

Of a series on the detailed history  
of the Bahá'í Faith in  
North Carolina  
Part 2 - First in the State

by Steven Kolins

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

Presented at the first Summer Seminar in the history of the Bahá'í Faith in North Carolina  
August 3-5, 2018 at the Efland Bahá'í Center, 119 Maple St., Efland, NC, 27243

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

## From “Part 1” of the Bahá’í Faith in NC

- Sarah Farmer trip winter 1902-3 - Wilmington?
- 1908 Hannens trip to Raleigh.
- 1910 - Gregory trip including Durham, Enfield, and Wilmington
- 1915-16 Stanwood Cobb lives in Asheville for school year
- August 1917 - trips of the Hannens and Sarah Gertrude Rawls Harris, wife of Hooper Harris, sister of Lula Rawls Carter, (Mrs. W. H. Carter) of Washington, NC.
- 1919 - February? Gregory had a brief stay in Wilmington
- March 1919- Charles Mason Remey and Charles Bassett took a trip through Washington, home of Mrs. Lula Rawls Carter, Greenville at Mrs. Bechwith’s East Carolina Teacher’s School Principal, and Raleigh with newspaper coverage, before going south.
- 1926 - Keith Ransom-Kehler visited the Raleigh area according to Gregory. (BN)
- 1928 - including Durham, Gregory spoke to at least one high school class of over 500 students.
- 1931 - In April, in Bricks, Gregory spoke to a black high school-college twice and a white college president and select students attended,(possibly Mrs. Katie R. Beckwith from Greenville.)



# Wilmington

- [https://bahaikipedia.org/The\\_Sadgwars,\\_the\\_Baha'i\\_Faith\\_and\\_Wilmington,\\_NC\\_\(July\\_2018\)](https://bahaikipedia.org/The_Sadgwars,_the_Baha'i_Faith_and_Wilmington,_NC_(July_2018))

## "News of the Cause", *Baha'i News*, April 1925, p 4

the best single source on the Sadgwar family is probably

### **Wilmington, A pictorial history**

by Anne Russell, 1981,

published through the

Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce

by the Donning Publishing Co

the next best source is probably

### **"Strength through struggle" -**

**the chronological and historical record of the**

**African-American community in**

**Wilmington, North Carolina 1865-1950,**

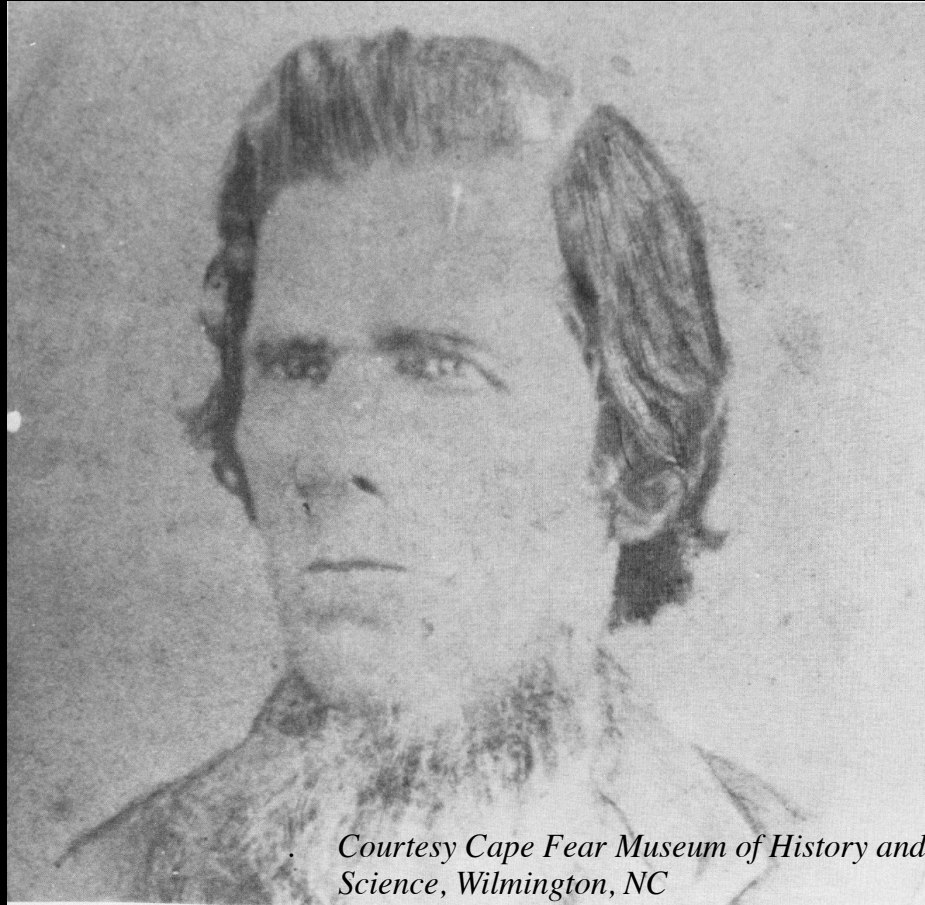
by William Reaves, edited by Tabith Hutaff McEarchern, 1998,

published by the New Hanover Public Library

## BAHA'I NEWS LETTER

Wilmington, N. C., during January afforded many opportunities for service. In this city there lives a truly remarkable believer, a young woman who for seven years has been devoted to the Cause under most difficult circumstances. At present her long trials and sacrifices are bearing fruit and Louis Gregory feels that in this city an Assembly will soon be organized. In Wilmington meetings were held daily in churches, with the Ministers' Union, in the public schools, and in many private homes. An influential Catholic invited Louis to address a gathering of Catholic young people in Wilmington and the response was so enthusiastic that he was invited to return.

## Felice's grandfather David Elias Sadgwar



*Courtesy Cape Fear Museum of History and Science, Wilmington, NC*

He was born of unwed white parents circa 1817. She was born about the same year.

Raised as a slave

both David and his wife Fannie were blue eyed, ; she was of African descent

two children died during escape from Wilmington to NY

the later seven children across 12 years were raised in Wilmington

Became a successful large construction carpenter and businessman

He died May 23, 1889 - she died August 3, 1872

First surviving son - Frederick Cutlar Sadgwar.

## Felice's grandmother Fanny Merrick Sadgwar



*Courtesy Cape Fear Museum of History and Science, Wilmington, NC*

**Felice's father  
Frederick Cutlar Sadgwar  
the second Bahá'í known of NC**



**There is no young picture of Felice's mother,  
Caroline Huggins Sadgwar**

Frederick was born in 1843 and Caroline in December 1847. Frederick had blue eyes, Caroline had a Cherokee father. The year of the invasion of Wilmington he was sent to college in Pennsylvania. A year later he returned and they married Aug 8, 1867 and he founded a school. Frederick and Caroline had 12 children across 25 years. In terms of ancestry thinking they would have been half African American, a quarter French and a quarter Cherokee. At least one child had blue eyes.

Frederick went on to found several business interests and also worked in large scale carpentry.

Frederick was among the black leadership summoned by the white rioters in the Wilmington Insurrection. One daughter married Alex Manly at the center of the riot and another daughter married Alex' bother.



Courtesy Cape Fear Museum of History  
and Science, Wilmington, NC

The children  
and wife of  
Frederick  
Sadgwar  
gathered for his  
funderal... in  
May 1925.



Courtesy Cape Fear Museum of History and Science, Wilmington, NC

So this is the first Bahá'í of NC, circa 1917-1918, followed by her father circa January 1925, while he was sick in bed and died several months later. Felice would live until 1989 and reunited with the Bahá'ís about 1974.

Sorry - no picture... **Hubert Parris**

Felice was not the only connection in Wilmington. The story comes up decades later. Bahá'í John Kolstoe visited **Hubert Parris** at the request of the area teaching committee in 1954 - he tells a story in *Crazy Lovers of Bahá'u'lláh: Inspirational Stories of Little Giants*. In his recollection, Kolstoe dwelled on the feeling Parris was an enthusiastic Bahá'í with a noble sense of service to humanity. Parris was listed as officially joining the Bahá'í Faith in April 1943, from the same day of the first Assembly in the state, at Greensboro, and records of the religion list him usually living in Rich Square. But his history with the Faith goes way.. way.. back.

Hubert was born in Barbados. He became a minister and advocate for fair trade practices in agriculture between the West Indies and Britain, was married and had a daughter. This work lead to travels from Colombia to Ireland.

About the age of 26 moved to America and made appearances at the Greenacre "Monsalvat School for the Comparative Study of Religion" several times from 1902. He continued his ministry moving to Florida and up the east coast and became involved with medical practice, earned a medical degree from Shaw University and a license to practice in North Carolina at the age of 40. He first served medical care in Wilmington, NC, and then became rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church there - the balance between the two eventually shifting entirely to medical care. His medical activities grew and his ministerial actives ebbed and he resigned from the ministry and soon moved to the small town of Rich Square, NC.

[https://bahaikipedia.org/Hubert\\_Parris](https://bahaikipedia.org/Hubert_Parris) (July 2018)



Sorry - no picture... **Hubert Parris**

We do not have any early documentation on his life, nor on how he came to convert to the Bahá'í Faith. There are several points in his history that he came close to Bahá'ís - first it is clear he encountered Bahá'ís at Greenacre in 1902-1904, but then there are other points of being close: in Charleston in 1910, or Wilmington in 1919 it is possible he encountered Louis Gregory, and around the time his ministry practice ended is when Felice Sadgwar was noted by Gregory. And some Baha'is are mentioned at a black school near Wilson in the 1930s. And is it a crazy coincidence that he moved to where Pocahontas Pope came from? But what thoughts, what experiences, what connections he chose to follow coming to the religion are not known. At that time the way one officially joined the religion was to find an assembly and convince them you knew what you were doing. The first Assembly in the state formed in 1943 and the first day it went was Apr 22, Ridvan, and that the day Parris officially joined the religion. He continued as a doctor to his last days.

What is known is that he spent a life time in service to humanity. At first he did this as a minister of Jesus Christ and tried to improve the quality of agricultural life and its gift of good food for good bodies for good minds, a point of some gravity to him, then as a doctor and as member of the Bahá'í Faith in a small country town. Unfortunately we have no picture of him, nor know where he was buried. He died Aug 27, 1955, just as the Faith in NC was really spreading.

[https://bahaikipedia.org/Hubert Parris](https://bahaikipedia.org/Hubert_Parris) (July 2018)

## Two distinguished black leaders related to the Faith came to North Carolina

In 1925 Leslie Pinckney Hill was enthusiastically involved with the Faith out of Pittsburgh, PA. His known connections with Bahá'ís goes back to a visit by Louis Gregory in 1912 before his class twice.\* In 1915 he wrote a paper for the *The Journal of Race Development* citing the progressive integrative views and practices of Bahá'ís,\*\* and by 1924 was taking part in the Bahá'í sponsored Race Amity Conventions.&

In September 1925 *Baha'i News* published a letter from Hill thanking the NSA for sending Keith Ransom-Kehler to speak in Durham to speak at for the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools.&&

Hill went on to decades of service at what became to known as the HBCU Cheyney University.^



\* [Binneial report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Officers and faculty; for colored teachers; Manassas, July 3 to Aug 2, 1912, Virginia. Dep. Education, 1914, pp. ages=332-3](#)

\*\* Negro Ideals: Their Effect and Their Embarrassments, by Leslie Pinckney Hill, *The Journal of Race Development*, v6n1, July 1915, pages 91-103, jstor = 29738105

& A convention for amity, by Louis G. Gregory, *Star of the West*, Dec 1924, vol 15, no 9, pp. 262-3, 272-4

&& [News of the Cause, Baha'i News, Sep 1925, No 7, p. 4](#)

^ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leslie\\_Pinckney\\_Hill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leslie_Pinckney_Hill) (July 2018, note the article needs some serious updating about the Bahá'í connections.)

## Two distinguished black leaders related to the Faith came to North Carolina

**Alain Leroy Locke**, originator and promoter of the Harlem Renaissance, and a Bahá'í since 1918,\* gave a talk at Greensboro A&T College in April 1926\*\* albeit about about the situation of black lives and seeking to foster a youth movement following Jessie Fausett, Walter White and Roland Hayes - if there was any mention of the Faith it was not covered in the newspapers. Locke had served in the May 1921 Race Amity Convention of the Bahá'ís in DC chairing one of the day sessions, and had recently finished traveled with Louis Gregory on a Bahá'í teaching tour in February and March 1926 speaking at four venues elsewhere.& Locke returned to NC in December 1926 to speak before the Phi Beta Sigma meeting in Greensboro.&& Locke had served on race amity committees from 1924-1932, and had a number of essays published in several editions of *The Bahá'í World*, and there was public recognition of talks of his as a Bahá'í in the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* while in Chicago, major national African-American newspapers, in 1933.&



\* Alain Leroy Locke, Wikipedia, Jan 30, 2017

\*\* Alain Leroy Locke at A&T College, *The New York Age* (New York, New York)17 Apr 1926, p. 2

& The Bahá'í Race Amity Movement and the Black Intelligentsia in Jim Crow America: Alain Locke and Robert S. Abbott, by Christopher Buck, *Bahá'í Studies Review*, Volume 17, Intellect Ltd 2011, doi: 10.1386/bsr.17.3/1

&& Phi Beta Sigma holds confab in North Carolina, *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)1 Jan 1927, p. 8

**Sarah Elizabeth Martin Eason Pereira** was born December 12, 1909 in Cleveland, Ohio. Her father was Alexander H. Martin and mother Mary E. Brown Martin. Mary was herself born in Raleigh, NC. Mary was the first connection to the Faith through Louis Gregory.

As a pre-youth Sarah was named first in a tablet from `Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to the Cleveland Bahá'í community in 1919. She went on to earn a number of scholarly posts and several inside the Faith as well. She may have been the first Bahá'í to live in Raleigh, NC, and there is evidence of a small community there while she worked at Shaw University from 1933 after earning a Bachelors in Romance Languages from Ohio State University in 1931. She married and had a son later known as Carlos.

Sarah was called an isolated believer in Raleigh NC in June 1938, in the *Baha'i News* who was visited/supported by Terah Cowart Smith, a “2 yr old” Bahá'í, and Marguerite Reimer (perhaps less than a year before marrying William Sears.) They were able to present at Shaw University and had contacts in Durham. Sarah was listed as an instructor in French at Shaw in 1938 and was elected president of the Negro College Women's Association of Raleigh. She was still listed as faculty in 1939 through '42 while also serving on the NC/SC/Southern GA regional teaching committee. She reported there would be five believers in Raleigh that winter.

[https://bahaikipedia.org/Sarah\\_Elizabeth\\_Martin\\_Eason\\_Pereira](https://bahaikipedia.org/Sarah_Elizabeth_Martin_Eason_Pereira) (July 2018)



<http://www.obeissancebaha.org/bahai-history-nations-capital/>  
an individual history project out of DC

However the marriage soon ended and by 1944 she was noted in the Washington DC area. She went from college to college, contributed editorial work to Baha'i World volumes 11 and 12, and gave talks on the religion.

In 1954 she was appointed as the first Auxiliary Board member for North Carolina and her travels expanded and included the Blue Ridge Conferences and summer schools that mark the statewide organization of the Bahá'í of the state.

[https://bahaikipedia.org/Sarah\\_Elizabeth\\_Martin\\_Eason\\_Pereira](https://bahaikipedia.org/Sarah_Elizabeth_Martin_Eason_Pereira) (July 2018)

## Sarah Elizabeth Martin Eason Pereira ...

In 1957 she was Department Chair of Romance Languages at West Virginia State College. In 1961 she was elected to the United States National Spiritual Assembly and served until she was appointed as a Continental Counselor for North America in 1973. In 1973 Sarah was Head of the Romance Languages Department at Washington DC Teacher's College until 1979-1980 and also retired as Counselor in 1985 with travels to many countries for raising up new national assemblies, centers, and schools. In retirement she gave a talk that got a lot of attention at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and contributed to an oral history archive. She died after some years of service on the Charlotte, NC, spiritual assembly.

She was one of four people of color to serve at the highest levels of the religion to live in North Carolina. She and Felice, and Felice's sister Mabel, bridge this early stage of the Faith in NC and it's more modern existence of dozen plus of Assemblies and thousands of Bahá'í.



from 1960

<http://bahaihistoricalfacts.blogspot.com/2010/11/january-1960-first-contingent-of.html>

[https://bahaikipedia.org/Sarah\\_Elizabeth\\_Martin\\_Eason\\_Pereira](https://bahaikipedia.org/Sarah_Elizabeth_Martin_Eason_Pereira) (July 2018)

## STANWOOD COBB TO SPEAK HERE

Principal of Maryland to Discuss  
"Constantinople Days."

Dr. Stanwood Cobb, principal of the Country Day School at Chevy Chase, Maryland, who was formerly a professor at Roberts College, Constantinople, will speak at Gerrard Hall next Monday evening at 8:00 o'clock on "Constantinople Days."

Long interested in education, Dr. Cobb was a founder and first president of the Progressive Educational association. He is the author of "The Real Turk," a pioneer book in the defense of the Turk and his religion. While in Constantinople Dr. Cobb became interested in the religion of the Near East and especially Baha'ism.

He is traveling through the south during the Easter recess, lecturing on the Baha'i movement. While in Chapel Hill he is the guest of Professor Ernest R. Groves of the sociology department.

## COBB DISCUSSES BAHA'S TEACHINGS

No Idle Rich and No Idle  
Poor One of the Doctrines  
Taught

Chapel Hill, April 12.—"The Cause of Baha'u'llah is the same as the Cause of Christ." Dr. Stanwood Cobb, principal of the Country Day School at Chevy Chase, Md., and former professor of Roberts College, Constantinople, last evening interpreted to a Chapel Hill audience the tenets of Baha-ism.

Baha's teachings, summarized, Dr. Cobb said, maintain:

Unfettered search after truth, and the abandonment of all superstition and prejudice; the Oneness of Mankind; Religion must be a cause of love and harmony, else it is no religion; all religions are one in their fundamental principles; religion must go hand-in-hand with science. Faith and reason must be in full accord.

Universal peace: The establishment of international arbitration and an international parliament. The adoption of an international secondary language which shall be taught in all the schools of the world. Compulsory education—especially for girls, who will be the mothers and the first educators of the next generation. Equal opportunities of development and equal rights and privileges for both sexes

Work for all: No idle rich and no idle poor. Abolition of extremes of poverty and wealth: Care for

the needy. Recognition of the unity of God and obedience to His revealed commands, as revealed through His divine manifestations.

The Baha'i faith originated with Bab, a radiant Persian youth, in 1844, who heralded the coming of a mighty educator to the Mohammedan world. He was martyred at Tabriz, July 9, 1850. Upon this preparation the foundation of the cause was laid by Baha'u'llah, who in 1868 was confined for life in the barracks of 'Akka, a Turkish penal colony. After Baha'u'llah's death in 1892, his eldest son, 'Abdul-Baha, who went voluntarily with his father into confinement and was liberated only in 1908, served the cause as its appointed leader and interpreter, and through his unique devotion, purity of life, tireless effort and unfailing wisdom the message slowly but surely penetrated to all parts of the world.

## NEW ZEALANDER PICKS UP GREENVILLE RADIO

Greenville, April 12. — Avera Wynne, owner and operator of the local broadcasting station WEED, was today in receipt of a letter from the province of Taranaki, New Zealand, to the effect that from 2:37 a. m. until 2:40 a. m. on the morning of March 6, he picked up the local station and heard part of the test program which was in progress at that time. The letter was from Arthur Maule and was mailed at Patea, New Zealand, on March 13.

Mr. Maule wrote quite a lengthy letter on the fine reception which he heard there and said that although he was a distance of 8,000 miles, the reception was unusually clear.

The local station is only of 100 watt power, operating on a frequency of 1420 kilocycles, and is the only station east of Raleigh.

Stanwood  
Cobb's talk  
at UNC in  
April 1936  
was the first  
to get more  
extended  
coverage

\* Stanwood Cobb to  
speak here, *The  
Daily Tar Heel*,  
(Chapel Hill, North  
Carolina), 3 April  
1934 • Page 1

\* "Cobb discusses  
Baha's teachings".  
News and Observer  
Friday, Raleigh, NC.  
April 13, 1934. p. 3.

**Terah Cowart Smith** was born Aug 23, 1897 into a large higher-society family in the rural countryside of Georgia around the turn to the 20th century and she and others of the family would go to college in Georgia.

Raised in the environment, she had both distinguishing beliefs and beliefs in common with the majority of her social circles. She believed in America making the world safe for democracy, she spoke of the equality, even the priority, of women, yet she also held people of African descent innately incapable of civilization - and issue she stated plainly.

Yet after her marriage to a New Englander businessman who she recalled pursuing her more than she was initially interested, and the birth of two children and the loss of another, she encountered the Bahá'í Faith as her marriage was dissolving affected by the spiritual tests of the material losses of the Depression in the United States.

She took trips to the West and South after 1936. In encountering the religion she resonated with the sense of the mission of America in the world though it had to be modified to be in a non-colonial sense, in the equality of women and men, but was of some challenge with the issue of racism. She believed but had a lifetime in the other world and southern pride, Shakespeare and the social circle of playing Bridge.

[https://bahaikipedia.org/Terah\\_Cowart\\_Smith](https://bahaikipedia.org/Terah_Cowart_Smith) (July 2018)



1934 at debut of Club supported play

"Sidney W. Landon to lecture before Monday Club". *Press and Sun-Bulletin*. Binghamton, New York. 28 Mar 1934. p. 4.



**SPEAKERS TO OFFER  
BAHA'I FAITH HERE**

The Baha'i Faith, a non-sectarian, non-political, non-commercial movement for the establishment of "World Peace and the Brotherhood of Man," is being introduced to North Carolina in two free lectures to be held at the Sir Walter Hotel at 8 o'clock to night.

The subject will be, "The Crisis" and The New World Order.

Mrs. Terah hamton, N. Y., Reimer of Michigan Baha'i lecturers Leigh under the tional Spiritual of the United S the purpose of Carolinians of ment.

The Baha'i Faith is published in 43 months of the United North Carolina five.

The Baha'i Faith religion must go hand in hand with science and that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful and ordered and progressive society.

There will be no admission fee to the lectures nor will any collections be taken. The public is invited.

**LECTURES ON BAHAI FAITH**

BY

**Terah C. Smith of New York**

**Tuesday  
Thursday  
SIR WAL  
No C**

**BAHA'I FAITH LECTURE  
TO BE GIVEN TOMORROW**

Baha'i Faith lectures will be held tomorrow night at 8 o'clock in the Carolina Hotel lounge room and again at the same hour on Wednesday and Friday.

This religious and social philosophy was first expounded in the middle of the 19th century by Mirza Ali Mahomet who taught the immortality of the soul and the omnipotent love of God. His followers today

withdraw from  
are told to  
installing a

"A New Cycle of Human Power" will be the subject tonight at 8:15 o'clock of the Baha'i lecture at the Carolina Hotel lounge.

There was a series of 10 articles in the *Raleigh News and Observer* from Feb 8, 1938 through March 5.

## Terah Cowart Smith

Perhaps her first serious challenge was as a table mate to an African American at Green Acre Bahá'í School who didn't believe there was a Southern white woman who could actually behave according to the teaching of the oneness of humanity. She felt her own honesty but on a car ride in the countryside near Green Acre they were refused service at a diner so she began to see the contrast of private belief and social reality. She also encountered and became friends with Jews at Green Acre. One of her first trips after that was to Raleigh NC where she assisted granddaughter of slaves Sarah Martin Pereira living and working at African-American Shaw University. From living and serving the religion in the North especially around New York State she decided to move to Atlanta to participate in the goal of raising a community in every state of the country and wanted to add Georgia to the list.

In Atlanta she went through perhaps her hardest time as a Bahá'í dealing with raising the standard of integrated meetings of the religion in 1940, yet with the friendship of Dorothy Beecher Baker out of it came a firm sense of identity. On the one hand she had faced the southern antagonism to yankees having just moved from New York, while on the other side the burgeoning community had to be led to having those integrated meetings by the personal corrective attention of the National Assembly. From there she undertook more travels and soon participated in a UN speakers initiative, serving in various League of Women Voters groups, while also living a few months at a time in various places as well as short term visits to many communities for a few years while her children went to college or had lives of their own in new marriages and then moving her last time to Greensboro NC. There she would assist the visible presence and action of the religion as she had in many other places and just here be visible another 25 years in activities as the burgeoning community established itself in addition to giving a keynote talk at a National Organization for Women meeting.



[https://bahaikipedia.org/Terah\\_Cowart\\_Smith](https://bahaikipedia.org/Terah_Cowart_Smith) (July 2018)

1951 at a UN meeting for the  
League of Women Voters

"'Barriers' prevent peace, says Mrs. Cowart-Smith". *Press and Sun-Bulletin*. Binghamton, NY. 30 Nov 1951. p. 21.

## Terah Cowart Smith

Her approach to faith was marked by experiences she termed paranormal including seeing her father after his death which left her with the conviction of life after death, and others leading her to study psychology and orienting to investigating the Bahá'í Faith and joining it in January 1936. Regardless, she devoted her life to many conventional and extraordinary services appearing in newspapers for opportunities to talk about the religion several hundred times while also serving in a number of regional teaching committees that coordinated and encouraged the work of establishing the religion in both the Georgia-South Carolina-North Carolina region and New York, while also appearing and being "drafted" several times to assist at one or another of the main Bahá'í Schools. She undertook specific training in meditation and journaling in her later years while continuing to recite Bahá'í prayers as she looked forward to entering, as she called it, the Open Door.

[https://bahaikipedia.org/Terah\\_Cowart\\_Smith](https://bahaikipedia.org/Terah_Cowart_Smith) (July 2018)



1965 and later...

[https://www.newspapers.com/clip/12250520/bahai\\_terah\\_cowart\\_smith\\_pictured/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/12250520/bahai_terah_cowart_smith_pictured/)



Felice Sadgwar in 1985,  
with Ciara Rhodes, left,  
and Richard Lee Hamrick, right