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## Martha Louise Root

Martha Root was a Baha'i missionary. Shoghi Effendi had heralded her as a unique apostle of Baha'u'llah. Although she was no longer young, had limited financial means, had cancer, and was afraid, lonely, and physically frail, she traveled several times around the world during eight lengthy trips to disseminate the Baha'i faith in as many parts of the globe as possible. She is primarily remembered for her intrepid, pioneering, audacious, and persevering spirit.

Martha Root, born in 1872, was raised in Pennsylvania and attended Oberlin College, but she eventually graduated from the University of Chicago in 1895. Her professional career began as a teacher, principal, and then a lecturer. However, in 1900 she was able to establish herself as a journalist. She became a Baha'i in 1909 and met Abdul-Baha in 1912. This was a pivotal experience in her spiritual development. In 1915, supporting herself as a journalist supplying stories to U.S. newspapers and magazines, she departed on her first trip for the Baha'i faith, traveling to Europe, Egypt, Asia, and Hawaii. In Egypt, she served as an early foreign correspondent, reporting on the displacement of the Jews from Palestine by the Ottoman Empire. In 1919, she left for South America, the Caribbean, and the southern coast of the United States. After some short travels in Canada and the United States, in 1921 she traveled to Mexico and Guatemala. When her mother died, she remained at home to care for her father. When her father died in 1922, she was free to dedicate herself to traveling to spread her religion, barely supporting herself through journalism and odd jobs.

Root started with a cross-country trip through the United States, and then from 1923 to 1925 went to Australia and New Zealand, Asia, and Africa. During the next four years, she traveled in Palestine, Europe, and Turkey. In Palestine she completed a pilgrimage to the Baha'i holy shrines and met Shoghi Effendi. From the end of 1929 to 1931, starting with Egypt, she crisscrossed the Middle East, Asia, and Hawaii. During this time she was again able to meet Shoghi Effendi. While in Iran, she gathered material and wrote the first book ever published on Tahiri. After spending one year traveling in the United States, from 1932 to 1936 she roamed Europe, including the Balkans, and the European part of Turkey. After a 10-month semi-rest from traveling, which she spent in the United States, the following two years saw her return to Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Martha Root, soaring in what she called "spiritual skylarking," braved through strikes, epidemics, illness, extreme fatigue, revolutions, civil strife, bombing, war, and rigorous forms of transportation, including an icy crossing of the Andes by mule, to accomplish her goal of disseminating the Baha'i teachings. She finally succumbed to cancer and died in Hawaii, where a monument was erected in her honor. In 1939, soon after her death, Martha Root was called by the guardian of the Baha'i faith the foremost Hand of the Cause of God, the highest spiritual station a Baha'i can attain.

**Loni Bramson**

### Further Reading

Garis, M. R. *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983.

Bramson, Loni. "Martha Louise Root." *World Religions: Belief, Culture, and Controversy*. ABC-CLIO, 2011. Web. 2 Nov. 2011.

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