



Aimee Semple McPherson 1890-1944

September 27, marks the
80th Anniversary of death of
the Salford farm girl turned
global evangelist

Glamorous thrice-married Aimee Semple McPherson was a 1920s sensation who founded America's first megachurch.

Aimee was born in October 1890, to James and Minnie Kennedy, a Methodist and a Salvation Army devotee respectively, in Salford, Ontario. Her mother, Mildred Kennedy was a devout volunteer with the Salvation Army and as a child, McPherson would play 'Salvation Army' with classmates and preach the gospel to her dolls.

When she was 17, McPherson married an Irish Pentecostal missionary named Robert James Semple that she met while attending an Ingersoll revival meeting in 1907. Enchanted by Semple's word, McPherson converted to Pentecostalism and dedicated her life to studying the bible.



Aimee Kennedy, circa 1895



Aimee Kennedy &
Robert Semple,
1908

McPherson's marriage to Semple lasted less than two years; he died in Hong Kong after contracting malaria and dysentery while on an evangelistic tour to China. McPherson board a ship returning back to the United States.

In 1912, Aimee met her second husband, an accountant named Harold Stewart McPherson and gave birth to a son, Rolf McPherson. She struggled settling into life as a housewife in Providence, Rhode Island and suffered from depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder.



Aimee said that she 'heard a voice' urging her to preach after she miraculously recovered from a failed operation to address her appendicitis. Harold returned home one evening in 1915 and discovered his wife gone, she took the children and hit the road to preach the gospel in a Packard convertible that had 'Jesus is Coming Soon- Get Ready' painted on the side.



Aimee Semple McPherson adapted the techniques of vaudeville and the theater to evangelism, using costumes, lighting, scenery, props, massive orchestras, brass bands, huge choirs, and biblical dramatizations to achieve an unforgettable emotional impact during her sermons. Graced with a silver tongue, McPherson quickly amassed a large following as she preached at tent revivals and churches across the country. She enthralled audiences by speaking in histrionic tongues and performing miracle healing demonstrations where cripples could walk and the blind were made to see again. McPherson's preaching events became so popular that they had to be moved into larger venues to accommodate the growing audience. Soon, she outpaced her predecessor, Billy Sunday, the professional baseball player turned influential evangelist. Her travelling tabernacle eclipsed every theatrical and political touring event in American history between 1919- 1922.

McPherson officially established her own denomination in 1923 - the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (commonly known as Foursquare Church). The 'Foursquare' represented the four main beliefs: Christ's transformative salvation, baptism, divine healing and the eventual return of Christ. In 1923, McPherson built a homebase for the followers of her new denomination.

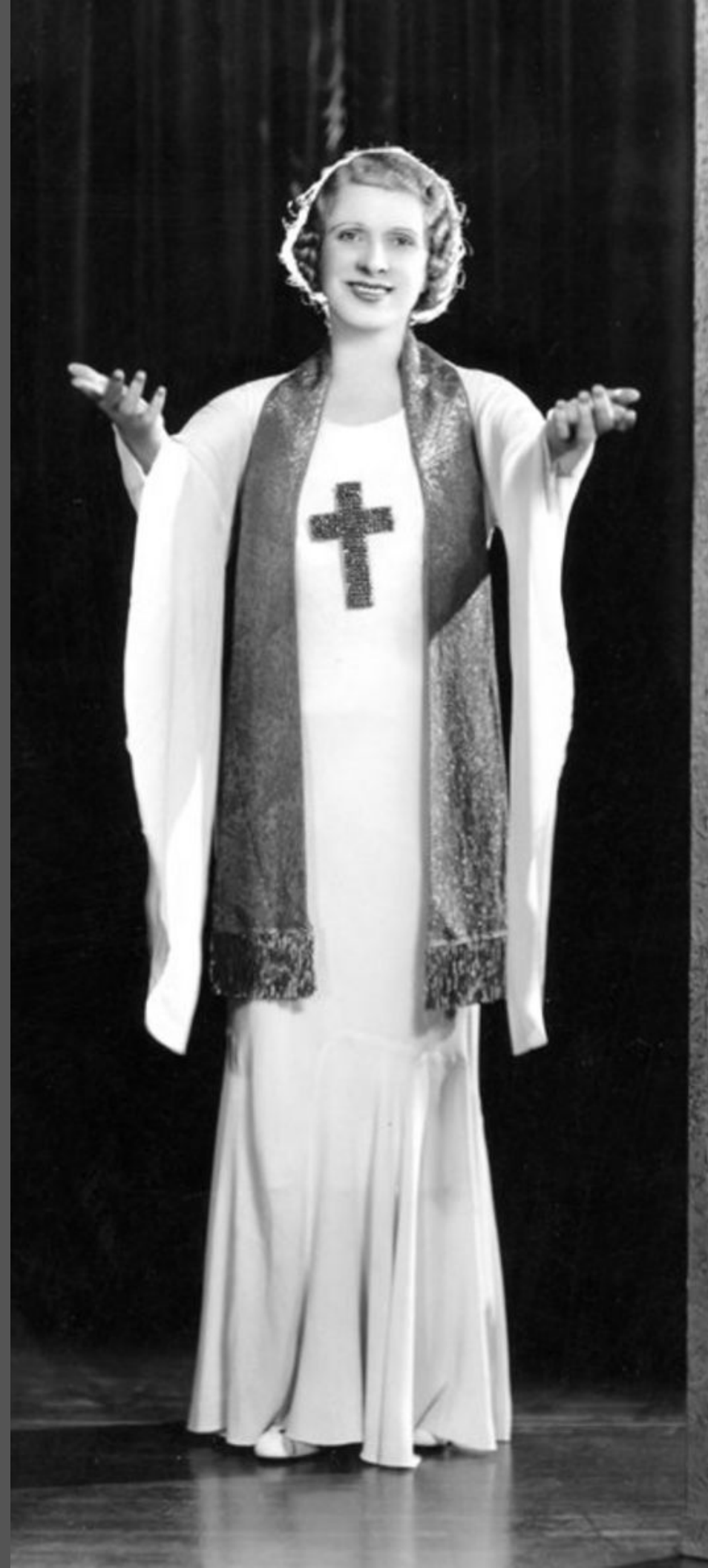


She resurrected a colossal white-domed church called Angelus Temple in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. The house of worship featured a massive stage and seated 5,300 spectators. According to church records, it drew 40 million visitors within the first seven years - making it the country's first megachurch and turning McPherson into a millionaire. McPherson's popularity grew as Hollywood became a tourist destination. She preached 22 sermons a week including her lavish Sunday night service that extra-trolleys and traffic police were needed to route cars through Echo Park.

Yet her fame wasn't without scandal. An international media furor ignited when, in 1926, she mysteriously disappeared while swimming at a beach in Santa Monica. She was thought to have drowned until a ransom note signed by "the kidnappers" was found.

She resurfaced more than 600 miles away and five weeks later in Mexico, claiming to have escaped her captors. Owing to alleged sightings of her while she was missing, McPherson was suspected of creating a ruse to cover up an affair with a married KFSG radio engineer.

During the depression, the Angelus Temple's Commissary provided food, clothing, and other necessities to needy families—no questions asked. In the 1940s, McPherson began barnstorming again, and in September 1944, she addressed 10,000 people in the Oakland Auditorium. She died the next day of kidney failure and the effects of the mixture of prescription drugs she had been taking. McPherson's funeral took place on her fifty-fourth birthday, October 9, 1944. Though her popularity had shrunk significantly since the 1920s, 50,000 people filed past her coffin. Her lasting legacy is the denomination she founded, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, with some 2 million members in nearly 30,000 churches worldwide.



Aimee Semple McPherson Dies Suddenly in Oakland

Famed Evangelist Believed Victim of Heart Attack

Illustrated on Page 3, Part I

Aimee Semple McPherson died yesterday.

The evangelist passed away in Oakland on one of her typical "magic carpet" crusades of whirlwind activity.

She was found in bed by her son Rolf, who said that, although unconscious, she was breathing heavily when he entered her room in the Leamington Hotel at 10:30 a.m.

Two doctors and an Oakland Fire Department inhalator squad worked in vain to revive her. She was pronounced dead at 11:15 a.m.

Although death was believed to have been caused by a heart attack, an autopsy, at first scheduled for 6 p.m. yesterday, will be performed at 9:30 a.m. today by Dr. E. F. Schmerl, Oakland autopsy surgeon. The postponement was requested by Rolf, to enable Attorney Joseph Fainer, who handled Mrs. McPherson's legal affairs, to be present.

Sleeping Capsules Found

The autopsy was ordered after a bottle containing about 20 sleeping capsules was found in her handbag. The bottle was about half full and there were several capsules scattered on the floor beside her bed.

Rolf said that Mrs. McPherson, who would have been 54 on Oct. 9, had been having difficulty in sleeping and that she was "keyed up" after speaking before a throng of 10,000 Tuesday night. She had been taking sedatives to insure rest, Rolf said.

Dr. Norman Leet and Dr. B. M. Palmer, who were called when Rolf was unable to arouse his mother, expressed belief that death had been caused by a heart attack, but added that perhaps Mrs. McPherson had taken too many sleeping tablets.

Doctor Denies Prescription

Although the name of the Los Angeles physician who has attended Mrs. McPherson for the last four years, Dr. Wilburn Smith, was reported to be on a prescription attached to the bottle of sleeping capsules, he emphatically denied last night that he had prescribed the sedative.

"It's a mystery to me how my name was on that bottle," Dr. Smith declared.

Dr. Smith said that he last saw the evangelist two months ago and at that time her heart and blood pressure were normal.

Dr. Smith said that while the evangelist was dying in Oakland yesterday morning he received a telephone call from Oakland but was operating at the time and could not answer.

Race Run With Death

After failing to get him, Dr. Smith said that the party in Oakland called another Los Angeles doctor whom Mrs. McPherson also had consulted recently. This physician, Dr. Smith said, recommended Dr. Palmer in Oakland.

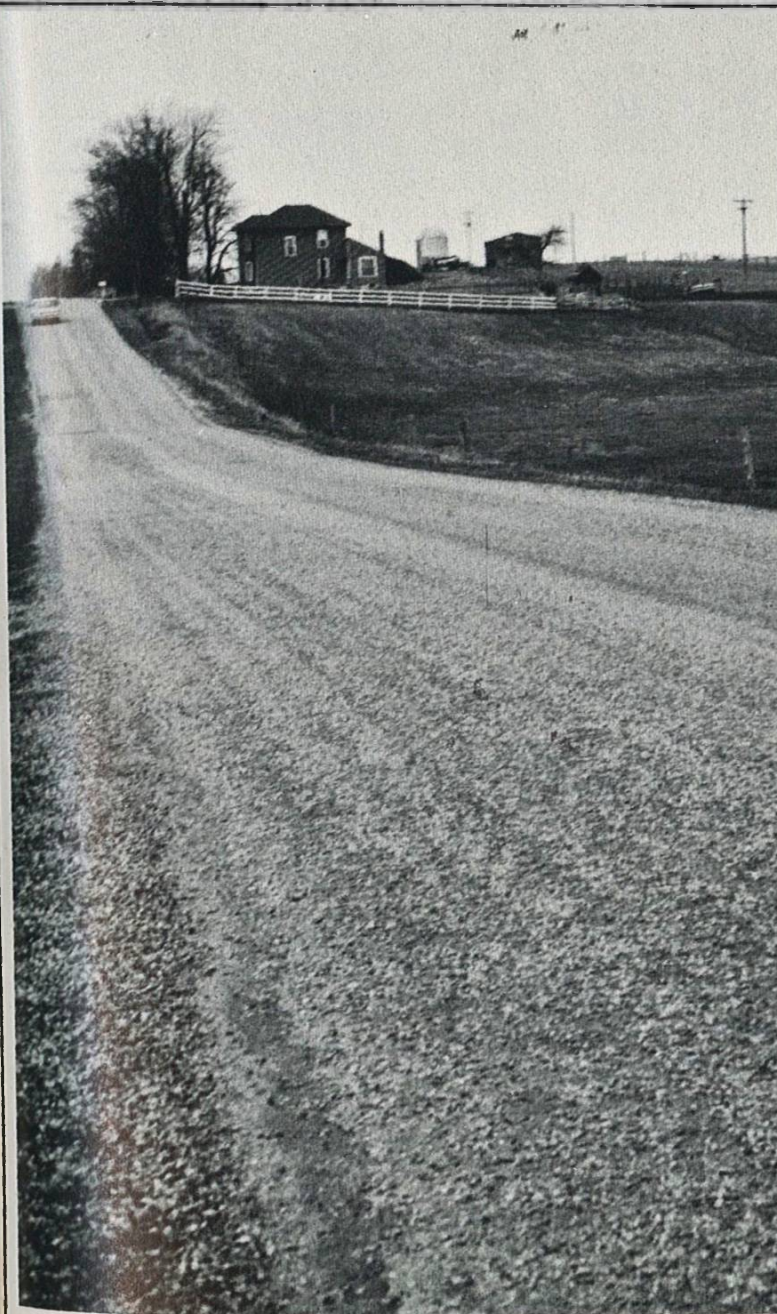
Inasmuch as Dr. Palmer was one of the two physicians who were finally called to the evangelist's bedside, it is believed that long-distance telephone lines between here and Oakland ran a race with death—and lost.

Besides her son, Mrs. McPherson was accompanied on the trip to Oakland by Miss Angela Sid.

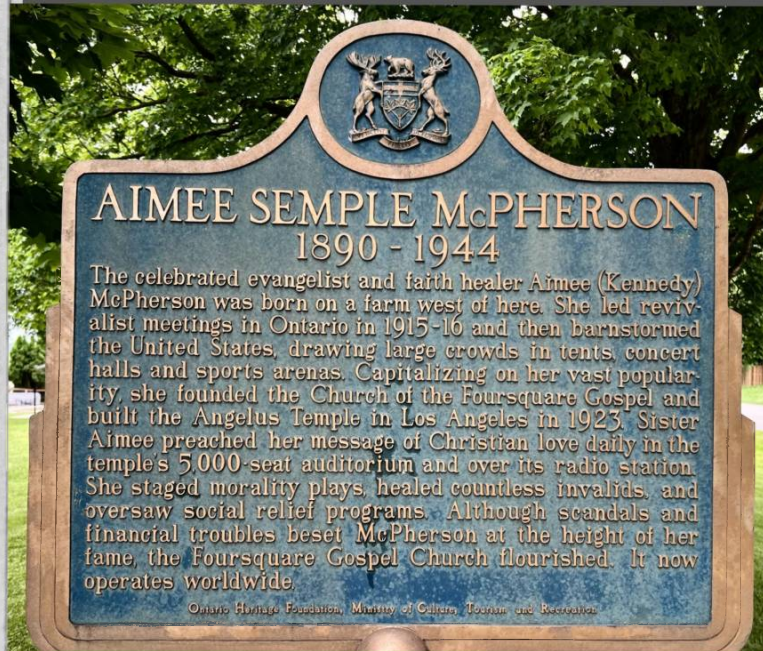
Turn to Page 6, Column 1



PASSES — Aimee Semple McPherson, world-famous religious leader, who died yesterday in Oakland.



Aimee's Salford farmhouse as it stands today. The barn, Minnie's lilacs, and dogwood are gone; only the vast, fertile fields James Kennedy tilled remain. *Author's collection*



Plaque located at
383908 Salford Rd, Salford, ON

