

Holy Land, U.S.A.



MINIATURE REPLICA IN WATERBURY, CONNECTICUT • JOHN B. GRECO, FOUNDER



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(Cover) Keith Johnson of Hamden photographed scenes of Holy Land in Waterbury for a documentary exhibit which is on display this month in the West Building Gallery at Mattatuck Community College. The photographs were shown last year at the Parson School of Design in New York City and next month will go on exhibit in Boston. The public can see the show Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Monday Morning Profile

Prince George Hardison

By Jack Goldberg



Prince George Hardison repairs hand on statue of Christ at Waterbury Holy Land.

Holy Land has long been a favorite stopping place for tourists in Waterbury.

Those who walk away from the representation of the Holy City tend to talk of being inspired by Prince George Hardison as much as by Holy Land itself.

George is a volunteer worker in his spare time. He paints, washes, sweeps, builds, and talks, a kind of general handyman who works because he believes he is contributing to something important.

"I try to help suggest things that might get people to see Holy Land as a good place to come and get acquainted with different versions of the Bible and to get people to affiliate with all children and to recognize God wherever he may be," said George.

George helps in diverse ways. Beautifully colored murals are painted by him, a talent he says he has always had. Many signs around the new area show George's touch, precisely worded and done in a flowing script that seems to have come off a machine.

George admitted he has spoken with people several times about things he con-

siders important and that he thinks can help them. Among the themes he stresses are love and unity.

"Most of us are not perfect but we must work to achieve perfection," George said.

Born Prince George Hardison in Georgia 60 years ago, he says he has held many jobs during his life, mainly as a laborer.

"I was taught to do right when I was small. . . I felt my parents led me on the right path," George said.

Slowed by emphysema and an aching shoulder, George only comes to Holy Land to work twice a week but once there he doesn't rest. He is always moving, sanding down a statue, sprucing up a sign, talking to a visitor.

"In our lifetime we lose half of the joy of life because we don't look at things the way they should be looked at because we allow ourselves to hate and to spread hate," George declared.

He sees his working and helping out at Holy Land as doing his share to make the world a better place to live.

"I want to help bury the things that hinder people from getting along," George said.

True to his word George created a grave. Bordered by a small fence the headstone reads "Here lies" and he lists avarice, greed, hatred, jealousy, gossip, and several other sins. Each sin has its own smaller headstone within the small plot.

The bachelor, a member of The Church of the Living God, doesn't favor any particular religion but would like all people to unite as brothers under God. George still tries to do his part to make this happen.

Technique To Enlarge World View

"Let Us Bury Forever," Mini Cemetery, Holy Land, U.S.A.

In 1972-1973, Sister Josephine Valenti, M.P.F. and Sister Lucy Vescera, M.P.F. went to Holy Land in Waterbury, Connecticut, as pioneers. It was there that they met a prominent artist and painter by the name of Prince George Hardison, a name given to him by his mother because she predicted that George was going to be a great servant of the Lord, when growing up. When he came as a volunteer to Holy Land, he had this to say:

"My mother thought she was doing me a great favor to affirm me at birth. I suffered tremendously in my early childhood, because of my name," he said. He related how his classmates scoffed at him and had teased him to a point that he felt belittled. He was never at ease to do anything worthwhile. He wanted to live up to his name, but the Almighty God, in Whom he had so much trust, did not permit him to be released from such a trial. In high school things were not any better. I once asked if he ever wondered, "Why me, Lord?" His simple reply will serve as an inspiration to me, as long as I live:

I used to ask that, but then I began to take stock of his situation, and began to inquire, why not him? If this had not happened to him, it might have happened to someone else. Prince George told Sister Josephine that he didn't wish this on anyone in the family. Then he added, "It might have happened to someone I love." He didn't want anyone to know that he had to deal with this. "God made me strong, so I'll take it, I'll fight it, and I'll beat it," he bounced back. The more he took this philosophy to heart, the more success he had with his talents, especially his great ability which he used for God at Holy Land, U.S.A.

Prince George's talent was innate. The artwork and painting which one sees around the Ecumenical Chapel is all hand done. He employed no tools. His work entailed sacrificial efforts since George suffered much with emphysema.

During the summer months, Sister Angela Bulla, M.P.F., former Provincial Superior and current Provincial Superior, graciously consented to Sister Josephine's request to send Sister Rose Machi, M.P.F. to assist at Holy Land, since there was a great need during weekends to run the Visual Aid Theater and help in the Gift Shop. During week days, Sister Rose displayed her artistic talents and creativity by helping Attorney John Greco in and out of the Bible Lands.

On one occasion John Greco remarked that Sister Josephine and Sister Lucy were expecting an unusual number of tourists on that particular weekend. Prince George, a black man, vigorously replied, "It is unfortunate that there are some white people who don't always accept the blacks." John Greco made it known that this was not the case at Holy Land, though. John added, "Prince George, we must rid ourselves of these vices and bury them by showing a concrete example." John then suggested a tombstone to be erected in front of the Ecumenical Chapel, an apropos spot, and that the words, "Let us Bury Forever," be inscribed. Prince George exuberantly said, "Let us talk about it." John said, "We could place little white bricks enumerating such words as: hate and envy."

Sister Rose Machi went dashing to Sister Josephine and inundated with fiery enthusiasm and energy, related their plan of action. Sister Rose's zeal rubbed off on Sister Josephine, and as quickly as a flash of lightning, Sister Josephine responded, "The key word here is prejudice." She ironically indicated that a burial place such as this must have more to teach, and from one word to another, the lessons were augmented. It read: "Let us Bury Forever," as the title, and underneath were what both concluded effective words: hate, gossip, avarice, prejudice, jealousy, malice, animosity. Joyfully and triumphantly, Sister Rose, with her imaginary roller skates, rushed to the area, and before you were able to say, "Jack Robinson," Sister Rose returned to the convent via helicopter speed. I asked, "What's cooking this time?" She replied, "We need clothespins," I rushed down the cellar and came up with a bag of clothespins. Mockingly she said, "No, just one" I thought she wanted to wash some clothes and then hang them up somewhere, but where? "We had no clothes lines except a small cord outside the back porch. Sister Rose was not seen for so many hours after that. I wondered what she was up to with the clothespin, but no explanation was given.

When John Greco came to the convent for supper that evening he spoke more than he ever did. The project, original as it is, caused a great deal of excitement. Sister Rose portrayed John with his little wooden cheese box which was filled with cement and limestone composition. He had asked Sister Rose for a clothespin, but finding that John had done the letters too big, Sister Rose used the round ball-shaped part of the two legged clothespin. Prince George painted the letters. Andrew Battaglia, John's first co-worker at Holy Land, took the hoop of a wooden barrel just about the right size. The hoop was placed on a wooden door and the two ends were nailed together. The open balloon of the hoop was cemented four

inches before it became cold and dry. The hoop was approximately two feet wide. John poured cement on the wooden door, and measured the letters with his fingers, but Sister Rose volunteered to do them herself. When completely dry, Prince George began to paint them. He, too, availed himself of the clothespin, as he smoothed them. When the raw product was completed, both John and George removed the door, holding it from one side to another. George painted the title black, and the remaining words, white.

John dug a hole into the ground so that he could place the tombstone into it. He poured cement into the mixture and then placed the tombstone into it, before the cement dried. He also used wooden sticks to prop up the tombstone and employed a plane for measuring it. About two days after this had dried, John constructed a mound similar to a grave and put a fence of chicken wire surrounding it. In order to release the bricks, he took the wooden cheese box apart. Half of the brick was placed into the ground, and the other half was raised above the ground.

While working that day, Mr. Greco and George spoke much about segregation. John had this message: "We are all sisters and brothers in Christ, and we must love one another." He also suggested to both guides, Sister Josephine and Sister Lucy to pass on that same message when giving tours in the catacombs.

That same weekend, Andrew Battaglia and Ivin Boivan, both volunteers at the gate, announced to Sister Josephine that thirty buses and five-hundred cars arrived at Holy Land. There were six separate areas with retreat groups, with their church pastors, who conducted their own private retreats. The mini cemetery, a clever technique to enlarge world view was received with keen interest and considered a favorable enterprise. Both the black and white race became enthralled with this humble project. Many tourists had given high commendations and formal praise to this perfect foundation of a gravestone in a proper location for meditative and thoughtful mellifluence.

Submitted by:

Sister Josephine Valenti, M.P.F.
Holy Land, U.S.A., Waterbury, Conn.