

BY THY STRENGTHENING GRACE

**The First One Hundred Years of the Bahá'í Faith in Topeka: 1906-
2006**

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Published by the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Topeka,
Kansas, Inc., Topeka, KS

ISBN 01-879448-18-1

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Preface

Writing the history of a Bahá'í community is somewhat different than writing the history of most other religious groups. In most instances the story can follow the progression of leaders, or whoever is the head of that organization. The Bahá'í Faith practices a new method of collective, group leadership, which means that there is no leader. The Bahá'í Faith is based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and His appointed successor, Abdu'l-Bahá. "Bahá'í" is spelled with three diacritical marks to indicate pronunciation.

Even though Bahá'ís have been in Topeka since 1906, no Bahá'í community records have been found here before 1938 and for the first decade after that, they are inconsistent. Information about what may have happened in the earlier years has to be found elsewhere. Some information has been found in holdings of the Archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States in Wilmette, IL. Some have been found in public records in the city of Topeka, such as city directories, phone books and the city newspapers. The holdings of the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library have been invaluable. Some personal memoirs have also been helpful. From these scraps of information the following account has been constructed.

It will be noticed that first names of individual members of the Topeka Bahá'í community have often been used in this history instead of more formal titles (Dr., Mr., Mrs., etc.) While social accomplishments are recognized as valuable achievements, the Bahá'í community functions with a minimum of formality, therefore Mrs. Paul Brown is referred to as May Brown, or more simply as: May. No lack of respect is intended.

It is not easy to establish a community in the midst of another dominant community which has very different norms and expectations. Aggression, confrontation and an adversarial attitude are not virtues in the Bahá'í community. Majority rule applies only (as 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "God forbid,") if it is necessary, a last resort in order to reach a decision. There is no clergy, no individuals in positions of power or control - there are no positions of power or control.

Because the population of America is a mobile one, some of the Bahá'ís here have lived both inside and outside the city limits (the boundary of the Topeka Bahá'í community). This means that some of their actions belong to the history of the Topeka Bahá'í community and some do not.

Notes have been kept to a bare minimum, used mostly to allow the people and documents of the time to speak for themselves. Every little fact could be referenced, but who would want to wade through all of that?

My thanks and appreciation go to all those who have been supporting of this effort to gather and recount the history of the first century of the Bahá'í Faith in Topeka. I cannot name you all, but I must particularly thank the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Topeka, whose support was crucial. Thank you.

May Brown, who wrote her memoirs near the end of her life, closed them by saying, "...this takes care of the early days of my Bahá'í life and younger Bahá'ís will take over from now on."

Thank you, May, for your memories as well as your efforts and those of your companions. I hope that this history fulfills at least part of your trust for the future. We would not have made it to the century mark without you.

Sincerely,

Duane L. Herrmann

A Brief History, 1906-2006

Just as Christians two thousand years ago began to build a new kind of civilization in the ancient world, that process is being repeated now. At that time, in the new Christian civilization, compassion and forgiveness were the highest virtues instead of flaws, women were entitled to live (whereas a respected Roman soldier could calmly write home to his pregnant wife: if the child is born a girl, kill it), and physical strength was ideally subordinate to virtue. In the same way, now, members of the Bahá'í Faith intend also to create a new level of civilization. The Bahá'í Faith appeared on the planet when slavery was a venerable human institution, women were subordinate to men, religious fanaticism was considered a righteous virtue, nations were "governed" by the whim of a monarch, and exploitation of others was a moral right. Bahá'ís are attempting to establish a society where each person is valued simply for having been created by God, where gender, ethnicity and other differences are valued embellishments, where no person has dominating power or control over any other person, where the welfare of one is vital to all and every person has a voice and a vote.

This task is comparable to a few small boulders trying to divert a river. Initially there appears to be no effect, but they provide a foundation. When the boulders are in sufficient number: the river will be moved. This account is the story of the first few small boulders in the river of Topeka, Kansas during the twentieth century.

Introduction

The Bahá'í community of Topeka has grown gradually beginning with the first Bahá'í who moved here in 1906. Rose Hilty accepted the Bahá'í teachings as a result of the Bahá'í class in Enterprise, Kansas in 1897 and, nine years later, moved to Topeka. After she had been in Topeka a few years another resident of Topeka learned of the Bahá'í Faith from her family in Urbana, Illinois. Eventually the Bahá'í teacher from Urbana and others came to Topeka and a class was formed to study the Bahá'í teachings on a more regular basis. Very little information survives from this time.

Bahá'í activities and interest appears to have died down in the 1920s until a professional lecturer came to Topeka and a new class was started in the early 1930s. Some of the former members were part of this group too, so continuity was maintained. In 1935 the governing council of the Bahá'í community of Topeka was formally organized and records have been kept since that time.

The council, or Spiritual Assembly, has guided and expanded the activities of the Topeka Bahá'í community. Not only have classes on the Bahá'í teachings been held continuously, but worship

services and other activities also. Gradually Bahá'ís of Topeka became active in regional, national and international activities of the larger Bahá'í community until today it is not unusual for a local believer to travel to another part of the country, or world, to assist or participate in some activity or event held by the Bahá'ís there.

The creation of a new religious community has necessitated the peaceful change of laws and expectations of others to allow the community to function. For instance, the laws of Kansas governing the authorization of marriage had to be changed to recognize Bahá'í marriage. The expectation of employers and schools that Bahá'ís will ask for time off to observe Bahá'í holy days had to be created. All this takes time and, in some cases, repetition.

At the same time Bahá'ís have tried to practice and share the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh with the rest of the city. Proselytizing is forbidden, so actions have to take the place of words. How does one demonstrate the belief in the equality of the races in a time and place of segregation? How can women function equally with men in a male dominated society? How can one “consort” with the followers of all religions when some religions deny even the possibility of praying together? These are some of the challenges faced by members of the Bahá'í Faith. This is the story of the efforts of their first century.

Beginnings in Topeka

The Bahá'í Faith became a part of the life of the city of Topeka in September 1906 when a family moved here. The family came from Enterprise, Kansas, near Abilene. This was not in itself unusual, many families move to the capital city each month. The unusual fact about this family was that both husband and wife had attended the classes on the Bahá'í Faith that had been held in Enterprise nine years before, and the wife was one of those who had accepted the Bahá'í Faith as being true. This change in residence for the family set in motion a chain of events which grew stronger with the passing of decades, and continues today. This first Bahá'í to live in Topeka was Rose, wife of Leonard Hilty.

Her connection to the Bahá'í Faith goes back to 1897. That summer the first Bahá'í classes were held in Enterprise, Kansas, where Rose Hilty lived, and with her husband, had attended the classes. They were held in his mother's home. It is unclear from the newspaper reports if one or two series of class sessions were held. Leonard's mother had invited a guest for the summer to come from Chicago to teach the class. She had learned of the teacher and his new religion from her daughter Josephine, Leonard's older sister, who was in Chicago. Not much is known of Josephine's contact with the Bahá'í community, but the Enterprise news articles said she had accepted the teachings of the new religion.

These Bahá'í classes in Enterprise attracted state-wide news attention. All across Kansas, from Atchison to Wichita, from Kansas City to Hays, news articles or other notices of the class were printed. Forty articles or other references to the classes have been found in twenty-three newspapers in fifteen cities all across Kansas. This could well be the first press coverage of events in the American Bahá'í community.¹

Two of these news articles appeared in Topeka. They appeared in both the *Topeka Daily Capital* and the *Topeka State Journal* in July 1897. These were the largest of any outside the Abilene-Enterprise area. This was “newsworthy” because of the attendance in the classes of a Regent of Kansas State Agricultural College (now Kansas State University). This regent was Chris Hoffman who attended the classes in the parlor of the home of his aunt, Barbara Ehram.

The headline of the article on page three of the *Topeka Daily Capital* of 14 July clearly indicates the subject of interest: “Hoff-man’s New Religion.” The article is reprinted intact from the *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* except for omitting the last paragraph referring to individuals who would have been only of interest in the Abilene-Enterprise area.²

The *Topeka State Journal*, carried the same article but with more editing. Opinionated comments and the last paragraph were omitted. These changes made the article a much more objective piece of news. In the *Journal* the article was titled, “Healer At Enterprise,” referring to the practice of the teacher of “healing” by touch. The article states that he cured one of the Ehram boys of colic and helped a blind “little girl named Hilty” to distinguish between light and dark and some colors. No other mention has been found of such “healings.”³

The subtitles of both articles indicate the reason they were printed: “The People Found Out What Ails the Agricultural College Regent,”⁴ and more specifically: “An Arabian Teaches a New Doctrine – C. B. Hoffman Investigates It.”⁵ Unusual for the time, both newspapers give credit for the article – but not to the same place. The *Capital* credits, “From the Abilene Chronicle,” while the *Journal* simply gives a dateline: “Enterprise, July 14.” Reprinting news articles from one newspaper to another was common practice at the close of the nineteenth century.

The article tells about the holding of the classes, some of the prominent people who attended, and some ideas about the content of the classes. Details of what was actually taught in the classes remained a mystery to the reporters because the teacher insisted on secrecy. This secrecy may have created some allure for the classes, but is not an element of the Bahá'í Faith, merely part of this teacher’s method of presentation.

The genesis of these classes goes back to the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, in Chicago. At that event mention was made of the Bahá'í Faith in one of the speeches. This sparked the interest of at least one member of the audience and, in his search for more information, he came in touch

with Ibrihim Kheiralla. Kheiralla was a Syrian who had come to the U.S. from Egypt where he had recently learned a little about the Bahá'í Faith. Though his knowledge was meager, it was more than anyone else in America knew, so he was the expert. A small class was formed the next year and the American Bahá'í community was launched.

Kheiralla taught his own limited understanding of the Bahá'í teachings along with his own interpretation of Biblical prophecy. His ideas found such a receptive audience that by the end of the nineteenth century the number of believers in America numbered several thousand. A tiny handful were in Enterprise, Kansas. Enterprise was the second city where he gave the classes, the first was Chicago. These were the first two Bahá'í communities west of Egypt, a notable distinction of Kansas and Bahá'í history.

On his way back to Chicago, from Enterprise, Kheiralla stopped in Topeka. An article in the *Topeka Daily Capital* reports on this. The article does not mention the Bahá'í Faith or the classes he gave in Enterprise, it is about a medallion given to the Private Secretary of the Governor of Kansas by the Khedive of Egypt when the secretary was on tour there. The Khedive was the ruler of Egypt at the close of the nineteenth century. The article is titled, "Ed Pasha's Jewels."⁶ Kheiralla, having lived in Egypt, was an obvious expert on things Egyptian, no one else in Kansas came close. The article does not indicate why he stopped in Topeka, but with his connections through students of his class in Enterprise, he had access to the highest state officials. He may have made the stop because of his interest in obtaining personal influence and power.

This desire on his part became a stumbling block. When the first group of American Bahá'ís traveled to Haifa to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Head of the Bahá'í Faith, and learn the Bahá'í teachings firsthand, they learned of discrepancies between what Kheiralla taught and actual Bahá'í teachings. For a brief time after that Kheiralla retracted some of his ideas, but this did not last. In 1900 he renounced 'Abdu'l-Bahá and withdrew himself from the Bahá'í community. This caused confusion and bewilderment among the Bahá'ís in America and many drifted away. The Bahá'ís in Kansas were left high and dry.

Kheirallah had taught the Bahá'í Faith as if it was a purely private affair of personal belief and devotions, he did not teach about participation in the Bahá'í community. He did not know about that. As a result, the Bahá'ís in Enterprise, and Rose later, did not know how to function as a Bahá'í community. Since these were the very earliest days of the Bahá'í Faith, there were few Bahá'í institutions or organized communities anywhere in the world and little formal support for the Bahá'ís who were isolated, such as in Enterprise.

Aside from some matters of doctrine, Kheiralla had problems with leadership and control. Kheiralla wanted to lead and control the Bahá'í community in America, but the Bahá'í Covenant did not allow for that, so he went his own way. This brings up a unique distinction about the Bahá'í

Faith, an aspect that has never appeared before in the world's religious history. This is important to note because it affects the rest of Topeka Bahá'í history. It explains the position and importance of certain individuals who will appear frequently in this story and how the Bahá'ís in Topeka responded.

The teachings of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith were written down or dictated and verified by Him. In this case the Prophet-Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, wrote or dictated His teachings and placed His seal on them to verify their authenticity. This established the Bahá'í canon of scripture. In His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh set forth His teachings, appointed His successor, and outlined the organizational system. The latter two are part of the Bahá'í Covenant. This had never happened before in any earlier religion and Kheiralla was unaware of it. When he did learn, he refused to accept it.

Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God) appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Servant of the Glory) to be His successor. This initiated the Bahá'í Covenant. Bahá'u'lláh specified in writing, as part of His will, that to be a Bahá'í one must accept both His own authority and the authority He conferred on 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It is a package deal. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in turn, in His Will and Testament, created an institution to succeed Him, known as the Guardianship. He also appointed Shoghi Effendi to be the first Guardian. This now became part of the Bahá'í Covenant and administrative order. Shoghi Effendi focused his energies on implementing the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to build up the rest of the administrative order and encouraged the Bahá'ís to teach the faith to new people. These processes directly impacted the Bahá'ís in Enterprise and Topeka.

After Kheiralla's refusal to accept the Bahá'í Covenant, he removed himself from the Bahá'í community. His departure created a vacuum in the communication network, cutting off those isolated believers whose primary contact was through him. This isolation of the Bahá'ís in Kansas continued when Rose moved from Enterprise to Topeka.

We know the date she came to Topeka because in the 13 Sept. 1906 edition of the *Enterprise Journal* (a weekly newspaper), a notice appeared on the front page. "Mrs. L. J. Hilty and daughter, Lovelia, went to Topeka Tuesday where they will make their home."⁷ On the masthead of the newspaper the date of the edition is preceded by "Thursday," so we can date the arrival of the first Bahá'í in the capital city to be two days before: 11 Sept. 1906.

Rose Hilty very likely knew she was the first Bahá'í to live in the capital city, but it was probably less important to her than reuniting her family. Her husband had already been in Topeka for several months at his new job, now the family was together again. It is quite possible that one of the first activities of the family, in exploring this new, large city in which they now lived, was to visit the recently completed state capital building. It had been finished just three years before and was widely known to be the site of legislative contention. The power struggle between the Populists

and Republicans was so fierce one year that one party barricaded itself inside the legislative chambers until the other hacked the doors down. This made national news.

Rose Hilty was born Rosa Abbuehl on 3 Dec 1863. Her name was Americanized at some point to: Rose. She was the second of twelve children of immigrants Kasper and Christina Reichart Abbuehl. Her father was native Swiss and her mother, native German, so German was the language of the home. Her parents met and married as recent settlers on Coal Creek near Grasshopper Falls, Kansas. The children were raised there on the family farm.

She traveled to Enterprise, Kansas to marry Leonard Hilty. He had been born near her and their families likely kept in touch after his family moved to Enterprise. His name had also been Americanized from Leonhard to Leonard. He and Rose married on the first day of 1881, less than a month after her seventeenth birthday. They had three children, all girls. One died as an infant, another was blind, or nearly blind, from birth.

The Hilty's owned several farms and various properties in the Enterprise area at different times. Leonard farmed and performed other jobs from time to time. When the family moved to Topeka, they retained some of their property in Enterprise. In the summer of 1897, both Rose and Leonard attended the Bahá'í classes in the home of Barbara Ehram, Leonard's mother, in Enterprise. Rose formally accepted the Bahá'í Faith while Leonard did not. She was one of the "little band of believers," her mother-in-law mentioned a couple of years later.⁸

Because of lack of contact between Bahá'ís in Enterprise and those in other places, the Bahá'ís in Enterprise grew desperate for fellowship and information. With no formal system of communication yet in place among the Bahá'ís, Rose planned a trip to Chicago in 1899 to meet other Bahá'ís and learn more about the Bahá'í teachings. A sudden need for surgery prevented the journey. No evidence has been found to indicate the trip was ever made, but her commitment was great enough to attempt it. The Bahá'ís in Kansas remained isolated except for infrequent personal correspondence.

In 1905, while still in Enterprise, Rose, with over 400 other American Bahá'ís, signed a petition to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This was one of many such petitions which circulated through the American Bahá'í community at different times for believers to sign. She and only one other believer in Enterprise (Mrs. Mary M. F. Miller, wife of the Methodist minister) signed it. This suggests that the others were either out of town, as Rose's mother-in-law often was, or had lost interest. At this point, we do not know.

The text of the petition has not yet been identified but the reply to it was printed as a pamphlet with the names of signatories included. 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed these believers, "O ye my divine friends!" He called upon the Bahá'ís to improve the moral character of their lives, "The hearts

should be purified and cleansed from every trace of hatred and rancor and enabled to engage in truthfulness, conciliation, uprightness and love toward the world of humanity; so that the East and the West may embrace each other like unto two lovers, enmity and animosity may vanish from the human world, and the Universal Peace be established!”⁹

This tablet was translated in the U.S. and dated 3 January 1906, by Ali Kuli Khan, a member of the Persian legation to the United States, who, twenty-five years later, would visit Topeka. A printed copy with the names of the signatories was kept by Rose and reached the Topeka Bahá’í Archives.

In 1907, Maud Kirkpatrick, another member of the Enterprise Bahá’í class, also moved to Topeka from Enterprise. No records survive from these years to indicate what Rose and Maud may or may not have done with a Bahá’í focus. Maud died in Topeka in 1911 and was buried in Enterprise beside her infant daughter.

In the December 1911 issue of *Everybody’s*, a nationally circulated magazine, appeared an article entitled, “The Light in the Lantern.” Reading this article prompted Barbara Ehram to write twice to Rose, her daughter-in-law. The first is dated the 4th of that month. She vented a conviction she appears to have carried since the Bahá’í class was held in her home in Enterprise years before, “I don’t think Bahá’ism was meant to be secret. I read the nice article about it in the *Everybody’s*.”¹⁰ And, two weeks later she specifically asked, “Did you read a big article in *Everybody’s* about the Bahá’í movement?”¹¹ The return correspondence has not been found.

This article would certainly have come as a surprise to those very earliest believers, such as Rose in Topeka, who had been taught to keep their faith a secret – one of Kheirallah’s peculiarities. This article was written by Ethel S. Stevens, the maiden name of Lady Drower, a Middle Eastern and Mandaean scholar. She had lived for many years in the Middle East and apparently spent time with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In addition to this article, she wrote another about the Bahá’í Faith published earlier that year and a novel (*The Mountain of God*, reprinted in the 1970s in *World Order*). The article is objective, accurate and comprehensive.

In the article the author describes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

This servant of Baha is a man with shrewd, kindly eyes, courteous eyes that seem to look into you instead of at you, but that instinctively make you like them and all that goes with them. A keen, sun-tanned friendly face is framed as in silver by his long, white hair and a beard; an expression that is alert, intelligent, and serene; a walk that is dignified without being conscious; a carriage that is particularly commanding. In him you see an Old Testament patriarch personified. Always he wears the snowy turban, the robe of plain white linen, and the gray wool

overgarment peculiar to all Persians of high standing, while behind him, at the distance prescribed by respect, walks a group of his disciples with folded hands.

Regard him well, my friends, for in him you behold one of the most significant figures in the religious world today; one who is perhaps doing more for the uplifting of the Oriental than any other force; one who has actually suffered for his faith; one whom nearly two millions of people hold in greatest reverence as the Light in the Lantern, the Knowledge within the Gate.

This hour when the sun sinks behind the Samaritan hills is his time for receiving visitors; and, however long and tiring his day's work has been, he never refuses to admit and talk with those who have any just claim upon his time, though no Bahá'í would presume to visit Haifa without first obtaining his permission.

Leaving our shoes without the door, after the Oriental fashion, we enter a reception room, spacious, airy, and spot-less, its woodwork and undecorated walls painted white, and the low divans that encircle it covered with unpretentious linen. It is a room with many windows, and jars of blushing roses stand on every table, for, as a result of his long imprisonment, perhaps, Abbas Effendi requires a wealth of light and flowers.

He possesses to a positively miraculous degree the faculty of interesting himself in every human soul that asks his spiritual or material aid, and it is this very power which has made him so passionately beloved by his disciples. But above all, he possesses that subtler quality of spirituality which is felt rather than understood by those with whom he comes in contact. Gentle, genial and courteous always, he receives, instructs, advises, and assists with unfailing tact and understanding the cosmopolitan stream of pilgrims which flows so steadily and so increasingly toward this little Syrian coast town."¹²

Further evidence of continued interest comes from a letter the next year. Written on 21 May 1912, Barbara told Rose about the recent experience of another Bahá'í in Enterprise who had just shared it with her. The other Bahá'í was Elizabeth Frey. She and her daughter had just returned from Chicago where they had attended the Bahá'í convention and met 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Barbara related to Rose, "Mrs. Frey was here last Sunday. She is so happy that she could see Abbas Effendi ('Abdu'l-Bahá) and could have a few words with him. He can really inspire and impress the people with the desire and feeling of the truth of a higher life. He would give private blessings to all the Delegates that came from afar off."¹³ Elizabeth Frey and her daughter are the only Kansans known to have met 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

One other note has been found about Bahá'í activities in Topeka about this time.

Later after Mrs. Hilty and her family had moved to Topeka to live, she helped to organize a group of about 12 or 14 people in the year of 1912. This was the first appearance of the movement in organized form in Topeka.

In time the interest lagged and only 2 or 3 loyal believers succeeded in keeping the group alive. They were Mrs. Hilty, her daughter Lovelia and Miss Bertha Hyde who later married Prof. Kirkpatrick of Washburn College and later went to live in Michigan.

Through the years following, Mrs. Hilty met and corresponded with several of the outstanding Baha'i teachers: Albert Vail, George (Louis) Gregory, Thornton Chase and Mason Remey. Mrs. Hilty also told us about seeing 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a vision about the year 1912.'¹⁴

None of the correspondence mentioned here has yet been found. These individuals Rose wrote to were all prominent in the American Bahá'í community at the time and all but one (Thornton Chase, who died in 1912) continued to play a further role in the Bahá'í history of Topeka.

In the 1910's a new name enters the Bahá'í history of Topeka, this is Bertha Hyde. She had come to Topeka in 1908 to help raise the son of her widowed brother, Arthur Hyde, the first professor of history at Washburn College. Bertha had been born in Connecticut in 1874. Despite the death of her father, leaving her family destitute, she attended Holyoke, graduating in 1898 and taught science for eleven years before coming west. A year after arriving in Topeka she resumed teaching, this time at Central Park Elementary. Bertha had family in Urbana, IL where Albert Vail, a Unitarian minister, lived. He met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1912. Two years later he started a class in his church to teach the interested members of his congregation about the Bahá'í Faith. The members of this class became the Urbana Bahá'í community, among them, Bertha's sister. It is likely that Bertha's sister shared the news with her soon after learning of it herself, so Bertha could have entered the Bahá'í history of Topeka about 1914-1915. The specific date is unknown.

In the last months of 1918, another of the many petitions to 'Abdu'l-Bahá was circulated among the American Bahá'ís, this one asking for Him to return. Due to the time necessary to assemble the signatures and send it by ship to Haifa, it was May 1919 before a reply could be given. It was published, with the names of all the signers in *Star of the West*, the American Bahá'í magazine. The only name from Kansas was that of Bertha Hyde, in Topeka. Was she the only Bahá'í in Topeka? Or merely, the only one who signed? We do not know.

There is a reference to a Bahá'í study class being held in Topeka with a date of 1918 and a list of students is given. "Members of this class during this time were – Mrs. Rose Hilty, Miss Lovelia Hilty, Miss Bertha Hyde, Mr. and Mrs. L.M. Kraege, H.R. Whittlesey, Miss Susan Whittlesey, Mrs. Margaret Williams, Mrs. Etta Trump, Mrs. Nellie Amos, Mrs. Etta Gilmore, Miss Anna Boyd, Miss Jennie Boyd."¹⁵

There is some inaccuracy in this list, though to what extent has not yet been determined. In 1917 Rose and Leonard returned to Enterprise for a few years, so she would not likely have been in the class in 1918. The 1916 Topeka city directory lists the Hiltys as living at 1626 Topeka Blvd (Leonard's occupation as "Sheldon Realty Co.") and their daughter, Lovelia, living with them.¹⁶ The directory for 1917 says simply, "moved to Enterprise Kans."¹⁷ In 1920 they returned to Topeka; the 1921 directory shows them once again in Topeka and living at 626 Topeka.¹⁸ Once she returned, it is logical that she would have been a member of the class. A note survives about the 1920's that, "Meetings were held at the home of Mrs. Rose Hilty and at times also at the Universal Truth Center, 504 west 10th street."¹⁹

In the spring of 1919 news was reported to the larger Bahá'í community that a class to study the Bahá'í Faith had been formally organized here, but no details were mentioned in the published report. This announcement was made by Albert Vail who had helped organize the class (so there is a direct connection between events in Urbana and Topeka). He told about this at the "Second Bahá'í Teaching Convention of the Central States." The report of the convention states that he reported on the formation of, "new and joyous groups this winter in Keokuk, Kansas City, Topeka and Omaha."²⁰ But no more details were given.

Shortly after that Bahá'ís in Topeka would have read, in the July 1919 issue of *Star of the West*, about the 11th annual Bahá'í convention where a special collection of Tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá were presented to the American Bahá'í community. They had been written during the war, but due to mail being stopped, they had only recently been received. These Tablets contained 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions to the American Bahá'ís for spreading the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith around the world. This was the mission given to the American Bahá'í community. These instructions formed the backbone for the teaching projects of the next century.

'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed separate Tablets to different sections of the country. Kansas was included with the group of "Central States." To the Bahá'ís here, He wrote, "These twelve Central States of the United States are like unto the heart of America, and the heart is connected with all the organs and parts of man. If the heart is strengthened, all the organs of the body are reinforced..."

"O ye friends of God! Exert ye with heart and soul, so that association, love, unity and agreement be obtained between the hearts..."²¹ This connected the Bahá'ís of Kansas with the larger Bahá'í community of America and the world.

Sometime in 1918 or 1919 Bertha and other believers in Topeka signed a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They were very likely members of the class that had been formed here that year, there would have been no other reason for the connection. In the reply He listed their names and promised a spiritual victory. Bertha considered her victory to have been realized a little over a decade later.

Bertha Hyde left Topeka in 1922 in sympathetic support of her brother's colleague, Dr. John E. Kirkpatrick, when he was dismissed from Washburn College. A crisis had developed in 1919 as Kirkpatrick and Washburn's President MacVicar could not reach a mutual understanding. MacVicar did not want Kirkpatrick disseminating his radical ideas, such as democratizing the administration of the college, so Kirkpatrick was dismissed. He and Bertha married in 1924 and settled in Olivet, Michigan where he taught at the college there.

In the late 1920s Bertha had begun writing for *Star of the West* and was appointed Assistant Editor in 1927. The name of the magazine was eventually changed to *World Order*. She was asked, in 1940, to become an editor of *The Bahá'í World*, a series of survey volumes covering activities of the Bahá'í world community. She also helped found Louhelen Bahá'í School in Davison, Michigan in the 1930s and was elected Secretary of the School Committee. Many statements about Bahá'í educational philosophy from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith were addressed to her as secretary. In 1948 she died as a result of injuries in a traffic accident. She is buried in Olivet. Her contributions to the Bahá'í community have touched all corners of the globe, but few know that they began here, in Topeka.

The names of Topeka Bahá'ís listed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that survive from 1919 are significant in that they are all we have for a membership list of believers here in that time. Though other individuals in Kansas wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá personally (such as James T. Hall and Fred Dyer in Wichita in 1902 and Ruth Klostermyer in Atchison in 1920), no evidence has been found to indicate that anyone else from Topeka wrote directly to Him.

The names of those in Topeka who signed a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá were: Nellie Amos, Anna & Jennie Boyd, Bertha Hyde, Louis & Nina Kreage, Harry R. and Susan Whittlesley, Margaret Williams, Etta Trump, and a "Mrs. Hardy." Many of these are the same that Rose mentioned as being members of the class she was part of. Some of these names will appear further in this story.

Nellie Amos is one. In addition, she was also a member of the Bahá'í community later in the 1930s for several years. In the 1930's she was elected to Chair the Spiritual Assembly and, one year, elected delegate to the National Bahá'í convention. She appears to have withdrawn from participation some years before she died in 1948.

Anna & Jennie Boyd were sisters whose father was one of the earliest residents of Topeka (he is first listed in an 1870s city directory). Neither sister married and both are listed as seamstresses after their father's death. For a time, their brother was the county Treasurer. Anna died in 1923 after being struck down by a car at 10th and Kansas, and Jennie died the next year. Both are buried in Topeka Cemetery.

Louis & Nina Kraege were also members of the Topeka Bahá'í community through to the early 1930s when they moved out of town. While in Topeka he was Secretary of the Independent Telephone Company and, on the side, President of the Universal Truth Center. When a traveling Bahá'í teacher came to Topeka in 1920, he announced that the Truth Center contained a complete set of Bahá'í literature.

Harry R. and Susan Whittelsey, brother and sister, were President and Secretary of Whittelsey Mercantile which their father had founded several decades before. They owned and operated a local chain (that eventually grew to seven) of "Owl" grocery stores in Topeka. They do not appear to have maintained any further connection to the Bahá'í community.

Margaret Williams, the widow of Barker Williams, was, in addition to the Bahá'í class, also Librarian of the Universal Truth Center which used her address, so the library was likely in her home. She maintained a connection to the Bahá'í community until her death in 1935. She is buried in Topeka Cemetery.

Etta, short for Henrietta, Trump was the sister of Margaret Williams and wife of Charles P. Trump, yard foreman for Thomas Lumber Company. Her name no longer appears in Topeka city directories after her husband's death about 1922. Years later, when her sister died, she was living in California. No more is known of her connection to the Bahá'í community.

No information is known about the "Mrs. Hardy" who signed the letter. There were six families with that name in the city directories at that time and her name does not appear in any later records, so it is not possible at this time to know which of the six Mrs. Hardys signed the letter.

We can assume that some of these Bahá'ís were involved in preparations for a special Bahá'í teacher who stopped in Topeka in December of 1920. He was sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to America and, in the course of his trip, came to Topeka. This was Mirzá Asadu'lláh Fádil. Known as Jináb-i-Fádil, he arrived in Topeka on the 18th from Lincoln, Nebraska and left on the 21st for Kansas City. Proclamation of the independent status of the Bahá'í Faith was a by-product of his visit. In the first newspaper article about his trip, in the *Topeka Daily Capital*, it clearly stated that he is a Christian, which is true in so far that Bahá'ís accept the divinity of Christ. In the same manner Bahá'ís can also be considered Muslims, Jews, etc. The Bahá'í Faith is independent, but recognizes the truth of the Founders of other Divine Religions. "Professor Fazel, who is a Christian, has two purposes in his tour, that of lecturing on the doctrines of universal peace, universal religion, which is the Christian religion, and universal language; and the study of American customs and schools."²²

The later article, the next evening in the *Topeka State Journal*, just as clearly stated that he was Bahá'í. "Persecution by the Turks was the lot of Professor Mazandarani when he adopted his faith, known as the Bahá'í movement in Persia...."²³ This is the first news article that has been found in

Topeka newspapers that clearly identifies the Bahá'í Faith. The article concluded by reporting on the Sunday afternoon lecture saying that Jináb-i-Fádil had said that, "The teaching of Christ should be accepted without question."²⁴ Of course they should.

Other lectures were held at such places as Washburn College, the Elks Club and the Universal Truth Center. At the latter, one member of the audience remarked, "I've always felt that too many missionaries are sent to the Orient, but I'm delighted to realize that now missionaries are coming from the Orient to give us knowledge and wisdom."²⁵

Two people came from out of town to help prepare for this special visitor to Topeka. One was Albert Vail, the other was Rose Hilty. She and Leonard returned to Topeka and decided to stay here near their daughters who had remained in Topeka when they had returned to Enterprise a few years before.

That next spring the first administrative organization was undertaken by Bahá'ís in Topeka. A year earlier, at the Second Teaching convention for the Central States, the proposition was approved to request all large Bahá'í communities to organize themselves and elect a full slate of officers, smaller communities were urged to, at minimum, elect a Treasurer, even if no other officers. This level of organization would help regularize the flow of contributions necessary to finance the construction of the House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois and support traveling teachers going from community to community. In Topeka, at least the latter was accomplished.²⁶ A regional "Committee of Nineteen," (nineteen members) was appointed to assist in this process, and also publish a regular newsletter. In April 1921 an election was held and Bertha Hyde was elected Treasurer. Several contributions were received by Bahai Temple Unity from her as Treasurer after that date. Bahai Temple Unity was the name of the national organization of the time. No evidence of any other officer has been found and it is quite possible that only a Treasurer was elected.

At the end of that year, the Bahá'ís in Topeka would have been startled to read of the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in their newspaper. The 1 December 1921 issue of the *Topeka Daily Capital* carried a brief notice on page two: "Baha'i Leader Dies. London. Nov. 30 – Abdul Baha Abbas, leader of the Baha'i movement, died at Hafar (Haifa), Syria, Monday, according to a dispatch to the London Times."²⁷ More news would come later through Bahá'í channels. At the time of His death, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a Knight of the British Empire, knighted for His success in preparing for and warding off a famine in the area during the years of the Great War. He never used the title: Sir Abbas Effendi. Rose received a copy of the folder about his funeral and kept it for the rest of her life. Her grand daughter gave it to the Bahá'ís.

Those years in Topeka were remembered by Sylvia Parmalee, Bertha Hyde's niece. Bertha and her mother had corresponded and discussed the difficulties they faced. Both her mother, in Urbana, and Bertha, in Topeka, were trying to help their new Bahá'í communities learn to function as Bahá'í

communities, observing the Bahá'í holy days, feast days, etc. Sylvia recalled that it was frustrating for both of them.

Gradually, over the decades, the manner of worship and administration of a Bahá'í community became better understood. This is not the same as simply beginning a new church. The pattern of the organization of a church cannot be followed. There is no position of leadership and the form of worship and outlook on life is very different. In fact, worship is not a separate part of life. Service to others is promoted by Bahá'u'lláh as being worship. Work, when performed in the spirit of service, is also worship. So, as far as Bahá'ís are concerned, worship is pretty much a continuous element of daily life, and each person has their own daily devotional practices. Each believer is responsible to set their own personal and family priorities for participation in their endeavor to live a well-balanced life of service.

Bahá'u'lláh has instructed each of His followers to pray daily and study the Bahá'í scriptures briefly at least twice each day, in the morning and the evening. To fulfill the obligation of daily prayer, He revealed three specific prayers from which the believer is to select one to recite. Each of these three emphasizes the relationship of the individual to God. Before reciting (or reading) any of the obligatory prayers, the Bahá'í is to wash his or her hands and face the direction of Bahji, the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Also, each Bahá'í is to meditate once a day and while doing so, recite the Greatest Name, a brief prayer or invocation: 'O Thou the Glory of Glories.' In Arabic this is: 'Allah'u'Abhá.' It is very simple to combine the prayer and meditation. These are done privately. No one checks, or asks if they have been done – it is no one else's business.

For community worship there are weekly devotional services (currently being held on Saturday evenings at the Topeka Friends (Quaker) Meeting house), study circles and children's classes. These are the kinds of activities that have formed the backbone of Bahá'í community life in Topeka along with meetings of the Spiritual Assembly and its consultations with the local Bahá'í community. The schedule and topics have varied over the century to meet the needs of a continually changing and evolving community. Many of these endeavors, holy days observances and other events, are held jointly by the Topeka and Shawnee County Bahá'í communities. Each of the communities has their own Spiritual Assembly whose members meet as often as needed. Every nineteen days each Assembly reports to and consults with its own community at the Nineteen Day Feast. Some individual believers serve on one or more committees of their Assembly. Several times a year both communities meet together to reflect on and celebrate the accomplishments achieved and set new goals and plans for the next part of the year.

A Bahá'í worship service is not liturgical, therefore there is no set program or formula or ritual. Since there is no clergy, worship is not 'led' by any specific individual, most often there will not appear to be any leader at all. One person, or a committee, will select the scripture and prayers to be

read and anyone who wishes to read may do so. Sometimes a talk (not a sermon), or other kind of presentation, will be given on some topic of interest. Sometimes nothing is pre-selected and people are invited to read what ever appeals to them at the moment. It is a more free-flowing style of worship than many people expect.

Scriptural readings are selected from the Bahá'í Sacred Text: those of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Also, selections can be read from the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, the Qur'án, as well as Buddhist, Hindu and other scriptures. Prayers are generally chosen from the vast number revealed by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá but others can be, and are, used. Holy day observances are very similar but with a focus on the event which that holy day commemorates. Afterwards there are usually some kind of refreshments available and people are encouraged to visit if they wish. There is no collection and no receptacle for donations.

So, what about money? How do Bahá'ís finance their activities?

Contributions to the Bahá'í Funds are private and can be made only by Bahá'ís registered with the National Spiritual Assembly. Bahá'ís have been forbidden, directly by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, to request or collect money from those outside the Bahá'í community. "It would be impossible to conceive any act more contemptible than soliciting, in the name of the one true God, the riches which men possess."²⁸ Contributions, all of which are voluntary, can be made through the Treasurer of a Local Spiritual Assembly, from there they are combined and sent on, or they can be made directly to a specific fund.

There is also a kind of tithe, but it is not a tithe, it is a payment on excess wealth. It is called 'The Right of God,' and is set by Bahá'u'lláh at 1/19 of a person's excess wealth. In the earliest years of the Bahá'í Faith, believers wanted to give Bahá'u'lláh money, but He refused to accept. Even though they begged Him to accept their offerings, He refused. Eventually He revealed the Right of God, and specified that only designated individuals could collect this money – then refused to name anyone to collect it! Finally, some years later, He named one person as 'Trustee' of the money to collect it. But the ability to give this money was limited only to those who could read the instructions – in Persian! If you could not read it, you could not pay it. The instructions were not translated for a hundred years! Only in the closing years of the twentieth century was the information for paying the Right of God made available to English speaking, and other, Bahá'ís. Payment of this is also voluntary.

This is an odd religion that refuses to accept money from outsiders and even, historically, from its own members!! The Bahá'í Faith has, in many areas, redefined what the term 'religion' can mean.

Another example of this is ‘salvation.’ Because the concept and meaning is so different from common usage, Bahá’ís don’t even use the term. First, one has to look at what humans need to be saved from. Bahá’u’lláh teaches that the world was created and continues to be sustained by a Being that is far greater than anything humans can adequately imagine. That Being is called by different names in different cultures and languages, in English the term is: God. God is the creator and sustainer of all of existence. To be distant from that source of life would be a hellish torment. It is that distance and remoteness that we can be saved from.

How can we be saved? By learning more about God, to be able to draw closer to God.

How can we do that? By paying attention to those who have brought exceptional knowledge about God to the human race. These individuals have appeared periodically in human history and great civilizations have arisen after them. Bahá’ís believe that, for the present period of human history, Bahá’u’lláh is that Messenger and the information He brought will most completely save us from the possibility of being remote from God.

Bahá’ís see no reason to take an in-your-face attitude about this. As the Qur’án says: ‘There can be no compulsion in religion.’ Bahá’u’lláh condemns conflict. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá goes so far as to state that two people who are arguing are BOTH wrong! Simply the fact of arguing makes them wrong. Harmony is far more important than being right.

Bahá’u’lláh also wrote about the next world which human souls are destined to enter after this life. “Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure,” and much more.²⁹

Faith in the Bearer of God’s message as necessary for salvation is not unique to the Bahá’í Faith, it is also common to Christianity, Islam and the Zoroastrian faith. What is new and unique in the Bahá’í revelation is that, in this age of emerging global consciousness and interdependence, salvation now requires acceptance, not of just one, but of all the Divine Messengers who have manifested God’s will to humanity.

This acceptance has immediate and practical consequences in our global village. As a result of accepting the Divine Nature of past Messengers, it is not possible for Bahá’ís to hate, reject or put barriers between themselves and the followers of other religions. Bahá’ís do not see anyone as an outsider. No one is beyond the range of God’s mercy and acceptance. There are no infidels, no heathen. All human beings are acceptable in God’s eyes and in the eyes of Bahá’ís.

Bahá’ís in Topeka have tried to convey this encompassing, accepting attitude to others.

At the National Bahá'í Convention of 1925 Corinne True, who had spent the past year traveling and visiting Bahá'í communities in the midwest, reported on her visit to Topeka. No details of this visit were published in the report of the convention. We do know that Rose Hilty, Nellie Amos, the Kreages, Margaret Williams and her sister Etta Trump were all in Topeka then, as were the Whitesleys and 'Mrs. Hardy.' All or some of them would have constituted the small Bahá'í community that she visited.

Corinne True was quite probably the most widely known member of the American Bahá'í community of the time. She was the one who took the petition signed by a vast majority of Bahá'ís in America to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1909 expressing their wish to build a House of Worship in this country. He, therefore, gave her the instructions for the project. When male members of the Bahá'í community later asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá for information about it, He repeatedly instructed them to consult her! In the male dominated American culture of the early twentieth century, this caused extreme consternation among the men. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was teaching them about the equality of women and men.

The next information we have about Bahá'ís in Topeka is from 1931. John and Bertha Kirkpatrick had returned to Topeka at the end of 1930 when he was hospitalized; his brother was President of Security Benefit and they, very probably, had insurance for the hospital here.

Before teaching at Washburn, John had been a Congregational minister (pastor of Seaman Congregational: 1895 to 1898 and various other churches in Kansas) and conducted his own research on the Bahá'í Faith. He had written to a friend in Palestine (a missionary), thinking to get original information nearer the source. Though Neale Alter lived in Jerusalem at the time, he had contacts with Bahá'ís in New York City and London and traveled to Haifa three times for research, at least once after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He did not agree with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's appointment of a Guardian to succeed Him and sided with those who opposed 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He either did not know about the Bahá'í Covenant, or choose to ignore it; this is the only subject not mentioned in his thesis. This point of view colored his perspective which, in turn, soured Kirkpatrick's opinion.

Alter summarized his opinion in a letter to Kirkpatrick saying, "...with the passing of Abdul-Baha, I feel it passed its crest wave, hence to write a book would merely help the Bahá'í cause, which I in no way feel justified in doing..."³⁰ And he passed on advice, "If you know anything of the followers of Shaukey (Shoghi) Effendi in America, the grandson of Abdul-Baha, you can tell them from me that they are all in the wrong."³¹ This is why knowledge of the Bahá'í Covenant is important. You cannot ignore a central element of a religion, then condemn those who are faithful to it.

Alter had written his doctoral thesis on the Bahá'í Faith, one of the earliest on the subject, and most of the information in it is accurate. His conclusions were colored by those who had rejected

the Covenant of Bahá'ú'lláh and by the newness of its crowning institution, the international council. He concluded that the idea of the international council was a bad one. This is understandable since an institution such as this had never before been considered or created. In the conclusion of his thesis, though, he stated another fault. "The most serious limitation of Bahá'ism however is the lack of a distinctive doctrine or doctrines, which will furnish a dynamic and inspire its devotees with missionary zeal to make it a universal religion."³²

He had studied, but he had not understood. Tens of thousands had given up their lives before Alter's time and millions since, all over the globe, have changed their lives as a result of being inspired by this faith, so Alter's assessment is obviously faulty. As with all religions, there are detractors. Alter's negative assessment colored Kirkpatrick's opinion during his marriage with Bertha. They agreed to disagree and did not discuss religion.³³

When Bertha's sister, Mabel Hyde Paine, began editing a compilation of Bahá'í scripture (published as, *The Divine Art of Living*) John agreed to study the selections with Bertha as they added them to their daily devotions. This direct contact with Bahá'í scripture changed his mind. The day before his death in January 1931 in Topeka, he was unable to speak, but wrote a note to Bertha saying: "One thing only, to be a good Bahá'í."³⁴ He is buried in Mt Hope Cemetery in Topeka beside his first wife, Elizabeth (killed in a traffic accident in 1918), and other members of his family. This recognition crowned his life full of other equally progressive ideas.

In the early decades of the 20th century, there was no clear understanding or definition of Bahá'í membership. Lists for mailing purposes were compiled haphazardly and names of the same people would come and go from time to time. Finally, beginning in 1925, the National Spiritual Assembly requested membership lists from local Bahá'í communities. This was one of the changes that came with the transition of the national council to more closely follow the form and functions of a National Spiritual Assembly. Not too long after that, cards were sent out for individuals to use to indicate membership in the Bahá'í community. Individuals who considered themselves to be Bahá'í were asked to complete and sign them in order to compile a definitive membership list.

It is not known what mailing list was used to send these cards out, a notice did appear in the national Bahá'í newsletter, but was that noticed by anyone in Topeka? If anyone in Topeka received these cards, did they consider it important to complete and return them? Rose Hilty, for instance, had been a Bahá'í for over three decades, why should she do something like that now? It is obvious that many Bahá'ís in the country felt the same way because subsequent appeals continued to be made from time to time.

In any case, none of these cards were completed by any of the believers in Topeka, and so the National Assembly eventually concluded that there were no Bahá'ís in Topeka. Local research has shown a different story.

Bahá'í Beginnings

Now our attention will turn to the beginnings of the Bahá'í Faith to gain a historical perspective showing why the twentieth century was the century of the formation of the Bahá'í community.

Different scholars have used different dates for the beginning of the Bahá'í Faith but Bahá'ís use 1844. This is the date of the declaration of a young merchant of Shiraz, Persia (now Iran) to be the Promised One of all religions who would usher in a Revelation from God greater than His own. He is known to history as 'the Báb' or "Gate" and his followers were known as 'Bábís'. One of His followers, while imprisoned for being a Bábí, received a vision that He was the One promised by the Báb. He is known to history as Bahá'u'lláh. He affirmed that the Revelation of the Báb and His own were to be considered as one Divine Message. Bahá'u'lláh announced His mission to a handful of Bábís in 1863, then to the rest of the Bábís in 1866 and to the kings and rulers of the world in 1867 and 1868. Some scholars have chosen one of those dates for their own reasons, but Bahá'ís use the date 1844 because that is when the sequence of Revelations began.

Persia was deep in the grip of fanatical clerics who had extinguished the light of the Qur'án which they assumed they were following. Practices had been added to the teachings of the Qur'án to the effect of negating the social progress and knowledge it had stimulated centuries before. Persia was deep in medieval darkness.

For the crime of being a Bábí, Bahá'u'lláh was exiled from Persia to the Ottoman Empire. He was further exiled over the years to His final place of imprisonment in Akka, the penal colony of the Empire. As the true nature of His message became more and more known the restrictions on His movements were relaxed and He spent his last few years in comparable freedom in the countryside outside Akka. As a result of these exiles, the World Center of the Bahá'í Faith is located in the Haifa/Akka area of present-day Israel.

People came to see Him and wrote to Him for advice and counsel. The written answers became Bahá'í scriptures. Running as a theme through these scriptures are the Bahá'í teachings about other religions. Topeka Bahá'ís have tried to share this perspective with other residents of Topeka through various meetings and presentations over the decades. Bahá'u'lláh affirmed that all revealed religions originate from the same divine source. The differences between them are due to the differing requirements of the times and societies in which they appear and the understanding and interpretation of different peoples. Because they come from the same divine source there is no basis for hate or contention between them. Followers of all religions have found common ground in the Bahá'í community.

Of most interest to Christians are the Bahá'í teachings about Jesus. Or, put more specifically: do Bahá'ís believe in Jesus?

The answer is very simple: Yes. Every Bahá'í accepts Jesus Christ as having the station of the Son of God. This acceptance has been made by millions of Bahá'ís who were formerly Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Muslims and others of no specific faith. And likewise, the Founders of these other faiths are also recognized as Messengers of God. From age to age God has sent a new Mes-senger, one who is the Manifestation of God for that age, to renew religion and help the human race advance. Each time, some people have a problem accepting the new Messenger, the message or the name; today the name Bahá'í may be unfamiliar.

In the Book of Revelation are found references to “a new name” being held by the Christ Spirit when He returns. One verse clearly states: “I will write upon him my new name.” (3:12). If the Book of Revelation is indeed, as Bahá'ís believe, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” then it is Christ saying that there will be a new name by which to identify Him at a later time. Bahá'ís believe this new name is “Bahá'u'lláh,” Who is the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

One Topeka Bahá'í explained it this way while sharing her beliefs in Salina with the parents of several youth who had recently entered the Bahá'í community. May Brown, in 1975, in her eightieth year, and a Bahá'í for some forty years, assured the parents, “I have not forgotten my love for Jesus the Christ. In fact He means more to me now than before, for I see the same love, the same spirit in Christ that I see in this New Manifestation of God, hence my love for one is love for both.”³⁵

Bahá'u'lláh wrote about the crucifixion of Christ, that pivotal event in Christian history, asserting, “Know thou that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee.”³⁶

Every Bahá'í from a Christian background recognizes that accepting Bahá'u'lláh does not mean rejecting Christ. It may seem incompatible, or at least inconceivable to accept both Christ and Bahá'u'lláh, but one does not invalidate the other. Just as the sequence of teachers in school assist the students to progressively learn more about the same subjects, so too does the sequence of Manifestations of God help mankind learn more about our soul and its destiny.

As stated before, Bahá'u'lláh means “Glory of God.” There are many references in the Bible to the Glory of God coming and interacting in human affairs. Baha'is believe this is the age when many of those statements have become literally true.

In addition to affirming and promoting the person and station of Jesus Christ, other basic teachings of the Bahá'í Faith include affirming that there is one Creator of the universe. Though people call the Creator by different names (God, Gott, Allah, etc.), there is only one Creator. The Creator has revealed His/Her/Its (English has no adequate, respectful non-gendered pronoun) will to the human race at different places and different times to enable the human race to advance as a species. Bahá'u'lláh states and science has confirmed that the human race is, in reality, one race. Examples of how the Bahá'ís of Topeka have tried to practice that in their lives will be found later.

It is interesting to look at what was happening in Topeka when the Bahá'í Faith began. In 1844 the deer and the antelope played and the buffalo roamed the future streets and suburbs of what would become the city of Topeka. The Kanza people traveled here, camped, hunted and grew food in places best known to themselves. The meaning of "topeka" most often given is: "a good place to grow potatoes." Contact with people of European descent had occurred but was limited. Colonel John C. Fremont had traveled through the land that would be Kansas and reported crossing the Kansas River on 14 May 1842 at a spot that was very likely in the vicinity of present-day Topeka. A trading post was established in the area six years later.

F.W. Giles, in his history of the beginnings of the city of Topeka, states that in 1844 the Kansas river flooded to such a height that the water extended from what would be third street on the south, then north two miles from the river. He did not state the source of the information but with the trading post here in 1848 the flood would still have been a sensational piece of local information.

Ten years after the Báb declared his mission, the city of Topeka was founded. It is interesting, in light of the significance for Bahá'ís of the number nine (that it is a symbol of unity, being the highest single numeral), that Topeka was founded by nine individuals. These men did not know each other until they had arrived at the side of the river. They had not intended to start a city when they left their homes in eastern states, they had merely been concerned to do what they could to insure that the future state of Kansas would be a state without slavery. From our point in time, we know they succeeded.

They were motivated in part, by defiance. The city of Topeka, specifically, was founded in defiance of the legally recognized government of Kansas Territory. That government, in Tecumseh, was dedicated to spreading slavery to Kansas. Fry W. Giles, one of these nine city founders, who kept a record of all activities of these first Topekans, wrote of their clandestine activities saying, "It would have been regarded as treason to the Free-State cause to have had them recorded in the pro-slavery offices at Tecumseh."³⁷ The streets of Topeka were laid out, lots were sold and even some couples were married, without satisfying any of the legal requirements of the time. Those who settled in Topeka refused to recognize the territorial government in Tecumseh, the capital of

Kansas Territory. After an anti-slavery government was established in Kansas Territory, Giles' records were legally recognized by the legislature as valid.

In 1863, when Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed His mission outside of Baghhdad, the city of Topeka was nine years old and consisted of a few houses huddled on the banks of the Kanza river. The invaders had arrived and had begun to import their civilization. The native Kanza had been largely displaced.

Just a few years later a rare earthquake shook the new city of Topeka. It was the most noticeable earthquake in Topeka's history. It occurred in the afternoon of 24 April 1867. Buildings rocked and people rushed outside, "those from the upper rooms getting down stairs quite regardless of the ordinary rules of decorum,"³⁸ quite an understated way to describe chaos and panic. At one church a funeral was in progress. The building shuddered so much that the casket jumped about and the lid came loose. Some in the congregation imagined the dead man was trying to get out: it was the end of the world and the dead were rising! That church emptied quite rapidly: some people left through the doors, others jumped through the windows – open as well as closed!

Renewal and Resurrection

A new chapter opened in the history of the Bahá'í Faith in Topeka in 1933. That August a professional lecturer, who also gave lectures on the Bahá'í Faith, came through Topeka. Her name was Orcella Rexford and she lectured mainly on nutrition. After each week of paid lectures, a free lecture on religion was offered. A participant reported,

There were about 50 to 70 people who attended her lectures and then one night she told us that she would give a lecture on religion on Sunday. Well, we (the writer and her husband) didn't go that time as we wouldn't think of missing our own church services. Then when we went to her next regular lecture the people were all buzzing about that religious lecture. It was something! Why, she even told us that Christ had returned. That was too much for us so we went to her next lecture on religion. Then she told us about progressive revelation, explained that there have been many messengers from God such as Abraham, Christ, Muhammad, Moses and even Buddha and Krishna, each with a message for their day to their people.

She even told us not to believe her just because she said something, but to investigate and read the words Bahá'u'lláh wrote and also those of His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá and find out for ourselves if they were true.

The one principle that shook us was 'the equality of men and women.' Why, when she said that you could just see the men squirm in their seats and the women snicker up their sleeves.

Every one was sure this was a crazy idea. It was true, women were just beginning to be educated, and in some ways feeling that they were equal, but how terrible that they were really the same as men. Why, the man was really the head of the family. He made decisions and if the wife didn't like it, she could holler a little but not too much because if his decision didn't turn out to be right, it was his fault and she had nothing to do with it!³⁹

May Brown explains, in her memoirs, how she and her husband came to attend this class:

In about late August 1933 a man came to visit our goat dairy as we were the only ones in town that had an 'A' rating. My husband, Paul Brown, had made a nice goat barn, room for cooling and bottling milk in connection with the milking shed, etc. At the time Paul did not have much work as he was a carpenter and builder. This was during the depression and no one was building houses etc.

This man looked things over and asked a few questions, in answer to which he made me the following proposition: His wife, Orcella Rexford, would be in town for several days giving lectures on health and if we could furnish them goat milk for the time they were here, she would give us free tickets and free reference books she had for sale. As we had plenty of goat milk we agreed. We had only a few customers for goat milk as well as a few quarts which we delivered to the hospitals for those who wanted goat milk for babies who could not take cows milk. Orcella recommended it as being especially good for those who had ulcers.

Orcella's lectures were very interesting and very dramatic as she demonstrated so many things such as how white bread (bakery bread) was a bunch of dough – as she took a loaf and wadded it up in a ball and threw it out in the crowd. Her husband, Dr. Gregory, passed out some samples of food made properly – seasoned with special spices and herbs, etc. Whole wheat flour was recommended against white bleached flour. After a few nights of lectures Orcella announced that on Sun-day she would give a lecture on religion. Well, being faithful members of the Seabrook Congregation Church, we did not go to that lecture. Then the next night when we went again to her health lectures, everyone was telling how shocking her Sunday lecture was.

There must have been 75 or 100 people, both men and women, in her health classes. When she told us that if enough wanted to learn about the Bahá'í Faith, thirty or so signed up to hear the Bahá'í lectures as they were free. Not having much else in the way of entertainment, we were glad to go to the lectures. Mrs Ruth Moffett came and gave lectures on the Bahá'í Faith as planned.⁴⁰

At the end of the lecture series, over two dozen people in Topeka decided to form a class to study the Bahá'í Faith in greater detail after the lecturer left. A teacher came from Chicago to help

organize the class. May Brown recalled, “Our teacher, Mrs. Ruth Moffett, came to Topeka several times staying sometimes as long as two weeks. Two members of the group were ready to join immediately, Mrs. Olive Kaley and Mrs. Irena Stevens. They both said, ‘This is what I’ve been waiting for.’ They both waited for a long time before their husbands joined, but they both did eventually.”⁴¹ In one two-week period when she was here, Ruth Moffett packed 46 lectures on various subjects into that time! This class became the Topeka Bahá’í Fellowship, and from the Fellowship came the present Bahá’í community of Topeka.

Several believers from earlier decades were part of the Fellowship, but Rose Hilty was not actively among them, she was elderly and may have been ill. Evidence is skimpy for the last years of her life regarding her Bahá’í connection until 14 February 1934 when Olive Kaley and Pliney Wiley, two members of the newly organized Topeka Bahá’í Fellowship, called on Rose to learn about the early days of the Bahá’í Faith in Kansas. They interviewed her regarding her memories of earlier years in Topeka and the very earliest days of the Bahá’í Faith in Kansas going back to 1897.

The record of the interview with Rose introduces her as, “...Rose Hilty being an acknowledged believer in the Baha’i Movement for a great many years.” And states, “This is her story of the appearance of the movement in Kansas.” The record then summarized the information she shared. “About the year 1900 Abraham Kheiralla an Egyptian came to Enterprise, Kansas. Mrs. Rose Hilty was residing there at the time. Mr. Kheiralla brought his wife and son from Chicago to Enterprise for a vacation. While there he gave the Baha’i Message including the ordinances and instructions. And healed some people while there. He also organized a group of 40 member in Enterprise before leaving.

“This is the first time Mrs. Hilty had heard of the movement but she said she was fully convinced from the very first that it was a message of Truth and she became a believer as soon as possible.”⁴²

After the interview, the Bahá’ís of Topeka voted to send a note of thanks to Rose for sharing her memories, but before the note could be sent, they learned of her death. Flowers were sent to her funeral instead and several believers attended. Rose Hilty died on 5 September 1934 and is buried beside her husband and other family members in Topeka Cemetery.

The notes from the interview formed the only history of the Kansas Bahá’í community until the 1970s when the 40th anniversary of the Topeka Bahá’í Assembly was celebrated. Historical research was begun for that occasion and has continued to this account.

Some time after her death, Lovelia gave her mother’s collection of Bahá’í books and magazines (a complete set of the first American Bahá’í magazine, *Star of the West*) to the Bahá’ís of Topeka, being blind she could not read them herself. This gift formed the basis of the Topeka Bahá’í

Library. Lovelia never married and died in 1970 and is buried in Topeka Cemetery beside her parents.

The Topeka Bahá'í Fellowship met regularly for study and observed the Bahá'í Feasts and holy days. In April 1934 Fellowship members attempted to elect the first Spiritual Assembly of the Topeka Bahá'í community but failed. Bahá'ís in Topeka were unaware that procedures had changed since the 1920's, especially with the creation of the National Spiritual Assembly in 1925, so the process was not completed. For the election of a Spiritual Assembly to be valid it has to be recognized by the National Spiritual Assembly to verify that the individuals elected to it are members of the Bahá'í community and that such individuals are eligible to vote (there are some who are not eligible due to being under age 21, limited mental capacity or flagrant disregard for ordinances which they had said they would uphold).

A letter with the results of the election was sent from Topeka to the local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Chicago. This seemed reasonable. In the earliest decades of the twentieth century the Chicago Assembly functioned somewhat like a regional center. Many of the Topeka Bahá'ís had memories from those years and very likely felt that was the proper procedure. They may have been aware that a National Spiritual Assembly was now in existence, but its address at that time was in New York City and the Topeka Bahá'ís may have felt it was too far away.

The Chicago Assembly wrote back saying, in effect, 'How nice.' And the matter was dropped.

Eventually the National Assembly learned of this attempt, but it was considered too late to validate the election in Topeka. Since Spiritual Assemblies can only be formed in April each year, the Topeka Bahá'ís had to wait until the next spring to try again.

During that year traveling Bahá'ís stopped in Topeka to bring personal contact with the larger Bahá'í community. The most notable of these was Ali Kuli Khan (1899-1966), the retired Charge 'd Affairs of the Persian legation to the United States and translator. His ambassadorial status made him an unusual visitor to Topeka. He was in Topeka in February 1935. He had come from Kansas City where he was staying for a short time with an exhibit of Persian art at the Athenaeum.

In 1899 he had traveled from Persia to the Holy Land and was asked by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to stay and serve as a secretary. A year later 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked him to travel to America. In 1902 he became secretary for the Persian Minister at Washington D.C. By 1906 he had married Florence Breede, becoming the first Persian-American marriage in the American Bahá'í community. He returned to Persia where he was appointed to Washington as Counsel General. Four years later he was appointed the chief diplomatic representative of the Persian government and chargé d'affairs in Washington.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came to America in 1912, Ali Kuli Khan was here to welcome Him. After the Great War he had attended the peace conference at Versailles. The delegation was hoping to obtain a greater standing for Persia among the nations of the world, but that was not realized. From 1921-23 he was chief minister of the Crown Prince Regent’s Court in Tehrán and was then appointed to be minister plenipotentiary of the Five Republics of the Caucasus. Two years later he was back in the U.S. as head of the Persian legation to the U.S. By now he was familiar to the Bahá’ís of the U.S. and was elected a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Bahá’ís of this country.

It is odd that the news article about his visit in the *Topeka Daily Capital* on 9 February 1935 did not mention his diplomatic career. One would think in the capital city, such a governmental connection would be of interest. It only mentioned that he was “an internationally known scholar, writer, and translator...also an artist and art critic.”⁴³ He planned to speak twice the next day, at 3:00 pm. And at 8:00 pm, in the Convention Hall of the Hotel Jayhawk.

Two months after his trip, in April 1935, the National Spiritual Assembly sent a representative, a Dr. Morris, to assist the Topeka Bahá’ís and help them carry out the process of forming a local Spiritual Assembly. The election was successful, the Assembly was formed and duly recognized by the National Spiritual Assembly. The election of the Topeka Assembly brought the national total up to 70, making it today, one of the oldest in the country. The nine members of that first Assembly were: Mr. Paul Brown, Mrs. Irena Stevens, Mrs. Mae Minor, Mrs. Irma Coburn, Mr. Louis Kreage, Miss Ruth Stevens, Mrs. Amos, Miss Teagart and Mrs. May Stone.

These members of the original Assembly in Topeka occupy a unique place in the history of the Topeka Bahá’í community. Unfortunately, for some, only a meager amount of information has been retained. Of these nine, two had been involved with the Bahá’í community since the 1910’s and signed the letter to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. These were Nellie Amos and Louis Kreage, who have been mentioned earlier. A note appears in the local Bahá’í records for 1941 stating that Nellie Amos removed herself from the Bahá’í community that year. Louis Kreage’s name last appears in the local Bahá’í records in 1936 when he and his wife were elected to the Spiritual Assembly, he as Treasurer (she was appointed historian, so both were very involved). The city directory for 1937 lists them being in Topeka, but not in 1938. From that, we can conclude they moved out of town and out of this story.

The names of two other members will be found further in this story so they will be only briefly noted here. One is Paul Brown who was active in the Bahá’í community until his death in 1979. The other is Ruth Stevens who learned of the Bahá’í Faith on a trip to California in the early 1930’s. When she returned home, she discovered that her mother had just begun to study the Faith. Both joined in 1933. Her mother, Irene Stevens, was also a member of the original Assembly in Topeka

and remained active until her death in 1941. In 1936 Ruth married George Ashworth and continued to be active in the Bahá'í community (often serving on the Spiritual Assembly) until her death in 1986.

There are four remaining members of that original Assembly and for some the information is extremely sparse. Mae Minor was the wife of Bert Minor. Both were Bahá'ís, she was elected to the Spiritual Assembly. They did not live in Topeka very long, only the 1935 and 1937 city directories have a listing for them. He was a salesman for L.F. Garlinghouse Co. No more information is known about them. No listing in any city directory has been found for Erma Coburn. There is a Mary E. Coburn, who might be Mary Erma, but additional research is needed to determine that. Maud Taegart, the Recording Secretary of that original Assembly, first appears in the city directories in the 1899/1900 edition. Her occupation is given as a "clerk" at the Santa Fe Railway. Evidently she was promoted because the next directory (for 1902) lists her as a "stenographer" with Santa Fe. For the next half-century she retains that position with the railroad. Oddly, in every listing (except for 1946-1950), she has a different residence. It seems that moving from place to place must have been her hobby! She was active in the Bahá'í community until 1938 when she withdrew her membership.

The last one of these four has a very different story. Mae Stone was elected to the original Assembly in 1935, then elected its Treasurer. She was the wife of George Stone, the most prominent portrait painter Topeka has produced. He died in 1931. Her name first appears in local Bahá'í records in 1935 when she was elected to the Spiritual Assembly and then elected its Treasurer. One would assume she was well-known to be entrusted with that responsibility. She was active in the Bahá'í community until her death in January 1937. But, that is not the end of the story. Three years later, in February 1940, her sister, Bertha Campbell, entered the Bahá'í community and remained active and a pillar of the community until her death in 1973!

A Local Spiritual Assembly is the governing council of the local Bahá'í community and conducts many of the functions of the clergy or priesthood of other religions. Councils are also elected on the regional, national and international levels. All of these councils have nine members and none of those members have any higher status than any other member of the Bahá'í community. The network of these councils may be the largest grass roots democratic movement on the planet.

These councils are composed of ordinary people learning to make corporate decisions. The consultative process of council decision making is a distinct alternative to millennia of authoritative power figures. The existence and operation of these councils constitute a planet-wide social revolution. The decisions these councils make are improving the educational level of the members of their local community, and aim to remove barriers of ignorance and prejudice that have grown up

over generations and centuries. From these councils come new ways of thinking based on the Bahá'í sacred scriptures with the aim of finding unity and agreement.

The election and recognition of the Spiritual Assembly in Topeka did not mean smooth sailing. Despite assistance to carry out the election, other problems soon arose. Learning how to administer the affairs of any group can take some time. The members of this new Spiritual Assembly had no experience with Bahá'í administrative tools or procedures. May Brown remembered, "Eventually the Bahá'í Community was organized with 21 members and an Assembly was elected. Things didn't go too well. We all knew that electioneering should not be tolerated but one elderly couple didn't exactly abide by that rule. There were other problems so the National Spiritual Assembly sent Mrs. Emogene Hoagg, a Bahá'í teacher, to Topeka several times."⁴⁴

Emogene Hoagg (1869-1945) became a Bahá'í in 1898, the first Bahá'í in California. In 1900 she studied the Bahá'í teachings under the foremost Bahá'í scholar of the time, Mirzá Abu'l-Fadl Gulpáygání. He knew no English so it was not an easy process until an interpreter was found who knew both Farsi and English. The first interpreters knew only Farsi and Italian or French. Emogene knew both Italian and French so she made her own translations from them into English, but it was slow going. But she persevered and became, most likely, the best educated of the western Bahá'ís.

Later, in the early decades of the twentieth century, she traveled through the United States, Italy and Alaskan territory sharing the Bahá'í teachings. In 1928 she was asked by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to manage the International Bahá'í Bureau in Geneva, Switzerland, which she did until 1935. Returning to the U.S. she traveled in the south and Midwest, including Topeka. Later she learned Spanish in order to teach in Cuba. She translated, or assisted with translations of Bahá'í scripture into Italian, French and German. Her two-month stay in Topeka had a profound impact.

One of the lessons she taught was the equality of men and women, giving practical application to that fundamental principle. May Brown tells of her difficulty with such a radical idea:

...the National Spiritual Assembly sent Mrs. Emogene Hoagg, a Bahá'í teacher, to Topeka several times and then I think she stayed all winter holding classes every night if anyone came to her apartment for her to teach. At any rate I went as often as I could and one night I was the only one there. She really gave me a good lecture. I have never forgotten it. She said, 'May, you are going to be one of those who makes the decisions.'

I said, 'Oh, I can't do that. It's the men that have always made the decisions and I can't begin now.'

'Oh, yes you can,' she told me. 'You only have to remember one thing.'

‘One thing?’ I was surprised. Only one thing to remember to make decisions? I couldn’t believe it. I knew that wasn’t for me, but I asked anyhow. ‘What’s that?’

Her answer, ‘Decide what you think would be the best for the Cause – not best for one or more individuals, but for the Cause.’ I have tried all these years to do just that.⁴⁵

This principle was actually not that difficult to implement in Topeka. For several early decades of the Topeka Bahá’í community women out-numbered men: they could simply out-vote the men! But changing their own cultural conditioning was difficult.

Another necessary skill to learn was the process of Bahá’í consultation which is crucial to the functioning of any group of Bahá’ís. This is a specific process explained in Bahá’í scripture and implemented by the Guardian. The first steps involve agreeing on the facts, then identifying the spiritual or administrative principles involved. Central to Bahá’í consultation is an attitude of selflessness. When a statement or idea is offered to the group trying to reach a decision, it is no longer the property of the individual who offered it. These form the parameters of the discussion. Through an evaluation and combination of all ideas, a decision is reached.

The next step, which is sometimes the most difficult, is to support that decision even if an individual believes it to be wrong. Only by supporting an idea you believe is wrong can it be obvious to everyone that it is wrong. This is a very challenging concept in a society where adversarial rightness is the norm.

Apparently these two key concepts were not understood sufficiently for the Assembly to function and it was dissolved at the request of the Bahá’ís in Topeka. May Brown recollected, “We sure had a time with that fellowship group. Some wanted to assume more authority than they should have; some wanted to bring pet ideas of their own to include in our studies – such as some (who) belonged to a spiritual group who tried to include their own understanding instead of finding out what Bahá’u’lláh had to say. At first we did not have much literature but depended on teachers to give us the answers.”⁴⁶ In this time several people left the Topeka Bahá’í community and the remainder were able to re-form the Assembly.

The election process that the Bahá’ís in Topeka were gradually learning is somewhat different from other forms of election. Every election in the Bahá’í community, at every level, is done by secret ballot in an attitude of prayer and reverence with no campaigning or nominating. The former are required and the latter are categorically forbidden. Elections are an act of worship. In places where the voters can read and write, such as Topeka, a voting list is printed before the election. This is done after a determination is made by the local and national Spiritual Assemblies of which Bahá’ís are resident in which jurisdiction. The voting lists are distributed prior to the election. Often in Topeka the voting list and ballot are the same piece of paper and the voter simply marks the

names of the nine Bahá'ís felt to be most qualified to serve. The nine individuals with the most votes become the members of the next Spiritual Assembly.

The person receiving the most votes is responsible for calling the first meeting of the new Assembly at which time officers are elected. If officers can't be elected immediately, a date is set for that election. The members of the Assembly serve for the next year or until the next election or until they can no longer serve. If a member of the Assembly moves out of the Assembly's jurisdiction, that person is no longer a member of that Bahá'í community and its Assembly, and a vacancy is created. A byelection is held as soon as possible to fill the vacancy.

Outside of a meeting of the Assembly the member of the Assembly has no authority or weight in the Bahá'í community greater than any other member of the community. Officers of the Assembly only have the status of the office when they are functioning in an administrative capacity. It is only the Spiritual Assembly as a body that has authority in the Bahá'í community. Power seekers do not flourish.

In addition to that earlier mention, there is one more instance of a connection between goats and the Bahá'í Faith in Topeka. This occurred after Paul and May Brown had been members of the Bahá'í community for a several years. I'll let her explain,

“We still had goats and took the *Goat Journal* which had an article about Roy Wilhelm buying a goat from Mrs. Tew, a friend of ours who had goats. On seeing that article we went to see Mrs. Tew to tell her we were Bahá'ís and Roy Wilhem was our national Bahá'í treasurer. We found that he had been corresponding with her and had told her a little about the Faith. He had also sent her gifts of cashew nuts, for instance, and imported coffee which was his business. She soon joined...”⁴⁷

Outward Expansion

In April 1937 the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith presented a plan of action to the American Bahá'í community to help the Bahá'ís focus their energies on the plan outlined by 'Abdu'l-Bahá two decades before to take the Bahá'í teachings to the rest of the globe. The Guardian felt that a certain level of administrative organization was necessary before such an ambitious project could be successfully completed. He also knew it was not possible to accomplish this project all at once, so he defined it in small stages. The first stage he called the Seven Year Plan, for a length of seven years.

It would end with the centennial of the birth of the Bahá'í Faith in 1944. The plan had three broad goals: finish the exterior of the House of Worship in Wilmette (the depression had slowed

construction), have at least one Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly in each state and province in the U.S. and Canada, and have at least one Bahá'í living in each country south of the U.S. border. These goals astonished the few thousand American Bahá'ís. It presented them with an entirely new level and concept of service.

To encourage them the Guardian would write letters to the American Bahá'í community to put it all in perspective. In one, dated 4 June 1937, he wrote, "To carry out in its entirety and to its final consummation this dual enterprise (teaching and construction) would shed on the closing years of this first century of the Bahá'í Era a luster no less brilliant than the immortal deeds which have signaled its birth, in the heroic age of our Faith."⁴⁸ The reference and comparison are to the thousands of early believers, in Persia, who had been martyred simply for refusing to recant their faith. The American Bahá'ís would sacrifice their lives in a different way. This fostered an outward orientation for the Bahá'í community.

Wanting to be more involved in the wider Bahá'í community, Bahá'ís of Topeka began to attend the National Bahá'í conventions. May Brown tells about her first trip to one of these conventions, "My first trip to the convention was so wonderful. We didn't have much money as it took a long time to raise a family and get over the depression. Gradually as things got better, I was able to attend the convention in Wilmette. I remember that my mother was pleased that I was going, so she loaned me a prettier dress than I possessed. To not spend too much money on going to restaurants to eat, I took some dates, triscuits and cookies to eat in my room. I didn't seem to have any trouble going to Wilmette on the El (elevated train) from Chicago as I had been given instructions as how I should do it."⁴⁹

Being a small Bahá'í community, and somewhat isolated, Topeka became a stop on the itineraries of traveling teachers. One of the more colorful visitors to Topeka was Loral Schopflocher, the wife of a wealthy Canadian who could afford to be extravagant. She was one of the few who could afford air travel in the 1920's. In fact, this resulted in an article in the *New York Times* when she was a passenger on the first flight from England to Cairo. The article ended by saying: "Mrs. Schopflocher will visit the headquarters of the Bahá'í movement at Haifa, Palestine, then fly to Baghdad and continue for a lecture tour through India and Persia, lecturing on the League of Nations Union."⁵⁰ This was just one of her many trips to promote the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. She would say that she traveled around the world nine times for this purpose. It was on one such trip, in 1937 that she came to Topeka. She would have regaled the believers here with some of her experiences. On one trip to visit Bahá'ís in Persia, she became the first westerner to ever visit that part of the country.

In those decades, membership in the Bahá'í community was seen in a slightly different light than it is now. The record for the Annual Meeting of the Bahá'ís of Topeka on 21 April 1938, when the

Spiritual Assembly was re-elected following two years of confusion and misunderstandings, contains a line that says, “Mr. Will Stewart and Mrs. M.E. Coburn signed cards to receive news and *renew* membership.”⁵¹ (emphasis added). In those years, when there was no Spiritual Assembly, it was felt that there were also no Bahá’ís in the town, just a community of people who accepted and studied the Bahá’í teachings. As May Brown simply put it, “The Assembly was re-formed and we became Bahá’ís again.”⁵² That is no longer the understanding of the meaning of membership in the Bahá’í community.

For several decades one or more members of the Topeka Bahá’í community attended the National Bahá’í Convention. Mrs. Katie Nye, Dr. Orda Cantrell, Fern and Mrs. Latimer and Mrs. Nellie Amos attended the dramatic Convention of 1938. This was the first convention with an increased number of delegates. Each National Bahá’í community is assigned a number of delegates by the Bahá’í World Center. This number is a multiple of nine. Originally the United States had 81 delegates, in 1938 that was increased to 171, almost double! This changed the nature of the convention and was very exciting.

To the 1938 Convention, the Guardian sent a letter of encouragement with a historical perspective. He wrote, “The Seven Year Plan, to which every American believer is fully and irrevocably pledged, during the closing years of the First Century of the Bahá’í Era, is in itself but an initial stage in the unfoldment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s vision of America’s spiritual destiny...”⁵³

This was the convention that witnessed the collapse, on stage, of Grace Ober as she concluded a passionate speech and died a few moments later. The convention was shocked and stunned. She had been a prominent Bahá’í for years with many deep friendships among the national Bahá’í community, a favorite speaker and an obvious choice to speak at the convention. This year the delegates had been grappling with some serious and divisive issues. Her death emphasized her plea for a greater level of commitment and galvanized the convention to a higher level of unity and purpose. An impromptu memorial service was held for her later that day.

The Topeka Bahá’ís who attended brought back this greater sense of unity and dedication as well as greetings from other Bahá’ís who were there and knew Bahá’ís in Topeka.

Immediately after returning from that convention an unusual letter was received by the Bahá’ís of Topeka from the National Bahá’í Assembly. It was shared at the Nineteen-Day Feast observed on 17 May. The letter explained the envelope it came in. The envelope had been specially post marked by the postal service to celebrate National Air Mail Week. The cancellation stamp for that week consisted of a drawing of an airplane flying over the Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette. The Bahá’ís marveled at this recognition from the government.

In addition to greetings from other Bahá'ís, sometimes symbolic gifts are given. The first such gift mentioned in the records kept by the Bahá'ís of Topeka, consisted of rose petals from the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Fresh roses are brought into the Shrine from the surrounding gardens each day. Pilgrims can take the petals home as mementos. These petals were given to Nellie Amos by Amelia Collins when she was in Topeka in June 1938. Nellie passed them out to other members of the Topeka Bahá'í community.

Millie Collins, in her later years, lived much of the time at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel assisting the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. She would also travel from time to time to visit Bahá'í communities, encouraging them and strengthening their connection with the World Center.

Some new people entered the Topeka Bahá'í community in 1938, one of whom was Katie Nye. She had been born in Pennsylvania in 1865 and come to Kansas with her parents when she was a child. Her father became the doctor in Silver Lake and later, the Mayor. She came to Topeka on her own to go to school in 1888 and eventually secured a job at the post office. Her parents moved to Topeka and she lived with them. When she was fifty years old she married Samuel Nye. He was older, with grown children, and died fifteen years later. She accepted the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh as true in 1938 and was elected a member of the Topeka Spiritual Assembly. No other information has been found about her Bahá'í activities. She died in 1941 and is buried beside her parents in Topeka Cemetery.

The next year, in April 1939, in his annual letter summarizing the progress of the past year and needs of the next, the Guardian wrote this praise: “The initial phase of the teaching work operating under the Seven Year Plan has at long last been concluded. They who have pushed it forward have withstood the test gloriously. By their acts, whether as teachers or administrators, they have written a glorious page in the struggle for the laying of a continent-wide administrative Order of the Faith. At this advanced stage in the fulfillment of the purpose to which they have set their hand there can be no turning back, no halting, no respite.”⁵⁴

A month later he cabled with an update, “Newly launched Central American campaign marks official inauguration long-deferred World Mission constituting ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's legacy Bahá'í Community North America.”⁵⁵ Now it was time to attend to the international aspects of the Plan.

The Bahá'ís in Topeka could not think much about that part of the Plan. They had just passed through a period of disunity and misunderstanding during which the Topeka Assembly had been dissolved. Some people had left the Bahá'í community to pursue other interests, and those who remained re-formed the Assembly with a more dedicated core of members. They had no idea that another test for them lay just ahead just one year later.

Organization

The Guardian decided that clearly defined community boundaries were necessary to stabilize Bahá'í communities and their Spiritual Assemblies. Before this time, Bahá'ís who lived in one city could consider themselves to be members of a different Bahá'í community and be elected to that community's Spiritual Assembly. The decisions they would make as a member of that Spiritual Assembly would not apply to themselves. This was manifestly unfair. And when individuals would claim membership in a Bahá'í community different from the one in which they lived, it was difficult for a Spiritual Assembly to know who was really in which Bahá'í community. The decision to use civil boundaries cleared that up. A Bahá'í community is defined by the boundaries of the smallest civil unit of jurisdiction.

This answers the question: what is meant by the term 'Bahá'í Community of Topeka?'

'Community' is used instead of such terms as church, congregation, synod, etc. It essentially refers to all the Bahá'ís who live in a specific governmental jurisdiction. The 'Bahá'í Community of Topeka,' refers to all the Bahá'ís who live within the city limits of Topeka, but no Bahá'í who lives outside the city limits of Topeka. The 'Bahá'í Community of Shawnee County,' refers to all Bahá'ís who live in the county outside any incorporated city of the county. The boundaries of each local Bahá'í community coincide with the civil jurisdiction of the smallest governmental unit. Where there is a city, this is the city limits. If there is no city, it is the county boundary.

The term 'Bahá'í community' is also used in different contexts with slightly different but similar meanings. The 'Bahá'í Community of the United States,' refers to all Bahá'ís in the continental United States (while still territories, Alaska and Hawaii were separate Bahá'í communities and remain so today). Each nation, territory or significant island will have a secondary or 'national' level council (Spiritual Assembly) when there are sufficient local Bahá'í communities. The 'International Bahá'í Community' refers to all National Spiritual Assemblies around the world (181 as of April 2006).

When it was learned that the Bahá'ís here who lived outside the city limits of Topeka were no longer members of the Topeka Bahá'í community or Assembly, vacancies were created on the Topeka Assembly. A byelection was held and the vacancies were filled. Those members outside the city limits were now in a new and separate Bahá'í community: the Bahá'í Community of Shawnee County. Decades later a separate Spiritual Assembly was formed in the county.

Along with the decision to stabilize the boundaries of local Bahá'í communities, a secondary decision was made about the election process of National Spiritual Assemblies. 'Abdu'l-Bahá specified that the election of the National Assembly would be an indirect election. At the beginning of the twentieth century large communities did the voting and this was continued into the 1940s. In

the earliest years of the Topeka Bahá'í community, the members of the Topeka Assembly, and only the members of the Assembly, elected the members of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Beginning in 1944, each state in the U.S. held an electoral convention to elect one or more delegates (the number was apportioned among the states). These delegates, in turn, met in convention to elect the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. The Kansas state convention was held in Topeka every year until 1962 when it was held in Lawrence a few years. The convention was back in Topeka in 1966 for three years, then it was held in a variety of cities till 1972. Only three times since then has it been held again in Topeka: 1980, 1983 and 1993.

In the early 1990s the international governing council, at the Bahá'í World Center, reviewed the districts and voting process in the U.S. Upon finding that the state-based districts were in no way equitable with each other, the National Spiritual Assembly was instructed to create new, more equitable voting units irrespective of state lines. As a result, the Bahá'ís of Topeka, and Shawnee Co., found themselves, in 1996, in a new electoral unit consisting of northeast Kansas and northwest Missouri. It was a surprise, but the adaptation was made and now the votes from Kansas carry a more balanced weight with the rest of the country.

In addition to voting for a delegate to the National Convention, those who gather at the 'Electoral Unit Conventions,' also consult about their concerns for the area and can generate recommendations to the National Spiritual Assembly. The delegates meet at the National Bahá'í Convention, cast their vote and consult on matters of national concern. After the convention, the delegates report back to the Bahá'ís that elected them. This completes the cycle of consultation through each national Bahá'í community.

Consultation and connections are very important elements of Bahá'í community life. Contact between Bahá'ís in the early decades of the century took some surprising forms. One time, when Bahá'ís in Topeka learned that two members of the National Spiritual Assembly would be traveling through town on a train, a traveling visit was planned. May explained, "...we heard that Roy (Wilhelm) and Horace Holley would be coming thru Topeka on their way back from California, Paul and Mrs. Tew arranged to get on the same train and ride to Kansas City to get to visit with them. This they did, arriving back in Topeka on a later train."⁵⁶ Such an arrangement is not possible if travel is by plane!

On 20 February 1941 an article appeared in the *Topeka State Journal* about the local Bahá'í community. It described some basic beliefs and practices of the Bahá'í Faith and listed the local believers, even giving their addresses. These were: "Miss Fern Latimer and Mrs. Loretta Latimer, 612 Fillmore; Will Stewart, 1157 Washburn; Mrs. W.S. Amos, 1914 Huntoon; Mrs Irma Coburn, 511 W 8th; Mrs H.C. Stevens, 601 Mulvane; Mrs. George Ashworth, 717 Parkview; Mrs. Olive

Kaley, 1267 Washburn; one negro member, Miss Edna Reynolds, 1901 High, and Mrs. Campbell." Campbell had been quoted earlier in the article and her address was given there as 403 Huntoon.⁵⁷

Others members reported as ‘out-of-city believers’ meaning, in the Shawnee County Bahá’í community, were: “Mr. and Mrs. Paul Brown, Mrs. Arthur Schulte, Mrs Nora Tew and Miss Ruby Sinell.”⁵⁸ Art Schulte was not listed, he would join the community later in the year. Mrs. Tew and her daughter, Ruby, shortly moved to Burlingame.

Several of these believers became a long-term core of the Topeka Bahá’í community until their deaths in the 1980s. Paul Brown (a building contractor) and wife, May (a cook during the 40s at the veterans hospital) had weathered the difficulties of the 1930s and remained steadfast for the next half century. Their loyalty and depth of understanding of the Bahá’í teachings was exemplary and served as a guide and inspiration for succeeding generations.

Cora Schulte (1905-1986), in 1939 and, three years later, her husband, Art (1905-1983), also became pillars of the community until their deaths in the 1980s. He was a draftsman at Sante Fe and rose to be a supervisor before he retired there. Olive Kaley (1883-1972), who entered the community in 1933 several decades before her husband Frank (a streetcar then bus driver), was also steadfast until her death in the 1970s. Bertha Campbell (1890-1975) was another pillar from 1940 until her death in the 1970s. She was Director of Public Health Education at the State Board of Health at the time of the news article, earlier she had been Society Editor for the *Topeka State Journal*.

The first contact between Olive and Bertha was an occasion for much laughter on the part of May Brown as she told the story of those two women. “I must tell about when Bertha Campbell came to town,” May wrote. “Since Bertha had gotten in touch with some of the Baha’is in town, Olive Kaley knew about the coming of a new Bahá’í. As Olive and her husband were driving along a certain street downtown they saw quite a distinguished lady walking down the street. It came to Olive that she must be the new Bahá’í. Well, she sure didn’t like her hat. Sure enough, at the next Bahá’í meeting there sat the lady with the disliked hat!”⁵⁹

Ruth Ashworth (1899-1986) and Fern Latimer Howard (1903-1999) are also core members but additionally unique in that their parents were also members of the Bahá’í community and joined when they did – their mother’s anyway. Fern’s father had died some years earlier, before Fern and her mother came to Topeka and Ruth’s father joined shortly after his wife and daughter. Ruth’s husband never formally entered the community, while Fern married a Baha’i. Both Ruth and Fern were active in community affairs until their physical health necessitated them moving to nursing homes in the 1980’s.

The May 1941 issue of *Bahá'í News*, the newsletter of the National Spiritual Assembly, described with pride, for the rest of the country to note, a booklet produced by the Bahá'ís of Topeka. It was a pocket-sized booklet with a directory of the local believers in the front and a calendar of each month's activities for the entire year giving the location and host of every event. It was the size of a postcard: in fact, the cover was a postcard, a colorized photograph of the House of Worship under construction in Wilmette. Seldom since then has it been possible to plan a year in such detail ahead of time!

In the July 1941 issue of *Bahá'í News*, the National Assembly published a recent letter from the Guardian that summarized the world situation. He reflected on the war, "The internecine struggle now engulfing the generality of mankind, is increasingly assuming in its range and ferocity, the proportions of the titanic upheaval foreshadowed as far back as seventy years ago by Bahá'u'lláh." And concluded with his assessment of what the Bahá'ís were doing, "The quality and magnitude of the work already achieved by these stalwart champions of God's New World Order are inexpressibly exhilarating and infinitely meritorious. The immensity of the task still to be performed staggers our fancy and inflames our imagination. The potentialities with which these tasks are endowed elude our shrewdest calculations. The promise they enshrine is too dazzling to contemplate."⁶⁰

The National Spiritual Assembly also used *Bahá'í News* to communicate with the American believers. In that same issue appeared a succinct summary of the goals of the Seven Year Plan. "The Guardian has given us an exact measure of our collective teaching responsibility during these three remaining years of the Seven Year Plan. This measure is: the establishment of a Spiritual Assembly in each unoccupied State and Province in North America, the reinstatement of every local Assembly dissolved for lack of numbers and the foundation of an active Bahá'í nucleus in each country of Central and South America."⁶¹ That applied directly to the situation in Topeka. By that time several members had died or moved away leaving insufficient numbers to re-form the Assembly in April 1941. It remained so in 1942.

A special meeting of the community was held on 13 March 1943 to consult on ways to increase the number of believers who would be living inside the city limits so the Assembly could be re-formed. At this meeting Art and Cora Schulte decided they would move from their home in North Topeka, outside the city limits, into the city. On 15 April they moved to 630 Lawrence and the Assembly was re-formed on 21 April. It has not lapsed since that date. Some time after the election, the city annexed the Seabrook area and the Browns, who lived there also, (again) became members of the Topeka Bahá'í community.

During the spring of 1942 several members of the Topeka Bahá'í community attended the National Bahá'í Convention in Chicago. A small article appeared in the *Topeka Daily Capital* that

May listing their names and telling a little about the convention. Those who attended were: Paul and May Brown, Olive Kaley and her daughter Marceline, from Hollywood, Mrs. Lloyd Tew, Cora Schulte, Loretta and Fern Latimer and Bertha Campbell. This was a significant proportion of the most active Bahá'ís in Topeka of the time.

The House of Worship

A very large (over 12 column inches) Associated Press article appeared in the newspaper of 7 February 1943 telling of the completion of the exterior of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, north of Chicago. The appearance of the article must have delighted the local Bahá'ís. Though the site had been dedicated in 1912 and a cornerstone laid, no work was done for several years while money was raised and the rest of the land purchased. Construction of the building had begun in the 1920s, financed solely by Bahá'ís on a cash only basis, no debts were incurred.

This House of Worship has been the subject of Topeka news-paper coverage several times during the century. Often, photographs of it were printed. One of the first was in 1939 and as late as 1994, in color (that last time, twice in the issue of the paper). Additional articles and or photographs that have been found to date include: May 1941, Mar 1943, Mar 1952, June 1987, and June and July of 1994.

By the close of the 1930s some Bahá'ís from Topeka had already visited the House of Worship. With the appearance of the photographs in the newspaper their friends and neighbors had the opportunity to see it also. When construction had begun in earnest in 1930 it drew national press attention. The *New York Times* saw it as an indication of hope for prosperity: "Building Revival For Coming Year." The article described several construction plans in the New York City area then concluded: "Other large projects under way include the \$5,000,000 State Capital at Charleston, W. Va., theatres at Milwaukee and at Erie, Pa.; the National Episcopal Cathedral at Washington; the Bahá'í Temple at Chicago..."⁶² Progress was slow during the depression and World War II. The exterior was finished in 1944 and the interior and gardens in 1953.

The construction process was slow for several reasons. When the design was chosen there was no feasible way to build it. Eventually the idea of pre-cast concrete panels was devised and since then this process has become a construction standard. Money was a problem because Bahá'ís are forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh from asking for or accepting money for Bahá'í purposes, even when offered, from outside the Bahá'í community.

The House of Worship in Wilmette is the continental House of Worship for North America. During the concluding decades of the 20th century, other continental Houses of Worship were built:

Sydney, Australia for Australasia; Kampala, Uganda for Africa; Frankfurt, Germany for Europe; Panama City, Panama for Latin America; Apia, Samoa for the South Pacific; New Delhi, India for Asia (since the one in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan was seized by the Soviets then destroyed by an earthquake in 1948); and the final one, in Santiago, Chile for South America, is under construction now.⁶³ When this series is finished the goal is to build one in every nation.

These buildings have been built on a continental basis not only because Bahá'ís are found everywhere around the world but, more importantly, they are gifts from the Bahá'ís to the rest of the world. Each House of Worship is an embodiment of the key spiritual principles taught by Bahá'u'lláh. Each has a central dome representing the one Creator Who created us all and which all people worship in some form or other. They have doors that open in all directions, not excluding anyone. And they have nine sides representing unity in that nine is the highest single digit. An unusual consequence of having nine sides is inclusion of the floor plan in some geometry books. A young Bahá'í in the fifth grade in Topeka was surprised one day to find mention of the House of Worship in his new math book! The floor plan is a perfect nonagon and there are few buildings like that!

In the early decades of the twentieth century the National Spiritual Assembly sent teachers to encourage the widely scattered Bahá'í communities. Sometimes members of the National Assembly itself would travel for this purpose. Early in November 1943, Dorothy Baker, one such member came to Topeka to visit with the believers and to give public lectures. While here she was the host for a Nineteen-Day Feast. To guarantee that the event would be outstanding she held it in 'The Chocolate Shop.' This was a favorite social spot in the basement of 911 S. Kansas Ave., a frequent site for banquets, dinner parties, etc. It was a memorable event, for the historian noted, "Feast Nov. 3, Mrs. Dorothy Baker, a member of the N.S.A. (National Spiritual Assembly). Hostess for the Topeka Bahá'ís at the Chocolate Shop." and described it as "stimulating."⁶⁴ Dorothy Baker also gave two public lectures at the Kansan Hotel on 2 and 3 November on the Bahá'í Faith.

Calendar

In those decades America was a much less multicultural nation than it is today and the Bahá'í holy days appeared to be strange. Today they are simply another part of the diversity that is our country. Bahá'í holy days commemorate events in the early history of the Bahá'í Faith. Because these events occurred at a time in global history when literacy was widespread, many details about the events were documented. For most of the events even the hour they happened was recorded, so the exact time can be observed. The program of worship to commemorate a holy day is much the same as worship at other times with a special focus on that holy day. The annual cycle of holy days begins with the start of each new year.

The Bahá'í calendar year begins with the spring equinox, so New Years Day is the first day of spring. It is also called Naw-Rúz, meaning: new day. This is observed on 21 March which is also the first day of the month of Bahá. For many decades this was the only Bahá'í holy day mentioned in the Topeka newspapers.

The Bahá'í calendar is a new way of marking time. With every renewed revelation from God, time has begun again. Bahá'ís count the Christian year of 1844 as the year 'One.' The Bahá'í calendar is a calendar that is not associated with the oppression of any group by any other group. It is a calendar that can be adopted by all people on the planet without reference to the superiority of an enemy.

In this calendar the months are named after attributes of God. The calendar divides the year into nineteen months with nineteen days in each month. The names of the months, in Arabic then English, are: Bahá/Splendor, Jalál/Glory, Jamál/Beauty, 'Azamat/Grandeur, Núr/Light, Rahmat/Mercy, Kalimát/Words, Kamál/ Perfection, Asmá'/Names, 'Izzat/Might, Mashíyyat/Will, 'Ilm/ Knowledge, Qudrat/Power, Qawl/Speech, Masá'il/Questions, Sharaf/Honor, Sultán/Sovereignty, Mulk/Dominion, 'Alá'/ Loftiness. The first day of each of these months is the day for the Nineteen-Day Feast. Essentially a business meeting, it is time for consultation between the local Assembly and the local Bahá'í community. It is also an occasion for worship and fellowship.

After Naw-Rúz comes the Ridván Festival: twelve days to commemorate the twelve days Bahá'u'lláh spent in the Garden of Ridván, on an island near Baghdad, in 1863. There He announced His mission to a small group of family and friends on the eve of His exile from Baghdad to Constantinople. These days are 21 April to 2 May, or 13 Jalál to 5 Jamál. The first, ninth and twelfth days are regarded as holy days because of events that occurred on those specific days. The celebration of the First Day of Ridván is held at 3:00 pm in the afternoon (standard time).

On the First Day of Ridván, but separate from the holy day observance, the annual meeting is held in every local Bahá'í community around the world. This is the time when the community takes stock of itself and the accomplishments of the past year. The membership of the local Spiritual Assembly is also elected for the coming year. Later during the Ridván Festival the National Bahá'í conventions are held each year for the election of the National Spiritual Assemblies, and every five years, the International convention when the Universal House of Justice is elected.

On 23 May, or 7 'Azamat, the Declaration of the Báb occurred. The Báb announced His mission to one young man who became the first to believe in its truth. This event happened at two hours and eleven minutes after sunset, so the commemoration is held at that time (about 10:45 p.m. in Topeka). The declaration was made in 1844, so that is year 'One' of the Bahá'í calendar.

The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh occurred on 29 May, or 13 'Azamat, at 3:00 a.m. Some Bahá'ís get up in the dark, drive through the empty streets, have a brief program of observance, and go back home. Others note the observance privately, at home. Some will stay up till 3:00, then go home and sleep all morning, others will eat breakfast together afterwards.

Another somber holy day observance is the Martyrdom of the Báb on 9 July, or 16 Rahmat. This is held at noon when the second squad of 750 rifles succeeded in killing Him. It was recorded by many witnesses, including western observers, that the volley from the first firing squad did not even touch Him. When the smoke cleared from the first attempt the Báb was found back in His cell finishing the dictation of a letter that had been interrupted earlier. The leader of the first regiment considered this a miracle and refused a second attempt, so a second squad of soldiers was called in. Because this event occurred at noon, a picnic lunch is often held in Topeka before or after the observance, for convenience.

The next holy day is more joyous, the Birth of the Báb, on 20 October, or 5 'Ilm. Some years a birthday party is held with a brief program on the life and mission of the Báb. This is followed, on 12 November, or 9 Quadrat, by the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. This is also a birthday celebration and often the Bahá'ís of Topeka will have a more formal dinner.

There are two more holy days in November, both involving 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Because He was born on the night of the Declaration of the Báb, 'Abdu'l-Bahá insisted that His birthday not be observed, the Báb's declaration was far more important to remember. When this saddened the American Bahá'ís during His visit in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggested they pick a date six months from his birth and celebrate that day in honor of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh of which He was the center. So, the Bahá'ís chose 26 November and that is celebrated as the Day of the Covenant. In 1921 'Abdu'l-Bahá died two days after that date. At 1:00 a.m. the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is observed. Frequently Bahá'ís will stay up until that time for the observance.

For all of these holy days, except the Day of the Covenant, Bahá'ís are to seek exemption from work and children from school out of respect for the day. The public is invited to share the observances of these holy days, but in Topeka those in the early morning hours are often not publicized simply because of the awkward time for most people. According to the Bahá'í calendar, just like the Jewish, Muslim and early Christian calendars, the day begins with sunset, so a holy day observance will often begin the evening before, just as the Jewish Shabbat service is held on Friday evening, the beginning of the seventh day.

In addition to holy days, other occasions are also observed by Bahá'ís in Topeka. The specific plans vary from year to year. Some years more of these events are observed in Topeka than others. To promote understanding between followers of the different religions of the world, 'World Religion Day' is held on the second Sunday in January. Different events can be sponsored on that

day with the goal of bringing together people of different religions. This day was started by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the U.S. in 1950 and has been adopted by other national Bahá'í communities in the decades since then. One country even issued a postage stamp in support of the day.

'Race Unity Day,' the second Sunday in June, is an out-growth of events begun by the American Bahá'ís in the 1910s to bring together the various races to demonstrate that we all have more in common than we have differences. Bahá'ís celebrate the diversity of the human race and encourage others to do so also. Bringing the races together is such a high priority for Bahá'ís that inter-racial marriage is encouraged as a service to all humanity.

'World Peace Day' was observed on the third Sunday in September for several decades starting in 1959, to arouse public awareness for the need and possibility of peace. In 1981 the United Nations declared the third Tuesday in September to be 'International Day of Peace' and Bahá'ís began to support that also. Four years later Bahá'ís stopped 'World Peace Day' in order to give more support to the UN day.

Bahá'ís also support 'United Nations Day' on 10 October as a way of supporting the United Nations. This support is given because the United Nations Organization is the only international forum on the planet and, as such, is desperately needed.

The Bahá'í calendar is a solar calendar so the dates stay the same in relation to the seasons of each year. For the number of days to come out even with the actual length of the year, four days are added every year and a fifth extra day is added every leap year. These extra days, or intercalary days, are called Ayyám-i-Há. They are days of parties, festivities, philanthropy and gift giving. They come immediately before the annual period of fasting.

Bahá'ís fast for one month of the year, during the last month of the Bahá'í calendar. This nineteen day fast is a daylight fast: just from sunrise to sunset. During the daylight hours Bahá'ís are to refrain from eating, drinking and smoking. It is a period of detachment from the physical world. It is to be used as a time of spiritual cleansing and renewal to prepare for the new year which immediately follows the fast. It's not to be burdensome or physically debilitating; there are many exemptions. Bahá'ís over age 70 and under 15 are exempt from fasting, so are those who are ill, pregnant, nursing, traveling or occupied in heavy labor. And, observance of the fast is purely a matter between the individual and God.

Special prayers were revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for the fast to give emphasis to the spiritual potency of detachment. It is not the eating or abstinence from eating that is of primary importance. Detachment from the physical world is the focus. People are encouraged by Bahá'u'lláh to enjoy the physical world, but not to be attached to it, after all, our time here is only temporary.

Simply observing the fast resulted in a surprise for Bahá'ís in Topeka one year. In the 1940s many of the local Bahá'ís would use the newspaper to learn what time the sun was to rise. The sunrise and sunset times were listed with other daily events such as Kansas river level, etc. One day during the fast in 1944 the Bahá'ís in Topeka opened their paper – and found no times for sunrise or sunset. They had been deleted! One Bahá'í called the newspaper asking why and explained the reason for the request. The next day the *Topeka State Journal* ran the following comment in a reporter's column:

“Topekans of the Baha’i faith these days are reading The State Journal’s page 1 weather table religiously – literally. From March 2 to 21, a period of fast and prayer, the moment of sunrise and sunset, and if they aren’t up and thru with breakfast before the official minute of sunrise it’s probably a pretty long day. Gloomy morning that it was, Saturday had no perceptible sunrise and what should happen but that line in the weather summary was pulled out in a last-minute makeup scramble for an extra line of space in Friday night’s edition. The composing room has been asked to yank out the Kaw river stage or temperature extremes for its extra lines of space between now and March 22.”⁶⁵

From time to time a class would be held on the fast. At one of these, in the 1970’s, those who attended were surprised to note that everyone there, for one reason or another, was exempt from observing the fast. This was distressing to several until the point was made that eating or not was merely the minor, outward expression of the fast; the true, inner meaning of the fast was detachment. This distinction became the subject of the class and brought such relief that the book, *Fasting: a Bahá’í Handbook*, resulted.

Centennial

The year 1944 was a pivotal one for the world-wide Bahá'í community. It marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Bahá'í Faith. The U.S. National Bahá'í Convention, like all national Bahá'í conventions that could be held that year, observed this anniversary. In those countries that could, despite the world being embroiled in war, commemorations were held; most were low-key. In the U.S., the Bahá'ís were also jointly celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the launching of the American Bahá'í community, the successful completion of the exterior construction of the House of Worship in Wilmette, and the victorious conclusion of the teaching campaign in Latin and South America. Several Bahá'ís from Topeka were able to attend this convention: Olive Kaley, Edna Savilles, Loretta Latimer and her daughter, Fern. Fern was the delegate from Kansas that year.

To strengthen ties among the Bahá'ís of the western hemis-phere, special effort was made to assist representatives from Latin and South America to attend this convention. Despite war being

fought in most of the rest of the world, Bahá'ís in the U.S. had helped establish and support Bahá'í communities in the Americas. Attendance of these special representatives was part of that effort. The representatives returned to their home countries and shared a wider perspective of the Bahá'í community being united and at peace despite the world being at war.

In Topeka, the Bahá'ís celebrated this centennial by airing their second radio broadcast. This was done over radio WIBW on Wednesday evening 23 May at 10:45: exactly one hundred years, to the minute, when the Báb made his announcement of the new revelation in Shiraz. The Bahá'ís in Topeka listened as they gathered for the holy day observance. A comment at the time said the broadcast was, “thrilling and exciting to all of us.”⁶⁶

This broadcast even attracted attention in other places. The radio station received a post card from Kansas City which said, “We did so much enjoy your Baha’i broadcast.... Never heard them before and am very much interested. Am going to get in touch...”⁶⁷ This may have been the first, but was not the last time a media broadcast attracted attention outside the city.

On 18 April 1945 Bahá'ís of Topeka hosted a ‘Race and World Unity Conference’ in the Hotel Jayhawk. It was just one of many efforts to acquaint the population with the Bahá'í belief in the equality of the races. It attracted a very integrated audience in a time of extreme segregation, those of African descent out-numbered the others by three to two

The first global Seven Year Plan had been successfully completed two years before and a second Seven Year Plan was now launched in 1946. It would terminate in the one hundredth anniversary of the time when Bahá'u'lláh received His revelation in 1853. This plan was even more international in focus: to raise up at least one local Spiritual Assembly in each Latin American country and to start or restore Bahá'í communities in ten countries of Europe devastated by the war. Bahá'í communities in some countries of Europe, such as England and Germany, had their own goals. The main homefront goals for the American Bahá'ís were to strengthen all small Bahá'í communities, form more Spiritual Assemblies and complete the interior of the House of Worship.

The Bahá'ís of Topeka took on a large project when they agreed to host their first regional conference in October 1946. Bahá'ís in Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri were invited to attend. The purpose was to strengthen bonds of friendship between them, consult together and share their experiences of teaching others about the Bahá'í Faith and building their own Bahá'í communities. This was held at Garfield Park Shelter house.

The regional newsletter reported, “Opal Winans presented large outline map drawings of the three states, showing location of cities having Assemblies, Groups and isolated believers. These were pointed out on the map. Towns of 15,000 or more population in which there are no Bahá'ís

were also pointed out, and the thought was that in some way the Teachings should be given to the people in those cities.”⁶⁸

The newsletter concluded with the assessment that, “It was a great day and all felt our first inter-community conference was a success. There was a spirit of friendliness and unity, coupled with a warmth of feeling. The speeches were all good, and it was certainly demonstrated that we do have some good speakers in this region.”⁶⁹ In summing up the year, this first local conference was described as “not an ordinary meeting” for the Topeka Bahá’í community.⁷⁰ Another similar regional conference was held here three years later, by then such events were taken in stride.

The Annual Reports of the Topeka Bahá’í community for that year (1946-47) contain a summary statement indicating that the youth were not far behind the adults. “The Youth Movement has been started in Topeka during this past year. On Sunday Nov. 24, a youth group met at the home of Mrs. Bertha Campbell. This meeting was sponsored by Bob Schulte, Mrs. Pauline Campbell and Mrs. Betty Grant. Much interest was shown.”⁷¹ This initial meeting planned a second event with a regional focus.

It was summarized: “And on Feb. 23, 1947, a Bahá’í youth meeting was held at 2:00 o’clock in the auditorium of the Mulvane Art museum of Washburn University. Paul Becker of Chicago was the speaker. This meeting was sponsored by Bob Schulte, assisted by Mrs. Pauline Campbell and Mrs. Betty Grant. The Topeka Assembly assisted with the expenses.”

“There were twenty-one present. Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Schulte entertained the out of town guests at dinner preceding the meeting and also held open house afterward.”⁷²

According to a news article in the *Topeka State Journal*, the topic of the event was, ‘Youth and the Atomic Age,’ held to mark ‘National Bahá’í Youth Day.’ All young people of Topeka were invited, other Bahá’í youth were expected to come from St. Joseph, Kansas City and Wichita.⁷³

Over the decades the amount of youth activities in the Topeka Bahá’í community varied with the number of youth and their interest. As the twentieth century closed, Topeka youth were the nucleus of ‘Winds of Change,’ a Bahá’í Youth Workshop. The workshop studied Bahá’í scripture, ways to live a spiritual based life, and performed dances that demonstrated the challenges faced by current society and how a person can respond in healthy, moral/ spiritual ways.

In the late 1990’s the youth organized regional meetings on alternating months that drew dozens of youth from Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri and others who wished to come. These meetings focused on the spiritual life and transformation of the youth and service projects. These projects ranged from painting murals to decorating semi-public spaces (such as day care centers) to painting a gym for the local Head Start in Topeka. In 2005 the focus of the Topeka youth changed to a more

local inter-faith direction. In this connection they have sponsored cross-congregational visits and an inter-faith youth festival.

As a reminder, and to emphasize the homefront goals facing the American Bahá'í community of the second Seven Year Plan, the National Spiritual Assembly, in September 1947, restated the challenges facing the community. These included, first: for each Bahá'í to teach one other person about the Bahá'í Faith. For small Bahá'í communities to double their size and for larger communities to adopt one or more smaller Bahá'í communities and help them reach Assembly status. To stimulate teaching, the National Assembly adopted a theme that could be used by local Bahá'í communities to stimulate discussion. The cold war was escalating at this time so, 'World Faith for World Freedom,' seemed an appropriate selection. Four subtopics were suggested for use over a period of time: 'The Search for Faith,' 'The Search for Freedom,' 'Credo for a World Community,' 'Bahá'í – A World Program.' In Topeka, these topics were used over a period of time for public presentations on the Bahá'í teachings.

Teaching outside the city was carried on through the Regional Teaching Committee appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly for this purpose. Different members of the Topeka community were appointed members of this committee, and its successors, for several decades until the committees were discontinued in the 1970s. In addition to serving on these regional committees, Bahá'ís of Topeka have helped other Bahá'í communities in more direct ways. Many have traveled to other communities to encourage the Bahá'ís there and conduct meetings to teach others about the Bahá'í Faith. Some have even moved to other localities to establish or reinforce the Bahá'í community there. A partial list of the cities in Kansas where Topeka Bahá'ís have moved would include: Colby, Delphos, Dodge City, Emporia, Hays, Holton, Hutchinson, Kansas City, Lawrence, Leavenworth, Manhattan, Newton, Ozawkie, Wichita, and Winfield.

Sometimes Bahá'ís of Topeka have moved to other states for the same purpose. A partial list of these states includes: Alaska, Georgia, Iowa, Maine, Missouri, and New Mexico. Some have even moved to other countries, these include: Bermuda, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Czechoslovakia. This is not typical religious behavior, unless you are a missionary – but Bahá'ís have no missionaries. That would be much the same as paid clergy – and Bahá'u'lláh forbid that. So ordinary Bahá'ís are encouraged to travel to promote the Bahá'í teachings. Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching our Cause – these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power. A company of Our chosen angels shall go forth with them, as bidden by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. How great the blessedness that awaiteth him that hath attain the honor of serving the Almighty! By My life! No act, however great can compare with it, except such deeds as have been ordained by God, the All-Powerful, the Most-Mighty. Such a service is, indeed, the prince of all goodly deeds, and the ornament of every goodly act."⁷⁴

Some Topeka Bahá'ís have also undertaken short term (a year or less) teaching projects or trips. Some of the countries Bahá'ís from Topeka have gone to for this purpose include: Belize, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Tanzania, and Germany.

Bahá'ís of Topeka have also been connected to the wider American Bahá'í community through attendance at Bahá'í school sessions in other parts of the country. These offer weekend or week-long sessions of education on various Bahá'í subjects. Bahá'ís from Topeka have attended sessions at three of the national Bahá'í Schools in the U.S., in Michigan, Maine and California. Other sessions are held in rented facilities in every state and attendance at these has been too numerous to note.

Topeka Bahá'ís have had the most connection with Louhelen Bahá'í School in Davison, Michigan. Not only was Bertha Hyde a founder of the school in 1931, and Secretary of the School Com-mittee, and Topeka Bahá'ís have attended various sessions over the years (Fern Howard was the first in 1947), but Duane Herrmann, in the 1990s, after having received the poetry fellowship earlier, served on the Steering Committee of the Robert Hayden Poetry Fellowship, based at the school.

In the 1960's Paul and May Brown lived at two other Bahá'í schools (at Geyserville, California and Eliot, Maine) for several summers while Paul made building repairs. They were the first from Topeka to go to either of these schools. He had retired from his carpentry business and was glad to be of service to the larger Bahá'í community. While they were at Green Acre Bahá'í School in Maine, it is likely they were unaware that a news article about the opening of Green Acre had appeared in the *Topeka State Journal* the same month as news articles about the arrival of the Bahá'í Faith to Kansas in 1897.⁷⁵

Several Bahá'ís from Topeka attended the National Bahá'í Convention in the spring of 1948. The focus of this convention was teaching others. On Friday, the first full day of the convention, there were three workshops on teaching. In the morning, the convention focused on the teaching efforts in the United States to teach those who were interested about the Bahá'í Faith. In the early afternoon, the focus turned to European teaching efforts, and late afternoon, the western hemisphere. The next day simultaneous workshops were given on various avenues of teaching: at the House of Worship, newspaper publicity, audio visual use, and youth and children's education. The workshops must have been stimulating because new effort was put into teaching activities in Topeka and new avenues were explored.

During the winter of 1948, a service project was conducted by Bahá'ís in downtown Topeka when free lunches were served at the Bahá'í Center. This was done every Friday noon for several months. May Brown tells about that project: "Cora (Schulte) had worked a while at the dime store and made a friend or two and we each had someone we wanted to tell about the Faith so we planned

to serve lunch to anyone who would come. As it was cold weather we served soup, crackers, relishes, coffee and dessert. Cora waited on the girls, pouring coffee etc., while I talked for 15 or 20 minutes. One time when Dorothy Baker was in town we had her talk and I think we had 22 there that time. We might have someone else talk sometimes and once in a while Cora talked or at least helped out with comments.”

“I remember one time I got on the bus with my kettle of vegetable soup (as I always went on the bus which went from the corner of my garlow right to the Center). This time the onions in that soup smelled so loud the motorman remarked that he’d like to have some.”⁷⁶ As with all things, it had to end when interest and circumstances changed.

It is interesting to note in these years that two brothers from the Bahá’í community of Topeka were each elected President of their class at Topeka High School. The first was Robert Schulte who was elected president of the class of 1947. At Senior Class Day, he presented the gift of the class of ’47 to the school and later performed in one of many skits at a special school assembly that day.⁷⁷ His brother, Keith, was elected president of his junior class at Topeka High in 1950, selected for his “outstanding achievements and contributions to scholastic life.”⁷⁸ They were the sons of Arthur and Cora Schulte.

The effect of letters from the Guardian was noted when Olive Kaley summarized the local accomplishments of 1948-49. She wrote in her annual report, “The Topeka Community has stepped up its teaching activities during the year. We have been aroused by the messages from the Guardian, also the letters from the N.S.A. Each and every one (of us) are putting forth more effort. Each believer is feeling this responsibility very keenly. We are all looking for and accepting every opportunity to spread the Cause in Topeka.”⁷⁹ One would like to assume that this was the response every year, but at least for this one year there was a response to be remarked on.

In August 1948 Topeka Bahá’ís rented space for their first Bahá’í Center. This was room number four on the second floor of 108 W 8th. May Brown remembered that room as, “...a honey. There was plenty of room for meetings and a room for a kitchen. We had a wonderful conference there.”⁸⁰ At this writing the building is being demolished to make way for a parking garage. Years later, one other room was rented downtown, but it became impractical to continue. Currently many Bahá’í activities are held, courtesy of the Topeka Friends Meeting, at their meeting house at 603 W 8th.

In December 1948 Topeka Bahá’ís were surprised to learn that a member of the cast of "Oklahoma," which was on tour and performing in Topeka, was Bahá’í. She joined the local believers to celebrate the Feast of Dominion that month.

The next year a small notice in both Topeka newspapers reported on that year's state Bahá'í Convention in Topeka. It also listed other cities in Kansas where Bahá'ís were residing at the time: Wichita, Kansas City, Kinsley and Burlingame.

A milestone occurred in November 1950 when the first Bahá'í marriage in Kansas was performed in Topeka. The wedding united Fern Latimer, one of the youngest members of the early Fellowship in Topeka, and Dr. Scott Howard, a doctor of chiropractic from St Louis. They chose to live in Topeka to make a home for her elderly mother. They had no children.

Scott had met Fern at a Bahá'í conference. He was also Bahá'í and had grown up in the Bahá'í community. He was born in 1910 and adopted by Charles and Anna Howard. He continued his practice of chiropractic until his death in 1975.

Fern and her mother, Loretta Latimer, had come from Abilene to Topeka in the late 1920s after the death of Mr. Latimer. In Topeka, Fern obtained a position with Santa Fe Railroad which she kept until her retirement. In 1933 she and her mother had attended the Bahá'í class in Topeka and accepted the Bahá'í Revelation as true. It became the major focus of their lives. Both Fern and her mother were often elected to be members of the Topeka Spiritual Assembly. Fern was several times elected its Secretary and, in 1944 and 1952, she was elected Delegate from Kansas to the Bahá'í National Convention. She died on 11 February 1999, the last survivor of the Topeka Bahá'ís of the 1930s. She and Scott were buried in Topeka cemetery near her mother who had died in April 1954.

Mrs. Latimer's gravestone has the unusual distinction of being one of the few in the world with the Bahá'í ringstone symbol on it. This is a calligraphic rendition, in Arabic, of the Greatest Name, Bahá'u'lláh, designed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Just two months after her death the Guardian answered a letter about the appropriateness of using the ringstone symbol on grave markers. He replied that such use was not dignified and should not be done, but if it was already done, leave the stone alone. So, the Topeka Bahá'í community has one rare marker with the ringstone symbol.

One may wonder, what could be the problem?

One answer would be that the Greatest Name is holy to Bahá'ís and, in the cemetery, there is no way to protect it from the elements or other things that could fall on it. Birds do not respect items on the ground. And Loretta's gravestone is flat with the ground so it can be walked on, driven over, etc.

Beginning in the same year that Fern and Scott were married, 1950 and 1951, Paul and May Brown had a brief experience of "homefront pioneering" when, due to his work, Paul was called to Delphos, Kansas north of Salina. He and May lived there about a year and a half. During this time, they placed small news articles and ads in the *Delphos Republican*. May recalled, "...Paul and I

moved to Delphos, Kansas where he built a High School. I tried to teach the Faith in Delphos, but didn't have too much luck, but I did put a display in the drug store window that attracted a lot of attention.”⁸¹

In the early years of the United Nations, various conferences were held around the world to acquaint the populations of the various member nations about the aims and goals of the UN. Some of these, in 1949-1951, were held in Lawrence, Kansas. Bahá'ís in Topeka were appointed by the office of the International Bahá'í Community to be its representative at those conferences.

In 1953 a special guest attended the holy day observance of the Declaration of the Báb. This was Herminia Reuteria, a staff member of the U.S. embassy in Asunción, Paraguay. She was in Topeka to visit relatives on her way to her next assignment: the U.S. embassy in Vienna. She had been in Paraguay for the past two and a half years and shared some of her experiences there. This added a distinctly international flavor to that holy day celebration.

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh have influenced the Bahá'ís in Topeka in many ways. Among other things, they have tried to practice the behavior encouraged by Bahá'u'lláh for interpersonal relations. These include high levels of honesty and truthfulness as well as courtesy and tact. There are vehement prohibitions on gossip and backbiting, which are regarded as more severe than murder because such behavior diminishes the souls of the people involved.

The teachings about the unity of the human race have resulted in acceptance of all people of whatever background. This was especially noticeable in the time of segregation. Segregation of any sort flies directly in the face of the Bahá'í principle of the oneness of the human race. Any hint of exclusivity is repellent. The Topeka Bahá'í community was never segregated and never held segregated meetings. From the earliest years of organized activities in the 1930s, even officers of the Spiritual Assembly were of various races. In 1938 the Secretary was African-American. It is interesting to note that the minutes she took that year, unlike those of other Secretaries of the Assembly from the 30's and 40's, were typed and kept carefully in a binder. From some other years, no records survive at all.

Great efforts were made to insure that the people participating in programs were racially diverse. Individuals of color outside the Bahá'í community were invited to participate in order to guarantee this. Sometimes these special guests performed music, sang or gave talks on various subjects. And guests were treated as family. May Brown wrote, “At one time when we had a Bahá'í conference in Topeka some black folks came from Omaha, Kansas City, and St. Louis. It was winter time and very cold but as they got in Topeka on the train they were not allowed to go to the depot dining room and get a cup of coffee – certainly not to get a room in the hotels. The Bahá'ís in Topeka took them in their homes and I had them at my little garlow for breakfast.”⁸²

That this reception and hospitality was sincere is evident from a comment made by one of the guests. May mentioned another time, “..when a bunch of black friends come in, Ruth Ashworth was instrumental in taking them around to places where they could stay. Our friend, Doreen, from Omaha, told everyone there at the conference that she knew Ruth’s name was Ashworth, but it was really Goldworth.”⁸³

The composition of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Topeka, the governing council, has always been racially diverse. Over the decades, members have been Native American, African American, Latino, and Asian as well as Caucasian. And through the decades, most notably in the 1930’s and 40’s, many programs, classes and conferences were sponsored by the Bahá’ís of Topeka on the unity and oneness of the human race. When this was discussed on the anniversary of ‘Brown vs. Board of Education,’ the observation was made from outside the Bahá’í community that such efforts as these could well have helped prepare the way for ‘Brown vs Board of Education.’ The climate for ending segregation was approaching.

Bahá’ís from Topeka were often elected delegates from Kansas to the annual National Bahá’í Conventions or attended on their own as spectators. Among those elected as delegates in the early years were: Fern Howard, May Brown, Paul Brown, Cora Schulte, Bertha Campbell, Edna Savilles, Ruth Ashworth and Ernest Grant.

At the conclusion of the Second Seven Year Plan in 1953 the Guardian wrote of praise and joy at the accomplishments of the American Bahá’í community, for all the goals had not merely been achieved, but exceeded: the interior of the House of Worship was finished, Canada had formed its own separate National Spiritual Assembly, there were local Spiritual Assemblies in every country in Latin America and Bahá’í communities, with Spiritual Assemblies in every one of the goal countries in Europe! He said, in part, “My soul is uplifted in joy and thanksgiving at the triumphant conclusion of the second Seven Year Plan immortalized by the brilliant victories simultaneously won by the vanguard of the hosts of Bahá’u’lláh in Latin America, in Europe, and in Africa...”⁸⁴ The message went on to announce the next development plan with even more ambitious goals.

A Visit to the Past

A special guest for the holy day observance of Naw-Ruz (Bahá’í New year) 1954 was Elsbeth Renwanz. She and her mother (Elizabeth Fry) are the only Bahá’ís living in Kansas that are known to have met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. She shared those memories with the Bahá’ís of Topeka making it a very special New Year celebration!

Her mother had attended the Bahá'í classes in Enterprise, Kansas in 1897 and entered the Bahá'í community (Elsbeth was only 10 that summer). Later, in 1912, mother and daughter went together to Chicago to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He attended the National Bahá'í Convention that year and laid the cornerstone for the House of Worship in Wilmette. One of the published photographs of the cornerstone ceremony shows Elsbeth clearly in the front of the group. An account of her memoirs which she shared with the Bahá'ís of Topeka was found in the Bahá'í National Archives. She wrote:

Words are inadequate to describe the indescribable. But since requested to do so will now make the attempt.

It was during the month of May, 1912, when mother and I were privileged to meet Abdul Baha at the Plaza Hotel, Chicago, Illinois.

We had journeyed to Chicago from Enterprise, Kansas for this one and only purpose, attracted there, no doubt, by that Essence of Power, the Holy Spirit.

It seemed but a moment after entering the suite of Abdul Baha that He came to where we were standing. We stood speechless. We were powerless to ask questions. We were with One, Divine. We stood there in the environment of a Holy atmosphere of Spirit, so sanctified above the bonds of earth.

Abdul Baha, turning to mother, patted her on the shoulder, then looking at me, tears rolling down my cheeks, bade me not to cry, not to cry, to be happy, to be happy. Then as I recall He said, "Both shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven." – a delightful memory indeed.

Suddenly something more had penetrated me through and through. I was overwhelmed with joy. It was an inexplains-able, forcible reality that cannot be denied, radiating from that Fountain of Love, the Mystery of God, Abdul Baha.

What a unique experience it was and how unique only the one who experienced it would know. No words can disclose it and no expression can justly describe it. I had been with Abdul Baha. I had slipped the bonds of earth. It was Heaven."⁸⁵

At the dedication of the Temple site Elsbeth heard Him say: "The power which has gathered you here today notwithstanding the cold and windy weather is, indeed, mighty and wonderful. It is the power of God, the divine favor of Bahá'u'lláh which has drawn you together. We praise God that through His constraining love human souls are assembled and associated in this way."

"Thousands of Mashriqu'l-Adhkars, dawning points of praise and mention of God for all religionists will be built in the East and in the West, but this, being the first one erected in the Occident, has great importance. In the future there will be many here and elsewhere--in Asia,

Europe, even in Africa, New Zealand and Australia--but this edifice in Chicago is of especial significance. It has the same importance as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Ishqabad, Caucasus, Russia, the first one built there.”⁸⁶

He concluded by describing that first Bahá'í House of Worship, “The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Ishqabad is almost completed. It is centrally located, nine avenues leading into it, nine gardens, nine fountains; all the arrangement and construction is according to the principle and proportion of the number nine. It is like a beautiful bouquet. Imagine a very lofty, imposing edifice surrounded completely by gardens of variegated flowers, with nine avenues leading through them, nine fountains and pools of water. Such is its matchless, beautiful design. Now they are building a hospital, a school for orphans, a home for cripples, a hospice and a large dispensary. God willing, when it is fully completed, it will be a paradise.”

“I hope the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Chicago will be like this.”⁸⁷

In one of the talks which He gave at the Plaza Hotel where Elsbeth and her mother stayed, on 2 May, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explained religious truths with vivid, concrete imagery, “This morning the city is enveloped in fog and mist. How beautiful is a city brilliant with sunshine. Just as these mists and vapors conceal the pheno-menal sun, so human imaginations obscure the Sun of Truth. Consider the radiant glory of the great solar center of our planetary system: how wonderful the sight, how its splendor illumines vision until clouds and mists veil it from the eye. In the same way, the Sun of Truth becomes veiled and hidden by the superstitions and imaginations of human minds. When the sun rises, no matter from what dawning point on the horizon it appears—northeast, east, southeast—the haze and mists disperse, and we have clear vision of its glory mounting to the zenith. Similarly, the nations have been directed to the dawning points of the Sun of Reality, each to a particular rising place from which the light of religion has become manifest; but after a time the dawning point has become the object of worship instead of the Sun itself, which is ever one Sun and stationary in the heavens of the divine Will. Differences have arisen because of this, causing clouds and darkness to overshadow again the glorious luminary of Reality. When the mists and darkness of superstition and prejudice are dispersed, all will see the Sun aright and alike. Then will all nations become as one in its radiance.”⁸⁸

At another talk there that day He explained the existence of God by saying, “Consider the lady beside me who is writing in this little book. It seems a very trifling, ordinary matter; but upon intelligent reflection you will conclude that what has been written presupposes and proves the existence of a writer. These words have not written themselves, and these letters have not come together of their own volition. It is evident there must be a writer.”

“And now consider this infinite universe. Is it possible that it could have been created without a Creator? Or that the Creator and cause of this infinite congeries of worlds should be without

intelligence? Is the idea tenable that the Creator has no comprehension of what is manifested in creation? Man, the creature, has volition and certain virtues. Is it possible that his Creator is deprived of these? A child could not accept this belief and statement. It is perfectly evident that man did not create himself and that he cannot do so. How could man of his own weakness create such a mighty being? Therefore, the Creator of man must be more perfect and powerful than man. If the creative cause of man be simply on the same level with man, then man himself should be able to create, whereas we know very well that we cannot create even our own likeness. Therefore, the Creator of man must be endowed with superlative intelligence and power in all points that creation involves and implies.”⁸⁹

World Crusade

As outlined by the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, the third global teaching plan would extend the full decade from the hundredth anniversary when Bahá’u’lláh received His revelation in 1853 to the anniversary of His announcement of it in 1863 (1953-1963). In this ten years the Bahá’í world community was called upon to establish new National Spiritual Assemblies in every country in Latin America, as well as in the goal countries in Europe, doubling (in just one year) the total number of countries in the world where Bahá’ís lived and building two new continental Houses of Worship! This plan came to be called the World Crusade.

In 1954, the second year of the plan, or Crusade, the Guardian created a new institution to help with the protection and propa-gation of the Bahá’í community. The individuals appointed as members of this institution would serve for specific years of service. It was not a professional or paid position, but a higher level of service in the Bahá’í community. The institution was called the “Auxiliary Board,” and the primary responsibility of the Board members was to assist the Hands of the Cause of God in their job of guiding and inspiring the Bahá’í community.

Hands of the Cause were individuals of proven capacity and dedication. They were given the designation of “Hands” to assist the Guardian in his many responsibilities. Their most obvious role was to inspire other Bahá’ís and Bahá’í institutions to higher levels of dedication and devotion. The Hands had no administrative authority.

The first Auxiliary Board Member to visit Topeka was Marjorie McCormick in October 1954. In the papers of Fern Howard is a study guide prepared by Margery McCormick. It is titled, ‘Aids for Understanding and Teaching the Fundamentals of the Bahá’í Faith.’ Though there is no date on the study guide it is mimeographed in the style of the time. It is very likely the same one used at that time.

This study guide puts into perspective the global progress of the Faith from its birth to the global campaign just launched. It begins with an overview of Bahá'í history with dates of the ministries of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, noting the number of countries where the Faith had spread in those periods of time (1844-1853: two countries, 1853-1892: thirteen more countries, 1892-1921: twenty-two more). This total span of time has been designated by the Guardian as the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Era. This period of time ended with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921.

It notes that, beginning in 1921, the Guardian indicated that the Bahá'í Faith entered its second stage of development, that of erecting the framework of the Bahá'í administrative order. He gave this period of time three different names: the Formative Age, the Iron Age and the Age of Transition. During the first decades of this time the Guardian taught the Bahá'í community how to administer the local Bahá'í communities according to the instructions provide by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the 1920s most local Bahá'í communities had some form of organization, but not necessarily according to Bahá'í scripture. Most of this information had not yet been translated or codified. This was the first task the Guardian set for himself in order to help the Bahá'í community function.

The study guide described the next task after the local level of administration was standardized, was the national level. What little regional or national level of organization may have existed in various countries was often not according to Bahá'í standards. When that was fairly well established, the Guardian turned his attention to the international level of administration. This progress continued past his lifetime and continues today. This development of the administrative order will be a continuing process.

The study guide summarized the Guardian's forecast of a third stage of development for the Bahá'í community to attain at some time in the future. In this future time the human race will have adopted some common moral standards such as the equality of women, the equality of races and nations, the elimination of all forms of slavery and a solid plan for peace among the nations will have been adopted and implemented. Once these steps have been accomplished then the human race will truly be able to prosper and flourish. He called it the Golden Age. It is this time that Bahá'ís are working to bring about.

Marjorie's lesson continued with the specific development plans that the Guardian had instituted up to the time of her visit. There was a seven year plan (1937-1944) for the Bahá'ís of the western hemisphere with goals to have at least one Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly in each state of the U.S., each province of Canada and each country of Latin America. The second major goal was to complete the exterior of the House of Worship in Wilmette. All these goals were accomplished.

Two years after that there was a second Seven Year Plan (1946-1953). It's goals were to consolidate and reinforce the accomplishments of the former plan, establish three new "national"

Spiritual Assemblies (in Canada, Central America and South America), and establish new Bahá'í communities in ten European countries to help them recover from the war. The final goal was to complete the interior of the House of Worship in Wilmette.

The presentation concluded with the activities that an individual believer could undertake in support of the goals of the current plan (1953-1963). This World Crusade embraced the entire planet, specifically listing 120 new countries where the Bahá'í Faith was to be introduced and established. Other goals included the purchase of sixty national Bahá'í centers in as many countries, purchase sites for eleven new Houses of Worship in as many countries and build two. Forty-eight new National Spiritual Assemblies were to be created and literature translated into eighty-one new languages. All required increased levels of cooperation between various National Spiritual Assemblies. The final goal was to hold the first Bahá'í World Congress in Baghdad in 1963.

As time passed it became obvious that some goals could not be achieved due to political conditions (in the Soviet countries) or religious fanaticism (building the Tehran House of Worship and holding the World Congress in Baghdad – it was moved to London). With the death of the Guardian in 1957, another goal was added: to elect the Universal House of Justice in 1963. By the end of the plan some Bahá'í communities were able to accomplish more than expected, so the total results exceeded the goals and expectations. For example, instead of building the Tehran House of Worship, two others were built: in Kampala, Uganda and Sydney, Australia. All the goals were accomplished by volunteer efforts, no paid staff, no missionaries; and financed solely by the Bahá'ís themselves.

At the beginning of the plan, to encourage Bahá'ís to consider moving from their homes to countries where there were no Bahá'ís (and often with a foreign culture and alien language and customs), the Guardian declared that the first Bahá'ís to settle in one of these goal countries would be designated 'Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.' In this spiritual crusade, 'Knight' was part of the metaphor. No Bahá'ís in Topeka found themselves able to carry out this service but several people who had been visitors to Topeka were able to achieve this. Suddenly the Bahá'ís in Topeka had friends in very distant places.

In all of this activity to teach people about the Bahá'í Faith, certain actions are forbidden. Equal to the obligation to share the Bahá'í teachings, is the responsibility to refrain if there is no interest. Proselytizing is forbidden. Sometimes this restraint has startled the listener.

One year after announcing the goal of doubling the number of countries where Bahá'ís lived the Guardian informed the Bahá'í world that all the goal countries now had resident Bahá'ís with the exception of those controlled by the Soviets. This status remained unchanged until 1989 and 1990, after the fall of communism, when Bahá'ís were able to move to the last two countries. The list of

these Knights was then finally completed and deposited in the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in accordance with the Guardian's instructions.

Several people who are on that list had visited Topeka in the years before they left the country. The first future Knights to visit Topeka were Alvin Blum (1912-1968) and his wife, Gertrude (1909-1993) and children. They were living in Little Rock, Arkansas at the time and made a circuit with a stop in Wichita before coming to Topeka. In 1937 Alvin had embraced the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh from a Jewish background. He spoke here on 'The Blueprint of an Enduring World Peace,' on Friday, 8 November 1946, at the Chamber of Commerce building.

The Blums returned to Topeka a few months later, the next January. This time he spoke at the Hotel Kansan on, 'World Order Through World Faith,' on the 26th. A third and final visit was 11 May 1948 when they were on their way out of the country to New Zealand to assist the Bahá'í community there. From New Zealand they moved to the Solomon Islands in 1954 where they each earned the designation of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

While in New Zealand, Gertrude was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand (a joint council before each country had its own), and later to the first Regional Spiritual Assembly of the South Pacific Ocean (before each of the island nations had their own National Assemblies). For her continued services to the community in general and to the Bahá'í Faith, she was made a Member of the British Empire in 1989. She had found manifold ways to carry out 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation to be of service to the human race.

The next who visited Topeka and later were both designated Knights of Bahá'u'lláh were Ben (1892-1979) and Gladys (1906-1979) Weeden. He had entered the Bahá'í community in 1948 and immediately went to serve at the World Center in Haifa. In 1950 both were appointed to the International Bahá'í Council to assist the Guardian in his work. They had to leave Haifa a year later due to the condition of Ben's health. They came to Topeka shortly afterward, in May 1952, and shared their experiences in Haifa and news of the international activities of the Bahá'ís. In 1953 they settled as the first Bahá'ís in Antigua, thereby earning the designation of Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.

At the Naw-Rúz celebration in 1955, Topeka Bahá'ís learned that a local goal had been won. For several years they had been giving support and encouragement to the few Bahá'ís in Wichita to help that Bahá'í community grow. The long-range goal was the formation of a Spiritual Assembly there. Now, at last, their efforts were successful. Specifically, the offer of financial assistance to help a Bahá'í from outside of Kansas move to Wichita was accepted. Now the news arrived that the first Spiritual Assembly of Wichita could be formed. This would be the second Bahá'í Assembly in Kansas. It was a joyous New Year!

Several Bahá'ís from Topeka attended the National Bahá'í convention that April. They were: Dr Scott & Fern Howard, Paul, Brown, Cora Schulte, Margaret Loveless, Ruth Ashworth and her son George. The delegate elected from Kansas was Dr. David Ruhe from Leawood.

Crisis in Iran

Since the beginning days of the Bahá'í Faith in Persia (now Iran) in the nineteenth century, it has not had a comfortable time in the country of its birth. Sporadic waves of hysterical fanaticism have swept the country and the Bahá'ís have been attacked. In the spring of 1955, this happened again.

On 24 August 1955, the Topeka Bahá'í Assembly sent a telegram to President Eisenhower asking for his support to alleviate the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran. Another was sent to the Shah of Iran asking for his assistance in the same matter. Paul Brown sent the telegrams on behalf of the Assembly and delighted in telling how shocked the telegraph clerk was to send those telegrams – not an everyday occurrence in Topeka!

The telegraphs were sent in response to an appeal from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the American Bahá'í community. He asked as many local communities as possible to implore the President's assistance to request the Iranian government, specifically the Shah, to curtail the persecution of the Bahá'ís occurring in Iran at that time. The President responded, the severity of the persecution subsided and, in thanks, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran sent a gift of appreciation to the President. The gift was a large hand-made carpet. That carpet has been on display at the Eisenhower museum in Abilene, Kansas with a note that it was a gift from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran.

The telegram to the Shah was more brief, simply a direct appeal to the Shah to stop the persecution of Bahá'ís. A flood of telegrams was sent from all parts of the world. The effect was dramatic. They demonstrated, if nothing else, that the Bahá'ís were not just a small, local group of Iranians. In September that year the secretary of the Guardian wrote to the Bahá'ís of India saying, "From word that we have received, it appears the appeals made by the followers (of Bahá'u'lláh) all over the world, and specially the appeals made by such countries as India, the United States, England, etc. have had great effect in causing the Government of Persia to restrain the prejudiced, bigoted mullahs, and the fanatical people. Our appeal to the United Nations has had great effect."⁹⁰

Unknown to the Bahá'ís of Topeka at the time, this outbreak of persecution would have a direct result on their lives. It eventually altered and brought more diversity to the Bahá'í community of Topeka. A young Iranian Bahá'í who lived just a block from the National Bahá'í Center in Teheran watched as the army took pickaxes and demolished the dome of the building, one of the significant

features of the city skyline. “Iran Razing dome of Bahá’í Temple,” the headline said in the *New York Times*. Though the building was not a “temple,” it was the national administrative center. “Gen. Timur Bakhtiar, military governor of Teheran, has ordered the dome of the Haziratulghodes Temple, center of the outlawed Bahá’í religious sect, destroyed.”

“The work was started yesterday by a team of forty engineers. It is expected to take two weeks.”⁹¹ Ownership of the building was eventually returned to the Bahá’ís, but the dome was not rebuilt. In the 1980’s it was seized again and remains confiscated today, along with all other Bahá’í properties in Iran: holy places, meeting halls, community centers, schools, clinics, farms, homes, businesses, etc. even cemeteries.

At the time the national center was seized in 1955, an art exhibit was on display there during the national Bahá’í convention. Mahin Omidvarin, who had watched the destruction from her home down the street, had a drawing in the exhibit. Needless to say, the drawing was never seen again. Her family encouraged her to leave Iran. She arrived in the United States where she attended the University of Kansas in Lawrence and began a family. After a few years she and her family moved to Topeka. That is how Mahin Omidvaran Stanley came to be a member of the Topeka Bahá’í community.

The persecution in Iran, and the telegrams, were undoubtedly a topic of consultation later in December 1955 when Bahá’ís of Kansas attended the State Bahá’í Convention in Topeka. They came from: Topeka, Kansas City, Wichita, Emporia, Hope and Leawood, Kansas.

Another shock came two years later. On 4 November 1957 the Bahá’í world was stunned at the passing of the Guardian. He had been in London and died of complications from the flu. Great consternation arose when it was learned that no appointment had been made of a second Guardian. There was no one who met the conditions as set forth by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to be a Guardian. This left the highest-ranking institution of the Bahá’í Faith being that of the Hands of the Cause of God. Along with the Guardianship this was the only institution with an international sphere of activity.

Hands of the Cause of God

The designation of Hand of the Cause of God is a life-time rank designating outstanding service to the Bahá’í Faith. Though there is no clergy in the Bahá’í Faith, and such is expressly forbidden, there remained a need for a long term, global perspective of guidance and advice. When this function is separated from positions of power the possibility of corruption is eliminated. Bahá’u’lláh appointed the first ‘Hands’ and this authority was passed on to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who passed it on to the Guardian. The Hands of the Cause are the most senior level of the two arms of

the Bahá'í administrative order; the one designated as, 'the Learned.' The other arm, the governing councils, is 'the Rulers.'

Bahá'u'lláh appointed some individuals as Hands in their lifetimes, to others He conferred the title after their passing. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also, after the passing of several individuals, indicated that they too had been Hands of the Cause of God due to the efforts they had expended to promote and protect the Bahá'í Faith. Early in his ministry the Guardian designated a few of the believers as Hands after their passing, then named some during their own lifetimes. This appointment of the latter individuals came as a great shock to them since most of the Hands before them had been dead before receiving the appointment!

'Abdu'l-Bahá defined the institution of the Hands of the Cause, "O friends! The Hands of the Cause of God must be nominated and appointed by the Guardian of the Cause of God. All must be under his shadow and obey his command. Should any, within or without the company of the Hands of the Cause of God disobey and seek division, the wrath of God and His vengeance will be upon him, for he will have caused a breach in the true Faith of God."

"The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words."⁹²

In one of his last communications, the Guardian emphasized the status and increased the scope of responsibilities of the Hands. Among other things he designated them as 'Chief Stewards' and 'Custodians of the Cause of God.' They had responsibilities that transcended national boundaries. Next to the Guardian, the Hands were the only individuals with institutional authority to conduct any business of the Bahá'í Faith on an international level. There was also an International Bahá'í Council, but it had been described by the Guardian as a temporary group of individuals to assist him, it had no institutional authority.

After the Guardian died in 1957, the Hands of the Cause of God consulted together, agreed unanimously that no second Guardian had been appointed and furthermore, could not be appointed by them. There was no institution or individual authorized by Bahá'í scripture to be the international head of the Faith except for the Universal House of Justice which had been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, but had not yet been created. The Hands decided to continue the plans set in motion by the Guardian with a timetable to 1963 and added the creation of the Universal House of Justice as an additional goal. The current plan called for the creation of more National Spiritual Assemblies (the goal was 69, up from 12), that would enable the holding of a truly representative international election.

When all these National Assemblies had been created and the election held in 1963, on schedule, the Hands stepped aside; they even removed themselves from eligibility to be elected to this council. The world's religious history has seen far too few examples of such selfless sacrifice.

Some of the visitors to Topeka who had come over the decades were later named Hands of the Cause of God. Because several of them came to Topeka more than once, they will be listed here alphabetically and their trips described.

Dorothy Baker (1898-1954) has been mentioned before. At age fourteen she had been taken by her grandmother to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She was too shy to speak to Him but requested to be able to serve the Faith. He replied that He would pray that would happen. She lived in Lima, Ohio and came to Topeka in November 1942 after speaking in Lawrence at Haskell Institute. In Topeka she spoke at the Hotel Kansan on basic teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. She also often spoke on 'The Elimination of Racial Prejudice.' She was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly at the time.

In 1949 she returned for the 4th and 5th of April. She was then the Chair of the National Bahá'í Assembly. The first evening she spoke to the Bahá'ís on the Bahá'í Fund. This meeting was private because only registered members of the Bahá'í community are allowed to contribute money in support of activities of the Bahá'í community. Some people find this surprising, but it is a condition set by Bahá'u'lláh. The next day she spoke at a public meeting on 'Rebirth of Civilization.'

In 1951 she was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God. She died three years later in a plane explosion over the Mediterranean Sea. The Bahá'ís here held a memorial service for her.

Amelia (Millie) Collins (1873-1962) is the second Hand that we have evidence of coming to Topeka which she did in 1938. She had been Bahá'í since 1919. In January 1947, she was told that she was one of the nine Hands appointed, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions, to personally assist the Guardian. She fulfilled this capacity for the rest of her life. She was also, in 1951, appointed one of the original members of the International Bahá'í Council.

As a Hand and representative of the Guardian, she traveled extensively around the world to encourage, guide and inspire her fellow believers. One of these trips included representing the Guardian to lay the cornerstone for the House of Worship near Frankfurt, Germany. After the passing of the Guardian she attended each of the annual meetings of all the Hands. The last one she attended was in October 1961, at 89 years old, with a broken arm! She died in Haifa a few months later.

Louis Gregory (1874-1951) of Washington D.C. came to Topeka in January 1944. He was a graduate of Fisk and Howard Universities and a member of the Washington D.C. bar. He traveled extensively for the Bahá'í community, often speaking on the need for unity between the races. He

had entered the Bahá'í community in 1909 and was designated a Hand after his passing. Son of a former slave, he was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly at the time of his visit to Topeka. While here he spoke on 'World Unity' in one of a series of four programs in 'a world neighborhood series.' The talk was given at the YWCA. Comments recorded at the time said the event was well attended. In addition to the public lecture, he spoke informally to the local Bahá'ís.

Before coming to Topeka some of the Bahá'ís here had met him at other places. At one event May Brown remembered, "...Cora and I were in Kansas City to hear a lecture by Louis Gregory. After his talk, as we went up to shake hands with him, Cora (a new believer) said to him, 'I have seen you at the conventions, but I've never met your wife.' I don't remember what he said, but I had to emphasize her not asking any more questions, so I kicked her on the shins and told her later, 'He is married to a white woman and they can't travel together.' 'Abdu'l-Bahá married them as an example that 'man is one' and even marriage between the races is approved.'"⁹³ Not only is interracial marriage approved, it is encouraged.

In October 1944 Charles Mason Remey (1874-1974), a retired architect from Washington D.C., came to Topeka. The topic he spoke on, at the Hotel Kansan, was 'Security for a Failing World.'

He was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God on 24 December 1951. As such, in 1957 he signed the statement made by all the Hands together that no guardian had been appointed, nor could be appointed to succeed Shoghi Effendi. The Hands were now the senior ranking level of administration of the international Bahá'í community by virtue of being designated the 'Chief Stewards' of the community. They unitedly decided that the Universal House of Justice should be elected at the close of the current teaching and development plan.

Though agreeing, apparently Remey was not satisfied with this decision. Later he unilaterally decided that he alone had to, and could, save the Bahá'í world. He proclaimed himself to be a second Guardian, despite the fact that he met none of the qualifications clearly set forth by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In His will and testament, that was recognized by all Bahá'ís as legal and binding, 'Abdu'l-Bahá set forth a new chapter in the covenant of Bahá'ú'lláh. This created the institution of the Guardianship, appointed the first Guardian (Shoghi Effendi) and set forth the conditions for successor Guardians. The appointment of a successor Guardian had to be made by the current Guardian. The appointee had to be a lineal descendent of Bahá'ú'lláh. And finally, the appointment had to be ratified by the Hands of the Cause.

None of these conditions were fulfilled by Remey or anyone else. He was not a descendent, there had been no appointment and the Hands certainly did not validate his claim. His contention to be the "hereditary" Guardian was absurd. He tried to encourage Bahá'ís to follow him instead of Bahá'í scripture. A very few did. The rest of the Hands, after consulting with him while he insisted on his position, regretfully announced that by asserting such claims counter to the will and

testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Remey had removed himself from the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh; he was not a second Guardian, nor was he, or any who followed him, any longer a member of the Bahá’í community.

Knowing him personally, the Bahá’ís in Topeka were greatly distressed by his claims and actions, but there was nothing they could do. May Brown recalled, “We were so sorry when we heard he was a Covenant Breaker, but we had no desire to join with him.”⁹⁴ He died rejected by his own followers who splintered again and again in contests over leadership. On the other hand, the Bahá’í community remains united and cooperates together in ways the world has never witnessed before.

William (Bill) Sears (1911-1992) came to Topeka twice, the first time on 10 September 1944, while on his way to Chicago. He gave two talks at the Hotel Kansan, one on Sunday afternoon, the other that evening. At both events he reviewed a forthcoming book written by the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, *God Passes By*, his history of the first hundred years of the religion. The newspaper article specified that the review would be given from galley proofs, since the book had not yet been released by the publisher. In 1957 he was appointed a Hand of the Cause.

There is an interesting note in the record of his visit, that is not found in any of the biographical information published to date about Bill Sears. It says, “He has a wife and two boys and all are studying German with the hope that they might be among the first to enter Germany after the war is over and thereby take the Bahá’í teachings and materially help in the rebuilding and re-educating devastated Germany.”⁹⁵ This hope was not realized, they eventually went to South Africa. There they bought a farm in order to hold mixed race meetings during the times of apartheid (farm tools were kept by the back door so if anyone they did not know approached the farmhouse, the natives could pick up tools on their way out of the house and pretend to be farm workers!).

He returned to Topeka in 1985 and spoke privately to the Bahá’ís in celebration of a nation-wide teaching campaign that was won by the Kansas Bahá’í community. His trip through Kansas, visiting Bahá’ís in city after city, was one of the prizes.

Corinne True (1861-1961) was the first visitor to Topeka to be later designated a Hand of the Cause of God (in 1952). She came to Topeka in 1925. The only evidence of her visit is mention in the report of the National Bahá’í Convention of 1925. She was widely known in the Bahá’í community by the title given to her by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: ‘Mother of the Temple.’ This was given in recognition of her role in building the House of Worship in Wilmette, IL. She was the American Bahá’í who traveled to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Akka taking the petition from the American believers asking for His blessing to build the House of Worship. Without His knowledge that the petition existed, He strode to greet her and reached behind her where she had hidden the petition and proudly exclaimed that it was what he’d been waiting for! The petition was evidence of the unity

and dedication of the American Bahá'ís and their desire to embody the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Later, as Treasurer of Bahá'í Temple Unity, she personally signed receipts for contributions. She had been a Bahá'í since 1899.

In 1958 an event was sponsored and supported by Bahá'ís of Topeka to create a greater level of unity and fellowship among the Bahá'ís here. It eventually became an annual event and a part of the national Bahá'í schools network. That summer several Bahá'ís in Topeka and Emporia agreed to hold a weekend retreat for all Bahá'ís in Kansas and others who might like to come. May Brown was very involved. “Paul and I owned a cabin out to Lake Wabaunsee about 40 miles from Topeka where we often had young folks come from Emporia and Topeka who were interested in hearing about the Faith. Don Newby, who was living in Topeka, then got together with Wayne Lowery, a Bahá'í from Emporia, and talked me into planning for a conference over Labor Day, Aug. 30, 31 and Sept. 1, 1958 at our cabin. Paul gave his consent if we did all the work of getting ready. That was some job! Don and Wayne went out on weekends and did some painting on a screen door making a pretty rose colored pink to tease me as they knew my color was always blue. Anyway, they mowed the grass but left me the job of sending letters to invite a lot of Bahá'ís, and I do mean, “a lot!” They wrote out what I was to say in my letter and I wish I had a copy, but I don't.

“They were told (in the invitation) to bring cots, bed rolls, etc. Meals were served if desired at a price of \$2.00 a day – or maybe for the whole time. The cabin had two rooms and a large screened-in porch. A little house out back and a place where swimming was available.”⁹⁶

In another collection of reminiscences she explained how the “cabin” came to be: “We got the chance to buy a lot at Lake Wabaunsee which was just 40 miles from our place in Topeka. It was Donnie (the youngest son) who decided we needed a cabin. We already had an 8 x 16 foot building and Johnny (son-in-law), Maella's husband, gave us an 8 x 16 foot paint shop building. We moved them both out to the lake. Donnie had already been “roughing” in there so he had a foundation for a building all ready. By putting the two buildings 8 feet apart and putting a roof over it all, we had a cabin 16 feet by 24 feet. We then added a large screened porch. By now, we really had us a nice cabin.”⁹⁷

She tells how that first retreat unfolded:

On Friday night Don and Wayne and a few others from Topeka went out early as did Paul and I. Soon the gang began to arrive. We were all settled in for the night – or so we thought – when someone else came in. Some forgot their cots or didn't have them so we got out of bed and put the guests in, then about midnight here another bunch came. Paul and I ended up sleeping in the back of our truck without much padding underneath!

We had it planned so that we had dry cereal, fruit juices, bananas, coffee, etc. for breakfast, lunchmeat sandwiches, potato chips, fruit, etc. at noon. When my son-in-law heard about the deal he was afraid I'd work too hard so he said, "Granny (his pet name for me and the one by which I am known by all the family now), I don't want you cooking for all that bunch. I'll fix the evening meal and bring it out every night.

My daughter came with him but he did the work which was old stuff to him as he was a cook in the army and 25 or 30 people was no trouble.

We had a regular schedule for studying the Faith, for fun, swimming and whatever was well planned for the conference.

It worked pretty well, except someone got locked in the outhouse out back as some kid turned the wooden button on the outside while someone was inside. Scott Howard worried when Maye Rittis was late at night getting there, so he took a lantern out to the crossroad so she'd be sure to find her way and while he was gone someone hid his cot down over the bank out of sight and let him hunt a while before bringing it back to him!

Of course we had a rain shower and everyone had to pack in on the porch and cabin so Dave Ruhe showed some pictures (slides) to entertain everyone. You might say we were a close knit group!⁹⁸

This weekend retreat was held several times informally until the Kansas District Teaching Committee, a committee of the National Spiritual Assembly, took it on in the 1960s as an annual project. This continued into the 1980s when the responsibilities of the committee were redefined on the national level and retreats were not included. The event was missed so much that several Bahá'ís around Kansas, including one from Topeka, formed a committee and asked the National Bahá'í Schools Committee if a formal Bahá'í School could be started in Kansas. The national committee was delighted, a school session was held (for a weekend just like the retreats) and it was rated as 'excellent' by the national schools committee. Except for a brief interruption in the 1990's, it has continued to be held each year.

As members of the Bahá'í community come from all nations and cultures the intermingling can sometimes be surprising. It is impossible not to learn about diverse customs. Meeting other people on the common ground of faith builds bridges that cross languages, cultures and customs. It is a step toward peace on the planet, and there are surprises on the way. One surprise, for a middleaged male construction worker from Topeka, was to be kissed by another man, albeit on the cheek! May Brown calmly wrote of her husband's experience as the man who received the kiss, "It was our policy to go to any Bahá'í meeting in nearby places. I'm not sure – but I think it was in Kansas City and my husband Paul was chairman. Why he was chairman, I can't remember. At any rate the

occasion was to hear that wonderful man, Tarazu'llah Samandari who had lived and spent some time with Bahá'ú'lláh. When he was introduced and came up on the platform he embraced Paul, kissing him on one cheek and then on the other as was the custom in his country. Of course that was unexpected, but think how wonderful to be kissed by a man that knew Bahá'u'lláh.”⁹⁹ ‘Unexpected’ was an understatement! It was verbally related that Paul turned several shades of red!

Beginning in the 1940s, up to 1962, the Topeka Bahá'í community has a unique set of records that was compiled each year by Olive Kaley, Historian for the local Bahá'ís. She began each year's records with a description of the Annual business meeting, often listing those who were present (the Topeka Bahá'í community was not so large that these meetings could not be held in someone's home). Since the Local Spiritual Assembly is elected at these annual meetings, she listed the names of the new Assembly members and sometimes the names of those who voted in persona and absentee.

The next section consisted of a list and description of all holy day observances during the past year: location, host or hostess, the program and the number or names of those who attended. After that is a similar list of the Nineteen-day Feast observances, next is a similar, but less detailed, list of meetings of the local Assembly. Two more sections followed: a description of special events and a section of everything else of interest that occurred in the Topeka Bahá'í community that year. Sometimes, but not often, she would make summary comments. After the reports, which were all handwritten, several pages of newspaper clippings would follow. These included notices from the ‘church’ page, any news articles from the Topeka newspapers about Bahá'í community activities and any other items that mentioned a local Bahá'í.

These records are priceless and have been invaluable in preparing this history. At the close of the records for 1961-62, Olive apologized for, “being absent a great many times that has made it difficult (to prepare these records) so I know you (the Bahá'í community) will be understanding.”¹⁰⁰ That was the last year she kept the records. No similar records were kept after that except for minutes of Assembly meetings, and they are confidential. It is a regretful loss, but the detailed picture she preserved for these decades is phenomenal.

The 1950s had been years of quiet growth with emphasis on nurturing fledgling Bahá'í communities around the state, most notably Wichita, Emporia, Salina and Kansas City. In contrast the 60's were years of sudden change. The first changes were calm and recognizable, several Bahá'í families moved to Topeka and became very active in the Topeka Bahá'í community.

Change accelerated in the late 60s when hippies all around the world began to enter the Bahá'í community – even in Topeka! May Brown, in her 70's by then, recalled opening the door one day to see two very shaggy people she did not know who greeted her as Bahá'ís. She remembered

thinking, "If Bahá'u'lláh loves them, so can I," and welcomed them into her home.¹⁰¹ In a few years the size of the Topeka Bahá'í Community had doubled with young people.

In 1967 the Topeka Assembly spearheaded efforts to amend the Kansas statutes to recognize Bahá'í marriage. Before this time a civil ceremony was required in conjunction with the Bahá'í one. This was a milestone for the entire Bahá'í community of Kansas. May Brown was so proud of this accomplishment she wrote, "On March 18 (1968), in Topeka, we had a dinner at the American Savings in honor of some of the legislators that helped to get the "Bahá'í Marriage Law" passed through the legislature the year before. Now we could have our own marriage service which would be legal in the state of Kansas."¹⁰² This was just one step necessary for a new religious community to function. The next year the first Bahá'í wedding in Topeka was performed under the new law when Gerri Barnes and Diana Hope were married.

This raises the question: What is a Bahá'í marriage ceremony like?

A Bahá'í wedding ceremony can be as simple or elaborate as the couple may wish. The only requirement is for the bride and groom each to say, 'We will all, verily, abide by the will of God.' This is said in the presence of two witnesses deemed to be trustworthy by the Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction the wedding is performed.

It is before the wedding that the real work is done.

First, before getting married, each person must know the state of their own character, then they must choose the one they want for their partner and get to know the state of their character. In some cultures, this is a radical departure from tradition. Next, because marriage is a union of two families, the consent of all living natural parents is necessary. In western cultures, this is radical, but it does strengthen the family bond and the marriage starts out with agreement by both families.

The actual ceremony is a public demonstration of the commitment of the couple.

In the 1960s frequent regular guests of the Topeka Bahá'í community would come all the way from Saudi Arabia. They were Virginia Maye Rittis and her husband, Duane. She had entered the Bahá'í community in 1958 while living in Manhattan. He had accepted a job with TWA which took them to Saudi Arabia. But that is not the only connection. Not only was Virginia a Bahá'í, but her mother had been friends with some of the Bahá'ís in Topeka even before she was born. Her middle name, Maye, was given after May Brown, but spelled differently.

Virginia had concerns about living in Saudi Arabia. It was then, as now, illegal for her to openly practice her faith. She could only live in the country because she, being a woman and property of her husband, traveled in and out of the country on his passport. Because religion is very important in Saudi Arabia he had to state his religion and being Christian was no problem. Her religion was

irrelevant, she was irrelevant. Whenever possible she attended Bahá'í activities in Europe and the U.S. When he retired, they settled in Topeka and soon, her husband, too, entered the Bahá'í community.

In 1963 the Bahá'ís in Topeka continued a role that had been assumed many decades before. On 24 March that year Bahá'ís here hosted another regional conference. An article about the conference in the *State Journal*, of the day before, does not state the subject of the conference, but does mention that the main speakers would be Naomi McCord of Webster Groves, Missouri and Jan Conley of Lawrence. It also mentioned that Bahá'ís from Kansas City, Leawood, Lawrence, Emporia, Wichita, Fort Riley and Salina were expected to attend, in addition to the believers in Topeka.

The next month, April 1963, the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh was observed in Topeka and every other local Bahá'í community world-wide. In Topeka a special program was held with Jan Conley again speaking, this time on 'Dawn of World Peace.' This title reflects the Bahá'í conviction that peace is possible on the planet. This anniversary was celebrated jointly by the Bahá'ís of the world in London later that month when thousands assembled for the (first) Bahá'í World Congress. It was the largest gathering of Bahá'ís in the world to that time.

Immediately prior to the World Congress, the entire Bahá'í world community took a step that had been long anticipated. Finally, it was possible to elect the international governing council ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. One of its titles, given by Bahá'u'lláh, was chosen to be commonly used, that in English is the 'Universal House of Justice.' This election was held during the Festival of Ridván that year.

The Bahá'ís of Topeka then had, and continue to have, a role in the elections of the House of Justice, just as every other Bahá'í in the world has a role. This is done, first by voting for a delegate to the national Bahá'í convention which elects the National Spiritual Assembly, then the members of all the National Spiritual Assemblies of the world vote for the House of Justice. This indirect method is specified in the Bahá'í scriptures. The membership of the House of Justice is re-elected every five years.

Amazingly, one of the members elected to the original House of Justice in 1963, had been born in Kansas! That was Hugh Chance. His family had left Kansas while he was still a child, but he kept fond memories of his childhood on the Kansas farm. After his retirement from service in 1993, he and his wife, Margaret, moved to Winfield, near where he was born and both are now buried in the Tisdale Cemetery, just east of Winfield. His Kansas connection was not widely known at the time of the election, but this was different at the next election in 1968.

At that election, in 1968, the newly elected member of the House of Justice, Dr. David Ruhe, was well known as being from Kansas. He was also a close friend of Bahá'ís in Topeka! In February 1954 his family had moved to Leawood, Kansas so he could take up a job in the newly created position of Professor of Medical Communications at the University Kansas Medical School. There he pioneered use of optical fibers for internal photography, high-definition projection in surgical theaters and other techniques to enhance the education of medical students. He and his wife and children were also Bahá'ís.

Through attending various Bahá'í activities in Topeka and else-where in Kansas, Dave and his family came to know and become friends with Bahá'ís all across the state. Kansas Bahá'ís chose him to represent them several years in a row as their delegate to the National Bahá'í Convention. In 1959 he was elected a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and, in 1963, elected its Secretary. His election to the House of Justice in 1968 brought the number of Kansans on that nine-member council, to two!

To balance the stress of global coordination and oversight which falls collectively upon the House of Justice and its individual members, each member was instructed to take up a hobby. Dave took up painting and resumed writing. He will be remembered for two books, *Door of Hope*, historical profiles of the Bahá'í holy places in the Holy Land, and *Robe of Light*, a biography of the Persian years of the life of Bahá'u'lláh. In 1993 he retired and moved to New York state where he died in 2005 near his children.

While living in Haifa, he welcomed members of Bahá'í communities in Kansas, including Topeka, who traveled there for Bahá'í pilgrimage. This is a pilgrimage to the historical sites in the Haifa-Akka area of present-day Israel associated with the lives of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith.

The first Bahá'ís from Topeka to go on this pilgrimage were Paul and May Brown in 1968. In addition to pilgrimage, they also attended the Intercontinental Bahá'í Conference in Palermo, Sicily. This conference was held to commemorate the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea one hundred years before. The Universal House of Justice, which hosted the conference, invited all those who attended to come as a group immediately from the conference on pilgrimage at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel. Paul and May accepted this invitation. She recalled, "When Paul and I were first married, we were acquainted with a young girl who married and moved to another town. Her folks who stayed in Topeka, died and left her some property. As a friend, she asked us to help her to take care of it. The final result was that we became involved to the extent that when the property was sold, we received enough money to take a trip to the Holy Land."

“The year was 1968. We were in Eliot, Maine, at the Bahá’í School when a group of Bahá’ís were planning a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We decided to join them.”¹⁰³

Mark Dillman was the next to go in 1974.

Ruth Ashworth, accompanied by her son George, who lived in California, went in 1975.

Duane and Virginia Maye Rittis went that same year, fulfilling a long-deferred hope of theirs. Virginia delighted in telling of David Ruhe’s surprise when he greeted the group of pilgrims which she and Duane were in. He had known them for years, but he had not known that Duane had entered the Bahá’í community after leaving Saudi Arabia.

In 1999, at age 12, Trosten Herrmann accompanied his father (from Shawnee County) and brother (a student at K. U.), becoming the youngest member of the Topeka Bahá’í community to go on pilgrimage.

The family of Dr. Chris and Kathy Hamilton, Tahirah and Noah, went early in 2002.

Pilgrimage to holy places strengthens the ties to those places and the people or events associated with them. Bahá’u’lláh ordained His house in Baghdad as a place of Bahá’í pilgrimage, as well as the House of the Báb in Shiraz, Iran. Though legally entitled to ownership of the house in Baghdad, local authorities have refused to allow Bahá’ís access to it since the early years of the twentieth century. From time to time Bahá’ís could visit the House of the Báb in Shiraz, but after the Iranian revolution of 1979 it was bulldozed down. Instead of those places, Bahá’ís make pilgrimage to the resting places of Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb in the Haifa-Akka area of Israel. They also visit other sites nearby which are associated with the early years of the Bahá’í Faith. Because of the imprisonment of Bahá’u’lláh in Akka, part of the Ottoman Empire at the time, the Bahá’í World Center is in present-day Israel.

Visiting the places and seeing the clothing and other items from those times gives the pilgrims a direct, physical connection to the roots of their faith. Pilgrimage brings the history alive. But as important as that is, prayers at the shrines of Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb are most often mentioned by pilgrims as being the most transforming aspect of pilgrimage.

The year 1968 was also significant in the life of the Topeka Bahá’í Assembly. That year the Assembly completed the process to incorporate as a not-for-profit religious body. This was achieved as a goal set by the House of Justice for as many local Spiritual Assemblies as possible to obtain legal standing. Some of the members of the Topeka Assembly were unsure of this step, they did not know how it might entangle their lives in unnecessary legal complications. Actually, it did just the opposite. Now the corporate body of the Assembly was responsible, not the individual members.

One of the challenges facing the Universal House of Justice at this time was to continue the role and function of the Hands of the Cause of God. Since the House is not authorized in Bahá'í scripture to appoint new Hands some other solution had to be devised. After much consultation the House decided to create a new institution to carry on these functions of protection and propagation of the Bahá'í Faith. Much to the surprise of the Bahá'ís of Topeka, one of their former guests was appointed a member of this new institution. The institution is called the Continental Boards of Counselors. One of the members was Donald Witzel. And even more surprising, he and his family have more than one connection to Topeka.

Decades before, in January and again in March of 1954, while stationed at Ft Leavenworth, as a Lieutenant of the U.S. army, he brought his family to attend several events in Topeka hosted by the Bahá'í community here. They returned at least twice the next year. When Lt. Witzel was discharged, his family returned home to California. Years later, after decades of service with native Bahá'í communities in Latin America, Donald Witzel was appointed to the Continental Board of Counselors for the America's. The other tie to Topeka is that his wife's mother grew up in Topeka, then moved to California where she accepted the Bahá'í Faith!

Local Bahá'ís have helped the national Bahá'í community. Several have worked at the Bahá'í National Center near the House of Worship. The first was Paul Brown when he spent some time in 1970 remodeling a small grocery store into office and workspace for the Bahá'í Publishing Trust. A youth from Shawnee County was next when Gail Etzenhouser was Secretary of the National Youth Committee, 1987-1987. Her brother, Shane joined her the summer he was 16, but in the office of the Treasurer of the National Spiritual Assembly in 1985. In 2002 Richard Brown worked in that same office for a year then returned in 2004 to work in the activities office of the House of Worship.

The fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Topeka, in 1975, was an opportunity which the younger members of the Topeka Bahá'í community took to honor the surviving members of that original Assembly and other elderly members. The celebration was held in April that year. In looking for a site for this commemoration, it was noted that a building which once housed the Bahá'í Center (630 S Kansas Ave.) now held, on the ground floor, Willie's Diner. Willie was a friend of several Bahá'ís and one of the few black businessmen downtown. The symbolism and symmetry were too perfect to miss.

For the occasion, the first investigation into the history of the Bahá'í community of Topeka was made and a short historical tribute was presented. The struggles and triumphs of the early decades were acknowledged. It was a grand evening! As a result of interest in the history, May Brown was encouraged to write down her recollections. She eventually wrote two collections of memoirs: one

of Bahá'í activities, the other a family history. Both have been invaluable in the preparation of this history.

In the late 1970s a survey was taken of the religious community of Topeka by the local Council of Churches regarding how the Council could best serve the community. The Bahá'ís had to answer that the current two-tier membership system, where Christian churches had primary membership and other religions a secondary one, prevented the Council from being as effective as it could be. Much to their surprise, the President of the Council agreed and replied that that was the reason the Council was considering a proposal to dissolve itself so that a truly inter-faith council could succeed it. When that happened in the fall of 1979, Interfaith of Topeka became one of the first inter-religious organizations in the nation. The Bahá'í Assembly of Topeka, as well as Temple Beth Shalom and the local Muslim community, were welcomed as members in equal standing with the Christian churches of the city. It was a historic step for the city of Topeka.

With exhortations from Bahá'u'lláh to, “consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship,”¹⁰⁴ as well as the teachings that all religions have a common source, and that no group of people is outside God's guidance and mercy, it has been a delight for Bahá'ís to participate in Interfaith sponsored events. Members of both the Topeka and Shawnee County Bahá'í communities have served as members of the Board of Directors, members of various committees, and one as President.

In 1979 the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Topeka was surprised to receive a letter from a former member who had moved away forty years before. She was disposing of her property and had five plots, in a lot of six, in Memorial Park Cemetery that she offered to the Topeka Assembly. The Assembly could either sell the property or keep it for future use in case there was a need. The Assembly accept the gift and decided to keep the plots. These became the first property owned by the Topeka Bahá'í community (a somewhat unusual distinction!).

As the 1970s closed, the Bahá'ís could look back to a decade of growth and development all around the world. Though Bahá'í activities had been banned in several Muslim countries, Iraq and Indonesia being two, individual Bahá'ís there could practice their faith in peace. Despite that, on a global scale, the number of localities where Bahá'ís lived increased from some 40,000 to over 100,000. The number of National Spiritual Assemblies had grown from 113 in 1973, to 130 in 1979. The first two expansion and development plans created and guided by the House of Justice had been successfully completed and a third one launched. New institutions had been created at the Bahá'í World Center to continue and assist this growth. Four new volumes of Bahá'í scripture had been translated and published, a process that will be ongoing into the foreseeable future.

Physical evidence of the international Bahá'í community had also become more apparent. In addition to new national Bahá'í centers in various countries (in the U.S. a new office building was

acquired), the permanent Seat of the House of Justice was constructed on the slope of Mt. Carmel in Haifa, facing Akka. Progress was made towards constructing more Bahá'í Houses of Worship. In this continental phase, one for Latin America was finished in Panama City and construction was begun on two others – in New Delhi, India and Apia, Western Samoa. When it was finished, the one in New Delhi soon began to attract more visitors than the Taj Mahal!

As this book is being written, plans have been adopted and construction initiated for the last one in this series: the House of Worship for South America, outside of Santiago, Chile. Plans call for it to be made out of alabaster – and, when lit from within, it will glow in the dark!

The 1970s ended on a contrasting note. Fanatical clerics in Iran led a revolution that drove the Shah from power and initiated a bloodbath against the Bahá'ís. Details of the butchery can be found elsewhere but Bahá'ís in Topeka were aghast to learn of the members of one administrative council after another being seized from their homes and murdered. Thousands of individual Bahá'ís were arrested and hundreds were murdered (in some cases the families were sent bills to pay for the bullets used in the executions!). As this is being typed, news has just reached Topeka that one Bahá'í, who had been in prison in Iran for ten years, has suddenly died. He had been in good health and there is no explanation for his death. Bahá'ís in Iran continue to be denied jobs, schooling, housing and pensions (some pensioners have even been sent bills to pay back the pensions they had earned and received!). There are no signs of these conditions being relieved.

This persecution received attention in various places. Readers of the *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, in the 1980s, may have been surprised to find, at least twice, in Dr. Karl Menninger's, 'Reading Notes,' mention of the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran. In one he told about a 'Day of Prayer' service hosted by the Bahá'ís of Topeka for the Iranian Bahá'ís. In it he concluded, "Throughout the service, the beautiful spirit, concepts, and prayers of the Bahá'í faith were in evidence. The Bahá'ís are not known to everyone; they should be better known, though. If we knew more about them, we might be more inclined to try to stop their maltreatment at the hands of the Iranians."¹⁰⁵ Bahá'ís are confident that, someday, the persecution will end and Iran will proudly take its role as one of the leading nations of the world.

In May 1985, several members of the National Spiritual Assembly came to Topeka as part of the national Victory Month to celebrate the conclusion of a national Bahá'í teaching campaign. Two of these were Judges James and Dorothy Nelson, husband and wife, both judges in California. He was a Los Angeles Municipal Court judge and she was a justice of the Ninth Federal Circuit Court of Appeals. While in Topeka they met with Governor John Carlin, at his request, members of the Kansas legislature (which had just passed a resolution condemning the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran), members of the Kansas Supreme Court and Federal District Court. A reception was also held for them to meet with local Bahá'ís.

That fall the Bahá'ís in Topeka, with the rest of the Bahá'í world, were surprised to receive from the House of Justice a copy of its first message addressed to all the peoples of the world. Titled, *The Promise of World Peace*, this message addresses the social and political condition of the world and linked those conditions with the progress of humanity as stated in Bahá'í scripture. "For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet..."¹⁰⁶

World peace is not a new subject for Bahá'ís in Topeka. At first glance it would seem impossible for the Bahá'ís here, so distant from any place where decisions to make war are made, to have any effect on such decisions. But the wisdom of God is inscrutable. In one of His tables to the central states, 'Abdu'l-Bahá' was moved to challenge the believers here to, "raise aloft the banner of international conciliation."¹⁰⁷ This is not merely a goal of every Bahá'í, but a specific task of the believers in the central states. The Bahá'ís of Topeka have taken up that challenge.

Since decisions to make war are not directly made in Kansas, the approach has been aimed at changing public awareness because, in this country, wars need public support. Since the late 1930's (when records survive) topics relating to the need and possibility of peace on the planet have continually been addressed. Sometimes it was the subject of peace itself, sometimes it was one of the several areas that are foundational to peace that were addressed.

The House of Justice said that the route to peace is a choice of the people of the planet, "Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth."¹⁰⁸ The House then surveyed the progress toward peace that had been made in the twentieth century and the achievements that are still needed. The Kansas legislature was one of the first in the nation to urge residents to read *The Promise of World Peace* for the insights it contains.

These foundational conditions for peace include: realizing the equality of women, the equality of races, the common divine foundation of all religions and the need for everyone to receive an education. Bahá'ís of Topeka have addressed all of these subjects repeatedly over the past century.

Local Bahá'ís have acted on their faith in the inevitability of peace by directly entering the field of international service. Gail Etzenhouser, a member of the Shawnee County Bahá'í community, was the first from here. In 1991 she went to work at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel. There she worked for two and a half years in the Office of Social and Economic Development to coordinate and assist with projects in various national Bahá'í communities all over the world. She was then asked to go to Tanzania for a year to teach computer literacy classes. It was one of the more interesting experiences of her life. She taught at a school where people from the bush came to

learn to function in the modern world. Computers were instruments of magic to them and the greatest challenge was to dispel the fear that magical witches inside the computers made them function!

Shahrokh Khaze was the first to actually go from the Topeka Bahá'í community. In 1992 he went to work in architectural services during construction of the garden terraces and new administrative buildings in Haifa. Amanda Boatright followed in 2000 as personal secretary of a member of the Universal House of Justice. She described the experience as being more educational than four years of university. In 2003 she went to work in the New York City office of the International Bahá'í Community.

In 1992 several Bahá'ís from Topeka, including two children aged 12 and 15, attended the Second Bahá'í World Congress in New York City. This event celebrated the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. They joined with 27,000 other Bahá'ís from all corners of the globe. For those who could not attend, a link to the satellite broadcast was arranged at Howard Johnson's Motel on South Topeka Blvd. Because the broadcast began at 6:00 am Topeka time, brunch was also offered. The first three hours encapsulated highlights of the first several days of the Congress sessions, the last hours were a live broadcast of the closing session.

The Congress opened with reciprocal satellite voice broadcasts to and from the New York City Congress site, the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel, and subsidiary conferences in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Sydney, Australia; New Delhi, India; Nairobi, Kenya; Panama City, Panama; Bucharest, Romania; Moscow, Russia; Singapore; and Apia, Western Samoa. The messages of greetings that were exchanged back and forth was evidence for all participants, and those watching the broadcast, that the earth was indeed one homeland and all of humanity, its citizens.

As 1997 approached, awareness grew among Bahá'ís of Topeka that the centennial of the Bahá'í Faith in Kansas was nearing. This interest generated a state-wide planning committee that eventually drew representatives of every Spiritual Assembly in Kansas. A centennial celebration was planned in Enterprise, Kansas where it all began in the summer of 1897. Though the Enterprise Bahá'í community has not survived since those early years, the Topeka Bahá'í community has its direct roots there, so the Bahá'í community of Kansas has been continuous since those closing years of the nineteenth century.

Several Bahá'ís in Topeka, as well as the Spiritual Assembly itself, supported that centennial celebration in Enterprise. Duane Herrmann, Babak Firoozi, Rick Boatright, Diana Wenger and Joyce Stohr attended meetings of the planning committee held in Enterprise and Abilene. The committee was responsible, in addition to the centennial program, for a parallel program for children, as well as providing a place for events (no available building in Enterprise was large enough) and meals for everyone (the only café in town is closed on Saturdays so the local Lions

Club was engaged to cook). The city gave permission for use of the city park and its buildings for the day of the celebration. The Bahá'ís who attended (some from as far away as New York, Florida and Australia!) increased the population of the city by one third!

Duane Herrmann wrote a dramatic sketch portraying some of the women who were significant through the first one hundred years of the Kansas Bahá'í community. He also wrote a brief historical account of the arrival of the Bahá'í Faith to Enterprise, Kansas which included profiles of the people involved and several other pieces about events in Enterprise in 1897 including two articles in *World Order* ('Letters from a Nineteenth-Century Kansas Bahá'í,' Winter 1996-97, and 'Turbulent Prairie: Politics, the Press and the Bahá'í Faith in Kansas, 1897,' Fall 1999) and an article published in *Kanhistique*. Previous to this, a chapter by him was published in *Community Histories*, (Kalimat Press): 'The Bahá'í Faith in Kansas: 1897-1947.' These document the unique role of Kansas as having the second Bahá'í community in the western hemisphere. He also gave tours of sites in Enterprise and Mt. Hope Cemetery associated with the early Bahá'ís.

During the day of the centennial celebration Bahá'ís from Topeka participated in various ways. Many were in the parade down main street to the city park. Several youth performed in the dances by the 'Winds of Change,' Kansas Bahá'í Youth Workshop. Diana Wenger organized a display of artwork created by Bahá'ís all across Kansas. This display was installed in the Enterprise Senior Citizen Center on main street. She, as well as Mahin Stanley, had work on display. Joyce and T.J. Stohr conducted the children's program.

Topeka Bahá'ís were also involved in drafting a resolution passed by both houses of the Kansas legislature supporting the Kansas Bahá'í Centennial.

After the Enterprise centennial normal activities resumed in Bahá'í communities around the state with an awareness that a unique milestone had been reached.

The acceptance of other Messengers of God and the religions They founded is so central to the Bahá'í Faith that Bahá'u'lláh enjoined His followers specifically to pray together with followers of other religions, to worship together, work together and therefore, together, we can save the world. That is the ultimate goal of the Bahá'í revelation. Our actions are a reflection, a demonstration, of our faith.

Bahá'ís in Topeka were surprised, in 2002, to receive and read a letter from the House of Justice addressed to the religious leaders of the world. In this letter the House of Justice identified religion as the final obstacle to peace on the planet. The problem is not religion itself, but the claim of exclusivity and fanaticism that are destructive. A copy was given to each member of the Board of Directors of Interfaith of Topeka.

In 2005 a former member of the Topeka Bahá'í community returned for a special event and in the process gave a public lecture on how the Bahá'í Faith had influenced his life and work. This was Walter Hatke, on the occasion of a solo exhibit of his paintings at the Sabatini Gallery of the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library. Hatke had been Bahá'í since 1967 when he was an art student at Topeka High. In the decades since then he has achieved a solid reputation. His paintings hang in many collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and many corporations, even the Bahá'í World Center. His paintings have been described to consist of, “landscape, architecture, still lifes and interiors in super-real and tromp l’oeil styles.”¹⁰⁹ Another critic said, “(the) juxtaposition of familiar human objects with the abstract, often spiritual qualities of light creates a fruitful tension, one that recurs through out Mr. Hatke’s work.”¹¹⁰ His work is just one fruit of the Topeka Bahá'í community.

Before the Beginning

While researching for this book, it was discovered that the Bahá'í history of Topeka goes at least a decade before the first Bahá'í came to live here, even before the first Bahá'í stopped to visit in Topeka. This very earliest bit of history goes back to newspaper articles that appeared in the *Topeka Daily Capitol* in 1896!

The articles do not use the word “Bahá'í,” that term was not used by the press until the twentieth century. Before then the designation used was “Bábí.” That term had been inaccurate since 1868, but the press was unaware of that fact. This occurred when the majority of the followers of the Báb accepted Bahá'u'lláh and His revelation. Most people looking from the outside only noticed (as one of the articles note) that the behavior and activities of this group of people had changed. That observable change merely reflected a more profound inner change. Of course, the label that others used remained the same. The western press caught up in 1912 when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited Europe and America. Since that time the term, “Bahá'í has been used. The education of the public about new words is part of the process of establishing a new religion. At one time the term, “Christ” was unknown.

In 1896 news reports were received in London, and were broadcast from there, mentioning this new religion. Europeans had been receiving news for several decades of the religious turmoil in Persia and this new faith. The mid nineteenth century witnessed religious turmoil in many parts of the world. The Wahabis were propounding a radical version of Islam that eventually transformed Saudi Arabia, the Templars were arousing Germans to look for the return of Christ, as were the Millerites in America, and the Mormons were raising expectations of new spiritual realities. One could say it was a time of global religious upheaval but it took a while for the news to reach Kansas.

On 2 May 1896, on the front page of the *Topeka Daily Capitol*, appeared several articles that reported on the assassination of the Shah of Persia. The first and longest article summarized the life of the Shah, including his persecution of Bahá'ís. The Bahá'ís are referred to as “Babis.”

The first article “Persian Shah Shot,” states that, “The late Shah’s first notable act was the suppression of a rebellion in Khorassan and his next the extermination of the sect of the Babis by sword and fire.” Under the subheading, “Some English Comment,” the article explains, “An article in the Times (of London) on the late Shah calls to mind that at the beginning of his reign he put to death by thousands the members of the Babi sect, whose crusade against corruption of the public and private manors (sic) in Persia was so popular as to become a menace to the government.”¹¹¹

It is interesting to note that the crime punishable by death is to be against public and private corruption. The corruption had to be preserved, so the Bahá'ís had to be killed!

The next day, after this news of the death of the Shah, more articles appeared on 3 May 1896. These articles were about the new Shah, the second son of the late Shah. In these the Bábí/Bahá'ís are also mentioned. First, in one of the headlines: “Is Thought He (the new Shah) Incited the Babists Against the Shah.” (Get someone to murder your father, then you can have the throne!) The last paragraphs of this article explain, “The discontent of the Babist sect, upon whose feelings Massoud Mirzia (the by-passed eldest son), is believed to have worked, is due to the fact that the late Shah did not allow them to establish their religion. His refusal to do so being based on representations made to His Majesty that it would conflict with the existing faith in Persia, and split the people into religious faction (sic).

“The Babists have always been kept in check, and little has been heard of them for some years.”¹¹²

This article at least admits that the Bahá'ís are a religious group. The fact that “little has been heard from them for some years” refers to the time when Bahá'u'lláh had begun His ministry and taught the Bábís that to be Bahá'ís, they would need to follow new standards of conduct; not even self defense is sufficient reason to harm someone else: it is better to be killed than to kill.

So, there are bits of truth in these news articles: Bahá'í is a religion, a religion opposed to corruption and for that, membership is a crime punishable by death! How odd.

The next evidence comes from 1903. On 30 July that year the second page of the *Topeka Daily Capital* carried the headline: “Now the Babis All Hide,” with a sub-head, “Many Are Killed and Tortured In Religious Riots in Central Persia.” The *Topeka State Journal* also carried the same article. With a dateline of, “London, July 30,” the brief article states: “The Times this morning describes serious religious riots in the city and province of Yezd, in Central Persia, which lasted

more than a fortnight and culminated at the end of June. The outbreak was directed against the religious reformers called Babis.”

“In the city, for two days, every Babi found was butchered by the rabble, and the mutilated bodies were dragged through the streets, followed by exultant crowds. Houses were looted, women beaten and killed, and finally the priestly leaders of the riot enjoined the populace to bring all the remaining Babis before them or the governor for judgment. The governor refused at first to yield to the threats of the mob, but his palace was surrounded by menacing men, and the following day he consented. One Babi taken before him was blown from the mouth of a canon and another was killed and dragged through the town.”

“Order has been restored, but the Babis who escaped are hiding.”¹¹³

This reaction has been repeated sporadically in Persia (now Iran) through the twentieth century, and continues today.

People may wonder, why, after a century, do Bahá'ís in Topeka not own a church or other building for worship?

Worship, for Bahá'ís, is not confined to a specific place or action. Bahá'ís consider service to others to be a form of worship and do not consider it unusual to sacrifice in order to help others. Doing without a building is just one way in which the Bahá'ís of Topeka can sacrifice in order to help others. The money that would go into a building is, instead, sent through Bahá'í channels to other communities where help is needed. In this way Bahá'ís of Topeka contribute towards the support of medical, agricultural and educational projects in various parts of the planet where government or other services are lacking.

Some people may wonder, how big is the Bahá'í community of Topeka?

The answer to this question, without a historical context, can be misleading. Christianity has had two thousand years of growth and expansion, the Bahá'í Faith has had less than two centuries. If the size of the Bahá'í community today is compared with Christianity only two hundred years after Christ (a comparable time), the Bahá'í Faith is larger (6-7 million world-wide). At this writing there are several dozen Bahá'ís in the Topeka and Shawnee County Bahá'í communities.

One final question may be of interest: How does a person in Topeka join the Bahá'í Faith?

First, a person must decide in their heart that it is possible that a Messenger of God has appeared to the human race in recent historical times and, that the most recent Messenger is Bahá'u'lláh. The person must also accept that the Báb was the Herald and Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh and a Messenger in His own right, and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the successor appointed by Bahá'u'lláh. The

person must also accept the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and agree to abide by it and be willing to learn and abide by the laws and ordinances established by Bahá'u'lláh.

The next step is to inform another Bahá'í so the person can be in contact with the Bahá'í community. The local Spiritual Assembly will verify that the person is making an informed decision based on belief and knowledge. If this is the case, the local Assembly will welcome the new believer into the Bahá'í community. The local Assembly will inform the National Spiritual Assembly and the new believer will then receive an identification card for travel purposes and add the new believer to the mailing list for *The American Bahá'í*, the news organ of the National Assembly. The new believer will now have all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of any other Bahá'í.

There is an expectation that the new Bahá'í will continue to study, learn and grow in knowledge and understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and participate to the extent they are able in the local and wider Bahá'í community.

The arms of the Bahá'í community are open wide!

Notes

1. Duane L. Herrmann, "Turbulent Prairie: Politics, the Press, and the Bahá'í Faith in Kansas, 1897," *World Order*, Fall 1999, pp. 29-45.
2. "Hoffman's New Religion," *Topeka Daily Capital*, 14 July 1897, p. 1, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library.
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4. "Healer at Enterprise."
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109. www.Askart.com
110. Clare Rossini, "Walter Hatke: Light and the Observant Eye," *Walter Hatke: Paintings and Drawings*, DePauw University, 1986, p. 9.
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Appendix I

Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1905

The following is the text of the Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent in response to a petition signed by American believers in 1905. Two of those believers lived in Enterprise, Kansas: Rose Hilty and Mary M. F. Miller. Rose received a printed copy of the Tablet which included the names of all those who signed. It was among her books given after her death by her daughter to start the Topeka Bahá'í Library.

The text of the Tablet is reprinted as it was in the original printed form, spelling, etc. An attempt was made by the U.S. National Bahá'í Archives to find the text of the petition, but it was unsuccessful; many petitions were sent in those years. It should be regarded as a provisional translation, it has not been authenticated. The explanatory notes at the end appear in the original.

To the Beloved of God in General in America
(Upon them be Baha Ullah)

9

He is God!

O ye my divine friends!

At a time when the sea of tests had become tempestuous, the waves of calamity were heaving, the hosts of nations were in the utmost violence, and the people of oppression dealt with infinite injustice, some of the calumniators, united with our unkind brother, wrote a letter replete with false accusations, and engaged in seditions and calumnies.

They confused the mind of the government and agitated the State authorities. From this it is evident how a prisoner in this ruined walled city would fare, and how the conditions are so full of perplexity and confusion as to baffle all description! Notwithstanding, this imprisoned exile is in the utmost firmness and calmness, trusts in His Highness the Peerless God, and wishes for every calamity and affliction in the Path of the Love of God!

(To us) The arrow of oppression is in rich flow of Divine Bounty, and deadly poison is a swift-healing antidote.

We were in such a state when a letter came from the friends in America. The whole of its contents showed an agreement on their part to be in unity and harmony in all respects, and it was signed by all determined to be self-sacrificing in the Path of the Love of God – in order thus to secure Eternal Life.

Upon perusing that letter and looking at the names signed to it, such a joy and gladness came over Abdul Baha as is beyond description, and he thanked God that such friends are found in that country, who, in the utmost joy and fragrance, are in union and accord, and one in agreement with each other. The more this covenant is strengthened, the happier, the better, the sweeter it will be and it will thus attract the Divine confirmations. If the friends of God are wishing for confirmation in order to enjoy the friendship of the Supreme concourse, they must exert themselves to confirm and strengthen this covenant; for the making of a covenant, and an alliance for brotherhood and unity is like unto the irrigation of the Tree of Life (which is conducive to) Eternal Life!

Briefly, O ye friends of God! Make your feet firm, make a firm compact, and in union and accord, endeavor to diffuse the fragrance of the Love of God and to spread the Divine Teachings, in order that ye may impart life to the dead body of this world, and bestow a real healing on every one diseased (in soul).

O ye friends of God! The world is like the body of man – it has become sick, feeble and infirm. Its eye is devoid of sight, its ear has become destitute of hearing and its faculties of sense are entirely dissolved. The friends of God must become as wise physicians and care of and heal this sick person, in accord with the Divine Teachings, in order that – God willing – it may perchance gain health, find eternal healing, and that its lost powers may be restored; and that the person of the world may find such health, freshness, and purity that it will appear in the utmost beauty and charm.

The first remedy is to guide the people, so that they may turn unto God, hearken unto the Divine Commandments and go forth with a hearing ear and seeing eye. After this swift and certain remedy has been applied, then according to the Divine Teachings, they ought to be trained in conduct, morals and deeds of the Supreme concourse and encouraged and inspired with the gifts of the Kingdom of Abha. The hearts should be purified and cleaned from every trace of hatred and rancor and enabled to engage in truthfulness, conciliation, uprightness and love toward the world of humanity; so that the East and the West may embrace each other like unto two lovers, enmity and animosity may vanish from the human world, and the Universal Peace be established!

O ye friends of God! Be kind to all peoples and nations, have love for all of them; exert yourselves to purify the hearts as much as you can, and bestow abundant effort in rejoicing the

souls, Be ye a sprinkling of rain to every meadow and a water of life to every tree. Be ye as fragrant musk to every nostril and a soul-refreshing breeze to every invalid. Be ye salutary water to every thirsty one, a wise guide to every one lead astray, an affectionate father or mother to every indigent one; consider love and union as a delectable paradise, and count annoyance and hostility as the torment of hell-fire. Exert with your soul; seek no rest in body; supplicate and beseech with your heart and search for Divine Assistance and Favor; in order that ye may make this world the Paradise of Abha and this terrestrial globe the Arena of the Supreme Kingdom. If ye make an effort, it is certain that these lights shall shine, this cloud of mercy shall rain, this soul-nourishing breeze shall waft, and the scent of this most fragrant musk be offered.

O ye friends of God! Be ye not concerned with the events transpiring at this Blessed spot, and give no thought thereto. Whatever may happen is good, for calamities are Bestowal itself, hardship is the reality of mercy, discomposure is but composure of mind, and sacrifice of life is a manifest Gift. Whatever may happen is a bounty from God, the Most High. Be ye engaged in your own affairs; be employed in guiding the people; train the souls in the qualities and nature of Abdul Baha, and convey the glad tidings of the Kingdom of Abha to the people. Do not seek rest during night and day and do not sit tranquil for a minute. Bring these glad tidings to the hearing of mankind with the utmost exertion, and accept every calamity and affliction in your love for God and reliance on Abdul Baha. Endure the censure of enemies and bear the reproaches of the people of oppression with patience. Follow the example of Abdul Baha and at every moment wish for offering yourselves in the Path of the Beauty of Abha. Shine ye like unto the Sun and roar and move like unto the Sea; impart life to mountain and desert like unto clouds; and, similar to the vernal breeze, bestow freshness, grace and elegance on the trees of human temples.

I long for all the friends with all my soul and heart.

Upon ye be greetings and praise.

(signed) Abdul Baha-Abbas

[Translated by Ali Kuli Khan, January 3, 1906, Cambridge, Mass. The above Tablet was revealed by the Master Abdul-Baha in response to a supplication signed by four hundred twenty-two Believers and sent to Him on July 4th, 1905.]

Appendix II

An incomplete list of names of individuals (adults and youth only – once a person reaches age 15 they can become formal members of the Bahá'í community) who have been members of the Bahá'í community of Topeka. Some have been mentioned in the text, others have not. Some have moved on to other Bahá'í communities, others have moved on to other areas of their life.

Robert Abiera	Kenneth Brown
Gayle Alderson	May Brown
Daryush Alipour	Paul Brown
Rita Almond	Richard Brown
Dave Alvis	Viola Brown
Josephine Alvis	Arleeta Burney
Nellie Amos	Dickie Burns
Bradley Anderson	Bertha Campbell
LuAnn Anderson	Leland Campbell
Irma Andrew	Pauline Campbell
Lucy Anderson	Dr. Orda Cantrell
Ruth Ashworth	Janet Carpenter
Jeffrey Ballard	Carolyn Cavitt
Geri Barnes	Mike Cavitt
Regina Barnes	Gary Clift
David Beagel	Erma Coburn
Fred Bechtold	Roberta Cochran
Janis Berry	Toni Coppa-Burgett
Rebecca Bieberly	Keith Crow
Amanda Boatright	Dona Crutchfield
Rick Boatright	Ron Crutchfield
Sherry Boatright	Cindy Dillman
Zacory Boatright	Mark Dillman
Jacob Bolm	Donna Alyce Donohue
Herman Boulter	Jerry Dolejsi
Vonnie Boulter	Joyce Dolejsi
Anna Boyd	David Dragone
Jennie Boyd	Frances Dunkan
Carter Brower	Alveda Duree
Karen Brower	Kathy Eads
Charlotte Brown	Margaret Eager

Essie Ennis	Mark Haslett
Gail Etzenhouser	Walter Hatke
Shane Etzenhouser	Alice Hawkins
Bill Fein	Dr. O. Hayden
David Fenwick	Richard Hayes
Fariborz Ferdowski	Edwin Hedges
Hoshand Ferdowski	Karla Hempstead
Babak Firoozi	Tim Herman
Patricia Ann Flournoy	Duane Herrmann
Sadie Garner	Hilari Herrmann
Kenneth Gale	Justin Herrmann
Afton Gerber	Lauren Herrmann
Howard Gibson	LeAnna Herrmann
Etta Gilmore	Susan Herrmann
Dr. Bill Gitchell	Lori Higuera
James Gitchell	Joe Higgins
Lua Gitchell	Pauline Higgins
Marcia Gitchell	Jim Hinegardener
Jean Gould	Rose Hilty
Ron Gould	Lovelie Hilty
Steve Grabosky	Donna Hobbs
Betty Grant	Joel Hobbs
Ernest Grant	Mark Holmberg
Enoch Green	Marcy Horton
Linda Green	Rosalie/Cookie Horvath
Kelly Greene	Fern Howard
Dan Grisell	Scott Howard
Dawn Griswold	Opal Howell
Louis Guild	Bertha Hyde
Dr. Chris Hamilton	(Kirkpatrick)
Kate Hamilton	Bob Imes
Maud Hamilton	Mike Ingram
Noah Hamilton	Harry Jackson
Tahirah Hamilton	Nancy Jackson
Jim Hall	Dr. William Jackson
Mrs Hardy	Jane Jennings
Eugene Harland	Tyler Jensen
Margaret Haslett	Gaynell Jessepe

Eugene Jolly	Robert Mitchell
Marian Jones	Wendy Mitchell
Frank Kaley	Farhad Monoutchechri
Olive Kaley	Mike Moss
Joanne Kallenberger	Ralph Nesbit
Klaus Kallenberger	Don Newby
Michael Keegan	Genay Newby
Shahrokh Khaze	Dr. James Nezol
Claudia Kidd	Ruth Nezol
Lena Kirk	Mathew Novosel
Dr. John Kirkpatrick	Katie Nye
Maud Mary Kline	Parizad Parav
Louis M. Kraege	Norman Park
Nina Kraege	Rentha Park
Diane Kuhn	Rhonda Parker
Dr. Gary Larson	Kim Payton
Nancy Larson	Norma Jean Perkins
Loretta Latimer	Sarah Poutasse
Francis Leffman	Roger Rains
Mary Lippit	Edna Reynolds
Davie Liu	(Savilles)
Floyd Loveless	Duane Rittis
Marguerite Loveless	Virginia Maye Rittis
Philip Loveless	Karol Ann Roehl
Esther Luttrell	Richard Rolfness
Chester Lynum	Robin Rovinsky
Mattie Lynum	William Russell
Phyllis Madson	Sagar (Sonny) Sandeep
Gladys Manbeck	Dr. Jim Schear
Scott Marshall	Nancy Schear
Cherie Mauck	Jim Schroeder
Charles McAllister	Dennis Schmidt
Elmer W. Mendenhall	Alberta Schulte
Nellie Mendenhall	Art Schulte
Bert Minor	Bruce Schulte
Mae Minor	Cora Schulte
Denton Mitchell	Keith Schulte
Elizabeth Mitchell	Robert Schulte

Pat Schutte
Robert Schutte
Mae Sidenor
Louis Sims
Ruby Sinell
Alice Shank
Kathleen Slay
Ronald Slay
Fred Slater
Addie Snyder
Dan Snyder
Lee Spurgeon
Sally Spurgeon
Mamie Squires
Maria Stamper
Mahin Stanley
Mel Stern
Will Stewart
Hester Stevens
Irena Stevens
Joyce Stohr
T. J. Stohr
May Stone
Suzi Strunk
Suzette Sullivan
Thomas Swope
Maud Taegart
Calvin Tedder
Marianne Tedder
Lloyd Tew
Nora Tew

William Patrick
Thompson
Thomas Thompson
Tim Thompson
Dolly Tillford
Connie Todd
Genese Toliver
Etta Trump
Terry Van Fleet
Mary Ann Vellenga
Peter Vellenga
Richard Vore
Fred Walstrum
Ruby Walstrum
Allen Warren
Dr. Sonia Wasan
Thomas Webster
Bruce Weiland
Dan Wenger
Diana Wenger
Bruce Wessel
Barbara Whittaker
Maria Whittaker
Harry Whittelsey
Susan Whittelsey
Clara Wiley
Pliny Wiley
Charlie Williams
Margaret Williams
Florence Wolf
George Woolsey
Mary Woolsey