

Ex-Scientology Aide Called 'Vigilante' in Fight for Documents

By MYRNA OLIVER, Times Staff Writer

A former Church of Scientology archivist who left the organization and allegedly took with him thousands of documents concerning church founder L. Ron Hubbard was described Thursday by a Scientology attorney as a "self-serving vigilante of the worst kind" as trial began in the organization's civil suit to recover the material.

Barrett S. Litt, attorney for Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue Hubbard, claimed in opening statements in the non-jury trial before Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Paul G. Breckenridge Jr. that former Scientologist and archivist Gerald Armstrong took more than 20 boxes of material to discredit the church and the Hubbards in a plethora of civil suits across the country seeking millions of dollars in damages.

The documents at issue in the trial here have been impounded since 1982 by the Los Angeles County clerk's office under court order. A church expert on collectors' items has estimated the value of the personal letters, income tax records, military records, unpublished manuscripts and other materials at \$5 million.

'Extraordinary' Activity

Litt said Armstrong, who joined the church in 1969, actively sought the role of archivist and eagerly set about the task of compiling Hubbard's papers for use by a hired biographer, Omar Garrison.

When Armstrong decided to leave the church Dec. 1, 1981, Litt said, he "engaged in an extraordinary range of activity of copying as many materials as he could to provide to Mr. Garrison." Litt said Garrison agreed in a settlement last summer to abandon the biography and has returned materials in his possession.

Litt accused Armstrong, however, of violating his sacred trust to protect the materials for the church and of wrongly spiriting some of the documents to his attorney, Michael Flynn of Clearwater, Fla., for use in civil suits against the church. Flynn is known for prosecuting civil cases against the organization by former Scientologists and others.

"In reality," Litt said, "what this conduct comes down to is voyeurs prying into the private life of these people (the Hubbards) to find things to discredit them and the church to make millions of dollars in lawsuits."

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Flynn countered in his opening statement on Armstrong's behalf that the only "sacred trust" involved in the case was Armstrong's own sacred trust to himself, to other Scientologists and to society to reveal falsehoods about L. Ron Hubbard proven by the documents.

He accused Hubbard of victimizing thousands of followers by misrepresenting himself and his background in order to take their money for his teachings.

Flynn said Armstrong, who had been branded a "suppressive person" guilty of theft and rumormongering by Scientologists, took documents and shared them with Garrison so the two could defend themselves against the church, which they claim files lawsuits and otherwise harasses those not in its favor.

Although Litt and church attorneys argue that all documents are private and should remain sealed from public view, Flynn intends to introduce about 150 that he said will show that claims by Hubbard about his background are "uniformly false."

Among those claims by the 72-year-old Hubbard, Flynn said, are that he is a nuclear physicist, a medical doctor, a scientist, a civil engineer and an atomic scientist who studied at George Washington University and Princeton, studied in Asia under Lamas in the 1920s, led expeditions to study barbaric cultures in the 1930s, performed mineral studies in Puerto Rico and recharted the Alaska coastline, is a blood brother of the Black Feet Indians, wrote the book "Treasure Island" and a movie called "Dive Bomber," was a Hollywood director and built an exemplary record with the Navy in World War II as the first casualty of the Far East who was crippled and blinded but later healed himself with his Dianetics philosophy, won 28 medals, was the subject of the play and film "Mr. Roberts," had no neurotic or psychotic tendencies and commanded a corvette (warship).

Flynn said Armstrong's suspicions about Hubbard's background began in 1980, when church officials promoted a 1930s movie, "Dive Bomber," supposedly written by Hubbard, to raise money for legal defense of the church leaders.

Finding a short story written by Hubbard with the same title but bearing no relation to the movie script and unable to find any credit listed in Hollywood annals, Armstrong wrote to Hubbard. The church founder responded that he was cheated out of credits and money by Warner Bros. and was paid \$10,000 "under the table," which he used after World War II for a Caribbean cruise—at a time, Flynn said, when Hubbard claimed to be destitute, blind, crippled and healing himself.

The discrepancy led Armstrong to check further into Hubbard's military records, Flynn said, and to conclude with Garrison that falsities abounded and "the biography could not possibly be written."

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