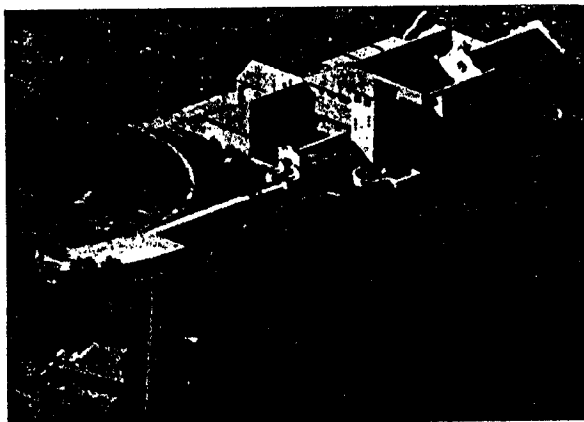


# Mountain of Mystery



The main house at the Scientology sect retreat near Trementina, N.M., cost almost \$1.5 million to build, building permits show. The retreat is patrolled by armed guards, some neighbors say.

A  
Scientology  
sect's  
underground  
N.M.  
archive  
is an  
enigma  
to some  
neighbors



The 5,500-square-foot caretakers residence, which cost \$524,700 to build, is said to house the entrance to the archive tunnel through one of its top floors.

PHOTOS BY GREG SORBER / JOURNAL

Stories  
by  
**Tom  
Sharpe**

**T**REMENTINA — High in the headwaters of the Rio Trementina, a reclusive sect of the Church of Scientology has established what is described as an archive to preserve for a millennium the words of its founder.

In January 1984, the California-based Church of Spiritual Technology — one of the parent

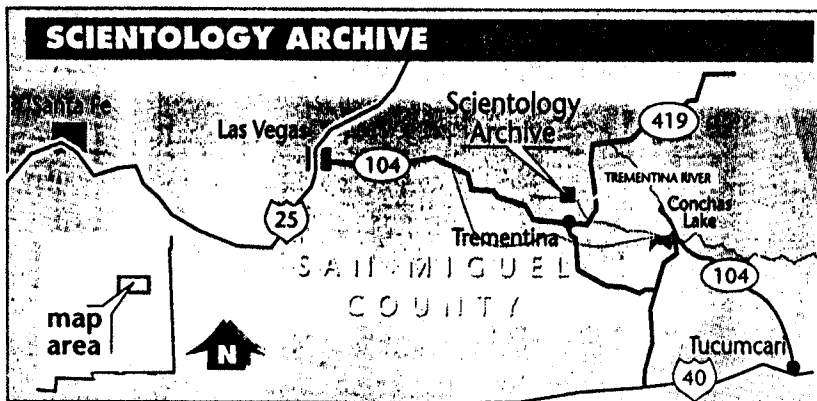
church's dozens of spinoffs during its 26-year legal battle with the federal government over tax exemptions — began buying the first of a dozen tracts of land some 50 miles east of Las Vegas, N.M.

In 1986, Church of Spiritual Technology officials got the San Miguel County Commission to start maintaining the 16-mile dirt road. Then the church began tunneling into the side of a mountain.

By 1990, workmen had finished the tunnel, cleared an air strip atop a mesa and built at least three luxury homes, valued at \$2.5 million. The main house is massive, with 12,000 square feet of living space and 12 bedrooms.

But what goes on inside the remote, 4,175-acre spread known as San Miguel Ranch remains a mystery to most on the outside — because church officials aren't saying.

In Las Vegas, ranch foreman Chuck Dunigan has for two years chaired the Chamber of Commerce's Rails & Trails Committee, which sponsors a festival in June, but he won't talk about the ranch because "I choose not to" and because "I am not the spokesman."



RUSS BALL / JOURNAL

Repeated calls for more than a month to the media spokesman of the Church of Spiritual Technology in Los Angeles have gone unanswered.

Neighbors give the ranch mixed reviews. One describes its occupants as "real nice people." Others say they've heard that armed guards patrol the perimeter.

According to The Associated Press, the Internal Revenue Service on Oct. 1 restored the nonprofit, tax-exempt status of Scientology and more than 30 spinoffs, including the Church of Spiritual Technology.

The news agency reported the Trementina complex is one of  
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three archives for the works of Scientology's late founder, L. Ron Hubbard. The other two are near Petrolia, Calif., and Crestline, Calif.

Hubbard was a science-fiction writer whose dissatisfaction with mental-health care in the 1940s led to his development of "Dianetics" and "Scientology."

By the time he died in 1986 — when a chief lieutenant announced the death to a gathering of Scientologists, saying Hubbard had "willingly discarded the body" — Scientology was being called the world's newest religion.

Despite the nonprofit status, the San Miguel County Assessor lists the Church of Spiritual Technology and its San Miguel Ranch as taxable. The assessor values the land at some \$600,000 and the improvements at \$2.5 million, and has billed the church for about \$33,000 in 1994. The church has not yet asked San Miguel County for any exemption from taxes.

## Rumors abound

Trementina, "turpentine" in Spanish, is named for the pine oil once harvested there. The ranching country is so vast and sparsely populated that F-111 jets from Canon Air Force Base in Clovis regularly practice low-altitude flying over the rugged mountains that drop dramatically into the broad, flat Canadian River valley.

The ranch is well situated for privacy, with buildings tucked away at the base of a mountain and not visible from roads. The 16-mile dirt road leading up to the property is blocked about four miles from the houses by a padlocked, white, metal-pipe gate.



**L. Ron Hubbard,  
Scientology  
founder**



**San Miguel  
Ranch foreman  
Chuck  
Dunigan**

Jose Muñiz, who is building a house near where the road leaves paved NM 419, said he has never visited the ranch, but has heard that armed guards protect it.

"I'm a religious person," said Muñiz, who moved from Santa Fe a year ago. "If you've got God on your side, why do you need guns?"

Alfonso Sanchez, a neighbor whose wife has worked at the ranch, said he knows of no one carrying guns.

Sanchez said ranch employees helped him build a new, steel-frame house after his old one burned down Nov. 5.

Sanchez said the San Miguel Ranch contributed to his restoration of the nearby San Rafael Chapel. He also said the ranch paid the major share of the costs for the Farmers Electric Cooperative in Clovis last year to extend electric lines 11 miles to the ranch and several residences, including his own.

"Those are real nice people," Sanchez said, adding that ranch foreman Dunigan had offered to fly in an airplane from Albuquerque, in case of a medical emergency. He said Dunigan's wife flies into the ranch occasionally from her home in Los Angeles.

Sanchez said his wife cleaned houses on the ranch until it "ran out of money" two years ago.

Gilbert Gallegos, whose sister Pauline sold the church its first tract of land in San Miguel County a decade ago, said he, too, has heard the archive is heavily guarded, though he has never been on it.

"I've heard they've spent lots of money," said Gallegos, from nearby Trujillo. "The last I heard was that they were kind of running out of money."

Burke Denman, a Santa Fe building contractor who worked on the construction four years ago, calls stories about guns on the ranch "baloney." He said the only gun he recalls was a .22-caliber rifle used to kill rattlesnakes.

"They were one of the most pleasant clients I've ever dealt with," he said. "They're neat people and obviously intelligent."

## Movement has grown

The Church of Spiritual Technology's "goal of longevity embraces a minimum of 1,000-year life for the materials it handles," say documents filed by the church with Humboldt County officials in northern California, for the Petrolia archive.

The Church of Spiritual Technology claims 8 million followers worldwide and nearly \$400 million in assets.

IRS records released late last year say that before Hubbard died at age 74, he bequeathed \$30.3 million to archive his works, according to a recent story in the St. Petersburg Times.

The IRS records show that the Church of Spiritual Technology spent \$13 million in 1992 to preserve "scripture" on 1.8 million stainless steel plates and his lectures on 187,000 nickel records that can be played back with a stylus as crude as a thorn in the event of some future cataclysm, The Associated Press reported.

Linda Simmons Hight, media relations director for the Church of Spiritual Technology International in Los Angeles, said the Church of Spiritual Technology is a "separate, free-standing" corporation that is "in charge of archives" for Scientology.

Hight said she lived in Taos in the early 1970s and has been a practicing Scientologist for some 20 years, but knows nothing about the Trementina archive or the two in California.

"I'm not quotable," she said of her lack of knowledge about the archive project.

Robin Geer, corporate secretary for the Church of Spiritual Technology of New Mexico, said in a telephone interview from the church's Albuquerque office on Menaul that she doubts the Church of Spiritual Technology is connected to the Church of Scientology. Denise Jacobs, president of the New Mexico church, has not been available for comment.

The existence of the New Mexico archive was first revealed in September 1986. A story in the Las Vegas Optic newspaper quoted Russ Bellin, Church of Spiritual Technology ranch manager, who said 14 to 17 men were working on the 14-by-10-foot tunnel.

Bellin, who resides in California and has not been available for comment, said in the story the sandstone formation would keep the tunnel's contents at a steady, dry 63 degrees which is "perfect for the preservation of paper."

In January 1990, freelancer Sally Ooms published a story in the Santa Fe New Mexican about the project. She quoted Church of Spiritual Technology administrator Jane McNairn of Los Angeles about how the organization got the underground-archive idea from the Mormon church.

McNairn said Scientology lectures would be digitally recorded onto gold-plated, chrome compact discs, and books would be printed using archival-grade papers, cloths and threads made from pure cotton and linen fibers.

McNairn, who has not been available for comment for this article, told Ooms the Church of Spiritual Technology is only seeking privacy. The site in central San Miguel County was chosen because "it is away from the pollution of a major city and it is an area that is not likely to be a nuclear target," McNairn said.

About the same time Ooms' story appeared, Las Vegas city and San Miguel County officials toured the site.

Hilario Rubio Jr., a former county planner, recalled that he toured the archive with former City Councilor Dana Lucero, former County Manager Edward Lucero, former County Attorney Arthur Bustos and a deputy sheriff.

"There are so many rumors about it," said Rubio, who now works for the regional housing authority. "They built nice houses and a tunnel in the mountain to store records — exactly what they said they would do."

Bustos recalled that the tunnel was "the size you could put a train in" with several "finger corridors" off the main shaft.

But those now in office say all they know about the San Miguel Ranch is what they read in a newspaper four years ago.

Last September, a group of State Police officers toured the archive at the request of the Church of Spiritual Technology.

After what had happened in Waco, these people came to us because they wanted to cool the rumors and some of the misconceptions that were going on," recalled Capt. David Velarde, formerly commander of the Las Vegas office of the State Police.

Department of Public Safety Secretary Richard C de Baca, who joined the tour, said that he visited the tunnel, the houses and watched a demonstration of document preservation. He said video cameras are placed at the tunnel's entrance, but that none of the San Miguel Ranch employees carried guns.

### Luxury in the wilderness

State Construction Industry Division records show that contractor Burke Denman of Santa Fe built the steel-frame, stuccoed buildings at the San Miguel Ranch based on plans by architects from Mazria Associates of Santa Fe.

Building permits for more than \$2.3 million worth of construction were taken out in 1989 — including a nearly \$1.5 million, 12,000-square-foot main house; a \$524,700, 5,500-square-foot caretaker residence; a \$143,000, 1,500-square-foot guest house; and other structures.

A Santa Fe mining engineer who worked on the project described the underground tunnel to reporters some four years ago as Y-shaped — a 200-foot shaft that branches into two 150-foot legs. The tunnel's entrance, he said, was through one of the top floors of the caretaker residence.

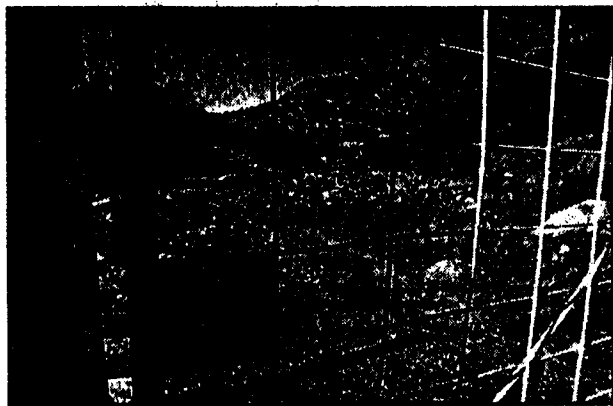
One workman employed there in 1989 and '90 said the main house on the property had 12 bedrooms and was "phenomenally elaborate." He said some of the church officials on the scene were armed and spoke a language he could not identify.

Others who worked on the project said they promised their clients not to discuss the project publicly.

The State Corporation Commission has no listing for the Church of Spiritual Technology or the San Miguel Ranch. But commission records indicate the Church of Scientology of New Mexico was incorporated as a non-profit entity in 1970, with an anticipated expiration date of 2070.



Above: Jose Muñiz, who is building a house some 16 miles from the San Miguel Ranch where Scientologists have built a archive complex, said he has never visited the ranch or met any of its employees. Left: In an aerial view of the Scientology retreat near Trementina, an airstrip can be seen on top of the mesa, the retreat is at lower right, and the building housing the tunnel entrance is at left. Below: The 16-mile dirt road leading up to the Scientology property is blocked about four miles from the houses by a padlocked, metal-pipe gate.



# Church Seeks World Conquest, Defector Says

Robert Vaughn Young, one of Scientology's chief public spokesmen until his defection four years ago, compares the underground archive near Trementina to a "pyramid for the pharaohs."

"Nothing is ever done lightly or innocently," he said. "Their goal is world conquest."

Young said the archive fits into Scientology's top leadership's plan to create a 1,000-year repository for the works of its founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

He said another plan calls for above-ground obelisks that would be engraved with Hubbard's words in various languages.

In recent telephone interviews with the Journal from his residence in the Los Angeles area, Young said people involved in local chapters of Scientology were zealots devoted to their cause.

"At that level, it's very harmless," he said. "Those people really believe in what they're doing ..."

"But as soon as you get into the organizational level, which has to do with what you're licensed to do, it gets very different. The organization became incredibly paranoid and went into a siege mentality in the mid-'60s."

In the 1970s, he said, paramilitary groups sprang up in Scientology's ranks.

By the 1980s, Scientology's leadership "began to devour itself," said Young, who left the organization in 1989. "There were always witch hunts and purges to find their enemies."

He said the Church of Spiritual Technology was created by top church leaders in 1982 "as a way to get tax exemptions."

Linda Simmons Hight, media relations director for the Church of Scientology International in Los Angeles since 1992, said in a telephone interview that since leaving his job with Scientology, Young has tried to make a living as an "expert for hire" against the organization.

Scientology is based on Hubbard's 1950 best-seller, "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health," which calls for freeing one's mind from trauma through intensive counseling called "auditing," involving a lie-detector-like device called an "electropsychometer" or "E meter."

One of Scientology's goals is to become a "clear" — a person who has rid himself of his or her "reactive" mind so as to achieve virtually perfect mental and physical health. An even higher goal is to become an "operating thetan" or "O.T." — a stage at which one supposedly remembers his or her past lives. Hight, who said she is "in a state of clear," said Scientologists believe "we live again because we're immortal."

The process of reaching Scientology's advanced stages can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to some reports. Hight said that figure was too high, but declined to name a figure.

"There is a system of fixed donations that vary from person to person," she said.

According to "L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?" by Hubbard's estranged son and another disillusioned Scientologist, the elder Hubbard told a meeting of science-fiction writers in 1947: "If you really want to make a million ... the quickest way is to start your own religion."

Hight said Hubbard's son has since recanted the 1987 book.

By the 1950s, Hubbard's book royalties had made him "a millionaire several times over," according to church literature.

In the '60s and '70s, Hubbard bought three ships. With his closest advisers, known collectively as the "Sea Organization" or "Sea Org," he sailed the north Atlantic and Mediterranean looking for an entire country for Scientology.

According to the book co-authored by Hubbard's son, Sea Org members who made mistakes questioned Hubbard's authority or tried to leave often were detained by what was known as the "Rehabilitation Project Force," or RPF, and forced to do "slave labor" in the lower decks of ships or in the basement boiler rooms of buildings.

Scientology claims in its recently published 690-page guidebook, "What is Scientology?" to be "the most open group on Earth." But Scientology's tenets don't recommend talking to the media. In a chapter called "Those Who Oppose Scientology," Hubbard is quoted as saying that there is no "good press."

"The politician, the reporter; the medico, the drug manufacturer; the militarist and the arms manufacturer; the police and the undertaker, to name the leaders of the list, fatten only upon the dangerous environment,]" Hubbard wrote. "Even individuals and family members can be Merchants of Chaos."