

= Gene Amondson =

Gene C. Amondson ( October 15 , 1943 ? July 20 , 2009 ) was a painter , woodcarver , Christian minister and prohibition activist , who was the 2004 US presidential nominee for one faction of the Prohibition Party and the nominee of the unified party in 2008 .

The son of a logger , Amondson was born into a Pacific Northwest lumberjack culture laden with alcoholism . He became interested in the temperance movement while attending Divinity School . After establishing himself as a preacher and artist in the community of Vashon Island , Washington , Amondson began touring the nation reenacting Billy Sunday sermons and attending events dressed as the Grim Reaper to protest alcohol corporations .

Amondson 's activism attracted notice from the Prohibition Party , which had been divided into two factions in 2003 . In 2004 , Amondson received the presidential nomination of the larger faction . On Election Day , he tallied over a thousand votes and finished in third place in several Louisiana parishes . With the death of the other faction leader in 2007 , the party reunified . In 2008 , Amondson again received the party 's presidential nomination , but fell short of his 2004 vote total . He died in 2009 after suffering a stroke .

= = Early life = =

Gene Amondson was born to Owen and Ruby Amondson in Morton , Washington near the city of Centralia . His mother was a German American homemaker , originally from Nebraska and his father , who was nicknamed " Red " , was a Norwegian American logger , an industry then rampant with alcoholism . As a child , neither of Gene 's parents drank , but he saw drunken logger fights and attended school with children neglected by alcoholic parents . In addition , he remembered witnessing a drunk logger molest a five @-@ year @-@ old child .

Gene was also exposed to politics . His uncle , Orville " Porky " Amondson was elected and served as sheriff in Lewis County , and his brother Neil served in the Washington State Senate as a Republican .

Amondson attended Warner Pacific College in Portland , Oregon , and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology . In college , he occasionally drank wine . His anti @-@ alcohol views did not take root until he attended Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky in 1966 , and learned about temperance leader and preacher Billy Sunday . Amondson estimated that after divinity school , he drank beer about twice a year . In the 1970s , he moved to the liberal community of Vashon Island , Washington , where he began preaching at Cove Road Church .

= = Activism = =

After moving to Vashon Island , Amondson grew closer to the temperance movement . He started touring the nation reenacting the Billy Sunday sermons Get on the Water Wagon , Booze. and The Sermon Against Alcohol . He visited churches , prisons , schools , and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings to spread the message of temperance . In addition , he traveled to New Zealand on a Women 's Christian Temperance Union @-@ financed trip , and toured Africa .

In protest of alcohol , Amondson often stood outside liquor establishments dressed as the Grim Reaper . He once stood outside a courtroom as the figure after a couple sued Jim Beam claiming its product caused their son to be born mentally retarded . During a 1989 interview , Amondson explained that he did not protest the individuals that drank , but the large corporations that distributed liquor . In 2005 , he led a movement to stop the Washington legislature from allowing alcohol to be sold on Sundays , but was unsuccessful . Because of the passage , Amondson predicted " a lot more alcohol will be sold , [ and ] a few more children will suffer . "

On Vashon Island , Amondson provided low rent housing for people with low income . He appeared in court a few times for zoning difficulties relating to the housing complexes but received legal aid from the Interfaith Council on Homelessness . Amondson was known to drive around Vashon Island in a Honda Civic accessorized with a fake elk head on the front and a license plate that read " Vote

Dry . " The car was also decorated with homemade bumper stickers that read " Dumb People Drink " and " Your Kids Need You Sober . " While driving past taverns , he regularly honked the car horn twice in protest . In 2008 , the car was installed with a hydrogen conversion kit that allowed it to be fueled by gasoline and water using electrolysis , significantly improving gas mileage . Amondson 's car was one of the first in the nation to be fitted with such a kit .

= = Presidential campaigns = =

= = = 2004 = = =

In 2003 , Amondson was approached by Thompson Township , Pennsylvania tax assessor James Hedges , the Prohibition Party 's only elected official . He convinced Amondson to seek the nomination of his faction of the Prohibition Party , which split over perennial presidential nominee Earl Dodge 's leadership of the party . Hedges ' faction felt Dodge was more concerned with his campaign button business than advancing the party 's goals . Dodge had run as the party 's nominee in every election since 1984 , but received only 208 votes in the 2000 election , down approximately 1 @, @ 000 from the 1996 election . Amondson commenced his first presidential campaign with the nomination of Hedges ' faction . Dodge received the other faction 's nomination . According to Dodge , Amondson had previously contacted him about the vice presidential nomination , but it had already been filled . Dodge reasoned Amondson was " probably a very nice man ... [ but ] he may not have known exactly what he was getting into . " Conversely , Amondson referred to Dodge as a " good man " with whom he shared the same message , but argued , " Dodge is just not getting the job done . He 's too old . We need to send it to an earlier generation . "

While speaking with the media during his campaign , Amondson voiced his anti @-@ alcohol message and attempted to address concerns that prohibition increases crime . In an AP interview , he explained that during Prohibition , " the budget was balanced , prisons were emptied , mental institutions emptied and cirrhosis of the liver declined . " He concluded , " I 'd rather have 100 Al Capones in every city than alcohol sold in every grocery store . " Amondson made an appearance on The Daily Show with comedian Jon Stewart . He spoke with correspondent Ed Helms who joked with the candidate . During the segment , Amondson remarked , " alcohol cuts the supply of oxygen to the brain and puts you in a kind of retarded state . " A short clip followed that showed Amondson in his Grim Reaper attire . Earl Dodge also appeared on the show in a separate interview with Helms .

The race between Amondson and Dodge was viewed as a way to determine which faction would lead the party in the future . Amondson achieved ballot access in Louisiana as the nominee of the Prohibition Party and in Colorado as the nominee of the Concerns of People Party . Dodge achieved ballot access only in Colorado , where he was listed as the nominee of the Prohibition Party . Overall , Amondson won the contest , collecting 1 @, @ 896 ( 1 @, @ 512 of those were from Louisiana ) votes compared to Dodge 's 140 . As expected , Amondson placed well behind both major candidates ( George W. Bush received 1 @. @ 1 million votes , and John Kerry received over 1 million votes ) . He placed eighth in a slate of 12 candidates on Colorado 's ballot ( Dodge placed last , even though it was his home state ) . Amondson 's third @-@ place finish in four Louisiana parishes was the first time since 1960 that the Prohibition Party nominee for President out polled @-@ all other third party candidates for president in any county .

= = = 2008 = = =

Amondson was nominated for President at the 2008 Prohibition Party National Convention in Indianapolis . About 10 to 15 people attended the event . Earl Dodge died late in 2007 , which reunified the split party . Similar to 2004 , Amondson 's based his campaign on media interviews . He spoke with Wikinews in June 2008 , admitting that third party candidates such as himself have no chance of winning elections . Instead , he remarked , they " say wise things . " When given a

choice , Amondson favored the election of a Republican over a Democrat because of the policies on Israel and the ideological difference in justices nominated to the Supreme Court . Amondson wanted former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich as his running mate , but the designation went to activist Leroy Pletten .

During the summer , Amondson campaigned in Louisiana and walked Bourbon Street dressed as the Grim Reaper in protest of alcohol . While in New Orleans , he filmed a documentary with his three sons . In interviews , Amondson took stands on issues other than alcohol . He declared support for the War in Iraq and tougher immigration laws , and advocated limits on divorce , an increased role of religion in schools and a decrease in government welfare programs . In an August interview with Weekend America , he explained his platform , " [ w ] e want to have protected borders and keep our gun rights and a lot of conservative things , but the main thing is help America realize that 95 percent of violent crime is connected with alcohol . "

After John McCain selected Alaska Governor Sarah Palin to be his running mate , Amondson complimented the Republican for picking a " beautiful woman . " Despite his own campaign , Amondson effectively endorsed McCain , revealing he would probably vote for McCain . Amondson attained ballot access in Colorado , Louisiana and Florida by Election Day , and received a total of 653 votes overall .

= = Personal life = =

Amondson described himself as a " red @-@ neck , Bible @-@ thumbing preacher . " He was married for 23 years and had four sons and one daughter , before divorcing . One of his sons died in infancy , and his remaining four children became involved in the motion picture industry upon adulthood .

Amondson appeared as a guest on The Oprah Winfrey Show in 1993 after writing a letter to the show expressing his interest in the 40 @,@ 000 single women who entered a contest hoping to win a date with five widowers from Seattle . In the letter , which left Oprah staffers " quite interested " and " surprised , " Amondson explained he was lonely and wanted someone " willing to work to help pay the taxes ... and my child support . " On the show , he discussed his artwork , and was later invited for a second appearance . According to Amondson , following the appearance , he received hundreds of letters .

In his later years , Amondson split his time between Vashon Island and Alaska , where he hunted and found landscapes to paint . He cited painters John Singer Sargent and Joaquín Sorolla as his artistic influences . In addition , Amondson took an interest in woodcarving . His life @-@ sized works can be found throughout Vashon Island . Along with painting and woodcarving , Amondson was an avid pie baker and published a book compiling his mother 's pie recipes .

= = Death = =

On July 18 , 2009 , Amondson , who had previously been diagnosed with hypertension , suffered a brain aneurism which caused him to fall into a coma . He died on July 20 , 2009 at Harborview Medical Center . His death came two days after marrying a couple and attending a local strawberry festival . He was survived by his mother , his two brothers , his sister and four children . His funeral took place July 25 at the Bethel Evangelical Free Church in Vashon Island .