

Clearwater Sun

Pinellas County's fastest growing newspaper

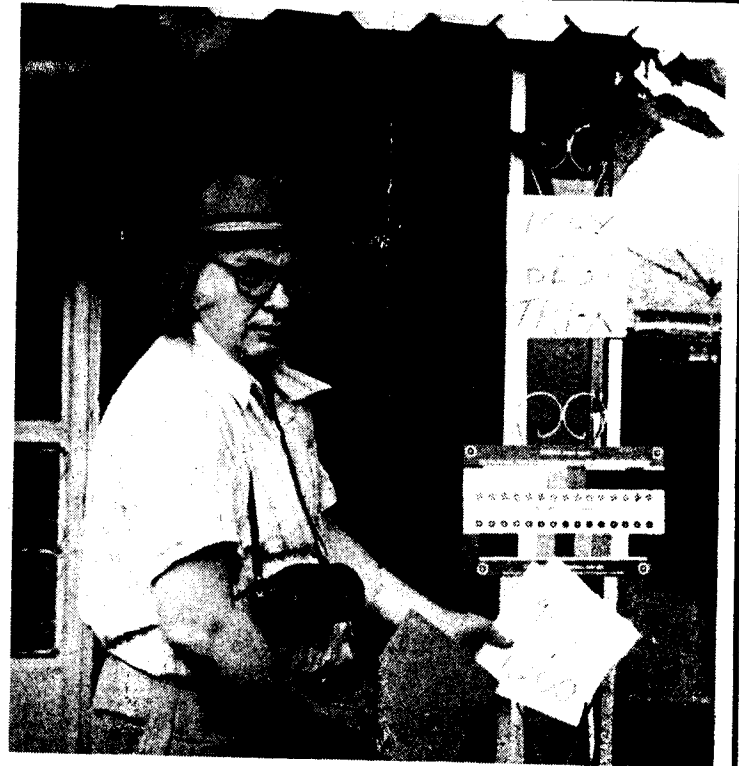
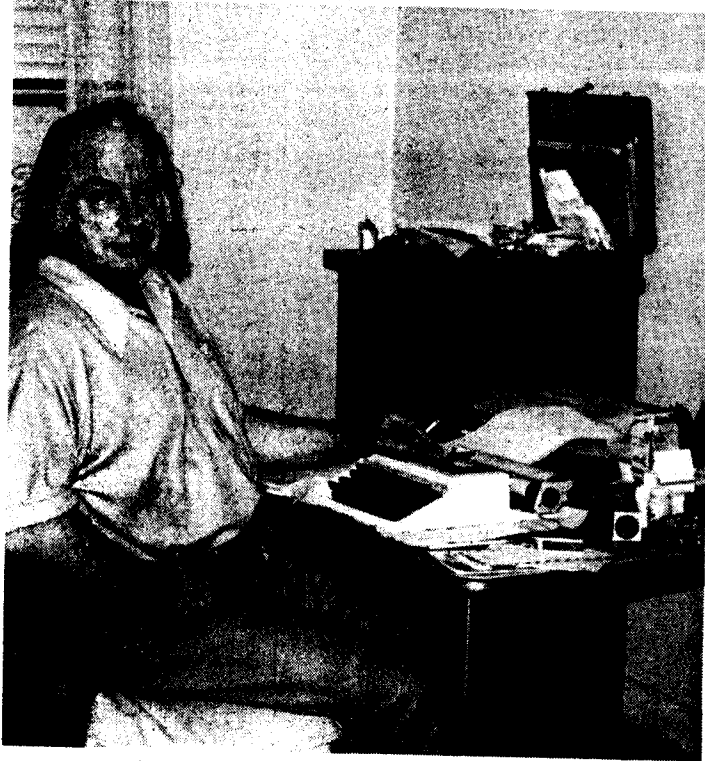
DAY, October 7, 1984

Clearwater, Florida

Volume 71, Number 157 50 cent

SUNDAY, October 7, 1984

Clearwater, Florida



Hubbard types at Codwise Place, Queens, N.Y., in 1973.

A long-haired Hubbard walks in Queens, N.Y., in 1973.

Could Hubbard be hiding on Suncoast?

By GEORGE-WAYNE SHELOR
Sun staff writer

He may be the most highly visible "invisible" man on earth—Mr. Lafayette Ronald Hubbard.

Although not seen publicly since 1980, the reclusive founder of the controversial Clearwater-based Church of Scientology is constantly the subject of newspaper stories, court testimony and television reports around the world.

L. Ron Hubbard, a flamboyant millionaire philosopher, adventurer and explorer, mystic and mes-

Commentary

siah, has become the Howard Hughes of our time. For no one knows—at least no one is saying—where the 73-year-old man can be found.

As author of the book "Dianetics; the Modern Science of Mental Health," the journalistic seed that blossomed into Scientology, Hubbard is revered by tens of thousands of Scientologists as the prophet who can save mankind from itself.

But far from being received as the answer to the world's problems, Scientology and Hubbard, since the May 9, 1950 publication of "Dianetics," have been under unrelenting pressure and scrutiny from outsiders.

For the past 34 years, Hubbard has discreetly slipped in and out of public view. And like billionaire Hughes, he has had the financial means to insulate himself from the outside world and seemingly

(Please see * SECT, next page)



The faces of Hubbard

L. Ron Hubbard, the reclusive Church of Scientology founder, dons a different look in each of these photos believed to have never been published before. The picture above was taken in Hemet, Calif., in late December 1979 just before he went into seclusion. Hubbard is said to have referred to gamblers as SPs (suppressive persons), and he never gambled—he was always 'the

house.' In the foreground is Mike Douglas, who reportedly was in charge of investing Hubbard's money. The sect founder had a different look in 1973 (top left), noticeably longer hair, when he lived at Codwise Place, Queens, N.Y. Hubbard took daily walks while in Queens, and often donned glasses and a hat that changed his appearance somewhat (top right).

Clearwater Sun

Pinellas County's fastest growing newspaper

Clearwater, Florida

Volume 71, Number 157 50 cent

SUNDAY, October 7, 1984

* Sect

(from page 1A)

disappear.

Where Hubbard is today, indeed, even if he is still alive, has become an increasingly widespread topic of speculation.

"You have a communication line to Ron!" claim various Scientology publications, which remind Scientologists that Hubbard's Standing Order No. 1 assures all that "All mail addressed to me shall be given prompt and full attention in accordance with my wishes."

In years past, similar blurbs penned by Hubbard assured readers that "all mail addressed to me is received by me." But that claim was revised in February 1981, and now an ambiguous statement says that mail addressed to Hubbard "shall be properly forwarded for reply."

It is unclear who will reply.

"They changed SO 1 because the original rule that all mail addressed to Hubbard was to be received by Hubbard caused some problems," recalls Gerald Armstrong, a former Scientologist and intimate of Hubbard's.

"Hubbard became concerned that litigants could effect service of process (serve subpoenas) by pointing out that Hubbard's statement 'All mail addressed to me shall be received by me,' meant that he could be reached and was in communication with others," said Armstrong, who defected from the sect two years ago after 11 years within.

A former member of Hubbard's inner circle and the sect's archivist who was in charge of compiling information on Hubbard's life, Armstrong has since become one of Scientology's most vocal and knowledgeable critics.

"So the decision was made to change the rule," he said Friday in a telephone interview. "Additionally, it was becoming widely known that LRH (Hubbard) was lying to all Scientologists because, in fact, he received none of the mail addressed to him. He wasn't even interested in it.

"He had a group of other people, called the SO 1 Unit, who received all his mail and replied for him, including signing Hubbard's name to the letters of response."

Numerous letters a *Clearwater Sun* reporter has written to Hubbard since November 1983 have gone unanswered—by anyone.

Even Hubbard's wife of 32 years, Mary Sue, testified in a Los Angeles Superior Court earlier this year that not only has she not seen her husband for four years, she believes her letters have not been forwarded to him.

When Scientology officials are asked Hubbard's whereabouts, they invariably say they do not know. When asked, sect President Heber Jentzsch neither confirms nor denies knowledge of Hubbard's whereabouts.

It seems that no one, including Hubbard's attorneys, his wife or Scientology's highest-ranking officials, claim knowledge of the whereabouts of a man who may be the world's most talked about recluse.

The last time Hubbard was seen locally was in Dunedin in February 1976. Mary Sue Hubbard testified she has neither seen or heard from her husband since January 1980.

And although sect officials refuse to speak with a reporter about Hubbard's location and health, a trail of Hubbard's travels has been established from Clearwater to the Eastern Seaboard to California, where Hubbard was last known to be.

According to former sect insiders, Hubbard left Dunedin in early 1976 and moved to Washington, D.C., where he directed Scientology organizations on an international basis and made preparations for establishment of a permanent residence in California.

In 1976, he moved to Culver City, Calif., the staging area for the acquisition of a number of properties in La Quinta, about 120 miles away.

Armstrong, who was with Hubbard at the time, said the Church of Scientology has since claimed Hubbard never intended to establish a permanent residence in California.

"But that was not what Hubbard told me," the 37-year-old Armstrong said.

He said Hubbard stayed in Culver City until December 1976, when he moved to the La Quinta properties, which were a number of adjacent buildings where he and a circle of confidants stayed for about two years.

In early 1979, the Hubbard entourage again moved, this time to a location then known to Scientologists only as "X." Actually, "X" was simply a number of apartments in Hemet, Calif., about 75 miles southeast of Los Angeles, according to Armstrong.

At the same time, Armstrong remembers, the majority of the La Quinta crew relocated to Gilman Hot Springs, a sprawling 500-acre desert resort, about five miles from Hubbard's Hemet hideout.

Hubbard visited the Gilman Hot Springs resort a number of times, Armstrong recalls.

Clearwater Sun

Pinellas County's fastest growing newspaper

SUNDAY, October 7, 1984

Clearwater, Florida

Sect

page 18)

"In 1979 he came by to see his house which the crew had renovated for him. He also came there to oversee video and film production on the property."

But in late 1979, Hubbard left Hemet. And by all accounts, he disappeared in February 1980.

"The reason he disappeared was because a number of lawsuits had been commenced in which people were seeking to serve him with papers," said Armstrong. "He had been named in them, so he disappeared because of his fear of the lawsuits."

Armstrong said he does not know where the elderly Hubbard fled. And now, nearly five years later, the trail has grown cold. Nonetheless, there are slight indications, unconfirmed reports and circumstantial evidence of Hubbard's possible present location.

L. Ron Hubbard's "international address" is listed in sect publications as a post office box in Tampa. So does Hubbard live in the Tampa Bay area?

The idea seems credible.

There are a number of reasons to surmise the reclusive founder of the worldwide sect could, indeed, be living in or near Clearwater, which is the home of Scientology's schools of advanced study.

Hubbard moved "Flag"—his international management headquarters—from his ship, the Apollo, to Clearwater in late 1975 and established the sect's headquarters known as "Flag Land Base" in the former Fort Harrison Hotel.

His vaunted "Sea Org"—the elite, uniformed organization responsible for keeping Scientology operating—also operates from Clearwater.

And in recent months, security around and within sect-owned buildings has increased visibly, including uniformed guards who carry tear gas cannisters, handcuffs and radios. And the "Open to the Public" signs that used to be posted outside the Fort Harrison have disappeared.

Hubbard's family and former confidants say the man's health has been failing in recent years and subsequently he must stay in temperate climates. Again, the Suncoast qualifies.

According to testimony earlier this year in Los Angeles Superior Court civil trial, a California physician named Gene Denk treated Hubbard for an illness in November of last year. Dr. Denk did not testify at the trial.

Hubbard, a former naval officer, is an unarguable expert on matters relating to navigation and other nautical topics, so possibly

he has again taken to the seas where he spent the early 1970s aboard his small flotilla of ships.

Hubbard's estranged son, Ron DeWolf, said Friday he has heard "rumors" his father has fled to Singapore, where he has obtained citizenship.

"I've been told that he is possibly in Singapore, having purchased citizenship there," the junior Hubbard said. "That could be just another wild rumor, but it does seem to fit his physical necessities and such a place also gives him access to everything he would need.

"But it must be realized that it is a rumor, and the various Scientology organizations themselves have been known to spread rumors on top of it all."

Persons in the hierarchy of Scientology continually claim no knowledge of Hubbard's whereabouts. They won't even speculate.

Nonetheless, during the past several years when circumstances dictated, Hubbard has been reached.

Last year, when DeWolf claimed his father was either dead or incompetent, sect lawyers produced for a California court a handwritten document from the 73-year-old man.

In the statement, Hubbard said he feared appearing in public because his life had been threatened.

"I am in seclusion of my own choosing," Hubbard wrote. "As Thoreau secluded himself by Walden Pond, so I have chosen to do so in my own fashion. Of course, I am older now than I used to be. In my case, I am fortunate to be in good health and thus able to maintain my heavy daily work schedule. As to the claim of my incompetence, I do not intend to dignify it with a response."

After handwriting experts authenticated the document, complete with Hubbard's thumb print in special ink, the court ruled not only that was Hubbard alive, but based on the handwriting sample the court was able to determine that the elderly writer was in complete control of his mental faculties.

"I'll be honest with you," DeWolf said. "I think all the questions are going to be difficult to answer. I don't think anything has been resolved concerning my father's health or whereabouts.

"But I would imagine—I would hope—that eventually law enforcement or defectors will someday let us know what has happened to him. I'd sure like to know ... a lot of people would like to know."