

Turbulent Prairie: Politics, the Press, and the Bahá'í Faith in Kansas, 1897

BY DUANE L. HERRMANN

THE Kansas Bahá'í community rightly claims to be the second oldest in the Western Hemisphere. In 1897 a series of stormy events in the city of Enterprise, Kansas, produced the first significant news coverage of local Bahá'í activities in the Western world. The publicity arose from a confluence of religious, political, and social turmoil that occurred when Ibrahim Kheiralla, the first person to teach about the Bahá'í Faith in North America, brought his version of the Bahá'í teachings to Enterprise, where he attracted followers who included controversial local political figures. Their interest in the Faith was used, in turn, for political advantage by their enemies, who derided that interest with articles in many of the state's numerous newspapers. The result was the earliest significant and sustained publicity that has yet surfaced of Bahá'í activities in North America. Using some forty press reports that have so far been found, one can reconstruct

the story of a fascinating episode that provides a record both of Bahá'í activities by "a small band of believers" in Enterprise, Kansas, and of a politically and socially charged moment in the heartland of America on the eve of the twentieth century.¹

Enterprise was a small industrial center in the heart of the American plains. In addition to the Ehram Machine Works, which operated for over one hundred years, Enterprise's industrial base included the Hoffman Mills, which ground and refined grain products and processed wool. Enterprise was well connected by railroad to major U.S. cities for marketing its milling products and machine works. Ehram milling equipment and farm implements were known nationwide. Products from Hoffman Mills were exhibited at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 and had been the first refined flour to be shipped outside Kansas and the first to be exported outside the United States.² Hoffman aggressively marketed the hard winter wheat grown in Kansas, which was quite different from the soft spring wheat grown in Europe and most of America at that time. The level of gluten in the hard winter wheat was found to be more effective in rising bread than soft spring wheat, which is light and is now used mostly for baking cakes. After an initial period of dramatic growth, the population of Enterprise peaked between nine hundred and one thousand and remained stable during the twentieth century.

Copyright © 2000 by Duane L. Herrmann. I wish to thank Priscilla A. Benignus, a granddaughter of Barbara Ehram, for providing photographs from her family archives and the Kansas State Historical Society for its generosity in making available its extensive collection of Kansas newspapers.

1. Barbara Ehram to Maud Lampson, 14 Nov. 1899, Maud Lampson Papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois.

2. Herman Steen, *Flour Milling in America* (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison, 1963) 313.

The leading families of Enterprise were related. Jacob Ehrsam, founder of the Ehrsam Machine Works, had helped Christian Hoffman to construct his mills and then married Christian's sister-in-law, Barbara Hilty. Hoffman's wife was the sister of Barbara Hilty Ehrsam, who, with their brother, Michael Senn, had opened and operated the first store in Enterprise. Senn was also a major figure in the founding of the town and by 1897 was a retired state Senator. The oldest daughter of Barbara Ehrsam was Josephine Hilty, the first of the two children from her first marriage to Joseph Hilty, who was killed by a horse after returning from service in the Civil War.

In 1897 the Bahá'í Faith became a part of life in Enterprise. Josephine Hilty had gone

3. Edward G. Nelson, *The Company and the Community*, (Lawrence, Kansas: Bureau of Business Research, U of Kansas, 1956) 312. Robert C. Haywood in *Victorian West* [(Lawrence, Kansas: UP of Kansas, 1991) 202] notes: "For a young Victorian lady the possession of musical talent and a pleasing voice were valued next to a 'good name.'" "Teaches Strange Things," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 16 Jul. 1897: 1, Kansas State Historical Society Topeka, Kansas (hereafter KSHS); the article was reprinted in the *Topeka Daily Capital* ("Hoffman's New Religion," *Topeka Daily Capital* 14 Jul. 1897: 3, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library).

4. Nelson, *Company and the Community* 312.

5. Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America, Origins, 1892-1900* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985) 108.

6. Glenn Cameron, *A Basic Bahá'í Chronology* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997) 123.

7. In contrast, at the end of the twentieth century, 180 national consultative councils had been constituted for as many national Bahá'í communities to oversee the affairs of 131,933 local Bahá'í communities; see *The Bahá'í World: An International Record, 1997-98*, comp. The Universal House of Justice (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1999) 279, and the 1999 Riqvân message from the Universal House of Justice.

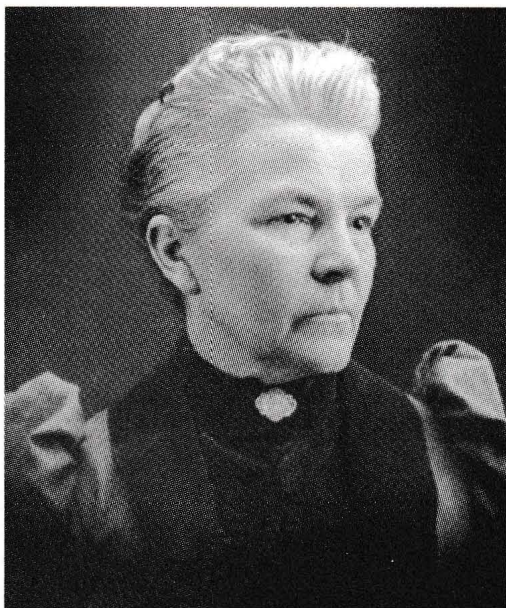
8. See letters of Lua Getsinger and others to various believers after meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Velda P. Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger: Herald of the Covenant* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997) 23-45.

to Chicago for advanced musical training. There, the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* reported, she became a follower of Ibrahim Kheiralla; Josephine shared the news with her mother who was known for her search for more spiritual nourishment than the local church had to offer.³ Barbara Ehrsam's brother-in-law, then a minister of the local church, eventually expelled Barbara publicly from the church for her continuing quest and unorthodox views.⁴ Kheiralla, the first person to give the Bahá'í message on the American continent, had started his lessons in Chicago in 1895. In 1897 he came, at the invitation of Mrs. Ehrsam, to Enterprise for a vacation.⁵

To understand the events that followed in the infant Bahá'í community in Enterprise, Kansas, it is necessary to provide some contextual background. At the time of Barbara Ehrsam's spiritual search, more than one hundred years ago, the Bahá'í Faith looked vastly different than it does today. In 1897 it was new to North America, having been first publicly mentioned at the Columbian Exposition in 1893. The religion itself only dated from 1844. It had few adherents and no institutions; none of its scripture had been published in English. In fact, in 1897 the first consultative council of Bahá'ís anywhere in the world was being formed, half a world away, in Teheran, Persia.⁶ By the turn of the twentieth century, similar councils would be formed in Chicago; Kenosha, Wisconsin; and New York City.⁷

Kheiralla's understanding of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith proved to be limited. He came from a Syrian Christian background and had studied the Bahá'í teachings only briefly before coming to America. But he was the first Bahá'í teacher on the continent, and no one here knew his limitations. Only later, when contact was established with the Head of the Faith in Palestine, would a more complete understanding of the Bahá'í teachings become known.⁸

Kheiralla's attempts to earn a living in the



BARBARA EHRSAM
the first Bahá'í in Enterprise, Kansas; the mother of Josephine Hilty Kimmel Abramson, who became a Bahá'í in Chicago; and hostess of Ibrahim Kheiralla, the first Bahá'í teacher in North America.



JOSEPHINE HILTY [KIMMEL ABRAMSON]
a daughter of Barbara Ehrsam. An Enterprise, Kansas, resident, she heard about the Bahá'í Faith in Chicago and became a Bahá'í.

United States were not successful until he tapped the market for “healers” and unorthodox teachings. He obtained a fraudulent mail-

9. For a review of the life of Ibrahim Kheiralla, see Richard Hollinger, “Ibrahim George Kheiralla and the Bahá'í Faith in America,” *From East and West: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, ed. Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen, vol. 2 (Los Angeles, Kalimát Press, 1984) 95–133.

10. The “Greatest Name,” in the Bahá'í Faith, refers to *bahá*, Arabic for “glory, splendour, or light. Bahá, or any of its derivatives, such as Abhá, as well as certain phrases such as Alláh'u'Abhá, Yá Bahá'u'lláh, or Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá, are all referred to as the Greatest Name.” See “Greatest Name, the,” *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, ed. Wendy Momen (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989) 90.

11. Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 40.

12. Quoted in Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 229.

order medical degree and combined his healing practice with teaching his limited understanding of the Bahá'í Faith.⁹ Eventually he developed a series of twelve graduated lessons culminating in announcing the existence of a “Greatest Name” whereby the initiate might enter into a special relationship with the divine.¹⁰ The final step of his classes was the imparting of that Greatest Name and the news that “God had returned to earth in the person of Baha'u'llah [the founder of the Bahá'í Faith] and that his Son, Jesus Christ, [meaning 'Abdu'l-Bahá] was living in Akka.”¹¹ There was some semblance to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith in a few of Kheiralla's lessons, but no substantial similarity. He initially claimed to have met Baha'u'lláh but then amended that to its having been a “spiritual” meeting.¹² Nevertheless, Kheiralla's les-

sons were successful, and by the beginning of the twentieth century the American Bahá'í community numbered about fifteen hundred people, about half of whom lived in or near Chicago.¹³ Enterprise, Kansas, became one of the other, smaller Bahá'í communities.

When Kheiralla visited Enterprise in 1897, only two pieces of Bahá'í literature existed in English, both of which he had written himself.¹⁴ One of these pamphlets, "The Identity and Personality of God," provides evidence of Kheiralla's lack of knowledge about or understanding of the Bahá'í teachings. Among its twenty-five topics only two have a direct correlation with the Bahá'í Faith: "the concept of the oneness or singleness of God" and references to the Greatest Name. Evidently Kheiralla brought this pamphlet to Enterprise because some statements from it were reprinted or paraphrased in newspaper articles reporting on Kheiralla's visit.¹⁵

Kheiralla arrived in Enterprise during the week of 12 July 1897 and began his lessons almost immediately. Because prominent residents attended—among them Barbara Ehrsam's brother (retired State Senator Senn) and nephew (C. B. Hoffman, the center of some political controversy)—the classes became

local news. Because of the principals' statewide political activities, that local news was subsequently broadcast to some fourteen Kansas cities, most in the northeastern part of the state. Without the political connections—Kansas was a political boiling pot at the time—the Bahá'í classes would likely have received much less attention. Studies of the late nineteenth-century American Bahá'í community have shown that, in general, press notice of Bahá'í activities was minimal.¹⁶

News practices common at the time also increased coverage. In the nineteenth century, standards were not as uniform as they are today. It was then quite common for newspapers to copy news articles intact from other newspapers. Sometimes, but not always, the original newspaper or the city of origin would be given credit. Some newsmen prided themselves in rewriting their own stories from other papers so that they could recast the information according to their own understanding or to local interests, but the choice to do so was theirs. In addition, a news collecting system (a forerunner of modern news syndicates and press associations) now called "patent" or "boilerplate" newspapers spread bits of international, national, and regional news far and wide. This process involved printing whole or partial pages of newspapers, including the masthead, in a central location and shipping them by railroad to the distant, local communities where the blank spaces were filled with local news and ads. This packaging allowed small, local newspapers, without the expense of gathering information themselves, to include international, national, and regional news.¹⁷ In consequence, one sentence or paragraph could appear in several newspapers across the state of Kansas. All these methods of gathering news are reflected in the press coverage of Bahá'í activities in Enterprise in 1897.

Kansas, in the late nineteenth century, had a remarkable abundance of newspapers, partially due to the multiplicity of daily as

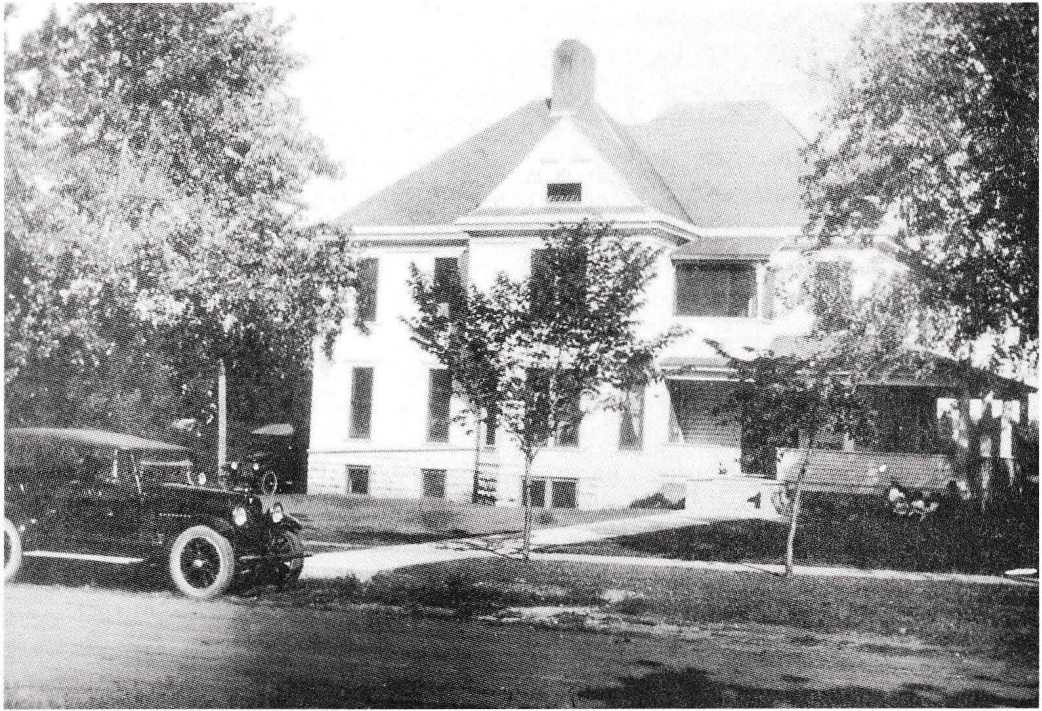
13. Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 163.

14. Hollinger, "Ibrahim George Kheiralla" 109, and Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* xxvii.

15. I. G. Kheiralla, *Za-ti-et Al-lah: The Identity and the Personality of God* (n.p.: 1896) 3, 5.

16. See Peter Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community, 1894–1917: A Preliminary Survey," in *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, Volume One* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1982) 85–223; Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 85–93; and Duane L. Herrmann, "The Bahá'í Faith in Kansas, 1897–1947," in *Community Histories: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, Volume Six*, ed. Richard Hollinger (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1992) 67–108.

17. Merle W. Wells, "'Patent' Newspapers: Their Impact in Kansas (1861–1906)," in Forrest R. Blackburn, et al., *Kansas and the West* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1976) 140–49.



BARBARA EHRSAM'S HOUSE
in Enterprise, Kansas, where she hosted Ibrahim Kheiralla during the summer of 1897
and where he gave lessons on the Bahá'í Faith.

well as weekly editions of many newspapers. The small town of Abilene had two competing daily newspapers, each with its own weekly editions: the *Abilene Reflector* and the *Abilene Chronicle*. Smaller towns, such as Enterprise, had only one weekly newspaper. Objectivity was not a regular part of news reporting.¹⁸ In Kansas many newspapers were profoundly political and even announced their bias in

their name—for example, the *Salina Republican-Journal* and the *Dillon Republican*. To this day Kansas is a predominantly Republican state but was even more so before Populism divided the party in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Fortunately, some of the information about Kheiralla and his classes that appears in the news articles can be confirmed from sources outside Kansas, such as surviving notes taken by Kheiralla's students in Chicago.

First Reports on Bahá'í Activities in Kansas Newspapers

THE earliest surviving article mentioning Bahá'í activities was one published on 13 July 1897 in the *Abilene Daily Reflector*, perhaps the first mention of Bahá'í activities in En-

18. Bahá'u'lláh urges newspapers to be just for they reflect the affairs of the world. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. [Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1988] 39–40).

terprise.¹⁹ The article was reprinted in toto two days later in the weekly edition of the *Reflector*. This short article uses an unnamed source, saying: "It is reported that C. B. Hoffman is practicing under an Arabian doctor in the art of curing by laying on of hands. Chris will probably add this new department to the State Agricultural college when he masters it more thoroughly."²⁰ The comment seems to have been an intentional political jab at Christian B. Hoffman (1851–1915, son of the millwright, Christian Hoffman), who was at the time a member of the Board of Regents of the State Agricultural College, now Kansas State University, and so well known that no further identification was necessary.

19. [no headline], *Abilene (Kansas) Daily Reflector* 13 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS. The newspaper articles will not be discussed chronologically but generationally, because the printed dates of the newspaper are not the dates on which they appeared on the street. Frequently an article in one newspaper would be reprinted from paper to paper, sometimes altered, sometimes not. Similarity in wording allows them to be traced from one to another. In that way several different streams of articles have been identified. The dates of the newspapers are no indication of their appearance because many newspapers were only published weekly or were weekly editions of daily newspapers. Sometimes the date of the "original" weekly newspaper was later than the date of daily newspapers that had reprinted from it. Two major news articles were used by several newspapers, copied intact or nearly so, or as the basis of new articles.

20. [no headlines], *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Reflector* 15 Jul. 1897: 6, KSHS.

21. Hoffman Papers, biographical outline data, Spencer Library, University of Kansas and Patricia Michaelis, "C. B. Hoffman, Kansas Socialist," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* (Kansas State Historical Society) 41 (1975): 166–82.

22. John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Minneapolis, U of Minnesota P, 1931).

23. "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal* 15 Jul. 1897: 1. The article was reprinted in *Abilene, Kansas*, a week later: "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 23 Jul. 1897: 1, KSHS.

He had already made substantial changes at the Agricultural College that had drawn considerable ire statewide. In a state the economy of which was, and is, based on farming, any changes at the state-supported Agricultural College rapidly drew attention. Among other things, Christian's establishing the first dormitory, cafeteria, and bookstore on campus, which were not seen as reasonable expenditures of state funds, had caused a great outcry.²¹ A few years earlier he and thousands of others had deserted the Republican Party and had become members of the Populist Party, a largely grassroots movement arising from the earlier Farmers Alliance. Its main concerns were those of the state's many farmers, such as lowering rates for freighting produce to market, and of the working class in general. The split had caused political power to pass to the Democratic Party, generating bitterness on the part of the remaining Republicans, who perceived it as a betrayal.²²

Sensationalism in Reports on the Bahá'í Faith

ON Thursday, 15 July, the *Enterprise Journal* ran the first major news article about Kheiralla's visit. The headline read: "THE BIBLE IS NOT THE TRUTH," clearly intending to attract attention in this church-going state. The headline did not necessarily reflect what Kheiralla taught, nor did it represent Bahá'í belief. This article, as it appeared in the *Enterprise* paper, is sympathetic in tone and, when compared with notes of Kheiralla's lectures in Chicago, is relatively accurate in describing Kheiralla's teachings.²³

The article begins by explaining why Kheiralla is in town:

Dr. I. G. Kheiralla, Chicago, who is spending his vacation with the family of J. B. Ehsam, is teaching the people of *Enterprise* the religion of his order. Dr. Kheiralla was sent by his Order from the Orient to this country to teach "the truth"

and has a large following in Chicago where he has resided since coming to this country from Egypt.²⁴

Kheiralla promoted himself as an officially designated "teacher," though that status does not exist within the Bahá'í Faith.

The article continues by describing Kheiralla's teachings:

He teaches the Oneness and Singleness of God; also whence we came, why we are here and where we are going. He gives to his private pupils the key to the sealed books of the Bible which he uses to verify his teachings. He believes the truth is in the Bible but that the Bible is not the truth.²⁵

The article does not further explain that apparent paradox.

Next the article describes what might be called his teaching parameters:

One of the strict rules of his Order is that no teacher is allowed to accept any remuneration, directly or indirectly, for teaching the truth; neither is any one allowed to teach unless a most thorough investigation has been made and every statement which they make can be proven.²⁶

The first part of this statement is true of the Bahá'í Faith, which has neither a paid clergy nor professional teachers. The second part was Kheiralla's own assertion, perhaps one of the techniques that he used to maintain control and authority over the community he was building. Yet this assertion bears some simi-

larity to the Bahá'í principle of the independent investigation of truth, which is enjoined on all Bahá'ís, meaning that all are obligated to think for themselves rather than blindly follow others.

The final paragraph of the news story describes the schedule he had established in Enterprise:

On Sunday evenings there will be public talks given in the parlors of the Ehram residence, to which all are invited. The private classes which have been held twice, meet Tuesday and Friday afternoons and evenings. There are twenty-seven people taking the private teachings and another class will be formed later. . . .²⁷

It is likely that Kheiralla had not yet been in Enterprise for a full week, since a later article said that a class would be held on Sundays. With private classes described as being held Tuesdays and Fridays, afternoons and evenings, it is unclear whether Kheiralla was teaching four classes a week, thereby condensing his twelve lessons into three weeks, or was holding duplicate classes. He stayed in Enterprise six weeks. If the classes were in the afternoon, how could those with jobs have attended? Answers to these questions have not yet been found. Still, attendance of twenty-seven is a substantial number for a city as small as Enterprise and a remarkable response. The reference to the possibility of a second class being started suggests that even more interest was evident in the town.

The article concludes:

A great interest is manifested by those who have begun the teachings of this religion of which so little is said, for the name of the order is only revealed to those who have taken all the teachings.²⁸

Kheiralla's insistence on secrecy, which is contrary to Bahá'í teachings, was the same procedure he had used in Chicago. It is possible that some level of secrecy had been necessary in Egypt, a Muslim country, where Kheiralla had lived and where even today freedom of

24. "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal*, 15 Jul. 1897: 1.

25. "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal*, 15 Jul. 1897: 1.

26. "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal*, 15 Jul. 1897: 1.

27. "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal*, 15 Jul. 1897: 1.

28. "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal*, 15 Jul. 1897: 1.

religion is not as open as in the United States. But in Enterprise, Kansas, it raised suspicions. However, the tone of the 15 July article in the *Enterprise Journal* is respectful and straightforward, perhaps because the publisher of the newspaper was Christian Hoffman, father of C. B. and brother-in-law of Barbara Ehram, Kheiralla's host.

The article from the *Enterprise Journal* was reprinted the next week in the 23 July issue of the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle*, bearing the same headline ("THE BIBLE IS NOT THE TRUTH") but adding negative comments at the beginning and end of the article.²⁹ It begins by mildly mocking the Enterprise newspaper, "The Enterprise Journal discovered this week that 'Dr.' Kheiralla was in its town and prints some facts concerning him and his creed in addition to those heretofore published in the CHRONICLE." The *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* version then deletes the introduction from the *Enterprise Journal* article and begins by saying that Kheiralla had been "sent" here "by his order." Except for omitting the dates, times, and location of the classes, the body of the article is reprinted exactly as it appeared in the *Enterprise Journal*. The article ends by criticizing Kheiralla's secrecy: "Nobody, however, will take much stock in a religion which cannot stand the open light of day and Kheiralla's 'religion' is perhaps as great a fake as his alleged miraculous cures."³⁰ Battle lines for responses to this new Faith had now been drawn.

A Stream of News Articles

NO OTHER newspapers appear to have picked up the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* article, but they did pick up others. One week earlier, on 16 July, the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* had printed at the top of page one a major article that appears to be the basis for most subsequent coverage across the state. As was then common, the article had three headlines stacked in descending size and emphasis. The first headline read: "TEACHES STRANGE THINGS." The second read: "An Arabian Springs an Entirely New Religion on the People of Enterprise." The third, in much smaller type, read: "HAS WONDERFUL POWER TO HEAL." Though the article identifies Kheiralla as an "Arabian," he was actually a Syrian whose last permanent address had been Egypt.³¹ But in the middle of Kansas in the 1890s, such a distinction was irrelevant: all Semites were "Arabs," and he did speak Arabic.

The 16 July article reported that Kheiralla "claims not only to teach the only true religion but to possess remarkable powers as a healer of all ills that flesh is heir to."³² Here one can see the result of Kheiralla's having conflated his religious teachings with his healing practice. He would eventually give up the healing business, but in 1897 he had not yet done so. The specific phrase about healing all the ills of humankind caught the interest of many editors and was repeated in many other newspapers, sometimes as the basis of their news articles.

"Dr. Kheiralla," the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* article continued, "has written a book in which he sets forth his peculiar religious ideas, which are to a considerable extent fanatical. By some it is called Neo-Platonism, by others pronounced a combination of Arabic mysticism, German rationalism, mesmerism, etc."³³ The reference to "mysticism, rationalism and mesmerism" is a key to the genealogy of subsequent news articles that drastically condense or summarize the 16 July article to the

29. "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 23 Jul. 1897: 1.

30. "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 23 Jul. 1897: 1.

31. "Teaches Strange Things," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 16 Jul. 1897: 1.

32. "Teaches Strange Things," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 16 Jul. 1897: 1.

33. "Teaches Strange Things," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 16 Jul. 1897: 1.

extent that sometimes this phrase, or part of it, is all that remains of the original. How these terms could be applied to the Bahá'í teachings remains a mystery, especially the reference to hypnotism (then called mesmerism, after Friedrich Anton Mesmer, who perfected the procedure). Since no Bahá'í scriptures had yet been translated into English, there was nothing the people of the time could use to form an accurate assessment. An assertion that Kheiralla taught "a modified form of Pantheism" is flatly at odds with actual Bahá'í teachings.³⁴ The article described Kheiralla's teaching schedules as "two systems of teaching," public lectures on Sundays and private lectures on Wednesday evenings, a very different schedule from that given in the 15 July *Enterprise Journal* article. One assumes the *Enterprise* schedule to be more accurate, though it is possible that the schedule changed between 15 and 16 July.³⁵

The 16 July article in the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* is also historically valuable in that it provides the names of some of the individuals who attended the classes. According to the article, "An inner circle, or class formed to take the advanced course in the Kheiralla religion, already has several members, includ-

ing, it is said, C. B. Hoffman, C. V. Topping, Ed Haffner etc." C. B. Hoffman's name is not on Kheiralla's own list, though the other two are. The article also mentions Josephine Hilty (referred to as "Josie") as having become a believer while still in Chicago. Others known to have attended the class included family members, Julia Ehram and John J. Abramson, a distant cousin. The article also claims that Kheiralla cured one of the Ehram boys of colic and helped a blind granddaughter of Barbara Ehram ("a little girl named Hilty") to distinguish between light and dark and among colors.³⁶ No other mention of these cures has been found.

On Wednesday, 14 July, the *Topeka Daily Capital* (a morning paper), the *Topeka State Journal* (an evening paper), and the *Lawrence Daily Journal* all reprinted the 16 July article from the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle*, or versions of it. Topeka, the capital city of Kansas, is eighty-five miles east of Enterprise and Lawrence a further thirty miles east of Topeka; the news had traveled far and fast. The articles in the Topeka newspapers were essentially the same, having been lifted directly from the original article in the 16 July *Abilene Weekly Chronicle*. Obviously the *Chronicle* of 16 July had appeared before that date when it ran the original version of the article. It is likely that the weekly edition carried a date subsequent to the release date, just as some monthly news magazines still do today to ensure a longer shelf life; hence the newspaper could well have reached Topeka before the issue date.

The *Topeka Daily Capital* gave credit to the *Chronicle*, while the *Topeka State Journal* put "Enterprise" in the headline and byline. The *Capital* titled the article: "HOFFMAN'S NEW RELIGION," signaling that the newspaper's primary interest was political. This version reprinted all except the last paragraph of the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* article, which dealt with calendar dates relevant only to Enterprise.³⁷ The *State Journal* headlined the

34. "Teaches Strange Things," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 16 Jul. 1897: 1.

35. Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 109. In Chicago, Kheiralla gave his classes only once a week, but it would not have been cost effective for him to stay in Enterprise that long. By conducting the class several times a week in Enterprise he could use his time more wisely and move on to another town. The private classes were later described as the "advanced class," which raises the question of how, or whether, the early lessons were previously given to members of the advanced class.

36. "Teaches Strange Things," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 16 Jul. 1897: 1, KSHS.

37. "Hoffman's New Religion," *Topeka (Kansas) Daily Capital* 14 Jul. 1897: 3, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library.



JULIA EHRSAM

a daughter of Barbara Ehrsam and younger half-sister of Josephine Hilty [Kimmel Abramson]. She attended Kheiralla's classes on the Bahá'í Faith in 1897.



JOHN J. ABRAMSON

a distant cousin of Jacob Ehrsam, Barbara Ehrsam's second husband. Possibly of Jewish extraction, Abramson attended Kheiralla's 1897 Bahá'í class in Enterprise and later corresponded with a relative in Palestine and with Thornton Chase, the first Bahá'í in North America.

article: "HEALER AT ENTERPRISE," with a subheading, "An Arabian Teaches a New Doctrine—C. B. Hoffman Investigates It."³⁸ Here again, Hoffman was the center of attention. The *Journal* reprinted the first and second paragraphs of the *Chronicle* article intact and parts of the third and fourth. The *Journal* omitted opinionated comments and the reference to Josephine Hilty, thereby

making the article a more objective news story.

The third news article bearing a date of 14 July—the one published in the *Lawrence Daily Journal*—began a sequence that brought the news full circle. The article contained the phrase "mysticism, rationalism and mesmerism," showing its genealogical connection to the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* article. The rest of the *Lawrence Daily Journal* article was spiteful retaliation. The Lawrence newspaper was radically Republican, and Hoffman, now a Populist, had betrayed the Republican party. The complete text of the article reads:

It is reported from Enterprise, Kansas,

38. "Healer At Enterprise," *Topeka (Kansas) State Journal* 14 Jul. 1897: 3, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library.

that C. B. Hoffman, the man who has been playing hammer and eggs with the agricultural college, is a member of a new religious sect organized out there by a gentleman by the name of Ibrahim Kheiralla, late of Arabia. The religion is said to be a conglomeration of mysticism, rationalism and mesmerism. With wheels of that kind in his head it is no wonder Hoffman wants to grind things up.³⁹

The game of “hammer and eggs” is not one in which the eggs ever win. The wheels and grinding are apparent allusions to the Hoffman Mills. The paper’s anger at Hoffman is undisguised. This article was reprinted on 17 July in the weekly edition of the *Lawrence Weekly Journal*, where even the word breaks are the same, indicating that this and other sections of type had been lifted directly from one edition of the paper to another.⁴⁰

On 15 July, the day after the article first appeared in the *Lawrence Daily Journal*, the *Abilene Daily Reflector* reprinted it, giving credit to the *Lawrence Journal*, where the images of the hammer and eggs and the grinding had first appeared on 14 July, and retaining the

reference to “mysticism, rationalism and mesmerism” that first appeared in the 16 July *Abilene Weekly Chronicle*. The “news” had now come full circle back to Abilene.⁴¹

The original *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* article dated 16 July is also likely to have been the basis of the 15 July story headlined “New Sect for Kansas” that appeared in the *Leavenworth Times* (140 miles northeast of Enterprise), and reprinted in the *Leavenworth Weekly Times* on 22 July. Significant rewriting is evident, but some of the same terms and phrases reappear—for example, calling the religion “a combination of German rationalism, neo-Platonism and transcendentalism” and saying that Kheiralla was “curing disease by laying on of hands.” It creatively jibes C. B. Hoffman as one who has “passed into the mystic realm” and attributes to him a quote, saying that there “is something to it,” which the other articles do not. It also adds the detail that Hoffman “has sent for his friend Breidenthal to come and be initiated next Sunday.”⁴² Breidenthal was John W. Breidenthal (1862–1910), the then State Bank Commissioner, a Republican turned Populist like Hoffman, the head of the Kansas Populist Party from 1893 through 1897, and also, like Hoffman, a resident (at one time) of Enterprise.⁴³ This is the only mention of Breidenthal in connection with Kheiralla’s classes in Enterprise, but it demonstrates the political network into which Hoffman provided access for Kheiralla. Later in the summer, after departing Enterprise for Chicago, Kheiralla was found in Topeka in the company of the highest state officials.⁴⁴

A very unusual short article apparently generated by Kheiralla’s presence in Enterprise appeared in the 15 July *Atchison Daily Globe* (140 miles northeast of Enterprise). The item stated: “The ‘healer’ business is so profitable that a good many ‘healers’ are springing up. The latest is an Irishman who claims to be an Arabian.”⁴⁵ The editor of the *Atchison Daily Globe* had evidently been keep-

39. [no headline], *Lawrence (Kansas) Daily Journal* 14 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS.

40. [no headline], *Lawrence (Kansas) Weekly Journal* 17 Jul. 1897: 9, KSHS.

41. [no headline], *Abilene (Kansas) Daily Reflector* 16 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS.

42. “New Sect for Kansas,” *Leavenworth (Kansas) Times* 16 Jul. 1897: 6 and *Leavenworth (Kansas) Weekly Times* 22 Jul. 1897: 3, KSHS.

43. Kirke Mecham, ed., *The Annals of Kansas: 1886–1925* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1886–1925) 162, 259, 300, and William E. Connelley, Sec., *History of Kansas State and People: Kansas at the First Quarter Post of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1928) 2,275.

44. “Ed Pasha’s Jewels: Private Secretary’s Decorations Explained by Dr. Kheiralla,” *Topeka (Kansas) Daily Capital* 3 Sept. 1897: 5, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library.

45. “News and Comment,” *Atchison (Kansas) Daily Globe* 15 Jul. 1897: 1, KSHS.

ing abreast of statewide events and related them to his immediate experience. The notice is rather cryptic and would only be understood by someone who had read other newspapers in the state and could also read between the lines of this new item. Kheiralla, who was not mentioned by name in the article, was the only "Arabian" in Kansas news at the time; hence the article must be referring to him. Earlier that summer an Irishman in Atchison who claimed to heal people was run out of town; the newspaper seems to have conflated the identities and claims of the two healers.⁴⁶

In an article dated 16 July, the *Kansas City Gazette* (150 miles east of Enterprise) picked up the news about Kheiralla and the Bahá'í Faith, combined it with comments from the 16 July *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* and the 14 July *Lawrence Daily Journal*, and put it in a column of miscellaneous, unrelated, and uncredited news items from all over the state, called "Pen, Paste and Scissors." For some reason the *Gazette* changed the location of

the events from Enterprise to Emporia (55 miles southeast of Enterprise), reporting that:

C. B. Hoffman, who has been playing hammer and eggs with the agricultural college, is a member of a new religious society organized at Emporia, Kansas, by a gentleman by the name of Ibrahim Kheiralla, late of Arabia. The religion is said to be a conglomeration of mysticism, rationalism and mesmerism.⁴⁷

That same day, 16 July, the *Junction City Tribune* (fifteen miles northeast of Enterprise) and the *Salina Herald* (thirty miles west of Enterprise) condensed different parts of the long original news article in the 16 July *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* into single but remarkably different paragraphs of local news using what were becoming familiar phrases.

The version in the *Junction City Tribune* read:

Considerable excitement has been created in Enterprise by "Dr." Kheiralla, an Arabian, who claims to possess power to heal all the ills that flesh is heir to. A little girl named Hilty, who has been blind from birth, is now reported to be able to distinguish light from darkness and note the difference in colors, by the laying on of the doctor's hands.⁴⁸

The *Salina Herald* reported more briefly:

The little town of Enterprise is said to be stirred over the peculiar teachings of one "Dr." Ibrahim G. Kheiralla, an Arabian, who claims not only to teach the only true religion but to possess remarkable powers as a healer of all ills that flesh is heir to.⁴⁹

A week later, in its 23 July edition, the *Junction City Sentinel* rephrased this same "news":

The little town of Enterprise is all worked up over the conversion of C. B. Hoffman to the new religion as taught by Dr. Ibrahim Gkerhemis Kheiralla, an Arabian who teaches the only true religion. He also claims to possess wonderful healing power.⁵⁰

46. [no headline], *Atchison (Kansas) Daily Globe* 15 Jul. 1897, KSHS.

47. "Pen Paste and Scissors," *Kansas City (Kansas) Gazette* 16 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS. One wonders if the change of the city, from Enterprise to Emporia, might have been made to tarnish, however indirectly, the reputation of William Allen White, then the most nationally famous of Kansas newsmen. One year earlier White had gained national fame by his editorial outburst entitled "What's the matter with Kansas," in the 20 August issue of his newspaper, the *Emporia Gazette*. In the editorial he lambasted the East-Coast attitude about Kansas and championed the ordinary citizens of Kansas as being the best resource of the state. Some residents of Kansas disagreed; the *Kansas City Gazette* article may have been a way to attack White's reputation.

48. [no headline], *Junction City (Kansas) Tribune* 16 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS.

49. [no headline], *Salina (Kansas) Herald* 16 Jul. 1897: 5, KSHS.

50. [no headline], *Junction City (Kansas) Sentinel* 23 Jul. 1897: 1, KSHS.

The inclusion of Kheiralla's full, native middle name is the noteworthy feature of this item and shows that some independent research had been conducted; with Enterprise only fifteen miles away that would not have been difficult. This item appears to end the stream of eleven articles flowing from the original one published in the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* on 16 July.

Articles of Support

A SECOND group of articles in Kansas newspapers represents an entirely different development—reporting about the Kheiralla meetings as support for freedom of conscience. A 22 July article in the *Enterprise Journal* is the earliest one yet found in the West to defend the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in print. It was prompted by two lines that had appeared on 16 July in the *Chapman Standard* (seven miles northeast of Enterprise), repeating lines from the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* article of the same date stating that “An Arabian is at Enterprise who claims to teach the only true religion. He also has the power to heal all the ills that flesh is heir to.”⁵¹ The *Enterprise Journal*, whose publisher was Christian Hoffman, the father of C. B. Hoffman, responded by repeating these two lines, crediting them to the *Chapman Standard* and retorting,

There you go, jumping at conclusions. Dr. Kheiralla teaches a new religion and one that he believes, like all other sects,

to be a true one, but as to the “only” religion and the power to heal all the ills the flesh is [“]heir to,” you are as far off from the truth as the average pop orator.⁵² Hoffman chastises the *Chapman Standard* for “jumping at conclusions” when it should have investigated Kheiralla's claims for itself. In effect, Hoffman is saying that Kheiralla is teaching a new religion that he believes to be true and that everyone has the right to believe his or her own religion to be true. Hoffman further chastises the *Standard* for going too far in saying that Kheiralla claims his religion to be the “only true religion” and one with the power to heal everything. That claim, says Hoffman, is as unfounded as the claims of someone who jumps on a soapbox to vent steam.

Why Hoffman would take on the Chapman newspaper but not the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* (where the statement had originally been made) is unclear, but perhaps it was a matter of geography; Chapman was a small rival town to the east, while Abilene was the county seat to the west. Chapman and Enterprise were on a more equal footing than Enterprise and Abilene, though competition between the two existed. Notwithstanding that long-standing rivalry, Hoffman may not have wanted to take on Abilene over this issue.⁵³

Kheiralla, a Part of Enterprise's Summer Social Scene

DURING the next few weeks most newspapers took no further notice of Kheiralla's presence in Enterprise, but the *Enterprise Journal* ran brief notices indicating that Kheiralla and his family had become an accepted part of the summer social scene. One such notice, dated 12 August, matter-of-factly reports: “Ed Haffner, Emmett Hoffman and George Kheiralla are with a camping party on Lyons creek, near Woodbine, and will fight chiggers and mosquitoes for a week.”⁵⁴ Haffner and Hoffman were obviously in social circles high enough to warrant attention, and George

51. [no headline], *Chapman (Kansas) Standard* 16 Jul. 1897: 5, KSHS.

52. [no headline], *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal* 22 Jul. 1897: 4, KSHS.

53. Enterprise had tried to wrest the county government away from Abilene in retaliation for Abilene's slighting of outlying settlers in the earliest days of the county. In the election of 1882, Abilene narrowly held on to the county seat.

54. “Local Items,” *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal* 12 Aug. 1897: 5, KSHS.

Kheiralla, Kheiralla's son, was included as a normal part of their summer.

On 19 August the *Enterprise Journal* ran an innocuous note about the classes that had by then become quite common: "Dr. Kheiralla has a large class taking lectures in the new religion and and [sic] the meetings are reported as being very interesting."⁵⁵ This article (with the second "and" deleted) was belatedly reprinted in the 27 August edition of the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle*, after Kheiralla had left Enterprise.⁵⁶

One other brief note about Kheiralla's activities circulated through many distant Kansas newspapers that summer. It was a laconic one-line quip—"Enterprise runs to religion and Abilene to base ball"—that is obviously a product of the patent or boilerplate newspaper system because the notice is found in the exact same line in every newspaper and, in most of them, located in the exact same position on the page. The note appeared in at least one newspaper dated 28 July, in two dated 29 July, and in other newspapers with subsequent July dates. The first of these appearances was in the *Hutchinson Clipper* (95 miles southwest of Enterprise). The second two were in the *Enterprise Journal* itself as part of boilerplate copy and in the *Herington*

Times (33 miles southwest of Enterprise). The one-liner appeared in the 30 July issue of the *Junction City Sentinel* and the following day in both the *Hays Free Press* (130 miles west of Enterprise) and the *Hutchinson Democrat*. Being so brief it many have also appeared in other newspapers but has simply not yet been found in them.⁵⁷

On 30 July the *Abilene Daily Reflector* repeated (from its 13 July daily edition and 15 July weekly edition) its derision of Hoffman's recent "radical" changes at the state Agricultural College, this time adding to its original jab another jibe about departmental changes at the college: "If the new Arabian religion down at Enterprise has a mind-reading department, it ought to give Chris Hoffman a chance to realize how the people of Kansas feel about injury done the Agricultural College."⁵⁸ The issue of Hoffman's activities as a member of the College's Board of Regents would not die a peaceful death.

Disorder in Kheiralla's Class

TWO more articles that appeared in the *Abilene Daily Reflector* give a glimpse into Kheiralla's method of teaching. As previously noted, C. B. Hoffman and the former Senator Senn attended the classes. Both reportedly asked questions, a practice not allowed by Kheiralla either in Enterprise or in Chicago, where one student reported that "there is little chance for any discussion at any lecture" and that those who tried were expelled.⁵⁹ Hoffman and Senn apparently persisted in asking questions and in challenging Kheiralla's statements. Neither activity was acceptable, probably because Kheiralla had no answers to give beyond his prepared lectures. If questions departed from his text, he could not have responded, for his knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith was severely limited.

Hoffman and Senn persisted to such a degree that Kheiralla expelled them from the classes, an act that generated nearly as much press attention as his arrival had a few weeks

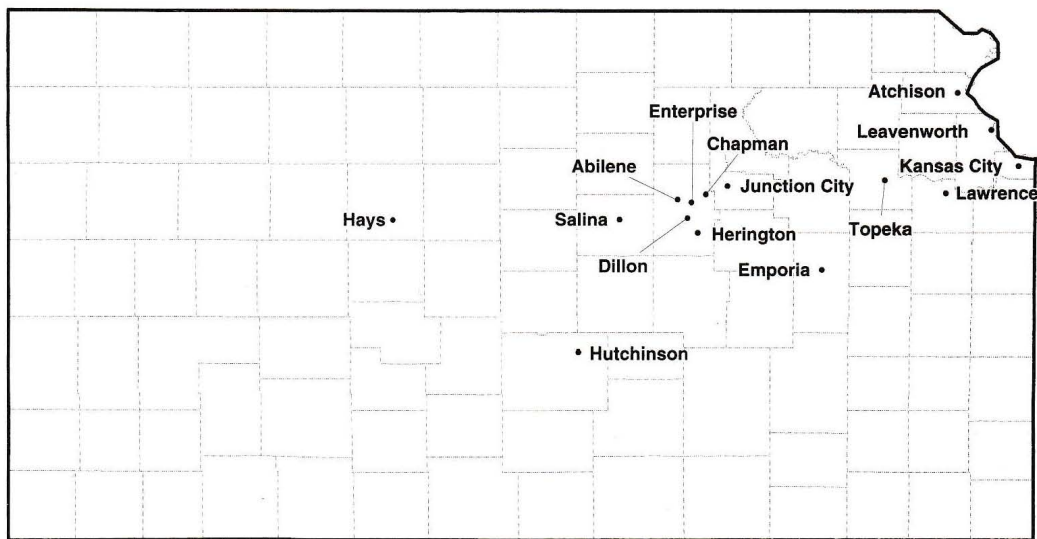
55. "Local Items," *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal* 19 Aug. 1897: 5, KSHS.

56. "Enterprise Items," *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Chronicle* 27 Aug. 1897: 3, KSHS.

57. [no headline], *Hutchinson (Kansas) Clipper* 28 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS; [no headline], *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal* 29 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS; [no headline], *Herington (Kansas) Times* 29 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS; [no headline], *Junction City (Kansas) Sentinel* 30 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS; [no headline], *Hays (Kansas) Free Press* 31 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS; and *Hutchinson (Kansas) Democrat* 31 Jul. 1897: 6, KSHS.

58. [no headline], *Abilene (Kansas) Daily Reflector* 30 Jul. 1897: 2, KSHS; [no headline], *Abilene (Kansas) Daily Reflector* 13 Jul. 1897: 2; [no headline], *Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Reflector* 15 Jul. 1897: 6

59. Quoted in Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 64.



NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF BAHÁ'Í ACTIVITIES IN KANSAS, 1897

previously. Under the headline “HOFFMANN IS ‘CHURCHED’” and the sub-head “New Arabian Religion Is Too Much for Chris,” the *Abilene Reflector* on 7 August reported:

An interesting story about the new Arabian religion at Enterprise is in circulation. It is said that Chris Hoffman was one of the first to accept the tenets of the new creed. The Arabian preacher arranged his congregation in classes. He put Hoffman in the highest one. It reached that point a few weeks ago where Hoffman imagined he knew more about the new religion than the preacher did and this so enraged the Arabian that he set Hoffman back in the

primary class as a punishment. The regent still continued to harass the preacher. As a last resort, the Arabian fired him out of the church and will not even permit him to attend his meetings. In order to get even, Hoffmann declares that he will not honor the Arabian now by establishing a chair of that particular doctrine at the Agricultural College. It is said that about 80 converts have been made to the new faith.

On 9 August the *Abilene Reflector* carried a separate notice of Senn’s expulsion.⁶⁰ Newspapers in Salina (twenty-five miles west of Enterprise) and Junction City (fifteen miles northeast of Enterprise) repeated in toto the first article on 9 and 13 August respectively. No reprints of the notice of Senn’s expulsion have been found. Both the *Salina Daily Republican-Journal* (on 9 August) and the *Junction City Sentinel* (13 August) gave credit to the *Abilene Reflector*.⁶¹

On 10 August the *Salina Daily Republican-Journal* ran a commentary on the whole affair and reprinted it on 13 August in its weekly

60. “Hoffman Is ‘Churched,’” *Abilene (Kansas) Daily Reflector* 7 Aug. 1897: 3, KSHS, and “Recent Reflections,” *Abilene (Kansas) Daily Reflector* 9 Aug. 1897: 3.

61. “Hoffman Is ‘Churched,’” *Salina (Kansas) Daily Republican-Journal* 9 Aug. 1897: 3, KSHS; “C. B. Hoffman Churched,” *Junction City (Kansas) Sentinel* 13 Aug. 1897: 4, KSHS. This article was reprinted on

edition.⁶² This commentary was reprinted in the *Dillon Republican* on the same day. The motive of political revenge is undisguised in the articles:

Since little Chris Hoffman's faith has been lost in "Arabian philosophy" may he not be turned from his feverish unbelief in everything sensible, and from his jaundiced view of life, to "fields of brighter day?" The little man has a big head, and there should be something more in it than an eternal kick against history, experience, laws of nature and good horse-sense. It is too bad that he should waste his very plentiful grey matter in the arid desert of discontent with everything that is.⁶³

30 July 1997 in the *Junction City Union* (successor to the *Junction City Tribune* and *Junction City Sentinel*) in the "From Our Files" column (p. 5) where news from ten, twenty, fifty, and one hundred years earlier is reprinted. Earlier in 1997 the *Union* had printed two articles about the Kansas Bahá'í centennial. Other centennial coverage appeared in twenty-one issues of sixteen newspapers in as many cities across Kansas as well as two in Missouri; some were the same newspapers that had carried news about the Bahá'í Faith in 1897.

62. [no headline], *Salina (Kansas) Daily Republican-Journal* 10 Aug. 1897: 2, KSHS, and [no headline], *Salina (Kansas) Weekly Republican-Journal* 13 Aug. 1897: 2, KSHS.

63. [no headline], *Dillon (Kansas) Republican* 13 Aug. 1897: 2, KSHS.

64. "C. B. Hoffman Churched," *Junction City (Kansas) Sentinel* 3 Aug. 1897: 4, KSHS.

65. [no headline], *Junction City (Kansas) Sentinel* 20 Aug. 1897: 3, KSHS.

66. Such a Chair would not be out of place at an agricultural university for in the *Lawh-i-Dunyá* (Tablet of the World), Bahá'u'lláh (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 81–97) postulates several principles upon which the reconstruction of human society is to be based. In particular, He notes that "Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others" (90). Agriculture and improved farming practices are the focus at an agriculturally based university and the foundation of every society.

Also on 13 August the *Junction City Sentinel* ran the notice that had originally appeared in the *Abilene Reflector* on 7 August.⁶⁴ On 20 August the *Junction City Sentinel* summarized the news of the week and added news of Senn's expulsion:

The Arabian preacher who is doing service over at Enterprise is having all kinds of trouble with his new converts. First little Chris Hoffmann was taken from the advance [*sic*] class and placed down in the primary department and now comes the report that Ex-Senator Senn has been expelled from the church for asking so many fool questions. In explaining the expulsion the Arabian said, "I am willing at all times to argue with a question but not with a man who has no sense."⁶⁵

Hoffman and Senn were news no matter what they did.

The article that first appeared in the *Abilene Reflector* on 7 August announcing Hoffman's expulsion and mentioning establishing a chair at the Agricultural College is the first news of a possible Chair of Bahá'í Studies at what is now Kansas State University. C. B. Hoffman, as a member of the Board of Regents, wielded considerable power over the college and could have instituted such a Chair. A Chair of Bahá'í Studies at that time would likely have meant a steady income for Kheiralla (as long as Hoffman was a Regent) and an accessible student audience.⁶⁶

Kheiralla's Departure from Kansas

KHEIRALLA left Enterprise near the end of August. His departure was first noted in the *Enterprise Journal* dated 26 August:

Dr. I. G. Kheiralla and family left yesterday for Chicago after a few months stay in the city. He had a class of 22 members in his new religion and gave lectures two evenings each week for some time. He teaches his religion but does not endeavor to argue with those who care to differ from his opinions. For that reason a few

members were “churched” and gave up the lectures early in the course. George Kheiralla will attend a medical school this winter, finishing a course in medicine. Dr. Kheiralla may return later and continue his lectures.⁶⁷ The concluding comment of the article suggests that Kheiralla had not completed his classes, a conclusion supported by other sources.⁶⁸ However, no evidence has been found to suggest that Kheiralla or any other Bahá'í teacher returned to Enterprise to nurture the new Bahá'ís there. The item about Kheiralla's departure was repeated in slightly condensed form in the issue of the *Abilene Daily Reflector* with the same date.⁶⁹ No other notice of his departure has been found.

Despite the Bahá'í activity and resultant publicity during the summer of 1897 in Enterprise, a stable and permanent Bahá'í community was not established. That distinction in Kansas fell to the capital city when two of the Enterprise Bahá'ís moved to Topeka in the fall of 1906. A Bahá'í community has been continuous in Topeka since that date.

The American Bahá'í community had not, in 1897, yet developed a sufficient administrative or communication infrastructure to foster cohesion among isolated and widely scattered believers. The closest Bahá'í community to Enterprise was in Chicago, more than five hundred miles away. Though train travel was possible between the two cities, and at least one such trip was contemplated, it was simply not practical.⁷⁰ Many of the “little band of believers” gradually drifted to other interests.⁷¹

The few who maintained an interest and commitment saw the problems of communication resolved to a degree. One who attended Kheiralla's class, remained in Enterprise, and remained a Bahá'í to the end of her life was Elizabeth Frey, wife of the postmaster in 1897. She and her daughter Elsbeth traveled to Chicago in 1912 to attend that year's national Bahá'í convention and to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the leader of the Bahá'í Faith following the death of its founder, His father, Bahá'u'lláh. It was a life-transforming experience.⁷² Her steadfastness and that of other Kansas Bahá'ís provide an unbroken link between Kheiralla's classes in Enterprise during the summer of 1897 and the Kansas Bahá'í community of the twenty-first century.

The newspaper coverage of the 1897 Bahá'í activities in Enterprise, Kansas, is intrinsically interesting on several levels. It documents early activities of the second oldest Bahá'í community in the Western Hemisphere and the first to have major news coverage of its activities. It illustrates early press practices in the heartland of rural America. And it contributes evidence to the cultural mosaic of religious movements that have always found fertile, if not always initially welcoming, soil in America in which to plant themselves and grow.

67. “Kheiralla's Teaching Over,” *Enterprise (Kansas) Journal* 26 Aug. 1897: 1, KSHS.

68. Duane L. Herrmann, “Letters from a Nineteenth-Century Kansas Bahá'í,” *World Order* 28.2 (Winter 1996–97): 27–35.

69. [no headline], *Abilene (Kansas) Daily Reflector* 27 Aug. 1897: 2, KSHS.

70. Barbara Ehram to Maud Lampson, 3 May 1899, Maud Lampson Papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois.

71. Barbara Ehram to Maud Lampson, 14 Nov. 1899, Maud Lampson Papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois.

72. Elsbeth Frey Renwanz Personal Recollections, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois.

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