

Looking back on early Feasts

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“The Spirit of God was there in real power ... working a spiritual revival in every heart, guiding the program by the power of God to the wonderful climax of the final afternoon on the Last Great Day of the Festival when seventeen, mostly newly converted and baptized, and added to the Church by the Spirit of God, were given the right hand of fellowship.”

Herbert W. Armstrong commenting on the 1948 Feast of Tabernacles, October 31, 1948 Co-Worker Letter

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By the early years of the 20th century, the festivals and Holy Days of the Bible began to take on renewed significance in several Christian circles.

It is possible that observance of the Holy Days was first taught as Christian observances in modern times by G. G. Rupert, a minister of the Church of God (Seventh Day), although many ministers in that church were not in favor of keeping them. As early as 1916, Mr. Rupert published material promoting the observance of the Feast, as well as the other Biblical festivals and Holy Days.¹

By 1927, Herbert and Lorna Armstrong — perhaps through the writings of Mr. Rupert—came to feel the personal need to observe the Holy Days of the Bible—including the Feast of Tabernacles. From 1927 to 1933, the two kept the Feast privately in Eugene, Oregon. After the parent congregation of the Worldwide Church of God was formed in 1933, the members of the congregation joined the Armstrongs in observing the Feast beginning in 1934. That year, the nineteen members of the Eugene congregation met with the Armstrongs at the Jeans Schoolhouse on the outskirts of Eugene on the first Holy Day and the Last Great Day.

During the early 1940s, the Feast was held in the church—owned facility in Eugene. Feastgoers stayed in tourist cabins in the area, and came from as far away as California and Washington. While members from out of town attended all of the events, many of the Eugene members were only able to attend on ' the Holy Days and/ or night services due to work conflicts.

During these early years, Mr. Armstrong often brought in guest ministers – from the Church of God (Seventh Day) minister who now lives in Canon City, Colorado, assisted Mr. Armstrong with Feast responsibilities from 1939 to 1945. On days when Mr. Armstrong had to be away due to broadcast responsibilities Elder Kiesz took over services.

"Herbert could not always be there. He'd say 'John, you take over when I'm not here,'" said Elder Kiesz. "We had good meetings in those days."

¹ Note: Rupert was *not* a minister of the Church of God (Seventh Day) but an ex-SDA senior minister who started up a group called *Remnant of Israel* around 1902. He loosely associated with them, but there was little co-operation. Also, he was not the first to teach these days in modern times but probably promoted them more than others did – CW

In 1945, Mr. Armstrong began to see how the Feast could be used to celebrate the millennial reign of Jesus Christ described in the book of Revelation.² That year, the Feast site was moved from Eugene to Belknap Springs, a hot mineral springs resort in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon (Eugene would once again serve as a feast site during the 1980s and early 1990s) which is referred to in the *Good News Letter*, 2 Jan. 1945. It- was Mr. Armstrong's desire to have the Church celebrate the Feast in a peaceful, natural setting, away from the distractions of everyday life.

The 1948 Feast was the first to be attended by Ambassador students (the 1947 Feast ended just two days prior to the Opening of Ambassador). All seven students attended. Meals were served under the supervision of Ambassador's house mother, Sister Annie Mann. Educational films and home movies were shown during the evenings. It was at this feast that the hymns of Dwight L. Armstrong were first introduced to the Church as a whole. Mr. Armstrong described those first twenty or so hymns as "carrying a dignity and character of divine royalty—songs befitting the regal splendor of a King..." (HWA, *Co-worker letter*, p. 2, Oct. 31, 1948). The Feast was held in Belknap Springs for the final time in 1951. A student's account published in the December 1951 *Good News* described the Feast as including sermons on prophecy, the significance of the Holy Days, and explanations of law and grace. Ambassador students assisted with speaking, song leading, and special music responsibilities. A sermon by Herman L. Hoeh, then a recent Ambassador graduate, encouraged Feastgoers to be prepared to teach others the truths of the Bible.

In 1952, the Feast was held in Siegler Springs, California. This site was outgrown after only one year.

In 1953, the Feast was held in Big Sandy for the first time. Since then, it has continued to be held there every year except 1979 and 1994. For several years, all activities were held in what is now the library. Baptisms were conducted in the pond located between the library and the original men's dorms. Feastgoers camped on the sites of the Administrative Annex, the women's dorms, and the area north of Booth City. When the Redwood Building was outgrown, Mr. Armstrong considered building a bowl-shaped amphitheater in a natural depression where the golf course is now located. Those plans were abandoned, and the Field House was built.

Thirty years after Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong began observing the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast was celebrated by the Worldwide Church of God at two sites simultaneously for the first time. In addition to Big Sandy, the Feast was kept at a site in England. Since then, the Feast has been celebrated in many locations - from cruise ships, to mountain resort towns,

² "And then in 1945... I think you never heard of the history of why we keep the Feast of Tabernacles; and why we keep all these days, and what they mean. In the public library in Eugene, Oregon (and I think it was one of the commentaries), I saw something. Someone could see that in some way these annual festivals of God pictured the SPIRITUAL creation of man. Now, God had started a creation in the human family. The first was the physical creation. That started with the first man, Adam. The spiritual creation was started with the second Adam. Jesus Christ is called the Second Adam. He called people out of the world that had built by the first Adam, influenced entirely by Satan. And I want to go into a little of that in just a few moments. But I want to continue with this history just a moment.

This article, as I remember, didn't give the whole thing. It just mentioned that the spiritual creation began with Christ, and that the Passover was the first event to happen in the spiritual creation. And then I could see that the Days of Unleavened Bread represented putting sin out of our lives; and it just naturally unfolded, and God opened up the meaning to me." (HWA Sermon, *Rely on God*, 6 April 1985)

to white sandy beaches, to jungles deep in the heart of Attica. Although many aspects of the Feast have changed, the celebration continues to be an integral part of the religious life of most Ambassador Students.

FEAST SITES: 1927-1956

Year	Location	Note
1927-1933	Eugene, OR	Mr. & Mrs. Armstrong alone
1934-1944	Eugene, OR	w / Eugene congregation
1945-1951	Belknap Springs, OR	
1952	Siegler Springs, CA	
1953-1956	Big Sandy, TX	Longest running site