

"Whittaker Chambers Testifies"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

In August 1948, Whittaker Chambers, A Time magazine editor who lived on a farm on Bachman's Valley Rd. in Carroll County, read a prepared statement charging that a number of government officials were communists. The story was published in the August 6 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"FORMER COMMUNIST TESTIFIES BEFORE COMMITTEE

Whitaker Chambers, living on Bachman's Valley road, on the Thomas farm, who said he was a Communist from 1924 to 1937 testified Tuesday that the Red 'underground' then included Alger Hiss, State Department official, before the House of Un-American Activities Committee, in Washington on Tuesday.

Chambers, now an associate editor of Time magazine, said in a prepared statement read to the House committee that he himself 'served in the underground, chiefly in Washington.'

He said there was an underground organization developed, to the best of his knowledge, by Harold Ware, one of the sons of the Communist leader known as 'Mother Bloor.'

He went on:

'I knew it at its top level, a group of seven or so men, from among whom, in the late years, certain members of Miss (Elizabeth T.) Bentley's organization were apparently recruited.'

'The head of the underground group was Nathan Witt, an attorney for the National Labor Relations Board. Later John Abt became the leader.

'Lee Pressman was also a member of this group, as was Alger Hiss, who, as a member of the State Department, later organized the conferences at Dumbarton Oaks, San Francisco and the United States side of the [Y]alta Conference.'

Miss Bentley, mentioned by Chambers, is the young woman who told a sensational story last week of collecting information for the Russians from scores of Government employees during the war.

She and Chambers both describe themselves as former Communists who turned against the party and went to Federal authorities with their stories.

Chambers said he himself reported to Washington authorities what he knew of Communist infiltration of the Government two days after Hitler and Stalin signed their nonaggression pact nine years ago.

He said he had renounced communism in 1937 because he had become convinced it is a 'form of totalitarianism, that its triumph means slavery to men wherever they fall under its sway, and spiritual night to the human mind and soul.'

Chambers said Alger Hiss served as secretary general of the San Francisco Conference, where the United Nations was founded.

Rather, he said, it was 'infiltration' of the Government.

After he broke with communism, Chambers said, he lived in hiding for a year, 'sleeping by day and watching through the night, with gun or revolver within easy reach.'

He said that since he had been in the Communist underground, "I had sound reason for supposing the Communists might try to kill me.'

Congressman Richard M. Nixon, among the first to believe Chambers' charges, came to national prominence during the investigation of Alger Hiss and others. Hiss was charged and the investigation led to the discovery of the famous "Pumpkin Papers" on the Chambers Farm in December 1948. Hiss eventually served forty-four months for perjury. Nixon's zeal was a leading factor in his selection as a vice-presidential candidate in 1952.

Following the hearings, Chambers wrote a book entitled *Witness* that chronicled his experiences. He donated a copy to the Historical Society of Carroll County with a cover letter explaining that most of it had been written in Carroll County. He wrote in part, "Many of the events it reports took place in Carroll County. Certain of the figures who move through it also moved through Carroll County or later. The episode, as a whole, bore directly on the history of our time. Nevertheless, this book is only indirectly about an episode of history. It is only indirectly a book about communism. It is primarily a book about the tragedy of a man in the 20th century. Its meaning rests in that." Whittaker Chambers remained on his farm until his death in 1961. When he died he was one of the most controversial figures of his generation.