

NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES

□ Wilmette, Illinois 60091

DONATING PAPERS TO THE NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES

National Bahá'í Archives

Personal papers are an important source of information for scholars about the history of the Bahá'í Faith. They often contain information not found in the records of Bahá'í institutions. Moreover, when such papers come from many different individuals they help to document the diversity of the American Bahá'í community. Personal papers donated to the National Bahá'í Archives will eventually be processed, arranged, and opened to research. They will become part of a Bahá'í archives, referred to in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi as “a most valuable storehouse of information regarding all aspects of the Faith, historical, administrative as well as doctrinal.”

As the archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, the collections of the National Bahá'í Archives relate to the history of the Bahá'í Faith, primarily for North America but also covering Central and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australasia. At present, the Archives is located in the lower level of the Bahá'í House of Worship, Linden and Sheridan, Wilmette, Illinois. It has a staff of professional archivists. The Archives' storage areas are environmentally controlled and protected against fire and theft. The Archives has a reading room for the use of scholars researching its collections.

Archival Material Sought by the National Bahá'í Archives

The National Bahá'í Archives has been given the responsibility to locate original Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and letters from Shoghi Effendi and obtain either the original letters or good photocopies. The Archives also actively seeks the papers of Bahá'ís who have contributed to the history of the Bahá'í Faith on the national or international level or who lived during the early years of the Bahá'í Faith in America. Information on the whereabouts of any such papers is appreciated.

Personal papers are the material accumulated during the course of one's life. The types of material found in personal papers can vary widely but materials of particular interest to the National Bahá'í Archives include:

Original letters, including Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and letters from Shoghi Effendi	Literary manuscripts, such as drafts of talks, books, articles, poetry
Personal and family correspondence	Personal recollections
Diaries	Scrapbooks
Photographs	Relics and some personal belongings or artifacts
Printed matter, including annotated books	Financial and legal records

When collecting personal papers, the National Bahá'í Archives is interested in materials relating to an individual's non-Bahá'í as well as Bahá'í activities. Personal papers are more valuable to the Archives and scholars if they document an individual's entire life, including areas that may not be strictly Bahá'í related, such as one's occupation, relationship with non-Bahá'í family members and friends, hobbies, and the like.

Donating Archival Material

The National Bahá'í Archives is also interested in acquiring papers of a personal nature, such as letters with close family members or friends and diaries. They contain information that is important to scholars if they are to understand the motivations, feelings and personal qualities of Bahá'ís and the changes the Bahá'í Faith has wrought in their lives.

The National Bahá'í Archives is conscious of the need to balance the interests of historical scholarship and the privacy of individuals. Therefore, donors can restrict access to any material of a personal and sensitive nature in their papers. These restrictions, which are for specific time periods, such as 20 years or the life of the donor or another individual, can either close the sensitive material to all research or require that the interested researcher obtain the written permission of the donor to use the restricted material. If a donor would like to place a restriction on his papers this should be discussed with the archivist before the papers are donated.

When personal papers are donated to the National Bahá'í Archives, legal ownership of the papers is transferred to the National Spiritual Assembly. The Archives uses a deed of gift to record this transfer. The deed of gift is signed by both the archivist, on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly, and the donor. Copies are kept by both parties. The deed of gift also records any restrictions on the collection. If the donor wants to have returned any material which the Archives finds it does not want, this should also be noted in the deed of gift. Donated printed matter not needed by the Archives or the National Bahá'í Library may be given to other Bahá'í libraries or sold, with the proceeds going to the Archives Endowment Fund.

While many people find it convenient to send their papers in one or more batches during their lifetime, thus relieving themselves of moving or storage arrangements, others make provisions to leave their papers to the National Bahá'í Archives in their wills. In either case, the Archives requests that the papers not be weeded and items discarded prior to their delivery since individuals may not realize the historical value to some seemingly unimportant items.