

# THE JOURNAL

OF POLITICS, PEOPLE & ART • Eureka, Calif. • Vol. II, Issue 6 • June 1991



## ABOVE & BELOW

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**Petrolia's  
new  
neighbors**

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**Hang glider  
pioneer  
is  
HUMBOLDTER**



# THE North Coast JOURNAL

OF POLITICS, PEOPLE & ART • Eureka, Calif. • Vol. II, Issue 6 • June 1991

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Unidentified workers at Church of Spiritual Technology site.

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## Petrolia's new neighbors — L. Ron Hubbard's

By Joe Cempa

**P**ETROLIA — A few miles outside of this coastal community, a massive 400-foot subterranean vault constructed of steel and concrete lies beneath a peaceful knoll overlooking the Pacific.

The breadth and dimension of the vault stagger the imagination: 100 feet longer than a football field and 20 feet in diameter, the two-story sarcophagus is almost complete. It is designed to withstand the ravages of nature as well as man-made destruction.

Humboldt County is now home to one of the most impregnable storage repositories known to man. Its prime purpose is to hold the teaching, philosophy and enlightenment of a single man: L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, one of the most contentious, controversial religions ever founded.

The vault is one of several under construction across the country. Southern California and New Mexico have similar underground facilities that are nearly complete. Unconfirmed reports say land has been purchased in Utah for a fourth facility.

Some residents of Ferndale and Petrolia are anxious. They are in wonder at the proposed use of the vaults. Why three or four vaults of such size to store the works of one man? they ask. What else is going into the vaults?

The Church of Spiritual Technology — a Scientology splinter group — has bought up tracts of Southern Humboldt ranches and homesteads outside of Petrolia since 1984. Its holdings in the area total 3,600 acres.

The centerpiece of the project is the former Walker Ranch. In June of 1987 the philosophical-religious organization began constructing a storage facility its members claim will "hold the wisdom of the ages."

As the vault nears completion, Petrolia residents are no more sure of what exactly is going on up on Walker Mountain than they were seven years ago when the Los Angeles-based Church of Spiritual Technology began buying land.

"We don't know what the hell is going on up there, and it stinks!" said one retired man from the steps of the Petrolia Post Office. "Some of us (locals) call it the dungeon! A lot of us do not like this one bit. Who are these people? They sure are a secretive, stand-offish lot."

That same description of "secretive" and "they sure keep to themselves" popped up again and again while researching this story. Reporters in New Mexico and San Bernar-

dino County who were working on stories about the storage facilities under construction there said they could get little or no information from CST representatives.

Dozens of phone calls to the CST office in Los Angeles were not returned. Queries to the Media Relations office of Scientology were answered with, "I really don't know who could talk to you about that. We have no information on the vaults."

In the San Bernardino Mountains another storage facility nears completion. It is 5,200 feet above sea level and it has two tunnels, connected by a metal corridor, each 104 feet long by 23 feet wide. The San Bernardino facility is surrounded by at least 10 buildings including a three-story administration office, dormitories, dining halls, residences and other buildings and offices.

No visitors are allowed, and an extensive security system surrounds the 33-acre site. A 35.5-kilovolt generator powers the facility.

According to Aileen Derdorff, Santa Barbara County planner, the property was valued at \$3.7 million before the vaults were constructed.

"They say they are going to store 'old and historic' documents up there," Derdorff said. "Since I hear this church has only been around for a short while,

I don't know how 'old and historic' these documents can be. It sounds questionable to me."

"I have no idea what's going on in them (the vaults) or what they are doing up there. They are very secretive people, very stand-offish. In our dealings with them it was always a 'we-don't-want-you-knowing-what-we're-doing-up-here' kind of thing," she said. "The vaults are impressive, really cold, but not damp. Actually very dry. They want to keep them cold and dry for some reason. I've never seen anything like them."

The Church of Spiritual Technology was incorporated in California in May 1985. Based in Los Angeles, the 45-member church was created as a non-profit organization dedicated to "preserve the religious and philosophical writings of the late L. Ron Hubbard," according to a spokesman for the church. Hubbard wrote dozens of science fiction books and is the founder of Scientology.

According to an interview published in the Ferndale Enterprise, Michel Ouelette, 40, a French-Canadian, is the manager of the Petrolia facility.

"We are not the Church of Scientology," Ouelette said in the weekly newspaper's story by Editor Elizabeth McHARRY. "However, we do

share a common interest with it through our belief in the value and workability of Mr. Hubbard's writing in solving today's spiritual problems."

Ouelette said that "other basic religious texts" also are to be stored in the underground facility outside Petrolia.

According to CST documents, the church was formed to ensure that Hubbard's "religious works" and "other key religious works of mankind do not fall prey to the ravages of time, and will still be in existence in the centuries and millennia to come."

According to the documents, the material will be stored by microfilm, archival publishing, metal etchings, audio recordings made from pure gold and compact disks that will last 1,000 years. The church also plans to install time-capsules made of titanium, "one of the toughest and long-lasting metal there is," will be welded shut and the oxygen pumped out and replaced with argon gas. The capsules will be stored in stainless steel storage racks.

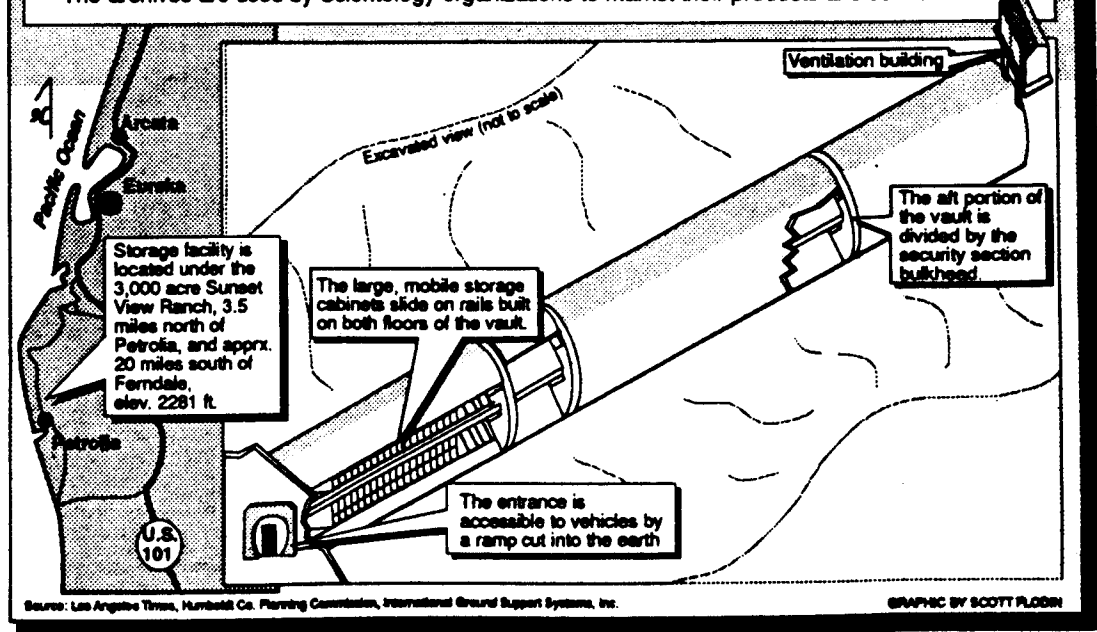
The Enterprise also quoted Ouelette as saying, "The church's activities include research into long-lasting archival materials, transferring written and spoken words onto such materials to preserve them, and storing them so they will be available for future generations. We will not be conducting religious ceremonies at the ranch. The

### Church of Spiritual Technology vault

The stated purpose of the vault is the preservation of the religious and philosophical writings of Church of Scientology-founder L. Ron Hubbard. The Church of Spiritual Technology, which has been linked to the Church of Scientology, is building the vault in Petrolia. This storage facility is 375 feet long and will be covered with 14 feet of dirt and gravel.

The inside of the facility will be two stories tall and will contain moveable cabinets which will hold the church's archives.

The archives are used by Scientology organizations to market their products and services.



Graphic courtesy of The Lumberjack, HSU

# followers, the Church of Spiritual Technology

purpose of the property is for the preservation of religious wisdom."

He said that money for the facility came from "donations." According to Todd Sobolik, Humboldt County chief building inspector, the vault is estimated to cost between \$3 and \$5 million. An 8,000-square-foot house called "The Bunker" that serves as a "caretaker's quarters" was estimated to cost \$300,000 to construct, Sobolik said.

The assessed valuation of the 23 parcels owned by the church is \$1.19 million, with improvements valued at \$510,533, according to county records. Records also showed that the church's tax bill for 1990-91 is \$18,488.

According to a six-part series in the Los Angeles Times last year, the Church of Scientology has spent more than \$15 million to protect and preserve Hubbard's writings. The paper said the CST has 45 members who function as staff. There is no "congregation."

Court documents filed by the church list its income for 1987 as \$503 million. Cynthia Kisser, director of the Cult Awareness Network, said in an interview that in 1987 the Church of Scientology reported income and fixed assets of \$206 million.

The New Mexico storage facility is the most complete of the three known

vaults. The San Miguel, N.M., county planner, Hilario Rubio, said the CST has been in his area for "at least six years."

"It seems to me that it is exactly what they say it is: a big tunnel in the mountains to store records. It's out in the middle of nowhere, 40-miles east of Las Vegas (N.M.). They invited county officials to tour the thing a while back. It's a real nice tunnel, away from people, that's for sure," Rubio said in a telephone interview. "To you or me it may seem absurdly ridiculous to build something so far out to store records, but I guess they have their reasons."

According to the Times articles the New Mexico vaults have "maintenance-free doors with lives of one-thousand years." The doors are "nuclear-blast resistant."

The New Mexico site is made up of two 350-foot long tunnels that make a V. Rubio said the church owns "around 3,000 acres" in San Miguel County. "They (CST officials) told me they wanted an area that won't get hit by nuclear war. They probably found it. Except, what I don't understand is who's going to be around to get the records out after the war? Who would know they were there if we're all destroyed?"

CST's Humboldt County vault lies

at the end of a twisting, paved road that climbs up into the hills two miles outside Petrolia. A solitary guard shack stands shaking from the strong winds that whip up Walker Mountain from the Pacific. A sign painted with bold, red letters cautions: "NO TRESPASSING — VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED TO THE FULLEST EXTENT OF THE LAW!" Visitors to the CST facility in Humboldt County are turned back by a security guard.

Most of the workers at the site were reluctant to talk about the vault. One unidentified concrete worker said that more than 16,000 square yards of concrete had been used in the vault's construction. "So far," he said. He estimated 16,000 yards to be approximately the amount that was used in the building of the Humboldt County Courthouse. He also said there were plans to construct a second tunnel.

Peter Brant, of Brant Electric in Arcata, worked on the 8,000-square-foot "bunker" that overlooks the vault. He described the house as "very fancy."

"They call it a residence, but it's built like a commercial structure. It's got 20-foot deep poured-concrete piers under it, a raised concrete floor and steel studs in the walls. Closed circuit TV cameras are in almost every room, and there are alarm systems all over,"

he said.

Brant said he had installed "around 25" uninterruptable power circuits and data communications outlets throughout the three-bedroom structure. "It looked like they were designing it for a computer work station," he said. He noticed one room referred to as a "sewing room" in the building plans. "But it had eight computer terminals in it."

As county officials and construction workers "speculate" on the Church of Spiritual Technology, there's speculation on the breadth and power of L. Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology.

Hubbard wrote "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health" in 1950 and a number of other books on self-help and science fiction until his mysterious death in 1986. Long dubbed the "science fiction religion" by the press and the psychiatric community, Scientology is a religion abounding in reincarnation, galactic encounters, interplanetary civilizations and universe-hopping tyrants, according to a score of exposed books and first-hand encounters.

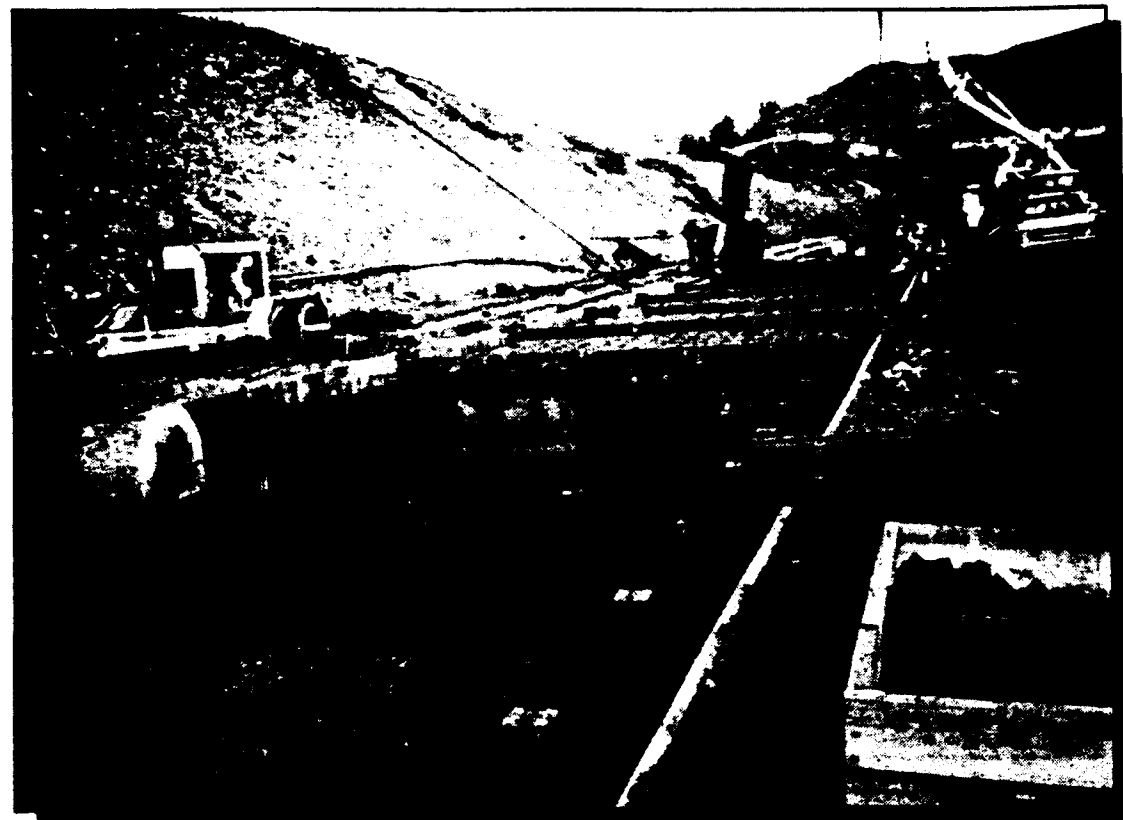
Scientology's (Hubbard's) wisdom comes with a hefty price tag. Church members are taught through a progression of sometimes-secret courses that cost thousands of dollars and take years to complete. Scientology executives say membership to be more than 6.5 million with churches in 200-plus countries.

Scientology's central belief is of an immortal soul, called a "thetan." The thetan passes from one body to the next by reincarnation and can "live" for trillions of years. When a person dies, according to Hubbard, his or her thetan goes to a "landing station on Venus," where it is re-programmed with lies about its past life and its next life. The thetan is told it will return to earth and be placed in the body of a newborn baby.

"What actually happens to you," Hubbard told his followers, "is that you're simply encapsulated and dumped in the gulch of lower California. To hell with ya! If you can get out of that, and wander around through cities and find some girl who looks like she's going to have a baby or get married, you're all set. You eventually just 'pick up a baby.'"

Hubbard told followers that the way around all this was for Scientologists to simply "select another location other than Venus to go to when they 'kick the bucket.'"

This man, adored and respected by Scientologists, was not without his earthy problems. Lawsuits and books by former members, a federal conviction of 11 of Scientology's top mem-



bers (including Hubbard's wife, for burglarizing the U.S. Justice Department in the 1970s), turmoil within the church resulting in defections and purges all resulted in a series of highly publicized situations that left the church embarrassed and in the spotlight.

Former members continue to file suits accusing the church of intimidating its critics, breaking up families and using high pressure sales techniques to collect large sums of money from followers.

Recently a new chapter opened up for Scientology which has attempted to attract a new generation of supporters and followers. With a "re-born fervor" official church programs and networks of Scientology groups are reaching into American society to gain legitimacy and new members.

With an apparent attempt to position Hubbard as a 20th century Renaissance man, and give new credibility to his teachings, the church is branching out to professional groups, medical practitioners, lawyers and even schools.

Followers of Scientology have set up a number of successful consulting firms which sell Hubbard's management techniques to professionals such as doctors, dentists and businessmen. As they "learn" they are steered into the church.

The church has also begun to place

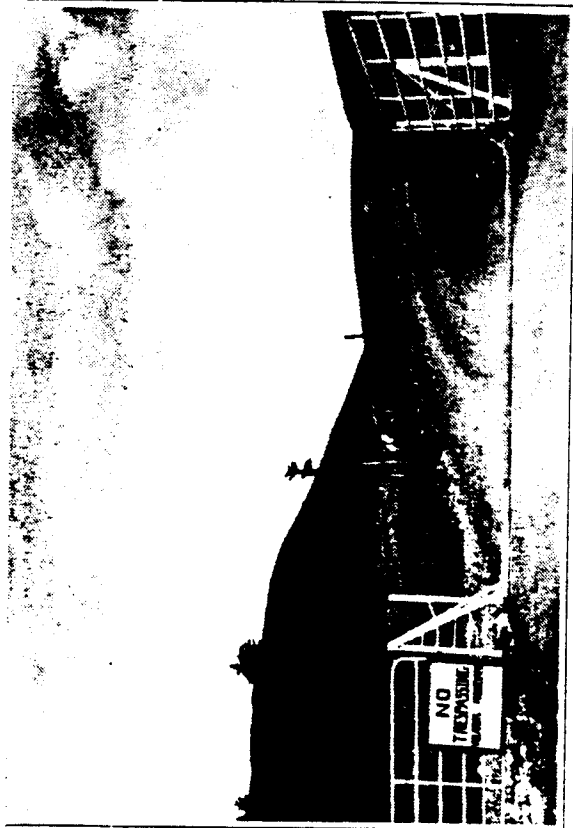
his teachings in schools across the country. Seldom are Scientology connections mentioned. "The world is ours," Hubbard once told his followers. "Own it!"

The founder of Scientology, Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, was born in 1911 outside Tilden, Neb. According to Scientology writings he was an adventurer in his early years. He roamed the globe, gold mining, becoming a master sailor, an expert hypnotist, glider pilot and studying with "Asian holy men" as well as "American Indian medicine men of the Blackfoot Tribe of Montana."

Documentation and eyewitness accounts published in the Los Angeles Times article dispute much of Scientology's claims of Hubbard's studies and spiritual interest. According to the article, when Hubbard visited the Great Wall of China for the first time he quipped, "If China turned it into a roller coaster it could make millions of dollars each year."

He also once wrote that "The trouble with China is that there are too many chinks here." As for Native American knowledge and spiritualism, the Times reported that a Scientologist tried to prove Hubbard to be a "blood brother" of the tribe as he'd claimed. The Scientologist—who was part Blackfoot—came up "empty handed."

He then created an "official document," became a blood brother with



This sign greets visitors at the entrance to the property near Petrolia.

Hubbard and all was thought to be well. Tribal officials in Montana said the document should not be given very much credibility.

Hubbard claimed he had received 21 medals and decorations during his naval service. Navy documents presented in court proceedings indicate Hubbard received four medals.

During a 1984 Superior Court lawsuit which brought many of Hubbard's biographical claims into the spotlight, Judge Paul C. Breckenridge said of Hubbard, "The evidence portrays a man who was virtually a pathological liar when it comes to his history, background and achievements."

Scientology members counter such statements with remarks such as: "Any controversy about him (Hubbard) is like a speck of dust on his shoes com-

pared to the millions of people who loved and respected him. What he has accomplished in the brief span of one lifetime will have impact on every man, woman and child for the next 10,000 years."

Hubbard was very literal about Scientology's reincarnation beliefs. Elite members of the group belong to a sect known as the Sea Organization or "Sea Orgs." Members sign billion-year contracts to serve Scientology, not only in this life, but in future lifetimes. "We come back," is their motto.

According to Danish writer Bent Corydon, author of "L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?" Hubbard was obsessed with the idea of returning, not only to "lead" again, but to collect his "booty," whether buried as gold or deposited in foreign banks.

The idea was that, in his next life on earth he would recall the appropriate location and so reclaim his riches. Apparently Hubbard disagreed with the saying, "You can't take it with you," Corydon writes.

Hubbard spoke to his followers of the underground storage plans before his death. Corydon explains that Hubbard planned to spend \$35 million on a mausoleum to store his writings etched on stainless steel and gold bullion hidden within. "How his new incarnation would gain access to any of this is unclear," he writes.

In an interview, Corydon says of the vaults: "There had been orders from Hubbard to put together what was to be a mausoleum. It would contain his writings in order to survive an atomic war and all the horrible things that were going to happen to the planet. So the 'great words of the great man' would survive and perpetuate into the universe and thus 'free' the cosmos."

The author was a major figure in Scientology for more than 20 years until he became disillusioned. He was one of the first to "publicize the deeds of its founder through their corruption and mind-control aspects of the movement," according to the publisher.

Corydon and others have also dissected Scientology's direct connection with another "messiah" well-versed in mind control: Aleister Crowley,

British satanist and author of "The Book of the Law." According to Corydon, much of Hubbard's Scientology philosophy comes from Crowley's book. The Los Angeles Times article reported that Hubbard admired Crowley and during a 1952 lecture described him as "my very good friend."

Corydon said interviews with Hubbard's wife, son and followers show "So much of Scientology comes out of that whole thing (Crowley's writings including 'The Book of the Law'). Hubbard's son, Ron, told me that his father would spend hours and hours pouring over documents and information he'd gotten from Crowley's family in England. Hubbard would read all this stuff at night, do cocaine the next day, then lecture to Scientologists for hours. He was 'brilliant' on cocaine."

Corydon also said that according to Ron Jr., Scientology actually began

***If this group ever turned into a political cult — like the Moonies — it could be really dangerous. But I don't get the sense that they have any political machinery in place.***

**Cynthia Kisser**  
Director of Cult Awareness Network

Dec. 1, 1947. "That was the day that Aleister Crowley died," Corydon said.

Director of the Cult Awareness Network Cynthia Kisser said of the multi-million-dollar project Hubbard's followers have undertaken:

"The people who are running Scientology now were raised in the group. They don't have any touch with normalcy, and you really can't tell if they have any conceptualization of even what they are doing with their projects," she said in a telephone interview from Chicago. "Or, it's taken on a nature of its own — unrelated to reality — just 'spawning' different things."

Kisser told of her "surprise" that such a large, powerful, affluent group was not more politically active.

"If his group ever turned into a political cult — like the Moonies — it could be really dangerous," she said. "But I don't get any sense that they

have any political machinery in place. I think that's the one ingredient that keeps them from becoming the ultimate horror show in the cult world. If they ever got that component together, I think it will be totally disastrous to this country."

As tales of interplanetary reincarnated encapsulated "thetans" and nuclear-war surviving documents banter about like imaginary cosmic chess pieces, it seem best to keep one's head and sense of humor about the whole "plan." As the editor of The Humanist Magazine, David Alexander, writes in a recent editorial about the Church of Spiritual Technology's storage facility construction:

"It's good to know that, if there is a nuclear war or global catastrophe, Dianetics will finally find the audience it deserves — as the survivors (most likely primitive and illiterate hunter-gatherer humans, rats and cockroaches) entertain themselves on cold winter nights attempting to decipher those stainless steel plates or may be trying to figure out how to play those compact disks without the use of electricity."

Meanwhile, Petrolia residents have some interesting if secretive new neighbors. And the county has added to its tax rolls. □

Joe Campa is Humboldt County's resident gonzo journalist.