

ELOHIM CITY

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A COMMUNITY OF "PURISTS"

Elohim City is an Identity settlement of 70 to 90 residents located on 400 acres at the edge of a rugged and mountainous tract of land along the Oklahoma-Arkansas border in Adair County, Oklahoma. It was founded in November 1973 by Robert G. Millar (1925-2001), a former Mennonite and a United States resident alien from Canada. "Filled with the Holy Spirit," according to a son, Millar moved to Oklahoma City in the mid-1950s, where he founded a church; in the mid-1960s, he moved to Ellicott City, Maryland, to run a campground. He returned to Oklahoma in 1973 with about 18 family members to establish Elohim City, or "City of God," as a spiritual community to "honor God" while waiting for Him to establish His kingdom on earth. A number of Millar's followers were related to him by birth or marriage.

Christian Identity is a religious sect notorious for its racist and anti-Semitic tenets, but Elohim City residents have preferred to identify themselves in milder terms. Indeed, to many residents, the compound has been a place of refuge rather than a site from which to wage a holy war. Extremists visiting Elohim City expecting some sort of bastion of white rage, like the former Hayden Lake, Idaho compound of Aryan Nations, were frequently disappointed by the comparatively more reclusive lifestyle adopted by many residents. Millar acknowledged that community members favored racial separatism, but claimed: "Somebody said, 'You're not a racist, you're a purist.' I sort of liked that." Similarly, his second-oldest son John, one of eight Millar children and the community's presumptive new leader following the death of his father in May 2001, has said, "we consider ourselves survivalists in the sense that we want to survive the best way we can...We have weapons, but any person within 15 miles of us has more weapons per household than we do. We don't make a big thing about weapons. We don't think we can keep the National Guard away with a few weapons."

Yet when Elohim City initially came to public attention, in the mid-1980s, guns were the issue. In 1986, the estranged wife of a Canadian man fled with their four children to Elohim City in defiance of a court order awarding custody of the children to the father. When law enforcement officials arrived at the compound in an attempt to enforce the court's decision, they were met by residents bearing semiautomatic weapons. Rather than risk gunfire, the officers withdrew.

EXTREMIST CONNECTIONS: THE COVENANT, THE SWORD AND THE ARM OF THE LORD

Elohim City leaders and members had ties to The Covenant, The Sword and The Arm of the Lord, a now-defunct paramilitary survivalist group that operated an Identity settlement near the Arkansas-Missouri border. Elohim City residents attended the group's 1982 "national convention" at the CSA compound, and Robert Millar preached several times at religious services held during the gathering; likewise, CSA activists James Ellison and Richard Wayne Snell visited Elohim City several times in the early 1980s. When Ellison, the CSA's leader, was arrested in 1985 for possession of illegal weapons, the F.B.I. and state authorities enlisted the cooperation of Millar and his son John to mediate Ellison's surrender in the hope of averting an

armed confrontation during the course of a four-day standoff. Ellison was later indicted on federal racketeering charges in the attempted bombing of a natural gas pipeline near Fulton, Arkansas, and on arson charges in fires at a Springfield, Missouri, church; a Jewish community center in Indiana; and a private home. John Millar called the charges against Ellison "bureaucratic technicalities" and "a bunch of hogwash." Robert Millar, moreover, served as Ellison's spiritual adviser during his imprisonment. Ellison eventually was convicted and sentenced in September 1985 to 20 years in prison on federal racketeering and firearms violations charges. In 1987, however, he testified for the government at the Fort Smith, Arkansas, sedition trial of 10 leading far-right figures -- including Aryan Nations' leader Richard Butler, former Klansman and neo-Nazi Louis Beam and several members of the white supremacist gang The Order (none of whom were found guilty) -- and was subsequently placed in the federal witness relocation program. He later married Millar's granddaughter Angeline Millar and lived with her in Elohim City.

Robert Millar also served as a spiritual adviser to the CSA's Snell, who was sentenced to life in prison for the 1984 killing of an Arkansas state trooper during a routine traffic stop (John Millar testified as a character witness for Snell during the trial) and then subsequently charged, tried, convicted and sentenced to die for the 1983 execution-style murder of a pawn shop owner in Texarkana -- whom he mistakenly thought to be Jewish. Snell reportedly told a CSA colleague that the pawnshop owner was "a Jew who deserved to die." On April 19, 1995, Robert Millar visited Snell before he was executed, witnessed the execution and arranged for Snell's body to be buried in Elohim City; the Oklahoma City bombing occurred the same day.

AFTER OKLAHOMA CITY: FEAR OF ANOTHER WACO

Following the bombing, Elohim City received substantial public attention, in part because of what some on the far right described as "parallels" between Millar's Identity enclave and the Branch Davidian sect in Waco.¹ Millar acknowledged that he and his followers feared a Waco-style raid of their compound (the 1993 federal siege at Waco ended in the deaths of about 80 Davidians); calls for further crackdowns after the Oklahoma bombing had intensified their anxieties. In media appearances, Millar maintained careful discretion about his religious, racial and civic views: The New York Times, in May 1995, described him as a Christian Identity preacher, but noted: "Mr. Millar was cautious in discussing Identity's racial outlook. Elohim City was 'not pro-Zionist,' he said. He charged that Israel was 'founded on terrorism,' and said that he believed that federal officials who arrested another Identity leader, James Ellison, in 1985, were accompanied by two agents of the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency."

Millar was quoted as saying, "we're going to have a civil war and race riots" in America, but insisting that he had "no ill will toward any people" and that whites were divinely obliged as leaders to serve others, providing food and other aid. He declared: "I have to be a voice for moderation, a voice for common sense. I believe destruction is coming, but I want no part in starting it." The Times reported that Millar shunned the term "white supremacist" to describe himself but that he believed in racial differences.

AFTER OKLAHOMA CITY: A CONNECTION TO TIMOTHY MCVEIGH

Beyond any resemblance to the Waco sect, the primary reason that Elohim City attracted media attention after the Oklahoma City bombing was the discovery of a link between the bomber and Millar's settlement. Federal investigators learned that Timothy McVeigh and Elohim City security director Andreas Strassmeir had previously met at a Tulsa gun show and that McVeigh had called the compound on April 5, 1995, two

weeks before the bombing. At a May press conference in Elohim City, Millar denied any connections with McVeigh, telling reporters that his community had never heard of McVeigh prior to the bombing. He stated: "I don't think I've ever seen him. I don't think he's ever been in any of my audiences to the best of my knowledge. He may have gotten our telephone number from someone if he used our telephone number. And if he phoned here, nobody here has any knowledge of ever talking to him."

Two months later, Millar said that he now thought, based on government sources, that McVeigh had, in fact, placed a two-minute phone call to Elohim City shortly before the bombing. Millar said the call came in to a private residence on the grounds, to a room where some of the residents gather for coffee, but that he found no one who remembered talking to McVeigh. By the following January, his story changed again: he now confirmed that a woman at the encampment took what was believed to be McVeigh's telephone call. He said that the caller was trying to reach Strassmeir (who had left the community about two months after the bombing). The woman said the caller claimed to have met Strassmeir at a gun show and wanted to know if he could visit the compound. Strassmeir was given the name and phone number but reportedly said he "didn't remember meeting this person." Millar said Strassmeir's decision to leave Elohim City was not linked to the bombing.

Strassmeir, who returned to Berlin in January 1996, was subsequently identified as a 36-year-old Civil War buff from Germany, a former lieutenant in the German army and the son of a prominent German politician. Reportedly enjoying the quasi-military atmosphere that pervaded Millar's encampment, Strassmeir, through his attorney, Kirk Lyons, gained a position as a security guard at the compound. According to Lyons, Strassmeir hoped to marry an Elohim City woman and gain permanent resident status in the United States

CONNECTIONS WITH EXTREMISTS: THE ARYAN REPUBLICAN ARMY

While Timothy McVeigh never made it to Elohim City, others with anti-government and racial resentments did. By the mid-1990s, the community had gained a well-earned reputation as a gathering place for radical activists. Dennis Mahon, for instance, a former imperial dragon in the Oklahoma Ku Klux Klan and an organizer for White Aryan Resistance, had kept a trailer there; the enclave also welcomed four men charged with conspiring to rob seven Midwestern banks -- including Mark Thomas, a Pennsylvania Aryan Nations leader and an Identity minister ("Mark and I go back a long way," Millar acknowledged); Mike Brescia, who moved to Elohim City at Thomas's urging, stayed for nearly two years, and was engaged to Millar's step-granddaughter; Scott Stedeford; and Kevin McCarthy. The group, part of a gang known as the Aryan Republican Army, committed 22 robberies of Midwest banks in 1994 and 1995, stealing more than \$250,000 in order to finance white supremacist causes. Millar denied having any prior knowledge of the bank robberies.

Thomas, whose Pennsylvania farm had been a meeting place for neo-Nazis, skinheads and other white racist groups, pleaded guilty in February 1997 to conspiring to rob banks and promised to cooperate with authorities. Both Stedeford and McCarthy were already in prison, stemming from some of the Midwest robberies; Brescia was being held without bail at the time. That same month, a Columbus, Ohio, jury convicted Peter Langan, one of the two ringleaders of the gang (the other committed suicide in prison), of five bank robbery-related charges. Langan faced similar charges in other states as well, including a conspiracy charge in Philadelphia; the Philadelphia indictment stated that gang members sometimes used

Elohim City as a refuge. McCarthy, testifying in the Langan case, said that Thomas encouraged young white supremacists to make pilgrimages to Elohim City.

In June 2001, the *New York Post* reported that pictures of McVeigh are displayed throughout Elohim City. It quoted an unnamed government informer who visited there in the last year as saying: "McVeigh is a hero inside Elohim City. They look upon him 'as a martyr to their cause.'"

CONNECTIONS WITH EXTREMISTS: THE KEHOE BROTHERS

Elohim City also provided a safe harbor to white supremacists Cheyne and Chevie Kehoe, who captured public attention in 1997 when an Ohio Highway Patrol cruiser's video camera filmed their shootout with state officers and their subsequent escape. At the time, both were targets of a national manhunt as suspects in the murders of an Arkansas gun dealer, his wife, and daughter, whom Chevie Kehoe had robbed months before. Millar conceded that the two men formerly had spent time at Elohim City: in fact, at least one of the brothers had received weapons training at the compound, Cheyne Kehoe had lived on and off there for three years and the Kehoe family often wintered at the settlement.

In June 1997, accompanied by his Identity pastor, Cheyne Kehoe surrendered to authorities at his home in Washington and revealed the whereabouts of his fugitive brother, who was subsequently arrested. In February 1998, Cheyne was convicted of assault and attempted murder in the Ohio shooting and sentenced to 24 years in prison. His older brother pleaded guilty to state charges in Ohio and agreed to a prison sentence of up to 20 years.

In addition, in December 1997, an Arkansas grand jury indicted Chevie Kehoe and Daniel Lee for the murder of the Arkansas family, racketeering and conspiracy in connection with financing a plot to overthrow the United States government and establish a so-called Aryan People's Republic; in May 1999, an Arkansas jury sentenced Lee to death and Kehoe to life imprisonment. Millar has said that he had no knowledge of criminal activity on Kehoe's part.

FEAR OF AN APOCALYPSE

Millar's affinity for the company of some of the most radical activists on the far right was in keeping with the apocalyptic tenor of his teachings -- an apocalypticism that characterizes Identity generally. His measured, almost grandfatherly tones notwithstanding, he taught his followers that a biblical period of tribulation had begun and that worse is to come when "Asiatics" invade America. "I abhor war, but it is a foregone conclusion," he said. In August 1999, he clarified, to a degree, his frequent but vague references to an imminent battle: "A civil war is brewing in which we must deal with the Jews. It is a time of reckoning for their pact with the devil."

In June 2001, Robert Millar's son, John, took over as leader of Elohim City. He was quoted at the time as saying: "We're suffering a big loss. But I can truly say, the same one who led him will lead us."

UPDATES

Posted: August 9, 2002

The group continues under the leadership of John Millar, the son of founder Robert Millar, who died in May 2001. It has remained quiet since that time.

Posted: January 14, 2005

By all appearances, the reclusive residents of Elohim City have kept to themselves, and have attracted little attention save for peripheral mention at the trial of Terry Nichols, who was convicted of 161 counts of first-degree murder for his role in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.