

The Baha'i Faith in Kansas 1897-1947

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THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH IN KANSAS, 1897-1947

by Duane L. Herrmann

NOTE: This is the author's pre-publication draft; see bahai-library.com/herrmann_community_histories_kansas

The following is the text of a chapter originally appearing in *Community Histories: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, Volume 6, edited by Richard Hollinger, published by Kalimát Press in 1992. Since that time I have not ceased my research. In the process I have discovered much new information. I am posting the text here with Auxiliary notes containing some of that new information. The auxiliary notes will be preceded by an X in the text and will occur wherever they may be useful.

This chapter was the initial in-depth publication to fill a void in Bahá'í history. The existence of the Chicago and Kenosha Bahá'í communities was well known. Between those two, though, was the Bahá'í community of Enterprise, Kansas. Before there were any Bahá'í in sub-Saharan Africa, before there were any Bahá'ís in Europe or South America, or any other places in North America, except Chicago, there were Bahá'ís in Kansas. As a native Kansan of five generations, the lack of knowledge about that concerned me. So I have endeavored to fill the void. Subsequent publication of, "Letters from a Nineteenth Century Kansas Bahá'í," World Order, Winter 1996-97; Early Bahá'ís of Enterprise, Buffalo Press, 1997; "Turbulent Kansas," World Order, Fall 1999; and By Thy Strengthening Grace: a history of the first one hundred years of the Bahá'í Faith in Topeka, Kansas, 1906-2006. Buffalo Press, 2006, continue that attempt.

I. 1897, Beginnings in Kansas, Enterprise

"About the year 1900 Abraham Keihrella (sic) an Egyptian came to Enterprise, Kansas. Mrs.

Rose Hilty was residing there at the time. Mr. Kheihrella brought his wife and son from Chicago to

Enterprise for a vacation. While there he gave the Bahá'í Message including ordinances and

instructions. And healed some people while there. He also organized a group of 40 members in

Enterprise before leaving."1. This is the report of an interview, in 1934, between two members of

the recently established Topeka Bahá'í Fellowship and Mrs. Rose Hilty, the first member of the

Bahá'í Faith to live in Topeka. Her recollections are all that was known of the beginnings of the

Kansas Bahá'í community for the next fifty years.

The city of Enterprise was the first site in Kansas of the first organized activities to promote the

Bahá'í teachings. At the end of the nineteenth century Enterprise was a bustling town on the edge

of the Great Plains. Located on the Smokey Hill River it was a milling and industrial center in east

central Kansas. The river provided abundant power for the technology of the times.

Evidence of the prosperity of the city is indicated by reports that the C. Hoffman & Sons mills,

"shipped 1,200 (rail) carloads of grain flour and millstuffs" during 1883.2.

For building new houses

in town the Badger Lumber company shipped in 863 carloads of lumber and to heat them the coal

dealer purchased sixty carloads of coal. In 1885 the newspaper, delighting in the prosperity of the

town, reported that "the J.B. Ehram Machine Company has secured contracts worth nearly \$75,000

in a single week."3. Later, the Enterprise Creamery and Ehram Mills were awarded first prizes for

exhibits at the Columbian Exposition of 1893.

The city of Enterprise grew from a settlement founded in 1868 by Christian Hoffmann, Jacob

Ehram and Michael Senn. All were native Swiss who came for a new start in the U.S. Hoffman

had owned and operated a mill in Switzerland and it was natural that he would do the same in the

new country. He enlisted the help of Ehram to build the mill and forge its required machinery.

Hoffman's newly widowed sister-in-law, Barbara Hilty came to the town site and,

with her brother,
Michael Senn, opened the first store in the area.X-1. Ehram married Barbara
Hilty in 1870 and three
years later the town was platted around the store and mill. The
Hoffman-Ehram-Senn family
dominated the town well into the twentieth century.
Josephine Hilty, daughter of Barbara Ehram by her first husband, went to
Chicago to complete
her musical training. In Chicago she learned of a spiritual teacher and shared
the discovery with her
mother. Mrs. Ehram was searching for more meaning in her life and invited this
teacher to spend
some time in her home and share his teachings. His name was Ibrahim Kheiralla,
a Syrian of
Christian background.
He was not the first or last to whom Barbara Ehram turned for knowledge, but
it was the visit of
Kheiralla that caused the greatest stir in the community. It even eclipsed her
public expulsion from
the local Methodist church by the minister, her husband's brother. News of
Kheiralla's teachings
quickly spread beyond the neighborhood of Enterprise and Abilene (the next
closest town) to
Topeka, the capital city, and beyond to Lawrence, one hundred miles from
Enterprise. Articles in
these newspapers, in 1897, may have been the first publicity of the Bahá'í
community in America.X-
2.

Kheiralla arrived in Enterprise in early July 1897. By the fifteenth of the
month articles were in
newspapers across the state. One headline announced: "THE BIBLE IS NOT THE
TRUTH," and
another: "TEACHES STRANGE THINGS, An Arabian Springs an Entirely New Religion
on the
People of Enterprise." The articles commented on Kheiralla's "healing," the odd
ideas presented in
his classes, and the secrecy he imposed on his students. These newspaper
accounts formed the basis
of public opinion toward the teachings Kheiralla presented and an examination
of them is necessary
to understanding the resulting public reaction.
The chronological order of these newspaper articles is difficult to determine.
Several articles
were reprinted nearly word for word from one newspaper to another. Some of the
newspapers were
printed only weekly, others were dailies. In at least one case an article was

reprinted in a daily paper before the date of the original weekly paper from which it was taken. It may be that the weeklies were distributed earlier in the week than the date given, just as some periodicals are dated a week or month before they are placed on the newsstands. Two basic articles, printed in at least six newspapers in five cities announced Kheiralla's arrival in Kansas. The articles with the earliest date, that of Wednesday, 14 July 1897, appeared simultaneously in two Topeka newspapers. One gave credit to the Abilene Chronicle, the other gave it a dateline of "Enterprise." The weekly newspapers in Enterprise and Abilene, credited with the article, carried a date of two days later, but they were the same articles. Some reason for the wide distribution of the news articles can be found in the headline given in a Topeka newspaper. The Topeka Daily Capital ran one article on the top of page three with the headline: HOFFMAN'S NEW RELIGION. The subheading explains the assumption of identity and indicates that he was well known in state politics. "The people found out what ails Agricultural College Regent." In an agricultural state the regents of the agricultural college are noteworthy individuals who make decisions which influence the future of the state through the education of future farmers. The "Hoffman" referred to in the headline is more clearly specified in the other Topeka paper as "C.B. Hoffman," the son of Barbara Ehram's brother-in-law, Christian Hoffman, owner of the Hoffman mills of Enterprise. C.B. had great political ambitions and became a major politician of the state in his time. He eventually ran for Governor and narrowly lost. His actions were news across state. The article explains: "Considerable interest and a little excitement prevails in Enterprise these days over the peculiar religious teaching of one "Dr." Ibrahim (sic) G. Kheiralla an Arabian, who claims not only to teach the only true religion but to possess remarkable powers as a healer of all ills that flesh is heir to. "Dr. Kheiralla has written a book in which he sets forth his peculiar religious ideas, which are to a considerable extent fanatical. By some it is called Neo-Platonism, but others

pronounced a combination of Arabic mysticism, German rationalism, mesmerism, etc. He believes in the individuality of God, that the Creator is not the universe or the universe the Creator. The resultant is a modified form of Pantheism.

"He has two systems of teaching, giving public lectures on Sunday evening and private lessons in which he teaches the mysteries of the religion, on Wednesday evenings. There must be no interruption, no queries and arguments. Last night a number of Abilene people heard the lecture.

"An inner circle, or class formed to take the advanced course in the Kheiralla religion, already has several members, including it is said C.V. Topping, Ed Hafner, etc. Miss Josie Hilty, who knew the "Doctor" in Chicago and through whose influence he was induced to visit Enterprise, is said to have embraced the doctrine he teaches. Just what this is no one is able to find out without acceptance thereof.

"The alleged performance of one or two remarkable cures, due to gifts resulting from his religious views, has added somewhat to Dr. Kheiralla's power. One of the Ehram boys had the colic or something of the kind and was cured by the laying on of the "Doctor's" hands, one being placed back of his head and the other on his abdomen. Another case, that of a little girl named Hilty, who has been blind from birth, is reported in which he has so far benefitted her that she can now distinguish light from darkness and note the difference in colors.

"Dr. Kheiralla claims to be able to cure everything and is credited with a host of remarkable cures of all kinds of chronic diseases, including consumption, kidney troubles, fevers, etc., by hypnotic or mesmeric influences, aided by medicines whose secret powers are known to him only."4.

This article appeared in the Abilene Weekly Chronicle dated Friday, 16 July 1987. It was identical with the article in the Topeka paper with an addition of a promise of, "further inquiry into the teachings of the Arabian are to be made for the CHRONICLE and, if successful, the result will be printed in due time."5.

The reference to Josephine Hilty is significant. If she had in fact "embraced the doctrine," then

Josephine Hilty would be the first native Kansan to embrace the Bahá'í teachings and her presence explains Kheiralla's otherwise uncharacteristic trip to Kansas. Josephine Hilty is listed in Kheiralla's "Supplication Book of Students in Miscellaneous State"s as being the first Bahá'í resident of St. Louis.

Dated the next day, Saturday, 17 July 1897, the Enterprise weekly paper published an article headed: THE BIBLE IS NOT THE TRUTH. Some of the information is more specific, but the tone of it is more impartial. This difference in tone can be explained by the rivalry between the two towns where the different newspapers were located. Enterprise and Abilene are both in the center of Dickinson, County, just ten miles apart. When the county was being organized as a political unit there was a fierce rivalry between them as to which would be the county seat. That distinction would guarantee prominence and prosperity. Enterprise lost. The rivalry persisted.

The article in the Enterprise paper, dealing as it did with activities of the prominent families, would not have been as sharp to criticize.

"Dr. I.G. Kheiralla, Chicago, who is spending his vacation with the family of J.B. Ehram, is teaching the people of Enterprise the religion of his order. Dr. Kheiralla was sent by his Order from the Orient to this country to teach "the truth" and has a large following in Chicago where he has resided since coming to this country from Egypt. He teaches the Oneness and Singleness of God; also whence we came, why we are here and where we are going. He gives to his private pupils the key to the sealed books of the Bible which he uses to verify his teachings. He believes the truth is in the Bible but that the Bible is not the truth.

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

"On Sunday evenings there will be public talks given in the parlors of the Ehram residence, to which all are invited. The private classes which have been held twice, meet Tuesday and Friday

afternoons and evenings. There are twenty-seven people taking the private teachings and another class will be formed later. A great interest is manifested by those who have begun the teachings of this religion of which so little is said, for the name of the order is only revealed to those who have taken all the teachings."6.

This description of the classes, in both manner and content, is an accurate description of the method Kheiralla was known to use in Chicago at this time. He did not tell anyone the "name of the order," i.e. the Bahá'í Faith. Only at the very end of the last session of the class would he divulge, with the utmost of expectation, the Greatest Name: Baha'u'llah. Until then he didn't think the students were prepared. Sometimes he wouldn't even do it then, but would hold a special meeting for the momentous event. He also held total control over the students this way. Even during the series of classes he did not allow discussion or questions of his teachings. It was this need for control that was his fatal flaw.

Interestingly, this article, with added comments at the beginning and end, was reprinted the next week in the Abilene weekly. The article closed with a disclaimer saying, "Nobody, however, will take much stock in a religion which cannot stand the open light of day and Kheiralla's "religion" is perhaps as great a fake as his alleged miraculous cures."7. This barb, of course, refers to Kheiralla's insistence on secrecy.

A short quip, continuing the superior attitude of Abilene, appeared in the Abilene Weekly Reflector dated 15 July 1897. "It is reported that C.B. Hoffman is practicing under an Arabian doctor in the art of curing by laying on of hands. Chris will probably add this new department to the State Agricultural college when he masters it more thoroughly."8.

The next day the Abilene Daily Reflector printed a similar barb, but with a dateline of the Lawrence Journal: "It is reported from Enterprise, Kansas, that C.B. Hoffman, the man who has been playing hammer and eggs with the Agricultural College, is a member of a new religious sect organized out there by a gentleman by the name of Ibrahim Kheiralla, late of Arabia. The religion is said to be a conglomeration of mysticism, rationalism, and mesmerism. With

wheels of that kind
is his head it is no wonder Hoffman wants to grind things up."9.
Hoffman's prominence in state politics, and his advocacy of radical changes at
the Agricultural
College (now Kansas State University) located just thirty miles from his
hometown, guaranteed
attention across the state for his activities. But his involvement with the
Bahá'í Faith is only
evidenced from the "reports" of the newspapers. Hoffman's name does not appear
on any surviving
lists from Kheiralla's classes in Enterprise. If Hoffman did attend some of the
classes, it is likely
that he dropped out after the adverse publicity. That attention did not fit
into his political ambitions.
With the newspaper articles it is sufficient to say that the arrival of the
Faith of Bahá'u'lláh did
not go unnoticed in the heartland of America. Plans were undertaken to share
the news with an
even wider audience. There is a list of people from other Kansas towns; two,
Admire and Beloit,
were nearly 100 miles away. No results are known from that effort.
In spite of the skepticism of Abilene, it appears that Kheiralla's family was
reasonably accepted
by the people of Enterprise. A few weeks after the initial commotion the
following notice appeared
in the Enterprise paper as if it was nothing unusual. "Ed Hafner, Emmett
Hoffman and George
Kheiralla are with a camping party on Lyons creek, near Woodbine, and will
fight chiggers and
misquitoses (sic) for a week."10. This was an ordinary report of an ordinary
event in the life of the
town. George was Kheiralla's teenage son.
The presence of the Kheiralla's in Enterprise had become so routine that the
next week the
Enterprise paper duly noted, "Dr. Kheiralla has a large class taking lectures
in the new religion and
the meetings are reported to be very interesting."11. They were now just
another part of the summer.
C.B. Hoffman was not the only person to drop out of the class. A newspaper
reported twenty-
seven attending the class, but only twenty-two are on the membership list
Kheiralla kept. Of that
group only eight are marked as having been given the Greatest Name. The names
of these Bahá'ís
are: Mrs. Addie Harding, Mrs. Elizabeth Frey, Mrs. Barbara Ehram, Mrs. E.
Rychener, Miss Julie
Ehram, Miss (Mrs.) Rose Hilty, E. Ehram and C.B. Harding.12. At least one

other person, J.J.

Abramson, received the Greatest Name but was not marked in the book.

Many who attended the class, like Josephine Hilty, were related in some way to the Hoffman-

Ehrsam-Senn family or were other members of the upper levels of Enterprise society. Barbara

Ehrsam, after the death of her sister, Elizabeth Hoffman, was the reigning matron of the city. Her

niece, Catherine Hoffman, wife of C.B., was the most socially prominent. One observer, in 1919,

reflected on the role they played in the life of the city and the long term impact of their actions.

"These rich people naturally would feel that they were superior to the average people in Enterprise,

and that the town was too small for them. Thus they would be led to seek new friends of an equal

social status and new amusements in the larger cities as they travelled.

Whatever the explanation

may be, these idiosyncrasies were bound to destroy any influence for good which these leaders

might have had among the average, church people of the town, and served to deepen the wide

chasm between the church and non-church groups in the town."13. This chasm did not bode well for

the permanent establishment of a Bahá'í community in Enterprise.

At the end of Kheiralla's class, after he gave the new believers the Greatest Name, he would

provide them with a form letter indicating their belief, which they would sign, and this would be

sent to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Often this created a chain of correspondence between 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the

new Bahá'í. This did not happen in Enterprise. Kheiralla sent the letters in a bundle but they never

reached 'Abdu'l-Bahá. No personal contact was established and the believers remained dependent

on Khairalla.

Two letters survive from Barbara Ehrsam to Kheiralla after he left Enterprise.

It was nearly two

years after he left when she wrote (she had received no schooling in the English language and little

in her native German, so the letters reflect the knowledge she simply acquired in daily life). "This

is the first time I attempted to write to you although I wished to have done so many times since I had

the teachings which makes a bond of unity between us," she wrote on 3 May 1899.

"I have been

very ill for nearly two years but have now gained much strength the last 3

weeks that I have hopes
of becoming well again."14.

She continued, "We are a little band of believers here but have no one to
instruct us." She goes
on to ask if Getsingers can stop on they way back from Akka to California but
the request came too
late. Then she asks, "What became of Mr. Chase? He used to write to one of the
believers here but
no one has heard lately."15.

The believer she referred to was John J. Abramson, a distant relative. He was a
son of a cousin of
Barbara Ehram's husband and had come, in 1888, "to live with the family after
a few years in
Palestine with a missionary. Although a boy of 15, he spoke German, English and
Arabic fluently
and added much energy to the family life in Enterprise."16. From Enterprise he
went to college in
Cedar Rapids, Iowa and returned to Enterprise to work for Ehram's machine
factory. By 1902 he
was a stockholder and on the Board of Directors. He later married Josephine
Hilty and they moved
to California. Thornton Chase was unable to go to Enterprise, but he had given
Abramson
instructions, in a letter dated April 1898, on how to complete the class.17. He
also responded to his
queries about the Greatest Name.

In October of 1898 Elizabeth Rychener, a member of the class the summer before,
was still
looking for someone to give her the Greatest Name.18. By May of 1899 Barbara
Ehram had
received it from her daughter, Josephine (now) Kimmel.19. Seven other
Enterprise students are
listed on a September 1899 list as having received the Greatest Name. Despite
these numbers and
this evidence of continued activity and interest after the departure of
Kheiralla, it was not sustained.

The turmoil after the defection of Kheiralla, in March 1900, would have created
even further
confusion and disillusionment.

Barbara Ehram had written to Kheiralla's secretary asking about a book which
had not yet been
published in 1897. She greatly desires a copy of it, something to study from,
there was so little
available in 1899. She concludes with a gentle reminder, "You promised in the
letter to my
daughter to send her, also Mrs. Hilty in Enterprise a copie of Mrs Gezingers
letter and perhaps some

of the Drs but we have not seen anything of the kind yett and it is nearly 5 weeks ago." 20.

The reply of Maud Lampson, Kheiralla's secretary, has not been found, but some of its contents

can be concluded from a second letter Barbara Ehrsam sent latter in 1899. She repeated her

questions about the availability of Kheiralla's book, even offering to pay in advance. Evidently

Lampson had suggested that Rose Hilty come to Chicago. Barbara explained that that was not

possible. "It is now impossible for Mrs. Hilty to come to Chicago, for she had to have a very

difficult operation performed."21. That avenue of contact was futile. And Barbara herself could not

travel the distance alone.

In closing, Barbara provides our only glimpse of what may be described as

"Bahá'í community

life" in Enterprise, Kansas in 1899. "We live close and see one another every day. We talk much

about the blessed truth and long to hear and know more about "Oh God give me Knowledge faith

and love" is the desier of my hearth at all times. Hoping to hear from you soon I remain yours for

the truth. Mrs. J.B. Ehrsam."22. No reply remains extant.

The only evidence of her subsequent interest in the Bahá'í Cause is a contribution from her to

Bahai Temple Unity eighteen years later, in 1917. This could have been stimulated by the return of

her daughter-in-law, Rose Hilty, from Topeka where she and her family had lived for ten years.

There may be subsequent contributions, but evidence of them has not been found.

Evidence has been found that two of the women of the 1897 class, Elizabeth Frey and Rose Hilty,

continued an involvement in the Bahá'í Faith for the rest of their lives.

Others may have, but the

evidence has not come to light. To these names, must be added one more, that of Mrs. Mary M.F.

Miller. She appears on Kheiralla's 1987 list with a residence of Kansas City, Kansas. She moved to

Enterprise in 1903 and remained involved for the rest of her life.

Mrs. Miller and her husband had lived in Enterprise some twenty-three years before and prior to

that had lived in Lyona, not far away. In both places the Millers were instrumental in establishing

the local Methodist church. Her husband was the minister. Nevertheless Mrs. Miller felt attracted

to the Bahá'í teachings, maintained contact and supported efforts of the

larger Bahá'í community to organize and build a house of worship. In addition to her financial contribution to Bahai Temple Unity, she signed, with Rose Hilty, a petition to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1905. They were the only Kansas Bahá'ís to do so. The response was printed a a booklet with the names, listed in front, of all 422 Bahá'ís who signed the petition. In the answer 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged the Bahá'ís to spiritualize their lives, be united, teach the Faith and promote the unity of mankind; the same basic tasks Bahá'ís are engaged in today.²³ It is likely Miller subscribed to Star of the West. The issue dated 28 April 1911 carried the following notice:

"Word came to us announcing the death of Mrs. Mary M. f. Miller, Enterprise, Kansas after a stroke of paralysis."²⁴

The other resident of Enterprise who maintained her support of the Faith the rest of her life was Mrs. Elizabeth Frey. Her husband, James Frey, was the Postmaster of the city for a time. She, with Mrs. Miller, was one of the few Bahá'ís of 1897 not to be related to the Hoffman-Ehrsam-Senn family. Her daughter wrote of one event she and her mother attended. "In May, 1912, attracted by the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, mother and I went to Chicago to see Him. Here we partook but for a moment of the great privilege of meeting the Mystery of God. We also saw him place the cornerstone of the Bahá'í Temple."²⁵

In The Dawning Place, a list is given of the names of people and cities represented at the cornerstone ceremony. Mrs. Frey is not mentioned, but her daughter, Elsbeth Renwanz, is. No city is listed by her name. Shortly after the trip a contribution is recorded from her from Enterprise in the Bahai Temple Unity ledger book, dated 10 June 1912. Renwanz had not been a member of the 1897 class because she was a girl of ten at the time. Not only did Mrs. Frey teach her daughter but she attempted to teach the Faith in town. This effort was remembered by Helen Erickson, a long-time resident of Enterprise. She remembered religious meetings being held, when she was a child, at the home of Mrs. Frey.²⁶

Mrs. Renwanz described her mother as one of, "the only two of this group (the 1897 class) who

accepted Baha'u'llah as the Manifestation and to remain faithful until the end."²⁷ The other one would have been Rose Hilty. Mrs Hilty attended Kheiralla's class with her husband, but only she received the Greatest Name and entered the Bahá'í community. They moved to Topeka about 1905 or 06, but did not sell their farms on the edge of Enterprise. Except for a brief return from 1917 to 1920, the rest of her life was spent in Topeka. After the death of Mrs Frey, the departure of her daughter and the death of Mrs. Miller, it can be concluded that the Bahá'í community in Enterprise ceased to exist. Considering the social distance between the Bahá'ís and the rest of society, and minimal outside support, it is not surprising that the community was not sustained beyond the initial period of interest.

II. BEGINNINGS IN TOPEKA, 1906 - 1931

Mrs. Rose Hilty and her family moved from Enterprise to Topeka about 1906. She was the first Bahá'í documented to live in the capital city of Kansas and the Bahá'í community there has been continuous since her arrival. There is evidence that two individuals who lived in Topeka in the 1890's, Josephine Clark and Henrietta Clark Wagner, were Bahá'ís very early in the days of the American Bahá'í Community, but how early has not yet been determined. It is known that Kheiralla stopped in Topeka for a short time after he left Enterprise in 1897 and there may have been some contact between them then, but it has not been verified.^[28] The reminiscences of Rose Hilty indicate that she, "helped to organize a group of about 12 or 14 people in the year 1912." And, "during the years from 1918 to 1925 study classes were held..." But admitting that, "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."²⁹ From the experience in Enterprise it is doubtful that Rose Hilty initiated many activities on her own. She, most likely, supported the work of Bertha Hyde, the second Bahá'í to live in Topeka. Bertha Hyde had come to Topeka in 1908 to keep house for her widowed brother, Dr. Arthur Hyde, and his young son. She had attended Holyoke and taught school in the east. She

eventually
returned to teaching and taught science in Central Park Elementary.
Miss Hyde had been taught the Faith by her sister Mrs. Mabel Paine of Urbana,
Illinois. Mrs
Paine recalled hearing of the Bahá'í teachings in 1912 and attended the
Bahá'í-oriented classes on
the Bible and "The Art of Living" given by Albert Vail, a Unitarian minister in
Urbana. Mabel
accepted the Bahá'í Revelation in 1915 and it is likely that her sister did
shortly after.³⁰
As remained the custom, when Bertha Hyde accepted Baha'u'llah, she wrote of her
acceptance
direct to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In His answer, He promised "a spiritual victory." ³¹.
During those early years it is known that several Bahá'í teachers visited
Topeka. They included
Charles Mason Remey, Mary Hanford Ford, Ida Finch, George Latimer, Albert Vail,
Mabel Paine
and a Mr. Powell. A list with the names was recorded but details of their
activities have yet to be
found. That Bertha Hyde was "active" is not in doubt. She signed a petition
that requested 'Abdu'l-
Bahá's return to the United States. It was sent around the country and signed
by over 1130
American Bahá'ís. The only city in Kansas with a signature was Topeka,
listing Bertha Hyde.
None of the other Bahá'ís in Kansas signed it. Rose Hilty was back in
Enterprise at the time. But
on the list appeared the names: "Elizabeth Rennwanz," with the Bahá'ís of
Grand Rapids, Michigan
and "Josephine F. Clark" and "Henrietta C. Wagner," both of Akron, Ohio.[32]
The latter two
appeared on the 1905 petition but not near the signatures of the two Kansas
Bahá'ís.
The reply of 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "the magnetic power which draw me to those
shores is the union
and harmony of the friends, their behavior and conduct in accordance with the
teachings of God and
the firmness of all in the Covenant and Testament."³³. The teaching trip He was
currently planning
was to India; it was not fulfilled
In May of 1919 a "Second Bahá'í Teaching Convention of the Central States"
was held in
Wilmette. Its aim was to stimulate teaching along the lines laid down by
'Abdu'l-Bahá in the
Tablets of the Divine Plan. These served as the basis for consultation and
planning. The report of
Albert Vail included news "of the new and joyous groups started this winter in

Keokuk, Kansas

City, Topeka and Omaha."34. To this teaching convention 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed a special tablet

wherein He compares teaching to gardening.

This report indicated progress and it is likely this was the time the class was started that Rose

Hilty recalled, "During the years from 1918 to 1925 study classes were held under the leadership of

Mrs. Bertha Hyde Kirkpatrick. Meetings were held at the home of Mrs. Hilty and at times also at

the Universal Truth Center, 504 West 10th street. 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."35.

Also that year a tablet was received in Kansas from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to an individual. It was

translated by Shoghi Effendi on 25 July 1919 and sent to Ruth Klos in Atchison.

Her name, as

found in the Atchison city directory of the period, was Ruth Klostermeier and she was a high school

student.[36] It appears that she had confessed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá her unworthiness. His reply should

be of comfort to many: "Thou hast written that "I am not worthy." Who is worthier than thee?

Hadst thou not been worthy, thou wouldst not have turned to God and wouldst not have wished to

enter the Kingdom. Thy worthiness has guided thee until this blessing and bounty have

encompassed thee."37. This is the only tablet known to have been received by an individual Kansas

Bahá'í from 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

In Topeka, lack of understanding of the independence and purpose of the Bahá'í Revelation

hindered the community from growing and developing. Few attended the Feast and Holy Day

observances. Even though fourteen people are listed for the Bahá'í class, there was not enough

interest or commitment to form a Spiritual Assembly. Even with similar problems, the Urbana,

Illinois Assembly was formed in 1920. Mabel Paine came to help her sister, but they could not do

much.38.

There is one major event that occurred in this time. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had sent Jenab-i-Fadil to

America to travel to as many Bahá'í communities as possible. His mission was to strengthen ties among the Bahá'ís, educate them more fully in the teachings and proclaim the message of Baha'u'llah to the public. His tour was such a success that it was later extolled, "The story of his teaching tour when recorded in detail will form a unique chapter in the Bahá'í history of this country."³⁹

Jenab-i-Fadil arrived in Topeka, from Lincoln, Nebraska, on the evening of 18 December 1920 and left on the 21st. Surprisingly the home where Jenab-i-Fadil stayed was not that of a Bahá'í.

The Hostess was supportive of the Bahá'í Cause and helped make arrangements for the visit, but never formally joined the community, an example of the loosely defined membership in those days.

She was Mrs. Matt Weightman, wife of a Kansas Legislator and cousin of George Latimer, frequently elected member of the Bahai Temple Unity and, later, the National Spiritual Assembly.

Ministers of two prominent churches located near the Weightman home attended a reception there the evening of Jenab-i-Fadil's arrival; Rev. Klup of First Methodist and Rev. Rayhill of Central Congregational. The latter had agreed to let Jenab-i-Fadil speak at his church. There was even an announcement of it in that evening newspaper's church section, "CONGREGATIONAL - Central, Evening Sermon, "The Religion and Reality of Jesus Christ." by Janeble Fazel Masandhrani(sic)."⁴⁰

Those plans were hastily altered after the reception. Rose Hilty returned to Topeka in time for the visit of Jenab-i-Fadil. Her daughter, Lovelia, had remained in Topeka supporting herself by giving violin lessons. She was blind and had been since a small child. She is the one referred to in the 1897 newspaper article as having been partially cured of blindness by Kheiralla. She considered herself a Bahá'í and with her mother helped prepare for Jenab-i-Fadil's visit.⁴¹

Several of the meetings were advertised and a sizable article appeared in each of the two major papers. Both refer similarly to the facts of his life and the purpose of the trip. One article clearly states that he is a Bahá'í, the other, in a likely effort to reassure the readers, emphasizes the Bahá'í

affirmation of Christianity. Other than that the wording of the two articles is virtually identical.

One of Jenab-i-Fadil's talks was given at the Metaphysical Library. A comment heard there

afterward concluded, "I have always felt that too many missionaries are sent to the Orient, but am

delighted to realize that now missionaries are coming from the Orient to give us knowledge and

wisdom."42. The President of that organization, also a member of the Bahá'í class, announced to all

that the "Library contains a full set of Bahai literature and a good deal for sale; that anyone can

borrow or buy or come there and read their books."43.

The report of Bertha Hyde to the teaching committee who organized the trip summarized it well.

"The meetings I think were well attended when one considers that they were held just a week before

Christmas. (Sunday, the 19th, three meetings were held; in the morning at the Metaphysical Library

on the 'Master Key to Self-Mastery'; in the afternoon at the Orpheum Theater on 'The Teachings of

all Religions are Identical'; and in the evening again at the Orpheum on 'The Religion and Reality

of Jesus Christ'.) ...Mr. Vail talked personally with a number and left a list with me whom I shall

consult with the idea of starting our meetings again. That, I am sure, is very important, and we want

prayers for our success. The Monday meetings were at the Elks Club on 'The Ideals of the New

Age', and at 8 pm in the Library of Washburn College on 'Modern Education in Persia'."44.

The talk at Washburn College could have been scheduled through Bertha Hyde's brother, who

was head of the History Department at the time. His life, and that of his sister, became entwined

with that of the other member of the history faculty, Dr. John E. Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick was an

advocate of transferring a greater degree of democracy and power to the students and faculty. He

was dismissed by the President of the college for these ideas and the manner in which he

propounded them.45. Arthur Hyde resigned in objection to the decision of the President and he and

his sister left the city. The lives of the three remained interconnected and ten years later Bertha and

John Kirkpatrick returned to Topeka for one final episode.

With the departure of Bertha Hyde in mid-1922 the Topeka Bahá'í community

lost its most committed, knowledgeable and stalwart member. Remaining behind as foundations of the community were Rose Hilty and her daughter and Mr & Mrs Louis Kraege. Rose Hilty did not have much experience in an active Bahá'í community and Kraege's were involved heavily with other interests. He, in addition to his job as Secretary of the Independent Telephone Company, was the president of the Universal Truth Center which gave him a great deal of satisfaction. One other possibly pivotal Bahá'í was Margaret Williams, the Librarian of the Metaphysical Library. The Library was held in her home, as was the Universal Truth Center.⁴⁶ These disparate interests did not lead to any unified Bahá'í community development. Nothing else has been recovered about Bahá'í activities in Topeka in the latter 1920's except for a report Corinne True presented on the teaching work of Albert Vail at the 18th annual National Bahá'í Convention in 1926. He had continued to return to Topeka and other cities. The need for follow-up teaching and consolidation is emphasized; that is not surprising. After leaving Topeka Arthur and Bertha Hyde kept in touch with John Kirkpatrick. In 1924 John and Bertha were married. The only point of difference between them was religion. John Kirkpatrick had been familiar with the Bahá'í Faith through Berth's activities in Topeka, but now he decided to seriously investigate this new religion. The virulent and distorted information Kirkpatrick received from Neale Alter, a missionary colleague in Syria, turned him against the Revelation for the rest of his life and divided the family.⁴⁷ Despite this he could not leave the Faith alone. In 1930 Kirkpatrick was dying. He and Bertha returned to Topeka to be near his family and their doctor. Although confined to bed his mind and spirit remained alert. He came to realize that the most potent force for reform was not aggressive confrontation but compassionate understanding. He and Bertha began to add to their reading and discussion a collection of scriptures her sister was gathering and eventually published as *The Divine Art of Living*. Through this experience he began to understand that his opposition to the Faith was unfounded.

One day, his wife later recounted, "he signified his desire for pencil and paper. Slowly his weakened hand, unable to hold the pencil without aid, form the almost illegible words, 'one thing only, to be a good...' then for a moment there seemed a great influx of strength and spirit as with firm hand he completed the sentence with the word - BAHAI in large clear letters. ...those were my husbands last words."48. Dr. John Ebenezer Kirkpatrick, an ordained minister of the Congregational Church, died in Topeka on 31 January 1931, a newborn Bahá'í. Bertha Hyde Kirkpatrick returned to her home in Olivet, Michigan. There she helped organize Louhelen Bahá'í School, for years she was the Secretary of the School Committee. She became a contributor, then Editor, of Star of the West and served as an editor for several volumes of The Bahá'í World.

III. Resurrection - Topeka, 1933

Beginning with the Tablets of the Divine Plan the Bahá'ís of the United States had been attempting to systematize their teaching efforts to initiate a steady pattern of growth and development. By the end of the 1920's the system of travel teachers who would return frequently to a city over a short period of time for intensive teaching had appeared effective. An initial teacher would come through a city and arouse interest. If successful, a resident teacher would return over an extended period of time, or even live in the town for a few weeks. This plan was initiated in Topeka. A resident later recounted, "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..." "This man looked things over and asked a few questions, in answer to which he made 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 reference books she had for sale. As we had plenty of goat milk we agreed" "Orcella's lectures were very interesting and very dramatic... After a few nights of lectures

Orcella announced that on Sunday she would give a lecture on religion. Well, being faithful members of the Seabrook Congregational Church, we did not go to that lecture. Then the next night when we went again to her lectures, everyone was telling how shocking her Sunday lecture was. She even said Christ had returned."⁴⁹. May Brown and her husband attended the next lecture and recognized that here was something worth investigating. They, along with 26 other people, indicated they were interested in starting a class to study the Bahá'í Message. Ruth Moffett of Chicago became their resident teacher. "She held a series of meetings at the Herron Studio 625 Kansas Ave. Three meetings a day were held there until November Fifth, covering a period of 15 days. Forty-six lectures in all were given covering prayer services, conference and luncheons. At the end of these series twenty-six people made declaration of their intention to go on with the study of the Bahá'í Movement."⁵⁰. Ruth Moffett returned later in the month. "On Nov. 24, 1933 a meeting was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. L.M. Kraege at which time Mrs. Ruth Moffett came to Topeka from Kansas City to assist in organizing the Bahá'í Fellowship Group."⁵¹. She brought her own BOOK OF LIFE for the new believers to sign. She stayed two days and left with the promise to return in the spring. By the next February the community could boast a library which included Dawnbreakers, Bahá'í Administration and Bahá'í Scriptures, the first two being new publications. That month a delegation from the study class visited Rose Hilty, now an invalid, to obtain information about the very early days of the Bahá'í Movement in Kansas. Shortly after that the Bahá'í library was greatly expanded by the donation of the books and magazines Rose Hilty had kept over the years, these included a complete set of Star of the West beginning with its first year as Bahá'í News. That April 21st, at Ridván, the community elected a local Spiritual Assembly. A letter of notification of the election and officers was sent to the Chicago Spiritual Assembly, not the National Spiritual Assembly "at Chicago." The Chicago Assembly returned a congratulatory note,

but news of this new Assembly never reached the National Assembly so its election was not recognized. During the next year the major activities of the Topeka Bahá'í community were the weekly study class and the Feasts. A "Thank you" was being prepared for Rose Hilty and her interview when the new Bahá'ís learned of her funeral. They intended that instead.

Few traveling teachers are recorded as having come to Topeka during the year 1934-35. Mamie Seto was one and her visit was long remembered. The other was Ali Kuli Khan with some members of his family. Some press coverage has been found of his visit. Two nearly identical articles appeared in both major newspapers heralding him as an internationally known scholar, writer, translator and "prominent exponent of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah."⁵² He gave two lectures on the 10th of February. Oddly, in the seat of the state government, no mention was made of his years of diplomatic service.

In preparation for the Ridván election of 1935 the National Teaching Committee sent a representative to Topeka to ensure that the Assembly was properly formed and recognized. Dr. Morris was in town from April 9-11. One of her tasks was to have members of the "Bahá'í Fellowship Group" sign declaration cards to establish a definite membership list. May Brown recalled that, "we all became Bahá'ís again."⁵³ Twenty-one people indicated acceptance of Baha'u'llah and His teachings. From this base the Assembly was elected. The names of its members were, Mr. Paul Brown, Mrs. Irena Stevens, Mrs. Mae Minor, Mrs. Irma Coburn, Mr. Louis Kraege, Miss Ruth Stevens, Mrs. Amos, Miss Tegart, Mrs. Mae Stone.⁵⁴

Despite these precautions of the National Assembly, the new Assembly did not have an easy time. The instructions of the Guardian regarding how a Bahá'í Assembly should function did not matter. This dissension ripped the infant Assembly apart. The National Assembly was not aware of the gravity of the situation until after a delegate had been assigned for Topeka for the 1936 National Convention. Early that April the Recording Secretary sent a letter to the National Assembly asking questions regarding the immanent Ridván election. Some of these were: Should

non-participating

Bahá'ís have the same voice as those who have been involved all along?

Should Bahá'ís

antagonistic to the Bahá'í community have the same rights as those who were working together?

What should be done when someone wants to withdraw from the community? Who is the teacher

for this area, and how do we get her to come here?⁵⁵ The questions alone indicate serious

differences of understanding among the Bahá'ís of Topeka.

The Secretary admitted the letter was long overdue, but thought the dust would settle in time and

they would all understand what had happened. But after a year they did not. Dr. Morris had gotten

them ready for last year's election when Ruth Moffett had returned to help with the procedure at

Ridván. The Secretary related that at the last moment before the election

Ruth Moffett had accepted

four people into the community who had not been part of the study group and had no commitment

or understanding of the Faith.

One of these four new people was elected to the Assembly, then its Treasurer, resigned by the

June after the election, gradually quit attending Assembly meetings and eventually refused to

associate with the other Bahá'ís at all. By the time she removed her presence, the rest of the

community had been demoralized by her attitude and behavior. "After the hurricane was over," the

Secretary resumed, "six or seven of the original workers shook off the debris and quietly began to

hold steady - and build... Now for a number of months, since August - we've been regaining our

former peace and harmony and have made nice progress."⁵⁶ But they did not understand why Ruth

Moffett enrolled people who had not studied, why events proceeded the way they did or what to do

with the individuals who no longer wanted anything to do with the Bahá'í community.

Early April was too late for the National Assembly to do anything before that year's Ridván

election. Horace Holly, the Secretary of the National Assembly, explained that all communities

would face tests as they grew, that individuals could not be kicked off the membership list for non-

attendance or disinterest, but if the Assembly wanted to verify membership status it could, in

preparation for the annual election, gently express that intention and request each member on the rolls to indicate their preference of membership or not.⁵⁷

This advice was taken, for the election was held at Ridván and a new membership list appeared minus several names. The exchange of correspondence did serve notice that the Topeka Bahá'í community needed help and, while she was available to travel in this country, Emogene Hoagg, being eminently qualified for the task, was asked to straighten out the mess in Topeka. She had been a Bahá'í for thirty-six years (since 1899), had studied directly under Mirza Abd'l-Fadl, the foremost Bahá'í scholar to date, had managed the International Bahá'í Bureau from 1928-35 at the request of the Guardian, carried out other tasks for him and assisted in translating Bahá'í Writings into Italian, German, French and Spanish. She was not the typical itinerant travel teacher.⁵⁸

In June of 1936 she made a one day visit to Topeka and got a glimpse of the situation. Because of previous commitments she could not do anything that summer but in September wrote the Topeka Assembly and asked it to consult on the way she could be of most help. There was no reply. On October 7th she arrived in town and was dismayed to learn that, not only had the Assembly not met (since spring), but the entire Bahá'í community could not function. She remained in Topeka for an extended period of time. After four weeks she reported to the National Assembly that the circumstances, "would be ludicrous, if not so tragic. Just like children quarreling."⁵⁹ None of the Bahá'ís she reported, except Paul and May Brown, had any understanding of the Revelation nor had given up their earlier interests which ran counter to the Bahá'í teachings. All felt the fault was with the others and the atmosphere was so impossible she felt the only solution was to dissolve the Assembly and try to start over. Nothing could be accomplished under the present circumstances. Not only were the Bahá'ís themselves demoralized, uninformed and confused, but the name of the Faith itself was in disrepute in the city at large. The Chairman of the Teaching Committee, through whom she corresponded, was reluctant to

endorse dissolving the Assembly. With twenty-one names on the rolls, it seemed she ought to be able to find nine who could carry on the Assembly. The complications in Topeka were similar to others that had arisen in other cities after a similar series of alternating teachers. She finally succeeded in gathering eleven of the Bahá'ís together to consult on the situation. That was no mean feat in itself, for attendance at her classes had dwindled from a high of eight, to two. The group agreed on a course of action and at the next Feast the community voted on a letter to the National Assembly.

The letter summarized events in Topeka since 1933. The feelings of those who assembled were expressed that, "we were prematurely organized."⁶⁰ The consensus of the remnants of the Bahá'í community was that the Assembly should be dissolved. This initiated a flurry of correspondence between the Topeka Bahá'ís, the National Assembly, Emogene Hoagg and the Chairman of the National Teaching Committee. Eventually, by the end of January 1937 a decision was made and a letter sent to Topeka. It stated, "...while the National Assembly is most reluctant to see any local Assembly dissolved, nevertheless, it was decided that the Cause will best be served by recognizing the dissolution of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Topeka."⁶¹ An updated membership list was requested.

Two lists were sent in rapid succession, one before the letter was received and one after. The first contained eight names, the second, eleven. After receipt of the second the Topeka Bahá'ís were advised to re-elect the Assembly at Ridván. They refused. On April 21 an annual meeting was called and fourteen Bahá'ís showed up. Before action could be taken to elect the Assembly an election of officers to a six month term for the study group was carried out. They didn't want any more to do with an "Assembly" for a while. Six months later officers were elected for an identical period to end the next April. In January of 1938 the membership list held eleven names and by Ridván two earlier members asked to be reinstated. At Ridván a representative of the recently created Regional Teaching Committee for Kansas and Missouri was present. The Spiritual Assembly

of the Bahá'ís
of Topeka was restored and it never again had such problems.

IV. A NEW COMMUNITY, 1938 - 1947

The years 1938-40 were calm ones for the Topeka Bahá'ís. The study classes were held each week and a record kept of the date, topic and hostess. Feasts were held regularly and maybe only one a year missed due to bad weather in winter. Lists were kept also of the dates of the Feasts, the "topic" (ie. Splendor, Glory, Beauty, Grandeur, etc.) and the hostess. The Assembly held a meeting each Gregorian month and studied a topic also. Lists were kept of each activity and carefully preserved in the infant Archives. All these events were scheduled in advance for the entire year and calendars given out at the annual meeting. At that meeting the Historian summarized the events of the year and read it, as well as that year's lists, to the assembled members.⁶² It was a very steady, uneventful time.

In this time one former member of the 1933 study group asked to be reinstated to membership and two new believers joined the community. All three were unaffected by the upheavals of 1935-36 and became strong members of the community. The son of one of the new members recalled the study classes his mother attended. He was too young to go to school so he played under the dining table which the ladies sat around and would often fall asleep there and nap.⁶³ It was a pleasant time for the Bahá'í community.

It did not last. In July 1940 a letter was received from the National Assembly to all local Assemblies regarding a recent message from the Guardian. It was time to clarify boundaries and membership of local Bahá'í communities. All members of local Assembly would henceforth live within the bounds of that Assembly which were to correspond to the city limits. In many areas of the country the decision created entirely new communities and Assemblies in suburban towns. In Topeka the decision caused five members of the Assembly to be isolated believers scattered outside the city limits around Shawnee County in North Topeka, Seabrook, and Wakarusa. The second result of this change was that delegates to the National Convention would be

elected by all Bahá'ís
in a district, not by each Assembly.
At Ridván 1941 the Bahá'ís residing within the city limits of Topeka
elected their Assembly
without the Shawnee County Bahá'ís. That summer one Assembly member married
and moved to
Chicago, two long time members who had weathered the storms of the 1930's
resigned. This
brought the number of community members down to nine. In December one of the
nine died. The
Assembly was lost and the community immediately reverted to group status. No
election was held
the next April.
After Ridván 1942, great changes occurred. During the year there were six
new enrollments: one
a youth (a nephew of the Bahá'í who had moved to Chicago), three were
spouses of Bahá'ís (two
lived in the county) and an entirely new couple. It looked as if the Assembly
would be restored.
But that December two of the older Bahá'ís died and there would not be nine
adult members to
reform the Assembly. To insure the restoration of the Assembly in 1943 the
family of Art and Cora
Schulte, in North Topeka, moved inside the city limits. It was a sacrifice but
the Assembly was
assured.
In the next few years the Topeka Bahá'í Community grew in another
surprising way. The city
annexed the Seabrook neighborhood and the Bahá'í family who lived there,
May and Paul Brown,
were once again part of the Topeka Bahá'í community. They were immediately
elected to the
Assembly. Most of the community now consisted of stable families. Many of the
children became
Bahá'ís, married and several spouses joined also. Topeka had become a good
place to be a Bahá'í.
With local problems settled the Bahá'ís in Topeka began to be more
integrated into regional and
national Bahá'í activities. Not only did several attend the national
convention each year but some
also served on the regional teaching committee. Many regularly attended area
conferences. A
"Center" had been rented in downtown Topeka for several years, where most local
activities were
held, and this became the site of the first Kansas District Conventions. From
1944 to 1953 a
Topeka Bahá'í was elected the Kansas delegate to the National Bahá'í

Convention.

Gradually there began to be Bahá'ís in other towns and cities across the state. In 1935 a couple had moved to Wichita from Topeka to be the first Bahá'í residents there. A family moved from Topeka to nearby Burlingame in 1943. A Bahá'í with no connections to Topeka lived in the northeast corner of the state, in Elwood, that same year. In 1945 a Topeka Bahá'í married and moved to Fort Leavenworth. Kinsley, in Western Kansas, received its first Bahá'í resident in 1948. Teaching activities in the city also picked up. Just before Rídván 1945 the community held its largest proclamation effort to date. A "Race and World Unity" meeting was held 18 April that year at the Kansas Hotel. Over thirty-five members of the black and white races attended, only about half were Bahá'ís. It was a remarkable event for the time and place. The next year the Regional Teaching Committee sponsored the largest Bahá'í gathering of the first half of the 20th century in Kansas. Because of its historic nature it remained a highlight for those Topeka Bahá'ís who attended. Forty Bahá'ís, plus several youth and half a dozen children, attended from Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. The Topeka Bahá'ís were delighted and impressed to see so many fellow believers in their hometown. Several who attended were family members of early Bahá'ís making the event all the more special for them. It was visible evidence that efforts to build a Bahá'í community had born fruit.

V. Beyond

Within five years the first Bahá'í wedding in Kansas would occur giving evidence of the continuity of the Bahá'í community. An authentic, self perpetuating and new community was taking shape where there had not been one before. The expansion of the Kansas Bahá'í Community continued in the 1950's. Bahá'ís lived in Emporia (1953), Scott City (1953), Oakley (1955 - the last two in the far, far western edge of Kansas), and Manhattan, Hope and Parsons in (1956), Overland Park, Greenleaf and Merriam in (1957) and Kansas City (where no Bahá'í had lived since the turn of the century). And in that decade Spiritual Assemblies were formed in Wichita (1955), and

Kansas City (1958). Also the first state wide educational events were held for Bahá'ís and interested seekers.

In the 1960's new Bahá'í communities spread around the state and two more new Assemblies

were brought into being and an earlier one that had lapsed was restored.

Bahá'í marriage was made

legally valid by an act of the state legislature and a Summer Institute was established. The 1970's

witnessed an explosion of the size of the Kansas Bahá'í community. New communities were

started in dozens of localities and Assemblies were formed in nine new cities.

Also the first Kansas

Bahá'ís were appointed to the Auxiliary Boards for Protection of the Faith and Propagation.

Growth continued in the 1980's. More towns were opened to the Faith and eight new Assemblies

were formed. Not all Assemblies have survived continuously, but progress is evident in restoring

those that have lapsed and stabilizing their membership.

As the Kansas Bahá'í Community nears its centennial it appears to be well established all across

the state in 100-some localities. Of the 105 counties in Kansas well over half have resident Bahá'ís

and nearly all towns of over 10,000 have a Bahá'í community with many having local Spiritual

Assemblies. Kansas Bahá'ís have pioneered to over a dozen foreign countries and several have

been elected to their National Assemblies. Two Kansans have been elected to the Universal House

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April 8, 1936, National

Bahá'í Archives.

58. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, The Bahá'í World, vol. X, 1944-1946, pp. 520-26.

59. Emogene Hoagg to National Teaching Committee Secretary, Leroy Ioas, May 7, 1936, National

Bahá'í Archives.

60. Miss Maude Tegart, "Secretary" of the Topeka Bahá'ís, to Horace Holley, December 14, 1936,

National Bahá'í Archives.

61. Horace Holley to Maude Tegart, January 15, 1937, National Bahá'í Archives.

62. Annual history records, Topeka Bahá'í Archives.

63. Interview with Keith Schulte, October 1986.

Auxiliary Notes:

X-1. Accidents at the Falls

Joseph Hilty, of Grasshopper Falls, had been to Atchison for a load of lumber; and while on his way home, one mile this side of Pardee, fell from his wagon and broke his neck.

A Mr. Johnson

was in company with him in another wagon, and seeing him fall, went to him, and drew the body to

one side of the road. Both parties were under the influence of liquor – Mr.

H. was an industrious citizen.

We are indebted to Judge Spalding for these facts.

Oskaloosa Independent, 17 April 1869, p.1

His enlistment document for the “Eleventh regiment of Kansas volunteers,” states he was “aged

forty,” with blue eyes, brown hair, light complexion, five feet, eight inches tall. His original

enlistment was for three years. The Civil War ended before that time was up, so he was transferred

to the west. He was promoted to farrier 16 May 1864, wounded in action 25 July 1865 at Platt

Bridge, Dakota Terr., and mustered out with his company 26 September 1865. He died 8 April

1869. He had been born 8 December 1821 in Germany, immigrated in May 1850.

Married Barbara

Senn 19 April 1860.

X-2 list of 1897 newspapers

— The Baha'i Faith in Kansas 1897-1947 (Used by permission of the curator)