

1988
3RD PRIZE
\$125.⁰⁰

THE HOLY CITY SIDESHOW

by

Joan B. Barriga
21425 Shady Lane
Los Gatos, Ca. 95030
Tele. (408) 353-2546

Submitted to

California Pioneers of Santa Clara County
Essay Contest
April 20, 1988

Not to be reproduced without author's permission.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	iii
The Holy City Sideshow	1
Footnotes	25
Bibliography	27

INTRODUCTION

Every four or five years a strange compulsion overtakes historians of local matters. It's called the Holy City Syndrome. The symptoms are predictable: a vague interest in the strange little settlement's beginnings; a curiosity about the philosophy behind its founding; and, finding these questions rather easily answered, a probing into the personality and character (or lack thereof) of "Father" William E. Riker , creator and founder of the World's Most Perfect Government.

It is obvious from the material that follows that I have also fallen victim to the Syndrome ... but not without a struggle. John Young, Evelyn Gallagher, and Barbara Bailey Kelly, to mention only a few, have written entertainingly about this wart on the nose of the Santa Cruz Mountains, and it would be difficult to improve upon their work, not to mention that it would serve no useful purpose to re-do what has already been so well done. Only the addition of fresh material that adds to our knowledge of the subject would justify another Holy City "study". For this reason I resisted the temptation to tinker around with the Holy City story, although hardly a day passed that I didn't pause to stare across the canyon of Los Gatos Creek to the location of the former colony, watching it gradually disappear behind the lush growth of acacias and chaparral.

It wasn't until I looked across the canyon early this spring and realized that the two remaining buildings across the way were no longer visible, that I began to feel the first faint stirrings of the Syndrome. The four-or-five year cycle was drawing to a close, and it was clearly time for another local historian to investigate Holy City. To make certain that everything was still there, I made the perilous descent via the Holy City Hill road to the open dusty flat of what was once, fifty years ago, the Entertainment Capital of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The old Riker house and garage were still there, almost hidden by rank shrubbery and weeds, the wide steps flanked by a pair of cracked concrete urns. Across the road, the boarded-up remains of the Eagle's Nest bar and the old post office still stood. I remembered the sly satisfaction of mailing Christmas cards from there -- postmarked "Holy City". ("Where is it? Is it anything like Santa Claus, Indiana?" Hardly.) An independent artist maintained an art glass studio at the extreme end of the long low building, but he had decided that this was not a scheduled workday, so Holy City was mine alone.

Across the Old Santa Cruz Highway, the turquoise stone wall was completely hidden by mounds of dirt piled against it by a bulldozer. The yellow lettering on the wall, now unseen, vainly announced: Holy City Mineral Springs. A trickle of spring water dripped from a high ledge into the dark, stone-lined grotto -- Father Riker's spring was barely clinging to life. But motorists still stopped here for a drink. The bottom of the grotto held a collection of discarded beer bottles and peppermint schnapps flasks.

In 1953 elderly disciple Stephen Rozum was asked by an interviewer what fate awaited the decaying colony. He answered, "Holy City belongs to mankind." Unfortunately for the failed experiment, mankind didn't want it.

THE HOLY CITY SIDESHOW

At the end of World War I the United States began a ten year binge celebrating the beginning of a new age. Anything and everything was possible. The world had been made safe by the War to End Wars; new inventions and marvels came thick and fast. The automobile was now an attainable dream for the average citizen, promising the delights of "touring"; movies were better than ever -- the age of "talkies" had arrived; dance marathons helped burn off the surplus energy of Flaming Youth; and labor-saving appliances gave families more time for entertainment. The time was ripe for the con artists and street-corner hucksters to move in on the more gullible members of the public and show them what to do with their new-found time and money.

Into this fertile ground came William E. Riker, who, several years earlier, had conducted a triumphal tour around the country with his mind-reading act. Riker, a handsome man in his late thirties, astounded audiences with his power to receive "messages" through his nerves (a power acquired through meditation in a wooded grove near Chico). The "Professor" had an electrifying manner that attracted followers; he exuded self-confidence and invited trust, especially from the ladies in his audience. As

he toured the country with his mind-reading act, he acquired not only money, but wives as well. In Colorado Springs there was Marene; when he touched home-base in California there was Bessie Zettie, by whom he had a son, Willis. Inevitably, he found himself in trouble with the San Francisco district attorney on a bigamy charge. Gathering up his son and his belongings he departed across the border into Canada, to give the situation time to cool off.

When the Prophet returned to his homeland in 1914, he had had time to think matters over and develop a new philosophy -- the Perfect Christian Divine Way -- and to give himself a new title: "The Comforter". The new philosophy was simple (as time went on and The Comforter expounded upon it, it became increasingly complex and contradictory): all disciples of the PCDW were "brand new" (i.e., born-again); white supremacy was the foundation of the philosophy, and segregation of the races all-important. In order to achieve this state of perfection it would be necessary for the disciples to band together and become a self-sufficient communal society. Gathering followers, Riker stopped off in Minneapolis, where he met a like-minded philosopher with an unfortunate nickname, Irwin "Crazy" Fisher.¹ Fisher was to move in and out of Riker's life, at times appearing to operate his own version of the philosophy in Southern California, but he came to San Francisco with Riker in 1915, and the disciples set up a commune on Hayes Street.

San Francisco was in the midst of a World War and the Panama Pacific Exposition, celebrating the opening of the Panama Canal; it had no time to concern itself with a fly-by-night street corner preacher/bigamist, so Riker's return didn't even create a ripple. A photograph taken at the Hayes Street house shows Riker and Fisher flanked by their disciples, a group of neatly dressed men and women, who efficiently divided up the work to be done. The women took care of the cooking, laundry, and other household chores, leaving the men to earn money through their skills as mechanics, electricians, and carpenters. All money was to be turned over to the PCDW, of course, because The Comforter had a great plan. He would establish a City on a Hill, a shining example to all who passed through. It would be built and maintained

by the disciples, and presided over by an all-wise man, "Father" Riker. And it would be called Holy City.

By 1917 the plan was beginning to take shape. With money contributed by the working disciples, and a generous donation of \$3,000 from the sale of some property owned by disciple Frieda Schwartz, Riker was off to buy 75 acres in the Santa Cruz Mountains, about ten miles south of Los Gatos.² This acreage would later be expanded to almost 200 acres. During the next two years the disciples hauled discarded lumber, hardware, window frames, doors, stamped tin ceiling panels, light fixtures, beveled mirrors -- whatever they could accumulate from their construction work around San Francisco. There was a lot of material to be cleared away after the Exposition ended, and the great earthquake of 1906 was only a decade behind them, still leaving much clearing out necessary as the new construction took place. Riker set up a drayage business, and the disciples went to work hauling this windfall of material 50 miles south to the proposed site of Holy City.

Finally, in 1919, everything was ready for the move. By now, Riker had begun to elaborate a bit on some of the regulations necessary to ensure a more perfect government: disciples would be supplied with food, shelter, and clothing, but all earnings would be turned over to the PCDW. They were free to leave the colony at any time, but could take with them only their clothing. The sexes were to be strictly segregated, and marriage was forbidden.³ Then he proceeded to violate his own rules. Riker married Lucile Jensen in what might be considered an "autumnal" wedding, since he was 46 and his bride 45 years of age. When the Rikers and their thirty disciples moved to Holy City, the men moved into the cabins they had built, the women moved into their quarters, "Building No. 2", and newlyweds William and Lucile moved into a comfortable two-story white frame house on a knoll overlooking the colony.

This arrangement seemed agreeable to everyone except Frieda Schwartz, who began to suspect that the Perfect Christian Divine Way was not quite as perfect as she had been led to believe. Frieda was furious when she and her husband arrived at the new colony. They were separated and sent to separate

living quarters; her children were taken from her to be cared for in another building. After investing \$3,000 in this new experiment in living, Frieda felt that she and her family should be treated with more consideration. She filed suit against Riker, charging him with embezzlement, grand larceny, and acts injurious to the public morals. At the grand jury hearing Frieda testified that not only had her children been mistreated, but Riker had pressured her into undergoing an abortion. ("Future Generations is Not the Wise Man's Way", admonished a sign in Holy City). Furthermore, Frieda claimed, the disciples were not observing the rule of sexual segregation laid down by the Divine Comforter himself. Agnes Jenkins, married to another disciple, testified indignantly that when she returned to the family home in San Francisco one day she found the house stripped bare of all furnishings, and her husband and Riker busily packing up the silverware. To add insult to injury, her husband abandoned her and their baby and went off to live in Holy City. Despite this damaging testimony, none of the charges were ever substantiated, and the suit was dropped after Frieda committed suicide while hospitalized with a nervous breakdown.⁴

The resulting publicity generated by this scandal only served to attract more tourists to this curious new cult located on the two-lane highway between Los Gatos and Santa Cruz. And Riker was ready for them. By the time the first chugging, overheated automobile ground to a stop in Holy City the disciples had ready a gas station, a restaurant ("Good Eats at City Prices"), a comfort station ("Free 18 Seat Comfort Station"), a mineral spring, and two print shops, busily turning out pamphlets extolling the Philosophy. Furthermore, they had plans for a dance hall, zoo, grocery store, butcher shop, bakery, movie studio, radio station, and observatory, to mention only a partial list of projects.

The visitor approaching Holy City during the Roaring Twenties had his senses assaulted on all sides. Garish billboards adorned with trumpeting angels and cartoon-like figures proclaimed: "Welcome to Holy City--



HOLY CITY IN ITS HEYDAY

Headquarters of the World's Most Perfect Government". Loudspeakers blasted out the latest hit songs of the day. Larger-than-life Santa Clauses stood along the sidewalk, hands jammed dejectedly in their pockets, their chests bearing the message: "Holy City answers all questions and solves all problems." Everywhere there were signs; the age of advertising seemed to have sprung full-blown from this freak show designed to separate the tourist from his money. During this period Holy City was attracting a \$100,000 a year tourist trade.⁵ There was something for everyone. Counseling: "See us if you are contemplating marriage, divorce, or suicide"; Refreshments and entertainment: a large billboard above a row of miniature churches (actually peep-shows) proclaimed: "Where There's Life There's Acme -- Dietetically Non-Fattening Beer." Above this, farther up the hillside, a sign on the observatory urged: "Come Up Here and See Something Magical, Educational, and Terrible." Two 14-inch telescopes -- open every night for visitors -- provided a look at the moon for twenty-five cents; for another ten cents the visitor could become the proud owner of a lunar lot. If all this has a vaguely familiar ring to it ("Where There's Life There's Bud", for instance), it perhaps only serves to show how advertising has served our society very effectively for many years. One shudders to think what might have happened had television been available to Riker.

Not to leave any stone unturned when it came to publicizing the wonders of Holy City, Riker studied the technique of a true master of the art of flim-flam. Down in Southern California Sister Aimee Semple McPherson was holding forth in the grand style of the ancient Roman circuses. Her staged spectacles featured swooping angels, terrifying devils that burst upon the stage in puffs of smoke, "wars" between the forces of Good and Evil, and constant appeals for money -- readily supplied by her captivated audiences. Riker himself could not resist Sister Aimee's appeal; he donated \$10,000 to her cause, although disciple Joe Albert, printer and business manager for the colony, had serious doubts about this largesse.⁶ Albert's job was comparable to that of a toothless watchdog. He tried to prevent The Comforter from becoming the victim of his own delusions of grandeur, but he lacked any real authority. Occasional policy meetings were held at Holy City, but Riker held

Positively The World Is Yours

Positively The World Is Yours



In Father Riker's coming, not only is the world yours to own and rule, but to be turned into a paradise. With you must read and study his wonderful claims, promises, and revelations. And remember, they are not only true, but they are the only true. Where there is life, there is hope.

William E. Riker's New Pension Plan For All Needy and Disabled People

This particular column explains my Perfect Pension Plan which I will put into execution should I become Governor of California. This plan is new, original, different and one hundred per cent Perfect, all other plans and systems are a menacing disappointment and a failure.

\$1,000 REWARD, IF ANY ONE CAN PROVE IT IS NOT A PERFECT FOOL-PROOF PLAN AND WORKABLE SYSTEM

IT LAST A TRUE SOLUTION

Here is the true solution for all disabled and pension-minded people. I assure that none can legally deny it.

sound race discrimination to keep it being torn is rearing, at which time fortunates to be one or the other, help then these half white lived but it impossible to play the distinct part

THE WHITE RACE IS THE RAC

The White race people mean does Jesus the Christ mean to phodites human beings, as well smart, but it will not qualify the tinctive part. Not white a mu horse, and he belongs to the bod idea is very deceiving. phodites a being being day

HOLY CITY OFFERED
SOMETHING FOR
EVERYBODY

(U.C. Santa Cruz
Special Collections)





TOURISTS VIEW HOLY CITY'S SANTAS

(U.C. Santa Cruz Special Collections)

all the winning cards. In 1926 he filed Articles of Incorporation, assuring the disciples of lifetime occupancy rights in Holy City, but all the property was in Riker's name.⁷ As long as Riker upheld his guarantee to provide food, shelter and clothing for the disciples, they carried out their promise to work for the Philosophy and support the colony out of their earnings.

Riker could not begin to equal Sister Aimee's spectacular productions; compared to her three-ring circus Holy City was a small-time sideshow, but a lucrative sideshow, nonetheless. The Comforter cast about for new ways to entertain the steady stream of tourists. He bought a limousine which had the distinction of having once been owned by General Jack Pershing, and the disciples, who seemed to abhor an empty space, covered it with scriptural texts and quotations from "The Wisest Man on All the Earth" (Father Riker, naturally). The limousine attracted quite a crowd whenever The Comforter journeyed to San Jose on business and parked it on a downtown street.⁸ In 1929 Riker applied for a license for a radio station -- the second license granted in the state. Before long, mountain residents fortunate enough to own radios could tune in Father Riker delivering rambling discourses on white supremacy and the evils of international bankers. Since the disciples were not too familiar with the technical problems of operating a radio station, KFQU regularly wandered off the assigned frequency, to the annoyance of listeners who were not interested in the philosophy of the Perfect Christian Divine Way. Complaints were made to the licensing authorities and after two years of operation KFQU's license was revoked, leaving Holy City with another eyesore, the ramshackle wooden transmitting tower. But there were always other attractions.

The Holy City Observatory was built on the hillside near the defunct radio station, and disciple Joseph Witzick became Holy City's official astronomer. Witzick was a German immigrant, naturalized in 1915 while he was living in Los Angeles. Since Irwin Fisher had spent ten years in Los Angeles before returning to Holy City, it is quite possible that Witzick found his way to the colony through Fisher's recruiting efforts. Next to the Observatory on the hill was the Holy City Zoo, a small wooden building housing,

according to one long-time resident of the area, "two monkeys and an old sick tiger."⁹ For those who preferred their entertainment down on the main street, there was the "Museum of Philosophy", housed in a front room of the Riker home, the restaurant (advertising chicken pot pie and coffee for twenty-five cents, and "Celebrated Pea Soup"), the Sunshine Soda bottling works, a souvenir stand (in the old post office building hauled from the nearby community of Patchen), the titillating peep-shows, and the dance hall. Although children didn't figure into the PCDW scheme of things (no babies were ever born in Holy City¹⁰), Riker didn't count them out as a source of income. As soon as Neilsen's Eatmore Creamery in Los Gatos opened its doors to the public Riker was its first customer, and ice cream became another reason to stop off at Holy City on the way to or from Santa Cruz. This of course necessitated building an ice storage plant, but the disciples were up to it, as usual.

Disciples came and went over the years. In 1929 the number of "true" disciples had dropped to sixteen, from the original thirty who settled in the mountain colony ten years before. But there were some who found their niche in Holy City and stayed there. Irwin Fisher, after a ten-year absence in Southern California, returned to the colony and worked as a mechanic; Joe Albert and Stephen Rozum ran the printing shops. Rozum had studied for the priesthood in his native Poland, but left the Church because it could not satisfactorily answer the questions he raised about its doctrines. When he came to the United States he became interested in Hinduism until he heard Riker preaching on a San Francisco street corner and joined the Brotherhood. Emil Reichsteiner ran the Holy City barber shop; Fred Rommel was an electrician; Joseph Witzick was in charge of the Observatory, and Arthur Landstrom acted as clerk in the community. The disciples referred to themselves as the "Brotherhood", and essentially it was an all-male group, with the exception of Miss Winifred Allington, who stayed on as a disciple to the end, keeping pretty much to herself and finding companionship in the company of her fifteen cats. "Mother" Lucile undoubtedly could also be counted as a member



VIEW OF EARLY-DAY HOLY CITY



THE OBSERVATORY ON THE HILL

in good standing of the PCDW. Since the Brotherhood had foresworn marriage the number of women in the colony became limited to those who were among the original members, or those who might have been attracted to the Philosophy for other reasons. Their numbers never exceeded three or four in the later years.

As the decade of the Twenties played itself out, Riker continued to direct the carnival in the main tent while the disciples worked behind the scenes. The Comforter had the print shops run off some advertising cards that could be handed out to the tourists, in an attempt to interest them in the philosophy of the Perfect Christian Divine Way, and one such card must surely have attracted some interest when Riker promised that "...you are going to see only the White Race people Fly through space without any machinery in proving, White man's Supremacy." However, the tourists were never as interested in the Comforter's ideas as were his faithful disciples. A number of them were immigrants from northern Europe, and came to this country with only their skills as a means of earning their livelihood and getting ahead. They were drawn to William Riker like moths to a flame. He seemed able to convince his followers that all things were possible if only they would embrace his Perfect Christian Divine Way philosophy and trust the all-wise Father to look after their welfare. Holy City frequently has been described as a "religious" colony, but no church or temple was ever built by the disciples in their city. "Ritual was never a vital factor in Father Riker's philosophy", said one writer,¹¹ and Riker himself frequently railed against "Churchianity", his term for the rituals employed by conventional Christianity. The PCDW was a philosophy, not a religion, and Holy City was a secular cult, founded on racism and a cynical pandering to the baser elements in human nature.

Riker's background had prepared him well for his future role. He was the second child in a family of six children, and the oldest son. His father, Daniel Riker, a former Confederate soldier, came overland to California in pioneer days and settled in Oakdale. William was born in 1873, and later spent three or four years in school at Oroville, his only formal education. He was seventeen when his father and older sister died, both in the same year, leaving his mother to care for four younger children. When

she remarried two years later, William left for San Francisco, where he soon learned the art of living by his wits. He held a variety of jobs: waiter in a hotel restaurant, necktie salesman, mechanic -- whatever came to hand. He became interested in "spiritualism", and soon discovered that there were easier ways to make a living than waiting tables or repairing broken-down machinery. He knew from his days as a salesman that he had a persuasive style and a brash self-confidence that was attractive to some people. With the impressive title of "Professor" William Riker, he set himself up in business as a palm reader. The Professor must have been pleasantly surprised to find out how gullible the public was, and how easy it was to separate them from their money simply by telling them what they wanted to hear. Palmistry, however, had its limitations -- the clients had to seek him out, so his range was necessarily limited. Thus was born the traveling mind-reading act, the precursor of the great sideshow to come.

Since he was in the business of living by his wits, Riker studied his subject -- people. He knew their fears, their ambitions, their prejudices -- whatever it was that made them tick. He found that people wanted security; they wanted their jobs protected; they feared the threat posed by minorities who undercut them by working for low wages. During this period of the early Nineteenth Century, there was an ugly undercurrent of resentment against the Chinese, as well as a residual anti-Black sentiment among older Confederate sympathizers who had settled in California after the Civil War, bringing their prejudices with them. Riker had grown up in the home of a former Confederate soldier, his own father; and he undoubtedly found himself in competition for work as a young man in San Francisco with Orientals who didn't consider a waiter's job beneath their dignity. Anyone who could convincingly promise a life that would provide financial security and protection of the White race from the encroaching minorities could attract a following.

By the time Riker returned to San Francisco in 1915 after his precipitous flight to avoid the bigamy charge, he was 42 years old, experienced in the ways of the world, and ready to test out his latest idea, the Perfect Christian Divine Way. Since the PCDW philosophy was based on the

insecurities and fears of its followers, they had to be provided with a strong leader -- a father-figure, a "Comforter" -- who was wise enough to know what was best for his disciples. The price of this protection and guidance was obedience and financial support. There was never any possibility of Holy City turning into another Jonestown, as Robert Hine suggested in his California's Utopian Colonies, because it lacked the religious fanaticism of the People's Temple. Holy City was a tourist business, a shabby Knott's Berry Farm, that grew out of the age of advertising and automobiles and drew from the various media -- the press and radio -- for its sustenance. The advertising attracted the attention, the automobile brought the tourists, and Father Riker collected the money.

Even as the country slipped under the gray tide of the Depression in the 1930s, Holy City continued to provide its special carnival of entertainment for the summertime beachgoers. Then an interesting phenomenon occurred. The population of the colony began to increase, at one time reaching 300 people. But these were not disciples. They were the wandering jobless, the tramps and hoboes, who came across Holy City in their search for food, shelter and work. Disciple ~~Stephen~~ Rozum recalled that during one dark year of the Depression the Brotherhood served 42,000 meals to transients. They were allowed to stay overnight, or longer, if they had no place to go. An hour's work would "buy" a meal, and the old movie studio served as a dormitory.¹² Riker had hit on the idea of a movie studio when Holy City was still in its formative years. The idea was perhaps not as bizarre as it might seem now. Back in the early 1900s the Essanay Film Company, led by its co-founder, "Bronco Billy" Anderson, located in Los Gatos to make a cowboy movie. For interior scenes they used a roofless structure behind the old Lyndon Hotel, but when it was necessary to shoot outdoor scenes they moved a few miles up Los Gatos Creek Canyon to the small settlement of Alma. Another filmmaker, on the other side of the summit of the Santa Cruz Mountains, used Boulder Creek as a movie locale in 1917, so it probably seemed reasonable to Riker that Holy City might attract some Hollywood money, especially if it was prepared to offer a ready-to-use studio. The sunshine and drier climate of Southern California won out

over the rugged canyons and redwoods of the Santa Cruz Mountains, however, and the Holy City movie studio was never used for its intended purpose.

While the disciples fed the unemployed, Riker worked on his solution to the world's problems, which were definitely on the increase. In order to bring his ideas before a wider public, he decided to run for Governor of California in 1938, the first of four such campaigns. According to a newspaper article, "Riker's plan of perfect government calls for state control of banking, pensions for all aged and disabled persons, difficult marriage and easy divorce, and government employment to eliminate unemployment."¹³ It sounded good, but the article didn't mention that the plan applied only to Whites -- Orientals and Blacks were prohibited from owning businesses under the Riker Plan.

Riker was not content just to challenge local authorities with his controversial ideas; he sent telegrams to heads of state and wrote letters to Germany's Chancellor, Adolph Hitler, whose ideas about racial purity struck a responsive chord in the Comforter. But here was the most preposterous contradiction in Riker's strange, convoluted philosophy: while he wrote letters to Hitler, he was searching for a Jewish Messiah who would unite Gentiles and Jews into a master race that would rule the world. At one time, according to his nephew, Riker became converted to the Jewish faith, although he was not certain that his uncle's conversion was ever formally confirmed.¹⁴ Whether formally confirmed or not, there is a photograph of Riker wearing a hat with the Star of David prominently displayed on the front.

Obviously, logic was not one of Riker's strong points. His philosophy constantly shifted ground to accomodate his changing arguments. When logic lost ground he resorted to bluff and bluster, as in his introduction to a treatise titled "The Final Wisdom and Understanding for You":

"Riker, who is the Founder of Holy City, says when you are dead you are plumb dead and He can prove it, and any other teaching contrary to this is only an ignorant gulling scheme to hold people over while they are enjoying propagating the race and living in ignorance and their Churchianity superstition."

A Special Message to you from Holy City, California, and

What We Must Now Have in this World is Explained

No. 1. Is a NEW INSPIRING GOD for ALL PEOPLE

No. 2. Mystically speaking, GOD must now become active in this world.

No. 3. Whenever the Great White race people cease acting crazy, it is only then, that they will become the NEW GOD of this world, for all other people

No. 4. The power of money through the money-lords will soon be displaced with a greater power, which is the true solution to our problems, advocated only at Holy City, and also you are going to see only the White race people FLY through space without any machinery in proving, White man's Supremacy.

No. 5. If you doubt this statement, come to Holy City and we will prove all of these things to you.

No. 6. Remember, the Political, Racial and Spiritual Philosophy of Holy City is the Salvation of this World, and Don't Forget It.

Signed. THE COMFORTER

*Headquarters of the World's Perfect Government
HOLY CITY, CALIFORNIA*



(Courtesy of Wilma Thompson)



Women seemed to pose an especially knotty problem for Riker. His feelings toward them were ambivalent, but , possibly based on his past experiences with them, he generally believed that they caused a lot of trouble. In the same philosophical treatise he wrote:

" Woman's greatest worth is either to worry a man into Hell or praise him into Heaven. If she does neither she is worthless to you."

Perhaps giving the reader a glimpse into his own marital situation, he continued:

" Man is naturally happy but is eternally miserable for the reason of trying to make some woman happy."

But while Riker was engrossed in spreading the word of the Perfect Christian Divine Way, the rest of the world had lost interest and was moving on into a new era -- World War II was suddenly upon them. That Riker didn't recognize the changes that had taken place became painfully evident to him in 1942. The FBI had been keeping an eye on Riker and his strange doctrine of racism since the start of the war; and when a group of sailors, stopping by Holy City to take in the sights, were advised by Riker to lay down their arms and refuse to fight the Nazis, they reported the matter to their commanding officer. The officer, feeling that Riker's advice certainly didn't contribute to the morale of his men, passed this information on to the FBI.

On October 29, 1942, Chief FBI Agent Nat Pieper and his men swooped down on Holy City and took Father Riker into custody. They gathered up fifteen boxes of evidence and announced to the press that some of his pamphlets described Hitler as "a second Martin Luther, freeing the people from the ownership of the international bankers." Had the government agents looked down the street from Riker's home, they would have seen the Holy City limousine -- parked on the sidewalk -- with a sign on the top:

" \$500 to the First Person to Bomb Tokio"

-- but this would only have served to further confuse the issue.

Riker had unwittingly stirred up a hornet's nest of fervent patriotism and strong anti-German sentiments by mixing his philosophy into

the explosive war-time atmosphere. The closing statement in one news article showed just how sensitive the times were to people who appeared to sympathize with the enemy: " ...[Riker] was born in California and is of German descent."¹⁵ This was certainly a far cry from Eugene Sawyer's impression of Riker when he interviewed him for inclusion in his History of Santa Clara County in the early 1920s: "Mr. Riker stands firmly for Americanism and the upholding of law and order."¹⁶ Riker was charged with thirteen counts of sedition and faced a possible sentence of 100 years in prison.

When the local lawyers hired by Riker wilted in the face of these monumental charges and advised him to plead guilty, he fired the lot of them and went in search of a bigger gun to use against the U.S. government. He found his defender in the person of San Francisco lawyer Melvin Belli. Belli was amused and challenged by the case. He made no pretense of trying to understand Riker's philosophy, and described his 68 year old client as "a windy old geezer" with "a mouth like a torn pocket", but he took the case. Perhaps it was Belli's belief that World War II was being fought "to allow any man to preach any crackpot ideas he wanted -- to anyone",¹⁷ or perhaps it was the \$5,000 fee paid him by the Comforter, with the promise of an equal amount to be paid if Belli won the case, that inspired the defense. In any event, Belli pulled out all the stops, and according to the King of Torts, had the entire courtroom -- including Riker -- reduced to tears during his summation. "I myself did not weep," said Belli, "but I have never underestimated the power of tears in the courtroom." Evidently the Wisest Man on All the Earth did not underestimate this power either.

The jury, confronted by this pitiful, befuddled, weeping old man, acquitted Riker on all thirteen counts. Once outside the courtroom, surrounded by the press and the photographers, Riker got a grip on himself and reverted to type. As Belli tells it, "...Riker was so grateful that he named me his 'second typical God' (whatever that was) in lieu of the second \$5,000 I thought I had coming." Warming to the occasion, Riker then promised the lawyer "a seat in my Kingdom of heaven and that is far more emolument than a paltry \$5,000 -- mere money!"

But money was the name of the game, and Belli firmly declined the offer of future bliss for the more immediate reward of his earthly fee. This prompted Riker to file suit against Belli, claiming that the lawyer had defamed his character by continually referring to him as a "crackpot" during the trial -- never mind that this very defense got him acquitted. Belli countersued his former client and got his fee. "So it goes," Belli philosophically concluded as he pocketed his paltry five thousand dollars.

It appeared that 1942 was not a very good year for the Perfect Christian Divine Way. Just two weeks before Riker was taken into custody serious trouble had erupted in Holy City. "Murder in Paradise!" announced the October 14 issue of the San Jose News. After thirty years of brotherhood and cooperation something went wrong. Disciples Arthur Kastner and Joseph Witzick, the astronomer, were at work constructing ladders to fasten to the sides of the wooden buildings in Holy City. Father Riker ordered this work as a civil defense measure, in case Holy City became the target of Japanese bombers. Any roof fires resulting from a bombing attack could be more readily extinguished if there was quick access to the structures. The fact that there were no fire hydrants in Holy City didn't seem to be a consideration. Needing another ladder for their work, Kastner and Witzick went to borrow one from Irwin "Crazy" Fisher. For some reason this request caused Fisher to fly into a rage. He refused to give up his ladder, and when the other two disciples persisted, Fisher picked up a crowbar and repeatedly struck Witzick over the head. Kastner ran, but seeing that he could not out-distance Fisher, turned to defend himself and was also struck down.

The commotion attracted other disciples who managed to subdue Fisher and lock him in a nearby cabin. They summoned an ambulance, but Witzick died two hours later at the County Hospital. Kastner recovered from his injuries and later became a witness for the prosecution during the trial. During all the excitement Fisher managed to break out of the cabin and escape into the nearby maze of canyons. Sheriff Emig organized a posse to hunt down the escaped murderer, but they had to call a halt when darkness made further searching impossible. After ten hours

of wandering around in the cold October night, Fisher finally realized that Holy City was his only refuge, and returned there around midnight to give himself up. When told about the murder, Riker said that he was too shocked to discuss the matter. Kastner, asked during the trial to describe Fisher's appearance at the time of the assault, answered that "something very ferocious seemed to overtake him." Fisher himself seemed dazed and repentant after all the violence. "I'm sorry I did it," he told Sheriff Emig. "I would rather have taken a beating myself than to have done this." ¹⁸

Fisher had no previous criminal record, and after changing his original "not guilty" plea to "guilty of manslaughter" he was sentenced to five years at San Quentin. In two and a half years he was eligible for parole, and it was granted, on condition that he stay away from Holy City. He moved a few miles away from the colony on Summit Road, where he spent his time writing philosophical treatises and called himself "Father Irwin B. Fisher, Metaphysician". Many years later a reporter sought him out for an interview and described him as a man who commanded respect and had "a certain toughness". He had developed a self-sufficiency during his long exile from the Brotherhood, but he still held to the Philosophy. He handed one of his treatises to the reporter as she was leaving. One paragraph spoke of man's purpose on earth as being the expression of "Life and Purification through our Sacred Bodies, here and now, on this Earth, while we are living and have the Sacred Privilege. Never mind the soul, that is God's business". ¹⁹

Just as the automobile brought prosperity to Holy City, the automobile took it away. In 1939 construction began on a more direct highway to the coast which by-passed Holy City by a scant quarter mile, but it was just enough to upset the delicate balance of the declining tourist trade. An added blow came with the war-time rationing of gas and tires; people had to save their gas coupons to get to work, so there were fewer and fewer cars out for pleasure drives. Formerly carefree beaches were now patrolled by the military, watching for enemy subs. The fun and games attitude had changed to the grim business of fighting a war. Holy City sat in the backwash, the empty streets a forewarning of what lay ahead.

In a final bizarre effort to attract tourists, Riker proposed to construct his own Colossus of Rhodes on the crest of the Santa Cruz Mountains. It was to be a heroic-size statue of a beautiful woman -- large enough to contain twelve elevators.²⁰ Fortunately, this idea never got out of the planning stage, but it did remind the public that Riker was still up there, alive and well. In the meantime, he continued to enter the gubernatorial races regularly. He filed four times in all, but never received more than 14,957 votes when he cross-filed in 1950, his last campaign.

"Mother" Lucile died at age seventy-six in 1950, stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage on the Fourth of July. She had spent her entire married life of thirty-one years in Holy City. Two years later, a count of the original disciples showed that their numbers had dwindled to twelve -- nine men and three women. They were growing old along with their city; most of them were now in their late 70s and early 80s. The Comforter himself was seventy-nine, but that didn't stop him from putting up a billboard proclaiming to the traveling public that he was the only person who could keep California from going "plum to Hell", because he alone held the only True Solution.

Not to be left behind by the younger generation, Riker added a Lincoln Zephyr to his automobile collection (some said that he owned a fleet of six Cadillacs), and spent his weekends traveling around spending money that Joe Albert vainly tried to control by appealing to the local bank to stop payment on Riker's checks. Clearly, Holy City was going to need an infusion of money and new blood if it was to survive.

In 1946 a Hollywood director-producer- film editor (he was described as holding all of these positions -- and more -- by the newspapers) turned up in Holy City, looking for a film location.²¹ Nothing came of the visit, but ten years later, Father Riker bethought himself of this incident and contacted Maurice Kline about coming back to Holy City -- not as a producer-director (although the prospect of Hollywood movie money wasn't to be ignored) -- but as the Jewish Messiah , who would unite Gentiles and Jews and achieve Riker's long-time dream of a master race. Kline thought the matter over, consulted his attorney who advised him to get everything in writing in his dealings with Riker, and agreed to come to the New Jerusalem

in exchange for one-half of the acreage held by Riker. In return for the approximately 93 acres, Kline agreed to rejuvenate the decaying colony and make it a paying proposition once again. He talked to the remaining seven original disciples still living at Holy City, and on March 16, 1957, they signed an agreement with him:

"We agree that the transfer of one-half interest of Holy City from William E. Riker to Maurice Kline [was] done with our consent."

Considering the fact that the 1926 Articles of Incorporation granted the faithful disciples only the right to food, shelter, and clothing and assigned all other assets to Riker (ie., property and income from businesses), this agreement with Kline wouldn't appear to carry much legal weight. Whether they approved of the transfer or not didn't really matter.

In June Kline delivered the coup d'etat to Riker. He obtained a second deed for the remaining acreage of Holy City for \$64,000. Riker was in a Los Gatos convalescent hospital at the time, recovering from a broken hip. While driving around San Jose the month before he ran a stop sign at Stockton Street and The Alameda and was broad-sided by a college student. The police cited him for violation of the right-of-way and dispatched him to the hospital.

When word of the sale reached Irwin Fisher up on Summit Road, he filed suit against Kline in an attempt to evict him from Holy City, claiming that the sale was illegal because Riker had no right to dispose of land that rightfully belonged to the disciples, including himself. Kline had never heard of Fisher, and said that the only disciples he was dealing with were the ones who had signed the agreement: Joe Albert, Stephen Rozum, David Capps, Arthur Landstrom, Emil Reichsteiner, Fred Rommel, and Winifred Allington, who had been appointed spokesperson for the group. Kline included Riker as an "original disciple", a bit of a come-down for the Comforter, but at least it made him eligible for the promised payment of \$8,000 to each disciple that was later decreed by the court.

Kline's San Jose attorney, interviewed twenty years later after all the legal maneuvering, admitted that "Kline had no outside money to give the disciples outright, and never brought in any outside money".²² But,

having won the disciples' support and taken over as business manager of Holy City, he began to check out the books. Attorney Faber Johnston continued: "Then Kline started asking, 'What happened to the money from 1915 to 1959?' Of course Riker wouldn't tell Kline anything, and no one could find Riker's assets because they were all well-hidden." A few assets were not so well-hidden -- the expensive cars, the small bag of diamonds reportedly carried by Riker, and, according to Attorney Johnston, "a suitcase full of federal gold certificates" -- not to mention the private plane Johnston claimed Riker owned.

The plane was supposedly piloted by Riker's son, a bricklayer who lived in Weaverville, but according to a long-time resident of the area who knew Riker, the plane was owned and piloted by Elmer Bailey. It made its flights out of Reid-Hillview Airport in San Jose. One strange incident involving the plane occurred when it landed on one of the few level areas in Holy City and was unable to take off again. (Perhaps it was at this point that Riker became the owner of a private plane.) After being partially dismantled the plane was stored in the garage behind the "Opera House", the large two-story building topped by a cupola, located at the end of the street.²³ Riker may have had in mind another tourist attraction, but the grounded plane was soon forgotten.

Riker's famous mind-reading powers seemed to have temporarily deserted him, but after mulling over what had happened since the Messiah's arrival, they returned to him in full force. The Wisest Man on All the Earth realized that he had been conned out of a piece of real estate conservatively worth \$250,000 by a slick operator he himself had invited to Holy City. When the full impact of this financial disaster penetrated, Riker filed a two million dollar suit against Kline in February 1959 to regain title to the property. But the proverbial Riker luck failed, and Attorney Johnston successfully defeated Riker's claim of fraud. Holy City had passed out of his hands, and even the faithful disciples deserted him. Five of them filed suit against Riker in 1958 to find out what had happened to "thousands of dollars in cash and realty" accumulated by the Comforter since the colony began its operation in 1919.²⁴ There was a feeling among the disciples that Kline treated

them better than Riker ever had, especially since Kline gave them a share of all the assets he turned up. The sleight-of-hand artists and legal jugglers had now moved into the sideshow; but the old carnival barker was getting tired. He was 86 years old and losing his grip. All that saved him from being evicted from Holy City was a court ruling that allowed the disciples the right to live in Holy City for the rest of their lives.

Kline had already begun the systematic destruction of the old buildings. The Observatory and the long-abandoned zoo were the first to go, followed by the old radio station in the "clean up, brighten up" program proposed by Kline to remove health and fire hazards. The mineral spring and the curio shop/soft drink stand were to be spared, however. Farther down the street, the Holy City Bar was taken over by Joe Albert, and Stephen Rozum the printer and Emil Reichsteiner the barber continued their businesses. The restaurant underwent a name-change and became "Poor Richard's". The other printing plant was now operated by James Wood, a friend of Riker's who had also been involved in the lawsuit against Kline. Wood published The Holy City Clarion on an ancient press housed near the Opera House. Several of the other businesses had been leased by non-disciples who operated the garage, gas station and restaurant; and of course the Holy City Post Office, opened in 1925 with Father Riker as its first postmaster, continued in operation.

Riker stayed on in his house on the knoll, surrounded by the wreckage of his city and the personal mementoes of past times. On a wall in his "Museum of Philosophy" was a collection of photographs surrounding the oval-framed picture of "Mother" Lucile. It was an unlikely grouping: Marilyn Monroe in a low-cut gown, George Washington, Adolph Hitler, and Abraham Lincoln. Beneath the photographs a small sign stated: "Everyone is good in some way." In Riker's mind this was probably no more illogical than his choice of a location for Holy City. He had frequently prophesied the coming destruction of the world by a devastating earthquake which would consume all men -- except Jews and Gentiles -- and then went ahead to build his city practically astride the San Andreas Fault.²⁵

But now the final destruction began. The first of several fires in Holy City was reported; it was discovered about ten o'clock one morning



HOLY CITY MINERAL SPRING



THE GAS STATION IN ITS FINAL DAYS

in the Comfort Station by a mountain resident, and did only minor damage, but it was only the beginning. In July of 1957 a larger fire occurred, which destroyed almost a third of the remaining buildings, including the "Mystery Hall". As the bulldozers pushed down the old wooden buildings and the dust rose into the air, the people who had invested in small businesses in Holy City began to wonder how long it would be before they, too, were bulldozed or burned out of operation.

There was a brief lull in the fire reports, until August 31, 1959, when a fire broke out that destroyed the two-story building housing Emil Reichsteiner's barber shop, the printing shop and the ice storage plant. The Los Gatos-Saratoga Times Observer reported: "The building dated back to the 1920s. It was topped by a cupola and was a conspicuous landmark." All that remained of the print shop was "the charred remains of the presses. ... It contained a rare collection of old type faces, in addition to much printing equipment." According to a resident of Holy City at this time, no melted lead was ever found in the burned-out print shop, leading to the speculation that the type faces had been removed before the fire. This fire had been reported by a barber shop customer, about ten o' clock in the morning. When Kline was contacted about the fire, he estimated that the damage was about \$50,000 , and said that he was not covered by insurance. The newspaper noted that water had to be brought in to fight the fire "as Holy City has no hydrants."

The residents of Holy City organized themselves into a safety patrol, led by gas station operator Robert Clougher, to keep a look-out for fires and vandalism in their disappearing city. But two months later on October 29 another alarm was called in at 9:04 in the evening, and seven fire-trucks responded. The old garage behind the Holy City Bar burned to the ground, as well as the plumbing supply store. By now a spokesman for Kline was ready to give the press some background on all these fires "of very suspicious nature", as the State Forestry Ranger described them. Kline reportedly had received threats by telephone and mail that Holy City was the target of an arsonist. The day before this fire he received another call warning that unless everybody got out of Holy City within two weeks the settlement would be burned. Both the sheriff and the fire marshal were advised of

the threats, but the arsonist evidently decided not to wait. "I don't care if I go to the penitentiary for life," he reportedly told Kline during one telephone call.²⁶ The arson squad began checking on the whereabouts of a recent resident of Holy City, and four days later, after another fire had been set in a brush pile near a house where seven men were sleeping, they arrested printer James Wood, who had been a member of the Holy City safety patrol. Unable to prove the arson charges, investigators had to release Wood, but the fires stopped.

By now Kline probably realized that whatever plans he might have had to spruce up Holy City were pointless, and it was at this moment that Attorney Johnston and some business associates offered Kline a way out of his dilemma. They offered to buy the acreage themselves. Since Kline was unable to obtain a clear title to the land and owed substantial legal fees after all the lawsuits of the past three years, he accepted without hesitation. The H.C. Corporation, as the group called themselves, took over in June 1960 and Kline left for what he undoubtedly hoped would be a more peaceful life in Minden, Nevada.

California began to experience a population explosion in the latter part of the 1960s, and real estate values appreciated rapidly. The H.C. Corporation found itself sitting on an undeveloped gold mine at Holy City, and they began to look around for ways to capitalize on their investment. History was on the verge of repeating itself: The H.C. Corporation proposed to create a "commercial park" at Holy City. Once again the bulldozer was hauled in, and the remaining buildings, with the exception of the old gas station and Edmonson's Garage at the foot of the Holy City Hill road, were leveled. A new flimsily-built building housing a bar, the post office, and space for a store, was hastily constructed, and across the road from the old mineral spring a bright purple cyclone fence enclosed a redwood grove. But the Corporation experienced difficulty in obtaining a use permit for their proposed recreational area, especially after local residents objected to the very real possibilities of increased traffic in the area and the danger of fire. When residents in the area suggested that the purple cyclone fence

was somewhat less than aesthetically pleasing, a spokesman for the Corporation commented that the developers might consider camouflaging the eyesore -- with poison oak.²⁷ Finding their plans for commercial development stymied, the developers then offered the acreage to the county -- for \$600,000 -- but this plan also hit a snag when a member of the County Park Commission was found to have a vested interest in the property. If Riker was paying any attention to this shell game, he might have figured out that the land he sold in 1957 for \$68 an acre was now priced at \$3,000 an acre, but he probably didn't care to dwell upon the matter.

Riker had spent the last few years in and out of hospitals and rest homes as his health declined. Upon returning to his home after one such period he was enraged to find that someone had stolen his picture of Adolph Hitler from the Museum of Philosophy.²⁸ In 1966, at the age of 93, he announced to the six remaining disciples and to the world at large that he had converted to Catholicism. A minor uproar ensued upon receipt of this piece of information. The Divine Comforter was on record -- many times -- as preaching against the evils of "Churchianity", and at one time considered flying to Rome (whether with or without mechanical assistance was not clear) to straighten out the Pope's doctrines. This was the final blow to the Brotherhood. Riker had sold their land and businesses out from under them, grown wealthy as a result of their labor, and now he had renounced the Perfect Christian Divine Way philosophy that held the colony together. "I have been intelligently converted," he said.²⁹

Not one bit abashed by his betrayal, Riker took his case to the local newspaper, and in a letter to the editor, in a column appropriately headed "Rage, Reason, and Reaction", answered his critics:

"The biggest question answered: how and why were you converted? After six years of deep spiritual meditation and in a hospital sick spell, the Catholic nunnery nuns inspired me into all these herein printed reasons.

If any person on earth can show me in error, I will recede. Story will continue."

Here followed eleven points on Riker's concept of the Catholic Church's



THE RIKER HOME



FATHER RIKER'S PHOTO COLLECTION



WILLIAM E. RIKER

teachings. Then he concluded with his usual bombast:

"Join the Catholic Church and Forever You Are a Real Christian."³⁰

Not long after this Riker's nephew was appointed his uncle's conservator, and since Riker needed care he was again placed in the first of several rest homes. His irascible personality made him a difficult patient, and he was moved from one nursing home to another because he upset the other patients.³¹ Eventually he ended up at Agnews State Hospital, where he died December 3, 1969, at the ripe age of ninety-six.

Just three months before Riker's death, disciple Stephen Rozum died, and the remaining disciples began drifting away from the wreckage of Holy City. They were elderly and without families; only a few had relatives, but they hadn't seen them for years. In 1970 Wally Smith, a reporter for the Ventura County Star, came to Holy City to do a story. He found two disciples still living there, Harry Reynolds and Joe Albert, who had moved into Riker's old home. "Five of Riker's disciples survive him," Smith wrote, "all in their late eighties or nineties. Wally Stovell has moved the PCDW to San Jose. Here he conducts periodic religious gatherings next door to his TV repair shop." Robert Clougher, (not considered a "true" disciple by some) who had written letters to the San Jose Mercury News on subjects ranging from morals and world government to nudism and health foods, was, according to Smith, "evicted from Holy City in 1957 because of his involvement with the National Nudist Colony."³² Smith's date may be off by two years, because Clougher was mentioned in an October 29, 1959, news item as being the organizer of the Holy City safety patrol. In any event, Clougher moved away, over the summit, to live in Felton.

Another long-time disciple, Arthur Landstrom, died of a stroke while arguing about the PCDW philosophy with a stray tourist who had stopped at Holy City. Joe Albert refused to give out any information about the colony or its leader to Smith, and a few years later moved to Manteca to live on his brother's ranch. After reporter Smith left, Holy City relapsed into its usual somnolent state, which was not disturbed for another four or five years, when a slow news day came along and another writer stopped by to do a Holy City story. All that remained of the colony was the old garage and the Riker

home on the knoll to mark the site of The World's Perfect Government.

In 1980 the only surviving disciple, Irwin Fisher, was ninety-eight years old and still living in his small house on Summit Road. He had never taken part in any of the lawsuits against Riker (his suit was against Kline), nor received any money from the settlement promised to the disciples. He described his former fellow-philosopher as "a very unusual man. He was a meta-physician."³³ Fisher had out-lived them all; a little, wizened old man, in frail health, whose only companions were his nine cats. Although Fisher had come to terms with his isolation he kept a television set in the house -- his window on a world that he seldom ventured out into. The world of the 1980s must have seemed a strange, confusing place to him with its computers and missiles; but two things he surely understood about modern life: corporate take-overs and television evangelists. Past experience had prepared him for them.

The Holy City story is a strange mixture of comedy and pathos, the raucous sideshow atmosphere of its early days standing in stark contrast to the quiet abandonment of its last years. It ended with a small group of ancient disciples clinging to a way of life and a philosophy that was no longer viable. In fact, the Perfect Christian Divine Way was headed on a dead-end road from the beginning. It was founded on racism, separation from the mainstream of society, and a belief by Riker and his disciples that their generation represented the apex of human development, therefore there was no need to consider future generations. Holy City held together as long as it did because of its leader's magnetic personality and persuasive abilities.

Once Riker began to really believe the strange philosophy he expounded, he put his foot on the downhill path. He fell victim to his own hoax and became fair game for the very con artists he had outsmarted for years. The old fox was finally run down; and with the loss of his "city", he was just another crazy old man sitting beside an abandoned road, peddling pamphlets to the occasional passing motorist. But for a blazing twenty years, while the tourists and the money rolled in, he put on a sideshow that proved a sucker is born every minute.



FOOTNOTES

1. Evelyn Gallagher, "Once a Thriving Town, Holy City Long Forgotten", Los Gatos Times Observer, Jan. 4, 1980.
2. Peg More, "Holy City -- Utopia in the Mountains", The Ridge Runner, Spring 1978.
3. Ibid.
4. Gallagher, op. cit.
5. John Baggerly, "Father Riker Dies", Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer, Dec. 5, 1969.
6. Bruce Franks, interview, March 7, 1988.
7. Robert V. Hine, California's Utopian Colonies, p. 156.
8. Phyllis Karsten, interview, February 8, 1988.
9. Bruce Franks, interview, February 28, 1986.
10. More, op. cit.
11. Wally Smith, "Once Colorful Holy City Fades into Ghost Town", Ventura County Star, April 5, 1970.
12. _____ "Harmony in Holy City Again", Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer, August 7, 1957.
13. _____ "Witzick Murder", San Jose News, October 14, 1942.
14. Baggerly, op. cit.
15. _____ "Father Riker Arrested by the FBI", Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer, October 30, 1942.
16. Eugene Sawyer, History of Santa Clara County, p. 153.
17. Melvin Belli, Melvin Belli, My Life on Trial, p. 175.
18. _____ "Witzick Murder", op.cit.
19. Gallagher, op. cit.
20. William Chivers, "Cult King of the Santa Cruz Mountains", The Trailblazer, p. 4.

21. _____ "Old Movie Studio Served Human Needs", Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer, August 7, 1957.
22. Gallagher, op. cit.
23. Bruce Franks, interview, March 7, 1988.
24. _____ "Riker's Disciples File Suit", Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer, March 19, 1958.
25. Curt Gentry, The Last Days of the Late Great State of California, p. 262.
26. _____ "Arson Suspected in Holy City Fire", Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer, October 29, 1959.
27. _____ "Park's Fence May Remain", San Jose News, May 16, 1968.
28. Gentry, op. cit.
29. Chivers, op. cit.
30. Riker, letter to editor, Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer, August 29, 1966.
31. Stephen M. Payne, Santa Clara County, Harvest of Change, p. 122.
32. Smith, op. cit.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:

- Baxter, Phyllis Filiberti. The Valley of Santa Clara -- Historic Buildings, 1792-1920 (pub. Jr. League of San Jose, Inc., 1975)
- Belli, Melvin. Melvin Belli, My Life on Trial (Wm. Morrow and Co., Inc., 1976)
- Gentry, Curt. The Last Days of the Late Great State of California (Comstock edit., Sausalito, Ca., 1968)
- Hine, Robert V. California's Utopian Colonies (U.C. Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1983, rev.)
- Hoover, Mildred B., Rensch, Hero E., Rensch, Ethel G. Historic Spots in California (Stanford U. Press, Stanford, Ca., 1966, rev.)
- Payne, Stephen M. A Howling Wilderness (Loma Prieta Publ. Co., Santa Cruz, Ca., 1978)
- _____. Santa Clara County, Harvest of Change (Windsor Publications, Inc., Northridge, Ca., 1987)
- Young, John V. Ghost Towns of the Santa Cruz Mountains (Paper Vision Press, Santa Cruz, Ca., 1979, rev.)
- _____. Santa Clara Valley Memoirs (Hot Type and Pony Wire) (Western Tanager Press, Santa Cruz, Ca., 1980)

Periodicals:

- Chivers, William. "Cult King of the Santa Cruz Mountains", The Trailblazer (Aug. 1987, Vol. 28, No. 3)
- Kelley, Barbara Bailey. "Salvation Circus", West (Nov. 18, 1984)
- More, Peg. "Holy City -- Utopia in the Mountains", The Ridge Runner (Spring 1978, Vol. II, No. 2)

Pamphlets:

- "Relative Geologic Stability of the Santa Cruz Mountains" . California
Division of Mines and Geology (June 1962)

Newspapers:

- | | | | |
|----|--|---------------|----------------|
| -- | <u>Los Gatos Mail-News</u> , Oct. 15, 1942 | | |
| -- | <u>Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer</u> , | Oct. 30, 1942 | Mar. 19, 1958 |
| | | May 7, 1957 | May 4, 1959 |
| | | July 23, 1957 | Aug. 29, 1959 |
| | | July 24, 1957 | Aug. 31, 1959 |
| | | Aug. 7, 1957 | Oct. 29, 1959 |
| | | | Nov. 2, 1959 |
| -- | <u>Los Gatos Times Observer</u> , | Apr. 27, 1967 | Feb. 2, 1975 |
| | | Dec. 5, 1969 | Jan. 4, 1980 |
| | | Jan. 4, 1974 | Sept. 8, 1987 |
| | | | Sept. 22, 1987 |
| -- | <u>Redwood News</u> , Jan. 1970 | | |
| -- | <u>San Jose Mercury</u> , | Oct. 14, 1942 | |
| | | Oct. 15, 1942 | |
| | | Feb. 22, 1944 | |
| -- | <u>San Jose News</u> , | July 17, 1967 | |
| | | Apr. 18, 1968 | |
| | | May 2, 1968 | |
| | | May 16, 1968 | |
| -- | Ventura County Star, Apr. 5, 1970 | | |

Interviews:

- Bruce Franks
- Phyllis Karsten
- Kenneth Robison
- Wilma Thompson

(All are long-time residents of Santa Clara County and have first-hand knowledge of Riker and/or incidents that occurred in Holy City.)

Special thanks to the Forbes Mill Historical Museum in Los Gatos, and to the University of California, Santa Cruz, for permission to use material in the McHenry Library Special Collections.

Distinguished John Hanson Kept "Open House" For Distinguished Travelers

By THURE GUSTAFSON

John Hanson was born 1715 at Mulberry Grove in Fort Tobacco Country of Charles County, Maryland. The family was sufficiently comfortable to give him an English education, and he was, "trained in the ways of the colonial planters". Handsome as well as prosperous, he married beautiful Jane Contee, herself descended from a distinguished family. Her ancestors, French Huguenots, had fled religious persecution in their native land. Mulberry Grove was near Hoe's Ferry, the most popular Potomac River crossing, and at his plantation, Hanson kept open house for the more elegant travelers. There he entertained political, business, military and social leaders of the states, among them a vigorous soldier/surveyor planter 17 his junior, who was named George Washington.

No doubt about it, Hanson ranked high in the Maryland Establishment of his day. Almost yearly, from 1757 until 1781, he served in the Maryland House of Delegates. In 1771, he was deputy surveyor for Fredrick County, a burgeoning area to the west. Two years later, at the graying age of 58, he did a puzzling thing. He pulled up stakes and took his family to a new home in the Fredrick County. Maybe, he was attracted by the prospects of new industry, fresh land for diversified crops or the speculative possibilities in a rapid growing area.

Had arrangements been made for his removal at Maryland legislative sessions, perhaps even at meetings at Mount Vernon? Certainly, "it appeared timely to have an older, wiser head leading the political affairs of the new and growing west". And it seemed the way had been prepared for him.

Within months of his arrival, Hanson was presiding at most of the public meetings in Fredrick County. He was almost immediately returned from that County to the state House of Delegates.

In the aftermath of the Boston

Tea Party, chaired a mass meeting that received support of New England City and suspension of import/export business with England until Boston was relieved. He served as county treasurer and was commissioned by the Maryland Convention to set up a gun lock factory. His adopted county also sent him to a "General Congress" at Annapolis which became a Convention and dispatched delegates to a "General Congress" of the Colonies. After the Battle of Concord, a "Committee of Observation" was set up to rule Fredrick County until a state government was formed in 1777. With his eldest son, Alexander Contee Hanson, he was a member. And Fredrick trusted his patriotism and discretion to such an extent that he was given blanket election to "any provincial convention" that might be formed.

John Hanson visited the Maryland troops camped in New Jersey to encourage re-enlistments and spearheaded the raising of two companies of troops to be sent to Cambridge, Mass., outside British occupied Boston. He did more. Too old himself to fight, he gave his sons to the cause.

Alexander served for a time as Washington's private secretary. Peter, a lieutenant in the Maryland line, was killed at Fort Washington in 1776. Samuel a surgeon with George Washington's Life Guards, died in 1781, of battle connected illness. Aside from Alexander, they were his only sons to survive infancy.

In June 1780, following the election by the Maryland Legislature, Hanson took a seat in the Continental Congress, and was reelected in 1781.

With Daniel Carroll, a fellow Maryland delegate, he had the honor of signing the "Articles of Confederation", - by which act the confederation of the United States of America was completed.... The words came from the Journal of the Congress itself. The following No-

(Turn to page 4)

ADD to: UCSC Research Special(p.1
Collections re: HOLY CITY, CA //
FATHER RIKER // Henry Allen
RISPIN Mystery Mansion, Capitola,
CA HISTORICAL FILES: Jan.1990/w1

The California VECKOBLAD (news)
(A Swedish/Nordic/American NEWS)
4967 Melrose, Los Angeles, CA 90029
(contact address as of: 1972AD)

Legends/stories of Locals say...
"From Father RIKER's early radio station broadcasts in 1924AD till the late 1930s era, JOHN HANSON was referred to "...as the REAL first president", which shook-up educators/politicians/scholars who claimed and taught otherwise! ...in fact, the questions raised by RIKER (via radio), prompted



JOHN HANSON MANOR HOUSE, MULBERRY GROVE, MD.

a legal measure to outlaw RIKERs 'wild' Radio Station call-letters but, RIKER took it to Federal Court(which determined that the State of California could NOT pre-empt nor over-rule an agency of the Federal Government, which 'assigned'/regulated broadcasts)etc (see(?)'35 Merc.NEWS/related info.)

Hubert Horatio Humphrey on the presidential tours(quoted RIKERs above comments re: JOHN HANSON) ...and the mis-information being taught in schools & accepted as factual/truth! There was such an uproar internationally, that the USPO had to issue a post-card... "HANSON...PATRIOT". Educated foreign students were aware of above situations historically and "laughed" at American-born who were ignorant of their nations true political/cultural history!"

(over)

California Veckoblad, Friday, May 5, 1972

Distinguished John Hanson Kept "Open House" For Distinguished Travelers

(Continued from page 1)

ember 5, he received another high honor.... Congress unanimously elected him to the presidency.

Though he was old and tiring fast, his administration racked up one major achievement after another.

The Great Seal of the United States was adopted, the conular system and a standard currency established, the postal setup furth-
thered, the country's first cabinet formed. Hanson authorized exploration of lands and signed the proclamation of the first Thanksgiving (the last Thursday in April 1782) which was set aside for "Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer".

It was John Hanson who addressed George Washington when he came to Independence Hall after the Victory at Yorktown.

In the spring of 1782, after his 66th birthday, Hanson found the executive load almost too heavy to carry. Congress assembled without him, and his fellow Marylander, Daniel Carroll, was named to preside in his absence. However John Hanson signed all official papers and performed most of his functions until the

thoroughly researched book, "John Hanson, our first president".

A team to find the burial place of John Hanson, was led by Lutheran minister Rev. Alan Freed from Dundalk, Md. Freed is the leader of a movement to have John Hanson recognized over George Washington as the first president as history so plainly reveals.

Mr. Freed has interested several Congressmen to pursue this goal, which many believe, will be the ultimate goal. Rev. Freed says he does not think the absence of a body for an additional national tomb will affect any chance he and others might have of getting the Marylander declared the first president.

On June, 1776, "after many meetings, many questions, many words", a set of resolutions proposed that the delegates be allowed to vote for independence.

"A politician but not an orator", John Hanson spoke only one word on the subject, but it was the last word of the debate. The tall rather solemn looking man with a prominent nose and the beginnings of a double chin rose slowly and said,



John Hanson
First in the presidency and last in the hearts of his countrymen?

ADD to: UCSC Research Special (p.2
Collections re: HOLY CITY, CA //
FATHER RIKER // Henry Allen
Rispin Mystery Mansion, Capitola CA
HISTORICAL FILES: Jan. 1990/w1

...Missing...
... TEXT: ...

"These resolutions ought to be passed and it is high time". They were passed, and a month later Maryland's delegates joined those from the other colonies in founding the United States of America.

When all is said and done, and sufficient information given to the people, it will be agreed that John Hanson was indeed the first President of United States.
-Thure Gustafson.

QUESTION: How did FATHER RIKER know the JOHN HANSON historical story? What was his motive for presenting it on radio? Why were educators, politicians & scholars surprised, angry and upset at this revelation?

Further indepth historical research is needed! Was Henry Allen Rispin's interest in above historical facts a clue to his building the Mystery Mansion for a future president of the USA...like Calvin Coolidge?