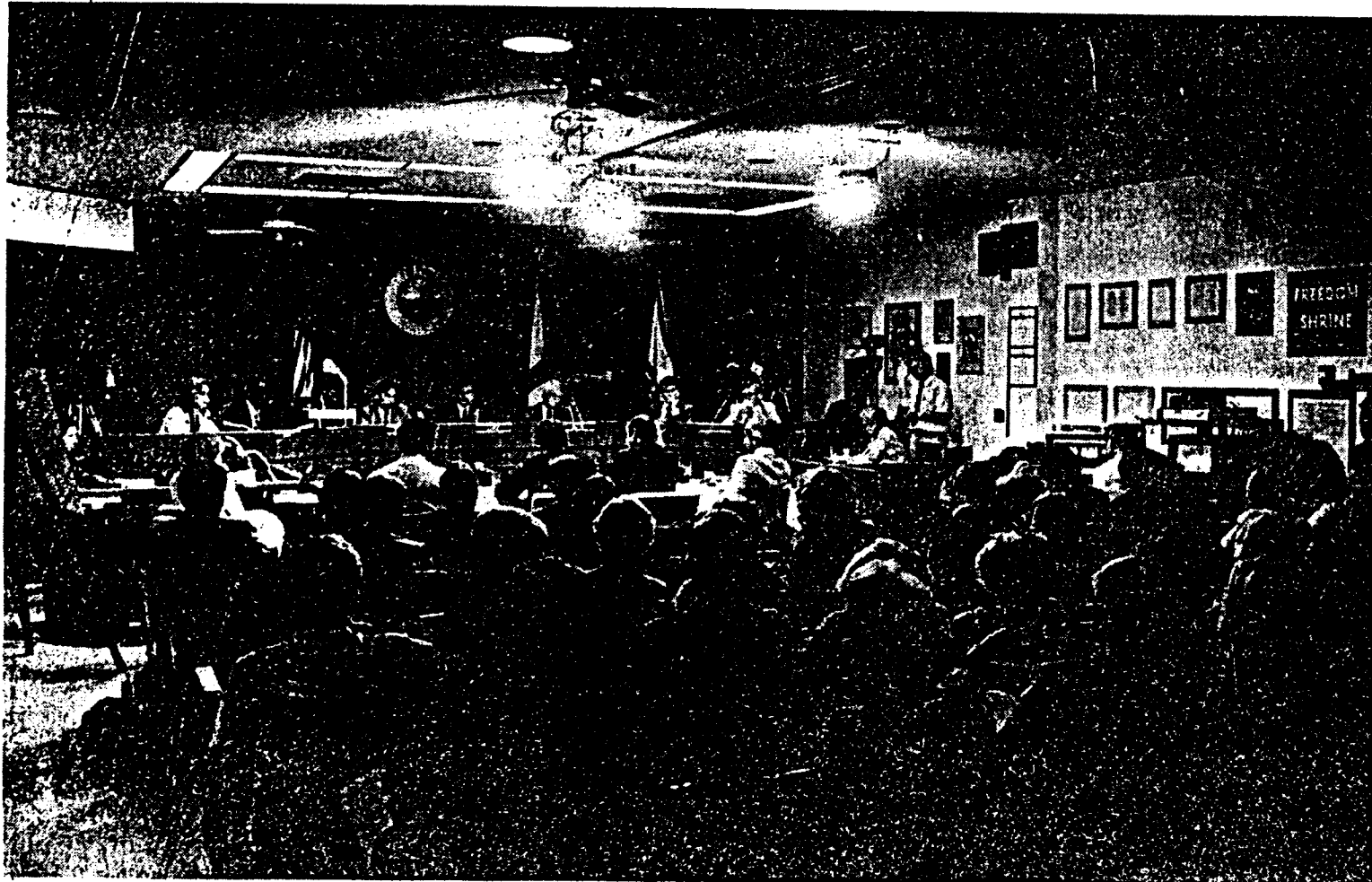


Ex-Scientologist describes church 'abuses': 1-B

Medium-sized crowd sees hearings open



Clearwater Times — STEVE HASEL

A crowd looks on as the Clearwater City Commission begins hearings on the Church of Scientology.

By LAURIE HOLLMAN
Clearwater Times Staff Writer

CLEARWATER — Pushing 80, Stewart Wilson is too old and too sick to do the raucous anti-Scientology crusading he once enjoyed.

But he came to Clearwater City Hall Wednesday with the Holy Bible and an American flag almost as big as Richard Tenney, the ex-city commissioner who led many of the anti-Scientology rallies, to show his opposition to the Clearwater-based organization.

Wilson was one of a medium-sized crowd to see the Clearwater City Commission begin its much-ballyhooed inquiry into Scientology.

While the numbers weren't overwhelming, the diversity of the crowd impressed many. Government watchdogs, anti-Scientology crusaders, oldtimers (both in years and in time spent around City Hall), a smattering of younger people, church members, ex-church members. Clearwater patrolmen, journalists and city employees filed into the 155-seat commission chambers in City Hall.

ALTHOUGH THE chambers had room for more, some people preferred to watch the proceedings on TV monitors set up in the City Hall Annex and in the Clearwater Public Library. Vision Cable, holder of the Clearwater cable television franchise, is broadcasting the hearings live.

The public hearings focus on what Michael Flynn, the 37-year-old Boston lawyer hired by Clearwater to help with the hearings, calls "a pattern of independent criminal activity, fraud . . . deceptive sales practices, and vicious personal attack and abuse."

At 9 a.m., the scene at Clearwater City Hall looked like this: There were still seats vacant as city commissioners, dressed in conservative business attire, took their accustomed positions behind a crescent-shaped table.

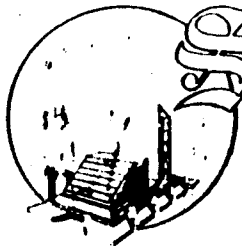
They were flanked by three court reporters, seven cameras and television crews, most of them local. One was from CBS.



MICHAEL FLYNN
. . . Boston lawyer.



ED WALTERS
. . . first witness.



St. Petersburg Times

clearwater times

EDITION

Belleair, Dunedin, Largo, Palm Harbor, Tarpon Springs, Safety Harbor, Oldsmar and all Upper Pinellas.

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Scientology

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Another camera crew, composed of three men, was from the church. Spokesman Hugh Wilhere said the crew is videotaping the hearings. Vision Cable's Don Mains said the Fort Harrison Hotel, nerve center of the church, does not have cable television.

CLEARWATER patrolmen stood arms akimbo at the chamber door, and the front row was reserved for police. The city has assigned round-the-clock protection to Flynn.

Among the people attending the public hearings were:

✓ Police Chief Sid Klein, who sat on one end of the front row. He said there had been no death threats against Flynn or general security problems thus far.

✓ Government watchdogs Charlie Finton, Lois Cormier and Bonnie Harding. They don't often miss a hearing. Harding even reached City Hall by 8 a.m. to get a seat in the front row. She was disconsolate when Klein told her she wouldn't be able to sit there. He later relented.

✓ Arian Tenney, Richard Tenney's mother. She did not want to comment about the hearings.

✓ Bob Bickerstaffe, one of the founding members of

the Scientology Victims Defense Fund, an organization created by local business people and residents to collect money for ex-Scientologists who want to sue the church. He was disappointed with the morning's events but said he would reserve comment until more has occurred.

✓ Paulette Cooper, an outspoken critic of Scientology. She said she will be testifying before the City Commission.

✓ Sven Egil Omdal, a Norwegian journalist here after a stint in El Salvador because he is writing a book on Scientology.

✓ The three-man Scientology camera crew. Their face muscles did not flinch as former Scientologist Ed Walters, the first witness, criticized the church. During the lunch break they refused to speak on the record about their feelings unless Wilhere said they could. He did not.

Pinellas County Commissioner Gabe Cazares, once the mayor of Clearwater and a target of the church, sat quietly by himself behind rows of empty orange seats at the City Hall Annex. Cazares predicted, "Some good things will come out of the hearings," and took umbrage at a remark made by former City Commissioner Karleen De Blaker, now Pinellas circuit court clerk, that the City Commission is just playing politics by holding the hearings.