And the trumpet shall sound,  
And the dead shall be raised,  
Be raised incorruptible.

(Editor's Note: Rochester is the world headquarters of the Megiddo Church, which has followers in many countries. Their campus on Thurston Road includes a church built by members; a printing plant for producing 16,000 copies of a monthly magazine, Megiddo Message, and other publications; a home-care facility for elderly members; apartments for local members; an office building; a social center; and a vast garden where Rochester members raise vegetables for their own consumption. The Megiddos have a large plot in Mount Hope Cemetery containing more than 150 burials.

This article was prepared by Gari-Anne Patzwald, a research librarian at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. Although not a member of the Megiddos, she has visited them in Rochester and is deeply interested in the fascinating story of what was first known as the Megiddo Band.

We also thank Ruth Sisson, vice-president and assistant pastor of the Megiddo Church, for her invaluable help in providing most of the photographs accompanying this article and for carefully reviewing the manuscript for accuracy.) (story cont. on page 2)

From October, 1901 to December, 1903, the 53 stateroom boat, Megiddo, sailed the Mississippi and Ohio rivers with 90 people aboard, spreading the gospel according to the Christian Brethren. Photograph courtesy of the Megiddo Church.)
More than 150 members of the Megiddo Church are buried in their plot in Mount Hope Cemetery. The inscription on the MB monument reads: "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ shall rise. Comfort one another with these words." Photograph by Frank A. Gillespie.

THE MEGIDDOS WAIT IN MT. HOPE FOR THE PROPHET ELIJAH

by Gari-Anne Patzwald

Each year on October 1st, members of the Megiddo Church gather in Mount Hope Cemetery at the grave of the church's founder, L. T. Nichols. They gather not only to celebrate the founder's life and his contributions to the church but also to affirm their belief that he and others who are buried in the Megiddo plot will one day rise to be judged and rewarded by Jesus when he returns to establish his kingdom.

L. T. Nichols was born October 1, 1844 in Elkhart County, Indiana. When he was about five years old, his family moved to Wisconsin. As an adolescent, he became skeptical of the established Protestant tradition in which he had been raised and began an intense study of the Bible. His views were often controversial and were ridiculed by his school classmates and others in the community.

In 1864 he was married, and two weeks later was drafted into the army. In the army he refused to bear arms and was transferred to service in a military hospital. After the war, he returned home to his wife to farm and to begin his ministerial career as an itinerant preacher in the Fox River Valley region of Wisconsin, northwest of Milwaukee.

In 1874, L. T. Nichols, accompanied by his family, including his wife, his parents, and his sister, as well as several other followers, moved to McMinnville, Oregon. There he established a church which he called "Christadelphian," because of the similarity between his views of the Bible and those of Dr. Thomas, leader of the Christadelphians. Nichols held a popular annual camp meeting, published religious tracts, engaged in public debates on religious issues, and gained many additional followers.

In 1880, Nichols' study of the Holy Scripture led him to the conclusion that "no man could be saved apart from knowing and keeping every commandment of God." This discovery led the Megiddo Church to identify 1880 as the year of its founding because at this point Nichols called his followers to lead lives that set them apart from their contemporaries.

The controversial doctrines preached by L. T. Nichols resulted in considerable persecution and in 1883 he decided to leave Oregon, settling himself and his followers in Dodge County in southeastern Minnesota. Here Nichols established a small church and preached in nearby communities. It was here also that he began his career as an inventor, patenting such inventions as a harness for four-horse hitches and a coupler for railroad cars. The profits from these inventions became a major source of support for the church.

Congregations were also established in Davenport, Iowa, and Barry, Illinois. The Barry church was pastored by Maud Hembree, a former Roman Catholic, who had joined Nichols' followers in Oregon. In his studies of the Bible, Nichols continued to find things that he tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Christadelphians to teach.
One fundamental issue concerned how to achieve salvation. Nichols believed that people must live holy lives, while the Christadelphians accepted the concept of atonement. In 1891, Nichols abandoned his attempts to relate to the denominational Christadelphians and renamed his body the "Christian Brethren."

In 1901, Nichols concluded that the only way the members of his congregation could achieve truly holy lives would be to gather together and work in concert with one another. He devised a plan to assemble his followers on a boat, a gospel boat, that would sail the Mississippi River and its tributaries to spread the gospel. To this end, he and his followers sold their property in Minnesota while Nichols commissioned construction of a 53 stateroom boat. The boat was named Megiddo, which was the name of an historic city in the Holy Land. However, according to Ruth Sisson, vice-president and assistant pastor of the Megiddo Church, "We don't know why Nichols selected that particular location for the name of his boat." The Megiddo was launched at Clinton, Iowa, amid great fanfare, on October 24, 1901 and set sail down the Mississippi with 90 residents on board.

The ship excited much curiosity, and the newspapers along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers published front-page stories describing the marvelous craft. The boat cost $22,000 to build. It was red, white, and blue in color, had a complete machine shop for manufacturing and repair work, a carpenter shop, and a flour mill.

Although the brethren, like members of the Megiddo Church today, were characterized by a high level of participation and a high degree of cooperation, they were committed to the principle of private property. Each family had its own living quarters and its own dining area, storage locker, and cupboards. Women cooked for their own families in the ship's kitchen, and there were often as many as 30 meals being prepared at one time.

In the center of the main deck was an assembly room, equipped with musical instruments, in which the members met for nightly services. Towed behind the boat was a barge on which were stored fresh fruits and vegetables along with the brethren's bandwagon.

Wherever the boat went, the men on board sought work while the women took care of housekeeping and knitted woolen goods for sale to support their families and the mission. The children attended school aboard the boat. A handbill distributed to the public announced: "We manufacture acetylene gasometers and windmills and are agents for a first-class automobile." The members also earned money from houses they built and rented in Nashville where the boat spent its first winter.

Upon arrival in a new port, if it were possible to borrow some horses, the uniformed Christian Brethren band would travel through the streets in their bandwagon, playing music and distributing handbills to publicize their meetings. They either arranged to meet in a public auditorium or pitched their 40 x 80-foot tent in a prominent location. The services consisted of songs, prayers, scripture readings, and sermons by either L.T. Nichols or Maud Hembree, "the lady preacher." The services were well attended, and the press reported Captain Nichols' messages at length.

After two years on the water, the Megiddo experienced navigational problems while returning to the Mississippi from Cincinnati in the fall of 1903. Nichols had hired a captain who landed the boat on a sandbar. The next boat captain did the same thing. These mishaps resulted in expensive repairs and emphasized the imminent danger of operating the Megiddo in those midwest waterways. Besides, there were considerable risks from ice floating down the river. Feeling responsible for the many lives on board, Nichols decided that the river ministry was no longer practical, and the Megiddo was sold. The Christian Brethren relocated to Rochester where the Nicholses had relatives.

As the members of the group left Paducah, Kentucky for Rochester on January 25, 1904, the Rochester press was already anticipating their arrival. This was

---

The Rev. L.T. Nichols (1844-1912) was the brilliant and colorful founder of the Megiddo Church. Photograph courtesy of the Megiddo Church.
the beginning of Rochester's longstanding fascination with these "queer" but sincere people.

L. T. Nichols and the members of the group arrived in Rochester on January 27, 1904, followed four days later by four railroad cars containing their belongings. Initially, as a temporary dwelling, they rented a large house on the city's near east side (on East Avenue, where RG&E now stands).

Within a couple of months, Nichols purchased five acres in the then sparsely populated area along Thurston Road on the southwest edge of Rochester, then outside the city limits. At the time of purchase, the property contained a large house and two smaller residences to which the members soon added a three-story, 21-room building and a nine-room residence. The group prospered financially, partially through L. T. Nichols' business acumen and the profits from his farm-implement inventions.

Initially, public services were held in a tent that the members pitched on a street corner a little over a mile from the Thurston Road property. Later, they moved the tent to the north side of the city and held services in the residential and recreation areas along the shore of Lake Ontario. Early in 1905, they rented a church on Plymouth Avenue.

The services were much the same as they had been aboard the Megiddo, with band music, singing, preaching by Captain Nichols or the Rev. Hembree, and calls for commitment to reformed lives. They were very popular and were reported regularly in local newspapers.

In 1905, L. T. Nichols discovered another point of doctrine that would distinguish the Megiddo Brethren from other religious groups. Based on his reading of Malachi 4:5-6 and Matthew 17:11, he declared that the prophet Elijah would return to earth to prepare the world for Christ's return.

Among Captain Nichols' most popular sermons were his attacks on spiritualism. It was consequently ironic that the mission was forced to vacate the Plymouth Avenue church in August of 1906 because the church had been purchased by spiritualists. Never one to avoid controversy, Nichols made his last sermon in the Plymouth Avenue church an attack on its future occupants.

The high degree of cooperation among the members of the group contributed to their prosperity. Members purchased supplies in bulk to save money. Captain Nichols bought property on streets near the Thurston Road headquarters and sold lots at cost to members. As they had done in Nashville, using lumber purchased at cost from Nichols, the member families each built two houses, one in which to live and one to rent for income. Nichols subsequently persuaded New York State Railways to extend their trolley line so that it passed the mission property. Later, the city of Rochester extended water and sewer lines to the area and paved the streets and sidewalks. Within a few years, several stores and other businesses had brought economic prosperity to the area.

In 1907, the members of the group constructed their own church building at the corner of Thurston Road and Sawyer Street. It was built partly from wood that was cut from the lot on which the church was built. That wood was processed in Nichols' own sawmill. The church cost about $5,000 and seated 400 people. It was dedicated on March 22, 1908 with about 250 people in attendance.

The group engaged in local outreach in the Rochester area. At any time, from four to twenty missionaries were in the field, going from house to house and visiting businesses, talking to people and distributing pamphlets and tracts.

Early in 1912, an episode of ill health led Nichols to the famous Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan, operated by the Kellogg family of cereal fame. It was there, on February 28, 1912 that he unexpectedly died at the age of 67 years.

Nichols' body was returned to Rochester by train and lay in state for a day at the church. Following a service conducted by the Rev. Maud Hembree, a cortège that extended for blocks down Thurston Road accompanied the flower-covered casket to Mount Hope Cemetery where a short
service was held. Officials suspended a regulation against the playing of music in the cemetery so that the band could pay tribute to their leader. Nichols was buried in the Megiddo plot in Range 3. The Rochester Herald reported that with the death of Captain Nichols, Rochester had "lost one of her most energetic and enterprising citizens, whose ability has during the last eight years built up quite a section of the west side of the city that was destitute of streetcars, sidewalks, gas, electricity, or other conveniences until they were brought into that section through his efforts." The band played for the annual graveside commemoration of the founder's birthday each year until sometime around 1960.

Following Captain Nichols' death, Maud Hembree assumed leadership of the group. Under her direction the group's outreach flourished. A periodical, Megiddo Message, was established in 1915. Missionaries traveled by car to spread the gospel in the Rochester area and by train to spread it throughout the country.

In 1914, the ministry again took to the water with the purchase of a yacht, Megiddo II, which cruised the Erie Canal and adjacent waterways in the summer of 1915 distributing 11,090 pamphlets and tracts. In 1916, when Megiddo II proved to be too small, a larger boat, Megiddo III, was acquired. With comfortable living accommodations for six young men, the boat sailed the Erie Canal, the Hudson River, the Finger Lakes, and Lake Champlain from 1919 until it was retired in 1923. It carried missionaries who distributed literature and made converts, some of whom moved to Rochester to join the church community.

During World War I, the Rev. Hembree and her assistant, Ella Skeels, L. T. Nichols' younger sister, made a trip to Washington where they met with government officials to establish conscientious objector status for members of the church. Hembree and Mrs. Skeels later made a trip to Dayton, Tennessee, to attend the highly publicized Scopes trial. There they met with members of the legal teams to explain the group's view of the doctrine of creation. Ruth Sisson said, "We hold views that differ from those of both sides in the Scopes trial. One side argued that the earth is 6,000 years old. We believe the evidence of geology that it is billions of years old. The other side advanced the concept that mankind evolved from lower animal species, and we believe evolution is limited to changes within a species."

By 1923, most of the areas that could be reached by water had been covered, and the boat ministry was abandoned in favor of a "Megiddo Mission Gospel Car," as lettering on its side announced. The car, which resembled a small bus, carried missionaries throughout New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia distributing literature and holding meetings. After seven years, the gospel-car ministry was replaced by missionary trips in individual cars throughout the country to sell or distribute tracts and to visit subscribers to Megiddo Message.

As a result of these outreach programs, small groups of believers met in several cities including Fort Plain and Utica, New York; Phoenix, Arizona; and Portland, Oregon. In addition, a small community of converts from a trip L. T. Nichols made to the British Isles continued to meet in Swansea, Wales.

In the early 1920s, a British convert named Alex Ploughwright suggested what was to become one of the most successful ministries of the Megiddo Church, the so-called "Elijah Campaign." Advertisements were placed in American magazines, primarily in the Midwest, offering a free book on the coming of Elijah. The campaign piqued the public's interest and became one of the group's most effective means of outreach.

In 1932, the Rev. Hembree began a book designed to explain the Bible and to answer all objections to it. Known Bible and Its Defense, completed in 1934, is 816 pages in length and was published in two volumes.

On November 22, 1935, Maud Hembree died at the age of 82, having led her flock for over 23 years. Like her predecessor, she was buried in the Megiddo plot in Mount Hope Cemetery. On the following Independence Day, a fountain and rock garden that had been constructed in her memory on the front lawn of the mission property were dedicated in her honor. The Rev. Ella Skeels succeeded Hembree and served until her death in 1945.

During the 1940s, converts continued to join the Rochester community. In the 1950s, a children's ministry was established featuring Bible storybooks, coloring books, and a periodical, Children's Doings. The post-World War II period saw improvements to the physical plant. A combination school and printing-plant building was constructed, and the interior of the church
building was remodeled. Missionary travel gradually declined, and the ministry became more dependent on publications for its outreach.

The faith of the Megiddo Church is characterized by hope, anticipation, and hard work. The Megiddos consider the understanding of Holy Scripture to be central to their faith. They believe that apparent inconsistencies and errors in Scripture are the result of faulty translation, misunderstandings of ministers with inadequate knowledge of the Bible, or attempts to interpret symbolic passages literally. They apply reason to scripture to determine which passages may be understood literally and which symbolically. The story of Noah's ark, for example, is interpreted literally because the description of the ark and its dimensions do not seem to favor a spiritual ark, while the creation story of the first three chapters of Genesis is interpreted symbolically because elements in the story, such as the talking serpent, defy reasonable explanation. Parts of the book of Genesis, such as the story of Adam and Eve, are understood as literal occurrences with symbolic meanings. The Megiddos make a special effort to identify later passages of scripture that refer to earlier passages and accept these later passages as explanatory because they are closer to the source and are inspired.

Megiddos reject the doctrine of original sin and believe that each person is responsible for her or his own character. Faith is necessary for one to be a true follower of God, but faith is genuine only as it is demonstrated by following Scriptural guidelines for living. Salvation is reserved for those who grew to become morally like Christ. When Jesus returns, all who agree to serve God will be judged and rewarded according to what they have done.

The Megiddos discourage marriage and childbirth at this time, because they believe that the end of the age is near, and their major concern is for their own salvation. Marriage and childbirth are viewed as potential distractions. Furthermore, the Megiddos view the current social and moral climates as inhospitable for young families, but children are always welcome in the church community.

Megiddos believe that all humans are totally mortal and that there is not an immortal soul. The dead are unconscious in the grave until, at the second coming of Christ, all who have agreed to serve God will have life restored to them and will be judged and rewarded by Jesus for what they have done. They reject hell and believe that the unrighteous, rather than suffering eternal torment, will sleep in the grave forever, while the righteous will enjoy endless life on a glorified earth. Ruth Sisson has said, "The Megiddos interpret references to 'hell' in the Bible as being another term for the grave, not for torment or torture."

Members of the Megiddo Church eagerly await the arrival of Elijah, who, they believe, is presently living on another planet in God's vast universe, awaiting the time when he will return to earth to prepare the way for Christ. The return of Christ will mark the beginning of a 1000-year period which is described in Millennium.
Superworld, a book distributed by the church since 1980. In the superworld, all illnesses will be healed, and everyone will live for several centuries. There will be ample food due to advanced methods of agriculture, climate control, and the absence of crop-destroying pests. There will be worldwide prosperity and employment for everyone, and beautiful music everywhere.

At the end of the 1000-year period, Satan will be destroyed, and a perfect world will be created on earth. This world will be eternal and will be characterized by eternal growth, eternal expansion, eternal improvement, eternal productivity, eternal happiness, eternal prosperity, and eternal life for all its inhabitants.

It is the ways in which the faith of the Megiddos is outwardly expressed that has made them objects of considerable curiosity to Rochesterians. Over the years, considerable press coverage in Rochester has been devoted to the Megiddo’s springtime celebration of the Abib season, which starts with the New Year and the birth of Christ on the evening of the first new moon after the vernal equinox. Ruth Sisson explained: “The Roman church in the fourth century arbitrarily set the December 25th date for Christ’s birthday. The Roman Saturnalia held in December for centuries was still such an attraction to newly converted Christians that the church finally compromised and placed the birth of Christ on that date, hoping to make a Christian event out of a pagan celebration.”

The first public Megiddo Christmas service was held on March 24, 1906. For the service, the Plymouth Avenue Church was, according to a Rochester newspaper, “decorated with flowers everywhere including sprays, wreaths, and bouquets of roses.” All of the decorations were handmade by the members. Fresh flowers, cut or potted, are still part of the Abib service along with special music and drama, which are important parts of Megiddo worship. In recent years, electronic musical instruments and audiovisual materials, some requiring the use of computers, have been used to enhance holiday worship. Services are recorded and duplicated onto cassette tape, VHS, and CD, and sent to distant members.

For many years, Rochesterians would often travel across town to see the Abib decorations in the windows of the Six-in-One Ladder Co., a hardware business located next to the church which, contrary to popular belief, was owned not by the mission but by a couple named Hughes who were members of the group. Local newspapers often carried photographs of the celebration or of people looking at the decorated windows.

Other important holidays for the Megiddo Church are: Independence Day, which is celebrated with a picnic and program; Founder’s Day; Thanksgiving; and Self-Denial Week, which occurs the first full week in February and is a period of rest and reflection, and abstinence eating.

Megiddos have long been recognized for the distinctive dress of the women which is characterized by long skirts, long sleeves, and high necklines. Women also use no makeup and gather their hair into bun, but unlike members of some conservative religious groups, they do cut their hair when it becomes inconveniently long. Colors of clothing are a matter of personal choice, and several of the women wear bright colors. The men, whose clothing styles are more likely to be dictated by the dress requirements of their employers, which have included the U. S. Post Office and such businesses as Eastman Kodak and General Railway Signal, wear conservative suits and functional work clothes. The one requirement of clothing is that it conform to the Bible’s principal of “modest apparel.” While many observers tend to characterize Megiddo attire as old-fashioned, the Megiddos themselves consider their dress to be merely conservative.

Today, led by its current pastor, the Rev. Newton H. Payne, the Megiddo Church still owns the complex of buildings across the street from the church and about 35 people live there. The school was closed in 1964 because the cost of improvements necessary to meet state standards — such as the addition of a gymnasium, playground, and lab facilities — was prohibitive, especially considering the small number of students. Children attend private or parochial schools selected by their parents. Most of the houses on adjacent streets that once belonged to the members have been sold. The church has retained ownership of the Six-in-One Ladder Company building because of its proximity to the church. In 1964, following the deaths of the owners of the business, it was converted into an office building. The offices are rented to various businesses, but there is still a business owned and operated by a church member in the building.

Since 1958, the church has been governed by a Board of Trustees composed of six members elected for terms of two years each. The church has ample resources for its ministry from the tithes of members, and from endowments and investments. It never has sought outside support and does not collect an offering if there are visitors present at a worship service. The church property is well maintained, and the interior of the church, the entrance to the complex, and most of the principal church buildings have been remodeled in recent years. An addition was made to the print shop in 1984, doubling its original size. Also in 1984, the church converted one of its homes into a home-care facility, providing around-the-clock care, short or long-term, for elderly, ill, or convalescing members. Church members have never utilized state or local social assistance. The membership of the Megiddo Church has declined gradually and there are about 35 people regularly at Sunday worship. Believers, however, still come as far away as British Columbia to attend holiday services. There are occasional additions to the community. Several years ago, a family in Poland joined and emigrated to Rochester. They represent a very limited number of foreign converts, as the Megiddo Church has never had foreign missions, believing that there is work enough in North America.

Megiddo Message, with a current circulation of about 16,000, is published eleven times a year in the church’s modern,
MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY PHOTO CONTEST GALA OPENING: NOVEMBER 7. DON’T MISS IT.

by Richard O. Reisem

You are cordially invited to the gala opening, champagne reception, and presentation of awards for the Mount Hope Cemetery Photo Contest at the Link Gallery, City Hall, on Friday, November 7, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

The contest is a joint effort of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery and Camera Rochester, a local photography club. A total of almost 50 photographers have entered the contest, and they have submitted around 160 photographs for the juried show. The closest entry is from Mount Hope Avenue, and the most distant one is from Limoges, France.

A panel of three jurors will select about 60 framed color and black-and-white prints for exhibition in the Link Gallery. The judges are Gene Berndt, past president of Kodak Camera Club, active exhibitor, judge, and lecturer; Andrew Davidhazy, professor of photography and imaging science, Rochester Institute of Technology; and Sally Wood-Winslow, photographer, weaver, painter, and curator of the gallery at the Center at High Falls. Camera Rochester volunteers will hang the show; they are also providing special equipment and much of the labor associated with the event. Their efforts are led by the president of Camera Rochester and co-chair of the contest, Judy Riales. Frank A. Gillespie, trustee of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, initiated the contest idea and spearheaded the project for the Friends.

At the gallery opening on November 7, Eric Logan, president of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, will present awards to first-, second-, and third-place winners, as well as certificates to three honorable mention recipients. Special donated awards will be given to the top three winners.

Members of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery are encouraged to attend this festive event at which, besides the exciting photographic exhibit of scenes in Mount Hope Cemetery, champagne and hors d’oeuvres will be served. It is an excellent opportunity to see the cemetery as interpreted by a number of exceptionally talented photographers. Free parking is available for the evening event in the City Hall parking lot on Church Street behind City Hall. Parking is also available in Sister Cities garage on Church Street in front of City Hall.

The show will be available for viewing at the Link Gallery from October 28 through November 28. The gallery hours are 9 to 5, Monday through Friday.