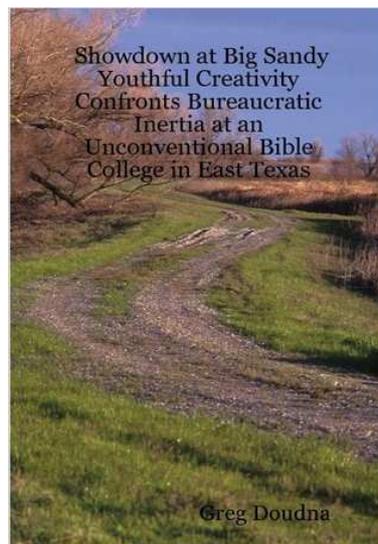


Showdown at Big Sandy: Youthful Creativity Confronts Bureaucratic Inertia at an Unconventional Bible College in East Texas. Greg Doudna. The Scrollery, Bellingham, Washington, 2006.

*"I invite you to walk with me some of the steps of the way,
like going to a strange land and back again."
Greg Doudna*

I was delighted to discover John Morgan's book *Flying Free* earlier this year. It is the story of life in the Worldwide Church of God over several decades, told from the perspective of a fellow Kiwi. I recommended it without reservation, and I still do.

Now we have another book which relates the WCG experience from a personal perspective. Greg Doudna was a student at Big Sandy during the turbulent Seventies, and this is his story. Like *Flying Free*, *Showdown at Big Sandy* seems to be mercifully free of the hobbyhorse apologetics that spoil many books of this sort. This is, in addition, more than just an AC alumnus on a nostalgia trip. The author, who later returned to his Quaker roots, is in fact something of an authority on the subject of the Dead Sea Scrolls, with articles in *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* and *The Bible and Interpretation*, and an 800 page text published by Sheffield Academic Press entitled "4Q Peshar Nahum: A Critical Edition." Be assured, however, that *Showdown* seems anything but a dense academic dissertation, and will be compulsory (and perhaps compulsive) reading both for those who attended Ambassador College in its heyday, and those of us who are simply fascinated by the history and evolution of Armstrongism.



Showdown at Big Sandy was first published in 1989, but has been out of print for some time. Greg has now updated and reissued the book. I'm very glad he has. He has previously written of the book:

"It is a light-hearted, but also serious, memoir of the fundamentalist experience from one who was there (me). I sought through humor and the foil of myself as the innocent, believing, naive, but growing young mind at this Bible college, to show the way forward and out of such thinking. Everything in the book is true yet I wrote it as a story with plot and theme. The theme revolves around about a dozen or so creative papers I wrote mostly when I was a sophomore student..."

By clicking across to www.scrollery.com you can preview some of the content for yourself. The book (540 pages) costs around \$30.

Did you know that:

- *The opening of the Ambassador Auditorium was marked by the appearance of streakers?
- *Herb Armstrong claimed to be related to US president Richard Nixon?
- *GTA proposed cancelling the 1975 Feast of Tabernacles so the members could send in their second-tithe direct to Pasadena?
- *Rod Meredith held a shouting match with Black WCG elder Tom Hall over racial matters in a Doctrinal Committee meeting?
- *AC Pasadena refused to recognise many of the courses taught at its Big Sandy sister campus?

Well, I didn't, and I'm indebted to Greg for plugging a number of gaps from the WCG's past. More specifically, the way the world looked from Big Sandy in the Seventies.

The WCG can probably be grateful that Greg wised up and found better things to do, for it's just plain scary to imagine what he would have got up to if he'd stayed and risen through the ranks. Just reading through his doctrinal papers from that time – positions he has long since moved beyond – indicate that this guy would have raised more than a little hell along the way.

The subtitle says it all: “Youthful Creativity Confronts Bureaucratic Inertia...” Doudna provides insight on a number of characters from the times: Dean of Students Ronald Kelly, for example, who is described as *a hard working “company man”... one of many “yellow pencils” cut from the same mold... [who] did not try to disguise his lack of interest in things intellectual.*

There are also anecdotes involving Herman Hoeh, Kenneth Herrmann, GTA, Charles Dorothy and other characters. The chapters on tithing and creationism are excellent, the treatment of healing and medicine is downright sobering, and the discussion of the old God Family doctrine is simply fascinating. (Let's all not tell Bob Thiel about that chapter, as he'd probably misunderstand it and gloat insufferably.)

Greg can be restrained at times. He makes only passing reference to Armstrong's alcohol problems and steers clear of the incest allegations altogether. At other times his critique can be biting (you can almost see the tooth marks.) I read the 500 plus pages of *Showdown* over three days, and was left wanting more! There are some slower moments as, for example, he explains how he once tried to make all those numbers in Daniel add up to apocalyptic significance, but I guess this just goes to show that there's hope for even the most dogged date-setter.

If you're interested in the story of the church, or you still secretly wonder whether the church had some things right when it taught that the English-speaking countries were descended from Ancient Israel, this is one volume you really should add to your bookshelf.

Greg is well known in the area of Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship, particularly in the vexed issue of dating these ancient documents (and we're talking something well beyond the “Michael Baigent level”.) In fact, I came across his name quite by accident in the notes to a recent text on the Scrolls shortly after reading *Showdown* (along with fellow WCG alumnus Lester Grabbe.) So, imagine for a moment an academic of this calibre turning his attention on the time-dishonoured theories of British Israelism.

Imagine no longer, but pull on your coat and gumboots, because the blood is up to the fetlocks and rising!

There are four chapters on this theme. Doudna begins with a surreal tale surrounding a student paper he wrote in the 1970s at Big Sandy, where he tried to show that the church had things back to front: Ephraim was America, not Great Britain, and the English/Australians etc. were Manasseh. The paper was ignored at the time.

Fast forward to the late 1980s, and Greg was looking for a publisher for the first edition of *Showdown*. A copy of the manuscript was sent to William Dankenbring, including an outline of that original paper, now a curiosity piece set amid a thorough deconstruction of the BI doctrine. Willie however was converted to the tribal reassignment on the spot, and eagerly began to proclaim the “new truth” - much to Doudna's consternation. But lo, more was to follow. Ken Westby adopted the theory (without crediting its source), Norm Edwards championed it for a while, there was coverage in *The Journal*, while an upstart New Zealander (modest bow) opined that the whole idea was totally absurd either way. Doudna notes:

“In my dreams I would rather see myself credited with helping to put the Anglo-Israel idea in the grave where it belongs. The idea is factually untrue as an historical claim and has borne bad

fruit..." (p. 227)

So it is that Greg is responsible for an Armstrong heresy without even trying. Providence obviously has a droll sense of humour!

The other chapters constitute a focussed discussion of BI that deserves to be read by anyone even remotely drawn to the Lost Ten Tribes theories. To cut to the chase, the historical sources used to justify the doctrine were abused and misused and sometimes created out of the whole cloth. Doudna spends some time demolishing the Tea-Tephi/Jeremiah fiction. "It may be an interesting story," he writes, "but it is completely fabricated." And then he proceeds to demonstrate just that in merciless detail.

As an aside, Greg relates how he once asked the great Doctor Hoeh whether he'd ever publish a new edition of his *Compendium*. The good doctor replied no, giving the reason that he didn't want to contribute to the world's paper shortage!

But back to the demure princess Tea-Tephi for a moment. It seems even that grand old dame of Biblical jingoism, the British Israel World Federation, no longer regards TT as a historical character. The whole story was a fiction from the beginning, and the supposed references in ancient Irish annals about as traceable as a leprechaun's pot of gold.

Having stripped the finery from the fair princess, Doudna takes a pneumatic drill to the Lia Fail Stone, and, barely pausing for a chapter break, asks "Were the Scythians Israelites?" Another fascinating anecdote: AC instructor Allen Manteufel taught Ancient World History using the legendary *Compendium*, but his other source materials were conveniently unavailable. Greg provides the following verbatim snippet from one of Manteufel's classes:

"Noah took his sons on a world tour to show them the world around the Mediterranean in 10 years. He began by the Black Sea, circled the Mediterranean, and left a colony on the Tiber River in Italy. Noah then retired to Armenia... He took another world tour in 2210 BC and spent 9 years in Spain. Then Noah arrived in Italy, found Gomer had died and the Italians were being corrupted by Ham. Noah kicked out Ham and ruled Italy himself. Noah died and gave the land to Saturn and one of Joktan's kids."

Such was the depth of scholarship at AC!

Doudna, on a roll, proceeds to demolish the work of Anne Kristensen (cited by BI enthusiasts as a credible authority) and then turns to Herbert Armstrong's assertions that Adam and Eve were white (*Mystery of the Ages*, 148.) Next to feel the heat is Raymond McNair's loopy thesis *Key to Northwest European Origins*. He concludes with some apt observations on the dark side of BI: GTA referring to the Inuit peoples as "grunting savages", and Bryce Clark calling Native Americans "heathen savages" who were therefore quite rightly dispossessed.

There are other books dealing with British Israelism, but this one has the benefit of coming from the keyboard of an incisive thinker and genuine researcher who has actually walked a mile in the moccasins of this "hallucinogenic" delusion. In short, it's priceless.

G Rumney