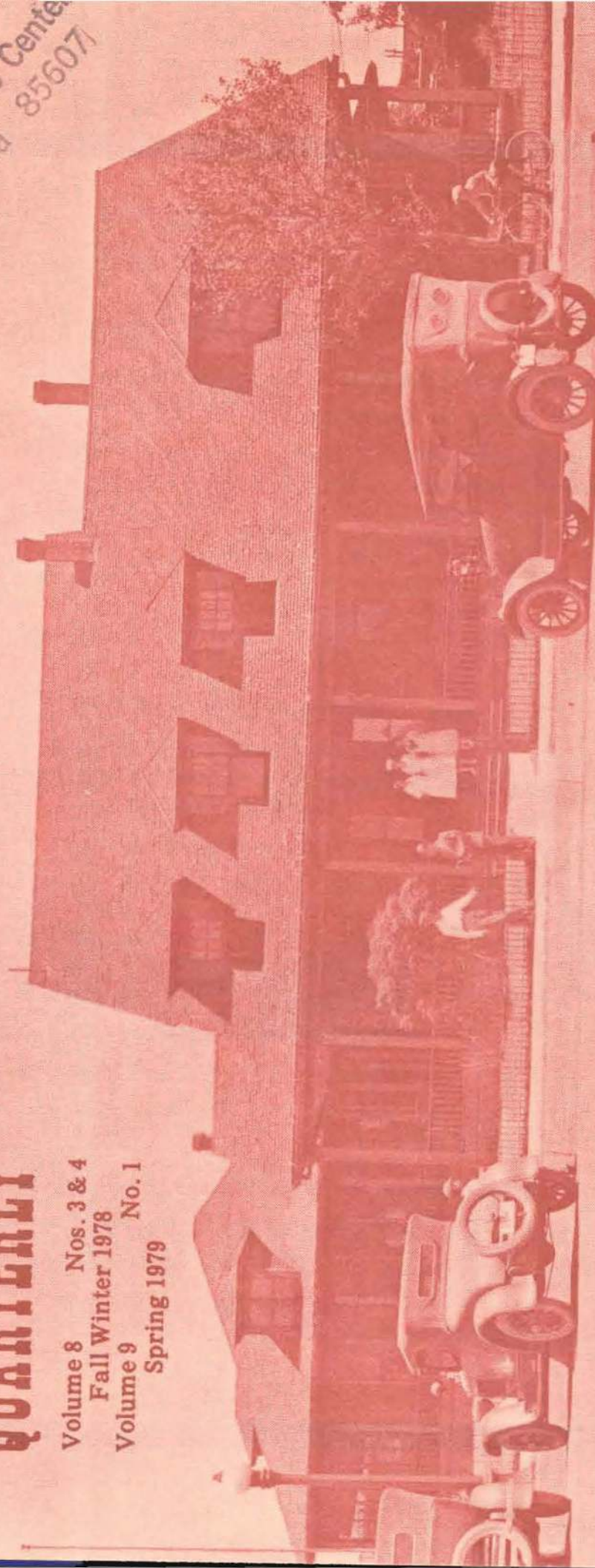


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Calumet and Arizona Hospital  
(Now Phelps Dodge Clinic on 10th Street)  
Douglas, Arizona



A Publication of the Cochise County Historical and  
Archæological Society

P. O. Box 818

Douglas, Arizona 85607



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HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 818  
Douglas, Arizona 85607

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## HENCEFORTH AND FOREVER AIMEE AND DOUGLAS

by Larry D. Christiansen

Half a century ago in June of 1926 strange things happened in and about Douglas, Arizona. The local newspaper issued the morning of June 23 told of the first live porcupine ever found in the area being exhibited in the city the previous day. Crowds gathered about the box where the prickly creature huddled, and the paper reported the tale that the animal threw off almost fifty of its quills in self-defense while "new ones appeared to grow out of his flesh to replace those" thrown off. The paper offered no explanation of how or why the porcupine made its way into the area. This page four mystery was repeated in an extra that same morning and again in an afternoon extra, but probably no one paid any attention to the second and third printings. A bigger and stranger mystery and tale took the center stage from the porcupine, and the local area played a key role in the dramatic reappearance of the foremost woman evangelist of the time and probably of all time. This article will recount the reappearance and the evangelist's story with an assessment of its impact on the local area.

Sister Aimee Semple McPherson, the renowned Los Angeles evangelist who had built Angelus Temple and organized her own church organization with thousands of members, unexplainably disappeared from a California beach on May 18, 1926. It was supposed she had drowned and a search began to recover her body. The hunt expanded into a giant operation in which two persons lost their lives. A week after her disappearance a \$500,000 ransom note came to Angelus Temple, but received little credence as crank letters started coming in by the dozens. When the search grew long, some discounted the drowning theory and suggested the disappearance was part of a giant publicity stunt. The press now dropped the full name of the evangelist and even the respectful titles usually associated with her. From now on it would be primarily "Aimee," which not only met the papers' needs for headlines and short words, but it also reflected a change in attitude toward the missing evangelist. The newspapers mentioned a possible link between Aimee and her former radio engineer who had disappeared from his home and wife the same time. The press thought they had a lead in the case when a certain blue Chrysler coupe, the radioman and a mysterious woman appeared 250 miles north of Los Angeles. The trail turned south and was lost at Santa Barbara by a timid young reporter who stopped the car one night but failed to identify the woman who wore goggles or large sunglasses and a concealing hat.

The Douglas and Bisbee newspapers covered the above stories except for the connection with the radioman, which seemed to be



the private domain of the California papers. Coverage in the local communities began May 19 with headlines announcing the evangelist's drowning and continued with almost daily front page coverage for five weeks. The **Douglas Daily Dispatch's** last article came on June 19 with a story on the Los Angeles coroner denying a request from Aimee's mother for a death certificate. The **Bisbee Daily Review** in its coverage included a picture of the missing evangelist and concluded its coverage with a short article on June 18 about a body found on the Oregon coast which might be the evangelist's. As the search lost its zest and was given up in early June, the Press' leads were lost and the coverage amounted to little more than periodic updates by mid-June. Then the scene shifted almost 600 miles east to the desert of northern Sonora, and burst open again in an even more bizarre drama which received world wide attention by the mass media for over eight months.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after midnight of the new day of June 23 Frederick Conrad Schansel, custodian of the quarantine slaughterhouse that straddled the international boundary a mile east of Agua Prieta and Douglas, had a strange caller. Awakened by the barking of his dogs, he stepped out of his quarters dressed only in his underwear. He quieted the dogs, then heard a woman's voice and saw her pressed against a nearby gate. She asked for help in finding the police. When Schansel asked what she wanted, she repeated that she wanted the police. When the German custodian queried, "What you done?" she replied that she hadn't done anything and still wanted the police. Then the woman told Schansel she had been kidnapped and spirited away. When the custodian asked who had taken her, he was only told "some people." The lady did not give her name voluntarily nor when asked. She asked for a telephone and was told none was available. She asked if the man had an automobile and was again told no. Next she asked if he had a horse and received a negative reply. Schansel told her she was in Mexico and to cross the fence into the United States. He would dress and she could rest until morning. The woman asked if he had a wife or any other ladies in his residence. When he replied "no," she asked what the building was. When he told her it was a slaughterhouse she said she would go on and asked how far it was to the first house with a lady. Schansel kept asking who she was and what she wanted. She asked, "Please tell me how far it is to a house where I can get the police or there will be a lady." Told it was about a mile the woman started off in a fast walk toward the lights of the nearby town.<sup>2</sup>

1. **Douglas Daily Dispatch** (Douglas, Arizona), May 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30, June 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 19, 1926. Hereafter cited as **Dispatch**. **Bisbee Daily Review** (Bisbee, Arizona), May 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, June 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 18, 1926. Hereafter cited as **Review**.

2. **Dispatch**, June 23 extra, June 24 and 24 extra, June 25 extra, 1926. **Review**, June 24, 1926.



The custodian quickly put on his overalls and followed her on the opposite side of the border until she entered Agua Prieta. Schansel returned to his bed and could only guess the nature of the business of his unusual visitor. He supposed she was an American who had placed a dent or two in the prohibition law of the United States. He later recalled that she once answered his numerous questions as to her identity with a statement instead of a name—"the world knows who I am." Still it puzzled the custodian why she would not give her name during their conversation of that night.<sup>3</sup>

A little later Ramon Gonzales, proprietor of the O.K. Bar in Agua Prieta, closed his bar at 1 a.m. and walked to his home on Second Street near Seventh Avenue. His wife Theresa was awake in bed and had left the hall light on for her husband. Ramon undressed and lay on the bed smoking a cigarette with the light still on as he waited for a friend to drop by and tell him the time they would leave on a trip in the morning. Shortly a woman's voice called out in English, "Hello! Hello!" Ramon answered back and a shadowy figure appeared by the window asking if they had a telephone. When told there was no telephone at the house, the woman asked where she could find one and asked where she could find the police. Mr. Gonzales told her to wait while he dressed. Moments later Ramon and Theresa came out of the house, but could not immediately find the person they had been conversing with. Theresa noticed the gate by the hedge ajar and found a body lying there. Thinking the woman was dead, Ramon ran across the street to get his neighbor Ernesto Boubion, Presidente of Agua Prieta. Finding Boubion not home, Ramon returned to the woman's body now showing signs of life so he picked her up and placed her on his porch.<sup>4</sup>

The Gonzaleses placed a pillow under the lady's head and a quilt over her. By the light of a lamp they saw half open eyes and a twitching eyelid. The woman had no hat and her hair was neatly tucked under a silk hairnet. Theresa rubbed the woman's arms with alcohol and after she revived, Ramon, in his limited English, asked her where she came from; if she had a husband or any family. The lady responded to each question stating that she was from Los Angeles, had no husband, and her family consisted of a mother and two children. Then the woman began talking very fast and the Gonzaleses could not understand most of what she said. They saw Boubion returning home and called him over. He listened for a moment and decided they needed an interpreter. At 3 a.m. the two men went to the Gem Saloon where an American bartender worked. He still had customers and could not leave, but suggested they get the "jitney driver." Boubion picked up Agua Prieta Police Chief Sylvana Villa and the three men found the

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.



"jitney driver" in front of a night club. Johnny Anderson, who operated a taxi between Agua Prieta and Douglas, went to the Gonzales' home. In the meantime the woman had asked Teresa for a drink of water, and Theresa had taken the silk hairnet off and let the woman's hair down.<sup>5</sup>

Anderson found the woman still lying on the porch. When he knelt down and began to speak to her in English, she grabbed him and let out with what Anderson described as a cry of relief. He later recalled that she "clung to him as if he were her only hope." Then she fainted, but quickly revived and began to talk. She identified herself as Sister Aimee Semple McPherson, the Los Angeles evangelist who had been kidnapped five weeks earlier in California, and had escaped from her abductors the previous day about noon and had been walking ever since. Anderson relayed this information to the Mexican witnesses in Spanish. Presidente Boubion told the taximan to take the woman across the border and let her talk to the Douglas police. The men placed the woman in the taxi and Anderson drove off. Boubion asked the Gonzaleses if the senora drank any water and was told she had eventually drunk two glasses. Puzzled, Boubion repeated, "Two glasses?" and turned and went home.<sup>6</sup>

Anderson drove to the Douglas Police Station arriving a few minutes before 4 a.m. Standing in front of the station was George W. Cook who operated a merchant patrol and served as a special policeman on duty from midnight to 4 a.m. Anderson called Cook over to the taxi to view the woman slumped on the front seat. The taxi driver told Cook she claimed to be Aimee Semple McPherson. When Cook stepped close to observe the woman, she spoke softly identifying herself and said she wanted to get in touch with her family as soon as possible. Anderson interrupted and repeated her account of escaping from kidnappers and flight to safety to Agua Prieta. Cook directed Anderson to take her to the hospital and he would follow in his own car. Just then Cook's relief, Officer O.E. Patterson, arrived at the station and all went to the Calumet and Arizona Hospital. Anderson and Patterson assisted the woman into the hospital where Cook had a problem with Dr. W---- who lived on the second floor of the hospital. Cook tried to register the woman as Mrs. McPherson, but the doctor said he did not care who the lady was only if she could pay for hospitalization. Because the other men were dubious of her identity, Cook personally obligated himself to pay the hospital bill. Cook was inclined to believe the woman was the famous evangelist, but he too had doubts.<sup>7</sup>

5. Ibid.

6. Dispatch, June 24, 1926.

7. Dispatch, June 23 second extra, 1926. Review, June 24, 1926. Interview with Mrs. George W. Cook, Jan. 28, 1973.



Anderson and Patterson helped the woman to a private room and placed her on the bed then stepped into the hall while nurse Margaret Attaway undressed the woman. After his ordeal of registering the patient, Cook came to her room to get some information for his report. He apologetically asked her if he could smell her breath and found she had not been drinking liquor. He noted some red splotches on her wrists which she said came from the rope tied around them. Cook took from under the bed a pair of kid slippers and she identified them as the shoes she wore. Just then the night nurse brought a glass of lemonade the patient had requested; however, no drinking water was placed in her room until thirty minutes after her admittance. After Cook left to file his report a nurse washed the patient's hands and face and removed two or three cactus thorns from one ankle. The nurse observed the red marks on her wrists and two small blisters on her toes. Otherwise the physical condition of the woman was good, even remarkable for a person who had supposedly undergone a long desert ordeal. There were no signs of dehydration, emaciation or sunburn. Her lips were not cracked, parched or swollen, and her tongue was also not swollen. Along with normal color her medical chart read—temperature 98 degrees, pulse 72 and respiration 20. She appeared exhausted and nervous, but spoke energetically when questioned.<sup>8</sup>

Patterson or Cook notified Douglas Police Chief Percy Bowden of the patient and the possibility of a case. Cook telephoned his wife to come down and see if she could identify the woman. Then Cook notified the Douglas and Bisbee newspapers. Mrs. Cook arrived at the hospital before daylight and stated that in her opinion the woman looked like the evangelist. Soon Chief Percy Bowden and Sergeant Alonzo B. Murchison of the Douglas Police, and William McCafferty, editor of the **Douglas Daily Dispatch**, joined Officer Patterson at the hospital. McCafferty, who had met the famous evangelist at a Denver revival a few years earlier, recognized Sister McPherson and she claimed to have remembered him. The men looked at her shoes and clothing, then listened to her story. Aimee gave her account in greater detail than she had previously, but she frequently departed from the basic facts with a lot of special pleadings such as requesting the local authorities to get in touch with the Los Angeles police at once; asking that the news be broken gently to her mother; warning Los Angeles that she heard her abductors talk about kidnapping other prominent citizens including Mary Pickford; and begging that her daughter Roberta be guarded. Although her account had few details, it laid the basic framework of being abducted at the beach, kept captive in a small house, tortured and held for \$500,000 ransom, then removed to a second shack outside

8. *Ibid.* *Dispatch*, July 13, 1926.





"Sister Aimee Semple McPherson lying in a hospital bed, June 23, 1926. Douglas Mayer A.E. Hinton visiting the patient."



the Mexican town she entered last night, and that her kidnappers were two men and a woman.<sup>9</sup>

Aimee said she escaped the previous day around noon. She ran as fast as her condition would allow, falling frequently from exhaustion. She finally saw a mountain and moved toward it and reached it about dark. Soon she saw a fence and moved toward it and came upon a road paralleling the fence. She told of struggling along the road and falling again several times. She came upon a small shack, but it was empty and she continued in the direction of some patches of red light. She told of encountering a man at a large building she later learned was a slaughterhouse. She was afraid to tell him who she was, and he offered her no assistance except directing her toward the nearby town. Aimee dramatically told how she forced herself to travel the last mile, falling repeatedly. In town she stopped at a small house and called for help and asked for the police but received no help. She went to another house and dropped unconscious before a gate.<sup>10</sup>

The men left the hospital to perform their public duties. The Douglas police assigned Murchison, a man very familiar with the area and the desert in general, to direct the search effort. He contacted the Agua Prieta authorities and arranged for a coordinated effort. At 6 a.m. the Douglas police called the Los Angeles police with such startling news that Herman Cline, chief of detectives who had worked on the earlier aspects of the McPherson case, was awakened at home to receive the news. Arrangements were made for a later telephone connection from the hospital in Douglas to Aimee's mother in Los Angeles. Cline traveled to the Angelus Temple residence and asked a sleepy Mrs. Minnie Kennedy what she knew of the report he had received about her daughter's escape from kidnappers in Arizona or Mexico. Mrs. Kennedy said she could not believe it. Soon the telephone rang with a long distance call from Douglas. While mother and daughter talked, Editor McCafferty listened to the conversation from Douglas while Cline listened from Los Angeles. Aimee, after assuring her mother she was alive and unharmed, launched into a monologue of family history apparently to dispell any doubts as to her identity. However, her mother immediately recognized Aimee's voice so perhaps the exhibition was for other ears. When the evangelist started to tell her mother of her recent experiences Mrs. Kennedy cut her off sharply and warned her not to talk. Mrs. Kennedy told Aimee she was coming to Douglas. Aimee concluded the call with a request, "Tell the chief to come with you. Tell him he needs a rest. I want him to come." Aimee,

9. Interview with Mrs. George W. Cook, Jan. 28, 1973. Dispatch, June 23 first and second extras, 24, 25, 1926.

10. Dispatch, June 23 first and second extras, 24, 1926.



who had already eaten breakfast, was not about to get any rest. Sitting up in bed she curled her hair with an iron borrowed from a nurse; apparently she knew she would soon receive a stream of reporters, photographers and other visitors.

Editor McCafferty left the hospital right after Sister told her story to the Douglas police and went to the newspaper office and summoned his co-workers to break the important news to the citizens of Douglas, Cochise County and the world. His newspaper was a morning paper and its regular issue had already been printed and distributed telling of the porcupine and the temperature hit 98 degrees the previous day, and proudly announced that "Douglas Is the Second Largest City on the Southern United States Border and the Gateway to Sonora, the Treasure House of Mexico." The **Dispatch** had a scoop and this Sonoran treasure could not wait until the next morning so an extra had to go out as soon as possible. The extra contained only a new headline and a signed article by William Fraley McCafferty which took up about seventy percent of the first page. The rest of page one and pages two through eight were the same as the regular morning issue. The headline stated: "AIMEE SEMPLE McPHERSON FOUND ALIVE." McCafferty's article told readers that Aimee was "so frightened she can hardly talk," and in the very next paragraph he claimed she told a "coherent story of her abduction." The newspaper related the evangelist's account of her ordeal, with the newspaper supplying such details as the mountain being Niggerhead, the red lights the glow of the smelter slag dump, and identified the man at the slaughterhouse as a "Mexican." The extra described how she was found and cared for by a Mexican family until an "American" brought her to the hospital where Aimee recognized Editor McCafferty and asked him to "take charge of all newspaper reports." The **Dispatch** broke all records for local newspapers and had its extra on the street by 8 a.m. telling of one of the biggest (McCafferty claimed it was the biggest) stories Douglas ever had.<sup>11</sup>

The newspaper extra and the grapevine spread the word of Douglas' famous visitor. Douglasites began to gather and soon "hundreds of persons" and automobiles packed the street before the hospital. The news reached the rest of the country and caused a furor with a rush of reporters, photographers and the curious to Douglas. But it took time to reach the border community and in the meantime local officials, reporters and photographers carried the day. Douglas' Mayor A.E. Hinton and several local ministers visited Sister's bedside as did the local reporters and photographers. Aimee held court repeating her story again and again. McCafferty returned to the hospital and apparently brought Aimee a copy of his extra. Among her first words to him

11. **Dispatch**, June 23 first and second extras, 1926.



on this second visit were, "I feel like one almost resurrected from the dead." As other reporters came in the evangelist announced, "Douglas people are wonderful," and asked the press to thank them for her. She heaped praise upon the local newspaper with these words—"I want to commend the veracity, the rapidity with which the **Douglas Dispatch** got out their first extra. The story was absolutely correct." Now in the second round with the press Aimee moved from her account of abduction and escape to telling her life story of early life in Canada, a bride in China, the death of her missionary husband and her evangelistic career. When she concluded she added, consciously or unconsciously, "It does just seem so cruel . . . I suffered so the least my people can do is to welcome me back. I want to get back to my work." The returned evangelist had fears and doubts which remained to bother her until she arrived back at her temple where the shouting, clapping and foot stamping of her people chased these fears away.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of Mrs. McPherson's verification of accuracy, the **Dispatch** in its second extra of June 23rd had to correct a few mistakes in its first story such as turning the "Mexican" at the slaughterhouse into the German Conrad Schansel. Mistakes such as this were insignificant and came as a result of the paper not checking the details of the evangelist's story in the rush to get the paper out. But with more time when the press expanded their accounts, more important errors crept into the newspapers. Such was the case when the press introduced imaginative details about the evangelist arriving in Agua Prieta with her shoes cut to shreds and with "mud-stained" clothes. The most glaring mistake by the Douglas and Bisbee newspapers came when they gave a fuller account of Aimee's meeting with the slaughterhouse custodian. Both papers interviewed Schansel and printed his contributions along with giving his underwear front page coverage. The papers claimed that Mrs. McPherson's and Schansel's stories were "identical in every particular." Yet in printed reality they differed in two important aspects. Aimee claimed she never knew she was in Mexico until after she reached Agua Prieta. Schansel maintained he told her at the slaughterhouse that she was in Mexico. More significant was the discrepancy of the two stories in regard to the evangelist covering the distance from the slaughterhouse to the town. Aimee emphasized that she struggled along falling frequently and only with great effort rise and go on. Schansel, who followed her, had her leaving the slaughterhouse in a fast walk and he did not see her fall. Neither the newspapers nor the law enforcement officials pursued these differences, although as the case quickly turned they both were certainly pertinent.<sup>13</sup>

The search effort directed by Sergeant Murchison began before sunup. Murchison, Patterson and Agua Prieta Police Chief

12. Review, June 24, 1926. **Dispatch**, June 23 second extra, 1926.

13. *Ibid.*



Sylvano Villa along with some other men began their efforts at the Gonzales home. They hoped to pick up Aimee's trail and follow it back to the shack and possibly capture the abductors. Shortly the Mexican authorities brought their line riders and some noted trackers—Yaqui Indians—into the search. By 9 a.m. the Americans had the service of Charles E. Cross, a cowboy with over thirty-five years' experience of riding over the area and a reputation as an expert tracker. Later Cochise County authorities, reporters and others joined the searchers. Murchison's party, backtracking from Agua Prieta, encountered the imprint of a woman's shoes near the road that paralleled the international border. They followed the tracks along the road, occasionally losing the trail, then picking it up again. Less than a mile from Agua Prieta the trackers left the road and followed the trail to the slaughterhouse and then back to the road further east where the tracks were lost and not picked up in the immediate vicinity. However, a mile further east on the road the searchers discovered more footprints, but unexpectedly the prints now led eastward away from Agua Prieta. Further investigation revealed that the footprints began where automobile tire tracks showed a vehicle had recently turned around and headed toward Agua Prieta. The eastbound prints followed the dirt road a short distance then left the road and led to a garita—a small rain shelter used by the patrolling Mexican rurales. The garita had not been lived in recently and the tracks circled the shelter and returned to the road and continued eastward. After a short distance the tracks crossed to the opposite side of the road and turned westward toward Agua Prieta. The footprints went almost back to the start of the eastbound tracks and then disappeared. The last footprints were, to say the least, puzzling. Murchison wondered if they were Aimee's; if so, they were baffling.<sup>14</sup>

Back at the hospital Aimee had a constant stream of reporters and other visitors. The influx of people into the hospital hindered the work of the doctors and nurses so a guard was stationed at the entrance to restrict admittance to the hospital. To each group of visitors Sister McPherson repeated her story and concluded at least one session by saying, "That's all there is to it." Then another reporter or group arrived and she would relate the affair again. Almost everyone who heard the account from Aimee's own lips agreed it was one of the most extraordinary and sensational abductions and escapes on record. When a nurse tried to restrict the onslaught of reporters and visitors so the patient could rest, Aimee advised her, "Let the reporters in! I just can't refuse to tell my story. They will tell it to hundreds of thousands." So the human wave continued unchecked into the evangelist's room.<sup>15</sup>

14. *Dispatch*, June 24, 1926. *Review*, June 24, 1926.

15. *Dispatch*, June 23 first and second extras, 24, 24 extra, 1926. *Review*, June 24, 25, 1926.



Reporters, photographers and motion picture cameramen came into Douglas by chartered airplanes, trains and automobiles. The vanguard arrived about noon June 23 from the west coast in two airplanes. The photographers and cameramen quickly took some pictures which were returned to California the same day by the planes. Aimee greeted the Los Angeles press with questions of her family and Angelus Temple. She asked if the crowds were still coming to the temple, and then declared, "Angelus Temple is my life! Nothing else amounts to anything." She asked a final anxious question, "Do you think I will be welcomed back?" Then she quickly busied herself by looking at a handful of Congratulatory telegrams, either waiting for an answer to her query or to cover her doubts and foreboding.<sup>16</sup>

Impatiently the Los Angeles reporters tried to shorten the preliminaries and pressed her to tell her story. With a more aggressive press Aimee stipulated that she must be allowed to tell her story straight through with no questions or interruptions. She cautioned she could not give dates, time or places since she had been chloroformed, gagged, blindfolded and locked up. Beginning as always with the abduction at the beach, Aimee's story emphasized her seizure and captivity in the first house with very little to nothing on the second shack and her escape. At the conclusion of her account she allowed questions; only this time the questions did not center on better descriptions of the kidnappers or more details on the shacks. The Los Angeles reporters concerned themselves with asking Aimee about rumors which had arisen during her absence such as her relationship with her former radio operator and did she expect to marry again. The questions upset Aimee and she asked the press to help "clear up any misapprehensions" that might exist in people's minds.<sup>17</sup>

One of Aimee's most important visitors was Cochise County Sheriff James F. McDonald. He arrived at the hospital about 11:30 a.m. and found her receiving a steady flow of callers which later he recalled made it impossible to get a complete and definite statement due to numerous interruptions. He questioned her regarding her abductors and the last captivity shack, but received vague and disappointing answers. The sheriff left Aimee's room and picked up her shoes and clothing from a nurse. After inspecting them closely, he had them locked in the First National Bank vault. McDonald and his deputies crossed into Mexico and entered the search of the desert. The area abound with mesquite, cacti, catclaw, rock and shale. After several hours of looking over the area, the sheriff took note of his shoes and clothing along with that of his deputies. Their daylight venture had been brief with no running, falling or lying down, but their shoes were scuffed and

16. Dispatch, June 23 second extra, 1926.

17. Dispatch, June 23 second extra, 24, 1926.



scratched, their dusty clothes marked with perspiration and tears. The sheriff was satisfied he had made the right decision to impound the evangelist's clothing and shoes.<sup>18</sup>

About noon of June 23 Murchison and Cross returned to Douglas after the frustration of trying to make the footprints meaningful to the search. The two men visited Aimee at the hospital to obtain more information. Since the backtracking had been stymied by the confusing footprints, the searchers wanted something more material to look for. Murchison questioned Aimee about the shack she had escaped from twenty-four hours earlier and received two very important details. First, she maintained that during her flight (estimated to have been 14 hours long and covered perhaps 20 miles) she had not crossed a road or fence; second, and more significant, the captivity shack had a wooden floor. Aimee's two details did two things. It narrowed the search field to a small area shaped like a triangle. This triangle had as one leg the nine miles of International border fence from Agua Prieta to Niggerhead Mountain, then a right angle to the base consisting of eight miles of the Gallardo Ranch fence to the Agua Prieta-Cenasas road, and then the eleven miles of the well-traveled road back to Agua Prieta. The only place this search triangle could be entered without crossing a fence or a road was in Agua Prieta. Aimee's second detail of the wooden floor eliminated the three shacks inside the delineated search area as well as all others within 150 miles. Both Murchison and Cross knew no shack with a wooden floor existed in the area even without looking. Nevertheless, the two men responded to duty and returned to the search.<sup>19</sup>

Cross, with Officer Patterson, returned to Mexico immediately and extended the search further to the east and south. Murchison obtained Sheriff McDonald's permission to take one of Aimee's shoes out of the bank vault and into the search area. Murchison, accompanied by reporter Harold Henry, returned to the first footprints and compared them with the shoe. He thought they matched. Near the slaughterhouse the shoe matched the tracks perfectly—same type, size and the "New Era" trademark on the heel was imprinted in reverse in the tracks. The check of the tracks around the garita and eastbound footprints showed no identifiable heel trademark, but otherwise the tracks and shoe matched. Murchison believed Aimee had made all the tracks—including those going away from Agua Prieta—found that morning. In the meantime, Cross and Patterson discovered some tracks in a sandy wash seven miles out of Agua Prieta (between 3 and 4 miles) from the last tracks. These tracks ran due north to the road that paralleled the border, and they were only visible a short distance and disappeared. Murchison compared the shoe

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Dispatch*, June 24, 24 extra, 1926. *Review*, June 24, 25, 1926.



with the tracks and found them to be the same size, but again the heel trademark was not visible. Furthermore, the tracks started abruptly, ended at the dirt road, and were two miles from Niggerhead where Aimee said she first struck the road. These footprints were as bewildering as the others, if they were Aimee's.<sup>20</sup>

Posses checked the three shacks in the search triangle. Two of them—the garita and an old mescal plant built of poles and a thatched roof—were empty with abundant evidence that no one had recently stayed in them, plus they had earthen floors. The third shack, made of adobe, had no wooden floor and was occupied by the Francisco Perez family. Posses, unofficial groups and individuals looked for the shack, tracks and other signs all day extending their efforts outside the triangle and even into the United States. The location of the shack quickly became the supermystery of the case and without it there was really no starting point to pursue the kidnappers. Several searchers tried unsuccessfully to find more tracks to link the discovered footprints together. Subsequent extensive and intensive searches failed to reveal any more significant tracks made by a woman, although terrain and road conditions were such that tracks should have been left by anyone walking over the area or on the road. Interestingly, all the tracks were found along the road or close nearby. The first day of the search had been fruitless, puzzling and frustrating, but officials on both sides of the border were not ready to quit. By dusk Mexican soldiers cordoned off the search area and covered all passes and trails out of the area. A close watch had earlier been imposed on the International border and the Douglas-Agua Prieta crossing point.<sup>21</sup>

June 23, 1926 had been a hectic day for Douglas. The local newspaper had put out two extras along with its regular edition. News and rumors swept the city and hundreds of the curious gathered about the hospital to view the procession of officials, police, ministers, cameramen and the press which did not stop until 9 p.m. Several churches in the city held "praise services" for the evangelist's escape and safe return. The famous patient's room became a "great bower of flowers" with the florists despairing to fill all the orders. Until late people clustered around the entrance to the hospital grounds "whispering and wondering how Douglas was selected by fate for the 'resurrection' of the loved evangelist." Apparently, if the newspapers could be relied upon, Douglas was in a greater state of shock than Sister McPherson on this first day.<sup>22</sup>

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. *Dispatch*, June 23 first and second extra, 24, 1926. *Review*, June 24, 1926.



The long first day closed for Aimee after 9 p.m. when her last visitor left, allowing her to get some rest. She awoke Thursday morning, June 24, and commenced another busy day by reading the early morning local papers. Quickly she became highly upset and at 5 a.m. she telephoned the **Bisbee Daily Review** to protest the headlines and a story in the morning paper. The headlines read: "MYSTERY CLOUDS MRS. McPHERSON'S RETURN." The article claimed the "mystery" developed when the search could not find the shack nor her tracks where she claimed to have come on the road at Niggerhead Mountain. Aimee fumed and accused the newspaper of injecting the element of mystery into the case. She also complained about a story that claimed Sheriff McDonald said her clothes were not damaged or soiled. According to the **Review's** side of the telephone encounter, Aimee claimed her clothing was soiled and stated it would have been impossible to traverse the area she did without soiling one's clothes. The newspaper editor countered by telling the evangelist the sheriff had her clothing in Tombstone (he was mistaken for they were still in the Douglas bank vault) and they spoke for themselves. With that Aimee rang off with a harsh "God bless you."<sup>23</sup>

The same morning the **Douglas Daily Dispatch** had articles very similar to the Bisbee paper in regard to the shack, the footprints and the sheriff's comments on her clothing. Reporter George Spears, in a signed article, even used the word "mystery" several times. He wrote that the mystery of her disappearance had been cleared up by her return, "but an even greater mystery remains to be solved," since officers could not find the desert shack. Aimee did not protest the **Dispatch's** articles, perhaps because the encounter with the Bisbee editor had not gone well or maybe Editor McCafferty's several extras and numerous praise articles tempered her feelings. The **Dispatch** took a stand and remained far friendlier to the evangelist than did the **Review**.<sup>24</sup>

The beginning of the second day in Douglas revealed some major weaknesses in Aimee's story plus a growing doubt as to its validity. The skepticism ranged beyond the mysterious shack and the confusing trail of tracks to her clothing, shoes and physical condition. Aimee brought these doubts into sharper focus when she called the **Review** and argued over the condition of her clothing. Perhaps Sister McPherson's problem over the condition of her clothing and shoes came in part from believing all she read in the newspapers. The Douglas paper cited the condition of her clothing as follows: "Mud-stained garments worn by Mrs. McPherson." The same paper stated that law officers "took one of the scarred and worn shoes" into the search area to match it with

23. **Review**, June 24, 25, 26, 1926.

24. **Dispatch**, June 24, 1926.



some tracks. Even the Bisbee paper referred to her "scarred and worn shoes." A Los Angeles newspaper printed that "her shoes were virtually cut to shreds," while a New York paper had her dress "bedraggled . . . (and) splattered with mud." The reporters used their imaginations instead of observation to get these graphic details for their stories for the clothing and shoes remained at the hospital until about noon of the first day.<sup>25</sup>

George Cook saw and examined the evangelist's shoes first just after he got her admitted to the hospital. The shoes were just the opposite of the newspaper description and Cook later told his wife that if he had just taken her shoes that first morning before anyone else observed them, the Cooks would have "had it made" with all their wants taken care of the rest of their lives. A doctor who saw Aimee's belongings at the hospital commented that the shoes were not scratched or the clothing torn. He added an even more significant fact—Aimee's feet were not even dirty. A hospital nurse observed that neither the shoes nor the clothing had dust on them. The nurse noted that the evangelist's hands and face were clean and her teeth "pearly like" with no long period without brushing. The nurse felt that even if the flight was ignored, Aimee "couldn't have been in one of those dirty shacks for as long as she said she was and be as clean as she was." Chief Bowden later observed that in his opinion Aimee's shoes indicated that she did not traverse more than a half a mile over the rough desert terrain.<sup>26</sup>

After starting the day off with the angry telephone call to the Bisbee newspaper, Aimee must have checked to verify that her shoes and clothing had been taken from the hospital. She ate a hearty breakfast and settled down to await the arrival of her mother and party from Los Angeles. The search effort began again at dawn with an even more frustrating day of searching the desert for evidence. It included recovering areas previously checked and areas further outside the search triangle. Shacks and all other buildings were inspected again and again. Searchers on horseback and on foot combed the area for tracks and any other signs that might be found.

Between 7 and 8 a.m. a Southern Pacific train brought to Douglas Mrs. Minnie Kennedy. Aimee's mother brought the evangelist's two children—daughter Roberta and son Rolf—with her. Also on the train were more West Coast reporters and two California law officers—Captain Herman L. Cline, chief of detectives of the Los Angeles police and Joseph Ryan, assistant

25. Dispatch, June 23 second extra, 24, July 13, 1926. Review, June 24, 25, 26, 1926. New York Times (New York City, New York), June 24, 1926. Los Angeles Examiner (Los Angeles, California), June 24, 25, 1926.

26. Interview with Mrs. George W. Cook, Jan. 28, 1973.





"The evangelist's family posed for pictures on the lawn of the Calumet and Arizona Hospital, June 24, 1926. Daughter

Roberta on the left, Aimee in the chair, Mrs. Kennedy on the right, and son Rolf standing behind."



district attorney of Los Angeles County. Approximately 250 people met the train in Douglas and Mrs. Kennedy spoke a few words and posed for pictures. As soon as the photographers were satisfied, Mrs. Kennedy, her grandchildren, Cline and Ryan went directly to the hospital where they found Sister propped up in bed with pillows. Mother and daughter embraced with sobs and tears in an emotional reunion, which included a hurried whispered conversation between the two women. Since Mrs. Kennedy's large hat hid Aimee's face and mother's face was buried in her daughter's hair, neither the Los Angeles officials nor reporters crowding into the room caught the substance of the communication although several later admitted they tried to listen to it. After several minutes the two women disembraced and Aimee bid her two children to come to her bedside. At that moment Mrs. Kennedy noticed the reporters in the room and said, "Oh, say, boys, I don't think you ought to butt in now." Mrs. Kennedy did not realize the press had free run of Aimee's room all day yesterday and felt they had an open invitation to come and go as they pleased. Cline stepped forward with a proposal, but Mrs. Kennedy interrupted him to introduce him and Ryan to Aimee. Cline suggested that the photographers be allowed to take some pictures of the reunion and then they and the reporters leave the room. The pictures were taken and then the reporters and photographers left the room.<sup>27</sup>

Now, Mrs. Kennedy took a seat near the bed and held her daughter's hand while Aimee retold her story. Afterwards Cline asked the evangelist if she would repeat the entire story with a stenographer present and she assented. While Cline left and arranged for a stenographer from nearby Camp Harry J. Jones, Mrs. Kennedy became nervous and to reporters, who were still lingering in the hall, she appeared "plainly unnerved." Perhaps Mrs. Kennedy realized Aimee had already talked too much. The previous morning when Aimee telephoned her mother, with Cline and McCafferty listening, Mrs. Kennedy had interrupted her daughter with a sharp "Don't talk." when Aimee tried to babble her tale over the telephone. It was now apparent the evangelist had and would talk plenty with a story of a spectacular abduction, gruesome torture, a marvelous escape and a thrilling flight to freedom. Now it was all to be recorded verbatim. If Mrs. Kennedy could have had her way, Aimee would have done a lot less talking. As reporters approached Mrs. Kennedy, she allowed herself a few loose words as she stated: "Here is Sister, a wreck! She will probably never be the same! I can't help but feel that our years of hard work will be hurt as a result of what has happened. We were always so careful and conservative." Apparently mother and

27. Dispatch, June 24, 24 extra, 1926.



daughter had very similar fears which an involuntary abduction would not normally produce.<sup>28</sup>

The stenographer arrived and Mrs. McPherson gave her "complete statement" in the presence of Cline, Ryan, Mrs. Kennedy and Percy Bowden. Aimee told her story with Cline interrupting with an occasional question, and the statement concluded with a series of questions from both Cline and Ryan. The account took three hours to relate, and it contained more details and amplification than earlier accounts primarily due to Cline's questioning during her telling of the story.<sup>29</sup>

Aimee's story began the afternoon of May 18 at a beach in southern California. She sent her beach companion, her secretary, to make a telephone call while she took a swim. A man and woman approached her with a "pitiful tale" of a dying baby in their automobile parked nearby. They persuaded the evangelist to go to the car to pray for the baby. At the car they pushed her inside and put a blanket over her head and chloroformed her. She awoke in bed dressed in a nightgown and held by three abductors—two men and a woman. They told her the objectives of the kidnapping were a large ransom and to "get that damn temple." Aimee was kept for over four weeks in a room of a house that had no electric lights but had a flush toilet. The kidnappers tortured her by burning her finger with a lighted cigar and threatened to cut off a finger. She recalled minor items of this room such as the wallpaper was "bluish stripe and pink flowered" and had a small border at the top; no paper on the ceiling and some cracks; contained a double bed with an iron bedstead; and a used dresser brown in color with varnish pretty well worn off. Then one night the abductors woke her up, she dressed and then was blindfolded and bound. She was put on a small mattress on the floor of a car where she remained for the whole journey without ever getting out of the car or even being allowed to sit on the seat. They traveled that night and all the next day. They occasionally put something over her mouth, and sometimes removed her blindfold. After dark at the beginning of the second night and as the kidnappers neared their destination, they blindfolded her. Some time later the car finally stopped and she was taken into a "little shack."

She remained in this second shack for three or four days. She was not sure if the building was made of adobe or wood, but she remembered the walls were dark and it had a wooden floor. There was one window, but she couldn't recall if it opened out, or up and down. The shack had no furniture and she slept on a camp cot brought by the kidnappers. There was no bathroom, only a pail of

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Dispatch*, June 25 extra, 1926.



water with a pan and dipper. Also a large tin can with a rough top which stood in the corner of the room which was her "salvation" (toilet of sorts). It became so hot in this shack that Aimee told the lady kidnapper, Rose, she couldn't stand the heat and wished they had some ice. The two men left on the morning she escaped (June 22) and after a while, Rose had Aimee lie down on the cot and bound the evangelist's hands behind her back and tied her ankles. Then Rose left to get some provisions. Although Aimee had been so weak she could hardly stand prior to being tied, she now got off the cot and "rolled across the floor" to the can in the corner. She stood up and sawed the bands off her hands on the rough edge of the can. She untied her legs and "got out the window" and ran, never looking back. She stumbled several times and ran until tired, then she walked, then "ran and ran and walked." After some time she saw a mountain and thought if she could reach it she might find "shade and water." She finally became so tired she had to lie down. When it began to get dark she continued on and came to a little rise and began to get "very thirsty."

She came to a "high place" and saw a fence in the distance, and as she approached the fence, she came upon a road. She believed it was about 9 p.m. when she reached the road and the moon was up. She walked down the road and eventually came to a tiny shack "with a tin roof" and found it vacant. She returned to the road and now as she continued, she had to "lie down very often." As it began getting cold, she put her dress up over her shoulders and wrapped it around her when she lay down. She scraped the "dust up in a little bundle for a pillow." She thought of sleeping in the desert until morning, but a rustling noise caused her to get up and go on. She now saw a glow in the sky and some little lights which she took as indications of a town. Aimee saw a large shed and some dogs began barking. She moved toward the building and hollered, and heard a man's voice quieting the dogs. She went to a fence, and through a gate to a second fence and saw the custodian of what she soon learned was a slaughterhouse. She asked the man for help in finding the police, but he asked so many questions and had no telephone, car, or horse in which to get the police. She never told the man who she was; just that she had been kidnapped. He told her to cross the fence and rest until morning. However, when she found he had no wife or other ladies at this place she decided to go on.

The custodian finally told her it was a mile to the next place with a lady in it, and Aimee returned to the road and walked toward the small lights. By now she was so tired and worn out she had to lie down "frequently." She finally came to a small house, but because there were so many dogs barking, she did not stop for she could see bigger houses ahead. Finally, she came to a house bigger than the rest with a hedge around it. She "thought it looked



as though the people living there might be responsible people" so she went to the gate and rattled it and called for help. The people answered her. After asking the inhabitants if they had a telephone and how she could find the police, the people in the house invited her into their yard. Aimee entered through the gate and got as far as the steps. By then her conversation with the inhabitants had informed her there was a telephone about a block away, so she turned around to go back through the gate. She collapsed and the next thing she remembered was someone shaking her head and saying, "Senorita, what is the matter with you?"<sup>30</sup>

Cline concluded the statement by asking the evangelist a series of questions, and the stenographic account was typed into thirty-five pages. Cline provided copies for the press and they printed it in full in newspapers from coast to coast. It became a standard by which to judge her earlier versions and later changes and additions. The comparison of the known accounts of Sister McPherson's story reveal a forced evolution of the basic story and several unexplained changes.

When Aimee first told her story she primarily covered the abduction at the beach and her stay in the first house. Then with little detail she was transferred to the second shack in the desert. She did not even explain how she got away from her kidnappers, only that she escaped. She did dramatically add personal details to her flight to freedom such as frequently falling and forcing herself to go on. But these items were of minute importance, and she could only give three landmarks—a mountain, a fence and a road. The only pertinent part of the flight to receive expanded coverage was the meeting with the slaughterhouse custodian. The custodian disagreed with her contention that she did not know she was in Mexico until she reached Agua Prieta. He also disputed the particulars of her struggle to travel the last mile. His account should have been a clear sign of her pure fabrication of the whole account. By design or otherwise, her story was California-centered with only a thin thread in the Sonoran desert, but if the thread could not be followed, the detailed California episode could not be checked. When the police first questioned her about the kidnappers and the last captivity shack, they got a vague description of two men and a woman but nothing on the location of features of the shack. Under repeated questioning she never really improved her description of the kidnappers, but repeatedly diverted the queries by launching off into monologues about how Rose was always with her and she was never alone with the male abductors. When Murchison questioned her specifically about the shack, she added the details of the wooden floor and in her flight she had not crossed a road or a fence. These important details, however reluctantly given, were the type that could be easily overlooked in the initial telling of a story. However, the absence of

30. *Ibid.*



such a shack would then knock the props out from under the rest of the story.

One vital incident which Aimee never mentioned volutarily came out embarrassingly after she had related her account several times. This addition came after the newspapers had recorded her first story, and it came about when a reporter asked her how she got away from the kidnappers. Aimee responded, "How did I escape? Oh, how foolish of us to have overlooked that." She now belatedly covered her escape stipulating the circumstances of being left alone on the camp cot with her hands and feet tied. She got off the cot and "crawled bound as I was to that can. I was able to reach it. Glory to God. I sawed and sawed and sawed on the edge of that can." Free of the bands she now said, "I got the window open, and knocked off the boards." She went out the window and fled on foot. Aimee's story had now evolved to the point of containing an escape episode, but the hasty addition had two items she would change within twenty-four hours.<sup>31</sup>

In her complete statement to Cline, Aimee no longer "crawled" to the can in the corner, but now she "rolled across the floor." A more significant change was over the window she escaped through. Her first recorded account at the window stated, "I got the window open and knocked off the boards." However, when Cline questioned her on the window she had changed the incident entirely. The questions and responses went as follows:

Cline: "Was there a window in the building?"

Aimee: "There was a window, I am trying to think whether it opened out or up and down."

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Aimee: "... I got out the window. It wasn't much of a drop."

Cline: "Did you try to get out of the door?"

Aimee: "No."

Cline: "Do you know whether the door was locked or not?"

Aimee: "It was closed."

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Cline: "Was the window up or down?"

Aimee: "The window was open."

Cline: "There was no screen on the window?"

Aimee: "No, no screen."<sup>32</sup>

The evangelist did not explain the reason for this quick change in her story, but even more unaccounted for was the fact that law enforcement officials did not ask for an explanation. Aimee's statement to Cline had another more subtle change than the others. The earlier accounts had the evangelist falling and dropping many times in her escape journey. Now she played down

31. Dispatch, June 23 first and second extras, 1926.

32. Ibid. Dispatch, June 25 extra, 1926.



the falling and only remembered "stumbling several times." This change can be seen as predictable after she had her telephone argument over the condition of her shoes and clothing plus the knowledge that these items had been impounded by the sheriff. She did not say flatly she did not fall and she still told of lying down frequently, but she no longer gave dramatic coverage of a struggling flight. She also changed the incident at the first house in Agua Prieta. Earlier, she claimed she stopped at a little house but could not get any assistance. In the stenographic account, she did not stop at this house due to the barking of some dogs.<sup>33</sup>

Aimee's story to Cline contained one significant addition. For the first time in telling her story, she mentioned water and being thirsty and then only briefly. As she fled from the shack and saw a mountain in the distance she remembered thinking if she could only reach it, she might find shade and water. Hours later and after it got dark, she mentioned she "began to get very thirsty." Perhaps this addition was just a spontaneous detail, or she may have caught wind of the whisperings of doubt expressed by many at her apparent lack of thirst at the slaughterhouse, the Gonzales home and at the hospital. Sheriff McDonald had told the press that in his opinion her first and foremost request at the slaughterhouse should have been for drinking water. When she returned to California and told her story to her followers in the temple, she added strong dramatic emphasis to this aspect of her account. She told how she was not only thirsty but tormented by thirst to the point her tongue swelled. However, to authorities, who knew of a hospital report and the statements of at least two nurses who stated that her tongue was not swollen, she could offer no enlightenment as to why thirst played so little a part in her story. She tried to play down the need for water and offered to walk the same distance again without drinking water.<sup>34</sup>

The McPherson statement contained other inconsistencies and weaknesses. The description of the kidnappers was so vague as to be worthless. The location of the abductors' car at the beach had to be relocated from a no parking zone to an unlikely location some two blocks away. She could not describe the interior of the car in which she rode a night and a day on a mattress. When Ryan asked her how she was able to ride a night and a day without ever getting out of the car, he received a cold, deadly stare and an insolent reply that "other arrangements" took care of any pressing personal needs on the journey. She wouldn't volunteer an explanation and Ryan did not press her. She could describe the first house down to where paint was missing, cracks and color and design of the wallpaper, but could only say of the more recent desert shack that its walls were dark and it had a can, a door, a

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.



window and a wooden floor. She didn't know if this shack was constructed of adobe or wood after spending three or four days in it, but she knew the garita she saw at midnight had a tin roof. Perhaps the biggest weakness of her story was that her shoes, clothing and physical condition showed no evidence of what she described. In regard to her clothing, she never claimed to have had other clothing during the whole five weeks of captivity. When Cline asked her what clothing the kidnappers gave her, Aimee vaguely replied, "Practically the same as when I came away; they are here."<sup>35</sup>

Most of the changes in the story and especially the window incident were irreconcilable. The numerous changes along with the inconsistencies, vagueness, belated additions and other weaknesses made the story-telling episodes almost unbelievable. It is difficult to understand why the authorities did not require her explanation of the changes and inconsistencies. Perhaps it was because she was a famous evangelist with considerable public influence and political clout. As it was, she received several extra benefits of doubt. If Aimee's story or stories were told to get her out of a predicament, they failed; and although law officials did not tear her account to shreds at the time, her story stands today as the proverbial millstone around the evangelist's reputation.

After the interview with Mrs. McPherson, Cline and Ryan had lunch as guests of honor at the Kiwanis Club luncheon at the Gadsden Hotel. Each spoke briefly with Cline emphasizing that Douglas was the "focus point for the eyes of the world" at that moment. The Kiwanians assured their guests they would do "anything under the sun to help them solve the mystery surrounding Mrs. McPherson."

Cline and Ryan proceeded to do their part in trying to solve the enigma by going to the First National Bank to examine Aimee's clothing and shoes. Her gray gingham house dress had a white collar and white cuffs which were only slightly soiled. The new dress had not been washed and contained few wrinkles. One pocket on the dress was torn and the other held the silk hairnet. The shoes were inexpensive black kid slippers that fastened with one button. The soles were slightly scuffed, but the leather on the insteps was bright and unmarked except for a green (grass-like) stain. The intact fastening buttons, the soles and upper portions of the shoes showed no signs of a long desert walk. The remaining items of clothing were lisle stockings, a cotton princess slip, a cheap combination undergarment and a corset (Aimee's correct size). The items of clothing were all remarkably clean and free of perspiration stains. The condition of the clothing caused Cline to have the local police bring in the proprietor of a local department

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Dispatch, June 25, 1926.





**"Sister McPherson flanked by Herman Cline on her right and Joseph Ryan on her left."**



store, Ben Levy. Mr. Levy could not identify any of the clothing as coming from his store, which had been the suspicion and a distinct possibility since the clothing appeared to have been worn such a short time. Levy did state all the clothing was new and pointed out that the stockings still showed creases from lying folded in a stocking box. During the inspection of Aimee's belongings Ryan began to wonder out loud and Cline cautioned him to remain openminded. Ryan still made a jab and asked Cline in regard to the grass stain on the shoes what was as "rare as a blade of grass on the desert in June?" Cline did not answer, but the echo of circumstances and fifty years reverberate to Ryan's query—a lost lady evangelist.<sup>36</sup>

In the meantime Aimee had been persuaded to hold a picture-taking session in front of the hospital. She dressed in clothing brought by her mother and appeared on the lawn about noon. She waved and smiled to the cheering crowd which had gathered when cameramen and photographers began setting up their equipment. The evangelist did some gesturing and movement for the newsreel cameras, but soon retired to a wicker chair. She posed alone, with her mother, and with mother, Roberta and Rolf. Cline and Ryan returned to the hospital and Aimee insisted they get their pictures taken as well. Just as the last picture was taken, the evangelist fainted and a police officer picked her up from the lawn and carried her into the hospital. More pictures were taken and the press recorded the incident and the crowd's stunned reaction. The next day the newspapers reported less sympathetically that a nurse told them the famous patient "fainted, or appeared to faint," but once in her room she came right out of it, undressed herself and got into bed. The nurse stated that an immediate check of Aimee's pulse and respiration showed everything normal; however, just prior to going outside to face the cameras, they had checked her and found her nervous and her pulse beating very rapidly. The faint, whether real or faked, made great copy for the press and the newsreel cameramen. Hereafter, the swooning faint would become almost the patented trademark of Sister McPherson, and she used it numerous times when she was in uncomfortable situations or confrontations.<sup>37</sup>

Aimee settled down in her room for a couple of hours of receiving visitors. For one of the few times reporters were in the minority if not totally absent from the patient's room. The press, with the verbatim story, were busy checking other angles and seeking interviews with anyone who seemed to have information on the case. The evangelist received more local ministers while a representative of the Douglas Chamber of Commerce and Mines

36. Dispatch, June 24 extra, 1926.

37. Dispatch, June 24, 24 extra, 25, 25 extra, 1926.



presented her with a small copper box. Mayor Hinton revisited her and according to the local newspaper he "turned over the city to Aimee Semple McPherson. Hers is the police department, the city government and the fire department if she wants it." Wellwishers continued to send flowers to the hospital, and a local store sent her several jars of cold cream. Outside the hospital taxi driver Johnny Anderson, trying to cash in on his part in the recent events, was beginning to ask prospective customers, "Do you care to ride in the seat that Aimee Semple McPherson rode in?" A committee of leading Douglasites worked hard Thursday afternoon making final plans and arrangements for a mass meeting in the park the following day. Aimee, during her first day in the hospital, had requested a meeting be arranged for her so she could appear before and thank the people of Douglas. A committee was formed and made some tentative plans, but it was not until the arrival of Mrs. Kennedy and her acceptance of the idea that the meeting was announced and work began in earnest.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, the search of the desert had again been unsuccessful. About 1:45 p.m. representatives of the Bisbee and Douglas newspapers took Mrs. Kennedy and her grandchildren into Mexico to see the primary search area. Mrs. Kennedy seemed impressed and told the reporters that Aimee must see the area. The party returned to Douglas where Mother Kennedy presently secured the release of her daughter from the hospital. The family moved into a suite at the Gadsden Hotel. Aimee explained the move to the press as being motivated because her presence at the hospital created a turmoil unfair to the other patients. The reporters thought they had a better explanation, feeling the move was Mrs. Kennedy's idea and way to better control her talkative daughter.<sup>39</sup>

Within an hour after checking into the hotel, Aimee and Mrs. Kennedy were "spirited down" the hotel freight elevator and back steps to a waiting automobile. The two women joined Cline, Ryan, Chief Bowden and a reporter. Cline and Ryan had just returned from the search area where Murchison had briefed them on the search effort. Aimee's party drove into Mexico, and, at the evangelist's insistence, went to the Gonazles home where she thanked Theresa for her and Ramon's assistance. After this delay, the group drove to the area of the discovered footprints where the evangelist pointed out some gullies she remembered near the slaughterhouse and she remembered the garita. After the garita, Aimee recognized no terrain feature except Niggerhead Mountain. The party stopped several times allowing Aimee to walk short distances from the road. The party traveled to the lower slopes of Niggerhead where the evangelist hoped to

38. *Dispatch*, June 24 extra, 1926. Review, June 25, 1926.

39. *Dispatch*, June 25, 1926.



see the fence she claimed she saw on her flight, but she was unable to see it. She told Ryan the landscape all looked alike to her. As darkness descended, the party talked with two Mexican line riders who stated there were no vacant shacks or houses within twenty-five miles of Agua Prieta to the east except one located at San Bernardino on the United States side of the border. Aimee asked the line riders if the house was off by itself with low foothills and a flat mesa. When the riders answered affirmatively, Aimee shouted, "That is the place, that is the place. I feel sure that is the place. Can we get horses tonight?" She was told no as it was already dark, but plans were made to go there early tomorrow. The party returned to the Gadsden Hotel.<sup>40</sup>

Immediately after returning from the desert, the party stood in front of the Hotel while reporters gathered around. Aimee and Mrs. Kennedy, who had worn white shoes on their excursion into the desert, called attention to their shoes. The two women showed off their shoes to all who would take note. The shoes were not scarred, but then they had walked a very short distance. Then, whether of her own volition or in response to a question, the evangelist explained to the press why her "white under skirt was so dirty." She now claimed that she had put the skirt of her outer dress over her head like a sunbonnet to protect her from the sun. Previously she had stated she pulled the dress around her shoulders to help keep her warm when she lay down at night during the late stages of the flight. The latest detail or change to her "complete statement" was the last one generally accepted, although she tried to make numerous other changes. The makeshift sunbonnet she described would have helped prevent sunburn, and expose her "white under skirt" or slip so it should have become dirty. However, the crux of the matter was that the undergarment was remarkably clean. Probably Aimee had two reasons for inserting the improvised sunbonnet into her story. It not only explained her lack of sunburn, but she could also use it to account for the cleanliness of her dress. Up to this time, the newspaper stories had only specified her dress was clean with no mention of undergarments.<sup>41</sup>

When Mrs. McPherson entered the hotel lobby, a reporter from the **Bisbee Daily Review** approached her and reopened the argument that had occurred early that morning. The reporter stated: "It is the understanding of this paper, from your telephone conversation early this morning, that Sheriff J.F. McDonald is in error when he says your clothing, worn in your trek across the desert regions of Sonora, was not soil damaged." The evangelist's mood quickly soured at her antagonist's tone and contention. The

40. Dispatch, June 25, 1926. *New York Times*, June 25, 1926.

41. Ibid.



reporter recorded Aimee's piqued answer as follows: "Why certainly, you can see that the dress I have on is not damaged. The one I wore on that terrible night was of the same material as this dress I now have on. I wore the dress over my head for protection from the heat of the day and cold at night. My white underslip was not soiled." It could be debated whether Aimee really answered the reporter's question or merely circled it. She may have also made a slip when she told of the dress she wore on "that terrible night." Her alleged trek covered more daylight hours than hours of darkness. More importantly, this statement contradicted her explanation of the dirty slip made in front of the hotel a few minutes earlier, and was a complete turnabout from her contention early that morning on the telephone. Later in the evening as Sister McPherson discussed her venture into the search area, she claimed she could have walked over the whole area without "seriously damaging her shoes and clothing." Consistency had never been one of the evangelist's virtues, but her changes on the condition of her clothing on this day defy a sane, rational explanation no matter whether the trek occurred or not.<sup>42</sup>

On this Thursday evening Cochise County Attorney John Rose, while interviewing Aimee after her unsuccessful search for the desert shack, asked her several questions concerning the captivity shack. The evangelist, while looking at a cover on a hotel radiator flower stand, responded: "I have been wondering if that house into which my captors last took me could have been a camping outfit of canvas or light wood?" Rose's eyes also spotted the flower stand covering and he asked that it be brought to her. The burlap cover was ripped loose from the stand shown to Sister. She paused a moment, perhaps noting the look of marvel on the faces of those listening to the interview, and then said, "no, it could not have been that, for I can see through that. I could not see through the walls of the hut I was in. And then, there was the wooden floor in the shack. I was just wondering." She had made other changes in her story, but to change the shack into a temporary camping outfit required a greater feat of mental gymnastics than even Aimee could pull off. The shack had become a thorn in her flesh that plagued her officially for eight more months.<sup>43</sup>

Many, if not all, of the out-of-state reporters missed Aimee's comments and wonderings upon her return from the desert Thursday evening. They were guests of honor at a dinner party at the Sociale Club in Agua Prieta. The Douglas Chamber of Commerce and Mines hosted the dinner for twenty visiting reporters and five photographers. Also in attendance were members of the

42. Review, June 25, 26, 1926.

43. Dispatch, June 24 extra, 25, 1926.



local press, prominent citizens from Agua Prieta and Douglas, and some visiting officials of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Not present was telegraph operator Glenn A. Bentley who had spent eighteen and a half hours at his key sending out not less than 17,000 words on the McPherson case over the Associated Press' leased wire. Two especially invited guests who also did not make it were Cline and Ryan. Their return from the desert would probably have made them late and perhaps they were tired from their long day, but more than likely they did not wish to miss any of Aimee's actions and comments at the hotel.<sup>44</sup>

Friday morning, June 25, initiated the third long day of searching the desert. The exploration of the desert continued as before with both official and unofficial posses and individuals looking in Mexico and the United States. Aimee led one search party consisting of her mother, Cline, Ryan, Murchison, Cross and a couple of Mexican officers. They made three ventures into the desert. Their initial attempt started at 4:30 a.m. when the party journeyed on the United States' side of the border to the San Bernardino Ranch. Aimee saw the shack the Mexican line riders had told her about the previous evening. It had an earthen floor plus being in a location where Aimee would have had to cross a fence to get to where she met Schansel at the slaughterhouse. Any shack in the United States placed the border fence before the road Aimee walked down to the garita and slaughterhouse, while Aimee's story had the road before the fence. In the hospital, the evangelist had drawn a "diagram" which had her approach the road and turn left, while an approach from the United States would have required a turn to the right at the road. With all of these known factors, it remained unexplained why Aimee, the posse or anyone else spent time searching in the United States. Nevertheless, Aimee carefully looked over the shack and finally concluded it was not the shack she was held in. She could not identify another shack inspected on the San Bernardino Ranch. The party talked to Bob Giles, manager of the ranch, who assured them no one had been passing in and out of the vast ranch via car or on foot. The party returned to Douglas and began a second effort east and southeast of Agua Prieta. She could not identify any of the shacks they checked nor recall any of the terrain features. The group returned to Douglas for lunch and then returned to Mexico in a final attempt. The party called off their effort after inspecting all shacks considered within Aimee's walking distance of Agua Prieta. The unsuccessful posse returned to the Gadsden Hotel about the middle of the afternoon.<sup>45</sup>

One reporter wrote that Aimee returned from the unsuccessful search "visibly dejected." However, her mood was influenced by

44. Dispatch, June 25, 1926.

45. Dispatch, June 25 4 o'clock extra, 1926. New York Times, June 24, 25, 26, 1926.



more than the failure to find the shack. When she returned to the hotel for lunch after the second search venture, she learned that many stories, rumors and innuendos filled the air which were unflattering to the evangelist. In front of the hotel she questioned the identity of several reporters and lectured them on their responsibilities. She was upset over what some of the press had written, but was absolutely furious over what the reporters were supposedly telling each other. She threatened to file several libel suits after she returned to Los Angeles. She insisted on questioning the reporters on sending out "erroneous stories" as soon as she returned from her last trip into the desert. A "show down" was scheduled between the reporters and the evangelist for later in the afternoon. When Aimee returned the last time from the search, she cancelled the show down and openly avoided the press as much as possible.<sup>46</sup>

Somehow a representative of the **Bisbee Daily Review** got Sister McPherson to listen to one last series of questions which caused her much "discomfort." The reporter asked: "Mrs. McPherson, were you or were you not in Bisbee a few days, say three days before your appearance in Douglas? Did you or did you not pass through the Bisbee district and register at a Lowell rooming house and occupy for a time, say one night, a room in said rooming house?" The evangelist issued a vehement denial and breathed an anathema on the reporter and his paper. Other than the reporter's question little more is known about this accusation. The California authorities did not bring it up in the grand jury or preliminary hearings. She could have been in the rooming house casing the area as to how to implement a reappearance to look like an escape from kidnappers. More than likely the incident reflects a case of either mistaken identity or an attempt by someone to get free publicity. The rooming house question illustrates the type of rumors and reports that began to circulate before Aimee left town.<sup>47</sup>

An Agua Prieta woman had earlier reported she thought she had seen the evangelist on the streets of Agua Prieta prior to the reappearance. The woman, whom the local newspaper described as "quite a character," was brought to Aimee's hotel room on Thursday afternoon where she admitted she had been mistaken. But other reports kept coming in. Cline received word on Friday that a Tucson building inspector thought he had picked up Aimee on June 20 along the Tucson-Douglas highway. Two Douglas men were returning from a trip to Esquita, Mexico (65 miles south of Agua Prieta) on June 22 and saw a car with a California top some nine miles north of Esquita. The car had two men and two women, and one of the females had a lot of auburn hair. One of the men, a

46. Ibid.

47. Review, June 26, 1926.



Negro, tried to see Aimee at the hospital to see if he could identify her as being in the car. He was not allowed to go to her room, but he was able to see her at the meeting in the park. He claimed she was one of the women in the car on the day before her reappearance. Gustabe Cardenas, a Mexican woodhauler from Agua Prieta, saw a large blue car halted off the Mexican road near Niggerhead Mountain about 8 p.m. of June 22. Aimee claimed she reached the same area about 9 p.m., however on foot. The car seen by the woodhauler had two men and two women sitting in it. Later that night Cardenas told a Douglas storekeeper about the car. Three days later on Friday when he paid his bill at this store, the storekeeper remembered his story of the car and it was reported to the police.<sup>48</sup>

A family who lived on a ranch a couple of miles east of Douglas and just north of the border also saw a mysterious car on the evening of June 22. As two brothers and a sister sat on the porch of their darkened house, a car approached from Douglas. Suddenly the car stopped quickly and a woman's voice was heard. The car began turning around as if to go back when a man's voice declared, "Let's go on anyway." The car turned around again and went past the house and up into a small canyon. The driver appeared to be unfamiliar with the road as twice while in the sight of the observers on the porch, the car left the dirt road and had to maneuver some to get back on the road. An hour or so later a similar car came out of the canyon and took the left hand fork at the junction so as to go along the road that closely paralleled the border back into Douglas. One of the brothers reported the incident the next day (June 23, the day Aimee was found) and Leslie Gatliff of the Douglas police and a deputy sheriff interviewed the brother the same day and decided the car had nothing to do with the case. The man felt differently about the car and so he sent his statement to a Tucson newspaper where it was printed in full; the Bisbee paper reprinted his statement a couple of days later. However, the Douglas newspaper refused to print the statement. The county sheriff's office did interview the man again on June 28.<sup>49</sup>

The spiciest rumor to surface provided a motive for Aimee's coming into the area albeit a false one. The whispering had it that the evangelist had come to Agua Prieta for an abortion from Dr. W---- (a different Dr. W---- than at the hospital). In reality Mrs. McPherson had had an operation in New York after the birth of her youngest child that made this rumor impossible. However, as late as 1973, the abortion rumor still circulated in Douglas.

48. Dispatch, June 25, July 7, 8, 9, 10, 1926. Review, July 3, 7, 1926. Arizona Daily Star (Tucson, Arizona), June 27, 28, 29, July 1, 2, 1926.

49. Interview with John Rogers, Jan. 28, 1973. Dispatch, July 3, 1926. Review, July 3, 1926.



Some of the reports and identifications may be valid, some may be just mistaken identity or vehicles whose occupants had nothing to hide, but it must also be admitted that the bizarre McPherson case had all the ingredients to draw oddballs to it. It certainly had more than its share of such characters in the California aspects of the case. How many, if any, of the desert witnesses could be classified in this category remains unknown. Only the abortion rumor can be listed definitely, the rest remain questionable. Several of the reports were given little or no consideration. If the law enforcement officials did as poorly with the stories of these witnesses as they did with Aimee's stories, their marks on the case should be way below normal. The reports and rumors highly upset Aimee. Initially the abortion rumor hurt and embarrassed her the most, but in the long run, it actually helped her since she had the proof of its falseness. She would later bring it up frequently and use it to heap scorn on all the other reports.

Aimee's third day in Douglas, June 25, saw a series of statements, interviews and offers that all made it into the newspapers. A woman reporter from California interviewed Ramon Gonzales and concluded by asking him if he believed Mrs. McPherson's story. Gonzales replies, "I do not wish to say anything against the lady, but I think the lady is a liar." When the press asked Cross about the existence of the captivity shack he made public the thoughts he had expressed only to Murchison and a few others engaged in the search. Cross said, "I do not know of an adobe house such as the one described by Mrs. McPherson within a hundred and fifty miles of Agua Prieta, and I know every house in this vast area." Pedro Demandivo, chief of the Mexican border patrol, after explaining to the reporters he had sent his men out to search for the kidnappers and the shack within one hour after the evangelist's identity became known and they had searched two whole days and part of the third, said, "These men know every foot of ground within fifty miles and none of them know such a cabin. If one did exist we would know about it within two days after it was built." The chief of the Mexican custom guards, Antonio Gabiondo, stated, "Almost all the land over which the search has been conducted is owned by my family. Do you think that if such a shack existed, we would not know of it; we who have lived here all our lives? It is a preposterous assumption."<sup>50</sup>

Aimee could only counter by offering a \$500 reward to anyone locating the shack, and she stipulated that Chief Bowden be the judge as to the authenticity of the shack. A Los Angeles newspaper quickly added a \$1,000 reward for the shack and \$10,000 for the kidnappers. Law enforcement authorities had doubts about the advisability of offering rewards. They had already witnessed

50. Los Angeles Examiner, June 26, 27, 28, 1926.



a great number of individuals and unofficial posses combing the search area. They predicted rightly that the money would make this situation even worse. The biggest offer of the day was revealed Friday morning in the local newspaper under the headlines: "DOUGLAS MAY GET ANGELUS TEMPLE BRANCH." According to the paper, the structure would be given to Douglas to show the evangelist's appreciation to the community that had treated her so good after her ordeal. The article claimed it would be the first branch in Aimee's church and the building would be erected on donated land. Sister said she would come "once, twice, or thrice" a year to the branch. The article concluded with "Douglas would welcome the 'second coming' of Aimee Semple McPherson."<sup>51</sup>

While Aimee's party searched the desert Friday, Douglas got ready for the "giant community service" in the park and the railroad prepared for the evangelist's departure. A platform was constructed in the 10th Street Park for the speakers and distinguished guests along with two refreshment stands, and all three were decorated with American flags and red, white and blue bunting. The Southern Pacific Railroad had earlier sent to Douglas a couple of officials who arranged the departure with Aimee and her mother. The company also sent in eight railroad detectives who were put at Aimee's disposal. The railroad brought in a special car and parked it on a siding by the depot. Aimee's party and departing reporters would board the special car which would in turn be attached to the Friday evening train. When the evangelist returned from the desert the last time, all was ready. However, Aimee, after her confrontation with the reporters and the swell of rumors, began to lose heart in the mass meeting she had personally requested and instead looked forward to departing.

Friday afternoon turned into another informal holiday like Wednesday when Aimee's presence in the hospital became known. People began to gather early at the 10th Street Park and a small group collected at the Gadsden Hotel. They had much to talk about and took full advantage of the opportunity as the day had been alive with reports and rumors. At 4:30 P.M. the 25th Infantry Band from Camp Harry J. Jones began playing and performed for half an hour at the park. Although the wind blew and a little rain fell, the crowd grew in size while the refreshment stands dispensed their ice cream and soft drinks. About 5 p.m. an automobile drove up with the honored guests. Sister McPherson and her family took their places on the platform and "Aimee's first service" since disappearing commenced. A select choir representing all the churches of Douglas and the Music Club sang two hymns after which the minister of the Presbyterian Church gave the opening prayer. Mayor Hinton gave an address of

51. *Dispatch*, June 25 4 o'clock extra, 25, 1926.



greeting to Aimee and her family, and the Reverend J.E. Howard, pastor of a local Baptist church, introduced the evangelist.

Now Sister Aimee McPherson had the opportunity she had requested several times. The crowd was estimated at 5,000 and the local paper heralded it as "without doubt" the largest gathering of any kind ever held in Douglas. It was an audience and an occasion which would expectedly call forth the best from Sister McPherson, but she did not come forth with the McPherson style or spirit. She only spoke for about ten minutes, which in itself was remarkable for the usually verbose evangelist. She began by reading the first seven verses of Psalm 107 which she apparently applied to her claimed desert ordeal and deliverance. Then she quickly gave thanks to the people, officials and churches of Douglas, and asked the people to pray for the conversion of her abductors. She sat down, the choir sang another hymn and the minister of the local Christian Church gave the benediction. It was all over before most of the crowd realized it.<sup>52</sup>

"Thousands" moved forward to meet and shake hands with the famous evangelist, but she would have no part of it. She still had almost four hours before her train left, so she was not pressed by time. She and her family were escorted to an automobile by the railroad detectives and some police officers who rode on the car's running boards as it immediately drove to the hotel. The people at the park were somewhat bewildered by it all. It was apparent the evangelist was tense and upset, but Aimee's first and last service in Douglas was a big disappointment to most of the adults at the "giant community service."

Back at the hotel, while the rest of her family prepared to leave, Aimee sat down to write an article for the **Douglas Daily Dispatch** per the personal request of Editor McCafferty. She probably did not have much heart for the project but had to go through with it. About 8 p.m. Aimee was interrupted by Rayn who approached her waving a sketch and stating that one of the unofficial posses believed they had found the captivity shack. Aimee viewed the sketch which detailed the shack's position and marked some tracks found near it. Soon the four searchers—Constable O.A. Ash, Lieutenant Leslie Gatliff, U.S. Deputy Marshal Tom Simms and reporter Harold Henry—held a short conference with Aimee. The four men had previously met with other police officers to recount their search and answer questions. Overjoyed and revived, Sister McPherson returned to writing her article while Cline and Ryan briefly looked into the claim of the four men. The evangelist must have torn up anything she had written prior to the interruption for her article, when published, was full of the good shack news. She began it by stating she feared she would leave

52. *Dispatch*, June 25 extra, 25 4 o'clock extra, 24 extra, 26, 1926.



Douglas with the "dissatisfaction" of knowing the shack had not been found, but the announcement of the four men came like "a gift, a blessing and a benediction." She lamented that if only she had known earlier she could have told the people in the park. She wrote that the men had found her footprints ten miles into Mexico and the tracks of two automobiles. She continued: "These four men worked quietly—one has not had his clothes off since I reached Douglas—and now they have won success. Each of the officers was offered, instead of one \$500 reward, the full amount of \$500 to each one, and they refused to take a penny. They said it was their duty."<sup>53</sup>

Then, reflective of her new mood and spirit, she wrote: "The shadow of night has been overshoot by the gold of morning," and launched into a great deal of praise for Douglas and its residents. She wrote that Douglasites "are a little bit more warmhearted than one ordinarily meets," and promised to tell her people over the radio about the marvelous city of Douglas. She concluded by expressing regret that she could not shake the hand of all Douglas residents. Aimee had revived to her old self and even allowed herself to get carried away and gloss over the fact that three men—Bowden, Cline and Ryan—were not impressed by the shack claim. Furthermore, the reward was and had been contingent upon Chief Bowden's acceptance. Bowden would not check the shack until early the next morning and after Aimee's departure.<sup>54</sup>

Aimee rushed to finish her article for McCafferty, then she and her family left the hotel escorted by the police and the railroad detectives. They traveled by car to the train station where the eight railroad detectives surrounded the vehicle and cleared the way to the special Pullman car on the siding. This prevented the people—a "great concourse" estimated at 2,000—from getting close to the evangelist. The McPherson party, Cline, Ryan, the detectives and departing reporters all boarded the special car. The crowd milled around nervously for several minutes until the Golden State Limited arrived. The passenger train was cut in two and a yard engine switched the special car onto the train and attached the remaining section. In a few moments Aimee appeared on the observation platform of the train and a "great cheer went up from the throng." The Southern Pacific allowed extra time in the station for a "fond farewell" for Aimee.

The evangelist told the crowd the shack had just been found. She introduced Cline and Ryan, who by now needed no introduction in Douglas, and praised them as fine officers and gentlemen. Aimee introduced her mother and the two women stood together holding large bouquets of flowers, a joint gift of the local Chamber of

53. *Dispatch*, June 26, 1926.

54. *Ibid.*



Commerce and Mines and Angelus Temple. Sister led the crowd in singing a hymn and a patriotic song, then she introduced her children who said a few words. She then addressed the crowd in the real McPherson style as the train started to slowly pull out. The local paper had it that her face was "aglow with a marvelous light" as she "praised Douglas, Douglas climate, Douglas people, Douglas hospitality, Douglas friendship, Douglas fairness, Douglas faith in God . . . . Good-bye Douglas, Good-bye. I am coming back each year to kneel here in thanks to the Divine Being who has brought me back." Then as a final gesture she queried, "We will hold a Four Square Gospel meeting. Shall we, people of Douglas?" According to the newspaper the crowd responded with a "rousing Yes" plus "throwing kisses, calling adieux, breathing prayers for her safety and continued good works" as the train left the station at 9:13 p.m.<sup>55</sup>

The shack claim lasted less than twelve hours. Reporters had asked Cline and Ryan for a statement on the shack found by the four men before they boarded the train. The two men would say nothing except that as far as the Los Angeles police were concerned, the search for the shack was over and unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the next morning the local newspaper proudly announced the abductors' cabin had been "definitely" located. The news article detailed the search of the four men, and how they held conferences with other officers and Aimee to answer all questions satisfactorily. The paper claimed erroneously that all the high officials charged with the investigation believed the shack had been found. The article concluded that the mystery of the shack "was ended for all time and conclusively with the approval of every official." A couple of hours later Chief Bowden and a posse checked the shack situated south of the Cenasas Ranch. This put it outside the search triangle and would have necessitated the crossing of a fence and a road during daylight hours to arrive at the slaughterhouse by midnight. The four room house had an earthen floor instead of wood, but most interesting of all, it was and had been occupied by a Mexican family. Either the shack had to be rejected or the evangelist's story, for they would not match. The four men then pressed a secondary claim of some footprints found in another location. A check was made of the prints of a woman's shoe in a sandy wash some four miles south of the international border and near an old, seldom used road or trail that paralleled the Gallardo fence. The tracks pointed north and ran a short distance and disappeared and then reappeared and then vanished again, all within a couple of hundred yards. The tracks could not be identified as Aimee's and contrary to the feeling of those who found them, they were about as significant as the shack since they came from nowhere and went the same place.<sup>56</sup>

55. Ibid.

56. Dispatch, June 26, 27, 1926.



In the meantime, on the train heading for Los Angeles on Friday night Aimee had a pleasant surprise then two sudden jolts. The happy experience occurred at Bisbee Junction just twenty miles from the start of her journey. Approximately a hundred people were waiting for the train and when Sister McPherson learned of this, she dressed and stepped out on the platform. She thanked the people for coming and assured them she harbored no hard feelings for Bisbee due to the harsh treatment she had received from a member of the Bisbee press. She blessed Bisbee and returned to the train to continue her journey. At this time or perhaps earlier, Cline told the evangelist that when they got to Tucson he wanted her to be available to be seen by a man who needed to see her in a possible identification. Enroute to Tucson Mrs. Kennedy told her daughter the reporters did not believe her story. Then mother brought up the thing she had cautioned Aimee about from that first telephone call and what Mrs. Kennedy thought was one of Aimee's biggest mistakes. "You are in trouble," Mother Kennedy told her daughter. "Why do you talk so much?"<sup>57</sup>

The train arrived in Tucson about 1:10 a.m. with Aimee asleep or faking but at Cline's insistence she arose, dressed and stepped into the car. She faced B.P. Greenwood, a Tucson building inspector, who studied her and asked her to walk a few steps. When Cline asked Greenwood if he could identify her, he responded affirmatively. Greenwood claimed he picked Aimee up on the Tucson-Douglas highway last Sunday, June 20. He further stated that she looked like a woman he saw on the streets of Tucson four weeks earlier. Aimee was shocked and denied she was in Tucson. She tried to dissuade him by arguing that all identifications were full of uncertainty. When he remained firm she appealed to his chivalry and asked him if he realized she was fighting for her life and reputation. Greenwood only budged to the point of saying that if it were not Sister McPherson, it would have to be a twin sister. As the evangelist stood nervously clasping and unclasping her hands, Greenwood volunteered that her thick ankles clinched it in his mind. Aimee quickly defended her ankles and continued to do so for some time after the train continued. Reporters who witnessed the identification described Aimee as "taken back" and stunned at the building inspector's claims.<sup>58</sup>

A crowd had gathered at Maricopa Junction, but Aimee did not appear when the train stopped at 3:24 a.m. When the train arrived at Yuma after daylight, she went out and talked to the assembled people. At Colton, California the Los Angeles Express had its broadcasting equipment ready and connected to every station in

57. Review, June 27, 1927. Aimee Semple McPherson, *The Story of My Life* (Waco, Texas, 1973), p. 173.

58. *Arizona Daily Star*, June 26, 27, 28, 1926. *New York Times*, June 27, 1926.



Los Angeles (including Aimee's station KFSG) and many more in California. As the evangelist went to the radio equipment, she received a telegram from Douglas. She silently read it and screamed, and then read it over the radio. It only repeated the information about the shack claim she had before she left Douglas on the train. She briefly related her story both over the radio and to the crowd and maintained that her worst ordeal had been the doubting of her word. For the benefit of Aimee and her Colton audience, the Evangelist asked, "How many believe my story?" Quite a few hands went up. True to her earlier promise, Aimee told the world about Douglas in glowing terms. She would praise Douglas again at her temple and over her radio station.<sup>59</sup>

Sister McPherson arrived in Los Angeles Saturday afternoon, June 26, and was met by a crowd estimated at 50,000 (she claimed it was over 100,000) at the railroad station. After a welcome home, she enjoyed a triumphal parade to her temple residence. A crowd quickly collected around her home and she appeared to the cheering throng and spoke to them from the French windows of her upstairs bedroom. She asked them, "How many have been faithful and believed through all this?" A solid mass of hands went up. Overjoyed, Aimee told the crowd to go inside the temple and she would speak to them. A short time later Sister appeared in the temple before more than 5,000 cheering followers. A radio microphone was connected and Aimee spoke to her disciples over her radio as she addressed the faithful in the temple. The evangelist told her story, dramatically acting out several parts of it. She ridiculed the various rumors circulating about her and heaped scorn upon the Tucson building inspector. She concluded the emotional meeting filled with much cheering, clapping, foot stomping and shouting with a question which soon became standard. She asked for a show of hands as to how many believed her story. That evening she repeated the performance and, of course, asked the standard question. She would use the ritual of telling her story, then attack her critics and then ask for a show of hands of those who believed her very frequently during the next year. Apparently it gave her an emotional recharge, certainly it assured her that her fears and doubts in Douglas need no longer bother her, she had been accepted back.

Later that night Aimee telephoned Editor McCafferty in Douglas to tell him the news of her glorious reception and meetings. She also asked about the shack claim and quickly asserted she would return by airplane if it was the one. McCafferty told her Bowden had stated that the shack could not be the one she was held in "if her legal statement was correct." She conceded it was Chief Bowden's decision. She did not tell Mc-

59. Dispatch, June 27, 1926.



Cafferty that already her legal statement had another serious dent in it. Earlier that afternoon when she took Cline and Ryan to the beach to recreate the kidnapping, she had to relocate the abductors' car from being parked near Lick's Pier in an embarrassing "no parking" zone where she had maintained it was in her story. She moved it two whole blocks to a position right in front of an occupied beach cottage with several other houses nearby.

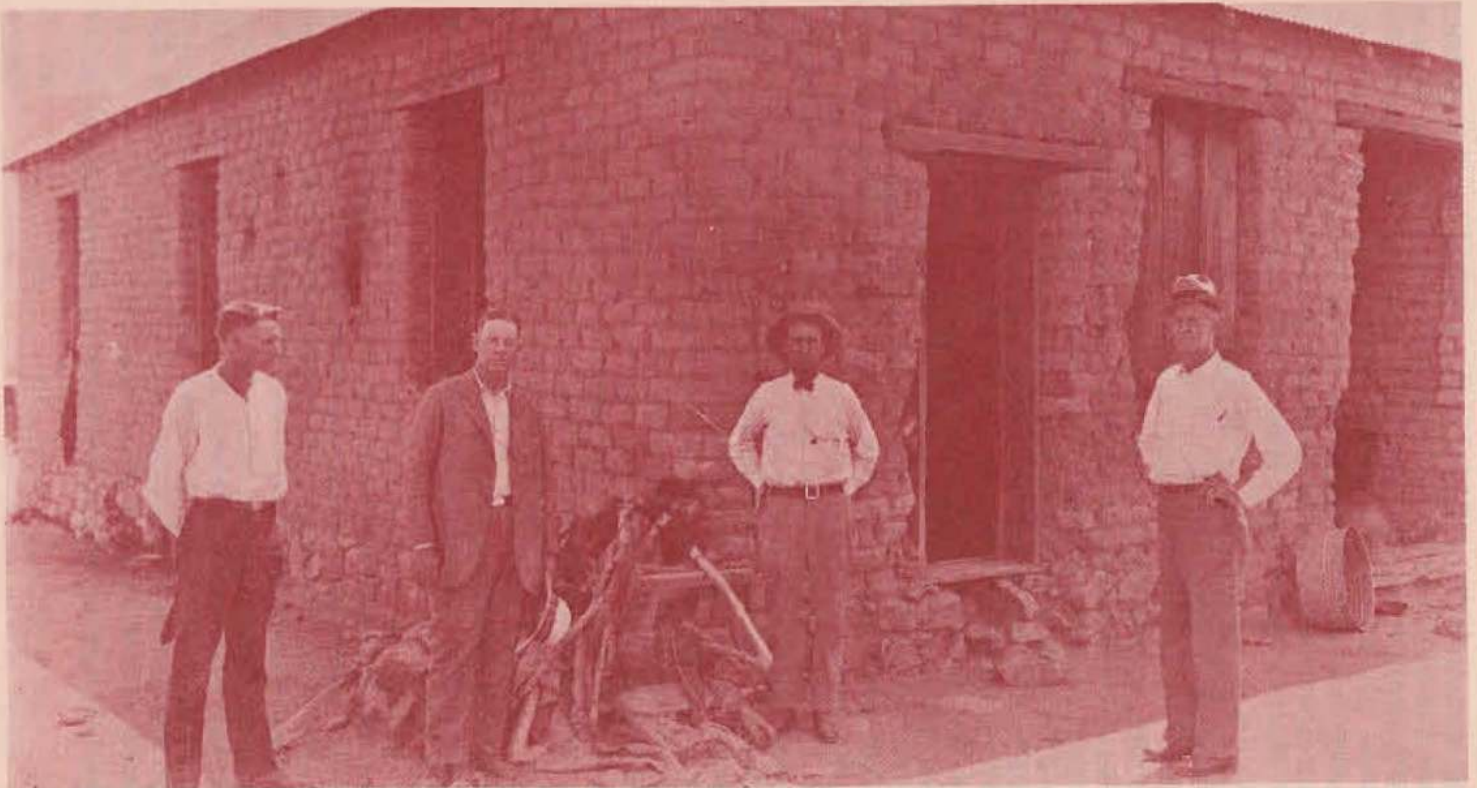
Still she stuck with her story, of course, with numerous shifts and attempted changes. The Los Angeles press dispatches were becoming more critical of her story and giving full coverage to the rumors and reports. This upset Aimee and after missing the morning service Sunday, she discussed her story in the afternoon and evening sessions. She tried to prop up several weak points, such as giving the real reason her clothing and shoes remained undamaged was that the desert vegetation grew in clumps and she easily stepped between the plants. For good measure, she recalled that the three Hebrew children who were cast into the fiery furnace endured without their clothing and shoes even being scorched. She tore into reports (she called them lies) of her critics and compared herself to Daniel in the Bible who, she stated, had been saved from the lion's den but not from lying tongues. She maintained it was possible to walk twenty miles in the desert without suffering sunburn for she pulled her skirt up over her head, but she carefully explained to her followers that she couldn't have done this even being alone on the desert for modesty's sake except her abductors had furnished her with a long slip. Surprisingly, Sunday afternoon she told her people it would be unwise for her to give a long sermon until she got some beef steaks in her; instead she gave her very lengthy story. Sunday evening she assured her followers she had had her first solid food in days—a half a sandwich and a glass of orange juice. This did not tally with the hospital records, the cook and waitresses at the Gadsden Hotel dining room, or the members of the search party who took a lunch break with Aimee on Friday.<sup>60</sup>

During one of the Sunday sessions at the temple, Aimee admitted there was a time when she feared adverse publicity but now that was over. Her people believed, or most of them did, but Aimee couldn't understand why everyone didn't believe her like the members of her church. She continued to avoid the nasty reporters and lashed out at the press who kept on emphasizing the mystery of the whole case, especially the illusive shack. Aimee and her mother spent Monday and Tuesday assailing the newspapers and doubters of the evangelist's story.

Wednesday, June 30, Aimee and Mrs. Kennedy slipped quietly

60. Ibid.





**"Four of the searchers who combed the desert looking for the captivity shack in Aimee's story. From left to right: Reporter Harold Henry, Constable O.A. Ash, Deputy U.S.**

**Marshal Tom Simms, and Douglas Police Lieutenant Leslie Gatliff."**



out of Los Angeles on the train. Reporters, perhaps suspicious at the lull in the bombardment, went to the temple but could get no information from the staff. The press guessed the two women were returning to Douglas, so they notified the press at way stations along the train's route where other reporters boarded the train. Immediately, the news men sought out Aimee on the train. Reluctantly, Aimee talked to the persistent reporters and denied the trip was secret or mysterious. She had just received a telephone call from "friends in Douglas" and they urged her to return and have another look for the shack. She claimed her Douglas friends had found several shacks which looked promising. She was cold and abrupt with the reporters and charged that the Los Angeles press had been very unfair to her.

In the meantime, Douglas was bogged down in shack checking. After the evangelist's departure on Friday, the posted rewards stirred great activity among those who had already been searching and those interested in a tidy sum. The search extended to unbelievable distances—east into New Mexico and as far south as Nacozari, Sonora. Several individuals produced shack claims and Chief Bowden was kept busy checking them out. He discounted every claim and in several shacks he saw items of evidence that had been planted. In a couple of these cases Bowden asked the claimants to look closely at the inside of the shacks and tell him if it had really been occupied recently; perplexed, they had to admit no one had resided in the shacks lately. Bowden took some of the planted evidence and locked it up in the city hall safe, which apparently dampened this impulse. On the Monday after Aimee's departure, the Douglas city council resolved to expend an effort to clear up the McPherson abduction case, but then did little or nothing to help resolve the issue. The following Wednesday, one week after Aimee stumbled into Agua Prieta, the Reverend J.E. Howard received a telegram from the evangelist notifying him of her arrival the next morning. She requested that a search party be ready when she arrived. Wednesday evening it rained and if there remained any significant tracks in the desert, they were washed out.<sup>61</sup>

Thursday, July 1, the morning newspaper was out early as usual and announced the imminent arrival of Sister McPherson. A couple of hours later at 7:40 a.m. the train arrived with the evangelist, Mrs. Kennedy, and the reporters. About a hundred spectators lined the station platform, but the only form of a reception came from the reporters. Angrily, the two women elbowed their way past the press to the waiting car of Reverend Howard. Aimee furiously slammed the car door and yelled, "I do not wish to be molested!" Aimee and her mother remained in the

61. *Dispatch*, June 29, July 1, 1926. *Review*, July 1, 2, 1926.



parked car at the station for some time hoping the pesky reporters would get the point that they were not wanted. Failing at this, the Howard automobile drove around Douglas for approximately thirty minutes trying to elude the reporters. Finally, the car stopped at the Gadsden Hotel where the women had rooms reserved. With the press hanging close, Aimee balked and refused to go into the search area if the reporters followed. A battle of wills ensued for a short period until a compromise was reached. Aimee would allow one reporter and one photographer to accompany her on the search, and they were to share their materials with all the others.<sup>62</sup>

With the compromise arrangement, the search party drove into Mexico to check out some shacks and to give Aimee another opportunity to see if she could recognize any familiar terrain. When the car stopped for the first time, the evangelist got out and announced, "I think I won't drink water for the same length of time I went without it when I escaped, and see what effect it has on me." Within an hour (one source timed it as exactly 45 minutes) and after walking from the car a few yards now and then as the vehicle stopped, Aimee retired to the canteen and refreshed herself. A couple of times, while miles from Agua Prieta, she offered to walk back to town to prove she could do it. Frequently, she told the other searchers that she could walk over the whole area without damaging her shoes. Yet she walked just a few steps from the car each time it stopped, and she never ventured into the rough terrain. At two shacks, the evangelist demonstrated how she climbed out of the window on her escape, and she posed sitting on the window sill for the photographer. Later she posed for a picture with her skirt draped over her head to form a sunbonnet, and again for modesty's sake, she had on a long slip. The search effort turned out to be largely demonstrations and offers meant to substantiate Aimee's story but without the shack, they had little or no meaning.<sup>63</sup>

The search concentrated in Mexico but did make one excursion into the United States to check a one room earthen floor shack on the Mill's Ranch east of Douglas. Then the party took a lunch break, after which, Aimee had a meeting with Presidente Boubion. Before her last venture into the desert, Aimee requested she be permitted to work alone with the posse. The reporter and photographer willingly obliged and left to find their colleagues and share the materials they had collected. Aimee's party then resumed their search at 4:30 p.m. and looked until 7 p.m. when they returned to the Gadsden Hotel. The search, including breaks, had covered ten hours and over 160 miles. They had unsuccessfully checked eight shacks. Reporters thought the

62. *Dispatch*, July 1, 1 extra, 2, 1926.

63. *Dispatch*, July 1 extra, 1926. *Review*, July 2, 1926.



evangelist looked "haggard" after her return from the desert; although, during the portion of the search covered by a reporter, she had walked no more than half a mile. This reporter observed that she was almost totally unfamiliar with the terrain, although she had been over it during her earlier search efforts less than a week ago. However, when she returned to Los Angeles she issued this statement: "Although we spent hours in the desert we were unable to locate the shack. However, I recognized a good deal of the country as that through which I ran after I escaped."<sup>64</sup>

Aimee had earlier met with Presidente Boubion at 1 p.m. in a cafe in Agua Prieta with an American interpreter present during the half hour meeting. Boubion showed Aimee a statement he had prepared and would soon release. It stated in essence that Mexican authorities did not believe the evangelist's tale of kidnapping and a long flight to freedom. They believed she had left Douglas in an automobile and was driven to the garita east of Agua Prieta. She got out of the car and walked to the garita and around it. She returned to the road and walked along the road a short distance. She came back to the car, which turned around and brought her back to a spot two miles nearer town. Here she resumed walking, going to the slaughterhouse and then on to Agua Prieta while the car left for the United States. The Mexican officials believed the entire transaction took place during the afternoon and evening of June 22. Boubion then asked Aimee "if she had been in Agua Prieta for eight days before she made her presence known." Aimee answered, "No, only three days." She later qualified her answer by saying she meant she had been on the outskirts of Agua Prieta for three days. Aimee asked him to withhold his statement, and he asked her to meet him in his office about 5 p.m. She agreed to be there.<sup>65</sup>

The evangelist resumed her search of the desert and did not meet with Boubion. The Presidente waited in his office until her train left Douglas. Then he released his statement shown to Aimee along with an account of the meeting with her at 1 p.m. He claimed she asked him to withhold or entirely suppress his statement because it differed so much from her story. Boubion's two statements appeared in the press the following day and were reprinted from coast to coast, much to Aimee's displeasure.<sup>66</sup>

When the search party returned to the hotel at 7 p.m. Aimee and the posse made plans for a search effort the next day. The evangelist stated she wanted to start early and "widen the circle of our search. I want to locate the cabin, and I am willing to devote

64. Dispatch, July 1 extra, 2, 3, 1926. Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, California), July 2, 3, 1926.

65. Review, July 2, 3, 1926.

66. Review, July 2, 1926.



every ounce of my strength and energy toward that end." Two Douglasites were at the hotel with another shack claim they wanted Aimee to inspect. Two women had planned a two day stay in Douglas with hotel and train reservations accordingly. Suddenly the evangelist cancelled her planned search, checked out of the hotel and hurried to the railroad station to catch the 9:10 p.m. train for Los Angeles. Aimee was upset and would not talk and went right into the railroad car without a word or smile to the small crowds assembled at the station. Mrs. Kennedy stopped on the car steps and tried to offset the curtness of her daughter. She said that Aimee might return again soon and she believed that would be a "lovely thing" for Douglas. Then she asked those who believed that Sister McPherson's return would be lovely to raise their hands. Only a handful of people bothered to raise their hands.<sup>67</sup>

Aimee's hasty retreat was not prompted by the failure of the desert search or even by the embarrassing statement that Boubion was about to release. She left when she received alarming news from California that two grand juries were thinking about looking into her case concerning possible mail fraud of a ransom note, and a strange temple memorial service that collected over \$36,000 in cash and pledges just prior to Aimee's reappearance. The news seemed to almost crush Sister McPherson; she went into her drawing room and refused to speak to the reporters, who had received the news and quickly boarded the train. At Bisbee Junction about fifty members of Aimee's "Foursquare Church of the Air" were at the station to say goodbye to the evangelist. Aimee refused to go outside but did open her car window and speak a few words to them. As the train rolled into the night, the pesky reporters persisted to knock on the door of the two women's compartment. Finally, Mrs. Kennedy reluctantly opened the door and the press saw a Sister Aimee Semple McPherson they had never seen before. She seemed in full retreat, extremely docile and quiet. She seemed almost child-like and taking orders from her mother to do little things such as to stand up and turn around for the reporters. Mrs. Kennedy did nearly all the talking.

The women reached Los Angeles Friday afternoon, July 2, where a very small crowd had gathered. Reporters asked for Aimee's comments on Boubion's statement which was now out, but she refused to say anything. Mrs. Kennedy dismissed Boubion's statement with an uncomplimentary gesture and three words "That's Mexico, Mexico." Back at the temple, the evangelist returned to normal as her people's continued confidence in her with the outward manifestation of cheering, clapping and foot stomping revived her again. By Sunday af-

67. Dispatch, July 2, 1926. Review, July 2, 1926.



ternoon, July 4, she was ready to take on Senior Boubion in her theater. She attacked Presidente Boubion and his "lies," and stated that in this case things had been turned upside down for people were paying more attention to the word of "one Mexican" than she had ever known them to do before. She paced back and forth on the platform ranting and raving about that Mexican. She attacked him again in the evening service (for several months to come temple services were Aimee story services) even acknowledging that his statement was different from her story, but it still was the word of "one Mexican." In the evening service she had a map of the Agua Prieta area put on a stand, then with a pointer she identified the major landmarks and made some vague references to her escape route. After which, she focused on the shack that no one could find. She couldn't find it because she had left in such a hurry that she did not take note of the outside of the shack or the terrain. Then she tried to declare her independence from locating the shack by stating: " 'Sister, darling, some are saying haven't you any sense? Don't you realize that anybody clever enough to plan that crime could do away with the shack and any evidence!' That is true."

Aimee and her flock missed the point. Boubion's statement was not the word of one Mexican, but of several Mexican officials after a week of investigation which included the evangelist's participation. Furthermore, Boubion was just the first official on either side of the border to issue a public statement that reflected not only the evidence of the footprints and car tracks but the belief of the vast majority of those associated with the case. Sheriff McDonald had earlier sent his private statement to Cline which reviewed the clothing, lack of thirst and physical condition of Aimee and concluded, "Mrs. McPherson's story is not borne out by the facts." It was really not the word of one Mexican but the word of one lady evangelist with a big vested interest telling a fantastic story without any corroborating evidence. In her temple she could wave away the shack and other evidence against her, but in the outside world it just wouldn't wash. The shack remained unfound and unexplained. It became the butt of jokes and dirty stories. The proprietor of a hamburger stand in Los Angeles renamed his establishment "Aimee's Shack" and did a booming business until the evangelist obtained a court injunction against his using the name.

Boubion's public statement caused the Douglas authorities to act. Quickly, Mayor Hinton, Chief Bowden and Murchison drafted a report of their findings. Although the full report was not known locally, it was known that it agreed basically with Boubion's. Bowden mailed the report to Cline on July 2 and the Los Angeles officer received it on July 5. It coincided with the Mexican report in every respect except it did not emphasize that Douglas was



thought to be the place where the car began that took Aimee into Mexico. It did add the detail that one of Aimee's shoes matched some of the footprints. Bowden's report also contained stenographic statements of five witnesses who saw or assisted Aimee when she first reappeared. When the press asked Cline about the contents of the Douglas report, he would not reveal the substance, but did state it contained startling information that he dared not have printed at that time. It was later revealed this included a positive identification by the railroad ticket agent in Douglas of Harry D. Hallenback as the man who bought a ticket for Los Angeles on the 9:10 p.m. train on June 22. Hallenback had been the construction superintendent during the building of Aimee's Bible school, and was presently a Yuma rancher. He had continued a warm personal relationship with Aimee and her mother. He also retained strong connections in Los Angeles where he was a special deputy in the sheriff's department.<sup>68</sup>

On July 3 Ryan received a letter from "A Listener in Radioland" containing a page torn from the **Los Angeles Times** of June 25. The paper had a picture of the evangelist in the hospital bed taken probably June 23. On Aimee's arm was a wrist watch. The letter writer had a question as to whether the kidnappers had given their captive a wrist watch as well as a corset that fit perfectly. The watch had not been deemed odd or significant by the first law officials and reporters who saw and talked with the evangelist. The watch had disappeared by the second morning in the hospital, but it was worn for at least part of a day and those whose business it was to notice such details had missed an obvious item. Under questioning in the first grand jury hearing, Aimee maintained she had no watch on while swimming or during her captivity. She affirmed that the watch she wore to the hearing was the only one she had. At this point a puzzled Aimee asked the district attorney if the watch questions were material, and he asked her if she had her watch on in the Douglas hospital. She gave a definite no. When she was shown the picture, she quickly claimed her mother had brought the watch to her and wanted to know the date of the newspaper. However, the newspaper date was not needed, for in this one case, her mother did not back up the evangelist for the watch had been in a Los Angeles jewelry shop from shortly before her disappearance until she returned from Douglas. Aimee had no explanation for the embarrassing watch in the picture.<sup>69</sup>

The Tucson, Arizona chief of police released a statement by an automobile dealer, C.A. Pape, identifying Aimee as the woman Pape and a doctor friend had seen in Agua Prieta on June 20. Pape

68. Dispatch, July 3, 6, 18, 25, 1926.

69. Los Angeles Times, June 25, July 8, 9, 10, 13, Sept. 28, 29, 30, 1926.



first made his identification from a photograph, but later he identified the evangelist in person when he testified before the grand jury. He claimed she was "positively the woman" he saw half hiding in a night club parking lot. She was with another woman and they were soon joined by two men who took the women to a car and left. Pape identified Hallenback as one of the men with Aimee. A Tucson store employee identified Hallenback as the man he sold a Panama hat to on June 20. Sheriff McDonald now released for publication the testimony of the two men who reported they saw Aimee in a large blue car near Esquita, Mexico the day before she reappeared. The sheriff also published his interview with a hospital nurse and Aimee's hospital chart showing Sister McPherson was not thirsty, and very clean and in remarkable physical condition that cast serious doubt on her claimed desert ordeal.<sup>70</sup>

On July 6, 1926 Los Angeles District Attorney Asa Keyes went before the county grand jury and requested it to investigate the McPherson case. Subpoenas were issued for Aimee, Mrs. Kennedy, Hallenback and other temple workers to appear before the grand jury, which also invited Douglas and Agua Prieta authorities and witnesses to appear. Although the hearing was to determine if there was enough evidence to indict kidnappers, the subpoenas drove Aimee and her mother into virtual hiding. The two women discussed with close friends whether the evangelist should testify before the grand jury or refuse to repeat her story under oath. Finally a judge friend persuaded them that Aimee should testify.

On July 8 Sister McPherson appeared before the grand jury. She told her story uninterrupted; then underwent two hours of cross examination by Keyes and Ryan in which she, the injured party claiming a kidnapping, almost fell into the position of a defendant. Twice during her testimony she said the shack seemed like a temporary camping outfit rather than a permanent building. She also qualified her original stand on the floor of the structure. She claimed that on her July 1 trip into the search area she was in a shack which she thought had a wooden floor only to be told later it was an earthen floor. She stated it was smoothed out and hardened with some preparation which made it look just like a wood floor. Aimee, who four days earlier claimed the shack had been destroyed, now returned to her earlier wondering. But the real wonder was that she tried to tie the temporary camping outfit in with a smoothed out specially prepared hardened floor. The two ideas worked at cross purposes with each other. The advantage of the camping outfit lay in its removal with little evidence of ever being there. The specially prepared hard floor would among obvious disadvantages, either leave a floor that could be found, or

70. Dispatch, July 7, 8, 9, 1926. Review, July 7, 8, 1926.



if removed leave evidence of its location. Aimee disagreed with the written statement of the hospital nurse and her hospital chart, and claimed her lips were cracked and her tongue felt swollen. Under questioning she had trouble explaining the presence of the wrist watch and the silk hair net. She continued to be evasive on the move from the first shack to the second one and all terrain features encountered on her alleged flight to freedom.

Sergeant Murchison, the only witness from the desert region, reported on the unsuccessful desert search and lack of evidence to support Aimee's story. The Hallenback connection was covered only superficially at best. Even before the hearing he had appeared in Ryan's office with apparent proof of his whereabouts all the time that witnesses had him in Arizona and Mexico with Aimee. He offered an affidavit giving his day by day movements to the grand jury. Hallenback's wealth and connections plus the design of the hearing—not to prove anything against Aimee but to see if sufficient evidence existed to proceed against kidnapers—prevented a thorough check of his possible involvement. However, a few reporters saw an apparent connection. They were not impressed with his employees backing him on his movements. They also discovered he had a blue Hupmobile (almost always the car seen in and around Agua Prieta with the two women and two men was described as blue Hupmobile) registered to him, but unexplainably couldn't be located, and Hallenback would not tell of its whereabouts. The reporters also thought they saw something significant in the most verifiable item of his alibi—his telephone call from Los Angeles to Aimee in the hospital at about 3 p.m. on June 23. If the Douglas ticket agent was correct in his identification of Hallenback boarding the train of June 22, he would have arrived in Los Angeles at 2:45 p.m. on June 23. The timing of the telephone call appeared suspicious enough, but increased when considered with the four eye witnesses who placed him and a blue Hupmobile in southeastern Arizona and northern Sonora. Many reporters believed Hallenback helped engineer Aimee's reappearance.<sup>71</sup>

Mr. Pape of Tucson testified to the grand jury that he saw both Aimee and Hallenback in Agua Prieta as his written statement had earlier declared. Aimee countered with an affidavit from a woman who claimed that Pape was mistaken, for he had not seen Aimee but her, and her car was a blue Hudson and the date was June 15 not June 20. The woman claimed she remembered Pape and his doctor friend. Most of the jurors thought this affidavit, suggesting a mistake, to be unlikely since the car dealer surely knew a Hupmobile from a Hudson; besides Pape had a visa to ascertain the June 20 date. As the time neared for the grand jury

71. *Dispatch*, July 9, 14, 20, 21, 22, 1926. *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 21, 1926.



to make a decision, Aimee attacked Presidente Boubion again and now charged that he had asked for a bribe to keep silent. The evangelist's lawyers produced another affidavit from the interpreter who supported Aimee's charge. Boubion denied the charge of attempted extortion. Reporters, checking on the interpreter, found he had a police record and was known for his shady dealings in the extortion area. The suspicion soon arose that Sister McPherson had paid for the interpreter's support.

On July 20 the district attorney laid three blank indictments—naming Steve Doe, Rose Roe, and John Moe—before the grand jury. The grand jury debated all day then voted against indictments stating there was insufficient evidence to warrant any action against kidnappers. District Attorney Keyes was relieved for he had never liked the case; in his mind, the grand jury, by not believing Aimee's story, had gently stripped her of her veracity—enough to satisfy her critics but not enough to get Aimee really steamed up. But the critics exploded, charging a suppression of the facts of the case which Keyes would not now make public as he had once promised. Aimee reacted and issued a statement charging that California and the desert had been searched, not for kidnappers, but for evidence against the evangelist. No such evidence was found, therefore, Aimee claimed her story was as "firm and unshaken as the first time it was told." Her statement maintained that the official investigation bore her story out and proved it true and revealed her as a "truthful, upright woman." Lastly, the statement claimed that Aimee Semple McPherson was vindicated.

Her unbelievable statement totally belied the facts. The search for the kidnappers never got very far because the starting point—the shack—couldn't be found, even by Aimee. The desert evidence disproved her story in numerous ways. Her story, far from being firm and unshaken, was weak and vague, and she had changed it repeatedly to prop up weak points and discrepancies. She stuck with her story for at this point she had no other alternative since she feared losing her entire religious setup if she admitted that which was being whispered. Furthermore, her lot was made easier when law enforcement officials failed to press her on her inconsistencies, discrepancies, numerous changes and the several points she would not explain. In self defense she had repeatedly modified and changed her unfirm account more often and as fast as the strange porcupine reportedly grew new quills. Aimee's story had evolved into a tale as tall, unbelievable and shaken as the prickly creature throwing off its quills. Her claimed vindication was strictly unilateral and self-proclaimed, but it probably revealed that Mrs. McPherson intended to let the dust settle rather than trying to reopen the case and run into that illusive shack again. She would cry vindication and use the raised hands of believers to restore her veracity until time settled the matter.



However, on the same evening the grand jury refused to indict, Ryan rushed north to Carmel, California on a tip. Soon a bombshell broke of an alleged love nest in a rented cottage occupied by Aimee and her former radio operator Kenneth Ormiston. This revelation put substance to what had previously circulated as rumor and supposition and put the blue Chrysler and its mysterious occupants back in the case. This aspect of the case, more spicy and damaging, swept the desert episode from the front pages and eventually completely out of the newspapers. As the damning evidence mounted, Aimee launched a bitter counter-attack at her temple and over the radio. On August 3, 1926 Keyes took the matter before the grand jury and this time Aimee was indeed the defendant. When a woman juror destroyed some prime evidence—handwritten grocery slips found at the rented cottage which handwriting experts stated had been written by Aimee—and when the lady juror refused to resign after promising to do so, the judge dismissed the whole grand jury.

In desperation Sister McPherson became involved with some characters in trying to produce kidnappers and a "Miss X," who looked like Aimee, to put in the love nest with Ormiston (he remained in hiding and only communicated by letter and affidavit primarily when called upon by Aimee). One of Aimee's characters got thrown in jail and when Sister did not come to the rescue in time, a newspaper bailed her out and she claimed that Aimee had coached and paid her to pose as "Miss X." That was the last straw for the district attorney. On September 16 he issued complaints against Sister McPherson, Mrs. Kennedy, Ormiston and the woman who admitted faking evidence. Since there was no sitting grand jury, Keyes had to resort to a preliminary hearing in court to see if there was enough evidence to warrant regular court proceedings. Ordinarily, such hearings took less than half an hour, but this extraordinary case covered the period from September 27 to November 3. It was the longest preliminary hearing in California legal history.

The state charged that Aimee's kidnapping story was a fabrication, and she had tried to get other persons indicted for a fictitious abduction and conspired to obstruct justice by producing false evidence and paid for the same. The total proceedings resembled a three ring circus, with the main ring in the hall of justice where evidence was introduced, while the second and third rings were Aimee's temple and her radio station where each night she recounted the courtroom happenings to heap scorn on the witnesses ("liars" and "parrots"), Keyes and Ryan (no longer fine officers and gentlemen but nasty Catholics persecuting a Protestant minister), and the whole hearing (the work of the devil). The judge received several death threats and a paper boy, calling out an unfavorable newspaper headline about Aimee, was



wounded by gunfire as passions ran high especially among Sister McPherson's followers since she encouraged them with her performances at the temple and over the radio.

Since this article is concerned with the desert episode of the case, suffice it to say the prosecution had several eye witnesses testify they saw Aimee at the Carmel cottage, and produced a photograph of the destroyed grocery slip with Aimee's hand writing and a signed telegram to show the evangelist was at Carmel. However, the prosecution concentrated their effort on the illegal manufacturing of evidence.

The desert episode was only a brief sidelight in the prosecution's case, and again Aimee had trouble with the unfound shack, her clothing and no evidence of a long desert walk. Murchison, of the Douglas police, testified as he had before the grand jury. He stated that no evidence had been found to substantiate the evangelist's kidnapping and escape story. He told of the puzzling tracks and on a map located every shack within twenty miles of Agua Prieta. He stated that a check of each shack by officers and Aimee had failed to locate the shack in her story. When shown the dress she had worn, Murchison commented on its lack of stains, dirt and its not being torn. As Murchison testified on the dress, Aimee's chief counsel had the dress at the defense table and let it fall to the floor. Keyes jumped up and asked the judge to stop the defense from smudging the evidence. Keyes charged the defense lawyer with dipping the dress in some water spilled on the table and letting the dress fall to the floor. Although the defense counsel denied this, the judge ordered the clerk to take the dress away from him.

When the defense presented its case, the desert and Aimee's story were the whole argument. C.E. Cross, the lead-off witness, told of finding a woman's footprints at least nine miles from Agua Prieta, and upheld the possibility of Aimee having made the long desert journey for he had once made one like she claimed. In cross-examination, he could not explain the connection between the tracks he mentioned and those Murchison described. He could not account for the cleanliness of her clothing, but he did put his feet up on the court railing to display his heavy desert boots and stated he had worn them every day except two since the evangelist reappeared and much of the time he was searching the desert. His boots appeared not overly scuffed or scratched. He was somewhat embarrassed when he failed to recognize a photograph of Niggerhead Mountain but was good-natured about it. Cross would not volunteer an opinion on the shack like his strong statement in Douglas. After Cross' testimony the hearing recessed for the day. The desert witnesses retired to Angelus Temple for an ice cream party. The guests included Cross, George Cook, O.E. Patterson, Tom Simms, Harold Henry, Leslie Gatliff and Ramon and Theresa Gonzales.



The next day Douglas Police Officer O.E. Patterson testified Aimee appeared exhausted when he first saw her. In his backtracking he claimed he found tracks eight miles from Agua Prieta. In cross-examination he confessed that the tracks ran for just a short distance and were next to impossible to connect with the other footprints, but he did not volunteer the information that these tracks were the same as the ones Cross mentioned with only their distance from Agua Prieta varying by a mile. Patterson denied a report that he had told the press earlier he didn't believe a woman could cross the desert as Aimee claimed and be in as good condition. George Cook told the court the evangelist was "all in" when he saw her. Unsolicited he told of a recent family trip into the desert in which his four-year-old daughter, in a hike, got neither sunburned legs nor scratches on her sandals. He did not offer to explain his original view on the evangelist's shoes when he told his wife that if he had taken those shoes before anyone else saw them, he would have had it made for the rest of his life. The only possible interpretation to this would be that a grateful or blackmailed Aimee would have paid dearly for those unmarked shoes.

Through an interpreter, Ramon Gonzales told of finding the evangelist in his yard, and she drank two glasses of water at his home. Theresa Gonzales mostly confirmed her husband's statement, and then volunteered to the embarrassment of Aimee that Mrs. McPherson did not ask for water until she had been on their porch for one hour. Three more Douglas witnesses—Leslie Gatliff, Tom Simms and Harold Henry—tried to give support to Aimee's claimed flight across the desert. They swore they found tracks more than fifteen miles from Agua Prieta, but admitted they showed only in a few places for a very short distance. The men added a new item to the desert evidence when they reported seeing a gap in the Gallardo fence that had recently been cut with pliers. They felt a person could conceivably have passed through this gap without noticing the fence. They did not know where the shack was and had to admit that all cabins had been checked within several days walk of Agua Prieta. The three men also displayed their shoes which they too had worn searching the desert. The shoes were not significantly scratched.

The prosecution asked the desert witnesses how much they expected to be paid by Aimee for testifying. They responded that \$10 a day and expenses would be fair for their trouble and loss of wages. That night in the temple Sister McPherson explained that paying the expenses of witnesses was customary and defended her ice cream party for her desert guests. Once again she discussed her desert ordeal, putting it in a Biblical context, and wrapped it up with a question: "If the children of Israel could walk forty years in the wilderness without wearing out their shoes



or clothing, why couldn't Mrs. McPherson walk twenty miles without coming in barefoot?"

The next day two more witnesses from Douglas—Constable O.A. Ash and photographer M.E. Irwin—testified. They merely repeated the report of the tracks some fifteen miles from Agua Prieta. Ash showed his coat and shoes which he had worn while searching the desert. Irwin confessed he had tried to sell one of his photographs to a Los Angeles newspaper as the captivity shack. The defense had brought in ten witnesses, yet their combined testimony and shoes did not begin to compare with Murchison's testimony in regard to the hard facts. In fact Cross, Cook, Ramon Gonzales and perhaps Patterson had expressed strong disbelief in Aimee's story earlier back in Douglas.

The hearing concluded with the two sides presenting their oral and written briefs. The defense asked for the case to be dismissed on the legal technicality posed by the prosecution's theory that no kidnapping had occurred. So, if no abduction, then it was no crime for Aimee and Mrs. Kennedy to say there was one. The defense parried the perjury and corruption of the public morals charges by claiming no material interest. Keyes agreed no crime had been committed in Aimee's disappearance or even in her going to Carmel, which the evidence proved, except the evangelist may have been guilty of violating a local rooming house ordinance, but he was not concerned with that. He stressed the charge of corrupting public morals in perpetrating a hoax and then producing false testimony and evidence to get herself out of a jam. Keyes stated: "It outrages human intelligence to believe that Mrs. McPherson was kidnapped." He called Ormiston a shaking, sneaky coward afraid to come out of hiding.

On November 3, 1926 the judge, after a recess, returned to the courtroom and read his brief decision: "The issue presented to this court is not the guilt or innocence of these defendants of the crimes charged in the deposition and the court is not passing upon such an issue. That is the province of a jury. However, this court is called upon to determine whether or not there is sufficient cause to believe the defendant committed such offense or offenses . . . . After a full examination of the entire evidence, there is sufficient cause to believe the defendants guilty." The judge ordered Aimee, her mother, Ormiston (still hiding) and another woman held for trial. After a mutual postponement, the state had until January 10, 1927 to start proceedings.

Even before the hearing concluded, reporters tracking the illusive Ormiston caught up with a much traveled trunk belonging to Aimee's former radio operator. The trunk was filled with women's clothing including a silk evangelist robe and clothing and shoes that were Aimee's size and from stores where she had



charge accounts. The trunk contained two damning articles—a blouse with a Carmel dry cleaner mark and a blue and gray silk dress with a dry cleaner mark from an establishment on the same boulevard as Angelus Temple. The latter firm's records showed the dress had been brought in by Aimee's secretary and that during the cleaning one of the dress's four tassels came off but was not noticed until after the dress had been delivered. The tassel had never been picked up, and it matched the other three on the dress perfectly. Finally, in mid-December reporters caught up with Ormiston in the eastern United States and he returned to Los Angeles on December 17. He and Aimee had a secret meeting before the end of the year. The prosecution's case appeared to have been sewn up, but just then the prosecution took a vacillating attitude toward the case. One day it was going to drop the case, and then the next day it declared it would carry the case to a conclusion. On January 9, 1927 Aimee announced from her temple she was about to leave on a "vindication tour" of the United States and predicted the case would be dropped.

The next day District Attorney Keyes asked the court to drop all charges. However, he did not spare the evangelist in his dismissal request which stated in part: "The fact that this defendant fabricated a kidnapping story, or that she spent a time at Carmel, are not, in themselves, offenses of which this court can entertain jurisdiction. Reputable witnesses have testified sufficiently concerning both the Carmel incident and the return of Mrs. McPherson from the so-called kidnapping adventure to enable her to be judged in the only court of her jurisdiction—the court of public opinion."

When this news (she already knew it and was not in court) was flashed to Aimee's home, she gave her patented faint and quick recovery. As soon as she could, she obtained a newspaper extra and read the press account. Seeking out her mother, she waved the paper and exclaimed, "Mother, I'm sitting on top of the world!" Mrs. Kennedy was not thrilled and told her daughter she had been "left in a dirty hole." But that hole was the best the evangelist could have obtained with the evidence mounted against her at the judgment bar. That night in the temple a jubilee of cheering, shouting, stomping, whistling and confetti throwing forced Aimee to wait fifteen glorious minutes before she could speak. She told her followers her case was like the Tower of Babel. The blocks of lies rose only so high until deity confused the tongues of the builders and they contradicted each other, leaving standing only the true facts as told by her. The next day she left on her vindication tour of the United States where she told her story to paid admission audiences. The case cost Sister McPherson a severe judgment in the court of public opinion and the unbelievable sum of between \$100,000 and \$269,000 in legal fees, bribes and blackmail (ten years later she admitted she had been



forced to pay off). It caused her to break her mother's nose and dissolved their partnership, and it almost caused the loss financially of her beloved Angelus Temple.

After Aimee left Douglas the last time on the evening of July 1 to become involved in her legal and moral problems, Douglas soon slipped to minor importance in the case. The search for the shack expanded due to the rewards until on July 2 Mexican authorities called a halt to the entry of Americans into the prime search area without getting the required permit. The official search continued until July 7, but individuals kept looking until at least mid-August. On July 9 another shack was found with the by now standard planted evidence with the addition of a copy of a California newspaper of May 18, the day Aimee disappeared. The men who found the shack claimed the structure had been recently occupied, but when officials checked it out, not only did it lack a wooden floor but had enough dust and cobwebs to indicate it hadn't had residents within five months.<sup>72</sup>

It was evident there were becoming too many shack claims. A Douglas plumber proposed to a friend that they tear down an old shack and reassemble it in Mexico with a wooden floor. One report claimed the man actually tore down an old shack, but more than likely the idea never got past being a proposal since where could it be reconstructed in the search area and be seriously considered? In Los Angeles on July 25 at Sunday morning services in the temple, the Reverend J.E. Howard spoke. He told the congregation he had come to their city from Douglas uninvited to assure them that the search for the shack was not over, and that only recently four shacks had been found and officers admitted any one of them could be the one in which Aimee had been held captive. The evangelist thanked Howard and emphasized that he came on his own and paid his own way. Then Aimee added that she thought the good friends of Angelus Temple would not let it be that way. Apparently a special collection was taken at that moment. A few days later Mrs. Kennedy announced that a radio set had been presented to Howard so Douglasites could listen to temple services. The radio was placed in the Douglas YMCA.<sup>73</sup>

The last serious shack claim (if any of them could be called serious) came in early August. The Douglas newspaper, whose record for getting the shack positively found was notorious by now, advised its readers, "Mrs. McPherson Identifies Shack in Mexico as One Where She Was Held." The shack was twelve miles south of Niggerhead Mountain on the Elias Ranch. It contained

72. Dispatch, July 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 1926.

73. Interview with John Rogers, Jan. 28, 1973. Dispatch, July 27, 28, 29, Aug. 24, 1926.



the standard five gallon oil can but no wooden floor. However, the floor was hard "seemingly of a light coat of cement." A map of the area, some twenty photographs of the shack, and affidavits had been sent to Aimee in Los Angeles. She called and identified the shack according to the newspaper. This claim was toned down the next day, and the paper told of the evangelist being ready with the reward if the committee of Chief Bowden, Mayor Hinton and Reverend Howard approved the shack. Howard was definitely for the shack and Hinton leaned that way as well, and apparently Bowden for once was noncommittal. Perhaps he was waiting to see if Aimee would come again and commit herself to a positive identification. Aimee's friends in Douglas pressed her to come and identify the shack in person and remove all doubt. Aimee protested that she was afraid to come because of Agua Prieta's Presidente. Boubion was shocked at the insinuation, but gave assurances that he would offer her no opposition if she came. However, the evangelist still would not come. The local newspaper printed that there were rumors that Aimee would be molested if she came. Since the paper cited no specifics and no one else had heard the rumors, perhaps they started in Angelus Temple. When Aimee did not come, this last shack fell from grace as Chief Bowden recalled that the evangelist had said she crossed no road in her escape, but she would have had to cross a well-traveled road in the daylight to get from this shack to Agua Prieta.<sup>74</sup>

On Sunday the Fourth of July while Aimee in Los Angeles tried to declare her independence from the shack by stating her abductors destroyed it, many Douglasites found their own way of showing their independence from the shack. At a baseball game between rivals Douglas and Bisbee, a gust of wind picked up a small pasteboard box and carried it swirling and bouncing across the field delaying the game. As the box closed in on the crowd, a fan jumped up, pointed and yelled, "There comes Aimee's shack!" Undoubtedly this fan got the hit of the day and the crowd its biggest laugh.<sup>75</sup>

In spite of the sentiments of the baseball fans, there were a few who saw a gain to be had from Aimee's visit. They were primarily businessmen, Mayor Hinton and Editor McCafferty. Their feelings were reflected early as shown by an article in the local newspaper on the Friday Aimee left Douglas the first time. the article said in part:

It has been two great days for Douglasites. Quite without shame some of them remarked that it was "great advertizing for the old town." Most of the residents of Douglas seemed to

74. Dispatch, Aug. 7, 8, 1926.

75. Dispatch, Aug. 7, July 8, 1926.



glory in the attention which was showered upon everyone who could proffer any information at all about the city's honored visitor.<sup>76</sup>

On the day Aimee returned to Douglas (July 1) the local newspaper not only published its regular issue and an extra detailing the evangelist's search efforts, but it also issued a "Special-Independent Number." This special paper advised its readers that Aimee had opened the way for Douglas to advertise its "wonders to the world." In boosting the home town the paper declared boldly: "Henceforth and forever, these two names, Aimee and Douglas, will be linked together in the minds of the people of this country. From now on the inhabitants of the United States will know that there are more than two cities in Arizona, namely: Tucson and Phoenix." The newspaper predicted that "from now on, Douglas will be remembered." However, Douglasites were warned that remembering and desiring to see Douglas were different matters. Aimee paved the way, but now citizens and groups must follow through with a good advertising campaign. Then the paper issued its clarion call in big letters: "ALL ABOARD THE AIMEE McPHERSON-DOUGLAS SPECIAL."<sup>77</sup>

A Los Angeles Times' reporter in an article reprinted in the local paper stated that in early July, two weeks after the reappearance, Douglasites were still talking about Aimee Semple McPherson not because the inhabitants retained much of their original enthusiasm for the evangelist, but because they believed that Aimee "put Douglas on the map." The correspondent thought the city was returning to "normalcy" after the furor over Aimee and the incursion of the press. He disclosed that most Douglasites discussed the case only in a jocular vein to satisfy the curiosity of tourists. The reporter saw a funny aspect to the McPherson case as he thought it increased the rivalry between Douglas and Bisbee several degrees. He cited as proof the manner in which the Bisbee paper told of Aimee's being found in Agua Prieta and then taken to the hospital in "that other town" across the border.<sup>78</sup>

While the Los Angeles grand jury deliberated as to whether to indict three unknown kidnappers of Aimee or not, some of the Douglas boosters issued a testimonial for Sister McPherson. The statement was signed by Mayor Hinton, the president of the Douglas Chamber of Commerce and Mines, the president of the Southern Arizona Ministerial Association, the British vice-consul, one bootblack and several bankers and businessmen. The statement read as follows:

We the undersigned residents of Douglas, Arizona, who

76. Dispatch, June 25, 1926.

77. Dispatch, July 1 Special-Independent Number, 1926.

78. Dispatch, July 8, 1926.



have been greatly interested in the mass of charges and counter-charges regarding the truth of Mrs. Aimee Semple McPherson's story with regard to her abduction and subsequent reappearance in Douglas, believe:

That the statements of Mrs. McPherson with regard to her reappearance here, after an escape from her abductors and her subsequent walk into Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico, as a consequence of her being forced to flee on foot, are true, so far as we have been able to ascertain.

That there has been no iota of proof adduced here that would in any way tend to disprove any of the statements made by Mrs. McPherson regarding her reappearance, and that as citizens of Douglas, in which city she appeared, and interested in righteousness and truth, we again affirm our belief in the statements she has made.<sup>79</sup>

The interesting affirmation came after almost a month of searching had failed to discover any corroborative evidence for Aimee's story. The lack of evidence was a telling demonstration that she had not walked across the desert or spent time in any shack. Mayor Hinton, just three weeks earlier, had joined Bowden and Murchison in drafting a report which so stated; now the mayor, perhaps overzealous in trying to promote his city, switched his position. The statement was published the same day the grand jury told Aimee that they did not believe her story due to the lack of evidence. Within a week the revelation of the Carmel "love nest" made the testimonial look ridiculous.

Sister McPherson dominated the Douglas newspaper from the time of her reappearance to July 23 when for the first time she had neither front page coverage nor mention in the entire paper. For one month she had most of the headlines and extensive front page coverage. The **Douglas Daily Dispatch** published five extras and one "Special-Independent Number" in nine days which established a local record that will probably never be broken. By mid-August all the local angles had played out or been overshadowed by the Carmel disclosures, but Aimee remained a news item in the local press until the case was dropped five months later.

Within a month of her reappearance, the Douglas Chamber of Commerce and Mines was "swamped" with requests for information and maps of Douglas. Since the reappearance came at the beginning of summer, many families put the place of the evangelist's "resurrection" on their vacation schedules. The influx of tourists created by Aimee continued strong even through 1927. Douglas' biggest "wonder" remained Aimee for several more years.<sup>80</sup>

79. Dispatch, July 20, 1926.

80. Dispatch, July 22, 23, 1926.



To assist in promoting the town, the Douglas Chamber of Commerce and Mines printed and distributed automobile windshield stickers with the proud inscription: "Aimee Slept Here." Wags quickly countered with their own stickers proclaiming: "Aimee Slipped Here." Both were probably correct, but the latter was more in demand. The local newspaper sadly observed that local wits worked overtime in making fun and coining wisecracks about the reappearance of the famous evangelist. A sort of Aimeeization did take place. When Sister's train went through Tucson on the night of July 1, a peddler at the station sold "Aimee Sandwiches" made of baloney. A formation in the desert area where the evangelist claimed to have crossed was renamed "Aimee's Needle," while Niggerhead Mountain became "Aimee's Bluff." "Where She Walked" glass shoe curios sold in both Douglas and Agua Prieta. A few outsiders jested Douglasites about renaming their community "Where She Walked." Local comics picked up from burlesque comedians the mimicking of Sister McPherson's actions and mannerisms to entertain their friends. Most prevalent were the "Aimee Stories," ribald, racy and extreme. The Aimee-came-to-Agua-Prieta-for-an-abortion story was only one of this type and a mild one.<sup>81</sup>

Aimee even got into the schools. A teacher in a primary grade received a paper from an imaginative student telling about how the evangelist disappeared in the sea and then came out of a volcano near Niggerhead Mountain. In 1927 a young Douglasite came up with a novel post card showing Aimee wearing high heel shoes and a fancy dress in the desert moving toward the two border towns. The evangelist had a string on a miniature shack which she dragged behind her. The post card caption read:

Douglas Sunshine—Agua Prieta Moonshine  
Bid YOU Welcome  
"Where SHE Walked"  
A dip in the Pacific Ocean is fun—  
But folks—Did *you* ever try our desert hikes?

A serious incident reflects the extent of the promotion campaign. A family visiting Douglas had a child die, and they had a local undertaker take care of the body. When the family received the undertaker's bill, they were shocked and enraged. They struck back with a blast at the city. They had a sign painted reading, "Aimee Walked Here—And They Rob the Dead."

Aimee never visited Douglas on her "vindication tour" and she never returned each year to give thanks as she promised. She had given the town several days of excitement, fame and exposure and much to talk about. For a few years local citizens witnessed

81. Dispatch, July 8, 1926.