

DR. DAVID S. RUHE, KANSAS AUTHOR

Duane L. Herrmann

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David S. Ruhe was born 3 Jan 1919, the second of eight children, to Percy Bot & Amy S Ruhe of Allentown, Pennsylvania. He received B.S. & M.S. bioscience degrees at Michigan State college and his MD from Temple University School of Medicine in 1941. In 1986 he also received an honorary Sc. D degree from the latter.

Though his initial research was in tropical medicine with a focus on malaria, he specialized in public health with an emphasis in audio visual communication. He eventually became a Senior Surgeon in the US Public health Service, then director of the Medical film Institute of the Association of American Medical colleges. He came to Kansas in 1954 and founded the Department of Medical Communication at the Kansas University School of Medicine of which he became a full professor and Chairman.

He published a book on the ongoing research, viewing and appraisal of medical films, specifically relating to psychiatry, psychology and mental health in medical communication, as well as many professional papers over the decades of his professional career. He also produced a large number of medical films for educational purposes.

Dr. Ruhe married Margaret Kunz on 7 Sept 1940 at Urbana, Illinois, with whom he had two sons, Christopher and Douglas. In 1941, while living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania he entered the Bahá'í community. His wife had grown up in the Bahá'í community after her mother accepted the Bahá'í Faith in 1916. Her mother was the daughter of a clergyman of the Reformed Church of Switzerland. Her conversion was the result of a Unitarian minister in Urbana, Illinois where she and her husband were living while he taught at the University of Illinois (a famous physicist, Dr Kunz had invented the first photoelectric cells). The Unitarian minister had met 'Abdu'l-Baha, the son of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith while he was in the US in 1912. The effect galvanized his being and he conveyed that to his congregation. Some left the church with him and began the Bahá'í community of Urbana. Ruhe's future mother-in-law was among them.

In 1942 Ruhe was elected to the governing council of the local Bahá'í community of New Orleans, Louisiana. Bahá'í elections are conducted in a spirit of prayer, with no campaigning or nominations, so being elected is oftentimes a great surprise; they are essentially a vote of confidence in an individual's ability. He served on various such councils, called Spiritual Assemblies, as his professional career took him from place to place.

In February 1954 his career brought him to Kansas. Five years later, much to the surprise and delight of fellow Bahá'ís in Kansas, he was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, a position to which he was re-elected for the next three decades. He was the first member of the Kansas Bahá'í community to be so elected. From the year he arrived in the state, he had been elected delegate from Kansas to the National Bahá'í Convention, so he was known on a national level of the Bahá'í community. He continued to be elected delegate every year while he lived in Kansas.

In 1959 Horace Holly, Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, was asked to serve at the Baha World Center in Haifa, Israel. This created a vacancy on the membership of the National Spiritual Assembly. When a bi-election was held to fill that vacancy, Ruhe was elected to fill it.¹ He attended the weekend meetings of the National Assembly from his home in Kansas. After election of the National Assembly in 1963, he was elected its Secretary. This meant leaving Kansas to assume responsibility for the Office of the Secretariat of the National Assembly whose offices are just north of Chicago, in Wilmette, Illinois. The family regretted leaving Kansas, but Ruhe later reflected, "The five years as National Secretary were challenging but delightful."²

For five years he served the American Bahá'í community in this office, then in 1968 he was elected to the international Bahá'í council, the Universal House of Justice. This council coordinates the affairs of the entire Bahá'í world community. This election necessitated moving to Haifa, Israel where the Bahá'í World Center is located. He served there until he retired in 1993.

The quarter of a century of his membership on this council saw tremendous changes in the Bahá'í world community. Its size went from several hundred thousand members to several million. Large areas of the globe where only a few believers were scattered here and there, now had large, thriving Bahá'í communities. At the beginning, many believers could only dream of efforts to improve the societies in which they lived, at the end thousands of such efforts had been initiated. The number of schools blossomed, especially in areas with no education for children, medical and agricultural projects proliferated. Major volumes of scripture were translated and published. And

several major construction projects were undertaken: continental houses of worship were constructed in Panama, India, and Samoa, and most significantly, the seat of the House of Justice was constructed in Haifa. This was the first major step of the development of the international infrastructure at the Bahá'í World Center since the 1940s. Successive stages involved the building of an archival facility, a research center, an office building, hospitality centers for guests and monumental garden terraces climbing one half mile up the slopes of Mount Carmel. One could say that the Bahá'í community had changed beyond recognition. As a member of the international council, Dr. Ruhe exercised a major executive role.

When Dr. Ruhe retired from service at the Bahá'í World Center, he and his wife settled in New York State to be near their children. In retirement he did not rest. He completed several books he had started decades before and, with son Doug, founded a video production company to supply videos for the American Bahá'í community. Some of these have been broadcast on cable and commercial networks breaking new ground in supplying information to the public about the Bahá'í Faith.

While living in Haifa, he conceived and wrote his first book to be published on a Bahá'í subject. It is titled, *Door of Hope: A Century of the Bahá'í Faith in the Holy Land*. The publisher is George Ronald in England. It was released in 1983. He explained the reason for the book as being that, "historically, the Holy Land has exercised an influence upon human affairs out of all proportion to its diminutive size, and without doubt it will continue to do so in the future. To 'Akká, 'the silver city,' Mount Carmel, the 'mountain of God,' and their environs come ever-increasing streams of Bahá'í pilgrims and visitors seeking their spiritual and administrative home. It is hoped that this book will be of particular use and interest to them, to answer the questions of the curious, to enrich pilgrim days, to provoke wide reading of original sources, and to be a perennial reference on this 'most holy land.'"³

This book "is much expanded in content and detail," beyond an earlier volume titled, *Bahá'í Holy Places at the World Center*, produced for Bahá'ís in 1968. That year the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh (Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith) to the shores of the Holy Land a century before, was commemorated. That earlier book was part of that effort. At the time of His arrival, 'Akká was the most infamous penal colony of the Ottoman Empire. Sentence there was effectively, for most prisoners, a sentence of death. It was the final destination of the series of exiles which Bahá'u'lláh had endured.

These exiles and the life sentence of imprisonment had begun when Bahá'u'lláh had accepted the teachings of a religious reformer in His native Persia. Bahá'u'lláh had been born to a noble family and could have lived a life of ease and luxury with the court. Instead, for His beliefs, He was stripped of His wealth, social position, imprisoned and exiled.

His exile to 'Akká made the land holy to Bahá'ís as it was to Jews, Christians and Muslims. *Door of Hope* draws on recent scholarship and archeological research, newly translated documents and archival photographs to document the sites with special significance for Bahá'ís. Its scholarly treatment for these sites was new for the Bahá'í community.

The structure of the narrative of the text was also new. He explained that the text, “is place-related and does not follow a strict chronology, its narrative necessarily moving forwards and backwards in time as the place of the drama changes.”⁴

In the text Ruhe skillfully blends his narrative with excerpts from source documents when giving the history of a site. An informative excerpt from the chapter on Mazraih, the first house where Bahá'u'lláh lived after the Ottoman governor and Muslim clergy of 'Akká made it clear that no one would enforce the firman of the Sultan requiring perpetual house arrest: “The House remained in the possession of the descendants of Muhammad Safwat during the period of the British Mandate. Then, about 1928, Mrs. Lillian Mc Neill came to the Holy Land with her husband, a Brigadier-General who had been with Allenby in the conquest of Palestine. Mrs. McNeill had been a childhood friend in Malta of the English princess who became Queen Marie of Rumania. She relates that when she was making a journey of discovery in the area below Nahariya and travelling ‘...across country where then only the roughest of tracks existed, I came upon an old house, neglected, some parts almost ruinous...’⁵

The reference to Queen Marie of Rumania gains meaning when one realized that she was the first monarch to accept the message of Bahá'u'lláh. Mrs. McNeill was also a believer.

The volume is lavishly illustrated with period photos which, unfortunately because of their age, are all black and white. Most had never been published before. As well as these “new” photographs, most of the information in it is also found no where else. The book is now indispensable for every person who wishes to learn about the sites in the Holy Land associated with the Bahá'í Faith.

Ruhe's second book on a Bahá'í topic is a biography of the early life of Bahá'u'lláh. While in prison for His beliefs, He received a vision that He was to be a Messenger of God. The message was one of utter simplicity: “The earth is one country and mankind its citizens.” Simple though it

sounds, its consequences are far-reaching and will result in great changes at all social levels before its realization. And, He said, its realization would come to pass for it is the will of God. Since this announcement in the nineteenth century social upheavals have occurred which have increasingly removed one barrier and another that have divided the human race for centuries. One of the first of these was slavery. At the same time new institutions and organizations have been created to facilitate global interaction among people, the United Nations and the internet are two examples.

Robe of Light, published in 1994, is the first of a projected series of long fruitions, begun even before the author came to Kansas. It was started in 1949 and he continued to work on it while in Kansas. At that time there was no documentary biography of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Since that time others have appeared, but this one remains unique in that it includes vast autobiographical references found in the Writings (some 21,000 documents) of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Ruhe had access to these while living in Haifa where the International Bahá'í Archives are located.

Ruhe explained the reason behind this book, "Nothing is more important than to explore the Great Lives which periodically have released man from each gradual new dilemma produced by his own social evolution. In any age the Supreme Souls born among mankind provide man's essential understanding of himself and his relation to God."⁶

Describing the role of these individuals he further explained, "Through the different expressions of spiritual genius of each Manifestation of God, man's primary and innate needs are perceived and the profound ideas required for the creation of a new age, with growth into another great cycle of human progress, are put forth with divine power."⁷ This is the role he believes has been fulfilled by Bahá'u'lláh. The full title of the book is: *Robe of Light: The Persian Years of the Supreme Prophet, Bahá'u'lláh: 1817-1853*.

Future volumes were planned to cover the years in Baghdad and Constantinople, each a successive stage in the exile from his native land. These books may well be reference points for future generations of Bahá'ís and others wanting to know more about how a religion begins in historical times.

Dr. David Ruhe's professional and Bahá'í publications have added a luster to the literature of Kansas of which few people are aware. It is hoped that this paper will relieve that to some degree.

David Ruhe Bibliography

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The Power of Race Unity

The Spiritual Road

The Struggle for Black and White Unity

Symbols of the Spirit

Unity and Diversity

We are One

Notes:

1. Margaret & David Ruhe, correspondence with the author, nd, postmarked 21 December 1987.
2. David S. Ruhe correspondence to the author, 29 April 2003.
3. Ruhe, David S. M.D., *Door of Hope: A Century of the Bahá'í Faith in the Holy Land* (Oxford, George Ronald) 1983, p.3.
4. *ibid.* p.1.
5. *ibid.* pp.91-92.
6. Ruhe, *Robe of Light: The Persian Years of the Supreme Prophet*, Bahá'u'lláh (Oxford, George Ronald) 1994, p.4.
7. *ibid.* p.1.

Letters to and from Dr. Ruhe

Letter from myself to David Ruhe [some personal details removed]

Thanks so much for your response, corrections and additions. It is a pleasure working with you like this. I am so glad you are willing and able to help. I feel much better when I can get the most direct information possible. I did much of the work on it between phone call interruptions, so I'm sure some editing will be helpful.

I have two questions: 1.) what year did you come to Kansas?

And, 2.) I don't understand the comment that: "*Door of Hope*, on the Holy Land, is number four in the series." Series of SEVEN? Have I missed five of them? If *Robe of Light* is number one, where are numbers 2, 3, 5, 6, & 7? Have I missed them, or are they waiting for their turn at the publisher? Would you have time to provide the title of each one and a sentence of the content? I don't want to leave anything out. If some of them have been published (and I am ignorant, I am very sorry) could you give the country and year of publication?

I have attached the revised version of the paper. If there's any additional information that you feel would be helpful, please feel free to add it. ...

his reply [some personal details removed]

29 April '03

Dear Duane Herrmann:

You have been bold as a biographer, but I have edited your "Kansas Author" detail and apologize for the delay in feeding it back to you.

Good to hear of the continuing Baha'i activity in Kansas! Keep up the good work! Everywhere our communities need an expressive publicist who knows his countryside, his friends and his opportunities. to you, all hail! Abdu'l-Baha left His footprints in Kansas – good that you and others keep the memories warm.

Here's to the Kansas Authors club and your membership in it. Our years in Kansas and at K.U. were happy ones, and you are keeping the pot boiling in your way.

...

Warm greetings and salutations to the Baha'is of Topeka, Lawrence, K.C. where ever you may travel. We keep reasonably well and as every plugging away for the Faith.

Your biog of Rose Hilty shows your gift as historiographer it seems.

Dave & Meg Ruhe
