

Divisions in the 2x2 Church

Divisions in the Two by Two Church

Willie Martin 1968-69

November 26, 2017

Division in the Canadian Maritimes 1968-69

William MacKenzie (“Willie”) Martin was born on August 5, 1908, in Wood Island, Prince Edward Island, Canada. He went in the work in 1929, and spent all his time preaching in Eastern Canada: Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. In 1968, Willie and his nephew, Martin MacMillan, were companions in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Martin started in the work in 1956.

In 1968-69, George Semple was the overseer of the Atlantic Provinces (NL, NS, PE and NB) and Willie Martin and Gordon Hazelwood were older brother workers.

Around 1968-69, Willie Martin, Martin MacMillan and Absalom Abbot were excommunicated from the work. A number of other workers and friends left the church as well, including the Bryantons who owned the Spring Valley (aka Kensington) PEI convention grounds, the McLeods who had Cape Breton Convention, and the Woods. The names of Willie and Martin are both missing from the 1969 workers list. George Semple was the Overseer in the Maritimes at the time.

Reportedly the reasons Willie was dismissed from the work was for doctrinal differences (teaching false/wrong doctrine), engaging in philandering (with Two by Two married women), and for his alcohol problem (sometimes showing up drunk or hung over for meetings and funerals wearing different color socks).

The Purge began earlier by the Ontario overseer, and continued in the Maritimes in 1968/69 where George Semple was the overseer. Letters were circulated to the friends telling them to not have Willie or certain other workers in their home—or they could not continue participating in the meetings. The friends were visited by workers who confronted them as to whether they had become followers of Willie Martin. The workers were much relieved when their answer was “no.” Others who supported Willie were purged out of meetings.

Valerie (Stokes) Pike, a Canadian woman, who knew Willie Martin personally wrote:

“Willie began to question the ‘Only Way’ beliefs of the group and all the legalism. He thought the workers had complicated things way too much. He talked about them putting ‘heavy burdens’ on the people that didn’t need to be there. He wasn’t afraid to talk about the things he saw in meetings that were contrary to their beliefs. Willie was very troubled about what was happening. He felt his time in the Two by Two’s was coming to an end. It seemed like the workers were doing whatever they could to find fault with him. Willie was told to leave because he was teaching the wrong doctrine.”

“He was one of the workers that could really hold your attention when he was speaking. Willie was liked and supported, not only in Eastern Canada and Ontario, but many other places as well. Willie spent a lot of time with our family in Newfoundland, and was a worker we cared a lot about. He thought a lot of our dad (who never professed) and enjoyed many great conversations with him. Jim Abbott [James] came to our home and said if we continued to associate with Willie, we would have to leave the meetings. It was the beginning of the end for my family.” Jim is now the oldest/longest preaching worker in the Atlantic Provinces.

“Afterwards, it was very evident how much Willie loved God. Every morning after breakfast he would get his Bible, and sit at the table and read. He openly told anyone how much he loved God, tears running down his face, telling how much he loved Jesus. He never lost his passion.”

After he was cast out of the work, Willie moved around from house to house, staying with his followers who had left meetings or had been purged out. He spent some time in Nova Scotia with Doug and Leonie (nee Baetsen) Sproule and also Angus and Peg MacLeod. Many of the Van Driest family of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada left meetings and remained loyal to Willie Martin. For a time, Willie used their mailing address.

A Canadian woman wrote: *“In a letter Willie wrote that he had visited Angus and Peg MacLeod in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia on his way to Santa Cruz, where he was staying in a cottage on the ocean. It was owned by an Indian Doctor in Saratoga [California]. Willie wrote, ‘When workers and friends started throwing dirt at them for having me in their homes, they left meetings and have not returned.’ The Martin family and Dr. Das’ family were longtime friends. Willie Martin’s mother and the Indian doctor and/or family came to gospel meetings together in Toronto where some of the Indian family lived. So it’s not surprising that Willie went to their place in California when he was put out.”*

Gordon Hazelwood conducted the New Brunswick portion of that purge and perhaps more. He orchestrated a confrontation in a Sunday fellowship meeting at the Sinclair family in Moncton, New Brunswick. He announced that he felt there were two different spirits in the meeting, and said if anyone else felt the same way they should not take the emblems—but should pass them on by. Only one little old lady took the emblems. Some from the McLeod and Wood families were present.

Shortly after it was reported that more workers and friends had joined the “Willie Martin Gang” and that they had held their own convention. The upheaval continued into the 1970s where the Woods and MacLeods in Nova Scotia supported Willie Martin. A worker

later said that Gordon had made a mistake at Moncton and "it has followed him ever since."

Willie Martin passed away at age 90 on December 16, 1998 in Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada and is buried in People's Cemetery, Kensington, Prince Edward Island. A photograph of his grave may be viewed in [**Find a Grave**](#).

Compiled by Cherie Kropp-Ehrig