

# Reverend Rex Humbard Changed the Face of Mackinac Island

## A Look at History

BY FRANK STRAUS

### Rev. Humbard



**Rev. Alpha Rex Emmanuel Humbard purchased the Mackinac College in the early 1970s.**

In the early 1970s, "Brother Rex," the Reverend Alpha Rex Emmanuel Humbard, was the largest private landowner on Mackinac Island. The Protestant minister died Friday, September 21, 2007, at his home in Florida. During this period of time, Humbard changed the face of the Island.

Rex Humbard was born in August 1919 in Little Rock, Arkansas. He describes his Pentecostal upbringing in his 1970 autobiography "Miracles In My Life." Humbard learned at an early age, from his family, the importance of tireless background work to evangelize effectively and convey the message of the Bible.

In 1942, he married a talented gospel singer, Maude Aimee.

As a young tent preacher, Humbard traveled all over the United States. In 1952, he successfully settled in Akron, Ohio, rebuilding a worn-out movie theater into a nondenominational church from scratch. Humbard's optimistic, aggressive preaching style, which concentrated on personal faith testimony, matched the spiritual searches of many "Baby Boom" parents. The "Calvary Temple" attracted a growing number of worshipers in Akron.

Rev. Humbard was one of the first Protestant ministers to recognize the importance of television. Using his tent revival experiences to maximize the entertainment value of his services, he reached out at once to a northern Ohio television station with an offer to have his services shown over the air. By 1953, only one year after Humbard began preaching in Akron, his services were being broadcast every week. From Humbard's point of view, he was simply reaching out to more Americans.

"The vast majority of people do not go to church," Humbard said in "Miracles in My Life." "The only way we can reach them is through TV."

Faithful to this vision, Humbard refused to get involved in issues of religious worship that divided Christian churches from each other. This

made his televised services more attractive for broadcasting.

Humbard's non-denominationalism was no bar to the growth of his church. His live services grew in popularity in the 1950s, with many worshipers driving some distance in Northeast Ohio to attend Sunday worship under the direction of the charismatic minister. In 1958, Humbard opened his new 5,400-seat "Cathedral of Tomorrow" in Cuyahoga Falls, north of Akron. In his autobiography, Humbard took justifiable pride in successfully opening this large house of religious worship in the face of pessimism and nay-saying. The new suburban church had cost \$3.5 million to build.

Humbard worked with his church staff and private donors to increase television distribution of his services beyond Ohio. In 1956, Ampex had introduced the first practical system for making broadcast-quality videotapes; the new technology was a sharp technological improvement over the earlier kinescope system. Rev. Humbard could now send taped copies of his church services to broadcasters all over the United States. By 1970, the Akron preacher was a full-fledged



**Mission House was one of the buildings Rev. Humbard purchased.**

syndicator who could pay for air time and whose Sunday worship services were rebroadcast across the United States. The jacket blurb for "Miracles in My Life" boasted: "He's seen on more TV stations than Johnny Carson, Dick Cavett, or Oral Roberts!" By this time, Cathedral of Tomorrow services were being rebroadcast on 335 stations in the United

States and Canada.

This was the man who emerged upon the scene when the first Mackinac College ceased operations in 1970. Complex factors had caused the active operations of this fledgling Mackinac Island place of higher education to shut down, leaving behind a campus complex on Mission Point valued at \$17 million, but

offered for sale for only \$3 million. Thrown in as part of the deal was a large parcel of property, Stonecliffe, on the western side of Mackinac Island. Rex Humbard acquired these assets in April 1971 as part of the Cathedral of Tomorrow's expanded growth push. At approximately the same time, the Humbard organization also

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