

Canada Newspaper Articles

Newspaper Articles

Canada

Revised February22, 2026

Lethbridge Daily Herald (Alberta, Canada)

1910 August 29, p7 – “Go Preachers” were Attacked

1910, Sept 01 p16 The Province (Vancouver, BC) "Go-Preachers" Show Strong Fight Spirit

1910, Sept 13 p7 The Province (Vancouver, BC) "Go Preachers – Correspondence to Editor

Newspapers in Napan, New Brunswick, Canada:

1912, Feb 29 The High School Times – The Go-Preachers

1912, Mar 21 Slandorous Charges Against Evangelists Refuted by Evidence from England

1912, Mar 12 Letter from son of W.D. Wilson

The World (Chatham Newspapers – New Brunswick, Canada)

RE: Go Preachers- printed shortly after John Cook & Cecil Buzby brought Gospel to Napan, New Brunswick, Canada.

1912, March The World (Chatham Newspapers – New Brunswick, Canada)

1912, Mar 21 Go-Preachers have Gone from Napan

1912, Apr 10 Unseemly Conduct of Prayer Meeting Attendants

1912, Apr 12 Napan Correspondent

1912, Apr 27 That Napan Controversy

1912, May 7-8 Napan Notes

1931 Ontario – RE Millbrook, Ontario, Canada Convention

1974 Feb 23 p15 – Leader-Post (Regina SK) Sermon tasting part of Sunday activity

June 5, 1975, p. 40 – Winnipeg Free Press (Manitoba, Canada)

Intrigued by Cooneyites

1980 Feb 23 p18 – Edmonton Journal – Fertile soil of Alberta cult breeding ground

Jan 14, 1984 – Calgary Herald (Calgary, Alberta, Canada)

RE: Convention at Didsbury, Alberta

Church With No Name Strong Draw in West; By Leslie K. Tarr

May 5, 1984 Pg 59 – Winnipeg Free Press

No-name church turns from world; By Leslie K. Tarr

Feb 7, 1990 – The Review (Weyburn, Saskatchewan, Canada)

Family Affair (Re: Russell and Mabel Jacobs, Workers); By David Creelman

July 30, 1994, Pg 17 – Calgary Herald (Calgary, Alberta, Canada)

RE: Convention at Didsbury, Alberta

Invisible Sect has Thousands of Followers; By David Climenhaga

Aug 5, 1994, Pg 14 – The Winnipeg Sun (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada)

Secret Sect Splits Families; By Peter Warren

Aug 12, 1994, Pg 12 – The Winnipeg Sun (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada)

The Church that Preys; By Peter Warren

Feb 11, 1996, Pg B1 – Edmonton Sunday Journal (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)

Church With No Name Had No Answers for Couple; By David Staples

RE: John & Shawna Mitchell

Feb 17, 1996, Pg A9 – The Record (Kitchener, Ontario, Canada)

No-Name Church – Mysterious Cult-like Sect Discouraged Questions, Criticism; By David Staples

Sept 15, 1997, Pg 34, Vol. 24, No. 40 – Alberta Report (Weekly News Magazine)

Doubts About a Mystery Church – ‘Sect or Cult?’ is the Question Before an Alberta Court;

by Joe Woodard.

April 28, 2001 – Regina Leader (Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada)
Guilderland N.Y. (Reuters) – Christian Two by Twos Worship Quietly in U.S.

October 7, 2002 – Western Catholic Reporter
By Sr. Louise Zdunich, Edmonton, Canada
"Who are the Two by Twos?"

August 18, 2005 p6 – Brandon Sun (Brandon, Manitoba, Canada)
Dealing in Absolutes

The Church with No Name: Church of Cult?

LightMagazine (a free monthly Christian lifestyle magazine) July 2019

By Rev. Danielle Martell, Priest: St. Andrew's Church

Unabridged Version, May 30, 2019

The Daily Province, Vancouver, B.C. Canada September 1, 1910, page 16 "GO-PREACHERS" SHOW STRONG FIGHT SPIRIT

Called Mormons, Members of Strange Sect Use Stones and Guns.

Moncton, New Brunswick. Sept. 1. The strange wandering religious denomination of "Go-Preachers" who were much in the public eye in this province and in Nova Scotia a short time ago, have started operations in Prince Edward Island, and at the village of St. Eleanor's the other evening, a hot encounter took place between a number of followers of this odd sect, and some residents who had been holding a convention in the vicinity.

Stones and revolvers figured in the clash, and there was some fierce fighting. The trouble arose when the Go-Preachers were referred to as Mormons. Thereupon, the Go-Preachers berated a number of boys who had been interrupting the proceedings for their ill manner and chunks of coal were hurled upon the boys with good effect. One young man, William Arsenault, received a bad cut on the face. A brother of the injured man then used a hammer effectively on the head of a Go-Preacher. The fight then became general. Stones flew in all directions, several parties receiving wounds, but none serious.

On the following Monday night, the trouble was repeated. An attempt on the part of some outsiders to set fire to the fence near the tents was frustrated. The Go-Preachers drew revolvers and the outsiders did likewise. A number of shots were fired, but no one was hit. Stones and other missiles were thrown and a number of windows in the houses close by were broken. During the night, the Go-Preachers folded their tents and departed.

Many charges have been laid at the doors of the Go-Preachers during their travels about the province. The members of this sect, who are well known in the British Isles as itinerant vendors of a "gospel" largely of their construction, are accused of disrupting homes and luring away, by the vigor of their religious appeals, a number of young people from their country homes.

Immorality charges have been freely made against the sect, and a vigorous campaign was undertaken against them in certain sections of the province. The "Go-Preachers" travel about from place to place, holding out-door meetings, and in many instances have aroused religious revivals amounting in some instances almost to frenzy on the part of the people appealed to. Large donations have been made the preachers by the more zealous of their following, and this in some cases has caused considerable domestic trouble.

Province Vancouver B.C., Canada September 13, 1910, page 7 Correspondence "GO-PREACHERS"

Editor Province,

In a late issue of your paper, there appeared from Moncton, New Brunswick, an account of the proceedings at a meeting held by Go-Preachers. Anyone reading that article would naturally come to the conclusion that these preachers are a bad lot and fit only to be classed with fanatics of the Sharps and Doukabor kind.

Instead of this being the case, these people are of the most inoffensive nature, it being against their principle to carry weapons or resist violence of any kind. With regard to the charge of immorality, there is not a particle of foundation in it. If the members of the

organizes churches were as pure in life and conduct as those of this sect, we would not hear so much talk of white slavery.

Until a short time ago, most of the preacher recruits, male and female, were drawn from the north of Ireland and Scotland where the Shorter Catechism and Bible still hold sway. The leaders are men of education and culture, in most cases having given up good positions to preach this Gospel, which your correspondent states is of their own construction. In this connection, I may say that I have heard many controversies between them and some of the clergy, but to my mind the Go-Preachers always had the best of it, according to the New Testament.

Ten years ago, the members of this sect could not have numbered a hundred persons and were confined to the British Isles. Today there can not be less than 30,000 scattered all over the British Empire and United States, and including quite a few races other than Anglo-Saxon. At a recent convention held near Enniskillen, Ireland, 3,000 persons were present from all parts of the world.

They may be termed believers in the doctrine that when a man is not only willing, but actually leaves all to obey the divine injunction "Go-Teach all Nations," he gets power to work on the hearts and minds of his fellows which is denied to the armchair professor who out of the stores of a trained intellect bewilders his hearers with pars from the Higher Criticism or gems from the learning of Greece and Rome.

If some of these "tramp preachers" have not already reached Vancouver, I can assure you that it will not be long until they do so, and they certainly do not hide their lights under bushels, if that expression can be used with regard to their preaching power and determination.

Thanking you in anticipation of your giving this a corner of your influential paper,

Yours, etc.

R. Elliott, Revelstoke, B.C.

Sept. 7, 1910.

Excerpt from *The High School Times*, Napan, New Brunswick, Canada

February 29, 1912

By J. B., a student of the high school who was present at the time.

THE GO-PREACHERS

Tuesday evening of last week was marked by a happening, that the people of Napan and all those present will not forget very soon. Mr. Wood of St. Andrew's church summoned the Go-Preachers, Mr. Cook and Mr. Buzby to answer certain charges that he was to make against them.

It was in the opinion of many that they would not show up, but sure enough they were there, ready to accept anything Mr. Wood might say. I was late getting there; Mr. Wood had been talking for some time. The place was crowded to the door-steps.

The St. Andrews church minister produced documents and pamphlets and letters from localities in which these men, or their associates were or had been working, to back up his arguments, together with the bible and what he had heard from people in the locality of Napan.

Mr. Wood claimed that they (the Go-Preachers) had told a certain person in Napan that they had not preached on the Chaplin Island Road in Protectionville, that they did not get the school by fair means, that they received registered letters, **that they lured away girls**, and broke up neighbor and family ties.

He said it looked very suspicious for two strangers to come into a place and not give any satisfaction as to who they were, where they came from, where they got their salary, if any, and to what class of religious people they belonged. Mr. Wood concluded his able speech by saying that he would leave it to the people to decide whether they considered it safe or right to have people in the neighborhood disturbing the peace of the community.

Mr. Cook then took the floor, unmoved by Mr. Wood's strong arguments. He started in by asking Mr. Wood if he was aware of the pamphlets and documents' origin. Wood replied by saying he was prepared to swear to them, in so far as he knew them to be true. Mr. Wood's documents were not signed by a magistrate, but by a Notary Public.

Mr. Cook claimed that such documents were illegal, and if those whose names were signed to the papers were enemies of theirs, then they (the undersigned) would swear to anything that would do them an injury.

Mr. Cook said Mr. Wood accused them of raising disorder. Mr. Cook said no such thing ever happened, that when disorder arose it was due to the ignorance of the people, or the interference of ministers who, he claimed, were to blame for a great deal of strife. Cook said they did not go try much in Catholic communities since their religious teachers had such an influence over them they would seldom attend.

He related an unpleasant experience he and his associate had with rotten eggs on P.E.I., but said everyone that was near him was hit but himself. He said this was caused by a pack of ruffians.

Mr. Cook said Mr. Buzby told him that he had obtained the school by the consent of the trustees. Mr. Cook told us his companion would answer for himself. He told about the girl going out west from P.E.I., and why she went, through no fault of their own. He said after being in the west for a month or so, she became a Go-Preacher. That's as far as he went. He did not tell us where she is. Mr. Cook also used passages from the Bible to show that his arguments were right, and also quoted freely from the New Testament to show that their mode of preaching was right.

Mr. Cook wandered away from his subject a great deal, and Mr. Wood was forced to rise to a point of order very often. The Go-Preacher said that when they were in want of money, they worked for it with their hands, and also worked in cases for their board, where their money was not accepted. He denied receiving registered letters and called upon Miss Stothart, postmistress at Ferryville, who said that neither Mr. Cook nor Mr. Buzby received registered letters there, as was claimed by Mr. Wood.

After a time, Mr. Wood questioned Mr. Cook on a subject, what it was I just forget, but at this point Mr. Buzby thinking Mr. Cook was out of breath, desired to speak, and was given the permission. Mr. Wood asked how long it would take him to say all he had to say. Mr. Buzby replied, "About two weeks." He then said half an hour would do for this time to say all he wanted to.

"All you know? All right," said Mr. Wood.

"Aho, no!" returned Mr. B. "Not all I know nor all you know either."

Mr. Wood then told Mr. B. not to drift away from the subject. He asked him what other way was there to get to Protectionville.

"Well," said B., "For my part, I often went through the woods, its eight miles shorter, but there is no other road, and anyway Protectionville is three miles off the road." Mr. Buzby also said he received the consent of the trustees to preach in the school. Mr. McDermaid said he gave him no consent. "You did," retorted B. A gray haired woman sitting about the middle of the audience, and who seemed to be on springs, one time shook her fist at Mr. Buzby as much as to say, "If I only had my rolling pin here, old chap."

Mr. Buzby answered many arguments brought against him but not all.

Mr. Wood again took the floor, when Mr. Buzby's time expired, and endeavored to back up his previous statements, which he did to a certain extent. Mr. Buzby claimed that some of the people had not told the truth about them in Napan. The minister claimed that he did not think anyone should call another a liar, because the Bible does not teach that. "Show me the passage you refer to," interrupted Buzby. Mr. Wood quoted it, but Buzby said that it did not contain the word liar. "Anyway," said the Go-Preacher, "Christ called a man a liar himself." "Show me the passage," said Mr. Wood. He did so, but the minister said that did not refer to man, but the devil.

"Did you ever see the devil?" asked Buzby, and needless to say Mr. Wood answered in the negative.

The meeting broke up about one o'clock, after nearly five hours debating, and worst of all after spending five hours in a room with no ventilation except the doors, and they were so crowded that a mosquito would have had trouble in entering.

Although the Go-Preachers defended themselves very ably, yet I don't think they allayed people's suspicions, and if their aim is to carry off young girls, I do not think they will be successful in Napan, if Mr. Wood can help it.

March 21, 1912

Slandorous Napan

Slandorous Charges Against Evangelists Refuted by Evidence from England

Some persons are born to preach and others to be preached to. It was so in biblical days and it is so now. Men experience a call to preach, and go forth and call upon sinners to repent. Besides the regular ministry we have the Salvation Army, lay preachers and evangelists connected with churches, and what are called the Go-Preachers.

And why shouldn't everybody preach who feels the desire to do so? Why should there be any let or hindrance in his path, so long as his preaching is not immoral or seditious? Any man, in this free country has the right to preach, and the law will protect him in the exercising of his right.

The man in the streets listens a moment, smiles, and goes his way, and the hoodlum, who would throw bricks is looked after by the law. But wonderful to relate, it is not the man of the world, not the tough friend of the slums, but ministers and elders of the church who are throwing brickbats at the Go-Preachers. And they are not at all particular about the weapons they employ. Any old slander or perjury is good enough for their purpose.

Note the case of the two young men who spent the last few weeks in Napan, preaching to all who cared to hear them. They were quiet young fellows, with no bad habits, and apparently sincere in thinking that they were serving the Lord. Those with whom they lived considered them without reproach.

But some clergymen became alarmed for fear these men would capture some of their church members, or collection plate contributions, and they proceeded to persecute them. Saul of Tarsus merely kept the clothes of those who stoned Stephen, but one of our parsons himself threw stones at the Napan evangelists.

Rev. George Wood charged them with belonging to a sect or circle or conspiracy of rascals in England who had been found guilty of taking girls away from their parents for improper purposes, and his authority for these criminal accusations was a leaflet received from England, giving the deposition of one, William Dennis Wilson of Ipswich, Suffolk. Mr. Wood had this

circulated throughout the community with echoes of it that had appeared in two or three newspapers, and he did so without having taken any steps to ascertain whether it was trustworthy or not.

Mrs. Harry Wilson, of Napan, after hearing the denial of Messrs. Cook and Busby, wrote to England for information, and has received the following letter from a son of the Mr. Wilson who made the Affidavit referred to.

c/o John Wilson
Sparks Farm
Cretingham, near Framingham, Suffolk, England
March 5, 1912

Dear Madam; I was glad to hear from you that two Preachers who I know are in your village, but sorry that there is such a bad report about them, and that that report is caused by my father's pamphlets. For the past few years he has been circulating this vile literature. He did the same around here for some time, besides doing other damage, for which he has been brought before the magistrates several times and fined. He has also been made to give public apologies, so he is not believed on this side.

You ask about my sisters. At present, they are all (four) living in this village. One was out preaching in the same scriptural way as the two who are in your village, but returned to try to stop her father from spreading such evil reports. Another was away for health reasons. Those two are now living with my brother, as does another who has not been away. The other is also at home.

It is great folly for him to go on pouring out his hatred and malice in this way, and spending money having this literature printed and sending it to your side. Only recently, he was made to apologize through the High Court of Justice to Mr. John West, of Cocknacrieve, Ballinamallard, County Fermanagh, Ireland, and his brother William West, having to pay 100 pounds damages and costs.

Yours truly,

W. F. Wilson

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With the letter came a clipping from the **\*\*East Anglia Daily Times of Oct. 18, 1910**, containing the apology of William Dennis Wilson for having slandered Charles T. Partridge, who is referred to in Mr. Wood's broadside as one of the gang—an honest dupe, to entrap girls" "I hereby acknowledge and admit," he says, "that I have for several months been printing, publishing, writing, and circulating letters and documents of a libelous nature, reflecting upon the moral character and integrity of Mr. Partridge. I further admit the charges against him contained therein are absolutely untrue and without foundation in fact. I also undertake to pay his legal charges, and also the costs of publishing this apology in such local newspapers as he may select".

Who wouldn't sit in the seat of the scorner, when ordained ministers claiming to have been called of God to preach the Gospel, show themselves to be so devoid of common, not to say Christian, charity? The amen corner cannot be comfortable when the pulpit is linked with perjurers and slanderers in attempts to take away the good name of men whose only fault is that they are trespassing on church preserves.

Mr. Wood owes it to himself, to the community, to his profession, to his congregation, and to his God, to make a humble confession of his sin and ask the slandered men to forgive him. Let him do this and resolve to mind his own business in the future, and people may forget.

**The following articles are from 1912 Chatham Newspapers  
shortly after the first workers, John Cook and Cecil Buzby, brought the Gospel to Napan.**

**March, 1912**

**A Napan correspondent of The World says:**

The gospel mission which has been held in Centre Napan for the past two months closed Monday evening, and all who attended enjoyed the mission very much. It is hoped that the next mission Mr. Cook and Mr. Buzby work, there won't be as many falsehoods told about them as there was while they were in Centre Napan. And probably the people who are doing so much talking about these two preachers will spend their time in something that will be more profitable to them in the coming days. And, further I would like to say that there are houses open to Mr. Cook and Mr. Buzby anytime they wish to come to Napan, or any of the rest of their fellow workers. They will be just as welcome.

**March, 21 , 1912**

The Go-Preachers have gone from Napan. Mr. Buzby went to Newcastle on Wednesday and from there to Protectionville to rest. Mr. Cook has gone to Burnt Church and Tabusintac.

**April 10, 1912**

**Unseemly Conduct of Prayer Meeting Attendants To the Editor of the World**

Dear Sir: I would like to call the attention of the ratepayers of the Central Napan School District to the misconduct of young people who attend the weekly prayer meetings in the school house. Such conduct would not be tolerated in any other place one day. From persons going and coming from these so-called prayer meetings, respectable residents of Napan are insulted by vile language, whooping, and shouting, such as is in vogue by a boisterous crowd coming from a dance.

The so called Go-Preachers who conducted a revival here some weeks ago were denounced by the adherents of the churches as immoral characters to be avoided, but I wish to put it on record, that the conduct of those who attended was all that could be desired in sincere Christian people—no shouting, no vile language; they had something of greater moment to think about. Yours Truly, Ratepayer

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#### April 12, 1912—Napan

Complaints like the above would have more weight if signed by the writers. Such unseemly conduct as 'Ratepayer' (who has sent us his name) complains of should be stopped. Nothing will be gained by subjecting the supporters of the Go-Preachers to petty annoyances. They are entitled to their opinions, and to the exercise of their preferences.

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April 27, 1912

#### That Napan Controversy—To the Editor of The World

Dear Sir: I notice in your last issue that a Napan subscriber denounces Ratepayer's letter as a pack of lies. I don't know who Ratepayer is, or what part of the district he resides in, but I can substantiate every word he says in his letter, and I can further back it up with the evidence of seven or eight residents of the South side of Napan, who live below the schoolhouse. And if Subscriber heard some of the young men going home from prayer meetings shouting and swearing and using other vile language, as I have heard them, he would not denounce Ratepayer's letter as a pack of lies. I agree with Ratepayer, that the school should be closed against all meetings, concerts, and socials, and let those people who locked the school doors last winter to prevent us hearing the word of God, find some other place to hold their amusements in.

I am yours truly,  
John W. Dickson

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May 7 or 8, 1912

#### Napan Notes

The weather has been fine this last few days and a number of the families are preparing their land for seed. Miss Eleanor Godfrey is attending school in Loggieville. Miss Lizzie Fitzpatrick is attending school in Chatham. Mr. and Mrs. Horace Dickson and family, of Athol, Mass., are expected to arrive this week to settle on their farm in Napan. It is very quiet around Napan just at present, as a number of the young men are away stream driving.

**Some of the clergy that seemed to be so interested about the girls of Napan some weeks ago, could not have been so interested after all, or they would have been around Napan after the gospel preachers departed to see if any girls or money had been taken.**

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(Publication unknown)

Millbrook Convention, 1931

Ontario, Canada

Arriving by train and motor from U.S.A., Quebec, and from many parts of Ontario, approximately four hundred delegates were in attendance at the three day annual convention of a religious body. The members of which claim they have 'no name', though the simple word 'disciple' is apparently the designation most favored.

The gathering being held for the third successive season at the Harry Riley's farm over the weekend, opening Friday at 2:30 p.m.. and convening again the same evening. The genuine religious enthusiasm and interest of the devotees of this sect is proved by the fact that they sit patiently and apparently with a real fervor of enjoyment, through sessions lasting from two and a half hours to three hours daily on Saturday & Sunday, in addition to the two on the initial day of Convention.

A big tent with separate entrances for the men and women, who sit in distinctly separate sections during the meetings, as there is no mingling of the sexes throughout. The Convention is amply supplied with seating accommodation for the delegates and for any visitors who may come. Many carloads motoring from the village and surrounding country side, and all being heartily welcomed to the meetings.

Two other large tents on the grounds serve as dining halls, one for men and others for women, while near by sheds are equipped as kitchens with workers in either cases of the same sex, as the occupants of the respective tents.

Sleeping accommodation for the women delegates is arranged for in the farm house of Mrs. Riley and J. Inns the latter a short distance across the fields, and for the men the barns and other out buildings were fitted in a manner that they could be used comfortably as sleeping apartments during the two or three nights while Convention lasted.

A community of goods is one of the ..... endorsed in actual practice by the disciples though no definite information regarding defraying the necessary and somewhat heavy expenses of the Convention would be divulged.

However the fact was quite evident that those who had shared equally and gladly with those who had not. No offering is taken at any of the meetings.

Such personal adornments as jewelry, silk hose, sleeveless dresses, or bobbed hair were conspicuous by their absence. But into the meetings the delegates came supplied with Bibles, hymnals, and in many cases with note books and pencils in order to carry home choice selections from the addresses for quiet study and meditation in the weeks ahead.

This religious body claims it has no bishop, or other elected or appointed head, different leaders taking charge of the informal sessions of the Convention. The one on Sunday afternoon being Arnold Schaffer, a worker in Germany, now home on furlough. Another worker from a distant field was Jack Jackson from South America. Christian names were used as the delegates speak of one another, no prefixes of any kind being heard among the adherents.

"Hymns Old and New" is the book used for singing, printed in Scotland, there is no instruments, but congregational singing is hearty and melodious, the majority of the worshippers seeming to know the words of the hymns announced by heart.

After an opening hymn or two, for which the audience remain seated, testimonials are asked for, and so ready is the response that usually two or three are on their feet at once waiting, their personal experience of salvation through Christ. The request for prayers is met in the same manner, one after the other leading without a moment being lost through waiting or hesitation.

At the Sunday p.m. service after prayers and testimonies which lasted more than an hour, two of the women delegates took the platform and spoke earnestly with a hymn between. They were followed by two young men who also had a personal message based on Scripture passages.

The leader Mr. Schaffer continued the exhortation and like others urging faithful witnessing in speech and conduct. "All that the Lord hath said unto us, will we do" was stressed as the ideal for daily living.

Several car loads of the delegates motored to Rice Lake early on Sunday morning for a baptismal service. Those wishing this solemn rite signifying their desire by standing when the request was made at the Saturday eve. meeting.

The 1932 Convention will in all likelihood be held again on the Riley farm, the practice being for a number of workers to arrive three or four weeks ahead of time to put up tents and have every thing in readiness before the opening day when the delegates begin to come in large numbers, and many from distant points.

There is no formal closing such as a benediction, at the closing saying seven o'clock the next meeting at the conclusion of the p.m. gathering, and the delegates rise and go quietly out. Large gasoline lanterns light the tent for the evening meeting.

My Grandmother ended this in the middle of the page, if there was more she didn't copy it.. This is very hard to read, as it is on onion skin paper, and falling to pieces. I am trying to find the newspaper this might have been published in.

By the way, Milbrook is about a 20 minute drive from my home now, and I was baptised there in the early 1940's. One of the Riley girls, Lorna, went into the work. She would be a little older than I am.

Thought you might be interested in this, I think this must have been written up in a newspaper, or maybe was suppose to be. However I found it with some poems etc. all in my grandmother's hand writing.

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**Church With No Name had no answers for couple**  
**Edmonton Journal, Alberta, Canada**  
**February 11, 1996**  
**By David Staples**  
<https://edmontonjournal.com/>

John and Shawna Mitchell were newlyweds living in a tiny Alberta town when they first came into contact with the Church With No Name.

John was working as a gas plant operator in Hardisty, 180 km east of Edmonton. He had a friend at work, Evan, who belonged to the mysterious Christian sect. Evan was a wonderful man with a great family. One day, he invited John and Shawna to a fellowship meeting. The couple was impressed. Everyone, even the children, got up to speak. Everyone was conservatively dressed and low-key. John and Shawna thought they had come upon some long lost Puritan group, a throwback to the 17th century.

In the next two years, John and Shawna were visited by a few of the sect's ministers, who called themselves the Workers. Sect members called themselves the Friends. Not only did the sect have no name, but it didn't believe in church buildings. The Workers had no homes and were unmarried. They travelled in groups of two. They lived in the homes of the Friends, staying a few days, then moving on.

John and Shawna were impressed with the Workers' simple, unquestioning faith. Asked by John where they went to Bible school, the Workers said that this was it, that they learned by doing.

In July 1991, John and Shawna were invited to attend a convention of the Friends at a farm near Didsbury. The convention seemed idyllic, everything orderly, everyone working hard, happy, gushing love even. The couple agreed this was the closest thing they'd ever seen to early Christianity, to the selfless love described in the Gospels. At a meeting, they stood up and professed, joining a line of believers, a line that the Workers claimed stretched back unbroken to the Apostles.

But is this true?

This is one of the many questions that troubled Shawna and John about the sect, especially after the world opened up to them when they logged on the Internet. Cyberspace teems with pages and messages from ex-sect members.

They call the mysterious sect the Two-by-Twos because the Workers travel two-by-two either two men or two women, going out just as Jesus sent out the Apostles, according to St. Mark. Ex-Two-by-Twos have published books, pamphlets and web pages saying the movement was founded by William Irvine in Ireland in 1897. Irvine, a fiery, charismatic preacher, decided all his followers should go out homeless and unpaid, just as Christ did. He decided the movement should have no name. He taught that salvation was only possible through his group and that converts must hear God's word through one of the Workers or they would not be saved. He condemned all other churches and worldliness. One of Irvine's few compromises came in 1908 when he decided not everyone had to be a Worker, that there could be Friends as well.

Irvine sent out missionaries around the world, only to see his movement fracture. In 1914, he was excommunicated. The new leaders of the Two-by-Twos decided that Irvine's role and the roots of the church would not be discussed, that new Friends would be told that The Truth was first spoken by Christ, then the Apostles, that it lay dormant in time, then sprouted again with the Workers.

The sect is known for its strict rules. No one is supposed to smoke, drink, play cards or dance. They are not to have TVs, radios or many books. Women aren't to wear make-up, jewelry or pants, but should have long dresses and long, uncut hair, done up in a bun (leading ex-members to refer to them as Bunheads).

The church uses no texts other than the King James Bible. It has no publications and few records. Ex-members say the sect practices mind control. They say its doctrine must be accepted without question and that the Bible isn't as powerful as the group's unwritten rules.

Around the world, it's estimated there are 200,000 Two-by-Twos. In Alberta, the sect has 2,000-3,000 members. Regional leader Willis Propp politely declines to address questions about the sect's beliefs and history. "I'd like to bow out," Propp says. "We have some adversaries who like to print negative things about us. We're not so keen about disclosing things because it might get into the wrong hands."

Asked about charges from ex-members that the sect is a cult, Propp says, "That's what our Master was called when he was here 1900 years ago. We expect that from the ex-ones."

When they joined the Two-by-Twos, John and Shawna Mitchell were overcome by the sect's friendliness. There were endless potluck suppers and tobogganing and birthday parties. The Mitchells had less and less to do with their old friends and families.

John and Shawna assumed the group must have started up at the turn of the century, when so many other back-to-the-Bible sects started. When John obtained a book on the Two-by-Twos and Irvine, he showed it to a Worker, but he never got a straight answer.

In their essay on their experience in the sect, which will be published in a book about ex-Two-by-Twos [**Reflected Truth**, compiled by Joan F. Daniel, 1996, Chapter 20], the Mitchells have written, "If you try to get an honest answer from a Worker in regards to reasons for certain beliefs, the result will usually leave your head spinning. You will also feel like your spirit is less than right for asking in the first place. It is a good way to discourage questioning!"

One day, Shawna asked another woman in the group if she at all doubted the story of the sect's origins, and the woman replied, "Don't you believe that something so precious to God could be preserved and passed on through his beloved mouthpieces over any age and time? God's Way is eternal."

"Well," Shawna replied, "certainly you don't believe that the early church looked like it stepped off the pages of a Victorian magazine. Why do all the Friend ladies mirror the women of the turn of the century in dress and hair and make-up?"

As John and Shawna dug into their new faith, they came up with more questions: How could they best love God? What was the way to heaven? Why didn't they meet in a church? Why did the ladies have to wear long hair?

But while they were full of questions, other members seemed smug to them, certain in their knowledge that other Christian sects were evil. At the same time, the Mitchells hooked their home computer to the Internet. The contrast between the intellectual free-for-all of the Net and the rigid, unexplained rules of the sect bowled them over.

"Our minds had begun to close to other views, to the notion that other people might have a valid way of looking at life," John says. "The Internet was a way that we were able to talk to other people. . . They want to know why you think things, and you're trying to explain, and if all you can say is, 'We think you're all going to hell just because,' well, it's hard to do that. You start to examine what you're saying."

On February 26, 1995, John called up a Friend and said he and Shawna wouldn't be coming to any meetings anymore. The Mitchells felt peace and resignation. In their essay, they wrote: "We learn best from the mistakes we make. . . God has laid out unique lessons for each of us which can be so exciting if we are willing to keep asking and learning. Don't let anyone steal your questions!"

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#### **DOUBTS ABOUT A MYSTERY CHURCH**

**'Sect or Cult?' Is the Question before an Alberta Court****By Joe Woodard**

At the end of August, Duncan Dorey and Janice Steingard, a divorced Edmonton couple, appeared in Alberta Family court to decide which of them would get custody of their two children. Mr. Dorey's lawyer, James Arends, charged that Ms. Steingard was raising their children in a cult to which both parents belonged but from which Mr. Dorey has since escaped. Known as the Two-by-twos, the Way, the Truth, the Go-preachers, or "the Church without a Name," the movement claims to be the one true Christianity. The Family Court deemed itself unqualified to settle the question and referred the case to the Court of Queen's Bench, which now finds itself in the awkward position of having to rule on the harmfulness of a religious sect.

The Two-by-twos were apparently formed in 1897 by a Scottish preacher named William Irvine. While working with the Faith Mission in Ireland, he decided Christ's instructions in Matthew 10 and Luke 10 still held: "Behold I send you forth as lambs amid wolves. Carry neither purse nor wallet...remain in the same house eating and drinking what they have, for the labourer deserves his wages." Mr. Irvine concluded that church buildings are Satanic and organized pairs of itinerant preachers or "workers." Without property or records, these workers would live among the "friends" or "professed" members of the new church. The result, a 100 years later, is an invisible sect. It subscribes to the fourth-century Arian heresy that Jesus is the Son of God but is not himself God and counts 400,000 members worldwide, with over 4,000 in Alberta and B.C.

"We compiled a list of 47 different cult characteristics," says lawyer Arends. "The Two-by-twos meet all the points. They are extremely secretive, have no written doctrine or records, you can't get a straight answer from them and yet they claim to be the only path to salvation. Their 'friends' must give unconditional obedience to the workers or they're guilty of backsliding. And if they backslide, they're damned." Mr. Arends says his case is bolstered by California academic Ronald Enroth's work *CHURCHES THAT ABUSE*, Port Coquitlam author Lloyd Fortt's *IN SEARCH OF 'THE TRUTH'*, and the testimony of a dozen former members in Alberta.

However, Gordon Melton, the California-based editor of the *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, argues the Two-by-twos are simply an "old-line, 19th-century Christadelphian sect," an isolated subculture of non-Trinitarian Christians. They are not a cult because "there's no real threats or violence," he says. "A good comparison is the Amish. They keep to themselves, with a minimal creed; they stress community, and their faith is passed from generation to generation. The big difference is that the Two-by-twos blend into the community, own houses and work normal jobs." Some ex-members have cited instances of sexual abuse, but author and ex-member Fortt has admitted such accusations are rare.

Ex-adherent Dale Wesenberg of Niton Junction, 94 miles west of Edmonton, insists the Two-by-twos are, "for the most part, godly people," but they are also "the most [biblically] ignorant ministers" in the world. "They feed the need for human attention, and their fellowship is unsurpassable," he says. "But they're parasites. They go from house to house, and it's deemed a great privilege to have workers living in your house, driving your car and living off you, because they're the only path to salvation. But if you ask them what they believe, they can't tell you."

Local "workers" did not return calls from this magazine. The Dorey-Steingard custody case may be heard at Queen's Bench in Edmonton within the month."

By Joe Woodard

NOTE: The Alberta Report was a Canadian Monthly Magazine. According to [Wikipedia](#), the Alberta Reporter ceased publication in 2003.