

## When Truth Found a Home

Written by Dr. Romeo Vitelli  
Friday, 04 January 2013 09:00

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Today, [Home of Truth, Utah](#) is nothing more than a ghost town located in southeastern Utah just twenty-four miles south of Monticello. Visitors traveling to the Needles district of Canyonlands National Park near the town of Moab may occasionally stop and view the remains of the town but there seems little trace of the controversial community that had been there during the 1930s.

When Spiritualist Marie Ogen settled on the town (which was originally called Dry Valley) as the new headquarters for her community of followers to live in, the inhabitants of the neighbouring towns likely had no idea what was coming next. She had developed a serious interest in Spiritualism following the death of her husband in 1929 and later established a School of Truth in collaboration with fellow Spiritualist William Dudley Pelley.

Pelley, who was a hardline political extremist as well as a spiritualist, had developed a national organization based on his fears that Jews and Communists would eventually take over the world. Following a “near-death” experience in 1928, Pelley declared a mission to spiritually transform America. With the rise of Adolf Hitler’s Nazis in Germany, Pelley founded his own “Silver Legion” advocating many of their same anti-Semitic policies in the United States. He would later run for President as part of the Christian Party.

All of this was too much for Marie Ogden and she decided to move her followers to Utah and the town that she rechristened “Home of Truth”. Most of these followers came from Idaho where she had lived and done most of her lecturing before splitting with Pelley and relocating to Utah. As part of her spiritualist message, she claimed that her typewriter received messages that relayed God’s will. These divine messages inspired her to travel across the country establishing lecture groups and raising awareness of her mission. It was the typewriter that reportedly directed her to Dry Valley which was declared to be the “axis of the Earth” and that she should establish her “home of truth” there. Part of the appeal of the site was that it was near [Church Rock](#) which Ogden believed would be where Christ’s Second Coming would occur.

Any follower willing to relocate to the new community had to follow Ogden’s strict instructions. That included renouncing any personal goods, becoming quasi-vegetarians, abstaining from tobacco and alcohol, and pledging absolute obedience to the “word” from Marie Ogden’s typewriter. In a move that she likely learned from William Pelley, Marie Ogden also purchased the only newspaper in the county which acted as the main source of news for people in her community. Throughout the 1930s, Home of Truth continued to attract followers and had as many as 100 people at its height in 1935.

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The new community was set up along strictly communal lines, with three groups of buildings. The Outer Portal included the dormitory and communal house while the largely uncompleted Middle Portal was to include the chapel made of cobblestones. At the centre of the complex was the Inner Portal where Ogden lived with her daughter. The Inner Portal also featured the divine typewriter that relayed God's word on a daily basis and located on the exact axis of the world (no, I don't know what that means either). The dominant theme of the messages was that the last days were at hand and only the true believers at the Inner Portal would be spared.

Along with revelations from her typewriter, Ogden also made regular trips to nearby Shay Mountain where she communed with God on a regular basis. Her teachings came from a variety of sources including works of theosophy and she advocated doctrines such as reincarnation and communication with the dead. Not only did she claim to be the reincarnated Virgin Mary but that many of her followers were reincarnations of various famous religious figures as well (including Brigham Young). She also maintained sole financial control over the community although she allowed some of her male followers to hire themselves out as labourers to nearby farms.

Though the Mormons in the surrounding communities were a little curious over what was happening in Marie Ogden's Home of Truth, they were not particularly alarmed. At first. The newspaper she purchased was largely the same as ever except for her own prominent column titled, "Our Corner" which featured her unique take on metaphysics and reality. Things began to change on February 11, 1935 with the death of one of her followers, Edith Peshak.

Peshak, who had been suffering from terminal cancer, had joined Marie Ogden's community after being assured that her life could be saved if she embraced Ogden's spiritualist beliefs. Even after Edith Peshak died, Ogden insisted that she was still receiving messages from her dead follower who was not really dead but "only in a state of purification" and would soon return to life. To prepare for the resurrection, the body was washed three times a day and carefully tended, including feeding (don't ask). All of these details were lovingly presented in a new feature in her paper titled, "Rebirth of a Soul".

While the surrounding Mormon communities had been accommodating up to then, this new preoccupation was a bit too much for them. Sheriff Lawrence S. Palmer brought in a medical doctor and a nurse to examine the body to ensure that no sanitary laws were being violated. Since Edith Peshak's body was well-preserved, they could not force a burial but things went downhill for Marie Ogden's community after that.

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By February 1937, only a dozen of Marie Ogden's original settlers were left (unless you count Edith Peshak). It was then that Ogden received a new message stating that Peshak was about to return to life. That was enough for authorities to return to Home of Truth and demand that a death certificate be filled out and that Edith Peshak be officially buried. When Ogden refused despite being arrested (since Peshak was not really dead), police officers searched for the body but failed to find anything.

The investigation only ended when another of Ogden's followers, Tommy Robertson, admitted that he had cremated the body on Marie Ogden's instructions. The cremation had occurred shortly after the previous investigation despite Ogden's insistence that the body was being preserved to prepare for Peshak's resurrection. This public revelation put the final nail in Marie Ogden's dream and only a handful of her followers remained in Home of Truth after that.

Though Home of Truth was largely a ghost town by then, Marie Ogden managed to struggle on until illness forced her into a nursing home. She died on March 4, 1975 and the contents of her Inner Portal were sold at auction two years later.

Click [here](#) for more information.