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## Harnessing the God Power

Frank Robinson's Psychiana remains one of the most popular religions of the 20th century

By Shanon Quinn, Daily News staff writer 9 hrs ago

Up until the time you recognized the spirit of God in you, you failed at everything you did, you existed but your life was a life of opposition, Washington State University doctoral candidate G Atkins told his listeners Saturday afternoon during what he said was his best impersonation of "Doctor" Frank Robinson.

Atkins shared his research on Robinson and Psychiana at the Latah County Historical Society's Suds with a Scholar event.

Robinson, the creator of Moscow's own mail-order religion movement, Psychiana, had a fascir if somewhat dubious background, owing to the single-source documentation that described it, Atkins said.

"Most of what we know about Frank Robinson comes from Frank Robinson," Atkins said. "Anc not always the most reliable source."

While Robinson claimed to have been born in New York state, it was more likely he was from Northumberland in England, the child of a "fire and brimstone-turned-congregationalist ministe Atkins said.

Robinson wrote that his father was an abusive womanizer who forced Robinson to enlist in the British Navy and disowned him when was 14.

It was only the first of several brushes with the military that ended with unceremonious dischar

"He was medically discharged from the British Navy," Atkins said Robinson claimed. "But that could have been alcoholism. You'll see that as a recurring theme."

After his discharge, Atkins said Robinson led a rather nomadic life in Canada and the northern where he attended a religious school, was charged with counterfeiting after throwing a firecracker at a police officer, and began working in drugstores - which would become his go-to job for the rest of his days - while continuing to drink heavily.

Robinson wrote he served a stint in the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, before being discharged for drunkenness, followed by a similar claim regarding the U.S. Navy and the Army.

The Army discharge, Atkins said Robinson wrote, was the result of a different scenario.

"He said he defied an order to have all of his teeth removed," Atkins said.

It was while working as a druggist in Oregon, and shortly after his marriage to his wife, Pearl, in the 1920s, that Robinson claimed to have had his first of many conversations with God, Atkins said.

"From these experiences he wanted more free time," Atkins said. "He wanted a drug store that had limited hours. He found a drug store in Moscow, Idaho, that closed at 6 p.m. That is the reason he claimed that he moved to Moscow."

Upon his arrival, Atkins said, Robinson began writing his lesson plans and selling them to Moscow residents shares in the unnamed, nonexistent company he planned to create.

After raising \$2,500, the company, while yet unnamed, had begun in earnest. Before long, Psych - the company name that came to him in a vision - prospered.

Robinson created lesson plans in a dozen or more typewritten pages and recorded them on vinyl records with his own organ music on the back and sold them to followers around the country and the world.

"One dollar a lesson, 20 lessons for \$20," Atkins said.

Although now recognized as one of the foremost metaphysical religions of the 20th century, few who live in the area understand the vast influence of the movement, even though it is responsible for some of Moscow's more notable landmarks, Atkins said. These include Robinson Park, purchased and donated to the county by Robinson, and even the federal building.

"Have you ever wondered why the post office in Moscow was so large? It's because at its height Psychiana was receiving 60,000 pieces of mail a day," Atkins said. "The post office had to design Moscow a sorting facility just to handle the bulk."

Relatively, this homegrown religion that boasted hundreds of thousands of followers in more than 100 different counties was short lived, closing its doors after less than 25 years in business, but when the business of Psychiana is defunct, its influence is alive and well in the plethora of similar religious movements the world over, Atkins said.

"It really fits into what scholars are calling metaphysical religion," Atkins said, noting the type remains one of the fastest growing religions. "Psychiana is as American as apple pie."

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