From: **Steven Kolins** smkolins@mac.com
Subject: Re: links to explore
Date: February 19, 2022 at 6:53 AM
To: Mr. Steven Kolins smkolins@mac.com

"A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity." Shoghi Effendi -- 11 March 1936, published in "The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters", BPT(US) 1938 (1974) p. 203 - https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/world-order-bahaullah/11#213721999

Also

In *Revelation and Social Reality*, by Paul Lample, who is a current member of the Universal House of Justice, says: "Thus, each practice has its own body of knowledge, its own criteria for justification, and its own methods of investigating reality and discovering truth. Different practices may interact and, through the exchange of ideas, influence one another; but change occurs as a result of a practice affirming new conclusions based on its own criteria. An individual is usually a member of more than one community of practice, and therefore, is able to contribute to change within a particular practice by introducing new insights from others.… Disciplines such as economics, philosophy, history or religious studies give rise to their own communities of practice. They have their own bodies of knowledge, standards and methods with which they explore reality and come to understandings that guide judgment and action. Baha'is who are participants in such academic communities of practice are correct to point out that they are obliged to conform to the accepted range of methods, criteria, and truths." (pp. 124-125)

Brief bio-data – where you grew up, where you trained, where you live now and your occupation

In the 1980s I had finished college in my home town with a Bachelors of Science double majors physics and philosophy and double minors math and psychology and had been president of both the physics and philosophy clubs and was an officer of the secular humanists club but had been investigating the Baha'i Faith for about 2 years when I made a decision to join the religion. But then I came out of it going to graduate school and service in the Baha'i community. I move to North Carolina where I earned a Masters of Science in Physics and minored in science education. Along the way I got married, someone had given me a computer and someone else had given me a modem and an arena to explore and I found opportunities of connection in the pre-internet era. That would develop into some 26 year career in computer use in elementary to graduate school. In that era I thought the right thing to do was hang out in a religion discussion area and post quotes and demonstrate sincerity and that was all it would take. But the actual technology of the internet rolled over and smooshed the technology of BBSes. But you can get a glimpse of all that era from the Baha'i World article by myself and Bryn Deamer though you have to overcome a misspelling of my name but it's out there in more than one form and the link can be posted.

* https://bahai.works/index.php?title=File:BW_Volume20.pdf&page=513
* https://bahai-library.com/deamer_kolins_computers
* https://bahai-library.com/pdf/c/collins_scriptum_4.pdf

So when the internet came along…

I struggled with trying to do the same thing in the internet age. But the anonymity of membership led to the phenomenon of trolling and no effective punishment for misdeeds so I gave up on religious discussion areas. I encountered Wikipedia around or alittle before 2005 and after poking around alittle I started by trying to make an Outer Solar System article. That got smooshed. The first evolution of engaging in Wikipedia was recognizing the value of sources rather than what seemed like the plain truth based on primary sources. My first still existing article, though its gotten pretty messy since then - and anyone can and should make it better - is the Baha'i Faith in Fiction article. But mostly it seemed like the main topics were 'done'. I was about the third or fourth generation of contributors and it seemed like they had done a lot of work already. It seemed like there was just dotting 'i's and crossing 't's to do. But there was alittle here and there and then I was reading through the discussion behind the article Religion in Australia and specifically a dialog between someone minding the whole article and someone trying to bring in more about Sikhism in Australia and the guy trying to keep the entire article balanced told this other person to go off and make a Sikhism in Australia article and come back and summarize and link to it in a couple sentences. This is my second major evolution in how I engaged in wikipedia.

You can see some posts near this time look for Sikh mention at
* https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Religion_in_Australia&type=revision&diff=89378768&oldid=88620728 ,
* https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Religion_in_Australia&offset=20080326125046%7C201045109&limit=500&action=history and the original very first 'save' of the Baha'i Faith in Australia is at https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bahá'%C3%AD_Faith_in_Australia&oldid=185941085

My mind exploded and my skins goose bumped down to my toes and my skull positively crawled. I was familiar enough with sections on the Faith in Australia scattered among many other articles that I could just cut and paste them together and have the beginnings of such an article AND I knew something like this could be done for many other countries and I was aware Baha'i News and Baha'i World had been somewhat available and provide material for more countries and I just kind of sat there blinking and shocked at the amount of work that needed to be done. I knew it would take years just covering countries let alone cities and places where there was already published material. That was about in 2006. I've found links to some of what I described. I began doing a lot of that and then I learned how to do something better or find a set of resources and I'd circle back to the Baha'i Faith in Australia article and make it better and then work through a set of articles after that. If you go back to that Baha'i Faith in Australia article you'll find at least three major revisions to the article where this happened. I was kind of approaching a fourth sea change when I get more into Bahaipedia and Newspapers and that work kind of ground to a halt.

Along the way and inbetween things I also began working on biographies in Wikipedia. I had already spent some of that dotting 'i's and crossing 't's period trying to detail people who already had wikipedia articles about them. This led me to the first observations that what I was doing actually had an impact. One day I went into a Baha'i Center to see someone's presentation on the screen and my words up there detailing people of African descent being described and lauded and I was heartened and gladdened. During my 2008 pilgrimage I also shared some of my work and one of my pilgrimages was from Australia and she lauded my work and encouraged me to keep at it. A few others positively commented on the work too. But that was about it.

For a bit of a deep dive in wikipedia here's some links about me inside Wikipedia. This is me https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Smkolins and if you click any article you find me listed in you can see any edit I've done and some websites capture Wikipedia data and digest stats. I started in Wikipedia August 2005 and have many of the 'rights' of most active editors in Wikipedia. I have done over 40k edits of 99.3% are 'live' in that they still exist. But I'm nowhere near the top 100 such users in all of Wikipedia. I'm officially about number 2400'th https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_Wikipedians_by_number_of_edits#2001–3000 (out of about 42 million name accounts. and 125k active accounts,) and I've edited something, anything, on about 2500 articles and created about 138 articles (https://xtools.wmflabs.org/pages/en.wikipedia.org/Smkolins/all) . I'm about user 5400 in number of articles created (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_Wikipedians_by_number_of_edits#2001–3000) Most of these statistics are not particular prominent in the larger context of Wikipedia. However if i'm about 2400th in edit count and 5400th in number of article count you might get the idea I write long articles and you'd be right.

People may be interested in some statistical clues for viewership.
https://pageviews.toolforge.org/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&redirects=1&range=all-time&pages=Bahá'%C3%AD_Faith But that data only goes back to 2015. For the main Baha'i Faith article in Wikipedia December 17, 2012 is the higher peak and my guess for a giant spike in traffic is the television coverage of the prayer vigil for the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. Unfortunately technical systems established in wikipedia no longer show traffic in graphical form before 2015 but you can manually go back and get numbers. Here's how to look at the simple graph (history/pageviews/all time and with redirects.) There's a lot of analysis that could be done. I'll leave that for now, this gives you a basic overview of the reach of Wikipedia. There's a whole different approach to stats on Bahaipedia.org which uses a product called awstats - here's an example - see downloaded PDF and look at the daily for November. You can see a few people looked at a lot of pages or a lot of people looked at a few pages.

since I've broached Bahaipedia now I'm going to shift alittle to coverage of Bahaipedia.
I started there in 2012. This is me: https://bahaipedia.org/User:Smkolins I've created about 270 articles in Bahaipedia - https://bahaipedia.org/index.php?target=Smkolins&namespace=all&tagfilter=&newOnly=1&start=&end=&limit=500&title=Special%3AContributions - and my 'rights' include 'administrator' but there are some 4k articles amidst some 16k pages of all types - https://bahaipedia.org/Special:Statistics and https://bahaipedia.org/Bahaipedia:About See also https://bahaipedia.org/Special:ContributionScores My involvement is mostly on article creation. Real

'administration' of the site is through David Haslip, so see his presentation. Bahaipedia doesn't access in the statistical packages of Wikipedia for showing stats but there are some. I can say that if you do a google search for some topics you can see how they rank sources and give short answers to questions - and sometimes you can see Bahaipedia in their results. I wish i had an example at hand but I don't. I'm just certain I've seen it happen.

Now I'm going to cover the development of newspapers as a resource.

Though newspapers are a recognized source of earlyi information and the Guardian was known for holding clippings there was never a lot of engagement. It's just too many pages of too small print only accessible in corners of libraries for the general readership to bother with. It's consciously not covered in William Collins annotated Bibliography and Moojan Momen's Contemporary Western Accounts. Well here we are in a digital age.

This is also me - https://www.newspapers.com/clippings/#user=27888 where I have approaching 50k clippings. I began clipping newspaper articles in 2013 including finding some of the earliest materials in English on the Faith's history. Probably one of my first 'finds' is a combination of the breadth of the first 1845 newspaper article at least a few Baha'is have known since the 1970s which was unknown then. It was republished in just about every single county of every country of the British Isles AND in just about every English speaking country of the world before 1847. One small initial collection is at https://bahai-library.com/first_newspaper_accounts_babism and a broader but still limited review is at https://bahaipedia.org/Historical_mentions_of_the_Bábí/Bahá'í_Faiths I'm aware others have also published in other arenas but I was largely unaware and these publication opportunities are meant for accessibility.

https://bahaipedia.org/Historical_mentions_of_the_Bábí/Bahá'í_Faiths and woven into Wikipedia articles like https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá'í_Faith_in_Greater_Boston and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá'í_Faith_in_South_Carolina

The other is the coverage of the 1852-3 slaughter of Babis that scholars have limped along arguing over since the 1970s. It turns out there are period sources describing the Baha'i narrative that scholars had found too little evidence to support. But newspapers are a clearly a useful set of sources to reconsider all the evidence. - Late November there were reports of 400 Baha'is executed in Teheran in 1852 - https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results?basicsearch=%22400%20babis%22&retrievecountrycounts=false and by late December you have to 20-30k and most of that in the south of Persia - https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results?basicsearch=%22babs%20was%20awful%2C%20and%20that%2020%2C000%20or%2030%2C000%22&phrasesearch=%22babs%20was%20awful%2C%20and%20that%2020%2C000%20or%2030%2C000%22&sortorder=score&o=date&d=asc

Another example was of the first scholarly paper known since the 1850s in German but long long thought to have been lost in the original English. But it turned out to show up twice in newspapers and that led to finding the original English paper itself. I'll also say that along with that writer Rev. Austin Wright turns out to have left unseen original letters from the 1850s that have yet to seen by the masses of people or scholars. There was hope for a virtual presentation of these but there's been too many other things for people to do. The World Center has copies and commentary such as I can generate with my own poor skills. Some of the released information is at https://bahai-library.com/wright_report_babis_urumiah https://bahai-library.com/first_newspaper_accounts_babism but there is more now months old that we've not been able to share.

Reflections on the technical issues you have faced & resolved.

I am loath to say anything has been 'resolved' but there are some things that I've been keeping up with. First is my own skill development. There have also been shifting requirements and priorities of style in Wikipedia. There are generations of standards about wikipedia and generations of articles that satisfied articles of a previous generation that are awkward and poor in the face of new generations of norms. So some pages have been addressed to bring them up to current standards. But it is an ongoing system of issues.

Development of stability of resources - a research collection of materials, stability of websites I'll speak to next but overall some degree of stability has been reached even while further issues remain. On the opposite side there are poorly done materials out there that used to be the best available non-Baha'i materials that are increasingly showing lack of support. at the same time newspapers have proven to be a surprising arena of

independently published material that can help anchor articles to concrete moments in time and threads of developing community life when nothing else is. Aside from a broad area of activity in 2018 I and others defended the use of Bahai-Library.com links in Wikipedia by finding reference academic libraries that recommended use of it. See:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources/Noticeboard/Archive_252#bahai-library.com

Increasing participation - there's too much for any one person to do but I've noticed a clear up tick in people signing into wikipedia the last year or so doing some work and sometimes I'm helping them learn how to do things better or in need of the standards of wikipedia. This isn't exclusive Baha'is btw. Non-Baha'is are getting more involved too with the same kinds of tests and struggles. Overall this is a help mostly but this does present a still present arena of action.

What am I still working through?

Linkrot is a pertetual problem. Earlier I spoke of Baha'i News and Baha'i World being variously available. That I'm aware of at least three places online had hosted copies of the pdf scans done some era before based on collections gathered some era before based on someone forming an exchange of copies so that a coherent collection could be developed based on things being published based on people doing the work of developing stories to write based on lives being led based on inspirational things being said to do. But links in that chain are fragile and I'm increasingly aware that those links have been forged and broken and forged and broken a number of times- where 'forged' and 'broken' can mean various things at various times. But today one of the great problems is linkrot. But let me also highlight some golden moments. One is Bahai-Library.com and Jonah Winters. He retooled the software running Bahai-Library.com but as a result urls changed and links across wikipedia broke. He went through finding them and fixing them. Newspapers.com had a practice of replacing pages of poor scans by summarily sending you a copy of what you clipped but killing the url to the old clipping and I howled as hundreds of my clippings disappeared. They changed their approach. Bahai.org thankfully avoided the problem by preserving a previous generation of the official reference library while retooling the new generation of presentation so that old urls work and new generation of presentation is there for new adventurers in documentation. But that being said I have concerns about other things out there right now and Bahai.Works is proving to be the best maintained and advanced platform but there are still urls in Wikipedia and Bahaipedia that point to some of these older platforms.

Syntax of urls. It may seem trivial but
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%CA%BC%C3%AD%E2%80%93B%C3%A1b%C3%AD_split is a really ugly url made worse by insistence in some arenas that names of articles respect careful and more exacting transliterations as well as cross-platform requirements of sharing urls. It's somewhat overcome-able but is taking more and more time to manage. People have come in insisting hamzas be distinguished from other grammatical structures while facebook and browsers drift in how they code unicode structured urls. This isn't particularly new but it has clearly been getting worse and it's hurting portability of access.

There is also a challenge for Wikipedia itself. Summary is what is a keystone component of wikipedia sense of style and the opposite end of that is original work which is forbidden. If you can make your point point by point in general reading you can make some concluding statement that is a straightforward summary but you have to go point by point. What about people that have never had a biography? How do you summarize a life that deserves a wikipedia article but hasn't been reviewed anywhere or where that review has been very limited? Please note what Will Hoonard called 'biographical zoning' in 2004. Will van den Hoonard. (2004). "Biographical Zoning and Bahá"í Biographical Writing: The Case of Rose Henderson." Bahá'í Studies Review, v12, pp50-66 Here's a couple examples.
* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_W._Bullock
When I started that page already existed but was almost all about his football career and ignored his decades of service as a social leader and Baha'i - instead it was just about his 4 or 8 years as a spectacular football player. Yet when I got detailed it got flagged. I'm not always flagged but sometimes that's because there's just less information available like https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nipo_T._Strongheart but I did again on https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Harrison_Mills but if you go to the talk page you can see the editor begin to take this issue seriously about when are you executing good summary style and when are you zoning away relevant information because you think it's peripheral. So zoning continues to be an issue and is overlaps with the issue of summary style vs original content.

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Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart!