

Of a series on the detailed history of the Bahá'í Faith in North Carolina Part 4 - Communities

by Steven Kolins

* a work of scholarship which is always unfolding, authoritative understandings should be directed to
Bahá'í institutions

Presented at the first Summer Seminar in the history of the Bahá'í Faith in North Carolina

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Sponsored by the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Orange County, NC

1954 is a year with many overlapping sources speaking to events in different places as well as overlapping from place to place.

* https://bahaikipedia.org/Coverage_of_the_Bahá'í_Faith_in_Greensboro,_NC,_newspapers

* [https://bahaikipedia.org/North_Carolina_in_the_\"Baha'i_News\"](https://bahaikipedia.org/North_Carolina_in_the_\)

* John Kolstoe (31 July 2015). "Dr Paris". *Crazy Lovers of Bahá'u'lláh: Inspirational Stories of Little Giants*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. pp. 4–5. ISBN 978-1-5152-8813-8.

* https://bahaikipedia.org/Coverage_of_the_Bahá'í_Faith_in_the_Carolina_Times

* https://bahaikipedia.org/The_Bahá'í_Faith_at_the_University_of_North_Carolina_at_Chapel_Hill

* https://bahaikipedia.org/Ludmila_Ott_Bechtold_Van_Sombeek

And stories yet ungathered...

Remaining untapped are the archives of local assemblies and the National Bahá'í Archives...

In January 1954 the Greensboro community held its fifth World Religion Day with a talk by Betty Koysl at the Center. Edgar Olson is first mentioned hosting meetings at UNC-Chapel Hill starting February. Then Walter R. Wootten and James F. Ginnent are visible there by April. Activity there was reasonably constant into 1956. Edgar Olson turns out to have been chair of the Area Teaching Committee and spoke at a Central Atlantic States conference held in Asheville. In the *Baha'i News* Durham is listed as a goal city for NC for the Central Atlantic States region in March, 1954. Sometime this year John Kolstoe visited Hubert Parris as mentioned earlier at the request of the Area Teaching Committee. Homefront pioneers were mentioned arriving in North Carolina in April, 1954: Frances Falvey was pointed out going to Raleigh, Betty Koysl to Winston-Salem, and Ethel Murray in Asheville. A newspaper entry in Raleigh appeared in September. Someone, withholding her name, is commented visiting Shaw University, planning a meeting in Chapel Hill, and being visible in other meetings. F Kimball Kinney had just begun work at WFMY-TV in Greensboro after moving from Albuquerque where he worked for station KOAT.

Ludmila, Mrs. George, Van Sombeek, in the process of getting married and moving to NC, was reported as a new member of the re-designated national inter-racial committee in September. George and Ludmila Van Sombeek pioneered to Durham having moved from Brooklyn/New York area. Ludmila was a nurse who fled World War I to the United States by marrying Adolph George Bechtold, learned of the Faith from Marie Foote in Brooklyn, New York, and joined the Faith in 1922. Ludmilla appears in newspapers in 1923...

**Arrange a Musicale For
Columbus Hill Nursery**

A group of well-known men and women of Greater New York are sponsoring a musicale in interest of the Columbus Hill Day Nursery on Friday night, October 25, at the Bahai Center, 119 West 57th street, at 9 o'clock.

Artists of distinction will appear. The sponsors for the affair are Mrs. A. G. Bechtold, Mrs. E. P. Roberts, Mrs. M. V. Boutte, Mrs. P. M. Murray, Mrs. William Wortham, Mrs. Watt Ternderman, Fred R. Moore, R. Elzy and Lester A. Walton.

Subscriptions are \$2, and for tickets and checks will

"Arrange a musicale for Columbus Hill Nursery".
The New York Age. New York, NY. 19 Oct 1929. p. 7

"Columbus Hill Day Nursery". *The New York Age*. New York, NY. 2 May 1931. p. 10.

Columbus Hill Day Nursery

Columbus Hill Day Nursery is located at 224 West 63rd street. It has an interracial board of twenty men and women who voluntarily give their services to the work.

Mrs. Ira S. Wile, wife of Dr. Ira S. Wile, one of New York City's leading specialists in the "Behavior of Children," is the founder and president of the board of managers. Up until the time of

The family's first appearance in the local news was when George Van Sombeek wrote a letter to the editor of *The Carolina Times*, a prominent African-American newspaper with a state-wide reputation, noting the revived persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran.^[95] That winter they are noted among the Durham Bahá'ís going to Greensboro for the state convention to elect delegates for the national convention; listed were Mr. and Mrs. George Van Sombeek, Margaret Quance, Ophra Daugherty and son Mark; Louise Sawyer was off in Florida and would attend the convention there.^[96] In Spring 1956 Ludmila is noted going on a speaking trip before national convention in the society notes of *The Carolina Times*. Ludmila returned to Louisville in June of 1956, followed by Van Sombeeks attending the August Blue Ridge Conference at Black Mountain. That October Challoner Chute from UVa from England spoke at Van Sombeek home, and a note of her return from another speaking trip was published in November covered her travels in some detail and noted her visit with the family of Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. among many others, though the entry was still just part of the society page.^[99] In December the first story in *The Carolina Times* to break out of the society notes was the visit of Bostonian lawyer Matthew Bullock who was a NC native and spoke at Van Sombeek home and though a short article it was on the front page. It is worth noting this was there an inter-racial meeting in a white couple's home in the still segregated South. A week later Bahá'í Sarah Pereira, Chair of a department at the integrated West Virginia State College, spoke in Durham at home of Van Sombeek, serves on the Auxiliary Board with responsibilities beyond the United States. The article was the first to present a picture of a Bahá'í. Ludmilla made news in Nashville with a talk while visiting in February 1957, while her husband George wrote another letter to the editor, this time on race unity and an appreciation of Black history. In March 1957 is the first article just about Ludmila, not her in the "society notes" but in an article just about her - this one reviewed her return from speaking tour.

https://bahaikipedia.org/Ludmila_Ott_Bechtold_Van_Sombeek

1955 Blue Ridge is called a Summer School



Where 75 had attended the 1954 meeting*, 100 attended the 1955 meeting.** Hand of the Cause Paul Haney gave a talk and some \$531 was donated to Funds of the Faith.***

* Teaching Missions by members of the auxiliary board, *Baha'i News*, October, 1954, p. 1 and (photo caption) Believers gathered at Blue Ridge Assembly..., *Baha'i News*, October, 1954, p. 13

** Second Southern Conference, *Baha'i News*, November, 1955, p. 12 and (picture caption) Baha'is and their friends..., *Baha'i News*, December, 1955, p. 14

*** Second Southern Conference, *Baha'i News*, November, 1955, p. 12

- A lot happened in 1955 - and in many places.

Here's a review from *Baha'i News*: [https://bahaikipedia.org/North_Carolina_in_the_\"Baha'i_News\"#1950s](https://bahaikipedia.org/North_Carolina_in_the_\)

- The January 1955 - Greensboro holding events, including a radio spot and announcements on tv.
- Auxiliary Board member William deForge toured several places in NC including Rocky Mount and Greensboro, and DeForge helped start a series of meetings in Rocky Mount.
- The Central Atlantic Youth Committee was announced with members Caroline Wooten out of Durham, Ray Lippitt, Quida Cooper, Richard Farmelee, John R. Nichols and Perry Gawen.
- There was a teaching conference in Greensboro as well as a World Religion Day program.
- Bahá'ís of Greensboro presented on the Faith at the end of Brotherhood Week at the Negro YWCA alongside other religious leaders and Bahá'ís were given a friendly introduction.
- **A New Day Comes** was completed in the Cherokee language and mentioned Ether Murray.
- Goals for the 10 year Crusade in NC were Charlotte, Durham, Raleigh, and Winston-Salem.
- Activity on Shaw University was noted with a panel including a Baha'i.
- Pioneers, perhaps the Tuckers, in Rocky Mount were noted holding an integrated meeting Oct 22 and showed a film "Palestine, Land of many Faiths" and a Bahá'í from Greensboro presented a short talk. Half the audience was not Bahá'ís and everyone attended a buffet dinner at their home.

Coverage of Bahá'ís at UNC thanks to the *Daily Tarheel*:

Some of this is at https://bahaikipedia.org/The_Bahá'í_Faith_at_the_University_of_North_Carolina_at_Chapel_Hill and some needs to be updated there.

Three Bahá'í are reported on UNC - Chapel Hill campus in 1954: Edgar Olson, Walter R. Wootten and James F. Ginnent.

In 1955 Walter Wootten had jumped to being a senior, was president of the Baha'i Club, finishing a degree, living in Durham, and there was a two part profile of the religion through an interview with him printed in the *Daily Tarheel* in February.

* What hath God Wrought? Bahai (sic) - The New Faith, by Ed Yoder, *Daily Tarheel*, Feb 16, 1955, p 6

* After catastrophe, the Millennium; a world embracing vision, by Ed Yoder (part 2), *Daily Tarheel*, February 22, 1955, p. 2

What Hath God Wrought?

Bahai—The New Faith

Ed Yoder

Walter R. Wootten, senior in public administration and industrial relations, has a unique mission on this campus.



Walter R. Wootten, senior in public administration and industrial relations, has a unique mission on this campus.

He is the advocate, missionary, and teacher for the Bahai World Faith—a new, world-wide religious movement aiming at a conjunction into one of all the world's higher religions.

“World turmoil,” Wootten said when I talked with him in the Graham Memorial lounge Tuesday, “is the signal of the death of an old era that has lost its spiritual power, and the birth of a new and golden age animated by the teachings of a new prophet of God.”

That new prophet of God, believe Wootten and the other members of his faith, was Baha'u'llah, a Persian saint of the 19th Century who proclaimed himself the new Messiah.

The first chapter of the Bahai drama, according to Wootten,

closed on The Bab, coming of a new era of 750 men teachings, Bab was accepted. An era epidermal lives, came

The focus of the 1840's and portance in It all hinges in Revelational prophetic Both by re

After Catastrophe, The Millennium

A World Embracing Vision

Ed Yoder

(This is the second of two columns on the Bahai Faith and Walter Wootten.—Editor.)

Must civilization be “purified” by destruction?

The members of the Bahai faith believe so—and believe that what Walter Wootten, the representative of the new faith on the Carolina campus, called a “severe upheaval” will not be long in coming.

The purge by catastrophe to to which members of the Bahai faith look will, they say,

... that the flood of Noah's time

wrote, “who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. . . . Let your vision be world embracing rather than confined to your own self. . . .

The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. . . . The earth is but one country and mankind its citizen.”

MERCHANTS AND MONARCHS

But, the Faith holds, the new millennium can't be rung in until after the purification through destruction. The purification may come, explained Wootten, by the

instruments of war—or by geological catastrophe—and at any time.

Space has not permitted much beyond a surface consideration of Bahai theology. Mr. Wootten urges those who find an interest in the faith to attend his periodical meetings.

But certainly any faith which stresses as strongly as Bahai the need for unity and harmony in the world has, by that virtue alone, a mandate on the consideration of thinking students.

Walter Wootten and the new faith he represents have, perhaps, a significant message for this hour and generation. They deserve a hearing.

Thicker, Dear Reader

In Raleigh... from the N&O

<https://bahaikipedia.org/>

Coverage_of_the_Bahá'í_Faith_in_Raleigh_NC_newspapers#Community

The first sustained presence of the Faith in Raleigh comes in 1954. Francis Falvey is joined by Mrs Harold J Wilson and both rented their addresses - just east of NCState campus.

In January 1955 they held a public presentation was held at the Richard B Harrison Library on the west side of town with a color-slide showing and an exhibit. In March a panel of youth, probably Bahá'ís, were gathered from UNC, NCState, and Shaw University, at Shaw. No names are listed but but we've already spoken of Bahá'ís from UNC however the rest remain unknown. In July the fact that Bahá'ís marked the Martyrdom of the Báb at Falvey's home. In later September there was mention of Bahá'ís holding Proclamation Day which recalls the 1893 mention of Bahá'u'lláh at the Parliament of Religions. In October a UN Day series of events was held in the city and Bahá'ís were noted among them. In November it was reported that Falvey was going to the state convention in Greensboro.

From the Durham *Carolina Times*:

[https://bahaikipedia.org/Coverage of the Bahá'í Faith in the Carolina Times#1955-1956](https://bahaikipedia.org/Coverage%20of%20the%20Bahá'í%20Faith%20in%20the%20Carolina%20Times#1955-1956)

The *Carolina Times* was the major black newspaper of the state in the 1950s and 60s. It covered the Bahá'í Faith to a very large degree.

The first known large scale meeting reported in the *Carolina Times* came in April of 1955 when A K Kalantar talked in Durham sponsored by the Inter-Racial Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly and the Durham Bahá'í community. However the article appeared the very day of the meeting, but at least it was on page 1 and notes that meetings have been racially integrated for the Faith a long time, "since its inception" it says.

Baha'i Group To Hold Meet At "Rec" Center

Members of the Baha'i World Faith, a religious group which has practiced integration since its inception, will make a presentation of the principles and goals of the Faith at a free public lecture to be given at the W. D. Hill Community Center, 1308 Fayetteville Street, on Saturday, April 23 at 4:00 p. m.

This meeting is being sponsored by the Inter-Racial Committee, a national committee of the Baha'is of the United States, and the Durham Baha'i Community.

On this occasion, Baha'is of various races, from several states, will converge in Durham to hear an address by A. K. Kalantar of Dumont, New Jer-

Phi Beta Sigma To Hold Business Week In Raleigh

RALEIGH

The annual "Bigger and Better Business Week" Observance sponsored by the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity will be held in Raleigh April 24-30. Under the theme: "Promoting Inter-Group Understanding and Economic Progress Through the Medium of Business," the Fra-

From the *Durham Carolina Times*:

[https://bahaikipedia.org/Coverage of the Bahá'í Faith in the Carolina Times#1955-1956](https://bahaikipedia.org/Coverage%20of%20the%20Bahá'í%20Faith%20in%20the%20Carolina%20Times#1955-1956)

Elsworth Blackwell, member of the National Spiritual Assembly, is noted at the "first public presentation to be made in Durham" though this one was about two weeks later than Kalantar's. The talk is sponsored, again, by the Inter-Racial Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly and Durham community. However the article feels more locally produced as the mis-spelling "BaHa'i" is used. This article was an after-the-fact review of what happened at the meeting. Blackwell's remarks spoke of the promise of things in the United States and the persecution Bahá'ís had suffered under Communism. Though persecution in Iran is more famous these days and was soon to be in the news again, persecution in Russia had been remarkably severe in the 1930s.

Human Unity Stressed By Ba Ha'i Speaker

Elsworth Blackwell of Chicago was the speaker at the first public presentation to be made in Durham of the goals and principles of the Baha'i World Faith. The meeting which was jointly sponsored by the National Inter Racial Committee and the Baha'is of Durham, was held Saturday afternoon (April 23) in the Hill Community Center.

The occasion attracted Baha'i of several states and interested citizens of Durham.

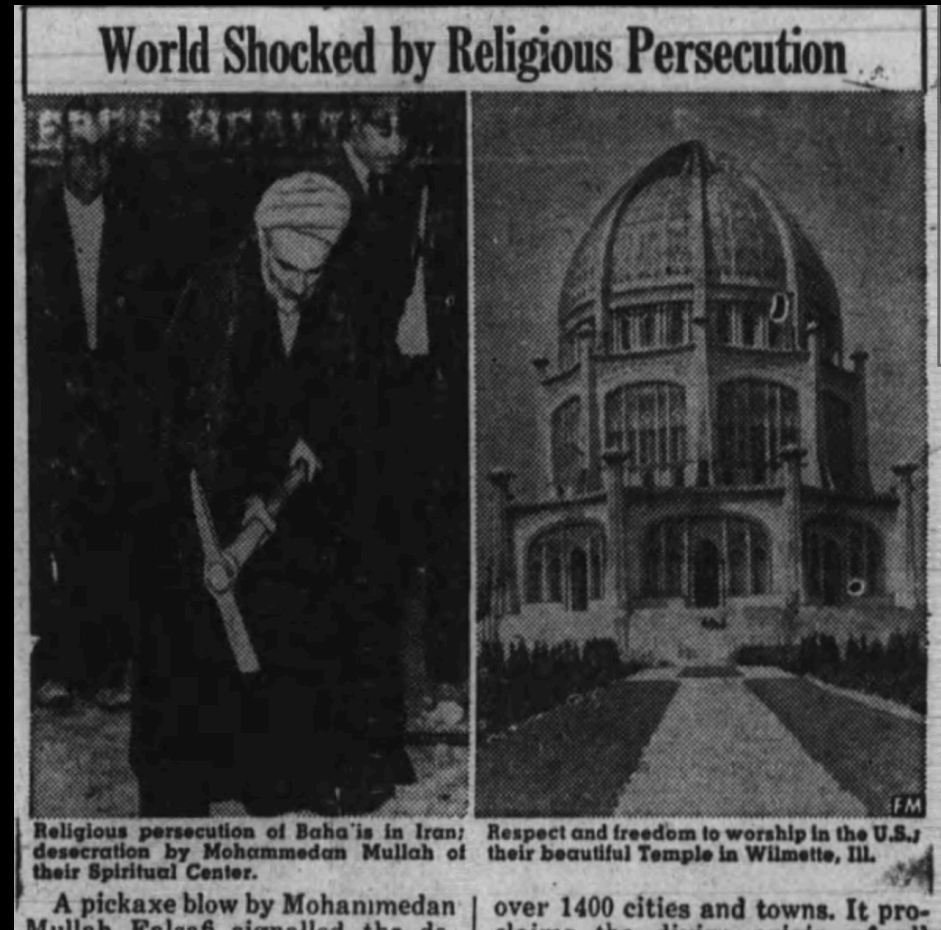
Mr. Blackwell, who is a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, was born in Miss., and graduated from the University of Iowa. He proved to be no stranger to the problems of the south.

Stating that the "Oneness of

From the Durham *Carolina Times*:

<https://bahaikipedia.org/Coverage of the Bahá'í Faith in the Carolina Times#1955-1956>

In fact just five months later, the destruction of Bahá'í buildings in Iran is in the *Carolina Times*. To push the point further George Van Sombeek wrote a letter to the editor about it the next month and it was published on the traditional date of the Birth of Baha'u'llah - November 12.



World shocked by religious persecution, The Carolina Times. / October 29, 1955 / page 2

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Editor
Carolina Times
Durham, N. C.

Dear Sir:

Appreciation by the readers of your paper for the manner in which it is edited, giving facts which one vainly searches for in the daily newspapers who consider at all times what their readers want to read and what the advertisers want to see printed or omitted, is really due to you.

Consequently, all who are convinced that all humans are God's creatures without discrimination, superiority or inferiority, should read your paper in order to be informed about what is going on in our state and elsewhere that violates the Commandment of brotherly love.

In the edition of October 29, your informative illustrated article about the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran by the fanatic Mohammedans who rule that country at present drew the attention of our Durham Baha'i group and it is instructed me to thank you sincerely.

The Baha'is all over the world are working for better understanding among all peoples everywhere, for unity and

justice. Many sacrifices have been made to promote the knowledge of the Oneness of God, the Oneness of the Prophets, and the Oneness of mankind. The Baha'i World Faith has followers in every land, people in high places and in every walk of life. We are grieved about the cruelties committed and still going on, and are grateful for accurate news and friends everywhere.

In your November 5th edition we find articles that prove how much there is wrong in the treatment of minority groups (hiring out of colored mental patients), dismissal of a white woman from a church organization because her racial views are unconventionally broad; also your cartoons "Missionary Work at Home" last week and "Embrassing Moments" this week are illuminating and must impress everyone who is free from all kinds of prejudice and believes in God, the Father of all His children.

We wish for you added success on your fine efforts and express our warmest thanks.

Faithfully yours,
G. Van Sombeek

Letter to the editor, by George Van Sombeek, The Carolina Times. / Nov 12, 1955 / page 2

Carlotta Holmes in Durham - [https://bahaikipedia.org/Carlotta Robbins Holmes](https://bahaikipedia.org/Carlotta_Robbins_Holmes)

Born 20 Dec 1909 or 1910, Holmes lived her whole life, less some trips, in Durham, North Carolina. Previous to her marriage in 1938 she a teacher as early as 1932, and then very visible in church, educational and social associations from 1949.

Late in 1957 Holmes began to hold Bahá'í meetings in her home. The story of her declaration has not yet been found but she was soon associated with Ludmila Van Sombeek's efforts. A January 1959 meeting in the Quaker Friends Meeting Room included Ludmila Van Sombeek and Holmes. Holmes was pictured on the front page as a "Baha'i leader" meeting with Southern Regional Council at a college group discussion on issues of race in July. Late that year Matthew Bullock, former Dean of Alabama A & M Normal, gave a series of talks in the area with receptions held by Van Sombeek and Holmes each at their homes. In January 1960 an observance of World Religion Day included Holmes. Two weeks later national assembly member Ellsworth Blackwell lead a local conference, as a guest of Holmes, while Ludmila Van Sombeek had an open house reception. In 1961 she served on the 1961 Southeastern Baha'i School Program committee, as well as 1962.



The NCCU *Campus Echo*

https://bahaikipedia.org/Coverage_of_the_Bahá'í_Faith_at_NCCU_Campus_Echo

The first mention of the Faith, in January, in *The Campus Echo* occurs because of a letter to the editor by Jean Norris (later Jean Scales). In it Norris observes the miraculous for the Christian narrative for Jesus Christ from Baha'i Writings, while observing the breadth of Manifestations sent by God.

The second mention of the Faith is an article covering the contribution by Allan L. Ward of some Bahá'í books to the campus library who was present for the "religious emphasis week" on campus in April. The volumes are: Hidden Words, Seven Valleys, Bahá'í World Faith, Bahá'í World vol 3, All things made new, Great themes of life, Promise of all Ages, and Release the Sun.



MRS. MARJORIE McCORMICK, presented under the auspices of the Interfaith and Fellowship Committee of the University Religious Council, explained last night the basic tenets of the Bahai religion, which was founded a century ago in Persia.

Bahai Faith Seeks To Establish Peace by Universal Religion

Last night in the Green Room of East Duke, University students heard an unusual program for solution of the world's problems through "union of all its people in one universal cause, in one universal faith," Bahai.

Speaking with authority as one of the leaders of the Bahai movement, Mrs. Marjorie McCormick noted that "today we seem to fear everything but God," although in these very troubled times we desperately need that one source of stability, faith in the Almighty Being.

"The world of humanity is walking in darkness today because it's out of touch with the world of God," Mrs. McCormick said.

She then told the assemblage about the Bahai prophet, a

Persian nobleman, who received his "soul-shaking revelation" nearly 100 years ago in a Persian prison.

Just as Moses at the burning bush and Jesus at his baptism realized their higher purpose for existence, the Bahai prophet at that moment recognized that his mission in life was to proclaim a "new measure of truth," which would unite and fulfill all the promises of all earlier religions and found an ideal civilization in the union of all cultures.

"This man, according to Mrs. McCormick, was the "Lord of Hosts" of whom Isaiah spoke, the Christ returned, mentioned 113 times in the New Testament.

The purpose of his mission was the foundation of a new world order in which God's purpose would be justified and His will fulfilled in the universal Bahai religion.

1961 was also the first real coverage of the Faith at Duke University:

Bahai (sic) Faith seeks to establish peace by Universal Religion, *The Duke Chronicle*, vol. 57, no. 26 (Friday, December 15, 1961), p. 1

We are missing the coverage from Charlotte and many other places.

Christmas' Receives
from University

seek out some of the other stu-