

FIRST DRAFT

Deception followed a death at the Home of Truth in Utah

When Edith Peshak died near Monticello, Utah, on Feb. 11, 1935, her passing didn't cause an immediate commotion. Family and friends didn't believe she was actually dead.

Within a few months, however, Peshak's death, and the unusual treatment of her body, prompted official inquiries. It also cast an unwelcome light on the community where she lived,



BOB SILBERNAGEL

known as the Home of Truth or the Ogden Center, and on Marie Ogden, the community's founder.

Ogden had convinced her followers that Peshak wasn't dead, that she was in a sort of limbo from which she would be resurrected.

So, twice a day, two of the 15 colony members gave Peshak's body salt baths to keep it clean and preserved, along with milk enemas, ostensibly to provide nourishment and replace dead cells with live tissue.

Word of Peshak's death reached authorities that spring. In May, the San Juan County Sheriff visited, asking to see the body. Ogden refused him.

With an order from Utah's attorney general, the San Juan County attorney visited and also was turned away.

Finally, a local doctor was allowed in, accompanied by two nurses. One nurse later described seeing a corpse, "well preserved and very clean. She has skin stretched over small bones with no muscle or fat, as if she had died of cancer."

There was no state law requiring burial of a corpse if it didn't pose a health hazard, so no legal action was taken. The body remained in this state for more than a year.

News of Peshak's death and the preservation of her body made national headlines. Many stories ridiculed the Home of Truth and its founder.

More news stories appeared two years later when Peshak's son demanded a death certificate for his mother, and Ogden eventually agreed.

Also in 1937, a former member of the colony filed an affidavit saying Ogden had instructed him to secretly cremate Peshak's body. She told other members of the group that the body had been "spirited away from curious and prying eyes."

Some members became disenchanted with Ogden, and the community dwindled to about 10 members. Peshak's husband, Elmer, remained.

Such activities were likely surprising to those who knew Marie M. Ogden as a socially active New Jersey housewife prior to 1929. She served on multiple committees, including women's clubs, music foundations and welfare projects, but was not particularly religious.

In 1929, however, when her husband Harry died of cancer, Marie Ogden began seeking a more spiritual life, investigating astrology, numerology and more.

She became associated with William Dudley Pelley, an author, spiritualist, fascist, and anti-Semite who claimed to receive instructions from an oracle on how to live a moral life. Ogden donated at least \$12,000 to him.

A decade later, when Pelley was convicted and imprisoned for his leadership of a fascist paramilitary organization, Ogden claimed they had never been that close.

In 1931, as she was turning away from Pelley, Ogden began receiving her own divine instructions.

"We followed a very definite form of Divine Guidance," she wrote. "Messages of Dawn, Truth and Wisdom were relayed from the Higher



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

After the death of her husband, Marie Ogden began seeking a more spiritual life.

Realms."

The divine advisers guided her fingers as she sat at her typewriter, she said, and later "directed us to come to this western land."

Describing Ogden's spiritual beliefs is difficult, because she was not always clear about them. While still in New Jersey, Ogden reportedly received apocalyptic messages telling her that large cities would soon be destroyed and a new community was needed in the remote West.

She initially considered Idaho, Oregon and California. But she chose southeastern Utah after another woman claimed she had a divine inspiration and wrote to Ogden about the area.

Ogden and founding members of the Home of Truth arrived in September of 1933 and initially set up a tent community. They called the area Rainbow Valley, but it is better known as Dry Valley, between Monticello and Moab near Church Rock.

In May 1934, Ogden purchased the San Juan Record newspaper in Monticello. She continued to print local news in it, but she also published columns about the Home of Truth.

At first, neighbors accepted Ogden's group. "The members, since their coming here, have proven themselves to be people of culture and learning and in all their contacts with the public have created a most favorable impression," a Moab newspaper reported in 1934.

That changed with the Peshak scandal. Newspapers began to refer to the colony as "strange" or "a cult," and termed Ogden a "cultist" and "dictator."

Some accused colony members of being layabouts, who depended on the money of new recruits to sustain them.

Ogden angrily disputed that. She said more than 200 people who had arrived to join the colony dropped out because they couldn't handle the hard work it required.

The men and women who remained toiled at farming, constructing buildings, and even developing a gold mine.

In July 1936, another scandal rocked the colony when authorities tried to find 13-year-old Thelma Moss. Her mother and stepfather had joined the colony and brought Thelma with them.

Thelma wrote her biological father that she was "unhappy and afraid" at the colony. Her dad traveled from Idaho to retrieve her, but found her gone. The girl had left with the brother of her stepfather.

In October, Ogden told a Salt Lake newspaper there was



The Peshak home near Monticello, Utah.



nothing to worry about. Thelma Moss and her step-uncle "were married and all the family is now happily reunited in Oakland," she said. "The parents gave consent to marry."

Ogden didn't say how the man's other wife felt about the marriage. Police said the man's wife was living in Monterey, Calif., with their children, and gave no indication they were divorced.

By 1940, the Home of the Truth had shrunk to seven members, despite Ogden's continued predictions for the "doom of civilization" and, consequently, expected growth in the colony.

In a 1946 interview, Ogden was asked about Peshak, but she still declined to say much.

"That is one thing that we have been misrepresented in and misquoted on," she said. "We aren't ready to talk about it now ... I have all my records and someday we'll tell that story."

But it didn't happen. Ogden sold the San Juan Record in 1949. She worked for years on a book to tell the story of the Home of Truth and presumably Edith Peshak. But when she died at a senior facility in Blanding, Utah, in 1975, one of her few remaining followers burned most of her papers, including, apparently, the manuscript.

The land on which the Home of the Truth colony was once lo-



cated was abandoned by the last of the colony holdouts in 1977.

Sources: "The Home of the Truth: The Metaphysical World of Marie Ogden," master's thesis at Brigham Young University by Stanley J. Thayne; "Marie Ogden and San Juan County's Home of Truth," by Andrew Gulliford, San Juan Record, June 20, 2017; "Home of Truth Cooperative Settlement" booklets, by Marie Ogden; Utah historical newspapers.

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2020 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — Senate Bill 100 moved out of a House committee last week, and the full House could debate on the floor whether the state should do away with the death penalty. That bill has already cleared the Senate.

Monday: Lawmakers had considered doing something similar to this last year, but it didn't go anywhere. This session, the House Energy and Environment Committee is to consider HB1162, which would ban restaurants from using polystyrene packaging for leftover or take-out foods.

Tuesday: The Senate Finance Committee is to hear SB33, a bill that would allow people 65 and over access to a new Medicaid buy-in program.

Wednesday: The Senate Judiciary Committee is to debate HB1014, a measure aimed at fertility medical professionals that would create a

new civil cause of action and criminal penalties for the misuse of reproductive material.

Thursday: The House Energy and Environment Committee is to discuss HB1191, a measure that would create a new outdoor recreation industry office in the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade.

Next week: While the Colorado Senate is to consider what to do about Columbus Day, the House is to hear a bill that would allow dogs to be brought onto outdoor restaurant areas.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Colorado Legislature's website at lege.colorado.gov.

Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

Students lift car to free girl who was run over

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLORADO SPRINGS — Students at a Colorado Springs high school lifted a car off the ground to free a girl who had been run over and trapped in the school parking lot.

KKTU reports several students rushed to help after the girl was run over by a car driven by a student at Rampart High

School earlier this month.

Joined by a school resource officer and security guard, the students lifted the car, allowing a resource officer to drag the girl out from under the vehicle.

She was taken to a hospital for unspecified injuries and later released.

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