, 1957, in Lyons. Later they began to go to Portland because they lived in Emida, northern Idaho and it was nearly 1,100 miles to Lyons! During this time Roger was attending Ambassador College, where he graduated in 1959.

Many of those who came into the church from the Laramie area were related, but didn't know other family members were coming into the church until they saw each other at services. This was also true of friends.

There are other names that will be mentioned later in conjunction with some of the "satellite" churches which were raised up, and some of these individuals attended at the tent near Lyons on Holy Days and in some cases at other times. In 1957 a guest speaker, Leroy Neff, came in January to conduct services in the three churches. The following is what he wrote in his autobiography, page 52.

### "Guest Speaker"

"In January of 1957 I was invited to attend the annual ministerial conference. This was the first such conference I ever attended. The Sabbath during the conference, Theology students were sometimes invited to go out to the various field churches to speak while the regular pastor was in Pasadena. I was asked to go to Colorado and Kansas to take the three church circuit then pastored by Raymond C. Cole.

"In order to make the circuit it was necessary because of prevailing schedules to leave on Thursday. I flew to Denver on what was then a fast DC-6B propeller airplane, as jet planes were not yet available. After that, the trip was by DC-3 to Garden City, Kansas. I stayed in a small hotel Thursday night, and then conducted services Friday night for the small Garden City Church. Late that evening I boarded a fast Santa Fe train headed for Pueblo, Colorado, arriving very early in the morning. I had to wait several hours until about mid-morning for services in Pueblo. Dwight Webster from Lyons Colorado had driven down to Pueblo to drive me back to Lyons for the afternoon service. After that I was taken by church members to the Denver Airport where I boarded another DC-6B for the flight back to Los Angeles. That was a full Sabbath with three sermons in distant towns and the travel in between, followed by the flight home.

"When I arrived home in the early evening, having benefited by the hour's change in time zone, there was no one home. I was surprised. Where

was Maxine and our three children? I found out a little later. After Sabbath afternoon services they were invited out to dinner and had not returned. Here I was at home from Church before they were. That trip was a memorable opportunity for a new ministerial trainee.”

The move of services to Denver took place in the fall of 1958, according to the Websters' history. Bryce Clark was the pastor at the time and his recollection is that it was after the ministerial conference in 1959 (January). Approximately 50 or 60 were attending at the time of the move. When Bryce moved to Springfield, Missouri, in August of 1959, attendance had grown to about 100. When Mr. Armstrong had conducted Sabbath Services in 1953, less than six years earlier, between 14 to 17 were in attendance.

To give you an idea of the dynamic growth taking place in these pioneering years, according to the May 1962 edition of the Denver-Pueblo Church of God News, 464 gathered for the Night to be Observed at the Victory Grange that year! 272 took the Passover. And there were 23 sermons and sermonettes! Those meetings are described later.

The “Longmont/Lyons/Denver” church was the 19th congregation established in the United States. Because of the rapid growth, “spin-off” churches began in neighboring cities and states. Pueblo was inaugurated sometime in the summer of 1956 by Raymond Cole and Jack Elliott. For several weeks services were held in Colorado Springs. But since Pueblo was more central, it was soon moved there, to the Women's Club building. Among those attending at the beginning was Helen Butler, who had listened to the broadcast since about 1946. With Mrs. Butler were her four children, Harold, Rose (then 16), Rita and Betty. Rose was later to attend Ambassador College and marry Bill McDowell, WCG pastor and Ambassador College faculty member. There was also the Roemer family, who drove all the way from Red River, in the Sangre de Cristo mountains of northern New Mexico. Their children were Janice (now Mrs. Roger Foster), Charles, Earl (later a WCG and UCG pastor) and Brian. If either of these families missed services, attendance was very light. Others present were the Todhunters, Mrs. Mabel Kelly (mother of WCG pastor and Ambassador College administrator Ronald Kelly), and possibly the Bill Quillens, also to become a WCG pastor. Eddie & Doris Johnson were other early members, but were not there at the beginning. Another congregation was begun that summer--Garden City, Kansas, which was eventually moved to Liberal. Ray & Verline Jantzen, from Satanta, Kansas, were charter members, and were the first in western Kansas to be baptized. Their children are Kay (later to marry WCG and UCG pastor Randy Schreiber), Larry and Loma (twins). Ray was to become a full-time elder in WCG. The Jantzens had listened to the broadcast since 1950 and were baptized in Big Sandy July 4, 1952. For a few years they attended the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven full days, Pentecost over a three-day period, as well as the Fall Holy Days, all in Big Sandy. When the Holy Days began to be observed in Lyons, the Jantzens went that direction. Over time they purchased a farm near Springfield, in southeastern Colorado. Mrs. Verline Jantzen still lives and works there, is in her 80s, and drives a tractor regularly, often to take water to the cattle. Her son Larry operates the farm with her. Both are now members of the UCG congregation in Colorado Springs, nearly four hours away.

Other members in those early years were John & Fern Groth, Ernie & Luanne Groth (also from Satanta), Mrs. Clyde Birney (now deceased, but she was in UCG in Missouri) and her daughter, Jeanette Steel, currently a deaconess in UCG in Springfield, Missouri. Over a span of just a few years, several pastors served this three-church circuit, speaking in three services each weekend. Bryce Clark described it as a “thousand-mile circuit” and said he put 60,000 miles on his car in one year. Garden City services were held on Friday evening, then Pueblo on Sabbath morning, and Lyons or Denver on Saturday afternoon. There were other such circuits in the country in those years, such as the one that consisted of Houston, San Antonio and Corpus Christi. But I don’t think any rivaled 1,000 miles.

Several pastors were in and out of the area in just a few years. But Burk and Billie Sue McNair came for two brief periods and in 1959 came to stay for eight years. They did much to strengthen and establish the churches in the area. Another matter of historical record that should be mentioned is that Denver was one of several locations where services were conducted for the entire seven days of Unleavened Bread. This took place in Denver well into the 1960s. In 1962 my father, Leroy Neff, was assigned to help Mr. McNair with the preaching in Denver. I was a senior in high school. My sister Carol would have probably been in the eighth or ninth grade and my brother Don a year or two behind her. I remember coming over Wolf Creek Pass, covered with snow (long before C.W. McCall’s hit record). We were in Dad’s first fleet car, a 1962 Chrysler 300—which broke down on the southern outskirts of Denver. We stayed in a motel on East Colfax, something that would require a degree of bravery now, considering that this street has become overrun with prostitutes and thieves. Services that year were held at the Victory Grange. I have vivid recollection of some of the families there. There were the ministers and elders—the Burk McNairs with their children Kerry, Mark and Susie; Frank McCrady; Mr. & Mrs. Bill Quillen; the Ledru Woodburys with their children Vance, Jeanette, Kevin and Dennis (Ledru was to later be employed full-time as an elder in WCG.); and probably one or two other families I’ve forgotten. William Sutton may have been ordained by then, but it could have been later. Then there was the Curtis family, the Burnhams, the Bonnets, Mrs. Ellis & daughter Cheryl, the Gene Lambs, the Russ Kruegers, many mentioned earlier, and others who don’t come to mind or whose names I didn’t learn. The Victory Grange is still available to rent and is located on Tower Road, south of Denver International Airport. Over the years, the congregation moved to various halls in the Denver area—the Farmers Union Building, the Women’s Club, Phipps Auditorium (now Imax Theatre), a skating rink, the El Papagallo nightclub and the Masonic Temple. Holy Days were held a number of times at the Victory Grange. When the overall group became too large to serve well in one congregation, others sprang up. Denver itself branched out into north and south congregations (at one time east and west) and in 1989 Lafayette was started to serve Longmont, Boulder, Lafayette and the far north Denver suburbs. The total reached to somewhere around 800-900, with just under 1,000 attending combined services on Holy Days.

To the north, Ft. Collins, Loveland and Greeley have taken turns as the home of that area’s congregation. Wheatland was another spin-off, although Douglas, Wyoming, was the location for a while. In addition to the Windom and Weber families, even though they came in a little later, the Fertig family should be mentioned since the extended family of Alex Fertig provided perhaps as much as half the

attendance in Wheatland. Eventually there was a church in Cheyenne, Wyoming. But before a Cheyenne church there was a Cheyenne Bible Study, and before that it was a Laramie Bible Study. Western Nebraska reached the point where there were congregations in North Platte, Scottsbluff and Chadron.

Burk McNair also conducted Bible studies in Grand Junction and Rapid City, South Dakota, both of which became churches, and another in Haxtun, Colorado. During much of his tenure he conducted Spokesman Clubs and Bible studies in Denver and Colorado Springs. In time, Pueblo ceased to be the most central location in southern Colorado. Colorado Springs has been the location for many years, and part of the time both cities had congregations. Interestingly, Dr. Clint Zimmerman, who had been a charter member in Lyons, pastored Colorado Springs for a number of years starting in 1976. Additionally, his son, Chuck, who attended as a little boy in Lyons, pastored Ft. Collins for a number of years. Alamosa sprang up to serve brethren like the Sprouse family in the San Luis Valley. Grand Junction started as an outlying Bible Study under Burk McNair, and Durango was added in the southwest. Families like the Nices, Kings and Days were mainstays in Durango in the early years. At one point or another, there were congregations in Craig and Meeker. What was originally one small church serving a vast area became a contingent of congregations serving that same territory, but making it easier for brethren to attend. But even then the distances were sometimes staggering. It began as the Radio Church of God, then became the Worldwide Church of God. Now there are various organizations that have emanated from that incorporated body. But those who are a part of the true spiritual body form the Church of God today. We in the United Church of God consider that we share in this legacy and we celebrate this milestone of the Church of God in Colorado with enthusiasm and with appreciation for those who have gone before and served as pioneers to establish congregations dedicated to the service of the Great God. It is our hope that Jesus Christ will once again restore unity to those who are His sheep and that the amazing growth of those years gone by, now 50, will return to His church and people, as He wills. I apologize for any errors or omissions in this account. Several of us have worked hard to gather the facts as best we could, but realize that after 40-50 years it is easy to lose track of some of the details. And we don't have room for all of them. Little has been said about the many pastors and wives who served in the area through the years, but the accompanying list provides their names. It is also difficult to go into detail regarding every period so I have concentrated on the early years.

It is amazing to consider that this many years have passed. But we look now to the future and to the establishment of the Kingdom of God around the entire world—a world that will change permanently for the good. For the children of God who began in the Denver area in 1956 and endured or will endure to the end, we are grateful that God called a handful of brethren, established a foundation through them, and built on it over the years. The present distress in the church notwithstanding, God will honor those who stay the course and remain faithful to Him.

With time, memories often become more meaningful. As we look back at these overall pleasant memories we can be thankful for God's favor in establishing His congregations in this colorful state and its neighbors.

## Pastors

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Raymond Cole (56, 57)  
Carlton Smith (57-58)  
Burk & Billie Sue McNair (56-57, 58, 59-67)  
Bryce Clark (58)  
Arthur & Billie Craig (67-70)  
Guy & Penny Engelbart ('70-78)  
Ron & Norva Kelly (78-81)

James & Alice Reyer (81-86)  
Doug & Tanya Horchak (86-95)  
Tom & Jody Turk (89-94)  
Ted & Opal Herlofson (87-89)  
Tim & Mary Ann Snyder (94-95)  
Jim & Diane Turner (95)  
Larry & Linda Neff (96-06)

## Associate/Assistant Pastors

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Ivan Sell  
Glen & Donna White  
Roger Foster  
Alton (Don) & Madeline Billingsley  
Jeff Barness  
Ledru & Shirley Woodbury  
Ray & Verline Jantzen  
Bill Kaiser  
Greg & Marian Sargent  
Stan & Gail Watts

Gary & Marsi Pendergraft  
Leroy & Jean Cole  
Randy & Kay Schreiber  
Norm & Donna Myers  
Michael Grovak  
Greg & Susan Williams  
Bill & Robin Rogers  
Jeff & Suzy Molnar  
Tim & Valerie Waddle

associates were generally local elders

## Elders

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Bill & Lois Quillen  
Larry Millard  
George Herith  
Jerry & Connie Wilson  
Larry & Karen Walker  
Gerald & Connie Schnarrenberger  
Dennis & Blaine Lindquist

Gary & Patricia Flesner  
Jeff & Sheri Tymkovich  
Scott & Connie Ashley  
Mel & Leanne Spangler  
Elmer & Vikki Wilke  
Dave & June Hale

## Deacons

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Dwight Webster  
Bill Sutton  
Garry George  
Jim Hupp  
Fermin Moya  
Ervin Sollars  
Lynn Hammel  
Mike Curlless  
Charles Gibson  
Ralph Swift  
Willy Doemeland  
Tim McMaster  
Bob Stahl

Dennis Lindquist  
Elmer Heilbrun  
Russ Krueger  
George James  
Merv Reed  
Don Harms  
Joe Milich  
Dave Ohmart  
Bill Wells  
Tom Wise  
Mike Benson  
Dan Girard  
Fritz Winnail

Paul Williams  
Al Baldrey  
Tim Elley  
Monte Lindquist  
Fritz Ziegler  
Jim Cobb  
Bert Merrill  
Charlie McCullough  
Ray Meyersick  
Allen Ellis  
Eli Kurtz

## Deaconesses

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Beth Wood  
Blaine Lindquist  
Pat (Morrow) Senyeryi

Dorothy Swift  
Lois Doemeland  
Viola Cossel

Faye Dornan  
Sharon Cobb  
Vada Hammel