

The Canadian roots of Elon Musk's conspiracist grandpa

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Raised in Saskatchewan, Joshua Haldeman was a tech-utopian, politician and apartheid fan

Joshua Haldeman was just one of thousands of Saskatchewan farmers who lost their land in the drought of the Dirty '30s.

While that trauma shaped the lives of everyone who went through it, the crisis affected Haldeman in an exceptional way — he never stopped raging at what he perceived were the causes of the Great Depression.

“He would remain leery of financial institutions and other bureaucracies throughout his life, a sentiment that would shape his political philosophy,” says a 1995 academic paper about Haldeman co-written by his son Scott.

Haldeman came to believe that an international communist conspiracy controlled the banks, the media and the universities and was aiming to run the world.

“An ‘Invisible Government,’ working to carry out the objectives of the International Conspiracy, is operating in every country,” he wrote in his book *The International Conspiracy in Health*, which was published in the mid-1960s. In it, he also said the conspiracy was pushing for the fluoridation of water supplies, mandatory milk pasteurization and mass vaccination programs.

Haldeman dedicated his life to fighting it.

“Only by following the example and guidance of Jesus Christ will man be able to successfully combat the evil forces of the International Conspiracy and achieve the greatness for himself and his country.”

Haldeman thought government was being badly mismanaged and at one point in his career, he embraced the solution proposed by a movement called Technocracy: that government should be run by scientists and engineers, not politicians.

Over his lifetime, Haldeman would lead two Canadian political parties (one of which he founded), campaign against Canadian prime ministers William Lyon Mackenzie King and John Diefenbaker, write a book defending South Africa’s system of apartheid and spend years flying and driving across the African wilderness with his family — hunting for the Lost City of the Kalahari.

Kevin Anderson, a historian at the University of Calgary who has studied the conspiratorial thinking that emerged during the 1930s and '40s, told CBC there are stunning echoes between that time and today.

He said if he were to read a list of Haldeman’s beliefs in one of his classes today and ask, “When do you think this was written? I bet the more aware students would say, ‘Oh, two years ago — this year.’”

The Canada connection

Haldeman died in a plane crash in 1974, when he was 72 years old.

His grandson, Elon Musk, was just three. Musk would become the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX — and the wealthiest man in the world.



Joshua Haldeman, a Regina chiropractor, was an influential player in Saskatchewan politics in the 1940s. Haldeman is Elon Musk's maternal grandfather. (Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan)



John Diefenbaker, seen here with U.S. president John F. Kennedy during his 1961 visit to Canada, became the country's prime minister less than a decade after he ran against Joshua Haldeman in a Regina riding. (The Canadian Press)

Elon's mother, Maye, born in Regina in 1948, was one of Joshua and Winnifred Haldeman's five children.



Elon Musk is shown with his mother, Maye, who was born in Saskatchewan, and his young son at a rally for Donald Trump during his 2024 presidential campaign. (Alex Brandon/The Associated Press)

“Throughout his childhood, Elon heard many stories about his grandfather’s exploits and sat through countless slide shows that documented his travels and trips,” wrote Musk biographer Ashlee Vance in his 2015 book *Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX and the Quest for a Fantastic Future*.

“My grandmother told these tales of how they almost died several times along their journeys,” Musk told Vance. “They were flying in a plane with literally no instruments — not even a radio.... My grandfather had this desire for adventure, exploration — doing crazy things.”

“Maybe that sort of adventurous spirit is in all of [Haldeman’s descendants],” Musk said to *Vanity Fair* in 2015.

Like his grandpa, Musk — a citizen of Canada, South Africa and the U.S. — has also taken an interest in politics, having become a senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump since his election last year. And, like Haldeman, Musk has tangled with a Canadian prime minister of his own.

In early January, then-prime minister Justin Trudeau posted a response on X to Trump mockingly calling Canada the 51st state. (Trudeau announced on Jan. 6 that he was stepping down as prime minister, and has since been replaced by Mark Carney.)

In a Jan. 8 post, Musk replied, “Girl, you’re not the governor of Canada anymore, so it doesn’t matter what you say.”

Last month, thousands of Canadians started signing a petition to have Musk’s citizenship revoked for his attempts to “attack Canadian sovereignty.”

“Canada is not a real country,” he posted on X in reply. (That post has since been deleted.)



Elon Musk posted this on his social media platform X in response to a petition calling on the government to revoke his Canadian citizenship. The post has since been removed. (Elon Musk/X)

Eighty years earlier, Musk’s grandpa had a much different response when he saw a political movement advocate that the U.S. take over Canada and Greenland by “force of arms.” He issued a warning against its “insidious and seditious propaganda.”

“The Canadian people and the Canadian government must take positive action now as a measure of national safety,” Haldeman wrote in the Apr. 5, 1945, edition of the *Canadian Social Crediter* magazine.

That was just one of many moments of political drama in Haldeman’s remarkable journey.

His views were shaped in Saskatchewan during a time of notable similarities to our own — an unstable stock market, punitive tariffs, rising racial tensions driven by mass immigration, a dramatically shifting world order and a public debate often influenced by conspiracy theories and suspicion.

Gophers and scurvy

Joshua Haldeman was born in a log cabin in Minnesota in 1902 and raised in Waldeck, Sask., near Swift Current.

According to the CSC biography, Haldeman “became quite skilled in bronco horse-back riding, boxing, wrestling and exhibition rope spinning.”

His mother, Almeda, recognized by many as Canada’s first chiropractor, ran a strict home, allowing “no one in her house to drink, smoke, use improper language or tell shady stories,” according to Erik Nordeus’s book *The Engineer: Follow Elon Musk on a Journey from South Africa to Mars*. “Playing cards and medicines were also prohibited.”

Haldeman attended nine colleges and universities, including Moose Jaw College and Regina College, according to the academic paper written by his son Scott. Scott Haldeman declined CBC’s request for an interview, but did answer some questions by email.

Haldeman concluded his chiropractic training in 1926. Throughout his life, Haldeman was a leader in the chiropractic industry, taking board positions in provincial and national associations and pushing for new legislation.

But in the mid-1920s, instead of taking up chiropractic, he began farming.

His timing was not ideal. He lost his farm during the 1930s after he was unable to keep up with loan payments.

The horror of that time in Saskatchewan is difficult to comprehend. This helps paint the picture.

“Stewed gopher, canned gopher, gopher pie” were “not infrequently” on the menu at that time, wrote Curtis McManus in his book *Happyland: The History of the ‘Dirty Thirties’ in Saskatchewan*.

The tragedy began with the 1929 stock market crash and was exacerbated by an extended drought — the “Dust Bowl.” Two-thirds of the population was forced onto social assistance and dozens of people died from starvation, rickets and scurvy.

Errol Musk, Elon’s father, told CBC in an interview earlier this year that he remembers Haldeman speaking about his frustration with Saskatchewan’s rail system, which had a difficult time getting food from the farm to those who needed it.

“He pointed out to me about how the Depression was man-made,” said Errol Musk. “In other words, it was planned.... a plan to screw up the world in favour of certain people.”

Anderson said people in Saskatchewan at the time had an understandable fear of “global forces that feel completely out of everybody’s control.”

That fear launched the creation of a series of populist political movements on the right and the left.



Growing up in Saskatchewan, Joshua Haldeman participated in wrestling, boxing and exhibition rope spinning. (J.C. Keating and Scott Haldeman)



In this undated photo from during the Dust Bowl, the soil in parts of Saskatchewan turned to sand. (Saskatchewan Archives Board)

A government without politicians

Haldeman's political activism began in 1928 when, at 26, he joined a couple of left-leaning farmers organizations.

In 1933, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) was formed with the signing of the Regina Manifesto, which called for the eradication of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist state. (The CCF was the forerunner of today's NDP.) The next year, Haldeman joined the CCF and took on leadership roles in the party, according to the paper written by Scott Haldeman.

"[The CCF] promoted the abolition of the profit system and the establishment of a planned economy," wrote Joshua Haldeman's secretary Vivan Doan in a letter to Scott cited in the paper. "He worked tirelessly for this new party."

By 1936, Haldeman had moved to Regina and established his chiropractic office.

Around that time, Howard Scott — a 6'5" man with broad shoulders and a magnetic personality — began delivering fiery lectures across Western Canada. The New York-based engineer and political visionary was the leader of Technocracy Inc., an organization promoting his plan for an economy run by experts, not politicians.

- **These techno-utopians wanted to put scientists in charge — and their ideas still hold sway in Silicon Valley**

"Politics is the natural approach of morons," Scott said during a December 1935 speech, according to the Regina Leader-Post. "Socialist, communist, fascist, liberal, conservative, Republican or Democrat — they all stink alike."

The movement began in the United States in the 1930s. By 1940, it was sweeping across Western Canada. Technocrats were known for wearing identical grey uniforms and saluting one another in what The Daily Province called "Technocrat fashion — right hand raised smartly to eye-level."

Haldeman quickly became entranced by the movement and took up a leadership role. In a July 1940 article in Technocracy Digest, he argued that advances in technology and global affairs had made it possible to create a utopian society in North America.

"No other country has anything that the North American people either want or require," he wrote, owing to the continent's relative isolation from the rest of the world and its abundance of resources and expertise. "It is possible to build this new order of mankind, this new America, here and now."

Scott promised that under Technocracy, problems like crime, class distinctions and debt would be things of the past. Only people between 25 and 45 would be expected to work, and only four hours a day, four days a week.

After that, they could "do whatever they wish for the rest of their lives," Scott said.



Howard Scott founded Technocracy Inc. in 1933. He led the organization until his death in 1970. (Technocracyinc.org)



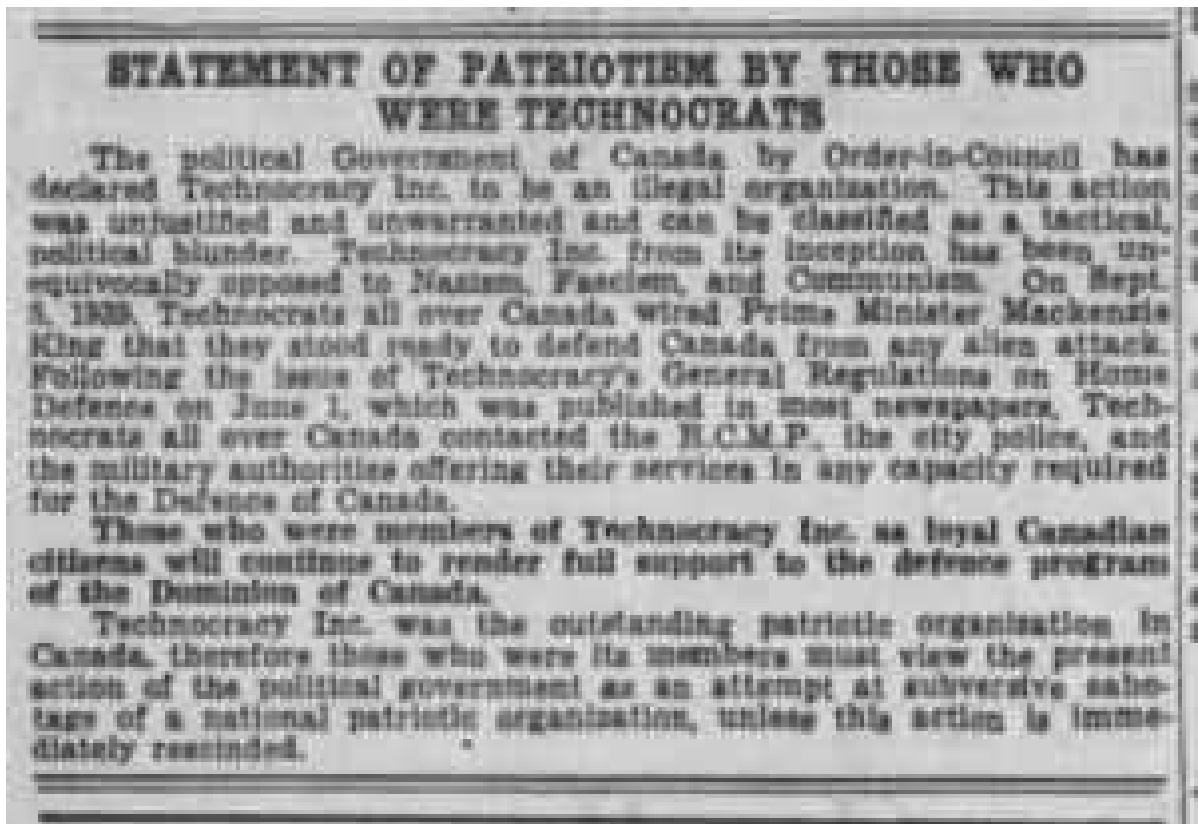
Followers of Technocracy Inc. wore grey uniforms, saluted one another and advocated for the eradication of the existing political system. (Commons.wikimedia.org)

'A scientific Frankenstein'

The Canadian government was not swayed by Technocracy's rhetoric. In June 1940, it declared Technocracy an illegal and subversive organization.

"The literature of Technocracy discloses, in effect, that one of its objectives is to overthrow the government and constitution of this country by force," said prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie-King in a July 16, 1940, speech in the House of Commons.

Haldeman was apparently not intimidated by this move. He placed an ad in the Regina Leader-Post promoting Technocracy and calling the government's move an "unjustified.... political blunder."



On June 26, 1940, Joshua Haldeman placed this ad in the Regina Leader-Post following Ottawa's decision to declare Technocracy Inc. an illegal organization.

(Regina Leader-Post)

A few months later, he was arrested and charged with stirring up disloyalty to the King and undermining Canada's prosecution of the Second World War. He was found guilty in a downtown Regina court.

Shortly after his arrest, Haldeman left the movement, after coming to the conclusion it had become treasonous. His son Scott wrote that Haldeman became disillusioned

when Technocracy flipped from opposing communism to supporting “complete economic and military collaboration with Soviet Russia.”

That wasn't his only beef with the movement.

In an April 1945 article in the Canadian Social Crediter, Haldeman warned that Technocracy had become “a scientific Frankenstein.”

He wrote that since his departure, the organization had begun pushing for the U.S. to take over Canada and Greenland “either by purchase, negotiation or by force of arms” – a position advocated by Howard Scott, who argued for isolationism and a strong continental defence.

Haldeman warned that Quebec and what is now Mexico were being targeted in particular. He quoted Scott as arguing “that these alien cultures on the continent of North America be annihilated. Assimilation is out of the question.”

Haldeman warned “Technocracy Inc. is conspiring against the British Empire — against the sovereignty of Canada.”



Starting in July 1940, Technocracy Inc. began to push for American expansion, arguing for a 'Technate of America,' which would include Canada, Greenland, Central America, the Caribbean and parts of Colombia, Venezuela and the Guianas. (Digital.library.cornell.edu)

A maverick

Haldeman was a bit of a maverick throughout his life — confident in his own apprehension of issues.

“He never had any person that would be considered a spiritual guide,” Scott Haldeman told CBC in an email. “He felt he knew the Bible better than any minister and only went to church for weddings and funerals.”

After Technocracy, Haldeman decided he would start his own political party, Total War and Defence. In his 1941 book, *Total War and Defence for Canada*, which was his manifesto for this new party, he argued for a policy of total conscription to support our British allies during the Second World War.

He called for the conscription of “every employable man and woman between the ages of sixteen and sixty” and “all natural resources, all industrial equipment and all property,” including “all bank deposits and private holdings of money.”

His movement did not catch on.

His next stop was the Social Credit Party, a rapidly growing political movement that formed government in Alberta in 1935 and held it until 1971.

Social Credit advocated low taxes, minimal regulation and free markets. But it doesn’t fit neatly into the modern left-right political divide. Social Credit wanted governments to give money directly to consumers in order to combat inherent inequity in the market.

Haldeman quickly rose through the ranks, becoming leader of the Social Credit Party of Saskatchewan in 1945 and the chair of the national party’s council in 1946.

During his political tenure he ran, unsuccessfully, against three giants of Canadian politics. In the 1945 federal election, he faced Liberal prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie-King in a Prince Albert riding. In 1948, Haldeman led Social Credit in a provincial campaign against Tommy Douglas and the CCF. Social Credit lost, receiving just eight per cent of the vote.

In the 1949 federal election, he lost to John Diefenbaker in a Regina district. (Eight years later, Diefenbaker became prime minister.)

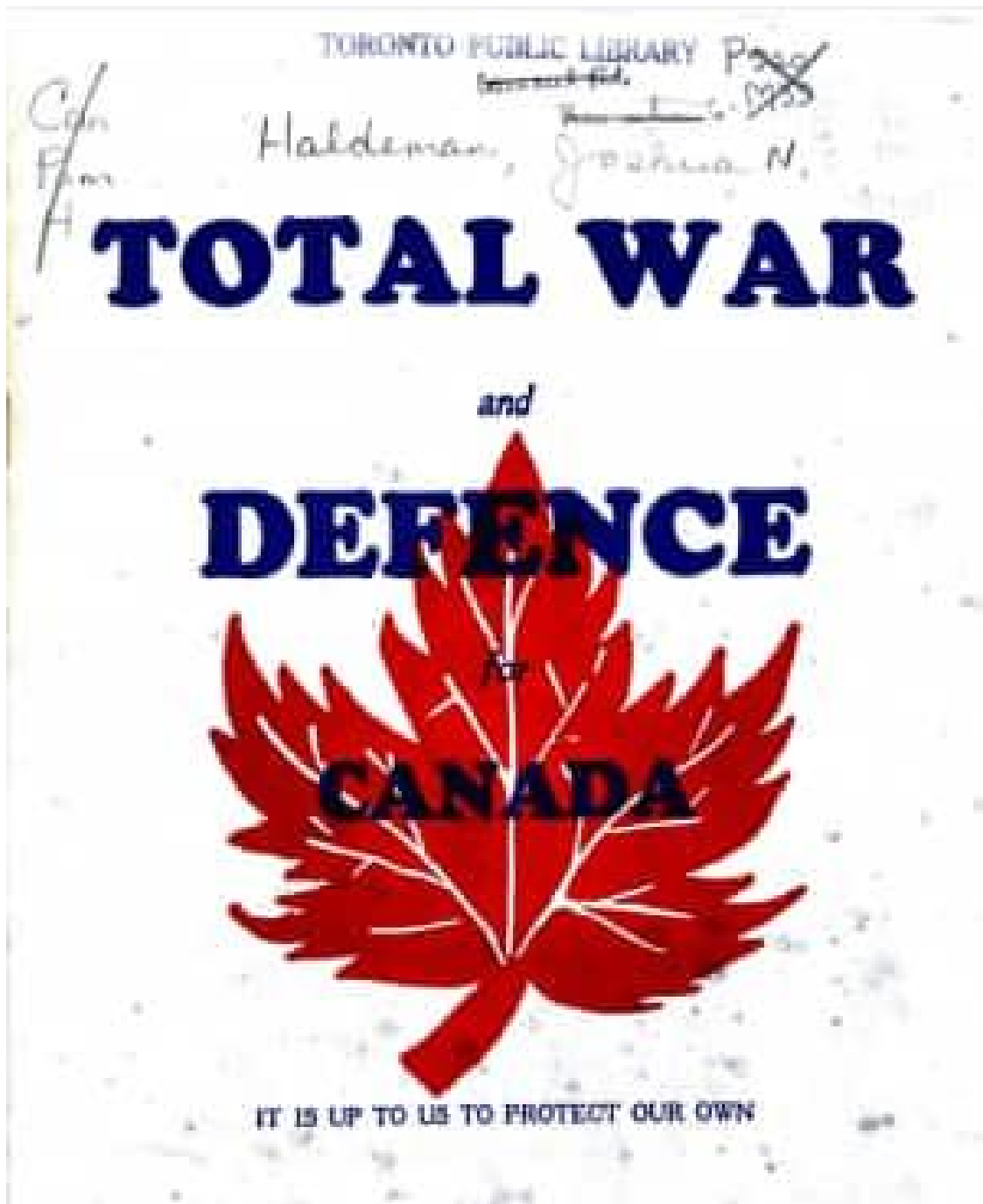
Haldeman campaigned as the Christian alternative to godless communists.

“The trouble with politics is that Christianity has been left out,” said Haldeman in an April 1948 address on CBC Radio, transcribed in the *Canadian Social Crediter*.

A 1948 confrontation at Regina City Hall put Haldeman in the midst of a political conflict that has echoes of our modern politics. He had been invited to a party leaders’ forum by the Regina Housewives League to discuss their proposal for national price controls.

Haldeman criticized their idea as a “strictly socialist resolution” and accused the league of being “a front for the communist organization.”

According to the *Regina Leader-Post*, “Dr. Haldeman was repeatedly interrupted by ‘boos’ and catcalls.”



In February 1941, Joshua Haldeman published *Total War and Defence for Canada*, advocating his policy of total conscription. (Libraries and Archives Canada)

Social Credit Movement Sweeping Saskatchewan

Make Him Your Premier



Dr. J. H. Haldeman

President of the Social Credit League of Canada

COLORFUL S. C. LEADER

Dr. J. H. Haldeman, Social Credit candidate for Regina constituency, has had a wide and varied career in Western Canada. His first job was in 1907 as a...

Social Credit—the Christian Way

Social Credit is a movement that has swept across the land and is now being felt in the world. It is a movement that is based on the principles of the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is a movement that is based on the principles of justice and equity. It is a movement that is based on the principles of the Christian faith.

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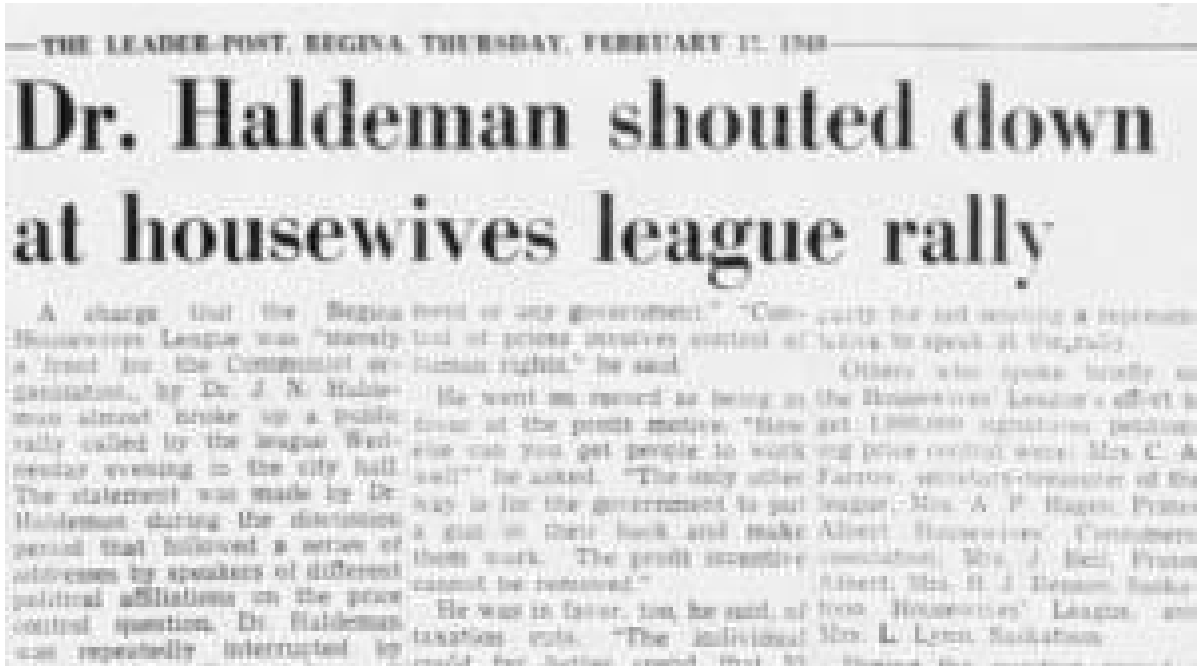
It is a movement that is based on the principles of the Christian faith. It is a movement that is based on the principles of justice and equity. It is a movement that is based on the principles of the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

SOCIAL CREDIT'S WHEEL CROSS

It is a movement that is based on the principles of the Christian faith. It is a movement that is based on the principles of justice and equity. It is a movement that is based on the principles of the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

In 1948, Joshua Haldeman led Saskatchewan's Social Credit Party into the provincial election. The party lost badly to Tommy Douglas and the CCF. (Canadian Social Crediter)

“I am making a speech here,” Haldeman replied. “Isn’t there still freedom of speech in Regina?”



During the 1940s, Haldeman regularly made headline news in Saskatchewan. (Regina Leader-Post)

'Home-baked fascism'

In 1946, Haldeman found himself in the midst of a national scandal, after the Quebec wing of Social Credit published the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

A Saskatoon Star Phoenix editorial said Social Credit was cooking up “home-baked fascism” by promoting a fraudulent document that “purports to reveal a plot [by Jews] to dominate the world.”

This reinforced Social Credit’s reputation as an antisemitic organization — which can be traced back to its founder, Clifford Hugh Douglas, also known as “Major Douglas.”

“The Jew has no native culture and always aims at power without responsibility. He is the parasite upon, and corrupter of, every civilisation in which he has attained power,” Douglas wrote in a 1939 edition of the party’s magazine.

Haldeman, as the chairman of the National Social Credit Association, responded in a letter to the editor of the Star Phoenix. He said “Social Credit is absolutely opposed to antisemitism,” adding, “the great mass of the Jewish people in Germany suffered greatly and our full sympathy goes out to them.”

But he also defended the publishing of the Protocols. He said whether the document was fraudulent “is not the point.”

“The point is that the plan as outlined in these protocols has been rapidly unfolding in the period of observation of this generation,” Haldeman wrote, noting the conspiracy this book supposedly revealed was executed “by international financiers, many but not all of them, Jewish.”

In a 1947 letter to the editor of the Saskatoon Star Phoenix, Rabbi Irwin Gordon expressed skepticism about Haldeman’s disavowal of antisemitism.

“Doctor Haldeman must have a short memory as well if he does not remember his own speeches shot through with antisemitic talk,” Gordon wrote. “Doctor Haldeman’s over-interest in clearing the party and himself from the charge of antisemitism and anti-Canadianism will not fool the people.”

Even Alberta’s Social Credit premier thought the party had an antisemitism problem. In a letter to a national leader after the *Protocols* incident, Premier Ernest Manning (father of Preston Manning, founder of the Reform Party of Canada) took aim at the organization’s magazine, the Canadian Social Crediter.

“No one who values their name or their influence is going to get behind a publication which contains little but negative and destructive criticism flavoured with ‘Jew-baiting,’” Manning wrote, demanding that Haldeman, as party chairman, clean things up.

South Africa move prompted by prophecies

In the midst of his frenetic political career, Haldeman made time to start a family.

In 1942, he took up dancing and a few months later married his instructor, Winnifred Fletcher. (This was his second marriage. He married Eve Peters in 1934 and they had one child together — Joshua Jerry Noel Haldeman — but the couple divorced by 1937.)

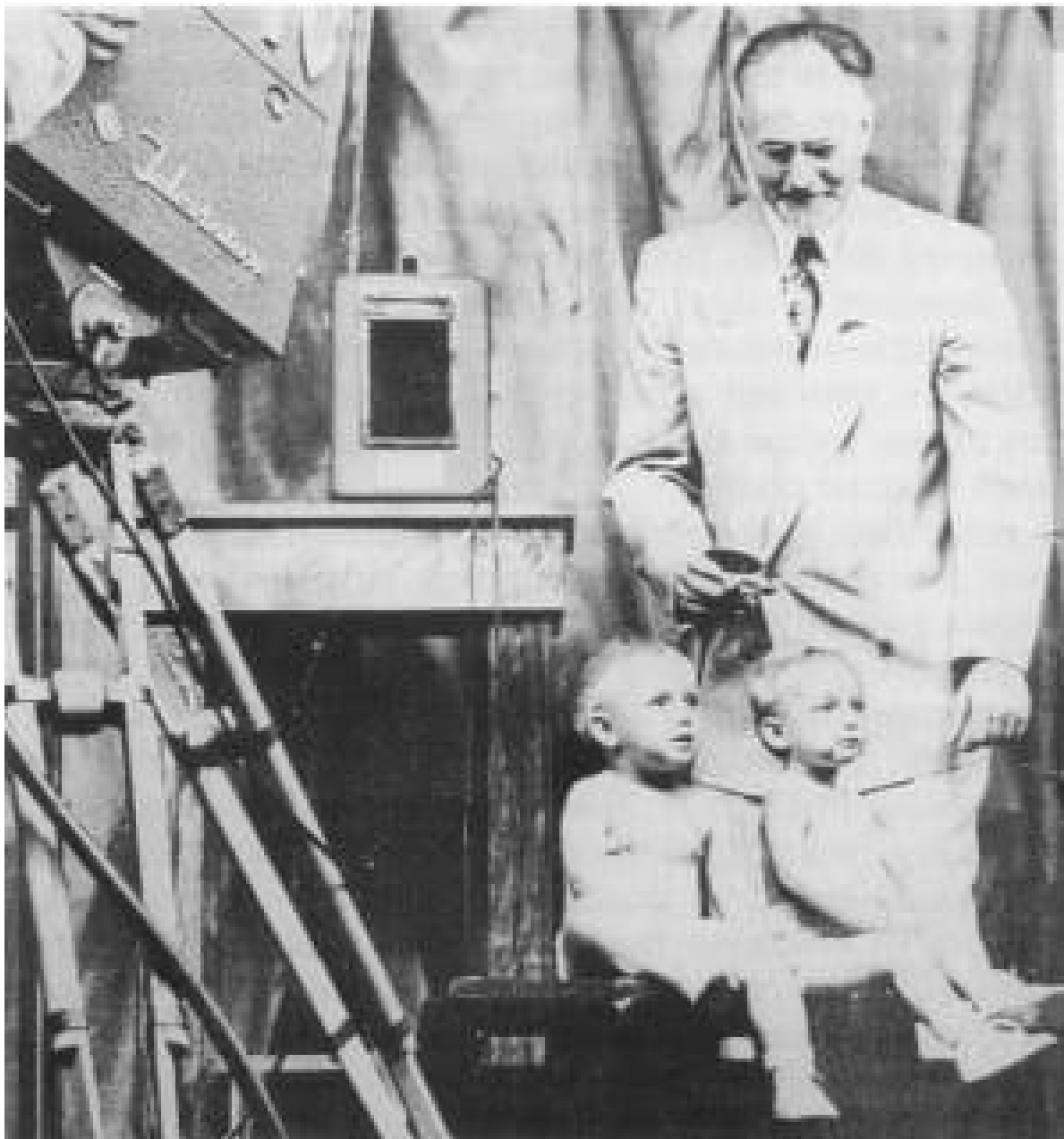
Fletcher grew up in Moose Jaw and, as a teenager, had been a reporter at the Moose Jaw Times Herald. She later established the Haldeman School of Dance, which was the first ballet company in Saskatchewan.

The couple had five children, including twins Maye and Kaye in 1948.

That same year, Haldeman got his pilot’s licence and bought a plane that enabled him to run his chiropractic business alongside his political career. The girls flew with their dad so often that newspapers began referring to the family as “the Flying Haldemans.”

“In Canada, they thought we were crazy because my parents would fly around in their single-prop canvas plane with their small children,” Maye Musk wrote in her 2019 book, *A Woman Makes a Plan*. She didn’t respond to CBC’s request for an interview.

By mid-1949, Haldeman started looking for a new home, a search inspired in part by two prophecies, according to a biography of his son Scott.



In this photo from the October 1949 edition of the ICA International Review of Chiropractic, Haldeman is seen demonstrating a nerve pressure reading with his twin daughters Kaye and Maye. (Los Angeles College of Chiropractic)



In 1948, Joshua Haldeman got his pilot's licence, allowing him to criss-cross the province for political events while maintaining his chiropractic office in Regina.
(Saskatoon Star Phoenix)

“Josh relates an experience with a ‘medium’ [spiritualist] in 1936 who told him he must practice in Regina for 14 years and then, ‘move to a city in a faraway place,’” says the book, *The Journey of Scott Haldeman*, written by Reed Phillips.

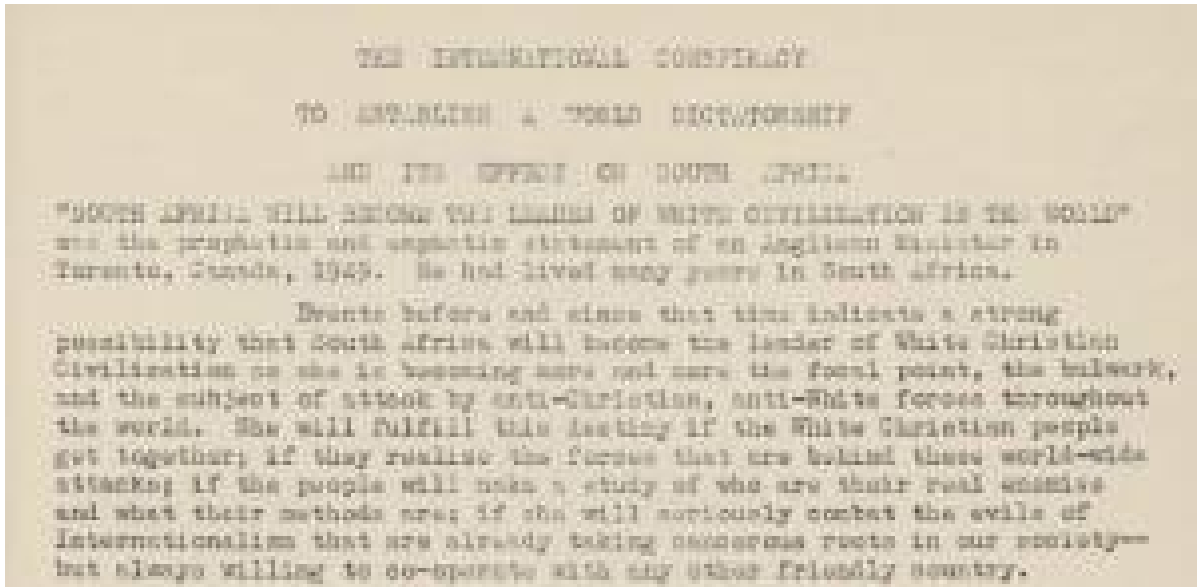
It goes on to say that once his 14 years were up in Regina, “everything fell into place.”

“After speaking with an Anglican minister from South Africa at an International Trade Fair in Toronto, Joshua became convinced that South Africa was that ‘faraway place,’” the book says.

So what did that minister say?

Haldeman’s 1960 book, *The International Conspiracy to Establish a World Dictatorship and The Menace to South Africa*, begins this way:

“‘SOUTH AFRICA WILL BECOME THE LEADER OF WHITE CIVILIZATION IN THE WORLD’ was the prophetic and emphatic statement of an Anglican Minister in Toronto, Canada, 1949. He had lived many years in South Africa.”



Haldeman published a 48-page book entitled *The International Conspiracy to Establish a World Dictatorship and its Menace to South Africa* in May 1960. (Joshua Haldeman)

A new life for Haldeman

The Haldemans’ move to South Africa made news across Canada, with a Sept. 11, 1950, article noting the family was leaving behind a “thriving practice as a chiropractor,” Winnifred’s dance school and a 20-room home in Regina, to “stake everything on this new venture.”

They settled with their five children in Pretoria, where they enjoyed warm weather and hired help.

“We have two native (Negro) garden boys in the summer and one in the winter and a native girl,” according to an article Haldeman wrote that was published in the Aug. 6, 1951, edition of the Regina Leader-Post.

“The natives are very primitive and must not be taken seriously. We get quite a bang out of them and they are really quite useful,” he wrote. “It takes three natives to do the work of one white man.”

In 1948, the National Party swept to power in South Africa and immediately began implementing its program of apartheid, a policy of racial segregation.

Months after arriving, Haldeman told South Africa’s Die Transvaler newspaper “instead of the government’s attitude keeping me away from South Africa, it has actually encouraged me to settle here.”



South Africa’s National Party, led by Prime Minister D. F. Malan, won the 1948 election and began implementing its policy of apartheid. (National Archives of Namibia/thenation.com)

‘White man.... the most difficult to control’

In his 1951 Regina Leader-Post article, Haldeman defended apartheid.

“Some [African natives] are quite clever in a routine job, but the best of them cannot assume responsibility and will abuse authority,” he wrote. “The present government of South Africa knows how to handle the native question.”

On March 21, 1960, police fired submachine guns on a crowd of Black people protesting apartheid in Sharpeville, South Africa, killing 69 and wounding more than 180 others. It came to be known as the Sharpeville massacre, “one of the first and most violent demonstrations against apartheid in South Africa,” according to the Encyclopedia Britannica.

A few weeks later, Haldeman published his book *The International Conspiracy to Establish a World Government and Menace to South Africa*, writing in such a hurry that the introduction said “due to the present urgency this brief has been rushed and typographical errors must be excused.”

Haldeman said the leaders of the Black protest movement hope, “with the support of the Internationalists, to oust the white man, who has in a few years brought their people from primitive savagery to a great measure of peace and security.”

“An unconditional propaganda warfare is carried on against the white man because the white man’s integrity, initiative and independence make him the most difficult to control,” he wrote.

Haldeman opposed the state mandating systems like compulsory medication on the white population, but had a different standard for the Black population.

“The State has the right to do for them what it thinks is best, the same rights as the parents have for their children,” he wrote in *The International Conspiracy in Health*. (Both of Haldeman’s International Conspiracy books were first reported on by Harvard historian Jill Lepore in a 2023 article in *The New Yorker*.)

’The Great Farini’

Shortly after his arrival in South Africa, Haldeman was swept up in the “lost city” craze.

Hermann Wittenberg, a professor at South Africa’s University of the Western Cape, says in the late 1800s and early 1900s, white amateur archeologists and explorers discovered ruins, monuments and sculptures of ancient African civilizations.

He said because of widespread racism, these explorers — even more progressive, liberal explorers — believed “that Black Africans, Bantu-speaking peoples, are primitive, not capable of any civilizational attainments. The best they can do is build mud huts, you know?”

As a result, they theorized that these civilizations, which exhibited some sophistication, must have been built by non-Africans.

“They would have imagined that this was some ancient northern, Western, Mediterranean civilization which had built these things. And they thought there was a whole string of these things in southern Africa, including that Kalahari thing,” said Wittenberg.

“That Kalahari thing” became Haldeman’s obsession: the legend of the Lost City of the Kalahari, which was allegedly discovered by William Hunt in 1885.

Hunt, who came to be known as “The Great Farini,” was a Canadian circus performer who became famous in the 1860s for crossing Niagara Falls on a tightrope — once with a washing machine on his back and another time with a sack over his entire body.



The Great Farini crossed the Niagara Gorge with an Empire washing machine strapped to his back on Aug. 15, 1860. (Historicalsocietyottawa.ca)

Farini, who was also the inventor of the “human cannonball” performance, became a promoter of “freak shows,” featuring a girl he called Krao and deemed the Missing Link.

P.T. Barnum once called Farini “the most talented showman” he knew, according to Shane Peacock’s book *The Great Farini: The High-Wire Life of William Hunt*.

1857 Aqueductum Westminster April 25

“KRAO”

THE “MISSING LINK,”

A Living Proof of Darwin's Theory of the Descent of Man.

SPECIAL LECTURES, 2.30, 5.30 & 9.30.



SPECIAL LECTURES, 2.30, 5.30 & 9.30.

THE WONDER OF WONDERS.

The usual argument against the Darwinian theory, that man and monkey had a common origin, has always been that no animal has hitherto been discovered in the transmission state between monkey and man.

“KRAO,”

a perfect specimen of the step between man and monkey, discovered in Laos by that distinguished traveller, Carl Bock, will be on Exhibition in the New Lecture Room, during the Afternoon and Evening.

ALL SHOULD SEE HER.

SEE OPINIONS OF THE PRESS ON THE OTHER SIDE

In advertisements in the late 1800s, Farini promoted a young girl named Krao as the Missing Link, announcing she was 'living proof of Darwin's theory of the descent of man.' (Public domain)

The showman was also an explorer and storyteller.

As the story goes, in 1885, Farini travelled to Africa and led an expedition across the Kalahari Desert. In a book he wrote about his travels (*Through the Kalahari Desert*), Farini claimed he had chanced upon the ruins of an ancient city:

*A relic, may be, of a glorious past,
A city once grand and sublime,
Destroyed by earthquake, defaced by the blast,
Swept away by the hand of time.*

According to Maye Musk, Haldeman read Farini's book and became transfixed. In 1953, Haldeman began taking regular trips into the desert with his wife and five children to hunt for the lost city.

"My father wanted to try to follow Farini's path," Musk wrote in her autobiography. "And that became our July vacation. Now I think: Can you imagine taking five little kids to the desert for three weeks?"

Musk wrote that her family's motto was "live dangerously, carefully." But she also described a scene where lions wandered into the family's camp.

"My father got into the car to chase them away and the lions made their way up the sand dune next to the camp and then spent the morning watching us."



For years, the Haldeman family's summer vacation involved lengthy trips into the Kalahari Desert in search of a legendary lost city. (Maye Musk/X)

Lost city searches 'always about white people:' expert

Haldeman's youngest son, Lee, has inherited his father's passion for the lost city, having written two books on the topic. He dedicated *Finding Farini's Lost City of the Kalahari* to his parents.

"They completed sixteen searches for the fabled ruins," he wrote. "There are no others in the history of this mystery that believed Farini's story as intensely, or who dedicated so much time, money, and effort to look for this fabled City." Lee Haldeman declined CBC's request for an interview.

Wittenberg agreed with the assessment, calling Haldeman "the undisputed Farini devotee of his time."

As for the motivation behind Haldeman's fixation, Elon Musk biographer Erik Nordeus wrote that "it's unclear... why he became interested in finding [the lost city] but he did everything he could to find it."

Jean-loïc Le Quellec, author of *The White Lady and Atlantis: Ophir and Great Zimbabwe: Investigation of an Archaeological Myth*, says Haldeman's lost city search was part of a well-established cultural phenomenon.

He said there are more than 1,000 books on the topic of lost civilizations between the mid-19th century and 1940, "and none of them is about the search for or discovery of a 'lost black tribe.' They are always about white people," he wrote in an email to CBC.

Le Quellec, director of research at France's Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, mentions Haldeman in his 2016 book, but had no idea of his connection to Musk until CBC reached out.

"I don't know if Haldeman was explicitly looking for evidence of an ancient white presence, but this was very generally the case in his time, and for decades," Le Quellec wrote.

He said these stories were used by colonists throughout Africa as a means of claiming historical legitimacy for their actions.

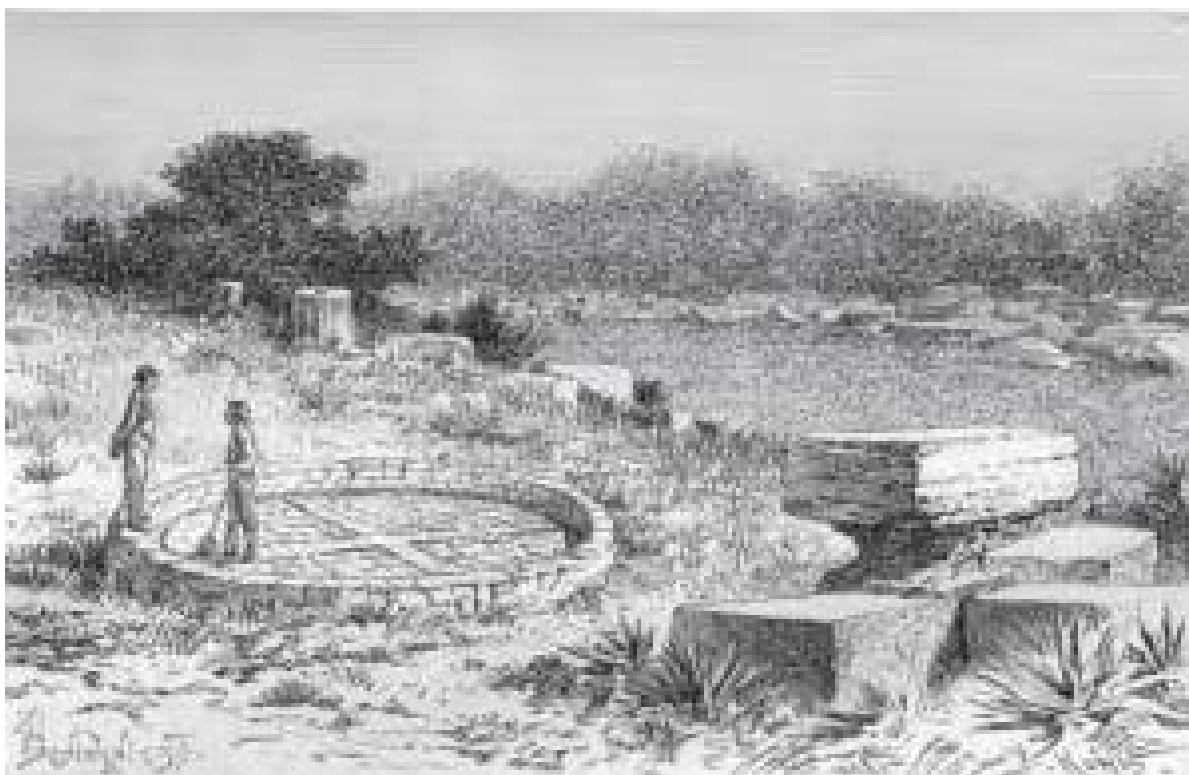
"The main motivation of the authors and explorers was to demonstrate the existence of an ancient white (European, Sumerian, Egyptian or Cretan) presence in Africa, in order to justify colonization in general, and apartheid in the case of South Africa," he said. "The Lost City of Kalahari is just one example among many of this type of approach."

Like Le Quellec, Wittenberg also wrote about Haldeman without knowing his connection to Musk.

In his PhD thesis, *The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape*, Wittenberg noted that explorer Doreen Tainton, a contemporary of Haldeman, believed that the Indigenous Black people of South Africa were incapable of building the sort of intricate architecture described by Farini in his book.



This is a picture of Joshua Haldeman taking compass bearings in the Kalahari Desert in 1965, as two of his children look on, including his son Lee. (Lee Haldeman)



This engraving, which appears in Jean-loïc Le Quellec's book *The White Lady and Atlantis: Ophir and Great Zimbabwe: Investigation of an Archaeological Myth*, shows the ruins supposedly discovered in the Kalahari by The Great Farini. (*Le Tour du Monde*)

That led her to ask “who, then, were these long dead builders?” In answering her own question, she suggested they could have been Romans, Greeks, Phoenicians, Egyptians or Arabs.

Wittenberg noted that just like Tainton, Haldeman was also open to the notion that the lost city was not of Indigenous origin, writing that Haldeman believed “this would be a major archaeological find, if it could be located, as it would show that the Egyptians were this far south.”

In an interview with CBC, Wittenberg said “Egyptians were not seen as African at the time. The general sort of idea was that Egyptians were some sort of Mediterranean civilization.... It was seen as not part of Africa, but it was seen as a European type of civilization.”

A plane crash

Despite his years of searching, Haldeman was unable to locate the lost city.

On Jan. 13, 1974, Haldeman died in a plane crash along with his son-in-law Peter Rae, according to Die Transvaler newspaper. It was front page news, featuring a photo of the overturned plane.

“One of South Africa’s most famous chiropractors and adventurers.... died yesterday morning,” the article says. “The suspicion exists that they wanted to carry out an emergency landing,” but “there were power lines that prevented the alleged emergency landing and the plane crashed nose first.”

In a separate article, the paper reflected on Haldeman’s Kalahari obsession, noting he “never allowed himself to be convinced that he was looking for something that might not exist.” The paper said Haldeman’s trust in Farini’s integrity drove him, even as other explorers concluded the circus performer’s story was false.

Wittenberg said in the decades since the lost city craze, archeology, geology and ethnology have shown that genuine African ruins are, in fact, of Indigenous Black origin. And, he says, legends like the Lost City of the Kalahari have been largely abandoned — though not entirely.

“Myths are myths because they don’t die,” he said. “They have a particular longevity. They’re not killed off by fact, you know?”

According to Nordeus’s book, after Farini’s death, Haldeman wrote to his family, saying “We do not feel he made the Lost City up as we have confirmed everything else in the book.”

For much of his life, Haldeman was captivated and driven by mysteries — a shadowy group of international communists conspiring to control the world and an elaborate ancient city, lost to the sands of time.

And he believed in them to the very end.



The 1974 plane crash that killed Haldeman and his son-in-law was front page news, with one newspaper paying tribute to 'one of South Africa's most famous chiropractors and adventurers.' (Die Transvaler)

Top image: Maye Musk/X

The Ted K Archive

Geoff Leo

The Canadian roots of Elon Musk's conspiracist grandpa

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