

# PANAMA

## THE CROSSROADS

### BETWEEN THE CONTINENTS

The Story of the Early Days of the Baha'i Faith in Panama  
1939 - 1972



*The first National Regional Assembly of Central America*

Fuad Izadinia - 2015, Pretoria

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*You must give great attention to the Republic of Panama, for that point the Occident the Orient find each other united through the Panama Canal, and it is also situated between the two great oceans. That place will become very important in the future. The Teachings once established there will unite the East and the West, the North and the South.*

Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Divine Plan,

Fuad Izadinia – 2015, Pretoria

## **DEDICATION**

This work is firstly dedicated primarily to Mrs. Shiva Asadu'llahzadeh, our beloved martyr, who was killed by the Iranian Government in the early 1980s, who asked me for the history of the Faith in Panama shortly before her glorious martyrdom.

The dedication also goes to the memories of those wonderful American souls who accepted the call of the beloved Guardian in 1939 and moved to the Republic of Panama to establish the Faith there. These were Mathew Kaszab, Louise Caswell, Cora Oliver, Julie Regal and Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton. The dedication also goes to those early Panamanians who accepted the Faith of Baha'u'llah in this blessed Country. These were Alfred Osborne, Raquel Francois de Constante, James and Maisie Facey, Blanca de Campos, Clare and Norma Edwards, Manuel Corgas and many more indomitable souls.

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Next, my loving thanks go to Mrs. Julie Regal, the only remnant of the early pioneers of Panama, now living<sup>1</sup> in Australia at the age of 95, who could verify many facts of the years she was participant, either as the pioneer in Panama or at a later stage as the executive secretary of the Inter-America Committee. She so kindly reviewed the text of this study with valuable suggestions for its improvements. Also, my thanks to Mrs. Diane Regal, her daughter, who above all other help she provided specifically on the life her dear mother. She also suggested a meaningful title for this book.

My appreciations go to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama for offering their archives for any further study in this regard.

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My special gratitude goes to my niece, Hedyeh Khoshaeen for having professionally re-arranged and page set the whole book as well as preparing the photo album to be seen as the last chapter.

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1. Soon after the completion of this manuscript, her soul winged to the real above. She got a copy of this manuscript with all the insertions of her memoirs and pictures of the early days in Panama.

Also, my special thanks to my longtime friend from the days of Panama, don Manuel Flores<sup>2</sup> for his special help from the archives of the NSA of Panama where he got valuable information.

My appreciation also goes to Alfonso and Roberta Escobedo for helping me with some details of the story of Louise Caswell<sup>3</sup>.

My gratitude goes also to Ms. Linda Malam, kin to late Mrs. Leota Lockman<sup>4</sup>, par excellence pioneer of Panama, who left all the relevant documents on the history of the Faith in Panama she was working on with her for safekeeping and in due time passing them to the writer. These important correspondences otherwise would have been left out and probably lost.

Last but not least my heartfelt thanks go to my dear wife Manijeh, who together, we made our lives for almost 19 years in Panama and came to know many of the outstanding and self-sacrificing pioneers mentioned in this work. I could always rely on her good memories of our dearly loved Panamanians. She also patiently helped me with the office work, which were multiple and by giving her valuable suggestions to improve the text. Thanks also to the constant encouragement of my children Mojdeh Leota and Vafa Dario, the two Panamenians, who proofread the text.

Here, I must make a special mention of our beloved martyr Shiva Asadu'llah-zadih<sup>5</sup>, who in my early days of pioneering once wrote and asked for the history of the Faith in Panama. In that time, I had nothing to offer, but never forgot my promise to her, now that there is such a history, yet she is not here anymore to enjoy it. No doubt, she has been all along watching and helping me from the above.

Coming lately in touch with Mrs. Anne King Sadeghpour, ex-pioneer of Nicaragua, I learned about the wonderful book she has written on the life of Mathew Kaszab, 'Gloriously Tragic Life of Mathew Kaszab, Letters from a pioneer 1939-1942' who generously gave permission to quote from her book. With my profound appreciation to her<sup>6</sup>.

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2. This very esteemed friend, pioneer of El Salvador to Panama from mid-1971, passed away in February 2023 after 50 years of unstoppable service and 40 years of being member of the NSA of Panama.

3. Who reached in Panama in 1940, as the second pioneer.

4. For many years as the Secretary of the NSA of Panama

5. Shiva Asadu'llahzadeh, member of the LSA of Tehran, was martyred by the Islamic Republic of Iran in early 1980, while she was pregnant with her second child.

6. This book on the internet is highly recommended to the reader for the complete tragic life of dear Mathew.



## **INTRODUCTION**

When the call for spiritual conquest of Latin America by the beloved Guardian Shoghi Effendi in 1939 and his message was read at the National Convention of the United States in Chicago, a new spirit was wafted into the minds and souls of the American believers, who quite heroically stood up by accepting the challenge and embarked into the far-off lands of the Spaniards, taking the Message of Baha'u'llah to them, bringing them closer to His Kingdom of Unity of Mankind. This call was a reiteration of the call from the beloved Master mentioned in His Tablets of Divine Plan of 1916/17, where He singled out the Republic of Panama from among the other nations.

Here you will find an authentic and true history of how the first Baha'i community in Panama was established. It was by the heroic efforts of Baha'is from America.

Besides living with Diane and her family, the greatest pleasure of my old age has been working with Fuad Izadinia to produce a true, complete, and thrilling account of how the first Baha'i community in Panama established. Through my perusal of the accounts of several pioneers, I now am glad to hold a higher appreciation of each one of them.

May you take inspiration from them and as much as you are able teach and spread the Baha'i Faith, which generates love for all mankind. Eventually universal love will bring about the end of all war and the establishment of universal peace.

Julie Regal

Gosford, New South Wales.

Australia

March 2015

## **GRANDMA'S EULOGY- DIANE REGAL (Move to the end Annex)**

My mother was born to older parents, who had no worldly distinction. However, my mother believed that in God's heaven their station was the very highest. She had a younger sister, Ruth, with whom she longed to be close but never was.

My mother was delighted to be born on the same day as Shakespeare. So that, as a young child, she wrote a poem about it. I regret very much that in her last years she threw her childhood poetry away. But it ended this way: "And when I grow up, I hope to be as great an author as he was".

She was very gullible as a small child. She hunted for fairy crowns under lilac bushes and believed that she would marry Bobby Shaftoe because the nursery rhyme said, "He'll come back and marry me, bonny Bobby Shaftoe".

My mother learned young to appreciate the Bahá'í teaching that everyone should be educated, especially girls if the family couldn't afford to educate everyone, as women are the first teachers of the young. My mother was disadvantaged because her mother had been pulled out of school by her parents at age 7 to work cleaning people's houses in the days when education was not compulsory, to feed her parents' alcohol addiction. Because of this, the girls were only given one book during their childhood. My mother's father was bookish, however he worked 10-hour days plus Saturday mornings, as all men did in those days. Therefore, he didn't have time to educate his children.

Her parents sent her to Episcopalian Sunday school, but surprisingly, she was only taught about the missionaries and not stories of Christ. Therefore, it was only when she was 11 years old that someone on the street handed out copies of the Book of St. Matthew that my mother read, developing a deep love for Christ.

The following year, her father got hold of a book on Esperanto, the auxiliary language, and began to study. He decided to order a book written by the founder of Esperanto's daughter, Lidia Zamenhof. Lidia had become a Bahá'í and translated a book, "Bahau'llah and the New Era" into Esperanto. Both parents became interested in the Bahá'í Faith, and attended meetings in Chicago which was the only place in the city where you would see white and black people sitting together. My mother had developed the neighbourhood prejudices and told her mother she didn't think they should sit together. At which my grandmother replied, "We like that". My mother then became both a Bahá'í and an Esperantist. She realised that becoming Bahá'í did not lessen her belief in Christ, as the Bahá'í Faith builds on the teachings of Christianity.

My mother had an interest in learning Spanish, which led to her taking a 5-month trip to Mexico when she was 22. She made close friends in Mexico. She was so thrilled about her experiences, that she was inspired to write a book about them, just for family. This also led to her going to Panama, to help the Bahá'í Faith there, in 1943-48, where she worked for the US Army then Navy as a secretary. She lived in the Canal Zone, becoming a member of the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama.

On return, she worked at the National Bahá'í Centre in Wilmette for 2 years, where she was a member of the Inter-America Committee with Hand of the Cause Dorothy Baker.

She had a short, unfortunate marriage, except for having me. My family was very

different from other families. I was the only person I ever knew who had divorced parents until I went to university. I was also the only one to have a grandparent living in my house, and the only one who had a working mother. Therefore, when my first friend from outside the neighbourhood came over and asked me where my mother was, I said she was up cleaning the attic. During my early years, my mother could just scrape by, even to give 10 cents to the Bahaí fund each month was a sacrifice.

My mother was keen to give me experiences. She took me on frequent excursions such as into Chicago for ballet performances or museums. She started these excursions when I was 18 months old, by taking me to the end of the line on the train. My earliest memory was looking out over the Fox River, that day while my mother walked towards me with an ice cream cone she'd just bought. She also offered me swimming, ballet, and piano lessons. When I was a teenager, she also took me on **trips** like my friends did not go on. To Mexico twice, to the first Bahaí World Convention in London in 1963, and on Bahaí pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1970. When I came back from London, a boy in my class said, "You must be rich to go there". I thought "You don't know our furniture is all hand-me-downs and threadbare".

I never knew anyone else who was thinking more daily on how to better the world. She talked almost daily about how the healing message of the Bahaí Faith would transform the world. It was irrepressible, it bubbled out of her. She also saw the international language, Esperanto, as a great force for unity in the world, and worked actively for it.

She took an early retirement and offered to be a Bahaí pioneer in a Spanish-speaking country. They wrote back suggesting Nicaragua, which had just been through a civil war. The capital city had also just been levelled by an earthquake. There is no place my mother would have liked to go less. But she disposed of all of her possessions, only taking with 2 suitcases. These suitcases she had to take with her each 3 months as she was required to renew her visa outside the country, not knowing whether she would be allowed back in. Her diary records that moving to Nicaragua was like jumping off a cliff. One custom she couldn't get used to, was that Nicaraguans of all ages were constantly spitting, even inside people's houses. When she asked a Nicaraguan to please not spit on her floor, the person instead spit on her wall. My mother founded the Esperanto movement in Nicaragua, interesting many people.

Because of the difficulties, after 3 years she instead pioneered to Mexico, where she remained until she was 81, when I begged her to join us in New Zealand. We moved to Australia 3 months after she became a New Zealand citizen.

She was delighted to be introduced to Soroptimist International in New Zealand and considered herself fortunate that it was just being established in Gosford in the year she arrived. Soroptimists are a group working to improve the lives of women and girls around the world. She attended meetings until she was 93.

My mother learned that if you want to meet nice people, hire a carer. The carer who showered my mother is our singer today, who gave up an opera career to marry. We begged her each week to sing for us before she left.

I have concluded the same about my mother as she concluded about her parents: that she has earned one of the **highest stations** among the angels in heaven. I thank you, mother, for all you have done for me.

## FOREWORDS

After the Tablets of Divine Plan<sup>7</sup> of Abdu'l-Baha corresponding to the years of the WWI were presented to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada<sup>8</sup> in 1918 and 1919, there was a moral obligation for the American Baha'is to raise up and become either visitors, teachers or pioneers.

Loulie A. Mathews<sup>9</sup> in her article<sup>10</sup> clarified the concepts of 'Visitor, Travel Teacher, and Pioneer. She wrote: "...Visitor indicates one who stayed less than six months; teacher or pioneer indicates those who remained longer."

Since Shoghi Effendi<sup>11</sup> assumed the Guardianship of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, he kept on encouraging those few very early teachers of the time of the Master who answered to His call, such as Martha Root, Leonora Holsapple, May Maxwell, etc. in their teaching activities wherever they travelled.

It was not until 1939, when the beloved Guardian wrote to the US Convention and strongly appealed to the American believers to go and conquer Latin America by settling down in those countries (Advent of Divine Justice). Shortly after a wave of young believers volunteered to accept their Guardian's challenge and not only to go to the Latin American countries, but to Europe, Africa, Asia, even to Iceland and Tahiti. Out of 88 detached souls who rose to go to the Latin American countries, were mostly women, 60 women and 28 men (The Baha'i Centenary 1844-1944, pp 200-201). With such an action, the women showed that indeed this is their sacred Age to act upon. From the very first Pioneers who went to Panama, three were women.

Basically, there were four principal pioneers for Panama from the United States whose history are closely linked to each other. First was Mathew Kaszab, coming to Panama in mid-1939 by his own initiative and volition, responding to the call of the beloved Guardian in his message of 1939, and after only some months, he was asked by the Inter America Committee<sup>12</sup> to pioneer to Nicaragua, soon after only three years of hard life that he went

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7. Tablets of Divine Plan are a series of 14 Tablets penned by Abdu'l-Baha during the WWI (March 1916 – March 1917), addressing the believers of the United States of America and Canada. As Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith described: "These collective letters, along with Baha'u'llah's Tablet of Carmel and Abdu'l-Baha's Will and Testament are the 'Charters of the Administrative Order of the Baha'i Faith'".

8. In those early stages of the formation of the Faith, there was only one National Spiritual Assembly for both Countries.

9. Once the Chairwoman of the Pioneering Committee - USA

10. Published in The Baha'i Centenary (Baha'i World) 1844-1944, pp195-197.

11. Great-grandson of Baha'u'llah who was appointed by Abdu'l-Baha as the Guardian of the Faith after His passing in November 1921, which endured until his untimely death in 1957 for a total of 36 years.

12. The Committee that was in charge of allocating pioneers to different countries.

through, he passed away in 1943 in the US.

Then came Louise Caswell in September of the same year of 1939, and three days later, Cora Oliver followed her footsteps to Panama. These two latter pioneers could be called as the initial founders and mothers of the Baha'i Community of Panama. Their early services and activities were so much linked together that trying to separate their stories would not be possible. Though these two ladies, who most of the time were addressed in the friendly letters by the Pioneering Committee as 'girls', were quite close to each other, and each one loved and served her community in a different way. Circumstances caused their separation, and the progress of the Faith went through some struggle, not much to the benefit of the young community.

In October 1943, Julie Regal joined them, half of their age, young, vibrant, whose activities in the promotion of the Faith and its establishment in Panama gave the community another dimension. Circumstances forced her to leave after a period of over four years of active service life in Panama to take the position of Secretary of the Inter America Committee. Stories of each of these heroes will follow in this study.

Louise, much loved, whose teaching activities went far to Central America, who finally after ten years of active life in Panama, left in 1949 for, Costa Rica, then pioneered to Honduras, later to Guatemala where she stayed for 22 years and finally in Mexico for the rest of her life.

Cora is the one who stayed for longer period in Panama, for almost 14 years before she pioneered to Belize where she was crowned with the title of Knight of Baha'u'llah in 1953, at the launching of Ten-Year Crusade.

## PREFACE

***“Nothing must be permitted to hamper or slow down this apostolic campaign, which the believers have undertaken. It represents the discharge of their moral duty towards their fellow men, that of permitting them, in these cataclysmic times, to hear the Message their Lord has sent to them and the ways He has prescribed for them to solve their problems and heal their ills.”***<sup>13</sup>

The beloved Faith of Baha'u'llah is replete of Dawn-Breaker<sup>14</sup> like heroes. Every time a believer leaves his home and travels to a new area for the sake of the Faith, being this short or long term, he is breaking the dawn in that country. One is assured of the promises of the rushing of the Concourse On High to his help in promoting the Faith.

The first call was raised by the beloved Bab by addressing His disciples:

***“...Scatter throughout the length and breadth of this land, and, with steadfast feet and sanctified heart prepared the way for His coming. Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty.”***<sup>15</sup>

The second call was raised by Baha'u'llah:

***“Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Bahá for God hath prescribed unto everyone the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds.... Should anyone arise for the triumph of Our Cause, him will God render victorious though tens of thousands of enemies be leagued against him.”***<sup>16</sup>

The third call was pronounced the beloved Master Who in the Tablets of Divine Plan called for souls to arise and scatter around the fragrances of the New Faith:

***“O that I could travel, even though on foot and in the utmost poverty, to these regions, and raising the call of “Ya Baha'u'l-Abha”<sup>17</sup> in cities, villages, mountains, deserts and oceans, promote the Divine teachings. This, alas, I cannot do. How intensely I deplore***

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13. Shoghi Effendi – Baha'i News, February 1942

14. Dawn Breakers is the story of the early believers in the new divine Revelation. History of the Bab, as the forerunner of the Baha'i Revelation. Very moving history of martyrdom of many souls 1844-1863

15. Dawn-Breakers, p. 94

16. Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 278

17. Literary means 'O Thou Glory of Glories', it is an invocation to attract the Concourse On High for help.

***it! Please God, ye may achieve it.***<sup>18</sup>

This call was followed by repeated calls from the beloved Guardian throughout his ministry by the formation of different Plans he devised:

***“...The entire community must, as one man, arise to fulfill them. To teach the Cause of God, to proclaim its truths, to defend its interests, to demonstrate, by words as well as by deeds, its indispensability, its potency, and universality, should at no time be regarded as the exclusive concern or sole privilege of Bahá’í administrative institutions, be they Assemblies, or committees. All must participate, however humble their origin, however limited their experience, however restricted their means, however deficient their education, however pressing their cares and preoccupations, however unfavorable the environment in which they live...”***<sup>19</sup>

These messages were continued with the calls of the Universal House of Justice to the present time and will be as such in a foreseeable future, encouraging the believers to pioneer and take the curative message of Baha’u’llah to those expectant souls of the world.

Dawn-Breakers’ episodes keep on living on this earth. There are and will be many moving stories of those young and old, women and men who reaped immense benefit by the example they set in the field of promoting the beloved Faith of Baha’u’llah. These stories could be gathered and made permanent part of the history of the Faith. Calls were addressed to the East and to the West in fact they were of universal character. But the 1938 call of the beloved Guardian was specifically addressed to the United States in particular, to conquer all those areas, to gather the divided humanity together. *“The American believers, standard-bearers of this worldwide community and torchbearers of an as yet unborn civilization, have girt up their loins, unfurled their banners and stepped into the arena of service. Their Plan has been formulated. Their forces are mobilized. They are steadfastly marching towards their goal.”*<sup>20</sup>

Such an encouragement from the beloved Guardian inspired the early pioneers who rose and conquered many countries, especially Latin American. The reader might find it interesting to see the challenges the early pioneers who settled in Panama went through, and it is hoped that stories of this work would encourage him/her to identify and gather together other stories of the first hero pioneers and the early believers of other countries, in recognition of their services and love, detachment and sacrifice that have built the foundations of the beloved Faith.

This is an attempt to analyze the power of words the beloved Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha’i Faith, the infallible source, aided by the spirit of Baha’u’llah, the Founder, and inspired by the beloved Master Abdu’l-Baha, the Center of His Covenant, in his message of The Advent of Divine Justice, in 1939 to the National Convention of the US, describing the arrival of the time where the Latin America should be spiritually conquered through stainless souls who would arise and take the lead, becoming not only teachers, but pioneers in all the countries of the Continent of America and disseminated the curative message of Baha’u’llah to the inhabitants of each and every country, nay, every city and community, who would be

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18. Tablets of Divine Plan, pp. 38 - 39

19. Advent of Divine Justice, p. 45

20. Message of Shoghi Effendi, July 5, 1938

longing to know of the New Message of God for this new Age.

In this message, Shoghi Effendi reiterated the words of Abdu'l-Baha in the Tablets of Divine Plan, about the importance of all the countries of Central America, but especially the Republic of Panama, where the East and West, the North and South meet through the Canal of Panama, a canal, which was built and inaugurated some twenty-five years earlier -1914:

***"...All the above countries have importance, but especially the Republic of Panama, wherein the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans come together through the Panama Canal. It is the center for travel and passage from America to other continents of the world, and in the future, it will gain most great importance."***<sup>21</sup>

History proudly remembers the names of those early pioneers, whom majority were women of young age, who rose in obedience to fulfill the desire of their beloved Guardian. And in fact, at the youthful age, filled with enthusiasm and dedication, and under any circumstances took the message of Baha'u'llah to the inhabitants of these countries and established His Faith there. They were thrilled by this call of their Guardian in the message, where he said:

***"Let some, at this very moment, gird up the loins of endeavor, flee their native towns, cities and states, forsake their countries, and, putting their whole trust in God, as the best provision for their journey, set their faces and direct their steps towards distant climes, those virgin fields, those un-surrendered cities, and bend their energies to capture the citadels of men's hearts."***<sup>22</sup>

It is the aim of this work, to inspire especially the beloved youth, to arise and take even further the Faith of Baha'u'llah in theirs and other countries and thus become immortalized by the history of the Faith, as their predecessors did.

The history of those who built the Faith in Panama, has thus two aims, one is local, in other words, is written for the friends of Panama, to come to know of their roots in the Faith, and the other is universal, where it would be acting as continuation of the Dawn Breakers and would inspire the communities in Latin America, nay, every country in the world, to come to know the heroes and heroines of their communities.

The leadership of the beloved Guardian, as the sole General of this army, who not only guided the institution of the National Assembly of the United States and Canada, who was called for this great service, but inspired by his personal letters of the early pioneers and believers in all aspects of their lives with his practical and loving brotherly messages to encourage and strengthen them in their fields of service.

The creation and role of the Inter-America Committee, the link-chain between the NSA and the pioneers, although now only a history, as it was dissolved after the creation of the National Regional Assemblies in 1951, but it was the nurturing mother that constantly communicated with those scattered around the foreign lands, listened to their pleas, guided

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21. Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Divine Plan, p. 10 – Haifa April 8, 1916

22. Shoghi Effendi, Advent of Divine Justice, p. 52



them in much of the relevant aspects, to help them grow and fulfill the goals so much close to their hearts.

The United States of America was indeed the mother country, which constantly was in communication with its citizens for this crucial task. No other country had such a possibility as the United States had. The pioneers and travel-teachers –of which mostly were women– were the new Dawn-Breakers. This is an historical fact that needs to be appreciated fully by everyone. Many of them passed through Panama, some served in different intervals, always ready as the conscript soldiers, in the command of their general, ready to act, ready to travel to wherever the need was.

Many of these dear souls helped other communities to grow, went to their communities and stayed with them. Used their own vacation times to help other communities through teaching and consolidating the newly enrolled friends. Formed communities and Assemblies, which indeed was not an easy job; with the help the small communities, arranged meetings and firesides, inviting people of all walks of life and explained the message of Baha'u'llah to them. The Inter America Committee arranged conferences for the Central and South America, where local delegates were encouraged to participate and to get the taste of 'unity' apparent in the forming institutions. The new communities learned how to consult together and how to associate with each other in the spirit of the Faith.

The beloved Guardian -the sole General- had planned that the Latin American countries have their own Regional National Spiritual Assemblies, one for Central and the other for South America. By 1951, after the formation of the newly established Regional National Spiritual Assemblies, the I-A Committee was dissolved, and the pioneers and believers made direct contacts with the beloved Guardian for further guidance. It would take for some of these countries to go through preparatory session of over ten years before they could have their own independent National Spiritual Assembly. These are beautiful stories of challenge, of human shortcomings and failure, of crisis and yet victory, to build and overcome all the hindrances on their path. The Guardian's goal was achieved.

After 1951 the early believers took the affairs more closely to their hearts and when the time came to elect their own National Assemblies, some of the early believers became part of these institutions.

Today, those heroes and heroines of the Faith have taken their flight to the Abha Kingdom, to help the growth of the Faith from above, to see their faithful spiritual children are still busy building the Kingdom of God on earth. They served in many capacities, either as pioneers and travel-teachers, as members of the institutions, as Knights of Baha'u'llah, always faithful to the command and ever ready to serve the Faith of God.

## PROLOG

In December 1976, the NSA of Panama addressed a letter to Fred Berest, himself a long-standing pioneer in the Canal Zone<sup>23</sup>, sometimes serving as a member of the NSA of Panama, and in the capacity of an Auxiliary Board Member<sup>24</sup>, asking him, as per mandate of the Universal House of Justice to record the reliable accounts on the Faith of its beginning stages of development in Panama. The House of Justice had already written to the remaining Knights of Baha'u'llah, to write their recollections. The list contained the pioneers Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver, Julie Regal, as well as some early believers such as Alfred Osborne, the second person to declare his Faith in Panama, James, and Macie Facey, the first believers of Colon and Mabel Sneider, who was the second Baha'i to declare her faith in Canal Zone. The list also carried the names of other believers who were still living such as Ruth and Alan Pringle, Mirtle Mulcare and Raquel de Constante. Of course, the list could have been much longer if the name of those early believers in Panama, would be remembered.

This work only covers stories of the first twelve years -1939-1951 of the establishment of the Faith in Panama to the formation of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of Central America. The continuation of this study also covers the consequent pioneers, the formation of the Canal Zone Assembly, the preparation for the construction and the dedication of the House of Worship in 1972, and the entry of the early believers of the three Indigenous groups, the Ngabe-Bugle<sup>25</sup> of Chiriqui, the Kuna Yala<sup>26</sup> of the Atlantic Ocean, and the Chocoos of Darien, neighboring with Colombia, who helped the progress of the Faith in Panama.

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23. Canal Zone was a territory within the Republic of Panama, embarking both sides of the Panama Canal for the administration of the Canal of Panama, handled since its inception 1913 by the government of the United States until the year 1999, which it was handed to the government of Panama.

24. Auxiliary Board Member is an institution serving directly under the guidance of the institution of the Continental Counsellors since 1968. Previous to the creation of the latter institution, the Auxiliary Board Members served under the guidance of the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God.

25. Formerly known as the Guaymi Indians.

26. Formerly known as Indians of San Blas

## MANDATE

The NSA of Panama wrote a letter in early 1990, addressing to Mrs. Raquel de Constante, Mrs. Leota Lockman and the writer asking to get the history of the Faith written and presented to the NSA. By that time Mrs. Lockman, who served as the Secretary of the NSA for long years, had already gone back to the United States; Mrs. Constante, who had gathered much historical information, had a personal project of compiling such a history<sup>27</sup>; and the writer had who after 19 years of pioneering in Panama, had already chosen a new pioneering goal and had gone to South Africa.

Mrs. Lockman made couple of visits to Panama meeting with Mrs. Constante for this specific purpose, yet, for whatever reason, the early write up of the history did not materialize. Leota wrote to the writer that she cannot do the work all by herself, therefore, before she passed away in 2007, she had all her initial studies to be mailed to the writer. Mrs. Constante passed away in 2011, passed her recollections to her daughter Rachelle, who is busy compiling a thorough story of her mother's life.

The writer while still serving at the Holy Land (2000 – 2012), met Raquel, who brought along a copy of an album of newspaper clippings, where mention of the Faith was made since the early days, and offered it to the House of Justice for safekeeping. No mention of our task was made, but after her passing, the writer took the task as a unique privilege and a partial return of bounties of those 19 years in Panama. Hoping that this yearning and love for the pioneering post in the Nine-Year Plan of the House of Justice, as well as the duty of performing with the request of the NSA of Panama would be the fulfillment of the long-standing duty, although, as it is mentioned earlier, this study only covers the early stage. Hoping with the confirmations of Baha'u'llah and the passion for such a history, the rest of the study to be made by the future lovers of Panama.

It should be mentioned that late Arthur Krummell, Auxiliary Board Member and long time the immaculate Treasurer of the NSA, a truly active American Pioneer in Panama / Canal Zone, before he passed away, did write a brief article for the sake of the history and mailed it to the writer. Mr. Donald Witzel, one of the early pioneers to Panama, now in Venezuela, and ex-Counsellor of the Faith had written in Spanish the history of the Baha'i House of Worship of Panama, in which there is quite a bit of historical information.

It is hoped that with Divine assistance, this work could be carried out, although my other two colleagues are in the Abha Kingdom, yet, membership from this Committee has not been cancelled, therefore, they are participants to this task and will do their share from above.

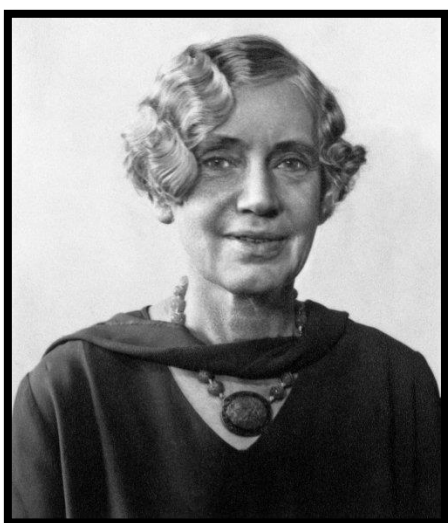
June 8, 2014 – Pretoria

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27. Rachel Constante, daughter of Raquel de Constante, has compiled a book on her mother *Una Vida Ejemplar* (An Exemplary Life), using all the relevant gathered information about the history of Panama, and the construction of the House of Worship in Panama.

## CHAPTER ONE- 1920

### MARTHA ROOT



Martha Root

*The six Central American Republics, situated south of Mexico – Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.*

*All the above countries have importance, but especially the Republic of Panama, wherein the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans come together through the Panama Canal. It is the center for travel and passage from America to other continents of the world, and in the future, it will gain most great importance.<sup>28</sup>*

The First recorded Baha'i ever to pass through Panama was the great teacher of the Faith, Miss Martha Root<sup>29</sup>, who visited the Isthmus in 1920, a year before Abdu'l-Baha passed away. And it took some 19 years before the first pioneer, Matthew Kaszab a US citizen of Hungarian background settled in Panama City, in 1939. Martha Root who wrote series of letters<sup>30</sup>. She mentions 'Abdu'l-Baha's words of the Tablets of Divine Plan regarding Panama:

***“Likewise, ye must give great attention to the Panama Canal Zone, for in that point the Occident and the Orient find each other united through the Panama Canal, and it is also situated between the two great oceans. That place will become very important in the future. The Teachings, once established there, will unite the East and the West, the North and the South.”<sup>31</sup>***

It is interesting that she also mentions 'Canal Zone', the American area of the Republic of Panama, which has not been mentioned by Abdu'l-Baha.<sup>32</sup>

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28. *Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Divine plan, p. 10, 1916*

29. Martha Root (10 August 1872 – 28 September 1939), an American prominent Baha'i travel teacher with outstanding achievements was a freelance journalist. Shoghi Effendi ranked her posthumously as Hand of the Cause of God.

30. These letters were compiled and published in the “Star of the West” Vol. #11, issue 12, p. 216 of October 1920

31. *Ibid*, p. 215. Also *Tablets of Divine Plan*, p. 10

32. Canal Zone, since its inception in 1913, had its own governing body, post office, bank, schools and colleges, police, health

The Star of the West<sup>33</sup> reports on Miss Root's short visit to Panama. It indicates that her arrival was on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> of October 1920. She immediately arranged for a visit to the office of the Panama newspaper of Star & Herald, which was bilingual, English and Spanish. Miss Root met the editor, a young man who had heard of the Faith in California. He welcomed his guest, offering her a prominent place of the newspaper a column and a half, where recorded the information provided on the Cause.

Martha Root then inquired about social clubs and churches where she could deliver the Baha'i message. The editor informed her of a sizeable event to be given that same evening in the fashionable Ancon Club House for the Memorial Fund. It was arranged for her to deliver a ten-minute talk, where she explained what 'Abdu'l-Baha had said about the Canal Zone, and she gave the vital principles. Four hundred people were present. It should be remembered that in those early days of the inauguration of the Canal, the focal of activities was Canal Zone. The Republic of Panama mentioned by the Master was not on the first plane for the English-speaking audience. The strip of 65 kilometers of Canal Zone was governed by the Americans, with Balboa town next to Panama City in the Pacific and Cristobal town next to Colon, on the Atlantic side. "One can only see where one city ends and the other begins, said the report, by the architecture and beautiful grounds of the American part. Everything that the United States has built in the Canal Zone has been high standard. The place may well be considered a demonstration of ideals in living for the world, coming and going, to see and learn.

Martha Root was told that: "There is a Union Church in Balboa. This Union Church is composed of people of all denominations of the Protestant faith". She was given twenty minutes time of the evening service, to talk about the Faith and Abdu'l-Baha. The Star of the West reported that the editor of their church magazine promised that he would use a column about the Baha'i Cause in his journal bringing in what 'Abdu'l-Baha has said about the Canal Zone.<sup>34</sup>

While there, the Cause was also explained to the editor of the Dispatch, a newspaper for the colored people, and the story was used.

Among the activities of Martha Root was an attempt to, was to pay a visit the Leper Colony at Palo Seco<sup>35</sup>, an island near Panama, but due to high winds, she had to cancel the voyage. Martha Root took the opportunity, and sent them Thornton Chase's leaflet on the lepers, "*Before Abraham Was I*", and "*Unity Through Love*", by Mr. McNutt. She also sent them four boxes of candy. In her report she mentions that there are seventy lepers on the island, seven of them children.

The one-week stay in Panama was used to its maximum, where Martha Root gave the message to the doctors of the Canal Zone ports, to the British Minister, and to several of the

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services and many other administrative functioning offices. It functioned a government within government, but under the auspices of the United States government.

33. Star of the West was a US Baha'i newsletter published between 1910 and 1935, reporting the activities and progress of the Faith in the Americas and around the world.

34. In fact, it could be said that what Abdu'l-Baha had mentioned about Panama, there was not much about the Republic of Panama, its indigenous groups, its people, etc. The territory had only recently being independent from Gran-Colombia, as Panama was a province of Colombia. Its importance that had caught the eyes of the world was because of its recent interoceanic Canal.

35. Palo Alto Island is in Caribbean Sea on the Pacific side of Panama.

American government officials.

The Star of the West wrote the following in order to encourage the American Baha'is with skills to go to Canal Zone and get established there:

“In the Canal Zone there are opportunities to get excellent clerking stenography, nearly every kind of work one would find in the United States. The climate is warm and the life extremely pleasant. It is said that Panama Canal Zone within a decade or two will be quite a popular as Palm Beach as a winter resort. The Baha'i who settles there and builds up an Assembly will be doing a work that will influence every part of the globe. It is the most central place in the world, where in the centuries just ahead the long lines of commerce and travel will pour up and down, back, and forth. The old Roman philosopher who said if he had only a place on which to stand, he would take a lever and move the world, would find that place today in the Panama Canal Zone. Someday someone will build a great university on the heights of the Panama Canal Zone; how glorious if it could be a Baha'i seat of learning!”

Miss Martha Root left Panama to Havana, Cuba by ship and never missed the opportunity of proclaiming the Faith with no hesitation to passengers. The report was ended by these words:

***“Abdu'l-Baha has said to “roar like a lion the Words of God” and sing like a bird the Melodies of the Kingdom.”***

The Great heart will not falter, and the world is ready!”<sup>36</sup>

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36. Taken from letters written by Miss Root while en-route to South America. Star of the West, vol. 11, issue 12.p. 216, October 1920

## MATHEW ISTVAN KASZAB<sup>37</sup>

*'His services are unforgettable.'*  
Shoghi Effendi



Mathew Kaszab

*As regards your plans for opening of Panama, the importance of establishing the Faith in that Republic, as already stressed by the Guardian in his last general letter, cannot be over-emphasized, and whatever the obstacles that will have to be faced by future Baha'i pioneers in that country, the task of insuring the spiritual conquest of that territory, of whose far-reaching possibilities as a radiating center for the diffusion of the lights of the Cause throughout Central and South America 'Abdu'l-Baha has so explicitly written in the Tablets of Divine Plan, must be vigorously and systematically pursued. The Guardian views with approval your suggestion, that in consideration of the special social and political conditions prevailing there, it would be more advisable to engage the services of men teachers rather than women and particularly those men pioneers who have the widest experience in teaching and the best possible qualifications.<sup>38</sup>*

Mathew (Mate) was born on 28 September of 1905 in Budapest, Hungary and in April 1911, accompanying his divorced mother, and at the age of 6, settled in Nicaragua, Central America. He became a believer when he was only 28 years old on 12 December 1933, while in New York where he was studying at the University, Mrs. Louise Talbot<sup>39</sup> introduced him to the Baha'i Faith. In that time Mathew was a member of the Christian Unitarian Church. The message changed him and his plans altogether. After he read the book of Dawn Breakers<sup>40</sup>, he fell so much in love with the early history of the Faith, the youthful Prophet, the Bab and His companions, that he would only study whatever he could find about the New Revelation. And when shortly afterwards he read Shoghi Effendi's Advent of Divine Justice in 1939, its contents inflamed him:

*"Let some, at this very moment, gird up the loins of endeavor, flee their native towns, cities and states, forsake their countries, and, putting their whole trust in God, as the best provision for their journey, set their faces and direct their steps towards distant climes, those virgin fields,*

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37. When the writer started to research on the life of the first pioneer going to Panama by the request of the beloved Guardian, he had access to whatever material he could get together with the existing letters Mathew Kaszab had with the Inter America Committee, the institution that organized posting pioneers to Latin America and the Baha'i World volume IX which had an obituary on his life, he was unaware of the full study on the life of Mathew done by Anne King Sadeghpour, herself a pioneer in Nicaragua, titled: 'The Gloriously Tragic Life of Mathew Kaszab, Letters from a pioneer 1939 – 1942'. Her book is highly recommended to the interested reader, which is available on Internet.  
Mathew was Born in Sept. 1905 – Died in Jan. 1943 at the age of 38.

38. Letter sent on behalf of the Guardian, May 19, 1939, to Mrs. Loulie Matthews, Chairman Inter-America Committee

39. Louis Talbot was one of the early American Baha'i teachers who helped to build a Baha'i Community in Augusta, South Carolina

40. History of the early period of the Babi/Baha'i Faith by Nabil Zarandi

*those un-surrendered cities, and bend their energies to capture the citadels of men's hearts".*<sup>41</sup>

Mathew became a member of the Baha'i Faith while studying at New York, Loulie Mathews wrote:

*"From that moment, Mathew's real life began. The heroic age of the Bab and the martyrs absorbed his mind, and The Dawn-Breakers became his constant companion. He never spoke of his childhood or youth or of anything prior to his contact with the Revelation. He was utterly without personal ambition. He worked at anything that would allow him time to study the Baha'i writing. At one time, he motored to Washington with a friend, and Mrs. Preston (then Miss Vail), who offered him a room in her house. He went to work in a restaurant, happy and content to be under the roof of a Baha'i..."*



Loulie Mathews

Mathew Kaszab was indeed a flame of fire, a ready soldier at the command of his general. As soon as he received the call, without any delay he embarked for Panama. Briefly he contacted the Institutions by writing a short letter to the National Spiritual Assembly and the Inter-America Committee, telling them of his plan, and next thing he was on his way to Panama. He did not even wait to receive any confirmation.

He wrote the following letter from New York to the National Spiritual assembly and the Inter-America Committee<sup>42</sup>:

*"This is my plan for my Central American expedition: I have \$105 for my ticket to Panama and an additional \$170 for living expenses and with this and what my friends will send me I may have enough to live on for one year in case I do not find employment in the Canal Zone as it is less expensive to live in Panama (City). I will try to get employment with an American firm or with the US government and if this does not materialize then I intend to go to Nicaragua to live on my plantation after a Baha'i group is established in Panama. Panama is my primary objective because of its strategic position both spiritually and geographically and because I would have less opportunity of contacting people on my plantation as very few people pass that way, and the nearest town is 60 miles away. Although my personal expenses are taken care of, yet my teaching activities could be reinforced by additional funds. I could use \$200 to rent a hall if I find this advantageous, or for printing of circulars and advertising, stamps and incidental expenses. Also, with additional transportation I would be more mobile, and the range of my activities could be broadened in scope.*

*I hope those who are apportioning the funds will let Panama come in for a generous share. "The resources of the Baha'i treasury should be liberally expended on its behalf. I will need*

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41. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 52

42. He wrote his letter on April 16, 1939, using the Baha'i calendar date: 5th day before Ridvan 96, Badi Era. (Badi Era, is the New Calendar, and Ridvan is the festivity of the Declaration of Baha'u'llah.



*Baha'i literature in Spanish and a letter to show my affiliation with the Baha'i Faith".*

As he indicated in his letter, he also sent a copy of this letter to Mrs. Loulie Mathews the Chair of the Inter-America Committee.

While at the New York Baha'i Center, Mathew wrote the following short note to Loulie:

*"I am heading for Panama this Saturday, (tomorrow) and I would like to have some literature in Spanish. Mrs. Wood said I should write to you about it. It will take me 8 days to get there, then I will write to Mrs. Wood because I don't know whether you get the letter if I wrote to you from down there".*

Mathew's arrival in Panama was tantamount to his immediate pioneering activities and losing no time in this regard.

Mrs. Loulie Mathews, wrote to Mathew letting him know that:

*"The post of Panama had been already assigned to two pioneers, Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver, who would arrive in about six months".*

At the time, Mathew as a new Baha'i was unaware that he should have acted through the assigned institutions, yet, he was not concerned about this news, especially at that early stage. He would not mind having two more pioneers in Panama, as the teaching work would require even more manpower.

Once in Panama, his first activity, was contacting the media. On Sunday, May 14, 1939, Mathew sent the following 'Newspaper Publicity' to the Editor of 'The Panama Tribune'<sup>43</sup>:

*The Editor,  
The Panama Tribune  
May 5, 1939  
Dear Sir,*

*Newspapers and other disseminators of information and general knowledge have a sacred responsibility toward their public. Their function should be not only to publish and interpret the ordinary everyday events but since they are also organs of propaganda capable of molding public opinion, they have another responsibility and trust imposed on them. This trust should be vigilantly safeguarded.*

*The responsibility is this: that they should endeavor to orient the minds of the people towards that which is worthy and beautiful, and towards that, which will be the greatest benefit to them. The organs of propaganda should not only passively reflect the signs of the times but should actively foster and give the proper importance and recognition to the positive elements within the community.*

*It is of course important to give an unbiased and unprejudiced survey of the news within the community and to give predominance to the constructive news instead of to sensationalism and crime. But this is not enough. There must be an alertness and consciousness of the basic issues*

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43. Leading Weekly Newspaper at the time in all Central America. The letter has a different date, nine days earlier!

*confronting the community. However, in undertaking to boost the humanitarian and spiritual elements of the community it is necessary to differentiate between “proper” -ganda and “improper” -ganda if I may use these coined words.*

*It is necessary to be discriminative because obviously it is just as dangerous to be caught up into the whirlpool of sectarian controversies and ancient superstitious dogmatism, a sit would be to take the completely materialistic outlook. Both are detrimental to the community and cause strife, prejudice, and lack of harmony.*

*A new orientation is necessary. This new orientation should be universal outlook and should veer away from national, racial, religious and class prejudice.*

*‘Abdu’l-Baha, the great Persian said: “Beware of prejudice. Light is good whatever lamp it shines from”.<sup>44</sup> If the people could be induced towards the adoption of this view, it would soon reflect itself in the economic as well as the spiritual welfare and happiness of the community.*

*When the Panama Tribune undertakes to sponsor this Most Great Outlook in its editorial policy it will become the daystar of guidance and the herald of a new civilization to this geographically important community.*

*Mathew Kaszab  
98 Calle Estudiante – Panama*

Thus, Mathew vigorously initiated his pioneering activities in downtown of Panama City, where he rented a room in a house at # 98 Calle Estudiante.

Two weeks later May 19, Mathew briefed the National Spiritual Assembly Secretary Mr. Horace Holley<sup>45</sup>, the following:

*“I have already made a preliminary survey of the field and have established friendly relation with the press. There are two daily and weekly newspapers. I had a letter to the editor published in the Panama Tribune, the weekly news of which I sent three copies to the N.Y. center, two of them to be forwarded to the Baha’i News service. I also had an announcement of my class in the school of arts and crafts on the front page of the Star and Herald daily and the English editor of the third paper said that he would give me a write up on anything of news value”.*

Then he mentioned:

*“Last night I started my class in the Escuela de Artes y Oficios<sup>46</sup>. My interpreter did not show up but another one volunteered to interpret and did a good job of it, so my lecture was very successful. The title was the New Civilization”.*

He also contacted other organizations. He wrote:

*“This Sunday I have been invited to talk in the Theosophical Society on the subject of Cycles of Civilizations. Next Sunday I am invited over to the city of Gamboa<sup>47</sup> to talk to a club composed*

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44. “Love is light in whatsoever house it may shine,” Abdu’l-Baha

45. Horace Holley (1887-1960), Secretary to the National Spiritual Assembly of United States. He was appointed by Shoghi Effendi him as Hand of the Cause of God in 1951.

46. Arts and Crafts School

47. Gamboa, a Canal-Zone settlement at the time, fully American.

*of teachers and other progressive people on the Basis for a New Civilization”.*

Mathew’s mind was working as a clock, looking for opportunities to bring about the name of the Faith, always determined and faithful. He mentioned to Mr. Holley:

*“I talked to the Superintendent of the Canal Zone schools but he said that I could not lecture in the schools on account of the fact that the end of the season is only three weeks away and they are very busy. However, he told me to come to talk to him about the Cause after schools are closed as then he will have more time”.*

He was full of enthusiasm and every passing day he got himself engaged in some kind of activity and for this, he continued:

*“I will need plenty of cooperation. When I get going in a big way I can use about a half of a ton of Baha’i books and literature both in English and in Spanish. It is best to send it directly to Panama City as a there will be less red tape’.*

He found that radio broadcasting would help him more in making the people hear of the new Message, going further he wrote:

*“I would like to broadcast in connection with my lectures in school and it costs \$2.50 per quarter of an hour. I would need two quarter hours broadcast a week; one in English and one in Spanish after I get it translated. That would be USD 5 a week. This is much less expensive than in the U.S. considering the territory this station covers”.*

If he would only have some available funds and the instruments he needed, he would have had the Faith established in Panama in the first year of his arrival. He wrote:

*“Then there are important progressive organizations in Colon on the Atlantic side, which is 48 miles away. The fare there is \$1.20 one-way second class. I haven’t money for these activities because the port authorities kept \$100 of my money, and I am not yet established down here. The Baha’i News Service could also cooperate with me by sending any important news releases, photographs etc”.*

He hoped the arrival of Louise Caswell would bring some relief to his situation, he concluded:

*“Mrs. Caswell may be of help when she comes in covering this 48 miles of territory”.*

## **ONLY ASSIGNED PIONEERS!**

The Geyserville Baha’i Community of Colorado wrote to Mathews on May 31, 1939, regarding his request for free literature in Spanish, which was not available at the time.

The letter addressed to Mathew, signed by Helen Bishop said:

*“Your letter arrived when we were on the point of departure from our home in Geyserville for Colorado Springs. We are here to help Mrs. Mathews, as Chairman or executive for the Inter-America Committee, in the plans, which are to be made for the monumental task that lies ahead. The field is so vast; the task is so great; the workers so few; that it is only by collaboration*

*together, and dependence upon the One who guides the Cause, that we can carry out the responsibility to which we have consented”.*

The Faith needed more pioneers like Mathew with dedication to learn the native language to translate some basic pamphlets and have them to be used. But that was not to be, and such work would take many years to be realized. But the yearning desire of Mathew to teach the Faith in Spanish could not be put off.

Helen Bishop’s letter informs Mathew that properly translated literature in Spanish is very scarce:

*“As Spanish is my mother’s language, I know it well enough to admit that, with the exception of the Booklet of Prayers translated by Senor Espinosa, the translations have not been in good style. However, from now on all translations will be done in Mexico City by Senor Espinosa and his chosen co-workers, so we can be assured they will be of literary quality as well as of true spirit”.*

In her letter to Mathew, Helen reiterated that no free literature was available to every individual pioneer but only to those who were sponsored by the Inter American Committee, and unfortunately Mathew was not counted among those. She wrote:

*“In regard to your query about free literature: this is distributed, not to individuals who are working under their own initiative and cover their own expenses, obviously, but only to the workers who go out under the direction of the Committee and, while they are self-supporting, find extra expenses for literature, etc. a bit much for them to carry. By this time, you will have received the nineteen “number 9’s”<sup>48</sup>, which I sent to you as a personal gesture of best wishes for your work”. The letter gives a solution for the free literature: “The Committee has been moving slowly with some plans because the free literature cannot be ready before autumn. It seemed more sensible to send the representative, Mrs. Louise Caswell, to Panama, equipped with literature for distribution.*

The letter clarified to Mathew the difference between him as an independent pioneer and those pioneers who are sponsored by the Institutions. A matter quite new to him, as, he considered himself ‘the representative of the Baha’i Faith in Panama, yet the letter says otherwise:

*“Your hope of hearing from either the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly or its Inter-America Committee will have been realized by now inasmuch as Mrs. Mathews has sent you a letter explaining the situation which differentiates between independent workers and the representatives sent out by the Executive Committee under the National Spiritual Assembly”.*

This revelation was very difficult for Mathew to digest!

The letter ends with a complement to Louise Caswell<sup>49</sup> and only good wishes for Mathew in his efforts in the service to the Cause. Mathew remains puzzled for months to properly understand the imposed difference between the two types of pioneers. They both serve

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48. Number 9, numerically in Abjad counting is equivalent to the name BAHĀ. B bearing 2, A, as 1, H as 5 and again A as 1, to a total of 9. It is the highest digit. And the number 19, is like Alpha and Omega, the first number and the last number, which are 1 and 9. These two numbers are considered as special numbers in the Baha’i Faith.

49. Louis Caswell, being the second pioneer, but the first appointed pioneer to Panama.

Baha'u'llah and for His sake leave behind their all. Why one is privileged and the other no! Is it because one takes his own initiative and the other, goes through the institutions? Well, this was the catch:

*"I thank you for your letter and hope to hear more of your undertaking. I am confident you will be glad to meet Mrs. Caswell for her appearance charms and her gentleness and devotion wins the hearts".*

Few days later, on June 3, 1939, Mathew received<sup>50</sup> a heartwarming letter. How happy the members of the Inter-America Committee were to see the copy of the article Mathew wrote and published by the press:

*"This morning's post brought the copy of your letter, printed by "The Panama Tribune" of Sunday, May 14, 1939. It is thrilling to us all! We cannot imagine an introduction to the plans for World Order more appropriately conceived. Without being too fiery in its style, -thereby losing in soundness-, it gives the challenge to independent investigation of truth and affirms the sober principle, which is the basis of universal welfare. The quotation from the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha on the open mind towards truth regardless of source is not apt; in fact, it suggests the oneness of mankind by implication that all can know the Truth.*

*"As far as my reading is concerned, it is the best of beginnings. I am glad, indeed, Mrs. Mathews, my husband, all of the Inter-America Committee will be glad for this statement made towards understanding being peoples and states".*

## **MEN ONLY!**

Louile Mathews<sup>51</sup> wrote again to Mathew on June 6, indicating that he will be recognized as the "representative in Panama", especially indicating that according to the Guardian "only men are to be sent to Panama". In response Mathew wrote back to the Inter America Committee indicating:

*"The Guardian views with approval your suggestion, that in consideration of the special social and political conditions prevailing there, it would be more advisable to engage the services of men teachers rather than women and particularly those men-pioneers who have the widest experience in teaching and the best possible qualifications".*

Such a decision from the beloved Guardian could have had a deeper wisdom. But with the assignment of two ladies as pioneers to Panama such an instruction was being ignored by the institutions, especially when already such a person has established himself at the pioneering post, and the Committee was approving him as "*the representative of Panama*". Such a statement was confirmation to Mathew's zeal and enthusiasm to stay in Panama as an approved pioneer. This mystery was not ever explained to Mathew by the institutions and the Guardian never interfered with the decisions of the institutions. The only possible explanation to such a change could be to learn the 'obedience to the institutions and period.

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50. From the secretary of the Committee Helen Bishop

51. Loulie Mathews was the chair of the Committee.

In her letter, Loulie sheds some light to this mystery<sup>52</sup>:

*“Your letter of explanation about the hasty departure for Panama has been received. The confusion has been trying to the responsible Committee, as well as to you; and I am glad you now understand the administrative procedure. I am telegraphing the National Spiritual Assembly that your petition for recognition has been received; and I trust they will accept you as the representative in Panama. In the meantime, you are resident teacher, with whom we are working in close cooperation.*

*“Instructions from the Guardian have arrived at the effect that only men are to be sent to Panama. It is likely that you will carry on alone, or that another man will be sent to join you at a later time”.*

This letter confirmed the logic to his remaining in Panama, as it was his ardent desire. The letter also indicates the amount of free English literature, recommended to be sent to Mathew for his use:

*12 English, “Baha’u’llah and the New Era”  
10 Dispensation of Baha’u’llah  
50 Goal of a new World Order in Spanish  
50 Text, (In Spanish), a companion study, title escapes me now)  
Wisdom of ‘Abdu’l-Baha and other Texts as stock permits  
Free pamphlets in good supply.*

Indeed, with the following note, Mathew is considered as any other pioneer with an assigned post:

*“Furthermore, the Inter-America Bulletin, prepared by this Committee for the equipment of its teachers is being sent to you. This is an index of what has been done, the contacts, which should be strengthened at the outposts. This is indispensable to the pioneer worker. In due time your successes will be added to the list of the interested seekers and friends, if you will continue the reports, which have given us much delight already. With every good wish to you, personally, and for the work you are doing”.*

## **CONTACT WITH THE INDIGENOUS TRIBES**

Mathew Kaszab continued his teaching activities in every sphere possible and of course he knew of the importance of the Indigenous people of Panama too. He needed to explore them and their readiness in receiving the Message of Baha’u’llah.

There are basically three kinds of indigenous tribes in the Republic of Panama,

1. Those who live in the Islands known as Islands of San Blas, called Kuna Yala, live on the over 500 islands in the Atlantic side between the territories of Panama and Colombia. They have been in contact with Panamanians from those early days and especially with the Americans since the construction of the Canal. The women of Kuna Yala are generally artistic

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52. Louile Mathews’ letter of 6 June 1939.

and the world famous 'Mola', material patchwork is their creation.

The very first Baha'i from the any Indigenous tribes of Panama was Mr. Manuel Corgas and he was from the Kuna Yala tribe, guided to the Faith through Louise Caswell. For a long time, he was a dedicated member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama.

2. The tribe that lives in Darien, an inland area between south of Panama and north of Colombia is covered with tropical vegetation. They have a very natural way of life, and their contact with the Panamanians has been less than the previous mentioned group. This indigenous tribe is known as Choco<sup>53</sup>.

3. The third Indigenous group, the Ngobe-Bugle or generally known as Guaymi people, are very spiritual, intelligent and independent. They live in the mountainous area of the Province of Chiriqui, neighboring the Costa Rican border to the north, scattered over the mountains on the extreme part of the country. They distinguish themselves by being cognizant of the Baha'i Administration without much intervention of any pioneer<sup>54</sup>. They are the most committed to the tenets of the Faith and actively promote it among their own people. They even have home-front pioneers from stronger communities to the most remote ones.

Back to Mathew's activities, a certain Mr. Nuñez, receiving the message from Mathew did recommend his friend Mr. Ruben P. Kantule<sup>55</sup> a leader in the indigenous area of San Blas – Kuna -Yala Indians, to whom Mathew wrote a letter in English<sup>56</sup>. As it was mentioned earlier, Mathew would take advantage of any opportunity to pass the message of Baha'u'llah. He was wise and very tactful person and new how to approach the people and groups. He wrote to the Chief of the Tribe the following letter:

*Dear Mr. Ruben Perez Kantule*

*Mr. Moises Nunez-Gomez gave me your name and address and told me of the work you are doing in raising the level of the culture and education of your people.*

*I came from New York here to Panama as an agent of a new civilization, to establish and outpost of a new World Order, and I have the conviction that I have something that would be of the greatest benefit to your people. Later on conditions may make it possible for me and Mr. Nunez-Gomez to visit you for a few days. Would there be any place for us to stay for about three or four days? We would like to see you and talk things over with you and see what the situation is and what we could do about it.*

Mr. Nunez personally wrote under this same letter in Spanish, telling Mr. Kantule of the

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53. There is also a group of Africans from slave ancestors who escaped from their captors, found their way to the same area and share the land with the Choco Indians. These Africans and the Choco Indians, due to their different cultures and language, do not mix and have little in common, yet they live in each other's neighborhood peacefully. The writer remembers, while visiting them during the LSA elections back in 1971, one geographical community had membership Baha'is of both groups on the two sides of the same river. An easy attempt was made to bring the two groups together to elect the LSA of the same community. Their handshake was something new for both groups. If it were not for the Spanish language, which both groups spoke, though with difficulty, there would not be any other way to have five Choco and four Africans to together as members of the Local Assembly!)

54. The first Counsellor ever appointed by the Universal House of Justice from the Indigenous groups in Panama, Mr. Bernardino Sanchez came from this same ethnic group.

55. Kantules are the heads of tribes in a certain area. Nele Kantule is the overall Chief.

56. June 19, 1939.

mission of Mathew, as being explained in his letter and of his desire to stay in their area for few days:

*“My dear friend Ruben:*

*In the statements that Mr. Kaszab has written to me, he has explained his mission in our countries, and he also desires to make a trip to San Blas for few days. I would much appreciate all the attention that you can give to this matter. When you answer him, you can enclose my correspondence with you. Be sure of my assurance and consideration that I have for you. Nunez”*

Unfortunately, this and many other Mathew’s plans were aborted by the urge of the Institutions sending Mathew away to Nicaragua. Though no doubt, he passed the information to the new pioneers<sup>57</sup>. This specific plan unfortunately was not materialized, although the new pioneers eventually did contact the Kuna Yala.

## **THE UNIVERSTIY**

On the same day, of June 19, Mathew briefed Loulie with his recent activities, writing on the letterhead of the University<sup>58</sup>, he indicated that he has enrolled at the University and taking classes to make contacts to teach the Faith so intensely he loved and served. This is obvious that Mathew had a special soul and special love for the Faith, a flame of fire that could not be extinguished by anything or anyone. This special soul and true pioneer were never sure that he really was the official ‘representative of the Faith’ in Panama. This matter was in his mind ever since he learned of the two lady pioneers who were officially assigned for Panama. Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver are indeed the true ‘Representatives of the Faith’ and not him. But he was such an obedient servant of God that apparently, he did not let this matter bother him, although no one ever knows what he really went through and how this decision affected his soul.

His letter to Loulie says<sup>59</sup>:

*“I am carrying on my regular classes at this University, and the head of it is interested in the Baha’i Teachings and can get me some good contacts among the Indians who live about 100 miles from here. I am closing a letter that we wrote to one of the most advanced and influential leaders among the Indians of San Blas. He, Mr. Kantule the Indian leader can talk English and Spanish as well as his native language”.*

Mathew mentions of his finding a group of Christians and he does not hesitate to give the Message in a high level, putting them before their conscience:

*“Yesterday, Sunday I met a group of six people who call themselves Christian Mystics of 15<sup>th</sup> Lodge, and were told to await the coming of the Great Avatar, so I told them their Avatar had come and that I thought that they were already far enough advanced in their studies to be able to appreciate the Writings of their Promised One and asked them to investigate and meditate on the Words of Baha’u’llah that perchance they would be acceptable in His New World Order.*

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57. Louis Caswell and Cora Oliver

58. Universidad Libre de Panama

59. Dated 15th day, month of Light, year 96 (should be 95 Badi) (19 July 1939). He always used Baha’i date rather than Gregorian.



*I told them that all this preparation was made so that they may be able to recognize the Manifestation and that if they fail in this they would have failed in the main object of their quest. They said that they would be willing to investigate so I gave them pamphlets to start them off and if I get some books, I will make it available to them. A young man who invited me to the group gave me the address of one whom he thinks would be interested in the Message. I will follow this up soon”.*

Mathew was sure on the right track as a pioneer should be:

*“All sorts of doors are gradually opening that I will follow up when I will have the means. I concluded my radio talks for the University but so far, I have no inquiries. Probably radio broadcasting should be kept up consistently to get results. The newspapers are still writing up the announcements that I send into them”.*

Pitiable Mathew does everything and more to be recognized as the Baha’i representative, but something deep inside tells him that he will not. In the same letter to Loulie he writes:

*“I do not know whether the National Spiritual Assembly have accepted me yet as a representative, however, I may hear from them within a few days”.*

The next project Mathew embarked on was getting deeper into the Indigenous people of Panama, if he would have the means to do so:

*“I have been reading a book on the Indians around here to get an insight into their customs. They have their medicine men and psychics and have a very primitive conception of religion, but it seems that an effort is being made by some of their members to elevate them to a higher plan and I would like to help them in this endeavor, however that also involves travelling expenses so I will have to wait until I have some financial resources for this undertaking”.*

Mathew wrote another letter to Loulie on June 29<sup>th</sup>. In his letter Mathew as a serious pioneer pleads for some funds and means to be able to continue his teaching work, but because he was not an institutional representative, his services were always taken lightly. The Institutions could have consulted upon Mathew’s effectiveness as a pioneer and his incessant and constant activities, especially observing his zeal and enthusiasm. Whatever the Institutions would expect of a pioneer in the field, he already had them in full. He had established himself and with dedication and sincerity was serving the object of his goals. He needed funds to live on, though he lived extremely simply.

He again wrote to Loulie desperately for funds and consequently his restrictions in the field of teaching. It has been crueiling on him:

*“Knowing the hesitancy and the reluctance of the National Spiritual Assembly it may not be out of place to urge them to act on a matter of immediate importance before Shoghi Effendi has to send them another telegram like he had to in previous important issues before he finally inveigled them to discharge what was their obvious duty. I need not go into detail as it is adequately set forth in the Advent of Divine Justice wherein, he advises prompt attention to this important region. The Baha’i fund may not be in such a overflowing condition that they could afford to expend \$500 or \$1000 which would be the sum required to send someone down here and enable him to do effective work. But could they not recognize me as their representative and send me at least fifty to one hundred dollars so that I could go ahead without being*

*hampered by lack of funds? I lack care fare and my teaching is restricted to a comparatively few people and I cannot follow up the leads that I should”.*

Poor soul had his back against the wall and was begging the institutions to come to his rescue. After all, if he was not their pioneer, he was their Baha’i teacher in the field with all his sincerity doing his best:

*“Later I may have to get a job on a farm in the interior where I will not be able to contact people so the more, I do while I have the chance the better. I cannot depend on a job in the Canal Zone until September or next year so if nothing else materializes I will have to take whatever job I get even if it takes me away from the city”.*

Mathew mentions the difficult conditions he is facing in his activities:

*“The conditions are difficult as the people are backward and also, I cannot talk Spanish as well as I can English, so I have difficulty in making myself understood. I have to meet up with more problems than those who went pioneering in the US where they did not have to face strange customs and language and all sorts of legal restrictions. Here the law requires that 75% of the money paid in wages be paid to natives”.*

Although he is losing the hope of receiving any help, yet, he keeps his head over the water:

*“I still think that I will get a foothold here as I have some valuable contacts, but it is not so simple as it looked originally, and it would be more encouraging to have some backing in this project”.*

The range of his activities during just few months of being in Panama was remarkable. Such a soul would have conquered the whole Panama, only if he had the backup of the institutions and just enough funds to move on.

*“The books that the Publishing Committee sent me came in very handy and is a great help in teaching and in this way I can consolidate the progress that I had already made while without it people would gradually forget what I had taught them and lose interest. I got five German pamphlets translated from Horace Holley’s article on economy and I already found use for them as there are some Austrians and Germans around here. I brought some Hungarian pamphlets along with me and they are also useful as I can talk Hungarian better than Spanish. One Hungarian woman was amazed that I can talk quite correctly although I was away from there for 28 years already. I used one Chinese pamphlet, and the Chinaman was quite interested. There are number of Chinese here”.*

And he goes on:

*“One picture of the temple and of ‘Abdu’l-Baha that the News Service sent could not be used in the local newspapers as they lack space but I showed it to the photographer who is interested in the Cause and he is making copies of them for himself and the other people who saw these pictures were quite impressed so you see everything comes in handy. Even a 1934 yearbook, which shows the far-flung ramifications of the Cause impresses the people with its universality”.*

And again:

*“I just received a letter from the Library Committee. I placed an Esslemont and a Wisdom of*

*'Abdu'l-Baha in the Library, outside of that they have no modern Baha'i book in there. Some of Mason Remey<sup>60</sup>s books and pamphlets were placed in there in 1926. I sent you a copy of the Tribune with a write-up of a speech I made in La Boca<sup>61</sup>, a negro community".*

In those early days, as funds were quite scarce, the institutions encouraged pioneers to find any possible way of supporting themselves by getting jobs and not to depend on the Fund. If a believer pioneered on his own, then he even was not considered appointed pioneer to receive any budgeted funds for any certain area. To be on the official list of pioneers, he should have left Panama and gone to Nicaragua, his newly assigned goal and the place of his birth where he spent his early childhood.

Loulie Mathews loved Mathew as her own son. She tried every consideration due to him. She wrote to Mathew on the July 22:

*"My dear Mathew: The suggestion of the N.S.A. is that you go back to your estate in Nicaragua, but I do not approve of this and have asked that you be sent to the two cities in Nicaragua with which you are perhaps familiar as you will have no opportunity to teach at your fruit farm and you have shown exceptional ability in your work. If at the expense of the Committee, you could take on the work, let me know at once what you think of this".*

With such a high evaluation of the abilities of Mathew, he should have been feeling betrayed and somehow not wanted of his services in this field. Yet his love of Baha'u'llah sustained him even further. Loulie's consolation to Mathew was:

*"It might be that later on you could return which would be fine and which I would help you to do. Please let me know how you feel about this".*

And she mentioned in her letter of the new pioneer:

*"Mrs. Oliver<sup>62</sup> of Washington, D.C., has offered a position in Panama as teacher. She can stay in Panama without any additional expense, and the N.S.A. prefer her to go".*

## **TO YIELD UP!**

On July 26, 1939, Mathew wrote back to Loulie accepting his transfer to Nicaragua. From here on, Mathew should be quite puzzled as to why his fate has been manipulated in this manner while he is serving the Cause of God so effectively.

Although he had claim to some assets in Nicaragua in a remote farm, which he did not even know well, but the question that remained in his mind was his forced move towards some unknown destiny. He wrote back to Loulie in the same letter, describing his assets in Nicaragua:

*"My grandmother's large plantation of 239 hectares has been transferred to somebody without consulting me although I owned one ninth of it through inheritance from my mother.*

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60. Charles Mason Remey even though a Hand of the Cause of God, he broke the Covenant in 1960 and was expelled.

61. La Boca is a small residential and commercial neighborhood closed to Balboa. Together with Balboa it forms the 'heart' of the former Canal Zone and neighbors with the Canal Entrance of Pacific side.

62. Cora Oliver, after 13 years in Panama, pioneered to Belize, where she became Knight of Baha'u'llah.

*My mother also had a small plantain of 40 hectares but there seems to be some mix up as to the records although I have the deed to it so I really should go to Nicaragua to straighten this out if possible and at the same time to initiate Baha'i activities in Bluefields and in Managua where the state records are kept".*

Then Mathew informs Loulie of the expenses involved for this move:

*"Passport \$11. Transportation \$30. They may require a deposit on entering the country. Living expenses would be \$30 a month for room and board. It may take a month to get the passport".*

Mathew's first concern was the Faith and his activities, he wrote in the same letter:

*"Mrs. Oliver will not get here until September, probably, when school starts. Meanwhile I will endeavor to consolidate my potential Baha'i group and try to have them carry on regular meetings".*

Poor and lonely Mathew, with no financial backup, had indeed little choice. He lived very humbly and was down to poverty. He even needed the very basics. He would spend whatever he had on the promotion of the high ideal of his Faith. He added couple of more lines to end up his letter:

*"If you want me to go, please send me about \$25 so that I can get my passport etc. as I have not much money left. Later on, I will find out if a deposit is required but the first step is to get the passport as this takes time. I will write you in detail through the regular mail. I appreciate your kind interest in my endeavors".*

And for postscript he added:

*"There may be less restrictions in Nicaragua, and I would like to find out what the employment possibilities are".*

On the same date of July 26, he wrote again to Loulie a long letter, describing his dire economic conditions. He is requesting for some relief fund to be able to continue with his endeavor. He is ready to do farming faraway from Panama City to earn some money, but he did not have much luck in that either:

*"Someone offered me a proposition whereby I could go in farming within 50 miles of the city. It takes two hours to get in, I thought that this might be a good proposition as the person would furnish the land and the seeds and the equipment but the next time I saw him he said that there was drought out there so the crops were not growing and so it was not feasible for me to go through with it. It is a dried place than the city and even here we did not have much rain although it is supposed to be the rainy season. If I could have taken up the offer, I would have to get a cedula<sup>63</sup> which is a permit to stay in Panama. This seems to require some red tape including a \$55 deposit with the Panama government. Besides the \$100 which the steamship co. is holding for me. The person with whom I am staying is letting me have room and board on the strength of that \$100 deposit with the steamship co. So, I owe him for two months' rent already. I owe him \$60 out of the \$100 so you see I do not have much of a margin of safety left. This*

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63. Identity Card is called cedula, with accent on 'e'.

*deposit is available either if I get a job or if I leave the country”.*

In years’ time jobs would be plenty in Canal Zone and men pioneers would easily go to Panama for available jobs, but in June 1939, Mathew wrote:

*“Getting the job in the (Canal) Zone is not so easy, there are very few jobs, and a person has to take his chance getting one. Some of the jobs are highly specialized”.*

Jobs were not available in Panama either, especially for the foreigners, he wrote:

*“Getting a job in Panama is also difficult on account of the restrictions on foreigners and a person requires a cedula”.*

Therefore, it leaves Mathew with one only alternative:

*“About the only way of getting started is to go farming, the Republic gives 10 hectares of land to a family or 5 hectares to a single man. They give this free to encourage agriculture but to take advantage of this offer a person must have a cedula permitting him to stay here. He needs seeds and equipment and, in some places, fertilizer. Also, he has to build himself a shack and has to have means of sustaining himself until the crops are ready to harvest and he may have to build a road to the main highway to market his crops if he is not close enough to a highway. So, it seems that everything takes some capital to start with. But there is an opportunity in agriculture here as the country is rich in the variety of things that grow and there is a large market”.*

From the rest of the letter, one observes that Mathew is a lost soul in the wilderness of his pioneering place. He is recounting many things about life in Panama, but he cannot focus what and how. He is trying to convince the Committee or the National Spiritual Assembly that with a little back up, he can do so much.

Then in his letter, he talks about Nicaragua that life might *“not be quite so stringent”*. Then he mentions of his land there that, he must find out what has happened to it. Rather he changes his focus on how he is going to find the right people there to teach them the Faith:

*“I suppose people are basically the same all over the world and there are only a few universally minded ones. It is our job to find those universally minded ones and to attract them to the Cause”.*

Mathew changes his attention to the West Indies of Panama and describes them in few lines of how materialistic these are. So, among them:

*“I have succeeded in inducing only a dozen people to investigate the Cause seriously. There is a good material among these for a Baha’i group. There are others who are slightly interested”.*

Then Mathew evaluates himself and writes:

*“I think that I have done a fairly good job considering my lack of resources and the uncertainties that I had to contend with”.*

He goes on:

*“I still think that if the National Spiritual Assembly were alert to the opportunities and*

*backed me up full force something outstanding could have been accomplished but as an individual, I can do only what is within my capacity and hope for Divine confirmations which will undoubtedly appear in due time, so I am not discouraged". However, opportunities ought to be fully explored, because it seems that each year there new restrictions and more stringent laws passed to try to prevent people from entering countries and to hamper activities and people are setting to be more suspicious".*

Poor soul, dear Mathew, if he ever had the backing of the Institutions, he could have done so much.

At the same time, he could sense the difficult times ahead, after all, WWII was right at the corner, and he could feel the suspicion among the people and restrictions of preventing the entry of the people to the countries. He was such a sensitive soul. He continued:

*"...and in every way life is getting more complicated, so, we should try to act while there is still a minimum of liberty and opportunity left".*

Dear Mathew, was in constant daydreaming! He even had a teaching plan for Mrs. Oliver when she arrives:

*"When Mrs. Oliver comes, she may not be stationed on the Pacific side, at least she can not know ahead of time just what school she will be sent to, so, I will try to get the interested people together to hold weekly meetings and she could encourage them whenever she gets a chance. If she is sent to Balboa, then she could carry on where I left off. Otherwise, she will meet new people, which is also an advantage".*

This letter seems to be his Testament, as he has only one thing in mind, how he or others occupying his place can serve the Faith he loves so much and cares for. He constantly talks about how he can promote the Faith and where, how much will be costing and is it fair or not. He had found out about radio broadcast:

*"The Ron Dalley broadcasting station was going to let me have three five-minute talks a week at a charge of only ten dollars month, which is very reasonable. A pamphlet written by Stanwood Cobb "Finding assurance in a World of Turmoil" takes only five minutes to read and there is plenty of other good material in Abdu'l-Baha's short talks for broadcasting. Maybe in the future someone can do this.*

Despondent Mathew changes the subject again to Nicaragua:

*"Meanwhile I like the idea of doing some additional pioneering in Nicaragua. I have been in Bluefields but not in Managua. I heard someone say that it is cooler in Managua than here".*

His ultimate wish is always to promote the Faith in any circumstances:

*"The more countries in which the cry of Ya-Baha'ul-Abha<sup>64</sup> can be vociferously raised, the better! Personal affairs are secondary, but I would like to see if I can clear the title to my mother's plantation as that could be a refuge for a few Baha'is in the future, those who are refugees from Europe on account of racial persecutions".*

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64. 'O Thou Glory of Glories', an invocation to God.

On 14<sup>th</sup> Kamal, August 14, Mathew wrote to Loulie thanking her for the \$50 check she had sent him describing how he is going to spend that money:

*"Dear Loulie, I received the \$ 50 check. Thank you very much, I will spend some of it on Radio broadcast...Also the newspaper that owns this radio station will publicize my broadcast. They are celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Canal, while I will be celebrating the opening of the spiritual channel in Panama".*

How tender, how dedicated, what a true lover of Baha'u'llah!

It should have been very difficult for the early pioneers who did not have any Baha'i friend to share their ordeal with, and their only refuge was to engage themselves in their teaching activities, report back to the institution and expect a return mail come as a relief to them, especially someone like Mathew who had the sense of guilt built inside and needed to please the institutions that they may change their mind and decision, letting him to stay officially in the place of his choice in the pioneering field. Of course, his deep faith and conviction made him stay active though always restrictive and dejected.

What would Mathew have achieved if he were treated as a proper pioneer with such a flame of fire always burning inside, no doubt miracles would have happened in Panama! He was not just an ordinary pioneer. He was a lover!

## **FIRST BELIEVER**

On that same date of *'the big celebration'*, Joseph Wantuk<sup>65</sup>, who became the first believer of Panama via Mathew, was an American citizen. He was not a Panamanian per se, but he has been living in Panama for quite few years. Notwithstanding that he who became the recipient of such an honor of becoming the very first believer in the territory of Panama. He wrote the following letter to Loulie Mathews on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1939, of his full belief and declaration of his faith in the new Revelation:

*"Dear Mrs. Mathews, Mr. Kaszab has accepted me into the Baha'i Faith and suggested that I report this to you so there may be a record of myself with the Inter-America Committee. I believe in the Bab as the Manifestation of God and the forerunner of Baha'u'llah. I believe that Baha'u'llah is the Supreme Manifestation of God for this day and that 'Abdu'l-Baha is the center of His Covenant and the Exemplar of His Teachings. I recognize Shoghi Effendi as the present Guardian of the Cause and I am willing to function under the international Baha'i Administration. I have read Esslemont book also the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah by Shoghi Effendi and a number of pamphlets".*

*I ordered from the publishing committee six dollars' worth of Baha'i Books, which Mr. Kaszab has selected for me, and I will read them diligently as soon as they arrive here.*

*I am citizen of the United States, but I have been living here in Panama for eight years and*

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65. Joseph Wantuk, letter to Mrs. Mathews of Inter-America Committee, dated 15 August 1939. It is not clearly known what happened. As per Wikipedia, a certain Joseph Wantuk, as a soldier of the American army was sent to Korean war during the WWII and consequently, was killed while in duty. Whatever the case may be, his name has adorned the history of the Baha'i Faith, as the first believer in Panama. He has been living in Canal Zone with his family, wife and three children, and worked as a photographer.

*have a business here, also a home and a wife and two children. I speak Spanish fluently. I am 42 years old and of the white race. I will write Shoghi Effendi soon.*

*Sincerely, in the name of Baha'u'llah,*

*Joseph Wantuk"*

Handwritten by Mathew at the corner of this letter:

*"Dear Loulie, I have accepted Mr. Joseph Wantuk as my co-worker in the Divine Vinyards.*

*Allah'u'Abha,*

*Mathew Kaszab"*

It is also such an honor and pride for a pioneer to enroll the first believer in any given country. Indeed, an incomparable divine bounty was vouchsafed to Mathew to accept a soul into the fold of the Lord. And again, it is an incomparable divine bounty to be the first soul in a country to become a follower of Baha'u'llah, a new St. Peter of this country, a firsthand Mulla Husayn of the new Revelation in Panama.

Mathew was 34 years old at the time of his first believer!

## **FATE IS SEALED**

Mathew had asked for a budget of \$200 to survive in Panama until he hands over everything the new pioneers and then to prepare for his departure. In the minutes of the Inter-America Committee of September 1939, it is recorded that:

*"This committee would not recommend a budget of \$200.00 for Mr. Kaszab."*

Thus, Mathew's case becomes sealed and his time in Panama nears to end. Again, in the Minutes of the Inter America Committee dated 24 September where the Committee reviewed each pioneer's case, under Mathew's name the following comments are recorded, where some clarification is done with regard to his status:

*"Mathew Kaszab goes to Nicaragua. The N.S.A. has allowed \$100 to transfer him from Panama, and they also voted to repay Mrs. Mathews (Loulie) the \$50.00 she advanced to him. Mrs. Mathews intends sending this on to him as she wishes him to make a short trip to Granada from Managua. Mrs. Mathews will write to the National Treasurer for the \$100 to effect this transfer and send it on to Mr. Kaszab".*

But Mathew's heart and soul was in Panama. He again came close to resist the institutional decision. The Minutes of the Inter America Committee reads:

*"The Chairman read a letter received this day from Mr. Kaszab in which he stated that he wished to stay in Panama as he expected to get a position and therefore could not go to Nicaragua. He had been advised of the plans to send him to Nicaragua and he had accepted. It was thought that in view of the fact that he was born in Nicaragua and the plans have been*



*completed and approved to send him there that he should be asked to reconsider his refusal to do so. As Nicaragua is the site of the new canal<sup>66</sup> it is a very strategic and important position”.*

*“It was voted to wire Mr. Kaszab saying that inasmuch as the N.S.A. has approved the budget, the plans of the Committee have gone thru to send him to Nicaragua, and as he is a native, we feel that he should go, and that he should wire his reply in time for the N.S.A. meeting here”.*

He was dismissed from Panama! Dear soul tried all the possible ways to stay in, yet he could not secure any job in Canal Zone and much less in Panama. Would he be able to secure a job, he could have convinced the Inter America Committee to stay. Mathew’s soul was in Panama, but he also was obedient to the institutions, though his logic was removing the barrier. But now, he was given an assignment – Nicaragua!

On September 29, 1939, regarding the funds above, Loulie, as a loving mother, who would feel the struggle of her son, yet encouraging him to feel positive and be obedient. She wrote to Mathew:

*“At the recent meeting of the N.S.A., they appropriated the \$100.00 for you to go to Managua. They have also returned me my \$50.00 which I advanced to you, and which I am sending you with the \$100.00. I am writing today to Roy, asking him to forward me a check for \$150.00 with which I can send you a draft”.*

Loulie in her letter to Mathew she mentions of the coming of Louise and Cora to Panama very soon:

*“Also, it is important, however, that you remember in Panama to greet Louise Caswell who arrives on...either the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 3<sup>rd</sup> of October...Mrs. Cora Oliver is also leaving via New York. Let me know the date of your leaving...Feel your appointment important and thrilling”.*

On October 1, Mathew wrote to Loulie, totally disconcerted, once again trying his best to convince the Committee of his decision to remain in Panama. He fought to convince himself that he was indeed the right pioneer for Panama and there was no reason for him to leave and go somewhere else. He told Loulie:

*“It seems that now I will be able to get by until January when there will be plenty of jobs around here, so I think it is best for me to stay here. Seeing that you recognize my merit as the representative of the Faith in Panama, there seems to be no definite reason or changing the status quo”.*

At the same time, he is very considerate and conscientious and recognizes the Fund situation when he wrote:

*“Although this is a strategic point on the Baha’i map where efforts and resources should be concentrated, yet, as I can get along on my own it would not be advisable to ask the National Assembly for funds for Panama since they will have to send pioneers to the rest of the Central American Republics which will be quite a drain on the National Fund”.*

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66. Several attempts have been proposed to build the second interoceanic canal, and proposed country was Nicaragua. The project has been filed several times.

Yet at every opportunity, he tries to be of some kind of service to promote the Faith:

*“I was trying to get a press card to the Panamerican conference because I wanted to write a story for the World Order Magazine, but the place is so crowded that I could not get a card”.*

Then he mentions of the efforts he has made to somehow catch the attention of the ‘diplomats’ but in order not to meddle with so called ‘politics’ he has not done so:

*“I talked with Mr. Montee, the representative of the United Press and he said that all the pressmen are kept out of the secret sessions. They can only attend the general sessions and as for the rest they just get the secondhand news that is handed out to them by the secretary, or they pick up what leaks out. He said that this 300-mile neutrality Zone is the biggest thing since the Monroe Doctrine<sup>67</sup>. I told him that this conference may become a sort of virtual international government for the western hemisphere which may spread out to Europe after the cataclysm and that the 300-mile patrol set the precedent for the international police force. I gave him a copy of the Goal of a New World Order. I did not make an effort to contact the diplomats for many reasons. I do not know what the other pioneers are doing, and I did not want to make a move that may jeopardize their position. Shoghi Effendi wrote according to the Baha’i News that we should not be messed up with politics and my efforts in that direction may be misconstrued by some as political activities”.*

In addition to all, Mathew also is frustrated because of he is not proficient enough in the local language and he has no one to aid him in this regard, he wrote:

*“I cannot speak Spanish fluently enough and have no adequate literature in Spanish. I have no one to help me or to consult with me. I cannot put up the proper front and prestige counts a lot in this situation”.*

And his new believer:

*“Joseph (Wantuk) is too busy to help, and I do not get a chance to see him because Fort Amador<sup>68</sup> where he has his shop is on a war basis and no one is allowed except on official business...If Pedro Espinosa was down here now maybe we could plan something big for the conference, but it will break up by Thursday”.*

## **RAISE THE CRY OF YA BAHÁ’U’L-ABHÁ**

**“Oh that I could travel, even though on foot and in the utmost poverty, to these regions, and, raising the call of Ya Baha’u’l-Abha, in cities, villages, mountains, deserts and oceans, promote the Divine teachings”<sup>69</sup>!**

**Abdu’l-Baha**

The anguish of his heart is immense indeed and he was in real struggle. His soul yearns for

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67. Monroe Doctrine is a US foreign policy position that opposes European colonialism in Western Hemisphere. Wikipedia

68. One of the US Military Bases in Panama at the time.

69. Tablets of Divine Plan, p. 39

big proclamation activities throughout the Central America:

*“There is not much information in the Baha’i News about activities in Central America. How many more Republics are as yet to be pioneered? Why everything is going so painfully slow? Is it a lack of funds or is Temple construction<sup>70</sup> taking a temporary precedence over teaching activities? If I had not taken a desperate chance and been willing to face the uncertainties involved in coming down here as an individual, the cry of Ya-Baha-u’l-Abha<sup>71</sup> would not as yet have been raised in this important region of Panama”.*

He is quite concern about the fate of so many millions of Latin American who need to know about the Faith, and he is single handed with no support whatsoever. He continued:

*“Are many believers studying Spanish? It is estimated that there are more than 80,000,000 people in South America”.*

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October Mathew wrote to Louile on the arrival of Louise Caswell, not to Pacific’s Balboa in Canal Zone, but to Cristobal at the Atlantic’s side<sup>72</sup>. He mentioned:

*“I received your airmail letter yesterday October 4<sup>th</sup> and found out that she<sup>73</sup> was transiting the Canal. She did not stop here but went right through to the other side. Probably she went through to see how the locks<sup>74</sup> work and to see the scenery”.*

Here Mathew touches again on the old matter, yet yielding against the wall, he finds no other alternative than to prepare himself to go to Nicaragua. He wrote:

*“I did not know that you had already asked the National Assembly for funds and they had already appropriated it. I suppose that now I shall have to go to Nicaragua as it is too late to back out although I was expecting a job here by next January at the latest. At any rate, I will consult with the Local Tropical Baha’i Community<sup>75</sup> as soon as it can be assembled. I do not know how long Mrs. Caswell will stay in Cristobal and when Mrs. Oliver gets here, the Baha’i Community will be augmented to four people. I will write complete details after we consult. I received a letter from the Guardian”.*

Although Mathew does not mention of the contents of the letter from the Guardian, yet, it could be the same letter as mentioned above, as, it talks about Mathew’s transfer to Nicaragua. The assuring letter of the Guardian mentions:

*“Dear and precious co-worker: I have just heard of your transfer to Nicaragua and hasten to assure you of my special and loving prayers wherever you may labor and whatever circumstances under which you serve. You should feel proud, grateful, and happy. The rising generation will be stimulated and inspired by the example you and your fellow-workers are setting. May the Beloved achieve your heart’s dearest wish. Persevere and rest assured. Your*

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70. US House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois.

71. The Cry of Ya Baha’u’l-Abha is a Baha’i invocation used at the time of desperation and jubilee, meaning ‘O Thou Glory of Glories’.

72. The interoceanic waterway through the Canal of Panama had two entrances, Balboa next to Panama City on the Pacific side and Cristobal next to Colon on the Atlantic side.

73. Mrs. Caswell

74. Canal locks are the way in which canals can to up and over hills be altering the level of water of the canal.

75. The small five members community to be consisted of Mathew, Mr. Wantuk, Mrs. Oliver and Mrs. Caswell. Jojn Eichenauer, another pioneer proceeding from Ecuador to El Salvador was also in the group for a short time.

*true and grateful brother, Shoghi*"

A day later, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October Mathew typed a longer letter to Loulie as promised, indicating the recommendation of the 'Tropical Baha'i Community' for him to go to Nicaragua. Mathew was humorous in his writings. He suggests to the Inter American Committee that if their ship to Nicaragua is blown up by a submarine<sup>76</sup>, they should send two more pioneers to replace them both<sup>77</sup>!

He calls himself 'a big bold Baha'i pioneer' who raised the cry of Ya Baha'u'l-Abha in Panama:

*"I consulted with Mrs. Caswell and John Eichenauer and the general opinion is that I should go to Nicaragua even if for six months. The trip there will cost only \$25 if I go on deck, and twice as much if in cabin. Being a hardy pioneer inured to hardships I do not mind going on deck. John and I will probably leave by the 16<sup>th</sup> of this month, on the Acajutla which is a small vessel belonging to Pacific Steam Navigation...If we do get blown up send two other pioneers to replace us immediately".*

He continued:

*"We could not find Mrs. Oliver, maybe she has not arrived yet and Wantuk could not get to the meeting on account of business showing up at the last minute. That is why there were only three of us at the meeting".*

The point that the Guardian had mentioned about the coming of only men to Panama, still puzzled Mathew, he asked in his letter again from Loulie:

*"I was surprised about the women coming after you wrote that only men would come".*

Mathew also came to know that Louise has received a letter from the Guardian encouraging her to pioneer to Panama:

*"...in the letter that Shoghi Effendi wrote to Mrs. Caswell, he was encouraging her to come and now it seems that all who want to pioneer in Central America should be encouraged by the National Assembly".*

Mathew does press that the credit of him being the first coming to Panama should be recalled:

*"Panama is no longer virgin territory, considering that there are already five believers around and the fact that the cry of Ya-Baha-u'l-Abha has been vociferously raised in these regions for already five months by a big, bold Baha'i pioneer"!*

He is optimistic that from January on, there will be plenty of jobs for the American citizens in Panama. He mentions the opportunity of renting land from the Government for agriculture, thus, the future pioneers can become self-supported!

Once he finds Louise, he describes how this happened:

*"Mrs. Caswell did not have my address, but she was coming here to see Mrs. Crespo whom she met at San Francisco. She was looking for a room and when I saw her, I thought to myself: This*

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76. During the WWII, the waters around and the path to the Canal and the US, were under vigilance by the Germans.

77. He means John Eichenauer and himself.

woman has a very nice face she must be a Baha’I, so I went downstairs and introduced myself and then she introduced me to John whom I was not expecting as you never mentioned him to me. John will be staying here with me, but women are more fussy and delicate so Louise is staying at the Tivoli<sup>78</sup> until she finds a suitable place”.

## LEAVING PANAMA

Loulie Mathew wrote an obituary for Mathew<sup>79</sup>, in which she mentions:

*“I sensed his immense disappointment at the news contained in the letter, but like the good soldier of Baha’u’llah that he was, he accepted our suggestion that he go to Nicaragua”.*

Mathew prepared himself to depart from his pioneering post in October 1939, although the exact date of his departure has not been recorded.

Mathew was the first pioneer not only to Panama but to Central America, although not the first travel teacher, and he taught the Faith to the first ever Baha’i in Panama and therefore



in Central America, and the history will record it as such.

There is a photo of the first Baha’i group in the “Baha’i News” number 132, January 1940, p. 7. Mathew Kaszab, Louise Caswell, Cora Hitt Oliver, John Eichenauer Jr. and Joseph Wantuk. Their historic meeting happened in Panama City shortly before Mathews left for Nicaragua on October 16, 1939. That historic occasion was held at the Hotel Tivoli in Canal Zone where Louise Caswell was staying. The date recorded was 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1939. They were the four Baha’is of the early days of Panama, though Cora had not arrived yet. They wrote on the letterhead of the Hotel Tivoli of their meeting and adorned it with the early Spanish version of the Prayer of the Bab for difficulties:

*“Ninguno puede librarnos de nuestras penas, Salvo Dios. Decid: Alabado sea Dios. El es Dios. Todos somos sus siervos. Todos existimos por Su Voluntad”.*

The solemn and historic document was signed and addressed to Mrs. Loulie Mathews. This document in his handwriting, could be considered as the Mathew’s farewell letter who would be leaving his much-loved pioneering post to never come back and never see it again. It also sounds as Mathew’s will, addressed to his benefactor, Loulie, it starts with *“Greetings from*

Picture taken October 10, 1939, Panama Seated L to R: Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver  
Standing L to R: Joseph Wantuk, Johnny Eichenauer (en route to El Salvador) Mathew Kaszab, first pioneer to Panama  
Published in *Bahá’í World* Vol. VIII 1938-1940 p.833

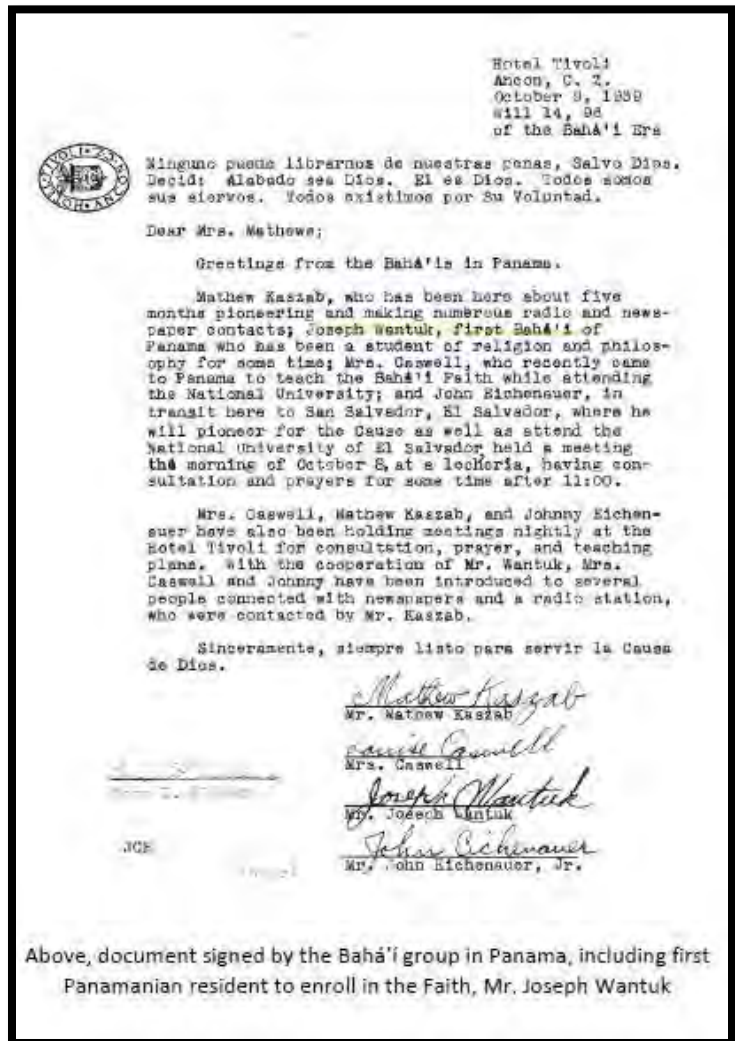
78. Tivoli was the name of an upmarket hotel in Canal Zone of Panama.

79. Which is recorded in the Baha’i World vol. IX, p. 615,

the Baha'is in Panama" and then continues:

"Mathew Kaszab, who has been here about five months pioneering and making numerous radio and newspaper contact; Joseph Wantuk, first Baha'i of Panama who has been a student of religion and philosophy for some time; Mrs. Caswell, who recently came to Panama to teach the Baha'i Faith while attending the National University; and John Eichenauer, in transit here to San Salvador, El Salvador, where he will pioneer for the Cause as well as attend the National University of El Salvador, held a meeting the morning of October 8, at the lecheria<sup>80</sup>, having consultation and prayers for some time after 11:00.

"Mrs. Caswell, Mathew Kaszab, and Johnny Eichenauer have also been holding meetings nightly at the Hotel Tivoli for consultation, prayer, and teaching plans. With the cooperation of Mr. Wantuk, Mrs. Caswell and Johnny have been introduced to several people connected with newspapers and a radio station, who are contacted by Mr. Kaszab.



Above, document signed by the Bahá'í group in Panama, including first Panamanian resident to enroll in the Faith, Mr. Joseph Wantuk

*Sinceramente, siempre listo para servir la Cause de Dios*<sup>81</sup>.

- (Signed) Mr. Mathew Kaszab
- Mrs. Louise Caswell
- Mr. Joseph Wantuk
- Mr. John Eichenauer, Jr.
- Cora H. Oliver<sup>82</sup>

At the back of the same letter, the following is recorded:

"This afternoon, October 10, Mathew and Johnny learned of Cora Oliver's presence in Panama City, and at 5:00, Mathew, Louise, Mrs. Oliver and Johnny met at the Hotel Central, read prayers, had consultation, and discussed plans and experiences. This evening the four had supper

80. Lecheria means 'dairy', but it is not clear in what context did Mathew use this word.  
 81. The document ends by saying: Sincerely, always ready to serve the Cause of God.  
 82. She was absent, due to not having arrived yet.

together at the “Rendezvous<sup>83</sup>”.

*“This morning Mathew and Johnny broadcast a Baha’i program in English and Spanish over the Star and Herald Station, HP5A, from 8:00-15. Plans include the starting of the Baha’i class, Thursday evening, Oct. 12 at the Artes y Oficios School; and the holding of 19 –Day Feast Sunday evening. Enclosed find picture”.*

Alfred Osborne, the future Continental Counsellor of the Faith for the Americas, being the second Baha’i of Panama, who received the message from Mathew, was not yet an enrolled believer to be present in this meeting.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October Mathew wrote to Loulie indicating the receipt of money he received. He also mentioned that the ship he had to travel with had already left and he had remained behind, awaiting the next ship. He takes the ‘waiting’ as a good omen, which will help him to spend some quality time with the new pioneers in their sacred work. He says:

*“I received your letter with the \$150 this morning however the ship sailed last night so now I will have to wait two more weeks...I do not mind staying around another two weeks as this will enable me to get Mrs. Caswell and Mrs. Oliver started. I started a Baha’i class in the Universidad Libre again for Mrs. Caswell... We have been making some important contacts the last two weeks...I did not expect to get the check, so I was quite surprised when I saw it this morning. I will send the receipt for \$100 as the other is through your generosity”.*

And Mathew mentions of his last radio speech:

*“My last good speech on the Radio entitled “The Panama City Conference and its contribution toward the New World Order” [this] was not published in the newspaper on account of the fact that the war news takes up most of the space”.*

## **NEW ORDEAL**

Finally, Mathew saw himself to be detached from Panama he so much loved and served so selflessly and brought into the Faith the ever first Baha’i in Panama. It could have been very early in November when he left Panama, as the exact date is not recorded. Two days after he arrived Corinto a coastal Nicaraguan town on the Atlantic side. He wrote the following letter to Loulie on November 10 describing the anomaly with his visa. In fact, from this moment Mathew’s new ordeal starts, leading him to tremendous consequent problems:

*“I got my passport from the U.S. Consulate in Panama and had it visaed by the Nicaraguan Consul. When I got here, they said that there was something irregular.*

*“I should have written to the Minister of Exterior Relations for permission to enter this Republic before the Consul visaed my passport, but he did not say anything about it to me and it was his business to know. Seeing that I am a U.S. citizen, and my passport was visaed, and it was the Nicaraguan Consul’s fault that there was an irregularity. The captain of the port allowed me to land here and told me to stick around pending the permission from the Minister. They seem to differentiate between a naturalized citizen of the U.S. and who was born there. So,*

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83. Probably the name of the dining room at the Hotel Tivoli.

*I had two drawbacks, I was not born in the U.S. and then I came here as a deck passenger and probably they are suspicious on that account. Otherwise, I probably could have gone right to Managua without any red tape. Maybe the consul figured that I could get by as they are generally very lenient with the U.S. citizens”.*

This time, Mathew’s super economic way of living got him into trouble:

*“The reason I came on deck was because I got my passage for \$25.00 while first class would cost twice as much. To go by airplane would cost only \$9 more than the first class and I did not see why I should pay that much for such a short trip. I only have \$110.00 left as it is. The agent told me I would have to deposit \$100.00 which I did. I got it back when I landed in Corinto, Nicaragua”.*

During the wartime, every person was under surveillance, everyone was suspicious until proved innocent. Spies were everywhere from both sides of the war. Nicaragua was more under the dominance of the Germany, and Communism propaganda was also on the rise. If anyone found to talk about peace and unity, the person could be a communist. No one would know of the Baha’i Faith and its tenets during those earliest days. An enthusiastic person as Mathew would easily be trapped in this matter and put in prison. He wrote:

*“The port captain telephoned to the Minister & I got the permission to come here without much trouble. He explained to me that he let in a person who was a U.S. naturalized citizen but was born in Russia and when he got to Managua, he started Communistic propaganda. So, the Minister told the Captain, to consult him after this, and that is why I had to wait”.*



Photo taken sometime in the fall in Panama, Mathew, Louise Caswell, Johnny Eichenauer, Joseph Wantuk, and Joseph’s daughter Edna.

## **IN NICARAGUA**

Mathew described Nicaragua and commented:

*“In Nicaragua the people are very poor and backward and illiterate. There are more barefoot people and naked children than any other Central American Republic. You evidently had great confidence in my ability! Sending me to the largest and most backward country in Central America. I think that the reason I was allowed to come to Managua was because I had a legitimate business to transact here. I showed the Port Captain the deed to my mother’s plantation and told him that I wanted to reclaim it. I do not know what the chances are of*



*locating any records of my plantation as the earthquake destroyed many of the records here in 1931 but anyway it served as a good excuse. My delay in Corinto was providential because I contacted Mrs. Frank Miller who speaks English fluently, he was born in Bluefields, Nicaragua where many speak English. I gave him the message and he was very interested, so I lent him the Esslemont. He will come to Managua in a few days”.*

Loulie Mathews, who as mentioned before, wrote the obituary for Mathew<sup>84</sup>. She wrote:

*“...I was, at this time, Chairman of the Inter-America Committee, and was obliged to write Mathew that the post of Panama had been already assigned to two pioneers, Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver, who would arrive in about six months’ time. I sensed his immense disappointment at the news contained in the letter, but like the good soldier of Baha’u’llah that he was, he accepted our suggestion that he go to Nicaragua. We knew he had some family connections there and we hoped this would make it easier for him. After his acceptance of the new post, he was made radiantly happy by a letter from the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, who wrote in his own hand:*

*“Dear and precious co-worker: I have just heard of your transfer to Nicaragua and hasten to assure you of my special and loving prayers wherever you may labor and whatever circumstances under which you serve. You should feel proud, grateful and happy. This rising generation will be stimulated and inspired by the example you and your fellow-workers are setting. May the Beloved achieve your heart’s dearest wish. Persevere and rest assured. Your true and grateful brother, Shoghi”.*

*“From the beginning, everything in this sick land was a disappointment. The property that had belonged to Mathew’s grandmother had been sold and he was not able to secure any redress...”*

In the minutes of the Inter-America Committee dated 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1940, almost a year after Mathew’s departure from Panama, the following is being recorded under Mathew Kaszab’s name:

*“Mathew Kaszab has left mines in Honduras and gone to Managua. Wants to visit Costa Rica, may go to Nicaragua to work on Panamerican Highway. Does not wish to return to Honduras”.*

Somehow his displacement from Panama had affected his stability in his pioneering place, and he has not been able to secure something permanent for himself in his new post. He should have had an internal battle to win, but for sure, he could not convince himself why he was uprooted and displaced.

It was in Bluefield Nicaragua that he received the short above-mentioned letter from the beloved Guardian in his own handwriting: *“he was made radiantly happy”* and restored him spiritually, but his fate was drawn already.

In Nicaragua, Mathew went to find his estate, or the fruit farm he thought he had, but after so long time of not knowing of the real owner, it has been ‘sold’ by the authorities to new owners, therefore, he could not secure nothing for himself.

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84. Baha’i World vol. IX, 1940 – 1944, pp. 614 – 616 writes

In the minutes of the Inter-America Committee's meeting dated February 16, 1941, it is mentioned:

*"...he was low in funds and morale when he received the Committee's letter containing the \$50 cheque. That same afternoon he obtained a job on the Pan-American Highway. U.S. consul advised him to secure a letter stating that he is representative of the Baha'i Faith in Nicaragua. The statement has been typed and sent to him as directed".*

Mathew was also alert with the subversive Covenant breakers' organizations such as New History Society<sup>85</sup> with the aim of destroying the Faith's reputation. When they contacted him, he wrote to the Inter American Committee and,

*"...suggested that names of Latin American believers be kept secret, so that they cannot be reached by this organization".*

He was a faithful and lover of Baha'u'llah's Faith.

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85. New History Society was created by Ahmad Sohrab, who was the interpreter for Abdu'l-Baha while He was touring in the US, though not fulltime, as there were other Persians who did interpret for Him. After the passing of Abdu'l-Baha, the former mentioned person did not accept Shoghi Effendi as the legitimate successor of the Master and broke His Covenant. He tried hard to win for himself some followers, though he could fool a couple of people but failed in all his attempts and perished together with his ideas and his followers.



**Bahá'ís and friends, Managua, Nicaragua 1942**

*Last photo of Mathew, taken approximately 10 days before his second arrest on September 28, 1942*

Standing l to r: Antonio "Toño" Bonilla, an unknown friend, Antonio Bonilla Jr., Mathew Kaszab, Blanca Victoria Mejía Arauz - first Nicaraguan Bahá'í.

Sitting: *in middle* - Evangelina Mejía [later de Barquero] - Blanca's sister.

On either side of her are Antonio Bonilla's daughters Marta and Aurora ("Aurita"). Evangelina attended Bahá'í gatherings regularly but never enrolled, and eventually moved to California.

Picture appeared in *Bahá'í News* No. 162, April 1943, four months after Mathew's death.

## **STAR OF MATHEW SET!**

**"His short life, filled with suffering and pain, was offered to Baha'u'llah. Down all the ages, he will be remembered and remain a beacon of light to the Baha'i world. His example will become a spur of achievement. Where he labored and lost, a bright victory will follow. The high standard of purity and faith set by his life will not die with him but live on forever"<sup>86</sup>.**

In Nicaragua, poor soul Mathew went through rough time. He was imprisoned twice and contracted tuberculosis and at the end of his life he was partially paralyzed. His imprisonment was totally mistaken by the authorities, thinking Mathew was working for a supra-national organization, which its tenets did not agree with those of the Country. His passport was confiscated and finally was thrown out of the country, and no one knew of his whereabouts, not knowing that this sacrificial lamb of God, was in prison and deprived of everything. In one instance, Mathew had wished to be imprisoned like his Lord Baha'u'llah,

86. Loulie Mathews, Chairman of the Inter-America Committee. *Baha'i World* vol IX, p. 616

and his wishes were granted.

Slowly the Inter American Committee lost touch with Mathew. In their minutes of December 14, 1942, it is recorded:

*"The Nat'l Sec'y informs the Committee that no word has been received from Mathew Kaszab. No one knows where he is".*

And in less than a month, in January 11, 1943 minutes, it is recorded:

*"Card from Mathew Kaszab from Brownsville, Texas, Dec. 30<sup>th</sup> announces his arrival in the States with no further details".*



..." so I actually spent 23 days in jail and grew a nice beard (not so long as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's beard but good enough to have a picture taken of it which I did before I had it cut off)." Mathew spent most of the Nineteen-Day Fast period and Naw Ruz in prison in Managua. He was released on March 27, 1942.

He had already left his post and moved to the States as it was originally thought, but he could not inform anyone of his whereabouts. Both the National Assembly and the Inter America Committee as well as Gayle Woolson from Costa Rica tried to locate him through the American Embassy, but his imprisonment was kept secret by the authorities very unfairly.

In the Minutes of February 8, 1943, less than a month later, it is recorded with dismay: *"...announcement of the death of Mathew Kaszab..."*

Mathew was a very humanly oriented person. He described to Loulie the deplorable conditions of poverty and vice in Nicaragua and the ignorance of the miners' children:

*"...that he took a night shift and taught school in the daytime. When I remonstrated with him because he was giving himself no time for sleep, he replied that his time was so short he could not afford to sleep"!*

Was not he a saint or an angel?

"HE CERTAINLY WAS A MARTYR"<sup>87</sup>

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87. Nellie Stuart French, then the Secretary the Inter American Committee.

On February 20, 1943, after hearing the news of Mathew's death, Mrs. French wrote to Cora:

*"We have no further news of Mathew Kaszab's passing but I think I told you that Loulie Matthews is planning to erect a suitable memorial over his grave. Poor Mathew, he certainly was a martyr".*

Louise Caswell wrote to Mrs. French of the Inter American Committee on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1943:

*"The reason I wrote about Matthew was that I was told he was still alive after receiving your letter saying he had passed away. Any pieces of information I could piece together would be without authority and I have not had replies to my letters to Nicaragua. The American Consul could undoubtedly give accurate information. I don't know how else to get it."*



Nellie Stevison French

And on March 5, after hearing the news from Mrs. French, Cora wrote in her letter to her:

*"Will be glad to know who is right about Mathew as there seems to be a wide difference as to the facts concerning him".*

Mrs. French, the secretary of the I-A Committee mentioned with regret the case of Mathew in her letter to Ruth Shook<sup>88</sup> in Colombia:

*"This year we have touched the high spots in several instances in our work. We have had a marriage to celebrate, a birth to record and a death to agonize over because poor Mathew Kaszab must have had a very hard time and been ill for some time though we have no news whatever of his doings for weeks before we heard that he had died in Brownsville Texas on his way home".*

Mrs. French<sup>89</sup>, in her letter to Mrs. Oliver dated March 24, 1943, has mentioned the following, as much as the circumstances of his death remains obscure:

*"You seem still to be in doubt about Mathew Kaszab. These are the circumstances:*

*"Mathew must have passed away in Brownsville about the 31<sup>st</sup> of December. The last word we had from him in the Committee was a postcard written there Dec. 30<sup>th</sup> in which he said he would write soon, as soon as settled. The postcard was written in a very feeble way, and we think he must have been ill, but where or how long, we do not know. When he passed away the people there, going through his papers, discovered the name of the NSA and wired to know what to do with his body. The NSA instructed them to carry out the interment there and forwarded money for the expenses of it, and now Mrs. Matthews is planning to have a stone put over his grave with a suitable inscription. There is no doubt at all that Mathew has passed on, but how we are ever going to learn the facts concerning his last days I don't know. We have written to Managua to Srta. Mejia<sup>90</sup> and also to Mr. Wheelock<sup>91</sup>, neither of whom can shed any light on the situation at*

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88. She was a pioneer to Colombia, who had travelled to Panama for health purposes.

89. Then Secretary of the Inter-America Committee

90. Probably the owner of the room he had rented to stay.

91. Probably a clerk from the US Embassy in Nicaragua.

*all. In going over the files of Mathew's letters, I realize more fully what a splendid person he must have been and how earnest and active in his teaching work. He certainly lived and died the life of a martyr".*

Cora Oliver in her letter dated April 8, wrote to Mrs. French wrote:

*"Thanks for the information about Mathew. He was devoted and the traces of his good work will live after him".*

On April 9, Mrs. French wrote to Louise Caswell the following concern:

*"We are also in receipt of letters from Mrs. Woolson<sup>92</sup> and we are discovering that the sad news of Mathew is something which will require careful thought for the future".*

Once back in Panama from her US trip, Louise met with ex-Rector of the University of Nicaragua Dr. Salvador Mendieta, visiting academics in Central and South America. As a sympathetic to the Cause, he knew the Baha'is in his country. He had a letter of introduction from the Baha'is of San Jose, to meet with the Baha'is in Spanish speaking countries. She had asked him about Mathew. Though he did not know him personally, yet he commented to Louise saying:

*"The whole affairs was a gross injustice".*

And that he tried to help without even knowing him. Apparently, he knew the false accusations against poor Mathew since his arrival in Nicaragua. Louise had pressed on:

*"I asked Dr. Mendieta whether there was any other thing against Matthew except that he had the Baha'i books, and he said he was accused of being a Nazi, which he considered to be unjust".*

Louise wrote to the Committee on August 18:

*"Isn't it just like the unfolding of a piece of cloth... the way I have met one person after another who has told me about Matthew".*

Then she continues in her letter suggesting:

*"I think a tree should be planted on Matthew's grave. I am going to mention it at the feast tomorrow".*

She has seen Mathew's tombstone Mrs. Loulie Mathews had it made:

*"The tombstone is beautiful".*

The untimely passing of Mathew weighed on everyone for a long time.

Mathew's short life in Nicaragua was indeed rather sad. He became imprisoned twice in the notorious prisons of Nicaragua for unknown, therefore unjust reasons. In his second imprisonment, he had become very sick to the point of death as he mentions in a letter to Louile, of:

*"...threatening Malaria and dysentery", which has been quite common. The other worrying*

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92. Gayle Woolson, pioneer in Costa Rica.

matter was being robbed, which was a constant menace and he lost money and material many times in the Country. He was accused of being Nazi and consequently imprisoned. No doubt that his sickness became because of maltreatment and malnourishment at the prison, as his body was partially paralyzed when he was in the hotel in Texas just before his untimely death.

Once out of prison, Mathew quietly travelled to Mexico and then to the Brownsville, Texas. He passed away on the 13th of January 1943, and was buried in the public cemetery. Over the stone of his grave is carved the words of the beloved Guardian: *"His services are unforgettable"*<sup>93</sup>.

He was only 38.

Loulie ends her obituary by the following:

*"His short life, filled with suffering and pain, was offered to Baha'u'llah. Down all the ages, he will be remembered and remain a beacon light to the Baha'i world. His example will become a spur to achievement. Where he labored and lost, a bright victory will follow. The high standard of purity and faith set by his life will not die with him but live on forever".*

It is not clear the reason as why the NSA or the Inter America Committee decided not to send another male pioneer to help Mathew with his teaching activities in Panama, yet, sending him to Nicaragua and instead have two female pioneers to go to Panama, but whatever the reason, it was with the full knowledge of the Guardian.

Shoghi Effendi hearing of Mathew's transfer to Nicaragua wrote him the following letter<sup>94</sup>:

***Dear and precious co-worker,***

***I have heard of your transfer to Nicaragua and hasten to assure you of my special and loving prayers wherever you may labor and whatever circumstances under which you serve. You should feel proud, grateful and happy. This rising generation will be stimulated and inspired by the example you are setting. May the beloved achieve your heart's dearest wish. Persevere and rest assured.***

***Your true and grateful brother,  
Shoghi***

Although Mathew left Panama for a new post, but his unfortunate life in Nicaragua followed by his untimely death, makes him an inseparable part of the history of the Faith in Panama. His love and service to the Faith in Panama could become as an example to the youth and follow his footsteps. No one ever came even close to knowing how and where he lived. No doubt, as a lover, he never stopped teaching and serving. So unfortunate that he took the rest of his story along with him underground, without divulging it to anyone. No doubt the letter of the beloved Guardian made him even more radiant in his new post of pioneering.

Only Baha'u'llah knows of the sighs and the agonies of his noble heart at the moments of despair and loneliness, of poverty and hardship that he went through and prayers he offered during the midnights to his Lord and the tears he and His Lord shed together because of his

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93. Baha'i World, vol. IX, pp 614-616

94. The Baha'i World: A Biennial International Record Vol. IX, April 1940 – 1944, p. 615

undeserved fate. But who knows divine wisdom?

One thing is clear, whomever Baha'u'llah loved, He made him a participant of His own sufferings, in this way one could be as close as possible to his Lord. This was the fate of Mathew. There are not many with such a glowing and precious crown of glory as Mathew was given by Baha'u'llah. He certainly was a piece of the purest gold. His known pioneering services altogether came to slightly over a year, but his selfless being and services remain there for eternity.

Part of a letter Mathew wrote to Loulie from his new post La Luz, Nicaragua, in June 1940, will adorn the story of a 'lover' of the Faith, showing his concern and high esteem he had for the pioneers:

*"How can one person keep in personal touch with all the Central and South American pioneers? There will be a whole flock of them. I was thinking that a Latin American Newsletter could be gotten out and sent to all the pioneers. In this Newsletter each pioneer would be asked to write a letter, and, in this way, he would keep in touch with each of the other pioneers and friends in the US. If you want to find out certain facts about a believer, you do not need a crystal ball, but you could consult the card that all believers were asked to fill out, one is on file at the Local Assembly and another at the National."*

His youthful spirit always concerned, ready in action, teaching, encouraging, active in the Faith and fully engaged in charity work and helping children, youth and women, in fact every soul in need.

Maybe no one better than the beloved Guardian has described with high appreciation on the pioneers and teachers in the field. He wrote a year after the passing of this stalwart youth, in the Messages to America, the following paragraph, where in each line one can find the hidden name of Mathew:

***"I am moved to pay a well-deserved tribute at this great turning point in the career of so privileged a community to the gallant band of its apostolic founders whose deeds heralded the dawn of the Day of the Covenant in the West, to its intrepid pioneers who labored to enlarge the bounds of the Faith in the five continents, to its indefatigable administrators whose hands reared the fabric of the Administrative Order, to its heroic martyrs who followed in the footsteps of the Dawn-Breakers of the heroic age, to its itinerant teachers who with written and spoken word pleaded its cause and repulsed the attacks of its adversaries, to its munificent supporters whose liberality accelerated the expansion of its manifold activities, and last but not least to the mass of its stout-hearted, self-denying members whose strenuous, ceaseless, concerted efforts so decisively contributed to the consolidation and broadening of its foundations. I desire to direct a particular appeal to the Latin American representatives participating in the Centennial Convention to deliberate on measures to reinforce the ties binding them to their Sister Community, unitedly devise means for the inauguration of teaching campaigns in their respective Republics, the dissemination of Bahá'í literature, the multiplication of Bahá'í administrative centers as preliminary steps in the formation of Bahá'í National Assemblies, and lend impetus to the***



***prosecution of any enterprise launched to carry still further the Plan conceived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the American Bahá'í Community*"<sup>95</sup>.**

Daniel Nelson Wegener<sup>96</sup> wrote a full biography on Louise Caswell. Regarding Mathew, which are complementary to this anecdote, he wrote:

*"Without assistant from any Committee, Mathew had arisen in April, six months before Louise's arrival to go to Panama. He responded to the Guardian's call in the Advent of Divine Justice: 'Let them not tarry until such time as their fellow-laborer's will have passed the first stage in their campaigns of teaching...'<sup>97</sup>"*

*"It was with unexpressed regret that Mathew accepted instructions from the Inter-America Committee to transfer to Nicaragua, a post where he was so urgently needed. The small cattle boat, the Acajutla, dubbed as 'not worth a German bomb' by Mathew, was waiting to take him on the next part of his journey as a pioneer. As dusk fell, Louise and Cora came to say good-bye to him. As they stood on the floating dock, Mathew sang a heart-rending chant he had composed about the Dawn-Breakers. The three pioneers were surrounded by the spirit of God as they stood alone in that profound silence by the sea, as though they were the only people in the world at that moment. After giving them a kiss on the cheek, Mathew boarded his boat, which slowly disappeared into the dark night, up the western coast to Nicaragua."*

*"Mathew always served as an example to Louise and his memory was very dear to her. He was a pioneer who first gave the message to Alfred Osborne, now known throughout the Baha'i World for his integrity, steadfastness and constancy"<sup>98</sup>.*

*"When he (Mathew) left for Nicaragua, he turned this precious contact (Alfred) over to Louise and Cora.*

*Louise said: "Mathew once told me, 'I want to be imprisoned like my Lord. I am an Apostle of Baha'u'llah. It is comforting to realize that Baha'u'llah has promised to those who are faithful, association with these holy souls in all the worlds of God."*

*Mathew was concerned only with promoting the Faith. He was most obedient to the Inter America Committee. Mrs. Loulie Mathews had told him to always wear rubbers and carry an umbrella. He dressed in immaculate white and always wore black, shiny rubber and carried an umbrella regardless of the weather. He was a profound and philosophical teacher of the Faith, and he attracted people by his spiritual talks in schools, over the radio, and in newspaper articles. The nobility of his expression, the unquestionable integrity of his character, his complete obliviousness to the world, his readiness to serve without ostentation, rendered him unforgettable to those who met him. He was one of those of whom it has been written, '... and*

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95. Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America May, 15, 1944, p. 72

96. Daniel Nelson Wegener, Divine Springtime, First printing 1977, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, pp. 21-23

97. Advent of Divine Justice, p. 50.

98. Alfred Osborne (1907-1992) was the second Baha'i in Panama served for many years as member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Panama. In 1968, Alfred was appointed by the Universal House of Justice as Continental Counsellor for the Baha'i Faith for the Americas.

*all that dwell in every land shall be illumined by their memory*<sup>99</sup>.

*He travelled with two suitcases, one filled with Baha'i books and the other with his clothes."*

*In Nicaragua, Mathew worked nights in a gold mine and taught school by day, truly living a life of sacrifice. However, his motives for being in Nicaragua were questioned by the authorities. His property was destroyed, and he was imprisoned. His imprisonment remains shrouded in a cloud of mystery. Some of the Baha'is visited him and brought him food and were unable to secure his release.*

*Gayle Woolson, a pioneer to Costa Rica at the time, wrote: "One day while I was in San Jose, someone brought me a letter sent to me by a believer in Nicaragua telling me that Mathew was in jail because his motives for being in Nicaragua were misunderstood and misinterpreted. It was suggested that I write to the United States Consulate in Managua to inquire as to the whereabouts of Mathew saying that he had not heard from him for a long time and was worried about him. This I did and brought an investigation of his whereabouts, and he was immediately released but his release was some months after he had been imprisoned. His health was broken as a result of his ordeal. He was sent back to the States and died shortly thereafter<sup>100</sup>. His grave is in Brownsville, Texas. We can truly say that he gave his life for Nicaragua."*

There is a couple of line information in Louise's letter to Loulie on 13<sup>th</sup> of November regarding Mathew and John Eichenauer after they left the shores of Panama. She wrote:

*"You have undoubtedly heard from Mathew, but I will enclose a few lines from him to me, showing his undaunted spirit: 'The ticket I had was for "cattle class" without any accommodation, however there being only 6 passengers & accommodation for 30, they let me sleep in a cabin. I had the whole cabin for myself with three bunks in it of which I used only one. The slumgullion that they fed me was not very edible, so I had a nice feast when we got to Costa Rica at Puntarenas, which cost me 2.50 Colones<sup>101</sup>, about 44 cents U.S. currency'.*

*"Mathew and Johnny are certainly examples of getting along on little money. They are so happy in every service they perform for Baha'u'llah that it is a joy to seem them serve."*

She also mentions a note on Joseph Wantuck:

*"Wantuck is a fine man. We have not seen him for three weeks and are praying 'the remover of difficulties'. He has not had the Will as Mathew did not have it to give to him. We want to make him aware of non-ecclesiastical aspects of the teaching as he is altar boy in Liberal Catholic church."*

Mathew became a member of the Baha'i Faith while studying at New York, Loulie Matthews wrote:

*"From that moment, Mathew's real life began. The heroic age of the Bab and the martyrs absorbed his mind, and The Dawn-Breakers became his constant companion. He never spoke of his childhood or youth or of anything prior to his contact with the Revelation. He was utterly*

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99. Advent of Divine Justice, p. 70

100. January 13, 1943

101. Costa Rican currency

*without personal ambition. He worked at anything that would allow him time to study the Baha'i writing. At one time, he motored to Washington with a friend, and Mrs. Preston (then Miss Vail), who offered him a room in her house. He went to work in a restaurant, happy and content to be under the roof of a Baha'i..."*

Blanca Victoria Mejia Arauz<sup>102</sup> remembered him:

*"Likewise, there was among us Mr. Mathew Kaszab, an ingenious man with a great heart. Those that knew him thoroughly were able to say that he was a saint. He remained two years in the country, but he also was not understood, and from then on he did not accomplish much in spite of his great wishes; his gentleness and humility were completely misunderstood."*

On 2 March 1942, a suspicious fire destroyed part of the factory where Mathew worked. During routine questioning, Nicaraguan authorities discovered Baha'i books in Mathew's possession and arrested him. He was released 22 days later.

His second arrest occurred almost six months later. According to subsequent accounts from his friends and contacts in Nicaragua, Mathew was apprehended at the airport just before he could board a flight out of the country. He soon became gravely ill with malaria and was moved to the prison hospital.

On 28 December 1942, the Nicaraguan authorities announced that Mathew was free, provided he left the country immediately. He boarded a plane for Mexico City, then travelled to Brownsville, Texas, where he became too ill to travel further. He visited Mercy Hospital but did not receive treatment; instead, he checked into a local hotel and died about 14 days later, on 13 January 1943.



Mathew Kaszab was buried in the Old City Cemetery in Brownsville, Texas. His gravestone was erected by Loulie Matthews.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, wrote:

***"Assure relatives of Mathew Kaszab of my heartfelt condolences and profound sympathy for the loss of this heroic pioneer. His services are unforgettable and abundantly rewarded, Loving prayers."***

In 1972, the Baha'i community of Anchorage, Alaska honored Mathew Kaszab by naming

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102. 1897-1975, the first Nicaraguan convert to the Baha'i Faith through Mathew Kaszab.

their Institute after him<sup>103</sup>.



Bahá'í Centenary in Wilmette, Illinois May 1944

Above photo is from *Bahá'í News* No. 171 November 1944. Front, seated, from left: Louise Caswell from Panama, Mrs. Keemer, Gayle Woolson from Costa Rica, Prof. Edelberto Torres representing Guatemala, and Blanca Mejía representing Nicaragua. Blanca was very proud of this picture and lamented losing her copy as a result of the 1972 earthquake in Managua.

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103. Anne King Sadeghpour, *The Gloriously Tragic Life of Mathew Kaszab: Letters from a Pioneer 1939-1942*, 2019. [https://bahai-library.com/sadeghpour\\_life\\_mathew\\_kaszab](https://bahai-library.com/sadeghpour_life_mathew_kaszab).

## LOUISE CASWELL<sup>104</sup>

**“Among (the) first to arise in 1939 following announcement (of the) Guardian (for the) first Seven Year Plan (to) introduce (the) Faith (in) Panama.”<sup>105</sup>**

The following story was extracted from the correspondence between Louise and the Inter-America Committee, as well as some other friends. Louise’s pioneering life in Panama, at least for the first three years is kind of inseparable from the life of Cora Oliver. There are messages from the beloved Guardian addressed to both, as well as those of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, and most of the letters of the Inter-America Committee with different chairpersons and secretaries.

Louise was born on 18 March 1896 into an affluent family in Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. Her parents were progressive and involved in the community. She quoted her father having once said: *“What the world needs is a world religion”*, and no doubt such sentiments influenced the daughter when she met the Baha’is of Portland. Wegener in the biography of Louise writes<sup>106</sup>:



Louise Caswell

*“Her parents were rich, influential, and progressive...The combination of their progressive ideas and the education they afforded Louise, gave her a wide background of experience and good preparation for working with people. Her education included one year at Miss Wheeler’s School in Providence, Rhodes Islan, Portland Academy private school blessed, two years at the University of California, and finally two years at Reed College, Portland, Oregon, where she graduated in 1916.”*

Later on Louise went to Army nursing school in Washington, where she met a soldier<sup>107</sup> and on July 14, 1918 and married him, but the marriage only lasted for four years. They divorced in 1922. And since she had a frustrated and unhappy life, until she met Mr. and Mrs. Latimer, Baha’is in Portland, Oregon in 1927 in a Baha’i Summer School, which won her heart. Wegener writes<sup>108</sup>:

*“The real love of the Baha’is and the supreme logic of the teachings quickly won me to the Faith and my full acceptance of it”.*

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104. Mar. 1896 – Feb. 1987

105. The Universal House of Justice, 1987

106. Daniel Nelson Wegener, Divine Springtime, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 1977, the NSA of Honduras

107. She married Dale Hinkle, a soldier from the US Army.

108. Divine Springtime, p. 5

Louise enrolled in the Faith in 1927, at the age of 31 who was by having outstanding Baha'i teachers including Helen Pilkington, Mr. and Mrs. George Latimer, Ella Cooper, John and Louise Bosch, Keith Ransom-Kehler<sup>109</sup>, Leroy Ioas<sup>110</sup>, and Martha Root<sup>111</sup>, after the latter she patterned her own teaching methods, as she had many things in common with her beloved teacher.

Louise maintained a correspondence with the Holy Land from the very beginning of her Baha'i life, not only with the Guardian, but also with Munirih Khanum<sup>112</sup>. She acknowledges a gift received from Louise:

*"My dear Baha'i daughter, I thank you so much for your lovely gift. It conveys to me your sweet love and devotion. To hear from the Friends of the Beloved brings joy and solace to my heart always... (Signed), Munirih Khanum*

She also sent her continuous stream of contributions directly to the Centre of the Faith and always received acknowledgment for her financial support of the Faith.

In 1936, when the Guardian cabled the National Convention of the US, with a call for pioneers to go to Latin America. Louise volunteered to go to Mexico. As circumstances would have it, she did not leave the United States that year, but went instead to Knoxville, Tennessee, as a home-front pioneer.

In 1939, Louise felt that her time had come to pioneer overseas and in October she arrived in Panama. Together with Cora Oliver, who arrived a few days later, helped establishing the Faith in that country to which the Guardian had given so much attention in his message of 1937<sup>113</sup>. She wrote a sketchy description of her early period of pioneering:

*"Heard of Cause from Latimers<sup>114</sup> in Portland, met Martha Root. Helen Bishop convinced and awakened me in 1927 and we attended the first Baha'i Session at Geyserville that summer. From that year till 1933 I taught as I learned in Portland, Vancouver, B.C. and Southern California, Pasadena and Santa Barbara, attending nearly every Geyserville Session with my son -Peter- and doing some teaching there. In 1933 my mother passed away and the following winter I moved to Vancouver, B.C. to teach and placed Peter in Kingsley School, North Lonsdale, B.C. In December 1934 a telegram called me to Spakane, Washington, to teach a class formed by Orcella Rexford at home of Isabel Campbell. I taught till February when I was called to follow Orcella's work in Boise, Idaho for two months. In the next year 1935, I spent four months in Boise at different times."*

She writes of the call for Latin America:

*"In 1936 the Guardian's call came for Latin American pioneers. I volunteered to go to Mexico. The NSA refused permission. At that time there was no Inter-America Committee. In the Spring of 1937, I went to Nashville at the request of the NSA and regarding this trip the Guardian wrote that he hoped that thorough it I would receive a "fresh and full opportunity to assist in the*

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109. Posthumously was named as Hand of the Cause of God by the Guardian.

110. Appointed as a member of the International Baha'i Council and later Hand of the Cause of God by the Guardian.

111. Posthumously she was named as Hand of the Cause of God by the Guardian.

112. The wife of Abdu'l-Baha. There is no date indicating when the letter was written.

113. The Advent of Divine Justice

114. Mr. and Mrs. George Latimer, early Baha'is of the US.

*spread of the Teachings in new fields". As I look back at this time, I can see that it marked a new period in my teaching efforts and since then I have moved with rapidity from place to place. That same spring Mr. Nils Chrisander opened up the city of Knoxville to the Baha'i Faith and invited his friends to hear Mr. Mason Remey and myself speak at the Hotel Andrew Jackson".*

In late August of that year while in Rhododendron she received another letter from the Guardian:

*"...asking me to return to Knoxville and lay the foundation for an Assembly. At once I rushed to town I was visiting from Rhododendron"*

She sold all her furniture and planned to send her son to school in Tennessee and leaving him in a Military Academy, she held her classes in the hotel.

*"In April 21, 1939 an Assembly was formed in Knoxville, and the power of Baha'u'llah sustained me through a period of tests".*

Louise mentions a dream she had, which was quite meaningful to her:

*"Meanwhile two days before the fast period I had a dream that I was travelling in Southern waters on a large vessel all alone. Pictures of oriental life suggested a place of great sensuality and my feeling was that the Guardian would be shocked. Then all at once the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, was with me in spirit, and events in the dream transpired with rapidity. The Greatest Holy Leaf was taking me up and down many flights of stairs in a spiritual world, teaching me how to serve the sick. At the end of the dream, I was going down a short flight of stairs with a large tropical fruit in my hands. It seemed to be a cross between two fruits. As I was powerless to hold it, it slipped from my hands and was caught in the hands of an important man who was thrown by an unseen power onto a bed and the dream ended suddenly with a sense of violence".*

Going through her life in Panama, it could be said that her life was the fulfillment of her dream. There was when the call to pioneer in Panama came to her:

*"Two days after this vivid dream, a letter from Leroy Ioas<sup>115</sup> arrived telling me of the publication of the "Advent of Divine Justice" and that the Guardian requested individuals of independent income (however small) to go to Latin America, and Leroy suggested that I go to Panama. At once I replied that in six months I would go when the lease of my apartment was up..."*

At the Convention of 1939, *"...the NSA and the Inter-America Committee finally decided that I should make a six-month survey of Panama and get information on other countries if possible. I had previously written to the same bodies according to Baha'i Administration, offering to pioneer in Panama for a limited time."* At this point she wrote to the beloved Guardian and, in her words:

*"...he replied with great encouragement. His words are forever engraved on my memory. In*

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115. A member of the National Assembly of the US at the time.

his own handwriting he says:

***“Dear and prized co-worker:***

***You stand on the threshold of a great and historic mission, so high in rank, so weighty with responsibility, so arduous in nature, so rich in possibilities, so unique in its significance. Perseverance will enable you to reap an abundant harvest. I will specially, continually and ardently pray for you and am eager to hear of the progress of your historic work. The Master is well pleased with you, watches over you and will rightly bless your endeavors. Rest assured and be happy. Your true and grateful brother, Shoghi”***

She goes on with her story:

*“I met with the Inter-America Committee and discussed plans. There was some idea of sending me to Costa Rica<sup>116</sup> instead with Amalia Ford; but the Guardian’s words about Panama convinced me that he wanted nothing to interfere with my trip. Husayn<sup>117</sup> wrote for him; “He hopes now that the NSA and the Inter-America Committee have chosen you to undertake this teaching mission no obstacle will hinder you from carrying out your plan and that by September next you will surely embark on your journey, fully determined to make this trip as successful and enduring as possible”.*

Before embarking her journey, she studied some Spanish,

*“...as the Guardian so strongly stressed the need for Spanish in my letter”.*

Finally on September 25, 1939, she sailed from San Francisco. In the vessel she was travelling, there was another young pioneer, Johnny Eichenauer, who after remaining a short period in Panama, travelled to El Salvador with great success in teaching the Faith:

*“We arrived in Panama October 4<sup>th</sup>, having left my son at the University of California. The first day we met Mathew Kaszab, two days later with Cora Oliver. Cora and I lived and taught together for five months. In the Spring of 1940, different feelings turned my attention to a trip to the US. The decision was too difficult to make alone in these days when there are so few pioneers but with the help of Cora and John Streans, my path was made clear”.*

Once back in the US, Louise spent over six months visiting her son, and attending in most of the Summer Schools in Geyserville, Greenacre and Louhelen before she sailed back to Panama in late September 1940.

## A BRIEF ACCOUNT

Louis has been in correspondence with the Inter America Committee’s chairman, Loulie Matthews before she embarked for her pioneering post. Although there was a long discussion of sending her to Costa Rica, the neighboring northern country to Panama, but instead she chose to go to Panama. To come out of doubt, she ventured to write to the beloved Guardian

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116. Neighbouring country to Panama

117. His brother and sometime his secretary



who approved of her for Panama. Yet the matter of her going to Costa Rica dragged long until she did establish herself in Panama. In June 30, 1939, she wrote to Nellie French of the IAC:

*“Yesterday I was able to obtain some very interesting information about Panama from some government employees who live in Gatun<sup>118</sup> and they asked me to call them when I come. They told me that the Tivoli Hotel was a very expensive place to live but that they made good rates for tourists. I cannot afford to live at a first-class hotel here and they told me that such a thing as renting a room the way we do here was almost an impossibility because there were the very rich and the very poor and not middle class. So, I am writing to you to ask you to write to the American Consul in advance and ask him whether he could suggest a place. I had hope to live with a Spanish speaking family in order to perfect my Spanish for further use, but they seemed to think this would not be a good thing to do.*

Louise mentions of the pre-conditions set for living in Panama:

*“They also said that the authorities were very strict and that I must have official recognition of my teaching work from the American consul. On account of an over-crowded population, they do not encourage foreigners. It will be necessary to deposit \$300.00 with the authorities unless I either live at the Tivoli Hotel, which is an American institution or be sponsored by the United Fruit Co<sup>119</sup>. If I buy a round-trip ticket (6 months) from the United Fruit Co. they will stand behind me and I will not have to deposit the \$300.00”.*

She goes on doing her evaluation of these conditions with the help of her friends in Panama who wrote to her: *“These friends suggested that I write to the consul but I am asking you to do so because of your experience along this line and because I might make some error unwittingly. Will you please tell him what you consider necessary about my teaching and ask about a place to stay. It will be such an advantage to know in advance. Meanwhile I will write to someone who knows of the Faith a Mr. Moore, Hotel Tivoli, Ancon. A letter sent to me by Mrs. Latimer contains this statement: “His daughter-in-law told me that several people in Ancon were interested in Baha’i Revelation – and please let Mrs. Caswell look up these lovely people” ... There will be much red tape and we must get there things done ahead of time as much as possible as time is short and I would like to sail about Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> from San Francisco”.*

The Inter America Committee (members: Amelia Collins, Sara Kenny, Leroy Ioas and Myrtle Dodge) in their meeting of July 9, 1939 discussed that Louise to be sent to Costa Rica instead of Panama. They approved a sum of USD 250 for travelling expenses. Yet, the recommendation remains in minutes that “This Committee recommends that Mrs. Louise Caswell go to Panama on the basis of the original vote of the National Spiritual Assembly for a six-months period and to make a survey of the surrounding area.

Louise had already received a letter from Louile as per her commendation that she makes her headquarters in Costa Rica. Louise wrote back<sup>120</sup>:

*“Received your letter with suggestion that I make headquarter in Costa Rica. If advisable I will be satisfied. However I have already written University of Panama to see if I could take a course there. I am adjustable to NSA decision”.*

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118. The town of Gatun was in the Canal Zone fringe, a small American town somewhere between Panama City and Colon.

119. The United Fruit Company managed many branches throughout Latin America.

120. Undated letter

However, the Inter America's unofficial meeting -because of lack of quorum- of July 23, 1939, the list of suggested pioneers for Central America is being written as follow:

<i>Mrs. Oliver</i>	<i>Panama</i>
<i>Mrs. Caswell &amp; Miss Gewertz</i>	<i>Costa Rica</i>
<i>Mrs. Ruth Moffet</i>	<i>San Salvador</i>
<i>Mrs. Gayle Woolson</i>	<i>Dominican Republic</i>
<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Blackwell</i>	<i>Haiti</i>
<i>Mr. Marangela</i>	<i>Cuba</i>
<i>Mr. Mathew Kaszab</i>	<i>Nicaragua</i>
<i>Mr. Sluter</i>	<i>Guatemala</i>
<i>Mr. Roca &amp; John Eichenauer</i>	<i>Honduras</i>

According to the list, Louise Caswell was destined to go to Costa Rica. Yet, Louise had written to Shoghi Effendi on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June and had received the following letter from him:

*"Louise Caswell, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1939*  
*Dear Baha'i Sister;*

*The Guardian has received your letter of the 28<sup>th</sup> June and was inexpressibly rejoiced at the news of your projected teaching trip to Panama. He hopes that the N.S.A. & the Inter-America Committee have chosen you to undertake this teaching mission no obstacle will hinder you from carrying out your plan, and that by September next, you will surely embark on your journey fully determined to make this trip as successful and enduring in its results as possible.*

*"Your project to take a course in Spanish at the University of Panama & also to live with the Spanish family while there, with the view of perfecting your knowledge of that language, Shoghi Effendi feels, is most splendid, & he would urge you from now on to make every possible effort to learn Spanish, so as to be able to speak it sufficiently well in order to start teaching once you reach Panama.*

*"A good knowledge of that language is indeed indispensable for all those pioneers who intend to teach either in Central or South America, & it should be the main concern of the teaching bodies in charge of the Central & South American teaching campaign to provide all such prospective pioneers with the fullest opportunity not only to acquire a perfect mastery of Spanish but in addition to familiarize themselves as thoroughly as possible with the history, customs & the social & religious background & traditions of the people in these Latin American countries. The Summer-School, one of whose chief aims it is to train & prepare the believers to become well-qualified & competent teachers, offers indeed good prospects of developing into a training ground for all prospective Baha'i pioneers, & it would be therefore most opportune if the Schools decide to start classes for the teaching of Spanish, & of any such subjects as would be helpful for teaching in Spanish-speaking countries.*

*"The Guardian knowing how heavy the burden of your financial responsibilities as present, particularly as your son will son enter the University of California wishes me to assure you that he will specially & most fervently pray that your business affairs may soon untangled & settled in a way that would be most satisfactory to you & most conducive to the furtherance of your teaching work in Panama.*

*“With renewed expression of his abiding appreciation of your untiring services for the extension & consolidation of the Cause in Knoxville, & wishing you continued guidance & confirmation in your labours”,*

*Yours very sincerely,  
H. Rabbani”* [Husayn Rabbani]

In Shoghi Effendi’s own handwriting:

***“Dear & prized co-worker;***

***“You stand on the threshold of a great & historic mission, so high in rank, so weighty with responsibility so arduous in nature, so rich in possibilities, so unique in significance. Perseverance will enable you to reap an abundant harvest. I will specially continually & ardently pray for you & am eager to hear of the progress of your historic work. The Master is well-pleased with you, watches over you & will rightly bless your endeavors. Rest assured & be happy.***

***“Your true and grateful brother, Shoghi”***

Louise forwarded this letter to Loulie with her remarks on why she feels that she is being destined to go to Panama:

*“This letter reached me in S.F.<sup>121</sup> the day before I met with 4 members of the IA Committee. Some of them still favored Costa Rica, for me but events which followed have confirmed strongly my trip to Panama. For instance, I met the Panamanian Consul in San Francisco & he introduced me to a lady who runs a boarding house just across the street from the University. I couldn’t do this well in the U.S. could you? Now I am staying with Mrs. Pilkington, Helen’s mother and we talk Spanish altogether when alone. I wired the N.S.A. a night letter last night, putting forth strong feeling of destiny in Panama. As you know I was quite content to go to Costa Rica until I heard from the Guardian. I wrote to him before there was any plan to send me to C.R. and I suggested that I make a visit to C.R. for a time as the rate of exchange would favor me & I had heard living in Panama was high. He ignored this mention and merely replied that he would pray for the settling of my affairs & I am confident his prayer will be answered soon as the time is short, and the sands of civilization are shifting. I also think I asked for the budget in a letter to the N.S.A. A good Norwegian boat leaves here Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>, stops four days in S.F. I hope to take this one. May see you in S.F. George<sup>122</sup> says you are going to be there in Sept. and also Marion. How nice to see both of you. Hope you are feeling better. George said you had been ill.*

*Do you not think this letter a final confirmation? Notice the Guardian mentions Panama thrice in this letter. He also applies the word ‘unique’ to this mission so I can see no reason for my not going”.*

Louise wrote to Loulie from Knoxville sometimes in mid July 1939:

*“Your letter finally reached me through the kindness of the post-man. I wonder whether you received my letter written a couple of weeks after the Convention. I gave you my plans as far as I know them in that letter. So far, they have not changed & I will be here at the above address*

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121. San Francisco

122. George Latimer

*until the middle of August when I will go to Portland to get a passport, etc. Then I will leave as soon as possible from Portland, Seattle of S.F. depending on which way will be cheapest but of course I want to get there as quickly as possible. I have begun Spanish & have been told by a Costa Rican whom I met recently that I could speak in a few weeks. Discount his courtesy and I will be able to speak well in 3 months. This young man gave me addresses in Costa Rica. They are nice to have”.*

Yet there is another letter from Louise, again from the same address and with no date, is written to Louile. In this letter she is being given the institutional confirmation of her pioneering post in Panama. Obviously, this letter has been written after the earlier mentioned above letter:

*“A letter from Horace<sup>123</sup> brought me official information that I was to go to Panama. I didn’t get to see you again at the Convention, but Marion told me of this decision. There can be no doubt of the wisdom of this since consultation of the NSA and the Inter America Committee is under Diving Guidance”.*

Louise asks in the letter for any practical help she can receive from Loulie:

*“Please write me any information you have that will be of practical assistance to me. September will be the earliest possible date of departure from Portland where I must go on business. You probably can tell me what literature to take what cloths I will need whether I can use electric iron, where to stay at first before I get settled and numerous other things”.*

As determined she is for her trip, she writes:

*“I am going to go to Summer School to study Spanish. This is a colossal responsibility & I shall do my best to prepare myself for it. Time is precious I wish I could leave sooner. Do let me hear from you. By the way, nearly every one of the Baha’is at that meeting Sunday morning wanted to go to Panama. Gayle Woolson was the only one who mentioned no preference. I think she is a good pioneer material. A marvelous exhilaration lifted us to a plane of unity as we discussed plans for this work”.*

On July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Louise wrote to Loulie where she handwrote above the typed letter saying:

*“Loulie, I am counting on you to copy to Le Roy<sup>124</sup> to tell me books to take.”*

From the contents of her letter, it is understood that she is un-decisive, her heart is in Panama, but her mind is in Costa Rica! She wrote again to Louile:

*“...Yes, I am thrilled about the Central American venture. Of all places in the U.S.A., I had to come to Knoxville to meet a Spanish teacher who has done research work in Costa Rican literature. He has given me introductions to teachers and men of letters and since the country is most Spanish and the most democratic of all Central American republics, I am sure the work will be pleasant there. In Panama doubtless the Guardian has regard for the hardships of the maidservants and wishes to protect them as much as possible from certain difficulties. However, I have several good contacts with Americans and can surely take on trip there during the winter.*

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123. Horace Holley, the Secretary of the NSA of the US

124. Le Roy, one of the affluent and active early believers and the Treasurer of the NSA at the time.

*The bulletin of the Panama University sounds most thrilling and were I to spend six months there I would attend the University and perfect my Spanish. However, if the Guardian wants men there may Baha'u'llah raise them up<sup>125</sup>. We surely need them. My letter of introduction to the Costa Rican friends asks them to find me a family to board with. So, I feel that I will be welcomed very warmly there”.*

In her letter, Louise lengthily describes about the ticket and all the money business, etc. for her trip that might be taking more than six months, as initially the NSA asked her to take:

*“I might stay longer than 6 months and probably will...You can see from the above that I am already “at sea”.*

The Minutes of the Inter-America Committee of August 27, referring to the ‘*Excerpts were read from the Guardian’s letter of 8/3/39 regarding pioneering in Latin America*’, the distribution of the pioneers is mentioned:

*“... it was voted that Marangella go to Cuba, Roca to Honduras and Louise Caswell to Panama. It was discussed whether the indicated approval of the Guardian was for these particular persons and if there had been any information from the Guardian to the N.S.A. that Louise Caswell should go to Panama. It was concluded that no names were mentioned by the Guardian to the N.S.A.”.*

This point of ‘who should go to Panama as pioneer, should be male or female, should be one or two’ remains as a question for the Committee as well as for Mathew Kaszab. Mathew questioned this point from the Committee and received no answer. He could not conclude the reason for him ‘a male pioneer’ already in Panama, should leave and go somewhere else and two ‘female pioneers’ take his place!

There have been cables from the Guardian stressing:

*“...the immediate settlement of the Central American states”, it is recorded in the same Minutes: “Mrs. Caswell first volunteered to go to Panama and the N.S.A approved of the plan. Also, it was the recommendation of this committee at the last meeting that Mrs. Caswell should go to Panama. Since then, we understand that there has been correspondence between Mrs. Caswell and Mrs. Matthews and from that we understand that Mrs. Caswell had given up Panama and intended going to Costa Rica, and late changed again to Panama. In the meantime, Mathew Kaszab has gone to Panama but expects to move. Mrs. Caswell believed that it would be possible for her to remain a year provided arrangements could be made for her soon. Mrs. Caswell has a letter from the N.S.A. approving the \$300 budget, which she believes will cover the travel expenses.”*

Up until the Minutes of June 28, 1939, the matter of should Louise go to Panama has been the dilemma for the Inter America Committee. The Committee questions:

*“Should Cora Oliver be sent to Panama and not obtain work which would necessitate her return, Mrs. Caswell, after establishing a group in Costa Rica could go to Panama.*

*“In the event Mrs. Caswell does not go to Panama she will go to Costa Rica and in the*

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125. Initially, the beloved Guardian had written that men instead of women to be sent to Panama.

meantime, Cora Oliver will be considered further. It might be feasible that Mrs. Caswell would be a key person. Mrs. Caswell heard at the Convention that she had been appointed to go to Panama for a six-month period. In the middle of the summer Mrs. Matthews advised that she had a letter from the Guardian stating that men should go to Panama and asked if Mrs. Caswell would like to go to Costa Rica. Mrs. Caswell replied stating she would be willing to do so<sup>126</sup>.

This Committee asked Mrs. Caswell if she had a preference as to place and she replied that she did not and would be happy to go either to Costa Rica or Panama but felt since receiving the letter from the Guardian that although Panama would not be as pleasant that she should go there, if not at first, eventually. She pointed out the fact that if she was a student at the University, she would have a place in the Community and would be able to make better contacts. Should she go to Costa Rica first she thought she might stop over in Panama for a week or two and help Mr. Kaszab in his teaching work. Mrs. Caswell feels that her letter from the Guardian was a call to go to Panama, but the committee pointed out that the Guardian would probably have been just as eager for her to go to Costa Rica and the N.S.A. and the Inter-America Committee made that recommendation”.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, Leroy Ioas<sup>127</sup>, as well as the Inter America Committee, wrote to Louise while still in Portland, clarifying the position discussed back and forth between the NSA and the Committee, clarifies and concludes the case of Louise upon the NSA’s decision and points out that Louise will be for Panama, while Cora will be for Canal Zone<sup>128</sup>:

“I have your favor of September 5<sup>th</sup>, with regard to the funds for your trip to Panama. I assume you have had a wire from Horace, telling you of the decision of the NSA, that you should go to Panama, having in mind specifically the opportunity for you to work with the people of Panama, rather than those of the Canal Zone, who no doubt would be US Government employees. The NSA also approved Cora Oliver of Washington, D.C. going to Panama, but her main fort will be work with those in Canal Zone. It is possible she can secure employment in one of the Government departments.

“It was further understood that when the vacation period of the University sets in, for the three months period, which you referred to, that you will go to Costa Rica, to open up, or assist in the work there. I don’t know just what procedure the NSA or the Inter-American Committee has or will set up to take care of budget for pioneers, etc. but, so you may not be delayed in concluding your plans, I am enclosing my own check for the \$300 budget voted; and I will secure payment for it from Roy direct.

“Needless to say, I am most happy the entire matter of your settlement and work in Latin America is now concluded, and in a way that will meet your views, as well as those of the Inter-America Committee, who have felt you could do such good in Costa Rica. This place is a great burden on you, but we all know you will be able to bear it admirably and will gain signal victories for the Faith in Panama and Costa Rica. As the Guardian has promised you in His latest letter, the Master will both guide and confirm your labors. If you leave on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September, when will that get you to Panama?”

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126. Emphasis added.

127. Member of the NSA of the US

128. Canal territory, although within the country of Panama, but it was administered by the US Government.

On 7<sup>th</sup> of September, Louise wrote Loulie from Portland, Oregon on the specific matter of Panama or Costa Rica that was put forward to the Guardian, and the answer was Panama:

*“Do not think that I was hurt about the change of plans. It suited me perfectly until I hear from the Guardian, and you can see how definite his letter is. I mentioned Costa Rica to him before the change in plans merely speaking of it as a place to go to save some money as I understood living was expensive in Panama. He only replied that he would pray for the settlement of my financial affairs and never mentioned Costa Rica. Of course, he wants settlement & the way will open undoubtedly. Don't you think so? I think something will take place whereby I will do some work in C.R. also as I have a fine letter of introduction. My present plan is to enroll in the University of Panama. I think this will give me a fine standing in the community as well as enable me to become informed of the history of the countries and make contacts”.*

Knowing of the institutional plans for Mathew Kaszab, already in Panama, asks Loulie:

*“Please do all that you can to keep Mathew there till I arrive. It would be a help to meet him, and I hope he can stay for some time as the field is very vast and we will work in different ways. His experience will be very helpful to me”.*

Then Louise adds that she has:

*“...written the hostess of the “casa de huespedes<sup>129</sup>” across the street from the University to save me a room. Pray that all will be well. I met her through the Panamanian Consul in S.F.<sup>130</sup> who is an alumno<sup>131</sup> of the Un. And he was quite thrilled at the idea of my attending. As you so aptly said the Holy Spirit is our guide especially when we are alone, and the Guardian approved of my living with a Spanish family, and this seemed a wonderful answer to meet this woman who takes pupils and lives just across the street from the University. These are stirring days, and no one knows the end. It is hard to believe that the last days are upon us. But it makes no difference to our plans. This was only making our efforts more intense”.*

On the 24 of September 1939, the Inter-America Committee met<sup>132</sup> and discussed the case of each pioneer being dispatched to different countries. On the Case of Louise Caswell, it is being recorded:

*“It was the opinion of the committee that Mrs. Caswell be given full responsibility of making a decision and that she herself should determine that if the environment is one of which she cannot act, and if she finds that the people in Panama are too difficult, she can turn to the Inter-America Committee and ask to go to Costa Rica. She has written to the N.S.A. that she would go to Panama, had contacted a woman who ran a boarding house there, that she would go to school there until Feb. and then go to Costa Rica. She sailed for Panama from San Francisco on Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>. Mrs. Matthews will write Louise telling her that she must let us know of the exact conditions which surrounds her”.*

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129. Guest house in Spanish

130. San Francisco

131. Student, in Spanish

132. With the following members Mrs. Loulie Mathews; Mrs. Amelia Collins; Mrs. Helen Bishop; Mrs. Sarah Kenny, Mrs. Myrtle Dodge and Mr. Leroy Ioas

On a postcard dated 26 September, Louise wrote to Loulie:

*“Our boat was kept outside the breakwater all night because of the storm. The harbor was full of warships. Johnny Eichenauer is going on [the] same boat and will supply me with some pamphlets”.*

Upon receiving the post card, Loulie wrote to Louise, c/o Mathew Kaszab on October 2, mentioning the passing of Miss Martha Root<sup>133</sup>:

*“Our darling Martha Root died Friday in Honolulu and will be buried there. I think her life will rank the greatest of the martyrs. I don’t know who will ever again come up to such a standard. As you know she had a cancer but did nothing about it. And reaching Honolulu from New Zealand was her last port.... nine times she had been around the world giving herself no rest or comfort.... travelling in the cheapest manner and meeting the people of the greatest importance through nothing but her spiritual power. I know that from the other plane she will surely help our work greatly”.*

The points mentioned in this short letter, shapes greatly the pioneering life of Louise.

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133. The unique and outstanding travel-teacher of the Faith who taught the Faith to Mary Queen of Rumania



## CORA OLIVER (1901 – 1997)

**"In 1930, when I first learned about the Baha'i Faith, it was the Guardianship, which attracted me. The Baha'i Covenant was like a magnet drawing me to that one and only authority, which has to this date, provided the security and inspiration, which has enabled me to overcome obstacles and press on to serve our beloved Faith"<sup>134</sup>**



Cora H. Oliver

The third pioneer to reach the shores of Panama was Mrs. Cora Oliver. She was born in New York on March 19, 1901, from Caucasian parents born in the US, Edwin L. & Augusta Hitt. She was only 19 when got married to John Robertson in March 1920. Later on, became a widow with no children left behind. Cora before becoming a Baha'i, was active with the Presbyterian and later with Methodist Church, from which she resigned on May 4, 1930, as soon as she was convinced that she had found the Faith she has been looking for, remaining strong and steadfast throughout the rest of her life, which ended on October 23, 1997, at the age of 96. Cora was quite a dedicated believer all during her life.

According to a letter dated July 25, 1939, she has been suggested by Harlan Ober<sup>135</sup> whom she met at Louhelen School, to start for her pioneering for which she mentions:

*"...Yesterday I received a wire from Mrs. Matthews<sup>136</sup> ...that the National and Inter-America Committee were anxious to have me go to Panama".*

She has been applying for some jobs in different universities to become a pioneer, but her primary concern was to seek employment somewhere. Yet, Mr. Ober was trying to guide her to her spiritual destiny. He wrote on July 27, 1939:

*"...The doors really opened in a marvelous way for you to go to Panama, and this is clearly a much greater service than a dozen positions in the University of Michigan even if you were to be chosen President of the University".*

Harlan presses on the issue and tries that Cora sees with her spiritual eyes the opportunity she might miss:

*"...There are thousands of people who are doing work in just the place they wish, in the ideal associations, at a splendid salary, having no financial worries, under conditions ensuring good*

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134. Cora Oliver's response to the NSA of Panama, 1977

135. Harlan Ober (1881-1962), NSA member, later pioneer to Pretoria – South Africa, where he passed away in 1962.

136. Chairman of the Inter-America Committee

health etc. but they will never be remembered for great universal services”.

Harlan Ober, truly a kind father to Cora, tells her in his letter, calling it: ‘divine inspiration’, he says:

*“...The qualities of personality, of attraction, of warm-heartedness, of faithfulness and insight are an asset everywhere, but they are endowed with the greatest power when they are combined with sacrifice and divine inspiration”.*

Harlan Ober talks to Cora about Panama and once there, facing difficulties, but recompense is immense:

*“...Of course, the Panama work is far more difficult, the climate difficult, the agreeable association limited, but the service is a service to the Kingdom of God. And when the believers become confirmed after many trials and heartaches, it will be heavenly there in this important outpost of the Cause...You will of course have to decide in your own heart, though I had no doubt at Louhelen that you were prepared to go to Panama if the door opened. In Panama you become one of the great pioneers whose services cannot be overestimated. You will establish a direct contact with the Guardian and will be a member of his army in unique way”.*

## **GUARDIAN'S MESSAGE**

Harlan Ober wrote another letter to Cora only two days later, on July 29, 1939, still with more encouraging and convincing words, quoting extensively from the recent letter of the Guardian. Due to the importance of such a letter, most of it is transcribed here:

*“A wonderful letter has just come from the Guardian in reference to the Teaching work in Central America, a letter which will thrill every pioneer teacher. I do not imagine that anybody can estimate the importance of this phase of the teaching work in the world today, for it is like the growth of a beautiful garden in an area that is rapidly becoming desert. While self-interest, prejudice, hatred and lack of faith and confidence are determining the policies of the people of the world, these intrepid teachers, characterized with heavenly qualities are arising to spread the divine fragrances, and to call the people of these countries to the standard of the Oneness of Mankind, to love and unity.*

*“The Guardian says: “This present phase of the inter-continental teaching campaign, coinciding as it does with the steadily rising tide of uncertainty and gloom throughout the world, acquires a special significance, and offers indeed a unique challenge to the community of the American believers, who, as the undisputed vanguards of the Faith in the West are now called upon to demonstrate, in fields hitherto unexplored and through exploits as yet unrivalled by any of their sister-communities throughout the West, the efficacy of this new saving grace of God revealed in this age through the person of Baha’u’llah.”*

*“The Guardian will continue to pray that the members of the American Baha’i community may arise and meet the challenge of the present hour with such audacity, such self-sacrifice and such unflinching determination as truly befits their incontestably high spiritual position, and in a manner that would evoke the admiration and excite the envy not only of the entire body of their co-religionists, but of the whole unbelieving world outside.*

*“Again, he says: “Let the privileged few, the ambassadors of the Message of Baha’u’llah bear in mind His words as they go forth on their errands service to His Cause. “It behooveth whomsoever willeth to journey for the sake of God, and whose intention is to proclaim His Word and quicken the dead, to bathe himself with the waters of detachment, and to adorn his temple with the ornaments of resignation and submission. Let trust in God be his shield, and reliance upon God his provision, and the fear of God his raiment. Let patience be his helper and praiseworthy conduct his succorer, and goodly deeds his army. Then will the concourse on high sustain him. Then will the denizens of the Kingdom of Names march forth with him, and the banners of divine guidance and inspiration be unfurled on his right hand and before him”<sup>137</sup>.*

Harlan Ober also in this letter mentions of a cablegram from the Guardian:

*“...in response to the one we sent including your name as going to Panama, showing that every one of the Central American countries would now be covered”.*

The Cable of the Guardian reads:

***“Thrilling news exceeds highest expectations Assure pioneers both settled [and] prospective unanimous voice Baha’i world acclaims their action. Posterity will celebrate achievements. My everlasting gratitude, Shoghi”***

Harlan emphasizes on the:

*“Response of the believers to this call of the Guardian is certainly one of the most wonderful actions of our times”,*

and he assures her that:

*“...I have no doubt that this great urge and dedication of lives to bigger and broader actions and motives will lead to steady stream of sanctified souls into Central and South America in the years that are ahead”.*

Then Harlan points out of this great privilege:

*“...Your great privilege is to go to that spot, which Abdu’l-Baha pointed out would have a unique station and significance because of its location as a point through, which the Orient and Occident would pass. No one can imagine the destiny of that spot or the destiny of the Baha’i who goes there and raises the banner of God”.*

Cora received Harlan’s letter and quickly answered in the very next day of July 30<sup>th</sup>, acknowledging the coming of tests and difficulties, and more in future:

*“...I knew that all you say is right and my weakness had all but overcome me. Even though I knew tests would come, it seemed as if another door had opened. I know other tests; very real ones will come and pray that strength and courage will be given me to do that service for the Cause”.*

Little did she know of the upcoming tests once she settled in her pioneering country. To overcome tests, it requires great strength. No test would be greater than misunderstanding among the pioneers, which would be halting the progress of the Faith. However, at this stage,

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137. Harlan Ober’s letter to Cora Oliver dated July 29, 1939, quoting Shoghi Effendi’s message.

Cora was so convinced of her pioneering to Panama that she would do anything once she got there. She assured Harlan that:

*"I will try to get some employment with a Spanish family to teach children English".*

Cora acknowledges the thrust of Harlan to this project:

*"If I go to Panama and I am sure I am, you have played a definite part in making it realized".*

And she assures him that:

*"...all my efforts now are being used to get employment in Panama...May I be given the courage to meet whatever comes and the spiritual power to carry the Faith to a new field".*

In the following letter, Harlan expresses his delightfulness to hear that Cora is making progress in the matter of the journey to Panama. He urges Cora to write to the Inter America Committee, informing them of her decision, as:

*"...they are under the impression that you have given up the idea".*

Harlan in his letter puts Cora before her conscience to make her decision:

*"In this matter, you must make your own spiritual contest with the Guardian. Whoever responds, responds to his call and to his inspiration. Everyone is weak, and without divine assistance nothing can be accomplished".*

Harlan, paints for Cora to see the reality of pioneering, he wrote:

*"Arabic Hidden Words<sup>138</sup> is always interesting when we are thinking of services in the Cause that entail sacrifice and danger. How many are run over in the streets or die from accidents in their protected homes or die from disease while living under what they consider ideal. It is increasingly apparent that the only ideal condition in this day is to live in the shadow of the Guardian and to guide one's life in accordance with his exhortations. For this brings true protection both in this world and in the world to come".*

Great persuasion.

## **DETERENCE**

Due to her financial circumstance, Cora was still hesitant to take such a thorough decision and for this reason she had written and asked for financial help from the Inter America Committee for which she had not heard of them. She wrote on August 17, 1939, to Harlan Ober:

*"Mrs. Matthews wired yesterday advising that the Committee must know definitely about the Panama project by September first so another could sent. I sent my reply air mail answering her I would let them know by that time...Since I have not had the reaction of the Committee regarding finances or any advice or suggestion about the project, I do not feel I can expect*

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138. The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah, is a revealed book of wisdom and exhortations, consisting of two sections, Arabic section contains 72 short paragraphs and Persian section 83. It has been superbly translated into English by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian.

anything from that source”.

However, Harlan wrote and urged Cora to write to the Inter America Committee:

*“...if I were in your position, I would write the facts to the Inter-America Committee and tell them that if they will advance the money for the trip to Panama, and will provide the means required per month for your living, while getting a position, that you are prepared to start for Panama in September...”*

But Harlan is counting on Cora’s capacity and dedication, he wrote:

*“The NSA did not accept your offer simply because of the financial situation...It acted on the basis of your capacity, and your desire to dedicate yourself to the carrying out of the Guardian’s plan. Of course, the sooner all pioneer teachers are able to get jobs and therefore release funds for additional development elsewhere, the more pleased everyone always is, because it means steady progress”.*

And then, Harlan expresses in his letter to Cora, the wish of the Guardian:

*“The Guardian wishes every Central American country settled before this year is finished...You are willing to offer your life and your abilities for this work and this is the real pioneer spirit”.*

Harlan then puts his thumb over the pulse of the main issue of pioneering:

*“The main point is whether the spirit of the pioneer, which caused you to offer to go forward, still burns brightly and vigorously in your heart, and if you long with a real, and ineffable longing to go forth and to spread the Divine Glad Tidings to the people of that land”.*

And he presses on very convincingly, turning the mirror of truth to one’s own face: *“It is the flame in your own heart that will determine not only your life but the actions of the Committees. They search for the finest spiritual material to carry out the divine purpose that the Guardian is unfolding. With the utmost courage and sacrifice, we must step intimately and without hesitation into the heart of the Beloved and grasp with a firm hand, the Hand of the Friend, and the opportunities that he opens up”.*

Cora wrote on September 20<sup>th</sup> to Harlan, giving him the good news of her upcoming voyage to Panama:

*“As you know, the Panama project has been approved and really the doors did open in the most wonderful way. I cannot doubt the confirmations and now can see that the delays and confusion was a test for me preparing me for this service. I am not sorry for it all and know that the encouragement you gave me at a doubtful moment was a source of great help. Surely, it is right for me to go. The doors to all the other projects have been closed in a way that only those who understand how Baha’u’llah works could appreciate...I leave September 29<sup>th</sup> on the Grace Line SS...”*

On the same day, Cora, wrote to the NSA with the same news as to Harlan: *“I have corresponded with both Mr. Ioas and Mrs. Matthews about the confirmation of the Panama project and final plans have been made for my leaving to settle in Panama. I leave September 29<sup>th</sup> at five o’clock on the Grace Line SS...”*

## BON VOYAGE

Harlan Ober, with his September 22 letter, brought the project to its successful end when he wrote to Cora:

*"Your letter...certainly brought the greatest happiness, for I know that it means the opening of the most wonderful chapter in your life".*

Harlan mentions of the upcoming obstacles and other difficulties when one embarks on a spiritual journey in the path of God, as tests in that pathway are for every pioneer:

*"Whenever we undertake any important enterprise there are always obstacles, and you will no doubt find many of them in Panama. If we can only become detached from all else save God, and become completely conscious of His Guidance, every path will be made clear, and every obstacle will be overcome".*

Here, Harlan turns the mirror of the call of the Guardian to her heart:

*"The Guardian's call to your heart, and the response you registered, brought the divine confirmations, and clarified everything, because you were steadfast. This will always be true".*

Then Harlan describes to Cora in his letter the importance of Panama and at the same time, intuitively he advises Cora of the upcoming tests:

*"You are going to a place of outstanding importance, and this is a great honor and a great privilege. At every instant you will be surrounded by the divine confirmations, and victory alone is possible, though the difficulties may appear to be insurmountable".*

Harlan Ober closes this chapter with assurances of his prayers for her success and any other future service he can offer:

*"I shall continue to pray for your success in every aspect of your work, and I hope that you will write me from time to time and always let me know if there is any way in which I may serve you. May blessings of Baha'u'llah pour down upon you and may you carry the flag of victory!"*

In her November 9, 1939, letter Cora mentions to Harlan Ober:

*"...The bounties are most too much to believe. Louise Caswell and I are together and find it a real advantage... In fact, I never felt more at home. I do not feel in a new place even though all is different".*

It is ironic that Cora in 25 pages of her life story never mentions the name of Harlan Ober as her prime mover and supporter to pioneering to Panama!<sup>139</sup>

Louile Matthews, the Chairman of the Inter America Committee also wrote on the same date of September 22 to Cora, expressing NSA's and their appreciation:

*"...The members of the National Assembly cannot express [enough] their gratitude to you for contributing your services in these opening phases of the International teaching mission assigned to the American Baha'is. You have our wholehearted support and continuous best*

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139. Harlan Ober, her true mentor, of whom unfortunately, she never mentions a word. It would have been only fair to give some credit to the person who acquainted her with Panama. F.

wishes for your success and happiness”.

## CORA'S DIARY

Cora wrote in her diary on how the Guardianship had attracted her to the Faith in her early days, which made her frequently contact him from her pioneering post.:

*“In 1930 when I first learned about the Baha’i Faith, it was the Guardianship which attracted me. The Baha’i Covenant was like a magnet drawing me to that one and only authority, which has to this date provided the security and inspiration, which has enabled me to overcome obstacles and press on to serve our beloved Faith...The messages of the beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, the Sign of God on earth, always moved me deeply...”*

Cora, because of her studying the message of the Guardian, “The Advent of Divine Justice”<sup>140</sup> caused her the desire for pioneering. She responded immediately by expressing her wish to her beloved Guardian letting him know of her intention of becoming a pioneer in a virgin territory not known to her. In response, Shoghi Effendi wrote to her on March 22, 1939:

***“May the Beloved direct your steps, pour forth His blessings upon you, and aid you to bear aloft, in virgin territory, the standard of His Faith, and proclaim befittingly the truths of this Divine and glorious Revelation.”***

After talking to Mrs. Emogene Hoagg<sup>141</sup>, Cora wrote in diary:

*“It became apparent that Panama should be the chosen goal, as it appeared to be the only Latin American country, which offered the possibility of employment”.*

What she writes in her memoir, is not truly the reflection of her correspondence with Harlan Ober. She writes: *“After consulting with the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and the encouragement of Mrs. Louile Matthews, Chairman of the Inter-America Committee, I left for Panama on the 29 September 1939...”*

She received another letter dated October 21, 1939, which was written on behalf of the Guardian, probably as an answer to another letter addressed to him:

*“The Guardian will specially pray that your hope of securing suitable employment would enable you to meet, and gradually confirm a number of spiritually receptive and influential people who would arise and help in their turn in furthering the knowledge of the Cause throughout Panama...You should take heart, and firmly persevere, however insuperable some of the obstacles you find in your way may first appear, in your high task...”*

Then in his own handwriting, Shoghi Effendi added:

***“How great and enviable is your post as an advance guard of the army of Baha’i pioneers who are to arise and proclaim the message throughout the American Continent. I am deeply appreciative of the spirit that prompted you to arise and***

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140. Written on December 25, 1938

141. Emogene Hoagg was the first Baha’i of California, learning of the Faith through Phoebe Hearst, Lua and Edward Getsinger.

***serve. My prayers will accompany you and I trust you will be able to render outstanding and historic services. Persevere and be happy and confident..."***

Cora comments in her diary of how the,

*"Quotations from Shoghi Effendi's letters...show how close he was to those who arose to serve in those early days. He was constant comforter, and inspired one to arise as he challenged each one to strive to achieve the high goals set before them.*

On October 21, 1939, the same day she received the letter of the beloved Guardian, a joint letter was addressed to the Baha'is as new pioneers from Panama. They both were happy and grateful for the opportunity given:

***"Waves of gratitude sweep over us at the thought of the bounty of pioneering in Panama. The body seems to be an instrument of the spirit and not an obstacle to one's daily activities. At this time, we feel only the gentle breezes of the spirit and in prayer there is no static of the world. The dawn of the new day is ushered in as the eastern sun rises over the ocean coloring the clouds and water with the morning glory silhouetting the tall palms, which skirt the bay. All created things bear witness to the reinvigoration of their lives and mutely adore Him at this hour of awakening while the believers in God conscious of the Greatest Name utters His praise and knows that the scattering angels are stirring the righteous souls to arise and serve. Each day brings new confirmations in both the material and spiritual worlds. Constantly aware of the loftiness of our mission we use every available opportunity in our contacts from shopkeeper to university president to mention the Baha'i Faith.***

And they go on saying:

*"We see all races mingling in apparent harmony and on a footing of equality. However, deeper investigation has revealed that the attitude of superiority of the Zone people is subtly influencing the Panamanians in favor of light skin. Recently we saw a school parade of mediaeval splendor of much formality, priestly robes, artificial flowers and a statue of the Virgin. The educators, priests and nuns belong to an age that has passed. The solemn faces of the children testify to this. The different races were grouped together, and the white superiority was implied by the chosen angels who were of the white race. At the University too preference is shown as only two members of the staff are of Negro extraction while the majority of the students are on the dark side. We have also learned that no dark-skinned people hold high political offices. The presence of two white women attending the University exemplifies the teaching that deeds are more powerful than words. This is the unique feature of the teaching work in Panama. We wonder what will be the great calamities visited upon the whites as a retribution for their fateful mood. The Baha'is alone hold the key to the solution of this problem.*

*"We can more fully understand "this most challenging issue" since we are face to face with this problem where East meets West and North meets South. Driven by the unseen forces of a benign destiny the people of Panama are as yet unaware of the fact that they are being welded into a body politic evincing the oneness of humanity.*

*What a bounty for us to awaken them!*



And in another letter<sup>142</sup> to Loulie Mathews the new pioneer ladies testify of their high intentions:

*“On the whole our experiences in Panama have been very beautiful and greater confirmations have come since we have been together. We give you four reasons why two women pioneers in Panama are almost necessary:*

- A. *Living conditions*
- B. *Food*
- C. *Impression on others*
- D. *It just doesn't make sense for a woman to be alone here.*

*“We are both impressed with the importance of knowing Spanish and have registered at the University, free of charge, have been invited to attend two other schools and will also take some private work. Cora, has had practically no Spanish but Louise can speak informally but feels the limitations of lack of practice. Daily conversations with students, policemen, streetcar conductors, shopkeepers etc. all help to familiarize us with the language. The natives of Panama are most courteous and most helpful in assisting one. Three times we have been escorted by police to our destination in response to the question, “where is ???”.*

And they describe their joint activities:

*“A regular weekly meeting is being held Monday evenings at La Escuela de Artes y Oficios through the splendid efforts of Mathew Kaszab. These meetings are being attended by students among whom are Nunez Gomez, president of the school; an Indian girl; two dark skinned girls; a Nicaraguan law student whose father is a judge (He spoke of himself and two others as being three future Baha'is.). It appears to us that the class is growing. At these meetings each non-Baha'i is asked to read a prayers in Spanish; Mathew gives a talk in English which is translated and Louise makes a few remarks in Spanish. Considering the language barrier, a very strong spirit is present.*

*“When Johnny Eichenaur was here, we held a meeting of four Baha'is every evening. Occasionally Mr. Wantuk, the new Baha'i, came. He is very earnest and gets up a half-hour earlier than usual in order to read the Baha'i books. He has a friend who has been reading and is nearly ready to accept the Cause. We are enclosing some photographs which he took when the five Baha'is were together in Panama. Once we gave the message to our hostess and the head of St. Luke's Children Home. They listened with great interest and asked many questions which Mathew answered remarkably well. At the invitation of Miss Ogden, we later visited the home where she acquainted us with the work, which she was doing in what seemed to us a truly Baha'i spirit”.*

Below the description of their visit to the leading newspaper of Panama<sup>143</sup>:

*“On Monday, October 9<sup>th</sup> Louise went with Mathew to meet some of the people he had interested in the Cause. Mr. Young, editor of the weekly paper Panama Tribune, offered her the same courtesy he had offered Mathew. Mr. Young is a Jamaican negro. The following is a quotation from Louise's notes: “When Matthew took us<sup>144</sup> (Johnny and Louise) to search out the*

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142. Letter dated 21 October 1939

143. Panama Tribune

144. Johnny Eichenauer and Louise Caswell

president and secretary of the Pan-American Conference my intuition told me we had gone far enough as he wanted to go to their private homes which I realized was faux-pas”<sup>145</sup>. The Panamanians, a friendly yet subtle people must be approached with great finesse<sup>146, 147</sup>

In the early days of her pioneering in Panama, together with Louise Caswell, her only companion of the early stages of the establishment of the Faith, she recalls in her memoirs that:

*“...the directives given by Shoghi Effendi in the Advent of Divine Justice<sup>148</sup>, we made every effort to use this advice. At the dawn of each day, we supplicated God for assistance, and following the reported example of Martha Root, said the ‘Tablet of Ahmad’ three times over – sometimes exceeding that number. These prayers, as well as our confidence in their eventual results, stimulated our actions and brought blessed confirmations...”*

Alas, this practice did not take long before it was discontinued. This could be attributed to Cora’s finding a secure job in the Canal Zone, a void, which was filled with tests involuntarily, which are part and parcel of each devoted pioneer that cause slowing down the progress of the Faith, especially in that blessed territory.

Contrast with Mathew Kazsab, who was trying to get himself established somewhere in the Republic of Panama where jobs were too scarce, for Cora who only spoke English, there would not be any job opening in Panama, but in Canal Zone’s two adjacent cities of Balboa on Pacific or Cristobal, next on the Atlantic side.

## FINDING WORK

As Cora indicates in her memoirs<sup>149</sup>, that she found a simple job in the Canal Zone as ‘saleswoman’ and as she records:

*“The most menial work a white person could do in the Canal Zone. I was deeply grateful though, as I had determined to remain in the country”.*

Louise and Cora together had already written to the beloved Guardian, supposedly briefing him with their activities, and of course in this respect and the following is his answer:

***“...As regards your own efforts for securing a salaried position in the Canal Zone, the Guardian hopes and will especially pray that you may succeed in your efforts and may find such employment as would give you ample time and far-reaching opportunities to teaching the Cause, and quite independently of any financial assistance from the National Spiritual Assembly or Inter America Committee”.***

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145. A significant or embarrassing error or mistake: blunder

146. Cora was so advised about seeking a position with Panamanians. She was told to establish friendship first, while in the Zone the opposite is quite acceptable, that is one can ask for a position immediately.

147. This letter is being abruptly ended here and the very last sentence is hand-written.

148. Pages 42-45,

149. On March 7, 1940

And in his own handwriting:

***“The spirit of devotion and of detachment, which you are so powerfully demonstrating is a source of great joy and encouragement to me, and I wish to assure you of my steadfast and fervent prayers for both of you, that the Beloved may bless you abundantly in your labours and historic work in the service of His glorious Faith.***

***“Your true and grateful brother, Shoghi”***

Louise always had enough funds to get by, as she was affluent. But for Cora, it was important for her to find job as, she did not count with any kind of economic back up. By finding a job in the Canal Zone, the pioneers kept their comfortable house in Tivoli Street, across from Balboa, Canal Zone. Cora had to count her pennies and spent, yet Louise was brought up differently. Job did not only bring some relief to Cora, but also brought some sensitiveness, which caused some irritation between the two mature ladies. Louise found an excuse to move to the city of Colon on the Atlantic side, to help with the two studying groups, which Mathew had started earlier. Provisionally she lived in a Pension. They still wrote their letters together and kept their relationship. They wrote to on April 3, 1940:

*“...We have been moving fast. Cora has quarters in the Zone<sup>150</sup> where she now is self-supporting on her small salary. Louise has moved to Colon where two study classes are being formed. One in Silver City<sup>151</sup> and the other at Mrs. Edgecombe’s<sup>152</sup> home. Louise is living at a Pension where she has given the message and literature to people from France, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Panama.*

*“The German ‘Esslemont’ has been read by three people and the French copy is being read now. Several of Stanwood Cobb’s books from Cora’s library are being read and he is sending more copies. We will soon need more English pamphlets especially ‘The World Religion by the Guardian’...Each week Louise will return to Panama to continue with the weekly classes here until such time as Cora’s schedule allows her time for teaching.*

*“The members of the La Boca class are progressing and spreading the message among their friends. They are an illumined group, as we can expect from Abdu’l-Baha’s words “May this downtrodden race become glorious”.*

Louise and Cora’s way of life had brought some changes, tough at the beginning they shared everything together, even writing their letters were shared, using the same postal address<sup>153</sup>, their diaries, and especially their jointly written letters, which they signed ‘Louise & Cora’ or simply ‘girls’. Yet later, they found it better if they remained separated and each one pursued her own activity. Each one was a star and would shine gloriously, but while together, their splendor would fade away, though at the beginning it was somehow different.

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150. Canal Zone

151. Colored section, where the black Caribbean people lived.

152. Mrs. Edgecombe an acquaintance of Cora from the States.

153. P.O.Box 1296 Ancon, Canal Zone

## HER PERSONALITY

Like many of the early pioneers who accepted the challenge and rose to the call of the beloved Guardian, Cora was a very dedicated soul. She nurtured those she felt had the capacity to learn more and deepened them constantly, not only with words, but with actions, dedicated actions. She was very staunch, and nothing would withstand her determination, even though she knew she might pass the limits of propriety. She was so sure of her faith that she would not budge before anyone's ideas. Of course, because of her way of action, both pioneers and local believers would become apprehensive and sometimes to the point of leaving the faith altogether, which would not matter to Cora. Among the early believers she had good friends such as Alfred Osborne<sup>154</sup> and Raquel Franco<sup>155</sup>, both of whom were thoroughly nurtured by her and remained appreciative of her throughout their lives. Raquel called Cora as 'her spiritual mother' and 'her benefactor', which shows the degree of love and gratefulness she had for her. Although some other early Baha'is did not approve of her way of handling the affairs of the Faith in its early days. This matter will be mentioned later.

One of those early visitors to Panama was the representative of the American National Spiritual Assembly, Emilia Collins<sup>156</sup>, stayed at Cora's place as her guest. Cora has mentioned in her diary words of love and appreciation she had for her. For example, when in 1946 the First Latin American Conference was launched in Panama, Amelia Collins, stayed with her for 12 days at her place:

*"...Your earnestness made a lasting impression upon me that deep longing to carry out the divine plan will triumph in the end, of that I am sure..."*

And through other correspondences with her:

*"...You looked beautiful the day we parted. I know of no one who has a smile quite like yours and you must become more and more generous with them."*

And when she visited the US:

*"...It was lovely to be with you in those busy days at Loulie's. You always have my love and prayers. May Baha'u'llah continue to shower His choice blessings upon you."*

*"Cora, my beloved sister: My heart has been full as I am sure you sense. The glory of it all and the deep joy it is bringing to everyone who hears of the Conference and the work in Panama".*

When both the National Spiritual Assembly and the Inter America Committee felt that there is kind of discord in the early community of Panama, Cora made a trip to Chicago and met with the Inter America Committee, where Mrs. Collins was a member. Later she wrote to Cora:

*"The NSA was made happy – IAC – Loulie is beside herself with joy, and last but not first, our beloved Guardian. Surely his heart will be happy – our command...and Cora as I picture the warmth, the hospitality in your hope I feel no one can resist it. Never, never will I forget the*

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154. Second to become believer in Panama. In 1968 was appointed as the Counsellor for Americas.

155. Staunch early believer who remained firm to the end of her life, in 2012

156. Who later was appointed as Hand of the Cause of God by Guardian Shoghi Effendi

*buzzing, the work – the doctors, the hospital, all, all due to Cora’s thoughtfulness and love.”*

*“Not for one instant can a thought creep in of inharmony. All, the world, every pioneer must feel the glory of the work in Panama and those who are Baha’u’llah’s tools.”*

Cora always wrote to the Guardian and described to him her points of view -right or wrong- and the beloved Shoghi Effendi always as a loving brother assured her of his prayers. One such a letter was shared with Mrs. Collins, and she wrote back:

*“Our beloved Guardian assures you that he will pray for your guidance. His written lines to you are glorious, my dear and should be your watchword. Thanks for sharing it with me”.*

At the same time, being fully aware of the situations in Panama, Mrs. Collins would also try to help Cora for more cooperation and understanding, more self-abnegation and helping the Faith to grow lovingly in Panama. She wrote:

*“I haven’t yet gotten around to writing to the Guardian about my trip – but will read the Bulletin and also see that an Assembly exists. O how grateful I am to God for the privilege of being with you all”.*

*“...I wish I could tell you all of how often I think of you – I won’t try the name them individually – but please give my message of love to the Assembly and say I have supplicated Baha’u’llah to inspire them all to great height...”*

And when she stayed again with Cora in her Canal Zone house during the Conference, she wrote back:

*“...Never will I forget the love, the devotion, the tender care you gave me – dear heroic Cora. He will bless you”<sup>157</sup>.*

The inharmony occurred in the community of Panama was brought to the attention of the Inter America Committee. The members knew well the degree of Cora’s love and her enthusiasm in the consolidation of the Faith in Panama. After the first Conference of Central America held in Panama, Mrs. Collins wrote to her:

*“Your name has been mentioned often and with love and appreciation. Loulie can say appreciates your worth and she appreciates so much all that was done to make the Conference such a great success”<sup>158</sup>.*

One of the great duties of the Hands of the Cause of God was encouragement of the pioneers wherever they functioned and served the Cause; their love would more than anything else, build and shape the pioneers’ services in the community where they functioned. Mrs. Collins, as a loving mother genuinely assured the pioneers of her love and affection. She wrote to Cora:

*“Precious Cora: Just this line to say what blissful joy you gave me. The real Cora, which I saw from the beginning has blossomed...Now you are going forth a happy herald in His vineyard. I*

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157. Letter dated 8 May 1946

158. Letter dated 30 June 1946

*am so proud of you. I can never cease to pray for you*"<sup>159</sup>.

And finally, she ensured her with the following words of appreciation:

*"I couldn't bear it if I didn't know for certain that our spirits are absolutely united"*<sup>160</sup>.

One of the most unfortunate things can happen is the lack of harmony in any given community, though it might be said that the discord if remedied soon and can, in fact become the cause of growth of the community in any given circumstances, but otherwise, it can cause disillusionment and consequently a rift. Cora's resistance in her actions from the beginning, and not willing to cooperate with the rest of the members of the community, made the institutions to send some representatives to Panama, such as Mrs. Collins and later Mildred<sup>161</sup> and Rafi Mottahedeh to see more closely into the problem.

### **MILDRED AND RAFI MOTTAHEDEH**

Cora comments of the coming of Mildred and Rafi Mottahedeh in early 1941 to Panama and spending few days with them, visiting all their contacts both in Panama and Canal Zone. The visit could have been to remedy the rift that had become well known between Cora and Louise, as this appears in Mildred's letter to Alfred Osborne<sup>162</sup>, in the same year, where she mentions to him to become a bridge:

*"... But those like yourself, who know the Baha'is can do much to serve as a bridge. It seems to us as though you have been specially chosen for this work in Panama both because of your ability and because of your position. There is so much you can do to help Mrs. Oliver and Mrs. Caswell in this regard and certainly there is no one in Panama better equipped to do".*

Mildred and Rafi wrote a well calculated and wisely written letter to Louise and Cora<sup>163</sup>, where, after their trip to Latin American countries, studied each community, making their most valuable comments. Their letter to Panamanian pioneers says:

*"We have been busy writing to all the new contacts we made in South America and, as they embrace the results of visits, to several countries, it has meant many letters each carefully calculated to give them what they need of the Teachings..."*

For example, during that period of time, at the commencement of the WWII, where spies were everywhere, and were trying to muddy the water for fish catching, a certain travel teacher of the Faith, Frances Stewart, while in Nicaragua, was caught up with one unscrupulous man, who after interviewing her published widely about her, calling her 'the fifth columnist', thus making her as a suspicious person to be followed wherever she went, making it impossible for obtaining visa for entering different countries and putting those who contact her under surveillance too<sup>164</sup>. To this matter, the Mottahedeh's wrote:

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159. Letter dated 10 Oct. 1947

160. Letter dated 22 Oct. 1951.

161. A promoter of social and economic development, and an early supporter of the United Nations. She was the first representative of the Baha'i Faith at the United Nations.

162. Letter dated 11 November 1941.

163. Letter dated 10 November 1941.

164. Probably this matter has been the case of Mathew Kaszab being thrown to prison.

*“The cause for your disturbance in Panama and Gayle Woolson’s in Costa Rica will be cleared up shortly...Many people knew of the situation, and we believe it is in hand now. We would suggest that you give in no further thought as it will take a lot of your mental and physical energy that you will need for teaching work. It is so similar to a situation in New York that was cleared up when the Guardian told us to stop thinking and talking about it. The moment his advice was taken the whole thing died down and fell into its proper unimportant position”.*

At the time, Cora and Louise, in spite of their differences, and only for the sake of their community, were moving into a larger house, making it a gathering place for the slowly growing community. To this matter, hoping the differences between the pioneers would somehow disappear, Mildred and Rafi wrote:

*“It is so good that you have solved the problem of a Baha’i Center. Your work there will certainly take a sharp step forward now that you have a regular meeting place. We have no doubt that in a very short time now you will have an active working assembly<sup>165</sup>. Once you get the Panamanians unified into an assembly, they will take up the teaching work too and will be better able to reach large groups of their fellow countrymen than anyone coming in from another country. Rafi and I both feel that the best a pioneer teacher can do is to weld together a small strong assembly and let them carry on the work of teaching their fellow countrymen<sup>166</sup>. The Latin American believers must be taught that the North Americans can only get them started but that they must not lean on us but must take up the torch themselves and actively teach. They must be to realize that in their own hand lies the salvation of their fellow countrymen. This is a stupendous task to accomplish among a people who have been taught only to follow the tenets of the church and never to think for themselves along the religious lines.*

Mildred and Rafi press on this matter of preparation of an assembly, they mention in their wonderful letter to the Panama pioneers that:

*“...we do feel that this is an important a teaching work as actually confirming nine believers and forming a new assembly”.*

They give the example of communities in the States:

*“Even in the United States, we frequently see groups that have been nursed along for years and when they are asked to stand on their own, they go through a long hibernation before they wake up to their responsibilities. As you know, Baha’is who do not teach are like people who are only half alive. Once you get your Panamanians to do teaching work themselves, the problems of unity and organization will solve themselves and their faith will be strengthened”.*

The Motthedehs have truly put their thumb on the pulse of the problem in Panama by saying *“Baha’is who do not teach, are like people who are only half alive”*. And getting into the matter of the problem of ‘unity’, they mention so rightfully that they need to work on the local Baha’is and have them to teach the Faith themselves and thus, the problems of ‘unity’ will be solved. They give such wise counsels and vision for their implementations.

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165. It would be another four years before the first Local Spiritual Assembly was formed.

166. Such was San Jose, Costa Rica’s case with Gayle Woolson as the resident pioneer.

In their letter, the Mottahedes also touch on the very important matter of 'Firesides'<sup>167</sup>, liking it to the way Philip Sprague<sup>168</sup> in Buenos Aires has done successfully and this, they themselves about to do in the States:

*"We plan to have each fireside give three open meetings to new people and then ask the new people after the third meeting if they are interested enough to come to a study class. The meeting will then to be closed to others and the interested new people will go through a regular six-week Baha'i study course covering all phases of the Faith. Whether such a plan would be practical in Panama I don't know but it is worth thinking about".*

Towards the end of their letter the Mottahedehs mention Alfred Osborne

*"We are writing to Mr. Osborne today. We did so enjoy [him] not only as a Baha'i brother but as a charming and interesting person doing important constructive work".*

In their well counseled letter, they remember all the loving Panamanians whom they visited:

*"Please do give our warmest love and regards to the Panama Baha'i friends. We remember with pleasure the time we spent at Mrs. Rudy's house and our short visit with Mrs. Ochoa".*

They also mention Joseph Wantuk - the photographer - the first Baha'i of Panama, who was still active in the early days but later was lost forever<sup>169</sup>: *"We think of our Baha'i photographer every time we look at the pictures, he gave us. Do tell him we hope he can take time off from the business of living to devote to the reality of life. He can be such a help to you and think what he can do for all those poor lonely soldiers who have lots of time and think and not enough to think about".*

At the end of their exemplary letter, the Mottahedehs give the best hopes to these two lonely pioneers of Panama and wish them soon to see the fruits of their endeavors, the wish that was delayed long, now to be realized: *"We both send you our warmest love and prayers and our fervent hopes that you will both shortly see the fruits of your noble efforts. The friends here, sheltered in the bosom of a community, cannot realize the loneliness of the pioneer teachers and the unending efforts they put forth for the Faith of Baha'u'llah, but we are doing our best to make them realize it. Then they make the assurance as beloved Shoghi Effendi has done in "The Promised Day Is Come". "It will not be long when you will have so many Baha'is in Panama that you will have to ask the names of the new ones you see at feasts. The realization of the dream is closer at hand than we realize. The seeds planted by the patient loving hands of the pioneers are still underground but Baha'u'llah Himself nourishes them and they cannot but bloom".*

At the beginning of the pioneering period, as it was mentioned earlier, the two ladies did everything together splendidly and they were very happy. Below, their joint report, which was called 'La Marina':

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167. Firesides are friendly gatherings usually done during the evenings in a believers' home, inviting colleagues and neighbours for a friendly discussion, introducing the Faith to them.

168. A Baha'i pioneer in Argentina during the 1940s.

169. He might have been recruited during the war and consequently killed in battle. Under his name the following is written on Internet: John Joseph Wantuck was born in Elmira, New York on November 26, 1923. He was killed in action July 17, 1943. Wantuck enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in Syracuse, New York on January 6, 1942, and served continuously until the time of his death. Wikipedia.



## FIRST IMPRESSIONS OCTOBER 1939

### “La Marina”

Louise and Cora wrote a series of articles for the World Order magazine as their impressions of the country in general and part of their activities. These articles are being published under the both names of Cora Hitt Oliver & Louise Caswell, in the volume 5, number 11 of February 1940, in volume 6 no. 12 of March 1941, volume 7 number 1 of April 1941, number 2 of May 1941, number 3 of June 1941 and finally number 4 of July 1941, all of which are of the same early period of their time together.

In the first article of October 22, 1939, there is a mention of one of their most important contacts, Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, Rector of the National University:

*“Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, Rector of the National University of Panama and leading literary light of the country, gave us a warm and poetic welcome to the University. He graciously accepted the offer of a gift of Baha’i books for the library and said that Panama welcomed all ideas, all races, all perfumes; that education was free for all, 25% of the budget being spent for it. He then extended to us the courtesies of the University and Institute and personally conducted us to our classes and introduced us to the new professor from Porto Rico, Dr. Caballero.*

In the March issue of the World Order their article goes on:

*“...We endure the heat patiently, and receive daily inspiration from the Guardian’s words concerning Panama: “The erection of yet another outpost of the Faith, in its heart, will constitute, I firmly believe, a landmark in the history of the Formative Period of the Faith of Baha’u’llah in the New World. It will create limitless opportunities, galvanize the efforts, and reinvigorate the life, of those who will have accomplished this feat, and infuse immense courage and boundless joy into the hearts of the isolated groups and individuals in the neighboring and distant republics, and exert intangible yet powerful spiritual influences on the life and future development of its people.”*

Later on, they continue in the same issue:

*“The patio at the University of Panama affords some splendid opportunities for giving the Message. We spoke the three of the eight young men of Panama who had attended the Youth Conference at Vassar College over a year ago...We have also given the message to a leader of the feminist movement which is temporarily suppressed; a school teacher in the Zone; a University professor and his wife; the creator of Panameno, an international language; his wife of the superintendent of schools in the Zone and others.*

*“In our efforts to spread the Teachings we have attended a variety of affairs: the Special Council Meeting above-mentioned; an art exhibit at Pedro Miguel, a charity tea, Jewish concert, dance recital by children of prominent families. Although we were not able to speak of the Faith at most of these functions, we know that our presence there is paving the way. The Greatest*

*Name opens the doors to meetings which would otherwise be closed to us. A well-known citizen remarked that he saw us everywhere and added, "I think you know more about my country than I do. You are invited to places where one else can go.*

*"December 1939. "You must give great attention to the Republic of Panama...That place will become very important in the future. The Teachings once established there will united the East and the West, the North and the South."*

In the issue of April 1941's article [pertaining to the early 1939/1940 period] of these two early pioneers of Panama, they continue mentioning of their activities:

*"We have extended our teaching activities to the Atlantic side of the Isthmus, to Cristobal and Colon, where we gave the Teachings to several people and left literature at the Y.M.C.A. We visited Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Edgecombe, friends of the Cause who have recently come to Panama from Haiti. They are lovers of mankind, standing out as beacon lights in the sea of racial prejudice.*

And visiting again Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, the Rector of the University:

*"Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, Rector of the Universidad Nacional, formerly Panama's minister to England and France and at one time Secretary of Public Instruction, gave us his picture and an article for the Baha'i World, vol. VIII. As far as our knowledge goes Dr. Pereira is Panama's leading literary figure. He has written extensively on the history of the Republic and how conducts a daily column in "La Estrella." He has shown special courtesy to us. When we called at his office one day he was presiding at a director's meeting. Waving aside everyone, including the special guard at the door, he came to meet us and ushered us to his private desk, much to the surprise of all.*

*"The three schools we visited this month were: La Boca (colored) in the Zone whose superintendent, Mr. Osborne is interested in the Teachings (in 1968 he was appointed as a member of the Continental Counsellors for the Americas, residing in Panama by the Universal House of Justice); Escuela Profesional in Panama; Lyceo de las Senioritas<sup>170</sup> in Panama where we presented Baha'i literature to Mme. Calvo, one of Panama's leading women.*

They list the people they have visited and have given the Teachings to them. They continue:

*"At the dawn of each day we commune with God, supplicating His assistance and giving thanks for His bounties. We try to follow the noble example of Martha Root who prayed much. It has been reported that she said the Tablet of Ahmad three times daily and sometimes nine times. We have found that the confirmations of Baha'u'llah descend upon us when we pray for specific matters, however small; we then act with complete confidence as though our prayers had already been answered.*

*"Public lectures were given at La Boca (Jamaican) Women's Life Problems Club by invitation of the president of the club; an illustrated lecture on the Temple at the Universidad Nacional de Panama, in Spanish, to a group of students, the Rector and professors; another illustrated Temple lecture at the Balboa Army and Navy Y.M.C.A. Excellent radio newspaper publicity was*

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170. Lyceum of the young girls in Panama

*given these lectures by their respective sponsors. These public lectures represented months of persistent foundation work. While we can have not meetings where we live, we are exchanging hospitality with our Panamanian friends as well as English and Spanish lessons.*

*“...The Master said, in speaking of pioneers, “to advance always, to achieve some new service every day, and to widen the horizon of the intellect every hour – these three rules must become a part of the program of their lives. With steadfast resolution and firm feet they must stand before every difficulty...”*

*“One other quotation comes to me as I write. Baha’u’llah said, “Proclaim My Cause before the people and do not fear.” And I recite these words daily: “Go thou straight on and persevere in His service.*

*“...Let us not imply, however, that we have not tests. At times all doors seem closed and then we remember that even with God there is motion and stillness, activity and quiescence; and in these dark night hours we are conscious that the dawn will break, and the sun of the teachings will arise and illumine this Republic of Panama.*

*“The Guardian tells in The Advent of Divine Justice that at the close of this first century the present generation will hand on to the generations that must succeed it the torch of Divine Guidance...that they in turn... may carry that torch...to the darkest and remotest corners of the earth”.*

In the same issue, they highly speak of the La Boca group as a radiant and an inspirational group:

*“The La Boca group is radiant and an inspiration to anyone coming in contact with them. The sudden arrival of Lorol Schopflocher<sup>171</sup> has further stimulated their interest, some coming to the three meetings during the week and literally hanging onto every word. They are really Panamanians, so we feel we have made a greater inroad into the Republic than we would have thought possible at this time. Surely God will make this downtrodden race glorious. Such faithfulness is enviable and such determination and perseverance to know the truth is to be commended. Truly they will become a great power and will, in turn, arise and assist in establishing the banner of Baha’u’llah in this most great land of promise.*

The coming of Lorol Schopflocher to Panama has had great impact:

*“The evening of Lorol’s arrival a meeting was held at La Universidad Nacional through the courtesy of the Rector, at which nineteen were present, representing races and nationalities. They not only gave a warm response to Lorol’s talk but also came to the following meetings. No doubt it was the first inter-racial experience for some of them, but they found in Baha’u’llah’s unifying message a power that transcended all man-made limitations and barriers. Among them were a dentist, a superintendent of schools, a statistician, teachers, a fingerprint expert, a young philosopher, the wife of a university professor, and a woman attorney. The lovely children attended and showed such attention and interest as we have never before witnessed in children at a meeting of this kind.*

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171. Florence Evaline Schopflocher (Lorol) 1886 – 1970, married Siegfried Schopflocher. She was an international travel teacher for the Faith, who circled the globe nine times as peace promotor with.

*"The illustrated Temple lecture at the Cristobal Army and Navy Y.M.C.A. attracted the Peruvian Consul and his wife and the Ecuadorian Consul. Their interest was indicated before the lecture began when they introduced themselves to us. The next day we were invited to the home of the Peruvian consul for tea. He had first heard of the Baha'i Faith from Mrs. Pilkington in Portland, Oregon. The same weekend we attended as guests the Isthmian Religious Worker's Federation and later became members. This of course means that the group of religious leaders on the Isthmus has recognized us as religious workers also. Some indicated their interest by asking questions. One minister is now reading some of the Teachings".*

On the May 1941 issue<sup>172</sup> of the World Order these two pioneers write of their new experience:

*"The month of fasting, 'Ala, unfolded an entirely unexpected plan for the establishment of the Faith on the Isthmus; Cora's moving into quarters in the Zone because of economic conditions and Louise's going to the other side of the Isthmus to start classes with the interested people there. In this way the pioneering has been extended to both sides of the Isthmus in the Zone and to the Republic of Panama as must be in accordance with the Master's words in the Advent of Divine Justice, p.5: "... the Republic of Panama, wherein the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans come together through the Panama Canal." Because the Canal is in the Zone<sup>173</sup> we believe that the Master refers in this passage to the geographical position of Panama, including Unites States territory with the Republic – and hence we feel that our work in the Zone is of equal importance with the carried on in the Republic".*

In fact, it was with the encouragement of Lorol that the two pioneers split into two different locations. They continue:

*"On the second day of the fast we moved to the Hotel Columbia in the very heart of the Spanish-speaking, Roman Catholic city of Panama – for two reasons; first, to be with Lorol, and second, to be where we could hear more Spanish than in our former home at 19 Avenida Forth of July. There had been some objections to our many callers so we felt that the time had come to go elsewhere in spite of the call of comfort and coolness of two nice rooms and a private bath. Lorol felt strongly that we should make the break and as we had considered if for some time it was not a great surprise to find ourselves in a large room with balcony facing the historic Plaza de Bolivar...*

*"Several ministers showed interest in the Teachings at the meeting of the Isthmian Religious Worker's Federation held at the Union Church of Pedro Miguel. One of the called at the hotel later to seek an answer to his many questions and is now reading "Security for a Failing World." This minister stands alone in the Federation favoring admission of Negro ministers to membership and is particularly attracted to the Baha'i principle of the oneness of mankind.*

*"The first days of Baha, Splendor, brought the light of the Faith to two new groups; at Pension Margot, New Cristobal, where Louise is staying, Jewish refugees from Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia have read the Baha'i literature in German in Volume V of the Baha'i World and in a German copy of Baha'u'llah and the New Era. English and Spanish literature has been distributed under the same roof. We are so thankful for the copies of Esslemont in French and*

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172. Pertaining to the early months of 1940

173. Has been considered as the United States territory.

*German as many languages are spoken and read in Panama. Only generations to come will see the fruit of the seed which is now being sown but 'Abdu'l-Baha has promised us that every seed sown in this glorious century will bear fruit".*

Their activities have really been remarkable. They had one thing in mind as pioneers in this new land, spread the Teachings as much as possible:

*"...We feel that much credit is due to Mr. Osborne, superintendent of Silver Schools in the Zone as it was, he who not only organized the La Boca group, which is an ever-increasing joy and inspiration to us, but he also arranged for the meeting with the club on the Atlantic side. The La Boca group is now studying Esslemont<sup>174</sup>, and each member is preparing and discussing a special chapter with the group. They are also spreading the Teachings among their friends, thus fulfilling 'Abdu'l-Baha's words: "May this down-trodden race become glorious." It has been said that Panama will become a black republic and if this is true these men will surely be worthy of high positions of trust and ready to rise to great heights of service to humanity.*

Louise and Cora talk<sup>175</sup> about their activities in the twin Atlantic cities of Cristobal and Colon it is recorded:

*"...For a short time one morning I was able to be there (the Tent City, built by the US Army after a great fire swept through the center of Colon) and even that gave me a glimpse into another field which Louise can tell us about – the West Indies who constitute a large portion of the population in Colon".*

Louise Caswell recorded in her notes of their Six weeks in the Port City of Colon<sup>176</sup>:

*"...Here of a population of 29,834 the majority are Jamaican Negroes with a sprinkling of Hindus, Europeans and Mestizos<sup>177</sup> The city was established about 1850 by the Panama Railroad as its Atlantic terminus on filled-in land and leased from Panamanian government..."<sup>178</sup>*

*"When John Stearns, lone pioneer to Ecuador, spent nine days in Panama he came to Colon twice. Cora crossed the Isthmus several times during the six weeks of my stay and altogether the three of us made twenty-four trips across. During these time meetings were held at the Cristobal Y.M.C.A.<sup>179</sup> with John Stearns speaking, at La Boca, La Escuela de Artes y Oficios, the Imperial Literary and Social Club in Silver City, Cristobal, La Universidad Nacional, and informal meetings in a home in New Cristobal. At one of these meetings, we had Mrs. Adolphsen of Honolulu who took a message from the study group to the National Convention at Wilmette.*

*"Cora and I did all we could to keep John Stearns in Panama longer because his services were so valuable there, but he was inflexible in his determination to hasten to Ecuador and teach the Faith in that virgin territory.*

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174. The comprehensive introductory book on the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah and the New Era written by the British, Dr. Esslemont, Hand of the Cause of God.

175. In the June 1941 issue of the World Order magazine.

176. March 27, May 12, 1940.

177. Mixture of Spanish and local indigenous people.

178. During that time Panama was the northern province of the Republic of Colombia. Only in November 1903, Panama got its independence from Colombia.

179. Young Men's Christian Association, founded in June 1844 in London by George Williams.

*"The six weeks in Colon and Cristobal yielded many new friends of the Faith and brought hope to many a discouraged heart. I had seen the great fire, I had seen Colon and the bay from the stratoplane<sup>180</sup>, and I now saw eyes that had been lifeless glow with the promise of the new day".*

In the last part of their diary, July 1941, Cora, and Louise pour their heart to those who are to be pioneers:

*"Cora Oliver and I have not the capacity to appreciate our great bounty in pioneering in Panama. We can only say that the Faithful Spirit has accompanied us. The world seems to be just beginning when the pioneer realizes that his life is not one of time, place, surroundings, and attachments to individuals – but a life constantly and lovingly flowing out from God and never ceasing. Thus, he learns to welcome change of surroundings and circumstances for the sake of God. For the Faithful Spirit is his companion, and the promise is fulfilled.*

*"If you want to live life of the fullest be a pioneer. Time is short. Do not let this Inter-America campaign be just a hope with you. Make it a reality, or you will have missed the great bounty. All cannot have the supreme privilege of leaving their home for a foreign land; these can send a deputy, or they can pioneer at home. In our cities we have residents of many Latin American countries, and the Guardian has urged us to sow seeds in their hearts, which might in future "yield the most unexpected results."*

*"...Waves of pioneers will be needed for the awakening of Latin America. Did not 'Abdu'l-Baha tell the early pilgrims that they were the waves who would spread and overflow the world?"*

*"Every time we read the Guardian's message about Panama, we discover in it a new meaning. He writes in The Advent of Divine Justice (p.59-60): "Faithful to the provisions of the Charter laid down by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Baha, I feel it my duty to draw the special attention of those to who it has been entrusted to the urgent needs of, and the special position enjoyed by, the Republic of Panama, both in view of its relative proximity to the heart and center of the Faith in North America, and of its geographical position as the link between two continents. 'All above countries,' 'Abdu'l-Baha, referring to the Latin States in one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, has written, 'have importance, but especially the Republic of Panama, wherein the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans come together... It is a center for travel and passage from America to other continents of the world, and in the future it will gain most great importance.'...Preference, no doubt, should be given by all would-be pioneers,... to the spiritual needs of this privileged Republic...Obstacles, however formidable, should be surmounted, the resources of the Baha'i treasury should be liberally expended on its behalf, and the ablest and most precious exertions should be consecrated to the cause of its awakening..."*

Truly inspiring period of service, they went through. And more activities they performed for a much longer period.

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180. Strato Plane was constructed in the land of Kalahia by Dr. Bruce Dickson, known as Thin Man and his wife, Olalla, daughter of one of the elders of Kalahia. The plane was used in the 1940s. (Kalahia desert in Southern Africa, consists of Botswana, part of Namibia and the north of Cape Province of South Africa. It is known as Kalahari Desert).

## EARLY JOINT ACTIVITIES - 1939

Loulie Matthews learning from Mathew Kaszab of Cora Oliver's arrival wrote to Louise on October 25, while she still stayed at Tivoli Hotel:

*"In Mathew's last letter, he tells me that Mrs. Oliver has arrived. The National and Inter-America are most anxious to have permanent addresses, and to know about your university course and your plan of campaign. You can imagine how thrilled and delighted we were to think of your meeting there and I hope that you will be able to draw Joseph (Wantuk) into as much work as possible".*

The Inter America Committee having high hopes for the Teaching campaign of the pioneers in Panama and positive response of Panamanians prepared declaration cards. In this letter, the acceptance of a new soul in the Faith is being described:

*"You will be glad to hear that our Spanish admission cards<sup>181</sup> are now ready. I am mailing a quantity of them to you. One of these cards should be kept by the person involved; the other by you and the name and address of the person who has signed should be sent to this Committee...They are poetic and lovely and you, Mrs. Oliver and Joseph will have to all agree as to the candidate's qualifications. Once they are passed by you, we shall accept them as registered believers".*

On October 29 of the same year, the 'girls'<sup>182</sup> wrote a short note as how delightful from the water of their commitment to stay in Panama:

*"We engaged this place the day after we arrived at "La Marina" where we soon discovered we were allowed no privacy. We have a bedroom and a study over a modern and attractive flower shop located in the highest spot in the city near the beer gardens, the University, the Ancon Post Office, Tivoli Hotel and just across the street from the Zone<sup>183</sup>. The building is an example of the best kind of house to build in this section...We have all the comforts of home. No screens are necessary, and we don't travel with mosquito netting. The indescribable charm of Panama won us both instantly. Our drinking water is piped from the Chagres River<sup>184</sup> of which it is said if one has once tasted of its waters he always returns. We have drunk deeply".*

Louise and Cora started with their Teaching activities immediately and meeting with the local people starting from the University where they have enrolled for some courses. They continue:

*"In pursuit of our daily duties we have made some surprisingly good contacts. From our experience so far, we find the people ready for the message of the New Day. Our most important contact thus far is the Rector of the University, Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, Universidad de Panama, R. of P. We asked him if he would like Baha'i books for the library. He said "Yes" and was very kind to us. He accepted the offer and recalled that several years ago three Baha'i women passed through...<sup>185</sup> Louise said that she might go to Colombia and he offered to give*

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181. Baha'i Declaration Cards, where upon signing the card, one admits his allegiance to Baha'u'llah. It is used for administrative purposes.

182. Louise and Cora were lovingly addressed as 'girls'.

183. The Canal Zone territory was called 'Zone'.

184. The Chagres River in central Panama, is the largest river in the Panama Canal's watershed.

185. Unidentified women.

*her introductions to his many friends at the University in Bogota...Louise thinks that by the spring of 1940 she may be able to do some travelling as Cora is to be here permanently, but she (Louise) feels that Panama should be her headquarters for some time, as there is a tremendous amount of work to be done here...We also request that you make possible a special gift of books to Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira for the University Library”.*

The new pioneers wanted to have more pioneers to establish in Panama. They wrote to the Inter America Committee and shared information about the cost of living, etc. It is amusing to see the prices of the early days of 1939/1940 in Panama:

*“If anyone wishes information about living conditions here, we can recommend Hotel Central with rates beginning at \$1.00 per day without bath and special monthly rates for more expensive rooms. (Cora was offered a \$45.00 per month room for \$30.00. The food is expensive in Panama and not good at Hotel Central. Fruits and vegetables are at a premium, mostly imported from the United States. Tivoli offers a \$2.50 per day rate without bath, in the offseason and \$3.50 from Dec. to Apr. 30. We have found suitable rooms in a private house in Panama City, but this is exceptional, and we are very grateful”.*

Their letter goes on saying:

*“...Louise was so happy to get your letter of October 2<sup>nd</sup> as a welcome to Panama...”*

And filling application for jobs:

*“Cora has made many applications and had promising interviews. She expects to find employment when Baha’u’llah wills it.*

*“We are praying for your continued confirmations in the Inter American work and are eager to do our part in establishing the banner of Baha’u’llah in Panama”.*

Louise wrote, on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1939, to Louise asking for books for the Rector of the University, putting their hearts in their activities in that center of learning:

*“In answer to your letter of Oct. 25<sup>th</sup> I wish to make clear that I meant that we wanted some books in English for the library. Will you please have the library committee send what they have available to the library of the University Nacional, c/o Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, Rector. Then will you please send me a copy of the Baha’i World, which Cora and I will present to him personally. I intend to ask him for an article and a picture of himself, which will surely please him. He can write the article in Spanish. The daily paper carries a literary column by him. He is the literary light of Panama and was asked to give a speech for the dedication of the canal”.*

In the letter they also mentioned that:

*“Mathew sails tonight and we are going to give him a Baha’i farewell and say some prayers as he leaves. The president of the Escuela de Artes & Oficios spoke very beautifully to him last night at the school in bidding him goodbye and offered Cora and me the same courtesies of the school which had been extended to Mathew. Others came in and bid him goodbye. He was given names of several people in Nicaragua. I hope he will be able to find something to do there and will find his property intact”.*

Louise and Cora, the two intimate sisters for now, kept on their daily discoveries in



Panama and writing of their impressions for the Committee:

*"I am enclosing a copy of some of our impressions. Later we will send some of our Baha'i thoughts, which are still forming".*

Adding that of their comfort and happiness and that they are ready for a long period of intense activity as they were happy, well and comfortable:

*"...We are happy and well and comfortable. We are prepared for a long period of teaching and are unable to give an outline of our campaign to the N.S.A. & Teaching Committee because this work is an intangible nature. We feel the valuable thing at hand is to establish ourselves in this community. When I tell you that we are the only white women at the university you can understand that our very presence is a teacher. "Deeds, not words". One girl at the University told us we were democratic. You see we are like the people in the zone in appearance and they are surprised to find North Americans without race prejudice. We feel it is a privilege to associate with these people of different races, but we do not expect them to accept us until we have proven ourselves worthy of their confidence".*

Living together made them soul mates, true exemplar pioneers. Complete mutual love and harmony made the Faith flourish, and their activities impressed the IAC. In their letter dated November 9, they are excited to receive some visits:

*"...We are delighted at the prospect of seeing two Baha'is en route to Peru and hasten to send you our telephone number so you may give it to them. It might be advisable to have it also printed in the Newsletter. In the next book the names of Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver will be listed. The number is Panama 2992. We want to be sure to meet these and other Baha'is who are passing through Panama and will appreciate knowing the time of their arrival in Balboa<sup>186</sup>.*

*"We are enclosing a copy of the Baha'i notes, which we promised. A Panama scrapbook has been started for the Panama archives. We are watching, working, waiting, and praying.*

*"We are anxiously waiting the arrival of the Baha'i World<sup>187</sup> to present to the Rector".*

Few days later, on the November 13, they wrote another enthusiastic letter to the Inter America Committee:

*"Your letter of Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> caused us to weep with joy to know that the Salas are going to Bogota and will stop in Panama. We hope to have some contacts for them...Please tell them that we think it would be advisable for them to stay a few days at the Tivoli & that reservations should be made at once because of the busy tourist season soon to come. Louise and Cora keep on pushing for the book they asked for the Rector of the University:*

*"We are anxiously waiting the Baha'i World to give the Rector of the University as we plan to ask him for an article and his picture when we give it to him. He is a striking looking man, and it surely would be thrilling to have a large picture of him as the first Latin man of letters to write an appreciation of the Faith".*

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186. American town on the Pacific side, next to Panama City.

187. Baha'i Year Books of, which were Baha'i World, and its publication was initiated by the Guardian Shoghi Effendi in early 1920s.

In the letter, there is again a mention of Mathew Kaszab's travelling now and how unassuming person he is. What a true pioneering spirit he has and what a legacy he would leave behind. Extract from his letter was mentioned in their letter:

*"...You have undoubtedly heard from Mathew, but I will enclose a few lines from him to me, showing his undaunted spirit. The ticket I had was for "cattle class" without any accommodations, however there only being 6 passengers & accommodations for 30, they let me sleep in a cabin. I had the whole cabin for myself with three bunks in it of which I used only one. The slumgullion<sup>188</sup> that they fed me was not very edible so 'I had a nice feast when we got to Costa Rica at Puntarenas, which cost me 2.50 colones<sup>189</sup>, about 44 cents U.S. currency. Mathew and Johnny are certainly examples of getting along on little money. They are so happy in every service they perform for Baha'u'llah that it is a joy to see them serve".*

They also mentioned Joseph Wantuk and a line of his background, the first Baha'i of Panama in the record:

*"Wantuk is a fine man. We have not seen him for three weeks and are praying the remover of difficulties. He has not had the Will<sup>190</sup>, as Mathew did not have it to give it to him. We want to make him aware of the non-ecclesiastical aspect of the teachings, as he is altar boy in the Liberal Catholic Church".*

In their estimation and comparison, Panama is behind the US in Teaching the Cause only for twenty years! Of course, they have been very generous in their valuation:

*"In teaching the Cause here we have to realize that we are more than twenty years behind the States and that the Latins are not given to organization".*

Though in another letter from Louise & Cora, dated November 19, to Loulie, they write:

*"Our list of acquaintances and contacts continue to grow. We know that each one needs its special attention and particular follow up".*

Two weeks later, November 30<sup>th</sup>, Louise mentions to Loulie that they have found themselves a spacious house, which has made them happy. Now they can hold public meetings as well as other activities:

*"Cora and I are in our new Baha'i house, a four-room apartment with ample room for a public meeting, place and a study where Assembly meetings and study groups can be held. The material and spiritual opportunities come hand in hand here as we have cool clean rooms with conveniences for doing our own cooking. Having waited two whole months for a comfortable room with privacy and a place to do a few of the things a woman likes to do in her home<sup>191</sup> we feel doubly blessed. Our first meeting was held to dedicate the Baha'i house on the day of the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha, and six people were present. The talk on a Baha'i house, which was given by the Master in Paris was read and we feel that a new chapter has opened for the very*

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188. Cheap or insubstantial stew.

189. Costa Rican Currency name.

190. Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Baha encouraged the contacts to read before they signed up. Through this Divine authority document, the Covenant is preserved and extended for the whole length of the dispensation.

191. Soaking her feet in hot water.

*arduous and significant work in the Republic of Panama”.*

Their enthusiasm took them to look for a guestbook to register the names of the believers, the new believers and the guests:

*“Could you find us a suitable book for the names of the believers, perhaps a guest book. Cora has been looking for one for months and nothing can be found here”.*

They also needed to accommodate a friend who needed to use a rosary to say the Greatest Name:

*“Another request which maybe harder to fill is for a rosary. A friend of ours uses the Greatest Name<sup>192</sup> everyday although she is not yet a Baha’i. We hope she will be, and she asked where she could get such a rosary. Perhaps a request in the Newsletter would bring one.”*

On December 11, the beloved Guardian answered the letter of Louise and Cora. This letter is especially significant where he brings to the attention of these two lady pioneers telling them to *“consider it your high and sacred privilege to be the first Baha’i pioneers working in that land”*:

*“Dear Baha’i Sisters,*

*“The joint message you had addressed to our beloved Guardian dated November 26<sup>th</sup> reporting on your teaching activities in Panama has just reached him in the Holy Land, and his heart is indeed filled with gratitude at this fresh and striking evidences of your determination to implant the banner of the Faith in that virgin territory. Knowing as you certainly do of the glowing references made by ‘Abdu’l-Baha regarding the spiritual future of that country, you should consider it your high and sacred privilege to be the first Baha’i pioneers working in that land, and you should rest assured that Divine confirmations will strengthen and bless your efforts, and will enable you to attain your hearts’ highest desire in service to His Cause.*

*“The Guardian is glad to know that you are both endeavoring to perfect your knowledge of Spanish and would urge you to persevere in your efforts, so that you may acquire a good mastery of that language and thus be able to present and teach the Message in an effective manner.*

*“Also he views with great favor your plan of establishing contacts with as many sections and classes of the population as possible, and hopes that you will equally succeed in attracting to the Faith individuals of high social position and influence, as well as those of lowly and humble origin who, no matter how limited in their capacity and influence, can nevertheless, once introduces into the Cause, render services of far-reaching value, outshining those which their fellow-believers of higher origin and of better social standing may be able to accomplish.*

*“Assuring you both of his prayers for the confirmation of your teaching services, and with renewed and affectionate greetings.*

*Yours in His Service, H. Rabbani<sup>193</sup>”*

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192. Greatest Name of God, Ya Baha’ul-Abha – O Thou Glory of Glories, is an invocation used by the Baha’is every day. According to Baha’u’llah this verse should be repeated 95 times in every 24 hours.

193. Hossein Rabbani, Shoghi Effendi’s younger brother and his secretary at the time, who later took the stand against him and was expelled.

In Guardians' handwriting also is of a special significance, as if he could foresee the future, telling them that *"no doubt enable you to overcome any obstacles that may confront you.*

*"Dear and valued co-workers:*

***"My heart overflows with joy at the news you give me. The spirit animating you both in your services to the Faith is truly exemplar and will no doubt enable you to overcome any obstacles that may confront you.***

***"I am deeply thankful for having such staunch and devoted co-workers in the Divine Vineyard. Persevere, and be assured that I will continue to pray for you both from the depths of my heart.***

***"Your true brother, Shoghi"***

Indeed, it has been a source of great encouragement and happiness for having received such a message from their beloved Guardian.

## **MORE OF JOINT ACTIVITIES**

The twin pioneers, Louise and Cora wrote the following letter to Loulie on December 12, indicating the books they have received to be presented to the University Library<sup>194</sup>:

*"We deeply appreciate the literature received this month. Books to the Library of Universidad Nacional..."*

And they could persuade the Rector of the University to write an article for the Baha'i World:

*"Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira<sup>195</sup>, Rector of the Universidad Nacional; Formerly Panama's Minister to England and France, ... has promised to give us his picture and an article for the Baha'i World Vol. VIII. As far as our knowledge goes, he is Panama's outstanding literary light. He has written many books on Panama... We are overjoyed".*

In their letter they also mention of their recent activities on the Atlantic side of the Isthmus:

*"Last Saturday and Sunday we spent in Colon and Cristobal making Baha'i and business contacts. We left literature at the Y.M.C.A. and with friends who heard of the Cause in the States. We think it advisable to go there twice a month..."*

Despite many continuous activities, they were not able to enroll any new believer, yet their gifted 17 years old young colleague in El Salvador – Johnny Eichenhour was already quite successful in the teaching field. They wrote to the Inter America Committee asking them to

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194. Note: The writer recalls back in 1972 when he became the student at the same university and approached the same Library to present some books for their collection, he was surprised to see that there were some books donated to this Library as early as 1939. He was not aware that the very early pioneers have already donated almost the same books, which were going to be presented and updated.

195. Dr Octavio Mendez Pereira 1887-1954 was a prominent Panamanian educator, became minister of Education and the first president of the University of Panama founded in 1935.

send him back to Panama:

*"...Johnny has written of eleven believers in El Salvador. We would like to have him visit Panama as he is unusually gifted and could do good work with the students".*

They remembered the assurance of the beloved Guardian that:

*"The Guardian wrote Louise that the work here would be arduous and weighty with responsibility. In spite of our persistent efforts, we have no confirmed believers".*

Two days later, on December 18<sup>th</sup>, Louise and Cora wrote again to Louie, indicating how arduous was the work of Teaching in Panama as the beloved Guardian had indicated,

*"...We both feel that substantial groundwork should be laid before proceeding with a publicity campaign. We have carefully weighed the Guardian's advice to pioneers in this matter and in order to leave no stone unturned assembled material for the press. However, after prayer and meditation we were guided to wait. Do you get any guidance on this subject?"*

The beloved Guardian had encouraged all pioneers to take the message of Baha'u'llah to the indigenous people of different tribes in the country of their service. Mathew Kazsab had already contacted one member of one of the tribes in Panama, the Kuna Yala. Louise and Cora felt that the length of their activities needed to continue to these noble people too, and if fact, follow up what Mathew had left behind.

The Kuna Yala population is the inhabitants of over five hundred island in the Atlantic side scattered between the two Republics of Panama and Colombia, but mostly in Panama. These were called San Blas Island, presumably Christened by the Catholic Church:

*"...We are told then transportation to the San Blas Indians is all but impossible now, but we are investigating and praying that Baha'u'llah will open the way. The work is arduous here."*

Here some points of interest of one of Loulie's informative letters that was addressed to 'Dear Girls' was written on December 21, 1939, shows how transparent were the matters of the Inter America Committee with its pioneers and lovely relationship between them, Loulie wrote the following interesting points:

*"I will write at once about your weekend trip to Colon and Cristobal. I am sending a small report of this to each member of our Committee".*

Loulie mentions of the impact of the war on the Holy Land and the recent restrictions imposed on Palestine and as a result the Guardian's correspondence in and out:

*"...My last letter from the Guardian was opened by the Censor with a little note saying, "Please answer this briefly and clearly". I have understood that Ruhi<sup>196</sup> came to Haifa to get the doctor for his wife and was not allowed to return. There seems to be tremendous restrictions in Palestine now. Did you notice that the Guardian used a Post office box for the first time in his life?"*

*"I saw May Maxwell in New York, she said write to the Guardian only happy things because*

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196. Ruhi Afnan, Shoghi Effendi's cousin and secretary then. He did not remain faithful to him and left the Faith.

he is burdened with perplexities. May looked well.”

-“...I am having the “Will and Testament” multigraphed<sup>197</sup> and sent to the teachers in Central America. This should be read to the believer who is to be enrolled, not given to him”<sup>198</sup>:

Loulie acknowledges the facts given on the Rector of the University:

-“I am delighted by what you tell us of Dr. Pereira and overjoyed that he will write an article for the Baha’i World”.

And she also mentions that the National Spiritual Assembly did not approve for Johnny Eichenhour to leave San Salvador at this crucial time:

-“...I do not believe that Johnny can leave San Salvador just now as I asked the N.S.A. if teachers there could travel between the Central American posts. They are definitely against this for the moment”.

## PANAMA CENTER STATE

The new responsibility given to the pioneers of Panama by the Inter America Committee and the National Spiritual Assembly, putting them ‘at the head of the Panama Division’:

“Mrs. Stewart and I both agreed that South America should be divided into three parts: The first, Panama as a center for the five surrounding states<sup>199</sup>; Argentina as a center controlling the teaching fields of Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile and Brazil; as the third, a center for Brazil and Guiana. That would put you two at the head of the Panama Division...”<sup>200</sup>

Through this line, Panama became the country with major attention paid to, as predicted by the beloved Master to get the Faith established to show its potentiality in unity. In the years to come, International Conferences and Conventions would be all celebrated in this country.

## MORE ON JOINT ACTIVITIES – 1939 - 1940

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of December Louise and Cora answered Loulie’s above-mentioned letter:

“Your letter of December 21<sup>st</sup> (received Dec. 23<sup>rd</sup>) concerning your visit to the State Department was an inspiration and a challenge to us. Now we are more convinced than ever that we should present ourselves to the representatives of the five countries about which you wrote as well as have an audience with the President of Panama to make known our mission and to go on record as being non-political. We have written you about letters from Secretary Hull. We would like one for each of us -in case we are separated- to present to officials, to get permission to go to the interior and to contact representatives from other countries. We also want to have cards made as Baha’i Representatives and would like the Committee’s suggestions

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197. Multigraph in mathematics and more specifically in graph theory is a graph which is permitted to have multiple edges (also called parallel edges) Wikipedia. However, in this context, it might mean it has been multiplied copies.

198. An important sentence on the Will and Testament of Abdu’l-Baha as the requirement for the enrollment of the new believers.

199. Meaning: Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

200. Seemingly some countries such as Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Ecuador have not been included in these divisional categories.

*about the wording on cards. Do you advise postponing the printing of such cards until the regional divisions are made so that information may be included?*

The pioneers request some literature to be sent to them for their vast activities:

*"...We have begun saying the 'remover of difficulties'<sup>201</sup> nine times daily and will continue to do so until we hear that Esslemont's book is on its way. Meanwhile we could use the following books: English Esslemonts, Gleanings<sup>202</sup>, Advent of Divine Justice<sup>203</sup>, Dispensations<sup>204</sup>, Economics as Social Creation H. Holley, Spanish Prayer books, Small English Prayer books, Large detailed map of Central and South America, copy of available book in German for a German Jewish refugee, University professor, Dr. Behrend, Prof. of Sociology and Economics and his wife introduced by letter from the Vice-Consul in San Francisco. They have shown real friendliness and hospitality. They told us the Panamanians did not have the custom of inviting people into their homes and have helped us to understand local conditions".*

Unfortunately, the Rector of the University disappointed Louise and Cora:

*"...Dr. Mendez Pereira gave us a short article expressing his views on peace and universal love but did not mention the Baha'i Faith, which was a disappointment to us. However, we have sent it with his picture to Mrs. French. We have great hopes of his assisting in establishing the Faith here".*

Louise and Cora mention of their activities in other spheres, directly contacting the people of Panama:

*"We have given the message to the Panamanian women with whom we are exchanging English for Spanish lessons. One, a High School teacher, said we were exceptional Americans to love all people and made inquiries about the pictures in our studio. She remarked that the message was beautiful but would be hard on the priests and the Pope. The other, a young woman from Los Santos<sup>205</sup>, an interior village, has shown a most beautiful spirit walking a long distance daily to meet with us and one day brought fruit which her mother had sent from the interior and Christmas morning made a special trip to bring flowers and wish us a merry Christmas".*

And even some teaching activity in Canal Zone, which also falls into their area of, despite being a US colony in the Republic of Panama responsibility:

*"...Through Cora's contact en-route to Panama an engineer's wife in Columbia wrote last week of her interest in the Cause asking for literature. Quotation from her letter: "Thanks so much for the Baha'i pamphlet. I am sending it on to my daughter. She is living at International House, University of California. There are probably some Baha'i students there. I should be pleased with any other literature you send me. After you left the boat, I went to get the address given on that pamphlet and it disappeared from the writing desk. Did you take it, otherwise it is very mysterious. I have never been able to accept any explanation of a personal deity or*

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201. The famous Prayer revealed by the Bab and recited on easing the difficult circumstance. The whole prayer is: "Is there any remover of difficulties save God? Say praise be God, He is God, all are His servants and all abide by His bidding". Often repeated several times.

202. Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah

203. Advent of Divine Justice by Shoghi Effendi

204. Dispensation of Baha'u'llah by Shoghi Effendi

205. Los Santos is one of provinces of Panama.

*immortality given by any religion, but the 'organic unity of mankind' stressed on this pamphlet certainly appeals to me."*

The twin pioneers tried every avenue possible to promote and proclaim the beloved Faith. They even asked the Inter America Committee for copies of the "World Order" magazine to be sent to the local Libraries both in Canal Zone and Panama City, which would be viable to present the Faith to the interested book-readers:

*"Will you please have the Baha'i Magazine "World Order" sent to Canal Zone Library, Balboa Heights, Canal Zone and to Universidad Nacional de Panama.*

On January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1940, Louise wrote to Lorol Schopflotcher sharing some interesting information about her way of life in Panama especially appreciative for having a companion in her teaching activities:

*"After all these years of living and teaching alone I am very happy now to have a companion in Cora Oliver. We have a small apartment without kitchen. Finding food is our problem along with other things. For description of life here you may get an idea by reading the introduction to the Dawn Breakers about the conditions of Persia. Then imagine the interposition of a more advanced civilization and you have Panama in its growing pains."*

She explains that she is becoming more confident to handle the Spanish language:

*"Last night I gave my first talk in Spanish without translator. I showed the Temple slides. It is a good introductory talk. You know the Guardian said that we should have "lectures on subjects akin to the Cause such as temperance, morality, social welfare, religious and racial tolerance, etc."<sup>206</sup>. I was able to mention the Cause and show several temple slides. Then the first announcement of a lecture by Baha'i in Spanish was published in the paper. After three months I feel that Cora and I have made a wee beginning. The Guardian wrote to me the work would be arduous and rich of possibilities. It surely is a wonderful privilege that I am sure I don't half appreciate.*

*So, you are considering a trip to the tropics. Be sure & let me know if you happen to change your mind and come to Panama. A few days before I received your letter Cora, and I were talking about you and saying how glad we would be to see you.*

*The Guardian has stressed the importance of consultation with committees in order to ensure the successful termination of the 7 yr. plan. So glad you realize this. More power to you!"*

And only a day later, on January 14, she wrote to Loulie, a well informative letter of their recent activities together, and possible hindrances. The heading of her letter is the following passage from Baha'u'llah's Writings:

***"Say: This is the day when every ear needs to be attentive to His voice".<sup>207</sup>***

*"We are delighted to receive the New Era in German and a letter from Clara Wood telling us that the other books were on the way. Do you know who translated the New Era? The manner in which you handle all of our needs is deeply appreciated, and now we have some good news*

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206. Advent of Divine Justice, p. 43

207. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings of the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 205



*for you. We can understand why the Guardian wants people to settle, as our first three months have been spent in laying down a foundation, making friends, learning the customs and making tentative plans. January opened as a month of promise with three public meetings scheduled and another study class formed. Over ninety people attended the meetings this week, the majority of whom heard the message for the first time”.*

Louise mentions of their encounter with Mr. Alfred Osborne<sup>208</sup>, who was introduced to the Faith by Mathew Kaszab:

*“When Mathew left he told us to go to see Mr. Osborne, Superintendent of La Boca<sup>209</sup> Schools in the Canal Zone as he was interested in the teachings. We postponed visiting the school until December with the aim of contacting people of as many different racial groups as possible and concentrating on the Republic first. As a result of our visit to the school Mr. Osborne selected a group of splendid men to study the Baha’i Cause. He arranged every detail for the meeting Tuesday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, when we met with his group of NINE intelligent, interested Jamaican men who have expressed their desire to study once a week. Our plan is to lend each one a copy of Baha’u’llah and the New Era for study. Mr. Osborne will get books from the Balboa Library to use with the group to supplement the reading. Some of the men are students at the Universidad Nacional and have access to the Baha’i books there.*

*“The next meeting was with the Jamaican Women’s Life Problems Club<sup>210</sup>, January 11<sup>th</sup> by invitation of the President. Both Louise and Cora addressed the group of over forty women”.*

Activities at the University with the help of the Rector were always on the top of their agenda:

*“After prayerful meditation and consultation, we approached our friend, the Rector of the University, about Louise’s giving an illustrated lecture on ‘Temples Throughout the Ages’, in Spanish. You can imagine our joy when he graciously arranged an hour for this lecture, Friday, January 12<sup>th</sup>; invited several of the outstanding professors; and arranged for announcements in the Spanish sections of the newspapers and Radio. Over forty were present including people from Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Spain, China, Germany, Italy and Mexico. These diverse elements must become united in this great Day of God. What else but the effusions of the grace of Baha’u’llah can succeed in welding them together? When the scenes of the Bay of Haifa and the Architect’s drawing of the Temple Model were explained all were united in rapt attention. We glimpsed then the oneness of spirit, which however dim, is a herald of the unity to come. No wonder the Guardian writes of the limitless possibilities of Panama. How we long for the great influx of pioneers to come and sweep through this Republic at the crossroads of the earth. Especially men are needed – strong, courageous men. “The preponderating share” surely does not mean that women are to bear the entire burden of this mission, who will arise to serve!!”*

Their vast teaching activities included people of many cultures:

*“Our Mexican friends were so sweet after the lecture; a German friend who could not come sent an Italian friend; a scholarly German-Jewish professor spoke favorably of Louise’s*

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208. Alfred Osborne, the first Counsellor of the Faith in Panama, appointed in 1968.

209. School for the original Caribbean immigrants to Panama during the interoceanic Canal of Panama.

210. The aim has been to identify issues and **problems** of **women** and gender in ways which lead to manageable solutions.

*translation of her notes, which she read”.*

*Their wondering in downtown streets of Panama, would always find a purpose: “The following day we met a Spanish professor of literature in a downtown café. We had attended his classes in Literature where he had always been friendly and polite but the ice was really broken when he witnessed how the Rector received us at the Lecture. Over our cups we had the privilege of a precious meeting with a representative of the culture of Spain. Born in Granada, he is returning there for this vacation. He offered to send slides of churches in Granada for Louise’s collection. The Spanish Temple pamphlet was given him to take to Spain”.*

Mathew’s friends were handed over to the ‘girls’ and these became their faithful friends:

*“Miss Navas and Miss Rangel, our most faithful students in Panama who were attracted to the Cause by Mathew, feel quite at home in our apartment, asking questions about the teachings and enjoying our books and pictures. The other evening, they forgot us completely in their interest in the Baha’i World...We are keeping a complete file containing minutes, correspondences, etc. as well as a scrapbook”.*

They always wished to have some ‘men teachers’ with them in Panama to help them in proclamation and teaching the Faith, the matter that was brought up time and again with the Inter America Committee; they even named few men:

*“We often speak of Harlan Ober, Mason Remey and Marvin Newport as possible men teachers here. We have written Martha Fettig, giving her information about applying for a position as a nurse. Louise has written Lorol, in answer to a letter from her saying she might come to Panama, advising her to get in touch with you as chairman of the Inter-America Committee. We think we can make some good openings for Lorol”.*

At those early stages, Cora’s priority was to get herself a permanent job in Canal Zone as the fulfillment of the purpose of her being sent to Panama, a task that was not easy for most of the pioneers at the start of their pioneering goal:

*“Cora is following every feasible avenue in her efforts to secure employment having made over twenty applications. The U.S. Army, which offered the best opportunity of immediate employment, finally said that they could not use her...The banks have had vacancies, but they pay only \$60 per month. The Director of Secondary School Education looks with favor upon her application for a position in the Panama schools, but appointments are not made until April and school reopens in May. There will also be an opening in Cristobal in June. While hundreds are coming to the Zone the usual political intrigue prevails... We think you will be interested to know that we have called in three modest Panamanian homes where we have received a warm welcome. Exchange of hospitality is one of our regular methods of teaching.”*

The Minutes of the Inter America Committee dated January 14, has recorded under the joint names of Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver, Panama, the following:

*“Mrs. Mathews reported that they are studying very hard and are making every effort to meet both the faculty and the students.*

*“Mrs. Bishop reported a letter from Mrs. Caswell in which she said that they meet the Panamanians and then are not recognized by them the second time, the Canadians being the*

most friendly. Also, that they had difficulty moving into another apartment. The landlord having been informed that they had a “queer religion”.

A fact that many pioneers faced while serving with enthusiasm the Faith they sacrificed their all for.

## SHARED EVENTS

Louise and Cora wrote another long letter of two and half pages to Louie on January 27<sup>th</sup> with a quotation by Baha’u’llah as the header of the letter saying:

*“The day is approaching when God will have, by an act of His will, raised up a race of men the nature of which is inscrutable to all save God, the All-Powerful, the Self-Subsisting”<sup>211</sup>*

The letter has the stamp of ‘Representante de Baha’i<sup>212</sup>:

*“...We are using the Spanish Temple pamphlets and have had no complaints. We are happy to have the books which you so kindly sent and they are being put to good use already. Favorable reactions have reached us about the books in the library and we are anxious to see the [World Order] magazine there. Through the library notices in the papers people learn of the arrival of new books and speak to us of the additional Baha’i books. It was sweet of you to send us the maps, which we now have pasted on the wall of our study...It is very good for travelers to take equipment for illustrated lectures to the Latin American countries on subjects of general interest.*

*“Mis Navas and Miss Rangel are translating passages from the Hidden Words in connection with the class at La Escuela de Artes y Oficios. Although Miss Navas has not declared her intention of becoming a believer, she expressed her understanding of the Faith when she said: “It is difficult to translate the Hidden Words of Baha’u’llah because God is speaking”. At the same class Sr. Ochoa, born in Ecuador, expressed his desire to become a Baha’i lecturer and win his friends to the Faith. He is now studying the literature...*

*“We have had our third weekly meeting at La Boca with Mr. Osborne’s group and are studying the Goal of a New World Order with them as a result of their consultation...*

*“There was a good response to the Temple lecture, which Louise gave at the Army and Navy YMCA Thursday evening, January 25<sup>th</sup>. About fifty people were there and a number of searching questions were asked at the close of the lecture by members of the audience. The Program Director handled the publicity ably getting Louise’s picture and articles in both of the newspapers. The majority of the audience were civilians who had seen the notices in the papers. Mr. McDaniel had sent some additional slides of the Temple showing the latest developments. We were most happy about this as the latest picture is a dream. We hope in the near future that a slide showing Abdu’l-Baha’s laying the cornerstone will be added to the collection. The Program Director and the Executive Secretary of the YMCA were deeply impressed with the message and discussed the teachings with us for some time after the lecture while getting some*

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211. *Baha’u’llah*, *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 72 quoted by Shoghi Effendi.

212. Baha’i Representative

refreshments. The Executive Secretary then brought us home and made some offers for future engagements whereby we may be able to give the message. We are praying that the results of the lecture will be far reaching. We asked why there were so few service men at lecture and were told that many of the men were fundamentalists from the South-Baptists and Methodists.

*"...We feel sorry for you every time we think of your having to read our weighty and this time, we hope the one from the Guardian will compensate. Surely you must be one of God's new race of men..."*

*"Last evening Sr. Ochoa, born in Ecuador, now with his family in Panama and working in the Zone brought his mother and two sisters to our house to hear the Message. He told his mother about the Faith and had given her the Spanish literature he had and she said that she believed all she had read. She represents the highest type of Latin motherhood, a mature woman of evanescent beauty. One of the girls, about 10 years of age, sat on the edge of her chair with her face aglow as she heard Louise give the message in Spanish. Both Sr. Ochoa and his mother recognized the picture of Abdu'l-Baha and think they have seen it in some book. He has been looking through his books but cannot find it or the one of Martha Root whom he also recognized. Sr. Rosendo Ochoa is coming twice a week to study with us to prepare himself to teach the Cause. He is now reading the Ighan<sup>213</sup> in Spanish. Allah'u'Abha"!!*

## VISIT TO THE PRESIDENT

*"Speed ye forth from the horizon of power, in the name of your Lord, the Unconstrained, and announce unto His servants, with wisdom and eloquence the tidings of this Cause, whose splendor hath been shed upon the world of being".<sup>214</sup>*

Louise and Cora's letter dated Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> 1940, to Louie indicates their visit to the President of the Republic:

*"You may recall that our first letter in January told you that this month opened as a month of promise, and we know you will be rejoiced to learn that the rapid succession of teaching events was climaxed on the 31<sup>st</sup> with an audience with President Boyd of the Republic of Panama. Through prayer and guidance, the ways and means were provided at this time. The previous evening, he had seen us sitting with the honored guests at the graduation exercises of the Universidad Nacional and had spoken to us..."*

*"His Excellency, tall and handsome, dressed in a white linen suit came forward and extended his hand in a friendly greeting. We presented our Baha'i credentials and in the direct manner of a businessman he inquired the purpose of our visit. Then with smiling and gracious dignity listened intently and with scrutiny to our message. He wished us success and told us we would find an echo of our work in Panama as they are a peace-loving people. We spoke of the destiny of Panama in the New World Order and presented him with "Baha'u'llah and the New Era" and*

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213. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan or Book of Certitude

214. Baha'u'llah, Advent of Divine Justice, p. 63, quoted by Shoghi Effendi

*“El objeto de un Orden Nuevo Mundial”<sup>215</sup> por Shoghi Effendi, calling his attention to the passage on True Civilization with reference to the rulers of the world.*

*“In saying goodbye to His Excellency, we offered him our services for the promotion of good will and understanding in this Republic and again he wished us success. Dr. Augusto S. Boyd, former ambassador to the United States, was recalled in December to assume the presidency at the death of the former president. President Boyd stands for world peace, and it was he who was chosen to send the America’s message of Peace to Europe.”*

## **BAHA’I OBSERVATIONS I**

*“Peerless is this Day, for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries, and as a light unto the darkness of the times.”<sup>216</sup>*

Louise and Cora used to write for the World Order magazine of their observations, as it was recorded previously. On Feb. 7 to March 2, 1940<sup>217</sup>, they wrote “BAHA’I OBSERVATIONS Panama”. It is quite interesting to know how these two ladies, have gone through difficulties and dark days, yet always with the hope of the bright day and have achieved it in full:

*“The month of Dominion, Mulk, has given us glimpses of God’s dominion over all by unfolding some of the limitless possibilities of the work here as foretold by the Guardian. Let us not infer, however, that we have no tests. At times all doors seem closed and then we remember that even with God there is motion and stillness, activity and quiescence, and at these dark night hours we are conscious that the dawn will break, and the sun of the teachings will arise and illumine this Republic of Panama.*

*“The Guardian reminds us that in the “Advent” that at the close of this first century the present generation will hand on to the generation that must succeed it the torch of Divine Guidance...that they in turn...may carry that torch with the self-same vigor, fidelity, and enthusiasm, to the darkest and remotest corners of the earth. During the month of Dominion children have come to the meetings. First two, then five and now nine, and incidentally they have come with a beautiful mother whose son told her of the message as a result of the meetings at La Escuela de Artes y Oficios. Our difficulty at the present is finding a suitable place to meet. Thus far they have come with the adults and sit with rapt attention and show a remarkable ability for memorizing the written word. What a power they will be as they develop, carrying with them the Creative Word itself. They range in age from eight to Thirteen years. Three sisters are Greek and the others are Panamanians. A picture of their radiant faces would reinvigorate any isolated pioneer.*

*“The La Boca group is radiant and an inspiration to any one coming in contact with them. The sudden arrival of Lorol Schopflocher has further stimulated their interest, some coming to three meetings during the week and literally hanging on to every word. Much to our great joy we have learned that they are really Panamanians so we feel we have made a greater inroad into the into the Republic than we had realized. Surely God will make this downtrodden race*

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215. The Object of a New World Order by Shoghi Effendi

216. Baha’u’llah – Advent of Divine Justice, p. 66, quoted by Shoghi Effendi

217. Baha’i month of Mulk, dominion of the year 96 Badi

*glorious. Such faithfulness is enviable and such determination and perseverance to know the truth before affiliating themselves with a Baha'i Community is to be commended. Truly they will become a great power and will, in turn arise and assist in establishing the banner of Baha'u'llah in this most great land of promise.*

*"The evening of Lorol's arrival a meeting was held at La Universidad Nacional de Panama, through the courtesy of the Rector, at which nineteen were present representing various races and nationalities. The encouraging thing was that they not only gave a warm response to her talk but that they also came to the following meetings. No doubt it was the first inter-racial experience for some of them that they found in Baha'u'llah's unifying message a power that transcended all man-made limitations and barriers. Among them were a dentist, a superintendent of schools, teachers, a statistician, a young philosopher, wife of a University Professor, a fingerprint expert and a woman attorney. The lovely children attended and showed such attention and interest as I have never before witnessed in children attending a spiritual meeting.*

*"The illustrated Temple lecture at the Cristobal Army and Navy Y.M.C.A. attracted the Peruvian Consul and his wife and the Ecuadorian Consul. Their interest was indicated before the lecture began when they introduced themselves to us. The next day we were invited to the home of the Peruvian Consul for tea. He had first heard of the Baha'i Faith from Mrs. Pilkington in Portland, Oregon. The same weekend we attended, as guests, the Isthmusian Religion Workers Federation and later became members. This of course means that the group of religious leaders on the Isthmus has recognized us a religious worker also. Some indicated their interest by asking questions. One minister is now reading the creative Word. May Baha'u'llah surround him with His love and protection and immerse him in the ocean of the Divine teachings so he will arise and assist in establishing the Faith in this Republic.*

*"We find the Panamanians most generous when one respects them and treats them as friends. An example of this was shown when a gentleman at the business office of the Star and Herald gave us many copies of the papers containing Baha'i publicity. Again, it was shown when we spent a day in the interior and visited the native huts with thatched roofs and dirt floors (at least three generations old) where we were given the customary welcome "a sus ordenes"<sup>218</sup> and made to feel at home. They gave us gifts of fruit from their garden and even carried the large package to the car. Every effort is being made by the Panama pioneers to take part in the life of the people. The Indian servant at 19 Fourth of July Ave. responded warmly to the Teachings and has taken with her to the interior several Spanish pamphlets so her people will know the message. Her face was radiant and tears came to her eyes when we parted. Such simplicity devotion and beauty is shown in her life as would inspire the heart of all who could know her as we did.*

*"Another friend of ours who is familiar with the Persian and Arabic literature has written out to Beloved Guardian remarking on the style of his writings and translations and referring especially to the Book of Certitude and The Advent of the Divine Justice as representing a new and fresh literature. We could write endlessly about these contacts.*

*"We live relying upon Baha'u'llah to guide and direct our every activity asking only for that*

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218. At your service, courtesy saying in Spanish.

which will promote the growth and establishment of the Faith. "He doeth whatsoever He willeth".

## GETTING MORE OF THE PANAMANIAN CULTURE

On March 17, Louise and Cora wrote to Louile. They now appreciate more thoroughly the Latin and Panamanian culture that everything should be taken with a grain of salt. Latins are very humble and loving, they are accommodative and respectful and rarely contradict one another, though they might not be in agreement, which could be taken for positive, while in reality it is not. That is why they have written:

*"As far as Panama is concerned, we feel that we must ask you to delete the entire list of names which Cora and Louise sent it. On reading it we saw our lack of discretion in sending the names knowing that as far as this republic is concerned only the names of confirmed believers should be listed. It would be disastrous to have these people approached or written to until time proves their interest".*

There is also a deep acknowledgement of Mrs. Lorol Scopflocher visit to Panama: "...Dear Lorol quickened and inspired the students of our two weekly classes, one at La Boca and the other at La Universidad Nacional (through the kindness of the Rector who opens his private office during vacation). Without exception all who attended these classes have a greater interest after hearing Lorol. Lorol is well aware of the difficulties here and even cabled the Guardian about them. In spite of the insuperable obstacles there are ever-repeating confirmations, which cause us to forge ahead.

*"Will you please ask Mrs. Frances Stewart to communicate with us as we hope to take her to Colon to contact some diplomats".*

## BAHA'I OBSERVATION II

"The Book of God is wide open, and His Word is summoning all mankind unto Him. No more than a mere handful, however, hat been found to cleave to His Cause, or to become the instruments for its promotion. These few have been endued with the Divine Elixir that can, alone, transform into purest gold the dross of the world, and have been empowered to administer the infallible remedy for all the ills that afflict the children of men..."<sup>219</sup>

On the 'BAHA'I OBSERVATIONS – PANAMA' pertaining to 'Ala and Baha'<sup>220</sup> 97 Louise and Cora write:

*"The month of fasting, 'Ala' unfolded an entirely unexpected plan for the establishment of the Faith on the Isthmus: Cora's moving into quarters in the Zone because of economic conditions*

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219. Baha'u'llah, quoted in America's Spiritual Mission, p. 4

220. Ala is Loftiness and Baha is Splendor, the last and first Baha'i months respectively, corresponding to March 2 – April 1940

*and Louise's going to the other side of the Isthmus to start classes with the interested people. In this way the pioneering has been extended to both sides of the Isthmus the Canal Zone and the Republic of Panama. In accordance with the Master's words recorded in the Advent by the beloved Guardian, p. 5 "...the Republic of Panama, wherein the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans come together through the Panama Canal". Because the canal is in the Zone<sup>221</sup>, we believe that the Master refers in this passage to the geographical position of Panama and includes United States territory with the Republic of Panama. Hence, we feel that our work in the Zone is of equal importance with our teaching in the Republic."*

*"On the second day of the fast we moved to the Hotel Colombia in the very heart of the Spanish-speaking, Roman Catholic city of Panama for two reasons: One to be with Lorol; two, to be where we could hear more Spanish than in our former home at 19 Avenida Fourth of July. There had been some objections to our many callers, so we felt that the time had come to go elsewhere in spite of the call of comfort and coolness of two nice rooms and a private bath. Lorol felt strongly that we should make the break and as we had felt it coming for some time it was not a great surprise to find ourselves in a large room with balcony facing the historic Plaza de Bolivar. Through the palms surrounding the statue of the great libertador<sup>222</sup> we had a view of the Catedral de San Francisco de Veraguas and adjoining it a girl's catholic school and the La Salle school for boys built on the site where Bolivar met with a group of men in 1826 and visioned an Inter-America University. In three directions we could see from our balcony the Bay of Panama and from the "terraza"<sup>223</sup>, roof garden the entire city of Panama, the bay with the islands in the distance and the Ancon Hill to the West."*

*"Several ministers showed interest in the teachings at the meeting of the Isthmian Religious Workers Federation held at the Union Church of Pedro Miguel. One of them called at the hotel later to seek an answer to his many questions and is now reading "Security for a Failing World". This minister stands alone in the Federation favoring admission of negro ministers to membership and is particularly attracted to the Baha'i principle of the Oneness of Mankind."*

*"The first days of Baha, Splendor, brought the light of the Faith to two new groups. At Pension Margot, New Cristobal, where Louise is staying, Jewish refugees from Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia have read the Baha'i literature in German in vol. V. of the Baha'i World and in a German copy of Baha'u'llah and the New Era. English and Spanish literature have been distributed under the same roof. We are so thankful for the copies of Baha'u'llah and the New Era in French and German as many languages are spoken and read in Panama. Only generations to come will see the fruit of the seed, which is now being sown but 'Abdu'l-Baha has promised us that every seed sown in this glorious century will bear fruit."*

On April 5<sup>th</sup> Louise and Cora were guests of the Imperial Literary and Social Club at the Cristobal Club House<sup>224</sup>, the most outstanding club or group on the Atlantic side of the Isthmus.

*"Both of us addressed the group of twelve members and their friends. A refugee from Hungary accompanied us and also spoke briefly and started the bombardment of questions, which the*

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221. United States territory in Panama

222. Liberator in English

223. In English, Balcony

224. For Caribbean background inhabitants



entire group kept up till after ten o'clock. Their rapid-fire questions (faster than we could possibly answer) were explained when they stated that they were a debating club. They expressed their appreciation and their wish for us to come again. Our chemist friend from Hungary is on his way to Roosevelt Hospital in New Jersey where he will continue his work with tuberculosis. He is much interested in bringing about a better understanding among the races and stands ready to assist in a practical way. He will address the club in the near future. We feel that much credit is due Mr. Osborne, superintendent of Silver Schools in the Zone as it was he who not only organized the La Boca group, which is an over-increasing joy and inspiration to us but he also arranged for the meeting with the club on the Atlantic side. The La Boca group is now studying the New Era and each member is preparing and discussing a special chapter with the group. They are also spreading the teachings among their friends thus fulfilling 'Abdu'l-Baha's words: "May this down-trodden race become glorious". It has been said that Panama will become a black republic and if this is true these men will surely be worthy of high positions of trust and ready to rise to great heights of service to humanity."

"Cora's work brings her into contact with many people every day and as world conditions become more tense and confusing, she can glimpse the importance of knowing all these people and standing ready to serve. In accordance with the Guardian's instruction on pp. 42 - 43 of the Advent we are trying to reach as many of the sections of the population as possible and through our friends in the consular service and in the Little Theater Group in Cristobal and Colon another field is opened. "Great indeed is this Day!"

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### BAHA'I OBSERVATIONS III

Between the Atlantic and Pacific  
 Where the Panama Canal is cut  
 Lie mountains, lakes and valleys  
 And thousands lost in a hunt.-  
 A hunt for gold and possessions  
 A search for glory and fame-  
 Now crumbled to dust and ashes  
 Man's heart is God's habitation.  
 Another hunt has began  
 There's a new pioneer in Panama  
 Anew life begun  
 Not for gold and possessions  
 Not for glory and fame  
 But a search for hearts  
 Which are quickened  
 Awaiting His Glorious Name.

Cora Oliver kept on writing her 'BAHA'I OBSERVATIONS - PANAMA' even when Louise had left for the US. She wrote a summary of the activities from May 16 to September 7, 1940<sup>225</sup>, and she adorned it with a poetry possibly one of her own, as it is not identified:

The observation three was written by Cora alone. Louise had gone to the US. Yet, Cora,

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225. Azamat, Nur, Rahmat, Kalimat & Asma 97 in Baha'i calendar.

always active in her teaching activities in the Canal Zone wrote:

*"It seems unnecessary to record that Louise left for the State in May to attend the Inter-America Summer Session and the other Baha'i Summer Schools as most of you know it and many have been fortunate enough to have gotten from her directly reports of the activities and conditions in Panama. However, it is being said, as before the end of September Louis will be in Panama again to assist with the work here.*

*"New avenues are always opening before the pioneer and adaptability as well as perseverance is an excellent companion. Shortly after Louise left, when calling on the wife of the Superintendent of Schools in the Canal Zone, a real surprise came when she invited me to be her houseguest for the vacation period. Can you imagine a pioneer being more fortunate? Our weeks of sharing walks, talks, drives, swimming, reading, work and play all contributed to cement our friendship – a friendship, which will always be cherished. We even did Red Cross work when chatting in the evenings in her attractive living room, a large room screened on three sides so one feels very close to the beauties of the tropics.*

*"In the morning the roses and tropical flowers in her garden were gathered to fill the house with their beauty and fragrance. We sat by and watched the spider lily open. It opens so fast that its movements are easy to observe. Only by living close to the gems in each kingdom can one partake of the real joys. This is especially true with one in a new country. One morning we looked out of my bedroom window to see the beautiful mango tree, which stood at the corner of the garden striped of its branches and finally taken out – extracted like a tooth leaving an ugly place and almost as ugly a feeling for those who had enjoyed it. These are unusual times and the tree had to give way to a high protective fence to enclose a nearby power plant. A few weeks later the Zone landscape architect had shrubs planted to fill in. One hardly misses the tree now. Would that all the wounds of today be as successfully healed.*

*"Her garden overlooks one of the large airports in the Zone and from early morning to late night one can hear the drone of the motors as the planes roar in and out of the airport. In the distance is the new town of Diablo sharply outlined against the background of low hills. It has been built in the last few months, complete with paved roads, bachelor quarters and family houses, a large office building for the engineers, the third set of locks will be built under the direction of this group<sup>226</sup> a commissary, a mess hall, Post Office, etc. all to provide for the many new employees – even a new school. Other new towns are being built, also Army Posts on both sides of the Canal. The whole Zone hums with activity and has taken on quite a new role since my arrival nearly a year ago. People are not alarmed and accept it all as it comes making the best of limited quarters and delays caused by abnormal influx of people.*

*"Transportation is somewhat limited in Panama, especially late at night, and early in the morning. There is a Zone bus, quite inadequate and too irregular in schedule. There are jitneys, remnants of the days of large and otherwise touring cars, but a bit expensive for one with limited means. There are Army buses -best of all- but they stop at midnight. Then there is the "chiva"<sup>227</sup>, the native bus looked upon as the transportation for the peon, colored employees and others of lower social rank. A street car line offers a long ride for a low fare but it stops at eleven o'clock.*

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226. The promised set of Canal locks project was abandoned under the US command, only to be materialized by the Panamanian Government some over a half a century later.

227. A type of colored bus in Colombia and Panama. Literary means goat.

*Recently for financial reasons, I have tried the chiva with good results and gathered a bit of local color. The occupants pay little attention to me except to shove along giving me as much space as possible. I'm usually the only woman and frequently the only white person, making the trip. The other night I came in after midnight on one driven by an oriental with a turban. Where in the world a white woman rides alone, after midnight, with an oriental driver away from his homeland, the bus made by Ford and do so safely!!! Did I say adaptability was needed by pioneers!! I am always conscious of Baha'u'llah's protection and ever ready to call upon Him.*

*"Panamanian friends have called at my quarters in the Zone and one young woman brought back from the interior dulces<sup>228</sup>, preserved plantain, which her mother had made. These people are most appreciative for friendship offered and are most generous in sharing when they know that the friendship is real.*

*"The La Boca friends are studying Fundamentals for Baha'i Membership. Mr. Osborne, the Supervisor of Silver Schools in the Zone has been in the State during the summer studying at Columbia.*

*"Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, Rector of La Universidad Nacional de Panama has left for the States to accept a position on the faculty of the University of Southern California. We lose a good friend. The meetings at La Escuela de Artes y Oficios are being held weekly. This group is particularly anxious for Mrs. Stewart's visit and were happy to have with them September 4<sup>th</sup> the former pioneer to Guatemala, Gerrard Sluter who was en route to Colombia his new field of pioneering for Baha'u'llah.*

*"A trip to Atlantic side renewed old friendships and made new acquaintances. Literature was given to some who had requested it and more left at the YMCA. One inquiry for literature came thru the Secretary of the YMCA who kindly loaned their copy and then got in touch with me about her. A Roman Catholic friend has borrowed books and also a copy of the Koran.*

*"So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole world"<sup>229</sup>*

## **DIVERGENCE**

Cora's story was recounted earlier together with that of Louise. Their first few months' activities are quite intertwined and the story of one is the story of the other or the story of both, which indeed are inseparable. Being too close and, living in the same place for long, created a detail observation into each other's lives, resulted a slow misunderstanding between the two. Each one was brought up quite differently. Louise was charming and relaxed and grown-up in an upper echelon of the society, while Cora, meticulous, disciplined, who had to work hard to earn her life. What they had in common was their deep love for the Faith, their dedication and commitment in every aspect of the Baha'i life. Yet standards were different, which caused estrangement between the two. How they could not solve this inharmony between themselves, both grown-ups and quite mature in life and in the Faith, before it had its effect on the newly build community, is the question that involved both

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228. Cookies from the interior of Panama.

229. Baha'u'llah, World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 203, quoted by Shoghi Effendi.

institutions and privates in the affairs of Panama. It was unfortunate.

The matter was not unknown to the beloved Guardian, and when Cora would write to him, of course she would receive his answer. But the Guardian's awareness of the situation was only to let the ladies to grow maturely. His role was only acting as a kind father. He would only guide and encourage. It was up to the pioneer to grow into maturity, and it was up to the institutions to correct their ways of actions, if necessary, not him. Cora was very dedicated to her Faith and as perfectionist as she was, could not tolerate nothing less. Her expectations were quite high. She considered that she was dealing with the newly born babies and treated them as an older sister with the right of rebuking if they did not see her and only her point of view, which it would go to the point of hurting them.

She had built herself in life and expected others to do the same almost immediately. Over anticipation and a dominant character would undermine the essential tenet of the Faith which is nothing short of unity! Her teaching trips to the Central American countries were not as successful as expected of her. Many a time there were unfavorable comments from the communities she visited, though she made her trips with sacrifice and dedication. When characters would not match, even love and sacrifice has adverse effect. Unfortunately, Cora would suffer much because of this.

## **FAST FORWARD**

Other episodes concerning Cora are being mentioned in some other sections, which the reader will become more acquainted with the situations. She always maintained her correspondence with the beloved Guardian and as usual, where he always encouraged her in her pioneering work. In serving the Faith, she had unmatched dedication.

Indeed, how wonderful it is to see the service performed by the 'servant' through the 'Divine's' eyes, where nothing is poured out except kindness and affection, praise and encouragement, boost hope and reassurance. And, happy the 'servant' who can realize all these in the path of service, improving it to its utmost ability. The prayer of the Guardian for Cora was to overcome all obstacles. At continuation, few examples of his answering to Cora's letters. After the formation of the first Assembly of Panama City in 1945, she wrote to the Guardian and received the following response on his behalf:

***"The work in Panama is at last on sound footing, and your patient labours are bearing fruit. He hopes that the Cause will gradually spread among the Indian<sup>230</sup> and other colored members of the population and demonstrate its truly universal and unbiased character".***

And in his own handwriting:

***"I deeply appreciate all that you have achieved for our beloved Faith, and I cherish great hope for your services in the future. You have truly set a noble example to your fellow-workers, and I pray that the Beloved may bless every effort you exert, and guide every step you take in the path of service. Persevere, be***

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230. Native indigenous and Caribbean inhabitants.

*assured and happy.*

*Your true and grateful brother, Shoghi”*

When Cora sent some information regarding the occurring problems in Canal Zone to the Guardian, he wrote back on March 9, 1946, in his own handwriting:

***“May the Beloved bless continually your meritorious efforts, guide you, reward you for the splendid endeavors, and aid you to surmount all obstacles, and win memorable victories in the field of teaching.***

*Your true and grateful brother, Shoghi”.*

In August of the same year, Cora received yet another letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian, after the incorporation of the Local Assembly of Panama City:

*“He urges you to go on with your work in the city of Panama, and assist in consolidating and building the community there. For the present time this is where you can do the most good and the classes you conduct, the friends you attract to the Faith, and the support you give the believers there are all needed and valuable services”.*

And in his own handwriting:

***“Assuring you of my loving appreciation of your notable services to the Faith, and of my constant prayers for your welfare, and the realization of every hope you cherish for the promotion of our glorious Faith. Shoghi”***

It is not to analyze neither to judge the positive or negative impact of a pioneer in the path of service to the Cause, yet it is important for the pioneer to be conscious of how the Cause is being served in the area of service and what results are being harvested, if the instructions are being carried on as expected, after all, the beloved Guardian was infallible and his guidance were always correct.

Although Cora was member of the Assembly of Panama, but Cora kept herself aloof and rarely participated in the meetings – maybe for the sake of harmony or she had other personal reasons, but the impact of the attitude did not accord with the instructions of the Guardian, he urged her to go and assist in consolidating and building the community in Panama City, emphasizing:

*“...for the present time this is where you can do the most good...”*

Yet it was not until Louise Caswell moved to Colon on the Atlantic side for good, and Julie Regal back to the United States, that Cora tried to be more active in Panama Assembly. Double effort was needed to close the already caused rift with the community.

## **THE CEBMA**

When the Baha’i Teaching Committee for the Central America<sup>231</sup> moved to Panama in mid-1949, Cora volunteered, using her vacations, to travel through Central America. But all

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231. CEBMA, Comite de Ensenanza Bahai de Meso America, Baha’i Teaching Committee of Meso America.

institutional reports indicate that it was undesirable to do so, due to the tension she already created throughout these countries. With the approval of the Inter America Committee, her trip was cancelled. Not satisfied, Cora wrote to the Guardian directly and told him of her teaching plan for Central America during her vacations in 1950, knowing that he was not going to turn her down, and once the approval of the Guardian reached her in February 5, 1950:

***“Highly approve loving prayers accompanying you. Shoghi”***,

Cora offered her services again with an Ace in her hand!

Undermining the institutions’ decision, Cora approached the CEBMA again, but this time, having a higher mandate approval, both institutions could not but agree with her to make her goal achieved. It was quite an astute plan where none of the institutions could contradict her. Cora writes in her memoir:

*“It was his message of approval, which enabled me to make the trip, as the committee had thought to cancel it after the return to Panama of two of its non-resident committee members, who had just finished a teaching trip<sup>232</sup> in the area. However, with the approval of the Guardian, I spent several weeks travelling throughout the area, gathering further consolidation data that would shed additional light on the development there, data, which was presented to the NSA of the United States.*

Cora wrote again to the Guardian and briefed him of her trip. Whatever her report, the beloved Guardian through his secretary answered:

*“He deeply appreciates all you are accomplishing there, and the progress made...He will pray for the success of your teaching trip; of great help to the friends, he feels sure”.*

And in his own handwriting:

***“Assuring you of my loving prayers for the success of your meritorious and continued efforts for the promotion of our beloved Faith and the consolidation of its nascent institutions.***

***Your true brother, Shoghi”***

Cora also kept the communal Guestbook at her home where many visitors signed it. The Guestbook is historical as it carries names<sup>233</sup> such as Mrs. Collins, Mathew Kaszab, the Mottahedes, Philip Sprague, Lorol Schopflocher, Mrs. True and her daughters, Katherine and Edna, Dorothy Baker, Horace Holley, Gayle Woolson and many more names, all who passed through Panama and stayed with Cora, enjoying of her hospitality and entertainment. The Guestbook has all different dates starting 1939 onwards.

Cora was a dedicated pioneer, in spite of personal differences with other members of the Community she had a warm and welcoming heart. She did help whoever needed it in the best of her ability. When Gwenn Sholtis –pioneer in Venezuela, became sick with severe asthma attack, she was brought to Panama, and she was hospitalized in the Canal Zone hospital. It

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232. Words ‘consolidation project’ is being replaced by ‘teaching trip.

233. All are active American believers in the 1900s, some were appointed as Hands of the Cause of God by the Guardian.

was all under the care of Cora that she was cured. Cora cabled the National Spiritual Assembly on the health condition of Gwenn, and the secretary cabled the beloved Guardian, who cabled back to Cora c/o of Roy Wilhelm:

***“Assure Sholtis fervent prayers advise pioneer wherever feasible for health,  
Shoghi Rabbani”.***

## **Observations**

During the early period when the two lady pioneers, Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver lived in Panama, when there was no established local institution such as Local Spiritual Assembly, slowly the relationship between them got soured to the point of causing disunity in the small community of Panama. The role of the third pioneer could not solve the deepening problem and even the institutions could be helpless.

The intention of the writer is not to point out the problem, but it is worth mentioning that if pioneers do not sacrifice their personal preferences for those of the community, the latter suffers much to the point of disintegration.

At continuation, the story of Julie Regal, as the third pioneer with set mandate from the Guardian to bring unity between the two pioneers, both were almost twice of age as she was, where it mentions the reason for lack of progress in the infant community despite of all her efforts.

This story is in fact being looked at in a positive way by every believer living in any given community to think and act according to the tenets of the Faith before anything else. Unity always is the goal, harmony and understanding always is what one should have in mind before anything else.

Tests are abundant and general, but it is us who must seek shelter in the teachings of the Faith to be protected. If careless of this fact, the result of the set goal is always adverse.

The writer had to eliminate some paragraphs from the Julie’s diary as he was advised to do so.

## JULIE LOIS REGAL<sup>234</sup>

This noble soul who at the prime of her youth dedicated her entire life effectively in the promotion of the Faith of Baha'u'llah that was so close to her heart. Her sensitivity would make her feel the spiritual vibrations around her. She was very detached, and nothing would hurt her feelings, except inharmony. She had a strong and loving heart that could repulse the undesired sentiments.



Julie Regal in Panama, circa 1946

Julie's unpublished 52 pages memoirs reflects her tender character and how she cared for her friends and anybody else. How she freely gave away to others for the sake of her Faith whatever might mean something to them. She spent almost all her savings to bring a number of native believers from all corners of Central America to the first ever Latin America Congress held in Panama in 1946, as well as the second Congress a year later, where she played a major role, paying for their travel expenses and lodging.

One thing though did bother her that was reflected in many of the pages of her memoirs of over four years of her stay in Panama and that was her relationship with her colleague pioneers, though optimum and to the point of admiration at the beginning, yet slowly ebbed causing a heavy heart. She pondered upon behaviors and studied it long, and observed such an effect on other believers, she could not but distance herself without uttering a word lest she might hurt and cause unhappiness, bringing inharmony to the community. Once she realized that her capacity was full, she left Panama, leaving behind her sympathy for all the

members of her community.

The dear and long-standing maidservant of Baha'u'llah, recipient of many messages from the beloved Guardian and highly appreciated by him, also so much admired by many members of the community, who was twice as old as Julie, like anyone else, had shortcomings not easily could dispose them off. Many a time, one's weakness can even affect to communities beyond. Julie could not but recount many of the incidents in her memoirs, as she was so much affected by the circumstances that even recently, at her advanced age, she wrote to the writer of how she suffered during those early days in Panama.

With the above preamble, the story of Julie as a heroine of the Faith of Baha'u'llah and co-

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234. Note 1: There are some information taken from Julie's memoirs which though overlaps with similar information from the Inter America Committee correspondence and Minutes, yet each is different in character.

Note 2: Some of the personal observations of Julie regarding pioneering relationship, due to their sensitiveness were not included in this study, although she mentioned in her correspondence with the author that even at her old age, she had a heavy heart from the memories of those earlier days.



founder of its early community of Panama, is to be recounted here.

Julie was born on April 23, 1920, in Chicago, just a year and a half before the ascension of the Master Abdu'l-Baha. Her father Arthur Regal from Ohio a descendant of early English Settlers in America and mother, Adeline Kessler from Germany accompanied her family as a small child. When she was only 12, her father took up with Esperanto and Julie became an active Esperantist throughout her life. Julie went to public schools in Chicago until she was 17, later, she went to college, which prepared her for secretarial work. She started working from the age 18 and ever since she was self-supporting. In 1932, the whole family accepted the Faith of Baha'u'llah and became very active in the Cause. When she reached Panama on October 3, 1943, she was just turned 23. Stayed in Panama till early 1948, roughly five years<sup>235</sup>.



Julie Regal at the age of 90 in Gasford, Australia, 2007

The circumstances, which lead Julie to pioneer to Panama, are recorded in her memoirs. They are short stories indicating each episode separately. The document she prepared is indeed important, as it sheds much light over the obscure corners of the initial period of the history of the Faith in Panama. She wrote her memoirs with much accuracy, thanks to her acute memory. Stories are simple, plain and straightforward, as was her character. She was a pure-hearted young girl and needed to be treated with care, tenderness and love, considering everyone as a dear member of her own family. Many of the friends deeply appreciated and remembered her with affection, during and even after she left Panama, such as Louise Caswell, Alfred Osborne, and other new believers such as Desiderio Duque, Manuel Corgas, Raquel Francois, Blanca de Campos, and many more for her orderliness and discipline. Having a big heart, she generously shared with everyone. Julie was very sociable and happy being, and much enjoyed entertaining her friends at her home.

Julie begins her memoirs by writing:

*“A letter and a postcard were awaiting me when I arrived home from Mexico in July 1942, and before I had looked at either, my dear Mother was telling me emphatically how I should respond to them, for she had read the postcard, which was a follow-up to the letter: Now that I*

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235. In 2015 when the writer was in touch with Julie, she was 95 and was living with her daughter Diane and her family in Australia.

was home, after an exciting and wonderful 5½ month vacation, I should not contemplate any more trips!"

Margaret Kunz Ruhe<sup>236</sup>, a friend of Julie had communicated to her:

*"...had written to suggest that, since I had learned some Spanish and acquired some experience in Latin America, I should write to the Inter-America committee and offer to pioneer. But I agreed with my mother, for after this long absence I was glad to be home".*

But when a call comes, nothing should stop it and when the divine plan is drawn, there is no escape, she continues:

*"However, at every Baha'i feast an urgent call for pioneers was made. I had no excuse. Finally, I offered to pioneer in my own country, was chosen for Laramie, Wyoming, quit my job, and got ready to leave in January. My grips were packed when, four days before the date for my departure, I suffered such a spell of weakness as necessitated a change of plans."*

*"Meanwhile, unbeknown to me, Margaret Ruhe had written to the Inter-America Committee about me and they had written me asking me to go to Panama to join the two pioneers already there..."*

Of course, Julie did not know that for quite some time, the Panamanian pioneers, Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver, have been trying every mean possible to get more pioneers to go to Panama for the formation of the Community and consequently, the formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly. And for this reason, Louise had offered \$1000 to the NSA of the US to spend it on one or two pioneers for Panama. Julie, before embarking to her home front pioneering, attended a Winter School:

*"...and while there, I was so tormented by my refusal to go to Panama that at last I yielded and wrote to the Inter-America Committee offering to go."*

Julie made an application for passport to Panama and also applied for job as stenographer in the Canal Zone, though her passport application was refused, yet:

*"I was accepted for employment by the Navy, who would pay my transportation."*

She was happy having a job-offer, a serious problem for many pioneers, which was thus nicely solved. Her plane landed not in Panama City but in Albrook Field of Canal Zone, and Army/Navy US base. She marked the day: October 3, 1943! Due to scarceness of lodging back then, the Navy found out that Julie has some friends in Panama. They called on Louise and Cora and arranged for her to stay with them:

*"So, it was that I arrived at their apartment at No. 10 Tivoli Avenue<sup>237</sup>, instead."*

Julie writes of her first encounter with the two pioneers:

*"Affectionately they greeted me, and the strong perfume of a bouquet of nardo lilies in the room emphasized their warm welcome".*

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236. Wife of the ex-member of the Universal House of Justice Dr. David S. Ruhe

237. Tivoli Avenue being the dividing border between Panama downtown and Balboa, Canal Zone, later called Fourth of July Avenue, now Martyrs Avenue (Avenida de los martires).

Soon Julie found her room:

*“A couch in the corner of the dining room was given to me as my bed. How ideal, I thought, for us three pioneers to all live together in this spacious and beautiful apartment”.*

Julie considered a real privilege to live with two lady pioneers almost twice as old as she was:

*“Besides, for me to live and work with Louise and Cora I considered a tremendous bounty. They were surely among the cream of Baha’is and would enormously inspire me, guide and help me to ennoble my character, and guide me in the paths of pioneer service”.*

The location of her new place was quite convenient, as she could catch a bus directly to her job:

*“...at the Naval Supply Depot on the bank of the Canal”.*

Cora did not lose time, when she took her to the University in one afternoon to see the Rector, Dr. Mendez Pereira, who arranged for Julie to attend history class free of charge, to improve her Spanish. And of course, she was going to make some Baha’i contacts there. She could attend the classes with no problem with transport and she also could attend more classes on Literature given by the Rector himself, Julie recalls her spirit during those first few weeks in her new pioneering place was:

*“...more elated, joyous and blithe than it had ever been”.*

Then she remembers one evening curled up in her couch, she was reading a statement from Abdu’l-Baha:

*“...that if life at one time proffers us a sweet cup, a hundred bitter ones will follow, and I could hardly believe it”.*

But she had thought of the hardships, which pioneers will go through and suffer; yet *“...I had resolved to unflinchingly brave them all. But the beauty of the world dominated my outlook, and nothing marred my gladness”.*

The misunderstanding between the two already established pioneers, had cooled off their relationship, for quite some time, and it was affecting the small community of Panama. The matter now out of hand, had already reached the institutions of the Faith in the US and even the beloved Guardian new about it. Of course, Julie did not know this matter at this stage and was ignorant of the sanction of the National Spiritual Assembly that the two pioneers had immediately to live separately. Their spacious, comfortable and convenient shared residence had to be vacated as soon as possible. Julie recalls the surprise she received very soon:

*“Two weeks had passed when one evening Louise and Cora drew up chairs before me as I relaxed on my couch, for they had some news to impart to me. A letter had just come to them from the National Spiritual Assembly with instructions that the pioneers must live separately. Stunned and disconcerted was I by this news. How strange! No reason was given, but Cora and Louise were firm; these were instructions from the National Spiritual Assembly, and they must be obeyed at once”.*

Julie must now start looking for another place to live and that is immediately! As difficult as it has been for the newcomer to find a new place, because of lack of housing, especially for a young girl, she put an ad in the newspaper. Her good luck soon responded! A Spanish refugee family – Lopez – was the only ones who answered - and soon she moved to live with her new hosts. Cora also moved to another apartment leaving Louise alone in that spacious place!

Julie loved her new place and the hosting family, though she was disappointed: “...because I could not interest them in the Faith. They were polite, but from the first, their minds were closed”.

Fortunately, Louise’s apartment still held firesides every Wednesday evening, where she got to know with the other Baha’is and their friends. She soon was asked to be the speaker for the celebration of the birth of the Bab on October 20<sup>th</sup>.

Julie recalled the only active Baha’is back then consisted of seven American citizens, namely Louise, Cora, Norma and Clare Hamilton, Philip Bartick, Alfred Osborne and herself. They all met in each other residents holding feasts. Alfred, after he got married also did hold meetings in her home as Julie recorded<sup>238</sup>. All were quite conscientious of the inharmony problem among this small group and even once Philip commented to Julie of not positive feeling Cora had for Louise. And Burt Wernokur, himself relatively new in the faith and a relative to Edna True, had also strongly expressed himself to Julie about the lack of harmony among the pioneers, which has made him to distance himself from the activities and would not again come to any meeting.

## **TASK FOR JULIE**

Julie before she left home in 1943, had written to the Guardian letting him know of her plans and of her of becoming pioneer to Panama. She had asked the Guardian not to take his precious time and respond to her letter. But Shoghi Effendi, knowing where she was going and what condition of spiritual life she might encounter there, wrote back and gave her a task to perform. Julie wrote:

*“His statement that my presence in Panama would surely benefit the Faith there cheered me greatly and ever since I have hoped that my deeds fulfilled this promise”.*

On behalf of the Guardian, it was written:

*“Dear Baha’i Sister: Although you very considerately requested the Guardian not to bother to answer your letter to him of September 28<sup>th</sup>, knowing how busy he is during these last months of our first Baha’i century – yet he wishes me to assure you on his behalf that he very deeply appreciates your arising at this time to do pioneer work, and he will certainly pray for the success of your endeavours in this noble field of service.*

*The Cause in Panama will surely benefit by having you there, and he hopes you will*

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238. The wife of Alfred Osborne’s, Dita, was a Presbyterian Christian, and during the time of the writer in Panama, her brother had reached the position of Archbishop in Panama. Dita became Baha’i in a later stage, and all their four children, except Alfred Jr., who has been a friend of the Faith, became Baha’is.

*exert your utmost to unite, encourage and inspire all the dear believers there. With warm Baha'i love, R. Rabbani*"<sup>239</sup>.

And in his own handwriting:

***"May the Spirit of Baha'u'llah sustain you in your meritorious endeavours, guide every step you take, and enable you to lend a fresh impetus to the work so nobly initiated in that country."***<sup>240</sup>

***Your true brother, Shoghi***".

The task given to Julie was:

*"...you will exert your utmost to unite, encourage and inspire all the dear believers there", and "enable you to lend a fresh impetus to the work so nobly initiated in that country".*

'A fresh impetus' was the key word to ponder and analyze deeply and then to act upon.

Many months later Louise reminded Julie on this point of:

*"...the Guardian had instructed me especially to unite the friends of Panama".*

And both knowing that the number one problem in Panama was 'disunity'. Julie goes further by recording in her diary:

*"More particularly, it was the animosity between Cora and Louise, for aside from this, everyone was very friendly with everyone else".*

But Julie did not fully realize that her primal task given to her by her Guardian was to unite Louise and Cora, being under the impression that like any other pioneer her:

*"...chief task was to be attracting new people to the Faith, and as the weeks and months rolled by without my having any "spiritual children", I was very much disturbed".*

She had to concentrate over the task given by the beloved Guardian to work on and of course on the parallel side, she could also teach the Faith and have her spiritual children too. Establishment of the Faith in Panama needed a strong united community, and the 'unity' had to be established among the believers, especially between the two pioneers, who set example to the rest, before others were attracted to the Faith.

Cora being so attentive, and a dedicated Baha'i often invited Julie over to dine with her, which made a strong tie between them two, and Julie became quite attracted to her. Though, Louise was very kind to her too, but their relationship was in another level not as friendly as with Cora. Julie observed:

*"Cora and Louise, both in their forties, were in many ways a pair of opposites...They were both exemplary in zeal for the Faith, in observance of all its laws (except that of unity)".*

Julie admired Cora for:

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239. Emphasis added.

240. Emphasis added.

*"...her passion for integrity, truthfulness and honesty and all that was decent".*

## **HER ACTIVITIES**

Since her arrival, Julie was quite an active youth accompanying others in all the activities of the Faith, both in Panama City and Cristobal on the Atlantic side and participated in giving talks in the social clubs as well as at the Baha'i meetings. On March 12, 1944, she wrote to Nellie French, the Secretary of the Inter America Committee, reporting her activities:

*"The last month saw much good work accomplished by our little Baha'i group".*

Then she mentions the talks given by Alfred Osborne and Clare Hamilton at the observance of Brotherhood Week, which were carried splendidly. She mentions of:

*"Cora and I accompanied the Hamiltons to Cristobal, on the Atlantic side, which was my second time across the Isthmus, and we returned just in time that evening to join all the other Baha'is, who turned out almost en-masse to hear Alfred deliver his talk at the USO<sup>241</sup> which was also broadcast over the Army radio".*

She goes on reporting on both Clare and Alfred delivering beautiful talks. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, being Baha'i Youth Day, she writes:

*"...and we observed it by a meeting of young folk in Cora's apartment. Philip Bartick, Bert Wernokur, and Alfred gave brief talks, and I was chairman. Two of the Panamanian friends came with a guitar and furnished music..."*

Then she mentions another activity, this time at the University:

*"Last Thursday, Cora and I invited friends in to hear a talk on Education by the Rector of the University. It was my fortune last term, through Cora's guidance and assistance, to attend his classes on Spanish-American literature, given in Spanish, and so I was able to secure him to this meeting. The Rector was an excellent speaker, and we had an animated discussion afterwards".*

The enthusiastic Julie keeps on recounting activity after activity, she wrote:

*"This evening I am giving a party in Cora's apartment for Carmen Ochoa, a Baha'i girl who just returned from a six months' stay in Ecuador. And on Wednesday evening, Louise is going to speak in Cora's apartment on Comparative Religion. Cora and I are planning regular fireside meetings once a week. Perhaps some evening we will invite rabbi as guest speaker, or the secretary of the USO, etc. besides our local Baha'is".*

In this letter Julie writes how she is deeply engaged in all the planning of activities together with other pioneers. She mentions in her memoir:

*"I turned to Cora to help me with them, because I can so easily with her, and I love her deeply."*

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241. United Service Organizations. The USO provides morale-boosting programs for troops and their families wherever they may be sent worldwide.

That was during the period when there was not a physical Center for their activities, and the meetings were held at the homes of the believers more intimately:

*“Both Cora and Louise were holding Baha’i firesides in their apartments – Louise in Spanish and Cora in English, where Baha’i friends attending both, but Louise’s were much larger because there was more interested Spanish speaking than English speaking people”.*

## **JULIE’S EARLY DAYS**

Julie was a lonely youth while in the early months in Panama/Canal Zone, she did not associate with other youth as she did not approve of their free association with soldiers and army/navy bachelors and was mostly confined in her room. Once after she changed job, she moved back to live with Cora and spent some few months with her, but as her admiration for Cora curved down due unfair treatment she received from her, made her even lonelier by distancing her, until she found her own apartment and moved back to Canal Zone.

## **ARRIVAL OF GERARDO VEGA<sup>242</sup>**

In January 1944, a Baha’i Teacher, Gerardo Vega, from San Jose, Costa Rica, was invited by Louise - with all expenses paid - to do some teaching work in Panama. He was taken to the Theosophical Society<sup>243</sup> in Panama City, where he planned to give to the participants some solid education on the Teachings of the New Day and thus, he was able to attract some souls to the Faith. Yet, none of the pioneers approved of his way of teaching except Louise. According to Louise, other Baha’is i.e., Cora, Julie and Alfred very seldom attended or did not assist at all in Gerardo’s talks, thus, not giving any support to the teaching activities currently going on in their vicinity. This matter pained Gerardo, who was doing his best in attracting Panamanians into the Faith. He was so dismayed because of the lack of harmony in the midst of the group and interest thereof, yet he pushed on and he could see that most of his efforts were in vain.

Despite all the reluctance by the pioneers, Gerardo kept on deepening the interested group of four Panamanians until they were willing to be enrolled in the Faith. This matter became the subject of frequent discussion among the pioneers and Cora was absolutely against admitting the newly interested four people to the Faith. Yet, Julie writes that Louise:

*“...now began to push more vigorously for the enrollment of the Latin people who had been drawn to the Faith by Gerardo Vega. There were several who avowed their belief in Baha’u’llah and wished to be enrolled, but Cora strenuously argued that they really didn’t understand the Faith, that they were more Theosophists than Baha’is, and therefore it would severely injure the Cause to admit them. She seemed so sincere, so zealous for the Faith, and she opposed their admission so intensely that member so f the Group were profoundly perplexed. Month after month the acrimonious battle waged between Louise and Cora. It crushed our spirits, and I am*

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242. More on him on Chapter V

243. The Theosophical Society is an organisational body of Theosophy, an esoteric religious movement, founded in 1875 in New York.

*pained now to write this, but it is the very truth”.*

This matter was indeed a difficult one to be dealt with especially in those days where there were no established and functioning institutions to consult upon. If one gives his allegiance to Baha'u'llah, then, who are we to admit him/her to the Faith or not, after all, it is between him and Baha'u'llah as, the sincerity of everyone is only known by Him. On the other hand, if every one of the Baha'is feel as the custodians of the Faith of Baha'u'llah – as in this case Cora did - shouldn't we be observant and careful in admitting the people into the Faith that later it may become a flop? But finally, there was a semi-consensus of admitting the newcomers. Julie writes:

*“Slowly our Group, unanimously except for Cora, became convinced of the candidates' worthiness and one or two at a time we accepted them: Jose and Beatriz Villalon, Blanca de Campos, Elsa Rohmoser. Also, perhaps Celia de Madrid was admitted then...Cora strenuously opposed them all.*

In those early days it was customary among the Baha'is that any applicant before enrollment had to study the book of Guardian, Dispensation of Baha'u'llah, as Julie wrote:

*“...besides having a thorough knowledge of all aspects of the Faith and its Teachings... “Often Louise and I studied this particular book, line by line, with the new believers.”*

Julie was surrounded by 'either this or that' situation. Any direction she turned to, there was either Cora with her unapproving manners towards Louise or there was Louise defending herself. She could but not recall every move of these two pioneers with whom she had constant association on daily basis, she wrote:

*“It should be said that Louise never showed the rancor towards Cora that Cora showed towards her, nor did she ever treat her with contempt or complain about her; but when opposed, she showed irritation and to Cora's cross remarks, she retorted defensively”.*

When Julie lived separately with each one of these two pioneers, she observed, studied and finally could not but blamed Cora, she wrote:

*“...I observed that the source of the problem was Cora, and that Louise was merely reacting to her provocation”.*

Julie, as per her given task by the Guardian, tried her best to bring unity between the two pioneers and for this she did advice both, Cora ignoring her, as if saying: *“who are you telling me what I should or not do”*, which brought more disharmony even with Julie, pulling her into reaction against herself. But Louise's reaction to Julie's was being thankful: *“Julie, you were very right in that advice...but you should follow it yourself”*, as if, she was also reacting against Cora without realizing it.

Julie recalls that once from her work going directly to Cora and explained that:

*“I thought we had been mistaken about Louise, that I was sure now that she was sincerely working for the Faith...As soon as I finished, ignoring completely what I had said, Cora mentioned some trivial matter...”*

With ebbed relationship of Julie and Cora, she looked again into the life of Louise and could



appreciate her more every day. Distancing herself from Cora, though was not what dear Guardian had asked her to do, but seemingly, she got into nowhere trying to soften their relationship. More attempts, not only by Julie, but even by both Committee and the National Assembly, as institutions were made, yet to no avail.

## **AGONIZING PERIOD**

Julie was not successful in bridging the gap and bringing unity as she was tasked to do. Materially she had everything she needed, but spiritually she was not happy. She wrote:

*“Before I left Chicago to pioneer in Panama, I had contemplated all the afflictions, which for the sake of the teaching the Faith I thought I might have to endure, but never on the Isthmus did I have to cope with any one of them. Panama’s climate delighted me, as did its scenery and flora; there was no lack of physical comfort, my funds were ample, my work was agreeable, the Panamanian people were friendly, and no persecution or hostility came from any quarter. Nevertheless, problems and sorrows wholly unforeseen weighed increasingly upon me”.*

Julie was quite disconsolate upon thinking of the infirmity, which had stretched its fangs over this small community with glorious promises that no other country had. Again, she wrote in her diary:

*“All spring and summer my spirit had been sinking, and in the fall, they reached bottom. The inharmony between Cora and Louise disillusioned and agonized me, as well as the fact that I had met no success in enrolling new believers. Besides, my social life was dull...Now and then the USO arranged weekend parties at outlying camps...and thus I got to see David<sup>244</sup>, Chame<sup>245</sup>, Taboga<sup>246</sup> and Isla del Rey<sup>247</sup>. These outings I greatly enjoyed because thus I got to see more of the country”.*

Julie recalls of her unique situation as a young woman in Canal Zone:

*“There were no social clubs I knew of to join, no classes to enroll in. Other girls working in the Zone, if they weren’t of Zone families or married, lived together in an apartment, thus helping each other with their social life. My situation was unique; I was isolated. Although I had friends, still I didn’t belong to any young folks’ circle; and I not only craved such society, I felt that it was wrong, and harmful to me in various ways to miss out so”.*

Reading of the loneliness of such a pioneer, which many of us have gone through, reaching to the point of one question only, ‘why’ and in fact, so many ‘whys’; after all, wasn’t she serving Baha’u’llah? Didn’t she give up all the earthly things at a young age, when everyone else enjoyed her life to the service of His Faith? Was not Him to look after her? Though at the end of every stagnation point, there is a hope of surging upwards, but how and when? Julie had wonderful youthful time in Mexico serving her Lord. She recalled time and again:

*“What a contrast to my five bright carefree months in Mexico, so full of sweet surprises, of*

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244. Capital city of the Chiriqui Province, neighbouring Costa Rica, pronounced Daaveed.

245. Chame is a town in Chame and district with the same name. It is on the west of Panama Province.

246. Taboga is a tourist destination island about 20 kms from Panama City in the Pacific side.

247. Is the largest island in the cluster of the Pearl Islands in the Gulf of Panama, Pacific side.

love and friendship, were these months in Panama, so full of gloom, of discord, of bitter loneliness”.

And she had no one to talk to, pouring out the inside agonies:

*“Passionately I longed to confide in someone, to obtain some wise person’s advice. Several times I came close to turning to Norma [Hamilton] who was so charming, so delightful, so sophisticated. But fear deterred me, fear that she would not fully sympathize and that she would feel contempt for my pathetic, perhaps ridiculous plight. Alone in my apartment every night, in a frenzy of restlessness I paced the full length of it, back and forth, back and forth, over and over again, through dining room, living room and bedroom, praying aloud as I did so. My heaving emotions impelled me to such frantic, violent exertion. This lasted for only few brief weeks, and never again have I experienced such a nervous state”.*

She only confided in Baha’u’llah, her only refuge, to seek His calming shelter: *“Fervently I read the Baha’i scriptures and fervently I prayed, and with enormous effort I gradually lifted myself out of the Slough of Despond. A Baha’i must be happy, the Writings said, and I resolved to be so. Nonetheless, the inharmony between Cora and Louise, and which came to include me also, was always a source of terrible anguish to me. And my social life, although at times it flickered with excitement and joy, generally it was dismally disappointing and distressing through all my days on the Isthmus. But I always loved Panama, and I am especially grateful, as I look back, for having pioneered there in its early days of the Faith”.*

## **PERPETUATING PROBLEM**

Julie persisted in her task given to her by the beloved Guardian over and over, but albeit with no success. She recounts an incident, lest she and the group become accused on a later stage of lack of exerted effort in this case:

*“One evening in Cora’s apartment someone asked why this discord existed between Cora and Louise and suggested that we probe to the bottom of it, and all the others enthusiastically chimed in their approval. We had hardly begun when Cora shrieked, threw up both hands and grabbed her hair, and ran from the room into her adjoin bedroom. This investigation was never resumed. Present at this meeting were Clare and Norma Hamilton, Alfred, Cora, Louise and I, as distinctly recall, and I believe there were no others”.*

Then one night while laying on her bed, Julie remembered Edna True<sup>248</sup> telling her while yet in Chicago and preparing to fly down to Panama, that she should feel free to write to her, if she thinks she would be of any help. Julie wrote the following letter to her:

*“Dear Miss True, a matter has shocked, perplexed and pained me beyond words since I arrived here, and I have decided at long last to confide it to you, not knowing whether I should have done so sooner or should still keep this knowledge from you. But as the situation has by no means improved and is most serious, and neither I, nor any of the other friends have been able to remedy it, as it saps the enthusiasm of all, has inflicted untold harm on our efforts and constitutes a terrible threat to the future, I feel impelled to ask your aid. Everywhere one reads in the Writings of the danger of bitterness and dissension among the friends, but nowhere have*

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248. A member of the Inter America Committee, later Counsellor for the Americas.

*I been able to find what procedure to follow when this condition exists, and it is impossible to reconcile the parties. Can you help us? First, I tried to remedy the estrangement, failing that to ignore I, and hoped the attention of the friends would be drawn towards the united endeavors of the rest and away from the negative angle, but everyone's attention is absorbed by the display of animosity, and they are greatly pained, and that is what disturbs me so and prompts me to write. Despite this, our Group is much more active at present than several months ago, and we are hopeful of increasingly greater activity. However, I, and in truth, every one of the other friends, have grave qualms because of this cleavage at our core.*

*"It grieves me to have to write you thus, but I know you will be able to understand my anxiety, and I am desperate to know what to do".*

She never mailed the letter to Edna. She did not want to be disloyal to the Group and act secretly on her own. Of course, she did not know that this matter was a well-known to the National Spiritual Assembly and to the Inter America Committee where Edna was a member. Then she came to realize that in fact the letter of the National Spiritual Assembly, ordering the two pioneers to leave separately was in fact because of this knowledge and when the said Committee met with Julie before her departure from the US, they knew well in what discord she was going to step in. Julie went through a tremendous test in early age of her pioneering.

## **FORMATION OF THE FIRST SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY**

Julie mentions the happy occasion when the newly declared Panamanians were admitted into the Faith, thus, those who now were living in Panama were eight in number: Jose and Beatriz Villalon, Blanca de Campos, Elsa Rohrmoser, Celia de Madrid, Louise and Cora plus Isabel Ortuno who came from Costa Rica or possibly it was Benilda Angulo, which Julie could not recall exactly. Yet, when April approaching and no more prospects for the ninth member was at hand, the Group looked at the ninth candidate – Julie Regal – who was still living in the Canal Zone. She recalls:

*"It never was suggested that Clare and Norma, also pioneers, might move from Canal Zone into Panama, nor was it imagined that Alfred could do this (it would have been hardest for him, with his non-Baha'i wife)".*

Louise came to her rescue and invited Julie to move to her apartment. Finding any other place for her to move in for the convenience of her job, would be impossible. She was in a dilemma, and this is what she wrote:

*"The thought of relinquishing my cherished apartment was bitter to me, but worse was my dread of living with Louise. Although...still I felt uneasy towards her".*

She thought the goal of the formation of the Spiritual Assembly was already a year late:

*"If I wanted to serve Baha'u'llah, I simply had no choice. "If you don't move now", I said to myself, "you should have stayed in Chicago and never have come here".*

Julie accepted the invitation with reluctance and many qualms to move back to No. 18 at

No. 10 Tivoli Avenue, her first home in the Isthmus. Julie remained with Louise for almost four years later, when finally, she left Panama.

*“During our first days together, there was tension on both sides...Our fears on one another soon vanished, and over the weeks and months that followed, the more I came to know Louise the more I came to admire her and love her, for it was increasingly obvious that she was a devout, self-sacrificing, and long-suffering servant of Baha’u’llah. There was no friction or hard word between us”.*

This was unlike the previous time when she was living with Cora.

Julie briefly described the newcomers:

*“The new Latin Baha’is were happy and enthusiastic to find themselves members of a Baha’i community – in fact, members of the first Spiritual Assembly of Panama. Jose and Beatriz Villalon were a sweet-tempered couple, much devoted to art and culture. Blanca de Campos was a widow, especially devout and earnest. Elsa Rohmoser, a woman in her early 30s, employed as a bookkeeper, intelligent and capable. They were all warm hearted, decent, responsible people whom I felt were very much a credit to us”.*

Shortly after the Assembly was formed, for obvious reasons, Louise withdrew and moved to Colon. There was already a replacement member in the community.

## **FIRST LATIN AMERICAN CONFERENCE**

Sometimes in mid-November 1945, the Inter America Committee informed the Local Assembly of Panama City *“...Panama had been chosen to the site of the first Latin American Conference, and at their request we had set the dates – January 21-25, 1946”*<sup>249</sup>.

The Spiritual Assembly of Panama being the host community for the First Inter-America Conference, had the Secretary of the LSA to make all the preparations. Julie wrote:

*“...and had mailed announcements to Baha’is in all of the Latin American countries. The idea for this conference had originated with Loulie Mathews, who donated \$400 to cover its expenses, with one explicit exception, which were travel costs of the attendees. This money was put into my hands to administer, although, I cannot explain now why this was so; I was Assembly secretary, but not Treasurer.”*

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249. In the memoirs of Cora Oliver, she mentions of an Announcement done by the Spiritual Assembly of Panama, for the same mentioned dates, regarding The First Session of the Inter-American School, under the sponsorship of the International Baha’i School of Colorado, USA, and the cooperation of the Inter-America Committee and the Spiritual Assembly of Panama, and the approval of the Guardian to take place in the City of Panama. The Inter-American School is made possible through the generosity of Mrs. Edward Roscoe Mathews, founder of the International Baha’i School in Colorado Springs. It is indeed strange that what is being mentioned in Cora’s memoirs do not agree with the correspondence and Minutes of the Inter America Committee. It was specifically an Inter-American Conference for the Latin America and not at all an Inter-American School.

Note: The following statement came from the Archives Department of the US on 23rd of April 2015 confirming the Conference and not the School: The 1945-46 U.S. Bahá’i Annual Report noted the “Bahá’i Latin American Congress” ... As for a “session of Inter-American School” then, we find no documentation. (We do have the booklets-with-study-materials which were used at the “Latin American Sessions” held in 1940 and 1942 at the “Baha’i International School” in Colorado as well as a 1944 compilation of “First Four Latin American Session Teaching Notes” of its sessions for 1940-1943, but they don’t seem to bear upon this subject.)

It was doubtful that anyone could afford plane ticket to fly from any Latin American countries to go to Panama.

The Inter America Committee had dispatched Gayle Woolson<sup>250</sup>, the distinguished teacher of the Faith in Latin America to help with organizing the Conference in Panama. Julie writes of Gayle:

*“On December 5<sup>th</sup> [1946] at long last Gayle arrived at my apartment. In high excitement I opened the door and welcomed her. How glamorous she was! Like a movie star. Soon also I discovered that she was possessed of keen intelligence and was diligent in her labors for the Faith. While Louise was away in Colombia, she occupied Louise’s room”.*

Julie and Gayle talked together about many subjects, as she knew about most of the matters, being in close association with the Inter America Committee and had sympathy for Julie, and she wrote:

*“Gayle immediately plunged into helping us organize the forthcoming Conference. I remember sitting in meeting with her and several other people...and discussing formulation of the program: the titles of courses to be given and who would give them, and the topics at public evening meetings and who would be speakers. Sometimes the question arose; who was coming to the Conference from outside Panama? Then Loulie’s instructions about how to spend the \$400, which she contributed were carefully re-read, with the hope that some of the money could be used to defray travel expenses for native believers, but the letter was explicit on this point: this use of the money was absolutely ruled out”.*

Julie recalled that only one letter was received from Louise Baker<sup>251</sup> who would attend with a native believer of Venezuela, Yolanda Stronach.

Julie thought that she is being in Panama, therefore she is saving her otherwise travel expenses, she wrote:

*“...So why should I not pay for some native believer’s coming? Even for two or three? Or even more? Carefully I revolved the idea in my head, and eventually decided that this was an expenditure that would certainly be worthwhile. When I mentioned it to Gayle, she enthusiastically concurred; she gave me names and address of Baha’is in the various countries, for on her way to Panama she had passed through them. We sent these persons letters (and sometimes wires) and finally we sent them plane tickets. Thus, it was that native believers came to the Conference from all Central American and Cuba. It cost me over \$500, which was most of my savings, but it has always been a source of deep satisfaction to me”.*

Large part of Loulie’s donation was returned to her, as, it was not necessary to spend.

Julie recalls that one day a letter came from Chile, quite surprising, which joyfully announced that a believer was coming to attend the Conference. Hugo Arteagabeitia, from Puntarenas:

*“Hugo came, and his presence imparted to the Conference a far wider scope and*

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250. At the time, she was pioneering in San Jose, Costa Rica

251. Louise was the pioneer in Caracas, Venezuela and Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker’s daughter.

*significance, also, his radiant personality delighted everyone”.*

And Louise returning from her trip looked much refreshed and she wrote:

*“...at once”, he began energetically to help with arrangements for lodging and feeding the native believers who would be coming. As they were all extremely poor, we had to consider how to keep their expenses low. Two women were lodged in our apartment. As for the men, Louise arranged for them to sleep in Steve Arneson’s<sup>252</sup> apartment, which was also in our building and which was large and nearly empty, as he had only recently moved into it”.*

Julie goes into details of the preparation of food for guests, by asking their helper, Jina, who also cooked for them to make dozens of extra plates for lunch and dinner:

*“...to our table all of the Baha’is were always invited”.*

Julie mentions that Cora also served food at her apartment, but by invitation only, of course she had a limited budget to act upon.

## **THE VENUE**

Today maybe it would be impossible even to think that as Julie put it:

*“...Conference sessions were all held in our apartment or in Cora’s and the evening public meetings were all held in our apartment, with the single exception of the finale, which took place in the Aula Maxima<sup>253</sup> of the Inter-American University. Many pictures were taken and compiled into a scrapbook, which was sent to Shoghi Effendi”.*

## **A JOURNALISTIC INCIDENT (The Curious!)**

Julie was the Baha’i columnist during the whole Conference for the newspaper, ‘La Estrella de Panama’. She wrote in Spanish about the public meetings of the evenings, taking them personally every evening to their office. She recounts, to the immense delight of everyone a note from ‘the Curious’:

*“...near the end of the week the following letter to the editor appeared in that newspaper:*

*“As an old reader of your newspaper I am wondering why you are giving so much space, even on your front page, when more important news is printed inside, to this Baha’i business.*

*“Never have I seen so much space given to meetings of Methodists, Baptists, Catholics or other orders or sects. I think you were right in such cases, and it is possible you have good reason for boosting Baha’i; only your readers, like myself, are sick and tired of it.*

*“They have been swooning for weeks over the opening of the Congress and now we get daily swoons. It may be that your policy is commercial, and you are catering to your numerous Baha’i*

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252. Mr. Arneson was a non-Baha’i friend of Louise, known to her in her college years and by pure chance they met in Panama again.

253. Aula Maxima is the biggest classroom or the conference room.

readers and advertisers, although you must have quite a few who are Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians or Roman Catholics like the writer.

*(Signed) Curious”.*

*“Editor’s note: The last ‘swoon’ will be tonight when the Baha’is close conference”.*

The owner and the publisher of the Spanish language newspaper ‘La Estrella de Panama’<sup>254</sup>, Thomas Gabriel Duque, former president of Panama, came to know Louise and Cora before he became acquainted with Julie. He was, as it is written by Julie:

*“...son of a Negro father and white mother and because of his race he had often suffered severely from discrimination. The unflinching adherence of the Baha’is to the principle of racial brotherhood evoked his warm friendship for us.”*

## **SPECIAL GUEST**

Julie writes in her memoirs regarding the first Conference in Panama, January 1946:

*“On the eve of the Conference, Amelia Collins<sup>255</sup>, representing the National Spiritual Assembly, arrived. She was such a majestic, powerful personality that her presence lent great dignity. Although she gave no prepared talks – which was not her style – she spoke informally and most eloquently in many of our meetings, telling numerous anecdotes about Shoghi Effendi, which delighted everybody, and bestowed immense inspiration upon our gatherings”.*

Recalling of the Conference she wrote:

*“The Conference was a huge, and exhilarating success. Everyone was elated by now well it went. Although many persons were aware of the discord that gnawed at the Panama community’s vitals, and although anyone could easily notice that while Cora and Louise and I were polite to one another still there was no closeness, which included all three of us...”*

After the Conference, the Envoy of the National Spiritual Assembly met with the three pioneers, discussing the differences between them. Of course, she was not a judge to condemn anyone, but only a helping hand, someone with much more experience who would only try to bring peace purely by Baha’i principles of forgiveness and love, though it was not what Julie expected:

*“Mrs. Collins stayed on for a week or two after the Conference”, wrote Julie, “and during this time she held several conferences with the local believers: one or two with the Panama Assembly...and at least one with Cora, Louise and me alone.*

Julie writes that all the minutes of their meetings with Mrs. Collins were recorded by Julie and approved of by all the participants. Copies of the minutes were also given to Mrs. Collins, and these should be stored in the archives somewhere, she says:

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254. The English version ‘Star & Herald’

255. Hand of the Cause of God Mrs. Emilia Collins was appointed to her highest spiritual rank by Shoghi Effendi in 1946, a fact that was only known between the two of them until in 1951, he announced the first contingent of the Hands of the Cause in a message to the Baha’i World.

*“Under Mrs. Collins’ dignified calm, benign supervision we all expressed our views of that was the reason for our trouble.”*

Julie would not describe these in her memoirs though. She wrote:

*“Looking back, I greatly admire the manner in which Mrs. Collins conducted these conferences, the skill she showed, her kindness, how she always stressed the positive and never assigned any blame – doubtless just as the Guardian would have wished. When we finished, the slate was wiped clean, bygones would be bygones, and we were all declared good friends and devoted Baha’is who would hereafter cooperate together in marvelous harmony”.*

Julie writes that unfortunately the wound remained as before. Though Mrs. Collins, knowing the source of problem never wanted to make an issue of it, she asked Julie: *“Have you written to Shoghi Effendi since you came to Panama?”* *“No”, I replied. “You should,” she urged me. “He wishes to hear from all of the pioneers, and you should write to him every soon”.*

Julie promptly sat down and wrote a letter to Shoghi Effendi about the successful Conference and about Mrs. Collins’ visit:

*“...mentioned that we had had problems (for now, I knew he knew) and that we had all been to blame (Of course, in a way we all were – although I did not then consider Louise nor myself to be the fundamental cause, still our reactions were not always impeccable); but that we were now united (so Mrs. Collins affirmed and I was accepting this attitude, with reserves, but hopefully)”.*

In few weeks she received a beautiful answer by Ruhiiyyih Khanum<sup>256</sup>:

*“Haifa, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1946*

*“Dear Baha’i Sister: Your letter of Feb. 10<sup>th</sup> has been received by the beloved Guardian and he has instructed me to answer it, and to thank you for the amusing criticism of so much Baha’i publicity!*

*“He was extremely happy to hear that the conference was a great success, both in uniting the friends and in the publicity, it gave to the Faith. The believers in Panama are indeed very fortunate in working for the Cause in a land so tolerant and receptive, and situated in such a useful position from a purely geographic standpoint.*

*“He will certainly say special prayers for Panama in the Holy Shrines, that the friends there may arise as one soul in many bodies to consolidate the work already achieved and follow up the favorable impression created by this recent conference.*

*“He will also pray for your own spiritual development, happiness and welfare. You should greatly rejoice that so early in life, God has enabled you to serve His Cause in such an important field at so crucial a time!*

*“With Baha’i love, R. Rabbani*

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256. Mary Maxwell, the wife of the Guardian was given the Baha’i name of Ruhiiyyih Khanum.



And Shoghi Effendi wrote:

***“May the Beloved bless richly your meritorious endeavours, guide your steps, cheer your heart, and graciously assist you to promote effectively the vital interests of His Faith and its institutions,***

***“Your true and grateful brother, Shoghi”***

Louise and Julie thought the Faith and did other activities together. They were two understanding and lovely friends. Certainly, Louise looked at Julie seeing in her a promising great teacher of the Faith and respected her for this, and Julie, had in her an almost a mother’s age model to emulate. Their friendship continued to the end of Louise’s life. Once Julie wrote to the writer that she only wants to go the Abha Kingdom to unite with her dear friend Louise.

Julie recalls of the day when together with Louise they were walking down a street in Colon and they passed by a hall, where there was a meeting in progress:

*“Louise entered and drew me along. It was a group of labor union organizers who were planning a campaign to obtain more equal treatment in the Zone for non-whites”.*

She wrote:

*“...they welcomed us so warmly and showed such a sincere zeal for justice, that I was touched”.*

Louise gave them the message:

*“A few evenings later one of them, who had taken my address, called on me at my apartment and requested me to go with him to the Unitarian Church in Balboa and speak to the people there about the Faith. Accordingly, I went and gave an impromptu talk. There was an enthusiastic response, and I was asked to come back on the second Sunday following, or to send someone else to speak at their regular church meeting”.*

Julie presented the invitation to the Assembly and Cora volunteered to be the speaker and she was chosen. Such interaction with the group of people gave the unionists to ask Julie to other church meetings, which of course she did partake.

## **AN APPRECIATION**

Julie writes of few new believers who came into the Faith:

*“First was Raquel Francois<sup>257</sup>, whom Gayle had met shortly before in Costa Rica and whom she had interested in the Faith there. Raquel was a superb public speaker and often spoke at our regular Wednesday evening meetings. In April 1946 she was elected to our Assembly. She was a most valuable addition, however, during these years she was able to attend fewer than half of our meetings”.*

Raquel was a resolute believer, even when she married Gorge Constante, a Catholic. Raquel

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257. One of the very early believers of Panama, who remained staunch to the end, very active in the building of the Panama Temple. She was mostly member and chair of the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama. She passed away in 2011.

was a committed believer and not even her marriage would interfere with the Faith, which she served to end of her life. In another chapter, more will be written of her. Her husband Jorge, many years later he also became Baha'i.

A month after Julie left Panama for good in 1948, Raquel wrote to her, expressing her feelings, she wrote:

*"My very beloved and distinguished sister, Julie...We feel your absence truly a loss, but this is life".*

Raquel hoped one day Julie would go back to Panama, where there are arms open to welcome her to her community. Though Julie only went to Panama for the dedication of the House of Worship in April 1972, around 24 years later, but their paths did cross few times in life in other international gatherings.

Another believer and a member of the Assembly of Panama, Desiderio Duque who also appreciated Julie's being in front of the activities, wrote to her on May 17, 1948, after she had left Panama, expressing his concept of Julie as one of:

*"...pure soul", of "...high spirit", with an "...innocent heart", what every human being needs to have, and this is "the reason for which Baha'u'llah, our prophet has come to teach and make us understand and give us the real understanding of how the community can be united".*

Desiderio writes in his letter that after she left, the community was not the same as before, several believers did not come to the meetings anymore, those who were interested in the Faith have almost stopped coming. The fact remains that with Louise's transfer to Colon and later leaving Panama, and now Julie's absence, the only remaining pioneer was Cora, who had to make an extra effort to win the hearts of the local believers to herself.

Desiderio in her letter to Julie reasons the fallen interest of the friends as the absence of the vibrant spirit of Julie, who mingled with everyone with enthusiasm, who spoke the local language well and whose qualities did attract people, he adds:

*"I beg of our Prophet to send you back as soon as possible, we miss you".*

He mentions that now he is the librarian and asks Julie to write more, as her letters are the source of encouragement to all of the friends, and they all need to have her spiritual counsel and help.

Manuel Corgas, the first Indigenous believer of the Kuna Yala tribe also wrote to Julie over two years after she had left. In October 1950, mentioning that her precious letter never reached him, and it has been lost as he was told. Then he so delicately and with such a tender love remembers Julie, now united with her family. He informs her that he became the Panamanian delegate to the fifth Baha'i congress held in San Salvador where all the participants received him very well. At the congress, a short Baha'i movie was played where Julie was also in the picture, out of gladness of his heart, he could not stop his flowing tears, as her image brought him happiness and sadness. Manuel sends a picture of the San Blas Indians to her and asks her in return for her picture, to frame it and hang it in his room, to look at it always with admiration, as he might not see her in Panama anymore.

Then Julie wrote of Mabel Sneider an American from Canal Zone:

*“Another new believer who attended some of our Conference was Mabel Sneider, head surgical nurse at Gorgas Hospital, where Cora worked, who was attracted to the Faith through Cora, whom she greatly admired”.*

Mabel was quite a staunch believer and served the Faith in many ways. She even offered as travel teacher in Central America and the Caribbean Islands.

The other person who became a wonderful believer was Arturo Cimorra. Julie wrote of him:

*“...there was also Arturo Cimorra, an office machines salesman and repairman, who lived in a closed-sized room among the slums of Panama City, who had heard of the Faith through a non-Baha'i acquaintance, and who regularly attended our meetings thereafter. When we held the second conference the following January, he brought me a loan a lovely new standard typewriter to use in addition to my own which my parents had shipped to me – during the conference more than one typewriter was often needed, and he left it with me until I left Panama”.*

In one of the gatherings at the Center, he had signed his declaration card.

## CHAPTER II- 1940

A summary of the activities in Panama with some details was presented in the previous chapter by going through Julie Regal's diary. Thank to her for having recorded such a detail of the lives of the early pioneers of Panama. Such a diary is the confirmation of the minutes of the institution. The following chapter will follow the chronological order after Louise and Cora arrived in Panama and started their adventures. The Inter America Committee has recorded many of their activities in their minutes, as well as keeping their correspondence, which all went to the Archives Department of the National Spiritual Assembly of the US for posterity. Thanks to their endeavor that the posterior generations come to know of how and under what conditions the beloved Faith was presented and established in all these countries.

It might seem quite ironic to see how 'reason' gives its place to 'love and sacrifice'. Though outwardly each pioneer is different yet, they play such an important role in the 'most meritorious of all acts'<sup>258</sup> –proclaiming and teaching the Faith of God. The differences pass away, their ways of living are no more, but the legacy they leave behind becomes eternal.

### FIRE IN COLON

On April 18, 1940, the "girls" wrote hastily to Louise after the big fire swept the heart of Colon, that was the time Louise would make some trips to meet with those whom either were met by Mathew or any new contact:

*"Just a hasty note to assure you that Louise was in a safe area during the fire, which swept Colon last week. While the entire heart of the city and the most undesirable section were devastated, the sections rented by the United States were not damaged. There is much work to be done but the plans are not yet developed. We will make every effort to serve in whatever capacity we can".*

In another note:

*"Cora's work is now permanent, so she is self-supporting and gets in addition many privileges – among them a twenty-four yearly pass across the Isthmus. We each have a monthly Baha'i pass now. Louise is using a mileage book, which we purchased with the funds for transportation and Cora can get half-fare when the passes are used up. We feel this indeed a victory for our teaching work as we now can cross the Isthmus for work on either side.*

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258. According to Baha'u'llah, teaching the Faith is the most meritorious of all acts.

*"This travelling serves as a teaching project in itself, as people are impressed when they know that Louise is coming to the Pacific side or that Cora is going to the Atlantic side and make a greater effort to arrange to see us on those days.*

## **THE US NATIONAL CONVENTION**

Loulie wrote back on April 20 to Louise and Cora. Louise had planned to attend the National Convention in Chicago and it was expected for her to meet the members of the Inter America Committee.

*"...I am enclosing for you the Inter-America program. If Louise is in this country, can she not attend it? It will be most suitable and helpful... This year it is to be by invitation only... You can't imagine how lovely the Guardian's handbook looks. It is all- cellophaned and has a box of its own and a padlock. It is even wrapped in striped material! It is ready to sail to seven seas whenever the Port Authorities say they have room for it. Meanwhile, I am hoping to find some rich old man to Photostat it so that all the pioneers may have a copy".*

Loulie wrote again to the 'Dear girls' on April 30<sup>th</sup>, though she is 'frightfully upset' because of fire that had swept Colon, yet she is happy to know that Louise is safe. She has sent the news of Cora's permanent work in Canal Zone, to the National Spiritual Assembly.

Accordingly, the Panama section on the handbook looked spectacular:

*"We are very proud of the Panama section including photographs, news clippings, newspaper pictures of Louise, magazine articles, account of the visit to the President, pictures of the University, and so on. On the cover of Panama, we put a lovely picture of a girl in a Pollera<sup>259</sup> custom ...Please let me know if Louise will be here in time to come to the session. It will be very valuable for us to have her here.*

Cora wrote on May 8<sup>th</sup> to Loulie with good news of having John Stearns<sup>260</sup> helping in teaching in Panama and Colon, and that Louise will be travelling to the United States meeting with the Inter America Committee. According to Cora, Louise:

*"...will give a fair and balanced picture of the situations as we have seen and experienced them these last seven months' once she attends the summer school."*

Loulie also acknowledges the receipt of the Message of the Guardian that was sent to Cora, who also informs her of the recent activities of Panama:

*"Since April 29<sup>th</sup> we have been enjoying John Stearns, who has been most valuable in assisting us with the activities here. We think that he is one of the selfless Baha'is and are happy because of his pioneering in Ecuador. His lectures at La Boca and La Escuela de Artes y Oficios opened a new spiritual atmosphere and not only the groups but the individuals whom he has met he has given of the fragrances of the spirit. Good publicity and follow up work accompanied his lecture at the Cristobal Army and Navy YMCA. His schedule did not permit his speaking at*

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259. Panamanian women cultural dress

260. Pioneer in Ecuador

the YMCA on this side (as invited) but he was able to meet the men who have been so generous toward the Baha'i program. He agrees with us that more pioneers are needed in Panama".

Louise spent some time in Colon and Cristobal, Cora added that.

*"Louise plans to leave May 20<sup>th</sup> ...is accepting your invitation to attend the Inter-America summer school and will be with you June 12<sup>th</sup>. Your invitation was irresistible over the miles. Louise will come over to this side again next week and we will assemble materials for she to use in the United States. She will be prepared to give talks on Panama Women's Clubs and is also taking the Temple slides with her. I feel that Louise should attend all the summer schools in the interest of the Inter-America work as Louise will give a fair and balanced picture of the situations as we have seen and experienced them these last seven months. Her assistance will be valuable in stimulating and inspiring others to arise and participate in this all-important program. You may be confident that her reactions and presentation of the facts are reliable and accurate in so far as we have known them".*

Cora in her letter mentions of her gratitude for having found a permanent job in the Canal Zone, the best news for a dedicated pioneer in Panama, who has risen to serve the Faith. In fact, her recent situation is an optimum one. She is well established and secure in an area under the US government with ample possibilities to serve the Faith:

*"No one is more grateful than I that my work is permanent and even the irregular schedule is working out to an advantage as for the most part I work late afternoons and evenings so have mornings free, and my free days are usually weekdays thus giving more opportunity for teaching activities. They are now going to arrange the schedule so I will have one free day a week when we have arranged to have the study classes so I will be able to carry on when Louise leaves".*

## **AN UNUSUAL APPEAL**

The short note from Loulie to the 'Dear girls' written on the May 12 -after Lorol Schopflocher's visit to Panama, indicates that her report to the Guardian has carried with some negative statements and had become of much concern to the Inter America Committee. She writes that teachers should be careful when writing a report, and Louile asks the 'girls' to cooperate:

*"In Lorol's report of Central America, she only praised Antonio Roca and every other center was more or less damned. I am asking when you write the Guardian if you would please say that the Inter-America has been cooperative with you, as I shall write on top of all these statements that the pioneers have cooperated with me. I do not wish the Guardian's radiant spirit of the Convention to be dimmed and I feel that if the pioneers and myself, would write him that the conditions are hopeful, the work is progressing, and that I have cooperated with you, it would nullify the terrible effect of Lorol's statements".*

It is not known the reason for which Lorol has written her negative report straight to the beloved Guardian and why she has not been careful to note the positive service the pioneers were rendering rather than any negative one. No answer to this request was found among the correspondences.

## VISITS TO THE ATLANTIC SIDE

The Panamanian pioneers had prepared a new list of contacts before Louise left Panama in May of 1940:

*"...The new list of Panama contacts is being enclosed... As a result of Louise's six weeks in Colon there are several new names on the Atlantic side. Louise, Cora and John have crossed Isthmus for Baha'i meetings often during the last six weeks making a total of twenty-five trips.*

*"The movement itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world"<sup>261</sup>.*

There is a list of 28 Panama-Colon Contacts. On the list names such as Rector of the University of Panama, number of Professors, teacher, and other highly educated people, as well as Alfred Osborne, - who became the second Baha'i believer of Panama<sup>262</sup> can be seen. It is interesting to have all the names of the people to whom the message is being given for their further follow-up but during all these months of hard work, the two pioneers were not able to make any list of the 'declared believers' due to their differences in accepting the declared and interested people in the Faith!

## SEEKING FOR 'MAN' PIONEER

Loulie wrote an undated letter to Louise and Cora answering to their request for a 'man' pioneer for Panama that they have been after for long time. She mentioned a relevant point that desire for pioneering should be borne by the pioneer himself and this cannot be imposed on anyone:

*"...Edna has presented your urgent call for a man to assist you and we are going to make every effort. You see it is very hard for the committee to urge a pioneer to go anywhere. This move must come from the person himself, else it lacks the spiritual urge to him that it should have".*

She added another relevant point that men for pioneering are scarce. Indeed, being this a general call for pioneering, women showed much more interest in this important field than men, clearly, this is the age of the women, which the history of the Faith is replete of:

*"We are desperate for applicants...we have no men on file. We are writing to Mason Remy<sup>263</sup> asking him to try to go for a while.... He is an architect and...is the believer...do not need assistance but he must have a job when he goes..."*

Loulie urges Louise and Cora to write to them directly<sup>264</sup>:

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261. *Baha'u'llah, p. 70, Advent of Divine Justice, quoted by Shoghi Effendi*

262. Joseph Wantuk was the first believer in Panama.

263. At the time he was one of the most active believers and came to be appointed as Hand of the Cause of God and became president of the Baha'i International Council, yet, despite of all, after the passing of Shoghi Effendi, he claimed to be the second Guardian, thus, the conclave of the Hands after long time counselling him, in order to keep the unity of the Faith, expelled him from the Faith and announced him as Covenant breaker.

264. Apparently there have been more than one name.

*"...tell them the whole situation and if they choose to go it would be fine...Cora could explain about the jobs being so numerous and I am sure an architect could get work, aren't you? This is all we can do for the moment although we know the need and are making every effort..."*

Louise wrote quite an encouraging letter to Cora and to Cora only, as Louise had gone to the U.S.:

*"We received your thrilling letter telling of Louise's attending the session and we are perfectly thrilled"!*

*"...The part you have played, dear Cora, is so wonderful. You have fulfilled to the highest degree all requirements written down by the Guardian and you have evinced the true Baha'i spirit. I brought this out to the N.S.A. several times".*

What Cora had done all by herself was to keep the flame of activities burning as if Louise was still with her. It boosted her spirit. The pioneers always need to be encouraged to be inspired in their service to the beloved Cause of God.

## **CORA'S ACTIVITIES**

While Louise travelled to the United States, Cora continued writing and informing of her activities. She wrote on 7 August to Mrs. French, expressing her appreciation and privilege to pioneer together with Louise, which was a fact that not many pioneers enjoyed<sup>265</sup>, a truly unique situation of having two countries of distinct languages and culture in one territory functioning side by side, with two different governments, two different societies and with two different type of people, namely American Canal Zone, where Cora was a pioneer, and crossing the Tivoli Street, to the City of Panama, where Louise made her home. Yet, they could share the same postal address, as well as their Baha'i activities. A truly unique situation and an envying situation hoping it would stay the same for generations to come. She wrote:

*"Thank you for the circular letter and especially for the copies of the Guardian's recent messages. These messages mean so much to those of us who are detached from home communities and are relying upon the mail service to get information to us. Louise has kept me in touch with events as she has learned of them in the States. Because of the new personnel of the Committee, I want to repeat our expressions of gratitude that two of us have been privileged to pioneer together and add that we believe this to be valuable whenever it can possibly be arranged and especially it is true when one is employed."<sup>266</sup>*

*"We have carbon copies of all our correspondence and are happy to share with the Committee any and all information we have. In answer to your questions: The Permanent address of the Baha'i Representatives in Panama is P.O. Box 1296 Ancon, Canal Zone. This is also both Louise Caswell's and my address. However, in the event anything other than books is sent, it is better that they be addressed to me as I am a Canal Zone employee and allowed duty free privileges.*

*"I am enclosing a list of important contacts – a copy of the last list sent to the Inter-America Committee. There are no additions to be made to the list at present even though the circle of*

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265. Emphasis added just to show how the initial relation of Cora with Louise was.

266. Emphasis added



*acquaintances and friendships as constantly widening. All addresses are written correctly indicating Canal Zone or Republic of Panama. All-important requests and communications will be continued directly to the Inter-America Committee and general reports of activities sent from time to time”.*

Cora mentions that now she is independent from the Baha’i Fund:

*“I am not depending on any allowance from the N.S.A. or others. Fortunately, I have permanent employment with the Canal Zone, and all the benefits, which go with it (and there are many)”.*

She informs the Committee that they have a supply of Spanish books and prayer books, yet would be happy to receive more Spanish literature, which:

*“...dear friends are anxiously waiting for them, and I know the work will be accelerated with books available in their own language”.*

And she mentions that she has engaged: *“...one of the students translate talks”.*

There is also a report on the English literature:|

*“Our English Baha’i library is an excellent one thanks to the cooperation and promptness of the Inter-America Committee. This means much, as many of those interested are English speaking. The library in the Zone, an excellent one it is, welcomes any gifts of books and would accept a subscription to the World Order magazine. The Army and Navy YMCA’s will also accept books for their reading rooms”.*

Cora writes again about the job opportunities in the Canal Zone, as there are many vacancies. She feels morally impelled to write:

*“I merely give this information so you may know of economic conditions for possible pioneers who could come to this area”.*

As Louise was absent from Panama, who used to write more often, and Cora’s fulltime job, the volume of correspondence slowed down, and the activities in spreading the Faith were handled by Cora alone. Cora’s next letter to Mrs. French, was written over a month later, she mentions:

*“Thanks very much for the bulletin and the information sent. Once more activities here are speeding up and with the arrival of La Sabiduria de ‘Abdu’l-Baha<sup>267</sup> and Contestaciones a Unas Preguntas<sup>268</sup> from Mrs. Stewart yesterday I feel really equipped to go out with these two staffs to conquer for Baha’u’llah. Each Wednesday a small group meets to study the teachings and these books in Spanish will stimulate the group and attract others...Last week Wednesday Gerard Sluter<sup>269</sup> arrived in Panama en-route to Colombia as you know. Fortunately, he was here for the meeting and spoke informally to the friends in Spanish. It was my only free evening, but we did meet during the day to discuss activities and meet other people”.*

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267. The Wisdom of Abdu’l-Baha known as The Paris Talks.

268. Some Answered Questions

269. Pioneer to Colombia

Cora's dedication to her pioneering activities, were truly exemplar.

Alfred Osborne had gone to the States furthering his education and for sometimes his 'La Boca School' was not visited, but now, she writes:

*"Mr. Osborne has returned from the States and next Wednesday I will meet with that group for further study on Fundamentals of Baha'i Membership. Most of those students speak both Spanish and English so will be valuable in assisting with the work in Panama when once confirmed"*.

She gives a bit of cultural information, which like the flowing river water does not mix with the sea water for quite some time, she mentions:

*"Most people in the Zone do not associate freely with the people in Panama except in the higher social circles, so my life is unique since I know many on both sides and come and go freely. The freedom the Faith of Baha'u'llah gives one is limitless"*.

## **LOUISE RETURNS**

Sometimes during the third week of September Louise Caswell returned to Panama, and the following joint letter of the 29<sup>th</sup> of September was written to Mrs. French<sup>270</sup>. The Panamanian pioneers time and again asked for men pioneers to come to Panama, but no one applied, although plenty jobs were available in Canal Zone for the Americans. This matter was written time and again, published in the Bulletin, personal calls and contacts were made, but no result was received:

*"Only yesterday the head of personnel told Cora that nearly every available man in the Canal Zone has employment. However, there are many women waiting for positions because of the tradition of favoring men. Only expert stenographer among women stands a good chance of work."*

And again:

*"It is important for Baha'is to realize that English is the only language used in the Zone. Spanish is the official language of the Republic of Panama."*

Mrs. French received another short letter from the Panamanian pioneers on October 16, where it indicates the availability of jobs for Americans and now for Louise too. How would pay job affect the pioneer's service to the Faith? Louise mentioned the Inter America Committee that her son Peter got a job in the Canal Zone:

*"Peter got employment eight days after he made application proving that jobs are waiting for able-bodied men."*

## **PANAMA NEWS**

On October 30, Mrs. French, Chairman of the Inter-America Committee wrote to the 'Girls'.

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270. Chairman of the Inter America Committee

Observe the interest of the Committee to the Panamanian pioneers' news:

*"Your newsy letters are a great source of interest and encouragement. We are deeply interested in all that you say, particularly about the openings for people seeking employment.*

The letter also indicates of some new pioneers for South America, who will be docking in Panama for few days:

*"We hope to announce this in the News Letter and refer people to the Panama Canal office in Washington, and also it seems as if it might be a good opening for those three young people from New York who are desirous of serving in South America. Please keep in touch with us, and you will find them arriving by steamer if they sail as they expect on November 15...Miss Eleanor Smith Adler and Mrs. Marsha Atwater. They should arrive at Cristobal on the morning of November 22 and will go either to the Washington Hotel in Cristobal or to Balboa at Ancon to the Tivoli Hotel...They plan to sail for South America for Cristobal...on November 27, Miss Adler going to Bolivia and Mrs. Atwater to Chile. They will have four or five days with you, and I hope very much that you will be able to use them as they are interesting speakers and full of enthusiasm and zeal.*

*"I shall send by them or by mail a "Spanish Translation of the World Religion" by Shoghi Effendi with mats of the Temple of Abdu'l-Baha and we hope that you can sometime use these in some publication and when you do, will you please send us five copies (clippings) so that we may have them for our records".*

The IAC acknowledges that Louise's son has got a job: *"We are delighted that Peter has succeeded in getting a job".*

## **SHORTAGE OF PIONEERS**

Panama is having all the visitors. They are happily on the path of all pioneers whether they travel by steamer or by plane, but they are still urging us to send them some permanent residents to bring their membership to the nine required.<sup>271</sup>

On December 6 Mrs. French wrote to the 'Girls' giving them hope of having some new pioneers to join them in Panama:

*"We have just received your letter, undated, in which you tell us of the interesting visit you had with our two South American pioneers and of the wonderful openings, which are presenting themselves at present in the Canal Zone. We will make mention of this in the Inter-America Notes for the News Letter and try to locate some of these people who wish to settle in Latin America. We are, however, very seriously handicapped at the present moment because the readjustment of boundaries and the breaking up of various communities on account of it has caused the fund to run very low and we haven't sufficient money to budget these pioneers. However, the opportunities are so alluring that we hope very much you may have additions to your number very soon...We are anticipating your brief account of your pioneer services in*

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271. Inter America Committee, Baha'i News, November 1942

*Panama, and we hope you will send us your photographs to include in an article in Baha'i World."*

## **IMPORTANT PIONEERING HINTS**

Cora Oliver wrote to Mrs. French on December 8, regarding the new pioneers and travel teachers' attitude in public. This letter is not signed by both pioneers, but only by Cora. She goes to some details that affects the American pioneers' relationship with the general public. But can these small and insignificant details also affect the relationship between the pioneers? She writes:

*"For some time, Louise and I have discussed the importance of Baha'i travelling teachers and pioneers to show by every work, and deed their good will and happiness at being the guest of whatever country it may be. A representative of a Woman's Club here told Louise of the criticism and consequent lack of establishing good-will caused by women from the States who smoked and drank too much. We have been desirous of conveying to you a constructive concrete message, which can be published in the New Letter to assist all would-be Latin American pioneers or travelling teachers and trust that in so doing the friends will be prepared for the conditions, which prevail in these countries. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to live in the United States with high standard of living, sanitation and efficiency naturally see at a glance the backward conditions, which is new at every turn the lack of development to progress. However, all should be advised of the unsanitary conditions, lack of hot water, strange and uninviting food, worn appearance of both public and private buildings, simple accustomed to, so that the visitor will not be shocked. The Guardian in the Advent (of Divine Justice) warns of the conditions. One pioneer en-route to his new home was an excellent example and said that always he studied the group around him and then tried to conform so he would not be conspicuous. We have found the people to be most receptive and hospitable but have also had the sad experience of Baha'i visitors criticizing service, food, appearance of rooms where they were, talking loudly and attracting attention so that they were invited to leave. The proximity of the Canal Zone no doubt lends its influence and stimulates the negative attitude. Hotels and other Canal Zone service should not be confused with the Republic of Panama. This of course would not exist in the other countries but the attitude of universal love, which melts all barriers and, misunderstanding is the banner under which every guest should abide. The pioneer or travelling teacher is the uninvited guest and in serving the Faith of Baha'u'llah can make himself one to be sought for by observing the everyday practices, which will attract people to him. The large things (adjustments) are comparatively easy, but these little everyday annoyances are less tangible and often are the source of obstacles in the teacher's path. May these little hints be of help to others.*

## GURADIAN'S MESSAGE

Cora wrote to Shoghi Effendi more than Louise did. But many of his responses are in the name of both of them. On December 11, 1940, the beloved Guardian addressed both Louise and Cora with the following message, which was extracted from Cora's memoirs. The message is full of encouragement and affection:

*"...His heart is indeed filled with gratitude at this fresh and striking evidence of your determination to implant the banner of the Faith in that virgin territory. Knowing as you certainly do of the glowing reference made by Abdu'l-Baha regarding the spiritual future of that country, you should consider it your high and sacred privilege to be the first pioneers working in that land, and you should rest assured that Divine confirmations will strengthen and bless your efforts, and will enable you to attain your heart's desire in service of His Cause...Also he views with great favor your plan of establishing contacts with as many sections and classes of the population as possible, and hopes that you will equally succeed in attracting to the Faith individuals of high social position and influence as well as those of humble origin who, no matter how limited their capacity and influence, can nevertheless, once introduced to the Cause, render services of far-reaching value, outshining those which their fellow believers of higher origin and better social standing may be able to accomplish..."*

And in his own handwriting:

***"My heart overflows with joy at the news you give me. The spirit animating you both in your services to the Faith is truly exemplary, and will no doubt enable you to overcome any obstacle that may confront you. I am deeply thankful for having such staunch and devoted co-workers in the Divine Vineyard. Persevere, and be assured that I will continue to pray for both of you from the depths of my heart".***

***Your true brother, Shoghi"***

## PANAMA PIONEERING

On December 22, 1940, the joint letter to Mrs. French has one relevant matter to add to the history, and that is the work on the history of Panama that these two pioneers have been working on. Albeit, not much of history still existed during their time:

*"The history of the Panama pioneering is enclosed and if Louise's picture has not arrived from the States by the next airmail we will send it later".*

The letter also contains two-piece of information on their recent activities, one at the University:

*"...The meeting at La Universidad this morning was thrilling. The students of the Faith are asking the priests questions, which the priests answer vaguely. The Baha'i Cause gives them satisfying answers".*

And the other one is:

*"...Louise is working on some translations, which will send in a few days..."*

## CHAPTER III- 1941

### ANTICIPATION

On the January 5, 1941, Cora wrote to Mrs. Stuart W. French, anticipating 1941, more Baha'is would go to Panama to establish themselves, it is a good training ground she says. The joint letters became paler each time. Due to finding permanent demanding job in the Canal Zone during the wartime, has occupied the hours of the day, where previously, the two pioneers spent in proclamation of the Faith, visiting people and places, and now they were relying on these happen through the pioneers-to-be. She wrote:

*"We are not doing any special work in the Zone on the Atlantic side now...We have been in correspondence with Marvin Newport, William Fries, a Mr. Arthur Jones of Washington (State) and Alice Dudley about coming to Panama, and I have written Joe Noyes, in New York State as he is an engineer. With all of us working the doors will surely open for some to come to Panama. More and more men are needed...Panama offers an opportunity for employment, learning Spanish and travel to other Latin American countries, an excellent training ground. We hope that this month will bring the good news that others are on their way. 1941 brings a challenge to us all".*

Such a happy occasion when the Trues visited Panama for a very short while, reported in a letter of February 23:

*"Last Friday morning at the wee hour of two o'clock the President Jackson brought to Balboa a precious gift. The Trues arrived and those hours when we were privileged to see them were brimming over with Baha'i conversation and love. It was all too short but indeed grateful are we for seeing the Baha'i travelers. During our conversation with Edna we spoke of the possibilities of men securing employment in the Canal Zone... "From \$100 to \$150 plus transportation should finance men, with the right qualifications, until work is found. We feel deeply the need of men to assist with the teaching in many sections of Panama and pray that the way may open for others who are qualified to come to this favored land".*

In the letter it is mentioned about Louise's son who so quickly became engaged in Canal Zone:

*"Peter, who is only 18 years of age got work eight days after making application. In November he took a Civil Service examination and now is employed at the Administration Building with a beginning salary of \$131.25 per month and a promise of an increase in six months. This examination was given for men only and Peter was second on the new register. Men without special training should be on the Isthmus to get work".*

The pioneers also inquired about the status of Canal Zone in relation to Panama:

*"We have often wondered about the status of the Canal Zone and believe that it is to be treated as any other US possession but here is another thought. There is a believer who is a photographer at one of the Army Posts, but not in the US service. He gets his mail in the Zone, earns his living in the Zone and spends his working time in the Zone but lives in the Republic of Panama. Are the believers in the Canal Zone entitled to the News Letter etc.? I assume that they all will be but what about one in his case? No doubt it is as in the States, determined by civil boundaries. Panama does have a unique position and presents some interesting problems. Dr. Katherine will tell you about Mr. Osborne and Edna will tell you about Emerita, the lovely Panamanian young woman..."*

### **PURSUING FOR PIONEERS**

Mrs. French after receiving more photos of Louise, wrote to her on February 27:

*"We learn from the National Assembly's report, which has just come, that you and Cora have contributed one hundred dollars towards the sending of another pioneer to Panama. This is a wonderful gesture on your part, and I wish we had just the right person to send you... We had in mind Mr. and Mrs. Lohse who sounded very helpful, but they could not finance themselves and the National Assembly had declined to accept the services of Mr. Lohse as a pioneer as he is not a declared Believer, so that makes the situation difficult. We are very hopeful that the next convention will produce results and that we shall have other applications...I wonder about Joel Marangella<sup>272</sup> in New York and his sister and her husband. We hear nothing at all from them. I only suggest them because I know they were anxious to go into the field".*

Mathew Kaszab had asked from the Inter America Committee for a form indicating of his works in the field of service related to the Baha'i Faith and something similar would also help Louise and Cora. Mrs. French informed on March 6<sup>th</sup>:

*"I am now enclosing a copy of the form, which Mathew Kaszab asked us to send him for use with the Consul and if this will be of any service to you, here it is. We have again taken the matter up with Mr. Holley<sup>273</sup> and hope that something definite can be decided upon which will supply you with any kind of recommendation, which you may have to use".*

And again, on the pursue of pioneers for Panama:

*"Regarding applicants, we are now down to nothing...we have no one to take up your wonderful offer, I have sent an air letter to Mason Remey hoping that he may visit you and I have urged the time limit for getting jobs as you mention it. But more I cannot do. I will try William Fries but unless you know him personally and the N.S.A. also we cannot guarantee him as none of us knows him and he might not be the type".*

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272. Later he broke the Covenant and joined Mason Remey's group after 1960, disappearing from the face of the Baha'i history.

273. Horace Holley, the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the US and great collaborator of the Guardian.

## CORA IN COSTA RICA

Cora on her vacation trip to Costa Rica on March 13, wrote from San Jose that she has tried to “*hunt for pioneers for Panama*”, but so far, no success. She mentions:

*“There seems little none to be said about Pioneers for Panama. Nothing now. Baha’is could not be approved for pioneering”.*

Then Cora writes of a certain:

*“William Luis is a believer wants to come to Panama, and has qualifications, which I’m sure would make it possible for him to secure employment soon. Surely he is much better qualified to pioneer than the Woods or the other couple –new though none of us known him”.*

She mentions important points in the field of pioneering:

*“Again & again, I have witnessed the young people take their place in this great work of spreading the Faith and observed with utmost satisfaction their freedom from this, which in cases of believers, who have seemed so nobly in the Apostolic age of the Faith, find it all but impossible to sever themselves”.*

She realizes the importance of deeper knowledge in the Faith for pioneering in the field:

*“The need of knowing the teachings is most important. When one once becomes a part of this great project the heavenly concourse assists him & them, his service confirmations are attracted. He (William) also has the spiritual urge. However, it may be an outside source, which brings a believer to the realization that he truly is qualified to serve –as it was in my case- thru the consultation with a devoted believer...”* Here she also mentions the intervention of the institutions:

*“It cannot be expected that when a volunteer has once been refused that he will ask for the approval the second time – this was true in the case of a (married) man who wanted to come to Panama, even before I made application”.*

Cora had deep faith in Baha’u’llah’s help:

*“Thru your letters of encouragement, our prayers for guidance and the sincere desire of all concerned to fulfill the Guardian’s wishes, expressed in the “Advent” about Panama, the doors will surely open –and the Convention will no doubt inspire others and, in the meantime, may there be confirmed believers in Panama who will rise to assist in the all-important work of establishing the Faith in that land. A new believer, with a real desire would assist much more in Panama than no one as a now-believer who comes for other reasons”.*

In her letter Cora mentions of the six wonderful days she spent in San Jose together with Costa Rican pioneers and speaks quite highly of Gayle Woolson:

*“I spent six days with Amalia enjoying her hospitality and friendship and a Baha’i meeting at her apartment. Gayle is an outstanding type of pioneer where work and I’m sure will be far-reaching and enduring”.*

Cora admits that the progress of the Faith in Costa Rica is much better than that of what they experience in Panama:



*“Some of the friends will come to the Hotel to see me (moved here yesterday) and Monday evening we will have a more intimate meeting for believers only at the Hotel where I have arranged to have them all come. It is wonderful to know these lovely people who reflect the highest & best of Costa Rica, which in itself presents a much higher development that with which we are associate”.*

She also is in touch with Louise and feels she is engaged with the activities of Panama:

*“Louise has kept me in touch with all she is doing for the Salas<sup>274</sup> visit. It is a great bounty when pioneers work with consultation to develop their work. Even though I am not there I feel very close to those activities. I’ll return in time to see them. Wish we dared hope that they could stay in Panama –our cup would be overflowing”.*

## **PIONEERING URGE**

In a letter of April 1<sup>st</sup> to Mrs. French, Louise accepts the request of the Inter America Committee mentioned previously to write to the new believers on her behalf:

*“Yes, I have been more than glad to take charge of Frances Stewart’s mail. And have also written to the new believers whose names you sent me”.*

And the prospect of a new believer:

*“Soon we will send two registration cards signed by believers that have been studying for some months.*

In this letter Louise mentions an important point regarding pioneering urge that should come from within. She wrote for the Committee to ponder upon:

*“In recent letter about sending out more pioneers you said that the Committee was not in a position to ask people to act as pioneers because the urge to pioneer must come from within. Mrs. Barton confirmed my personal experience that the pioneer urge (while it must be potentially in one’s heart) often needs to be fanned into a flame from without.”<sup>275</sup> Since we are weak humans, we need constant encouragement from our fellow believers for only a few are single-hearted. So many of us think we want to serve with complete detachment but find it so easy to slip into such thoughts as this:*

*“The teachings are needed everywhere. I had better stay home and make a home for my family”; or any one of the varied excuses, which the students of Siyyid Kazim gave to Mullah Husyan in Karbila”.*

What she wrote is in accord with what Cora wrote previously:

*“You also spoke of those who had offered to pioneer before but had not been heard of recently. It might be that had they been rejected once they would hesitate to offer again and would become involved in the round of local activities, which are such a joy”.*

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274. Mr. and Mrs. Salas, members for the Inter America Committee

275. Emphasis added.

And she pressed on giving her own example:

*“I feel that I owe my privilege of being here in part, to two heroic souls who caught a glimpse of my work before I did. We Baha’is are so closely connected, small parts of an organic whole. A pioneer is one of the feet of the Cause and it usually requires eyes to guide the feet”.*

Once it was intended to have Arthemus Lamb<sup>276</sup> to become a pioneer to Panama as the Committee discussed it in their meeting:

*“We are trying to persuade Mr. Lamb to go to Panama as he has applied to be a pioneer, but he not quite ready yet to start out. It seems that if he could go to Panama for a while, he would be very helpful to you girls”.*

## **VISITORS’ IMPRESSIONS**

In the minutes of the Inter-America Committee dated June 14, 1941, is recorded:

“Mrs. Sala again compliments the pioneers of Panama for the beautiful work they are doing and mentions that Mrs. Caswell had introduced Mr. and Mrs. Sala to the Vice Consul of Great Britain and his wife; the wife of Consul of Peru; the Consul of Ecuador and his wife; and the Consul of Colombia and his wife. All of them are very nice to the Salas because of their great admiration and respect for Mrs. Caswell.

## **SUBVERSIVE ATTEMPTS**

The IAC discussed the newly attempts of a certain society by the name of New History Society, trying to infiltrate the newly organized Baha’i communities in Central America<sup>277</sup>. The IAC recorded:

*“We found Central America riddled with material from the New History Society and among these new people the work is going to be extremely destructive unless we can counteract it speedily”.*

By the urge of the beloved Guardian, the Protector of the interests of the Faith, and through the immense work of Horace Holley through the National Spiritual Assembly and the Inter America Committee, the pioneers were requested to send back whatever such material they received without opening them. All the pioneers obeyed this request very faithfully. Time and again, the pioneers mentioned in their letters to the Committee, of having received packages marked from this mentioned Society and that they sent them back to the address from where they were coming from.

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276. One of the outstanding early pioneers to Chile. Later appointed as a Counsellor of the Americas in 1968.

277. This Society was formed by a Covenant breaker – Ahmad Sohrab, one time interpreter of Abdu’l-Baha in America, broke the covenant after the passing of the Master. He tried to use the Baha’i ideals by non-Baha’is means, targeting the pioneers and the new Baha’is. This organization started its activities from 1939 and became defunct in 1959, after the death of its founder.

## **TRAVELS**

During the years, Louise made many trips to Central American countries, specifically to Guatemala where she promised to go back. In fact, that country became her second pioneering place after she left Panama for good, in early 1949 and after staying in Costa Rica and Honduras, made Guatemala her home, where she remained there for 22 years before going to Mexico. In late October 1941, Cora wrote to Mrs. French: *“Louise keeps me in touch with her visits to the countries in C.A. and I am sure her trip will be most fruitful. Johnny (Eichenhauer) also writes often. It is a bounty to the friends in these countries to have Johnny and Louise at the same time, two loyal and faithful Baha’is”*.

Upon her return, Louise recommended to the IAC that both the National Spiritual Assembly members as well as the Inter America Committee, should make trips to the Central American countries, to see for themselves the progress of the Faith as well as being source of encouragement to the pioneers and new believers.

## **A NEW CENTER OF ACTIVITIES**

Louise and Cora have been trying for sometimes to get a bigger place to share living and at the same time use it as their center of activities, where all kinds of meetings could be held there easily. Cora writes:

*“Louise is still in Honduras, and we are both waiting for an apartment in Panama to be finished so we can establish ourselves and have a center for meetings”. A permanent place to meet is our greatest need at present. The location will be excellent for both the Zone and Panama. It will be expensive, in fact housing for me will be over nine times as much as it is in bachelor quarters where I now live”*.

By December it was recorded that the pioneers in Panama have indicated of their new home having comfortable quarters. Mrs. French wrote:

*“The Committee read with great satisfaction the account of your pleasant living quarters and the comfort, which you must be enjoying together with Cora”*.

## **WWII - POSSIBLE EVACUATION**

As the WWII became more intense, there appeared a new concern for the Panama pioneers to find a solution in case of forced evacuation. Though the war has been raging for some time in Europe, yet the US was not as involved, although due to its affinity with the UK, she helped the sister country by mere coaching its war ships. The bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 compelled the US, though hesitatingly, to enter the combat zone. The Canal of Panama would be the place of transit of the warships; therefore, the whole Canal Zone would be in danger too, and consequently, its pioneers. The IAC became concerned about the safety of the pioneers wrote to Louise:

*“We hope very much that you will not be exposed to any danger in your present residence and that the emergencies, which the world is undergoing will draw people closer to God”*.

This matter continued to be discussed in the early following year.

## CHAPTER IV – 1942

### EVACUATION AND THE SEVEN-YEAR PLAN

#### PRIORITY

*“Our anxiety about our pioneers in Ancon seems to be unfounded as they write that Mrs. Oliver’s employment in the Laboratory of the Gorgas Hospital would probably necessitates her remaining there under any conditions and Mrs. Caswell would not leave unless required to do so by the Government in which case she will try to get permission to go to another of the Republics”<sup>278</sup>.*

Louise wrote the first letter for the New Year, to Mrs. French on January 6, 1942. The letter, unlike the previous ones, has no recipient’s address. There is a concern and enthusiasm on the newly launched Seven Year Plan of the beloved Guardian. While in Costa Rica, Louise in consultation with Gayle Woolson, talked to a certain believer, Mr. Ulloa a Latin local Baha’i teacher and asked her to come to Panama. There were many correspondences back and forth with the IAC, and finally he did not come. The following letter is just an example:

*“A letter from Gayle Woolson informed me that she had written to you telling you that Mr. Ulloa would need funds for his family while he is in Panama. I hope she told you how much he should need, and that the money will be forwarded to him at once if he can come. TIME IS SHORT! We cannot tarry with the remaining year of the Seven Year Plan. If Mr. Ulloa cannot come why not send Tany Viana. You said he was needed in Honduras. He could return after he does some good teaching work here. The Guardian wants us to overlook all qualifications now. It would be better to have one of these men come and spend only a few months of active teaching work among the Panamanians than anything else I know. Then they could return. Please get one of them here as soon as possible”.*

The IAC’s top priority was on the evacuation of its pioneers in the case of emergency. The following letter/cable was written to the pioneers in Panama:

*“Dear Cora and Louise, this is to confirm the cable, which I sent you at the suggestion of the NSA so that we may be able to know what can be done in case the Government feels it necessary to evacuate all the American lady citizens who are now in the Zone. You may know how very*

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278. IAC, Baha’i News, February 1942

*sorry we should be to have you leave Panama and we are very anxious that your services be utilized in spreading the Baha'i Faith and its spirit of unity and cooperation throughout the Republics who are our neighbors and whose friendship we so highly value, and we shall look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience to inform us of your plans".*

Cora and Louise, the two staunch pioneers, resolute in their pioneering post and ever faithful to the request of their beloved Guardian, responded to Mrs. French, on January 10, 1942:

*"Your cablegram referring to our possible evacuation from the Isthmus of Panama arrived January 8<sup>th</sup>. We much appreciate the spirit in which you are lovingly watching over the pioneer activities in these countries. In answer to your question whether we could go to Central America in case of our evacuation – first, let us answer for Cora. She has a permanent position in the Gorgas Hospital Laboratory, and it is unlikely that she will be forced to leave. If so, she would be one of the last to go. In that event she would have to go someplace where she could earn her living and there is little chance of that in Central America. The case of Louise is that there is no probability at all that she will have to leave; but she would go to Central America if evacuated and permitted to do so. It seems evident that we will both remain and persevere in the Guardian's plan throughout the present conflagration".*

The main concern of the pioneers was not war or evacuation, but the Seven Year Plan of the Guardian and having pioneers to come to Panama. They wrote:

*"It is our earnest hope that other pioneers will come here as there are jobs waiting for them. The Guardian does not want us to relax in our pioneer efforts because of the war. Travel by plane through Central America is good and we hope that the committee will consider sending an itinerant teacher through these countries while it is still possible. Good audiences could be arranged".*

## **FIRST DECLARATION IN CANAL ZONE**

A very short letter from Cora and Louise was addressed again to Mrs. French, on January 11, 1942, regarding the registration of their first believer in Canal Zone in the record book they just received<sup>279</sup> and they sent off the registration card. The Committee acknowledged:

*"We are so happy to record the name of Mrs. Aura E. Rudy of Balboa and we hope now that the work will progress steadily".*

And again:<sup>280</sup>

*"The Committee is very happy to receive the registration card of Mrs. Aura E. Rudy of Balboa and begs you to express to her our delight that she has come into the Baha'i ranks'.*

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279. Mrs. Aura E. Rudy

280. Balboa, the name after the first Spaniard to Panama, Vasco Nunez Balboa, the discoverer of the Atlantic Sea, given to the Pacific side of Canal Zone.

## PIONEERS DILLEMA PERSISTS

Mrs. French wrote on January 19, 1942, to both Cora and Louise regarding the possible evacuation of lady pioneers to some other places. There were possibilities of getting other pioneers for Panama, but not certain. And Johnny Eichenauer will remain in Central America in spite of earnestly calling for him to join in Panama. The Committee is trying by all means possible to get new pioneers, even for short time for Panama, but unfortunately there are no applicants:

*“Your letter assuring us of your intention to remain in Panama has been received and we want to assure you that the cable, which we sent you was sent at the instance of the National Spiritual Assembly who feel that an emergency might arise at any moment”.*

The Committee realized that Cora would remain, due to her job in Canal Zone, but if Louise to be evacuated:

*“Undoubtedly from what you say, Mrs. Oliver would be retained in Panama, and we had hoped that you would consult the authorities there, regarding Louise’s possible transfer to either Central America or the one of the countries of South America. We are so eager to send someone to Venezuela because we feel that Priscilla<sup>281</sup> needs assistance and encouragement very much...Any information, which you may get and any suggestions regarding your transfer will be most gratefully received”.*

Johnny Eichenauer was a star youth in demand almost everywhere, yet:

*“The National Spiritual Assembly has voted to retain Johnny in Central America after he has completed his work in Honduras because we find that he has Central America practically at his fingertips now and has made friends in a most interesting way and is advancing the Faith with great wisdom and understanding”.*

And it is surprising that despite job opportunities in Panama, not a single soul would apply for pioneering there:

*“We know how much you would like to have some other pioneers in Panama, but we are without any applicants on our list at the present time and although we are continuing striving to awaken interest and enthusiasm and have presented to the people for readings at the Feast<sup>282</sup> time and remarks of the Guardian about the importance of the work in Panama, we are still awaiting applicants”.*

## SEEKING LOUISE’S ASSISTANCE

All in all, Louise was more prepared to move around to help the Faith in different countries and the Committee could most of the time count on her availability and willingness to take the extended hand. The Inter-America Committee wrote to Louise on February 2, 1942, asking her if possible, to go to Caracas, Venezuela try to help the only pioneer there, who

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281. Priscilla Rhoads The only pioneer in Venezuela at the time.

282. Nineteen Days Feasts, marking the commencement of the Baha’i calendar months.

needs great deal of help:

*“My purpose in writing you this morning is to ask if it would be possible for you to go to Venezuela for a short time? We have not yet recommended this to the NSA because we wish to approach you first to see what arrangements it would be necessary to make. Priscilla Rhoads seems very discouraged, and we had hoped to supply another teacher for Caracas, but on closer investigation we find that the person who had volunteered is not adapted to the work there, especially as she has no funds and the expense of maintaining a pioneer there is very high. If you could arrange to go, would you require financial assistance and just how much would that be? We, of course, do not expect that you would remain any great length of time, but we felt that any encouragement to Priscilla would be very helpful. We wrote her some weeks ago requesting her opinion regarding the sending of another pioneer and asking her to reply at once, but we have had no reply from her, and we are at a loss to know whether she is ill or whether she is so downhearted that she doesn't feel like writing. In either case we feel that it would be well to investigate the matter by a personal visit there if possible. Will you be kind enough to reply at once so that we may know if we are to recommend this matter to the NSA”.*

Louise wrote back to the IAC on February 10 highly recommending Gayle Woolson for the job. She mentions of the outstanding pioneering work she has done in Central America and ‘who has shown her superiority to all pioneers’. The description of Louise is of such a high standard that one cannot but admire Gayle Woolson, the stalwart and committed young lady who could do so much single handedly:

*“Your request that I make a trip to Venezuela to assist Priscilla Rhoads was read this morning and I still feel it is not wise for me to leave Panama at present when the Cause is still in an undeveloped stage. I do think Priscilla should have some help and both Cora and I agree that no one would be better to send to her than Gayle Woolson who has done the outstanding piece of work in Central America, who speaks Spanish fluently, who adapts herself to the customs and spirit of the Latins and who has shown her superiority to all pioneers whom I have observed in getting results. Her Syrian parentage gives her the appearance of the Latins and they accept her as one of themselves so that she does not have to break down the usual prejudice against Americans”.*

Indeed, they were quite few pioneers as Gayle Woolson with such golden qualities:

*“With these qualities she has selfless devotion to the Cause. The ability to meet Latins so well is the quality which will bring results in getting believers and that is what we all want. She associates with all classes and is accepted by all. She mingles with the outstanding people of San Jose. They come to visit her and come to the meetings”.*

Louise has analyzed the neighboring country and frankly observes:

*“After a week with the Salas here in Panama I am well aware the difficulty of the situation in Venezuela and I consider Gayle the best teacher to send. Sending a pioneer from Costa Rica by plane would cost little more than sending one from Panama. Any amount invested in sending Gayle would bring good returns. ...and you may be sure that it will be well used as Gayle is very self-sacrificing and denies herself many things for the Faith”.*

To which, the Committee answered by accepting Louise's suggestion:

*“We have, at Louise’s suggestion, written immediately to Gayle Woolson, asking if she would consider a trip to Venezuela. We are quite at a loss to know why we do not hear from Priscilla. Some time ago she wrote requesting us to remove her name from the list of pioneers. This, of course, we declined to do because whether she wishes or not, she is a pioneer, being a Baha’i in a strange land, but we feel that her request was due to her feeling of failure to have been able to make any believers in Venezuela. We do hope that if you have had any word from her, you will let us know because we are anxious over this silence and hope it may not be due to her health or other circumstances. Conditions are increasingly difficult, and we are at a loss to know just how to arrange the pioneers when the Guardian is so insistent that we must send others.”*



## THE HAMILTONS

Our pioneers in Ancon<sup>283</sup> have now realized their hearts' desire since recently they have been reinforced by the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. C.E. Hamilton who are going to reside in Cristobal and thus they can meet and study together even though they are not in the same city<sup>284</sup>.

Out of nowhere, a certain American Baha'i, Clare E. Hamilton from New York landed in Cristobal and found a job, contacted the Panamanian pioneers He apparently either a new Baha'i, registered or not, without going through the administrative channels and consulting with the Committee, took off and left for Panama. There are few letters in this regard that are important to notice. He wrote to Mrs. French on February 3, 1942:

*"With a one-way ticket to Panama, twenty dollars in my pocket and the Baha'i faith in my heart I boarded a Chilean steamer on October 25 at New York. Contrary to all predictions that I would never be allowed to land without a return ticket, I arrived in Cristobal on October 31 with the twenty dollars still intact. My first and very urgent task was to find employment. My prayer for guidance was immediately answered and I found a fairly lucrative position. However, it was necessary for me to get an eligibility card from the Central Labor Office before I could go to work. I got a real jolt when they demanded that I post an eighty-dollar bond before they would issue the card. The problem then was to raise enough money to cover the bond, so I went to friends living in Panama and told them of my needs. They responded by taking me to the bank and arranging for the necessary funds. My next task was to get Norma<sup>285</sup> here, so after going through the usual red tape, permission was granted for her to join me. Before she could leave the States, war was declared, but war or no war she left New York on December 14 and arrived in Panama on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Since then, we have spent some very happy weekends with our Baha'i pioneers, Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell. Much credit is due these women for the very praiseworthy Baha'i work they have done. In spite of many hardships and handicaps they have kept the banner of BahaUllah [sic] flying high and have made steady progress".*

At the closing of the letter, Clare hopes soon to have an Assembly in the Isthmus, and he also reiterates the availability of jobs in Panama:

*"By the will and guidance of God, we hope to soon have a Baha'i assembly on the Isthmus of Panama. There is a great need here for many more Baha'is. There is employment to be had in almost any line. To any Baha'i who feels the urge to pioneer in Panama we shall be very happy to furnish any information we have or to assist in any way we can to help him get established here".*

Mrs. French, responded to the Hamiltons almost immediately, admiring this young family who pioneered to Panama, but she laments that they did not do this through the administrative channels:

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283. Ancon the established town of Pacific side of Canal Zone and Cristobal on the Atlantic side.

284. Inter America Committee, Baha'i News, June 1942

285. Clare and Norma Hamilton, new pioneers in Panama.

*"Your letter and your radiant photograph has sort of taken us off our feet. We are more than delighted to know that you have gone out into the Panama regions and have been successful in finding a position, but we regret very much that you did not approach the Inter-America Committee so that we might have the satisfaction of feeling that we were behind you and that you would thereby become a regular correspondent receiving our Bulletins and operating under the Administrative Plan as established by Shoghi Effendi".*

The Committee inquires of their background:

*"...in order to preserve our records".*

Cora who has been in contact with the Hamiltons sometimes the previous year, wrote to Mrs. French and speaks highly of this couple, mentioning that:

*"They are joy-bringers and have radiant spirits". They have lived as isolated believers and last year when a notice was inserted in the Baha'i News, they wrote me in response to the plea for pioneers and made inquiries about employment. He followed the advice [I] sent him and for months we did not hear from them. In fact, we did not know they were on their way or about their arrival until Louise met them on the Atlantic side one day. Their story is one of real courage and faith such as would be a great test to even the most earnest seeker".*

Cora explains that:

*"On April 11, 1941 I wrote you of the Hamiltons... They are the kind of people I have longed to see here. At present we are dashing back and forth across the Isthmus weekends to get better acquainted (they have never had the privilege of being in a community and long for that experience) and share the fragrances of the teachings...I only wish that all of the Committee and the entire National Assembly might know these souls, they would not hesitate a moment to have them as delegates in any land...Praise be that they are here to assist us. All of us are benefiting as a result of this move and I am sure this news will gladden the Guardian's heart. They are students and their lives show their devotion to the Faith. We all hope that they may come to this side so that our studies may be more organized and that we may deepen in the teachings. Would it not be wonderful to have an Assembly in this land of promise?...the Hamiltons have the spirit, which is needed and Baha'u'llah surely guided, protected and brought them here".*

The IAC was elated by the news of this new couple to be in Panama, thus enriching the community, thus Baha'u'llah has answered to the prayers of the Panamanian pioneers. Mrs. French wrote on February 23, 1942, addressing the "Girls":

*"Just this morning we have received Cora's letter regarding the Hamiltons and we are so happy that they are proving just the addition to your group that you have so long hoped for. Strangely enough, no one has yet told us where the Hamiltons hail from, but that is only a matter of interest on our part and not because we desire to check up on them after the beautiful reports, which you have sent us".*

The letter also mentions of another young Baha'i in Fort Clayton of Canal Zone that should be contacted<sup>286</sup>.

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286. This believer could have been the same Burt Wernokur or Werneken or Wernecken, the NSA pronounced his name as A.R. Werneken.

On April 2, Mr. Hamilton wrote back to Mrs. French describing their story back in the US and the way they ended in Panama. Indeed, their understanding of the Faith has been remarkable. These were kind of pioneers needed in Panama helping Louise and Cora. He wrote:

*“While in Houston, Texas during the early part of 1939 we had the good fortune of meeting Mrs. Kathryn Frankland, who in turn introduced and made us acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Ward Calhoon. After spending many evenings discussing the Baha’i Faith with them and reading many Baha’i books, we concluded that the faith of Baha’u’llah was indeed our faith. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Frankland left Houston and we went with the Calhoons to San Antonio where they stayed but a short time before returning to Milwaukee. While in San Antonio we became acquainted with Mrs. Nichols and attended regular meetings at her home. We remained in San Antonio only a little over four months before moving to Brownsville, Texas.*

*‘I believe it was while we were in San Antonio that we received the first issue of the Advent of Divine Justice and both Norma and I felt the call to go into pioneer work. However, due to the lack of both training and knowledge in that type of work, we did not feel qualified to ask for financial aid from the Inter-America Committee. We, therefore, decided to wait until we were better informed on the Cause, or some opportunity presented itself whereby we could earn our own way. In the Baha’i Newsletter last spring we noticed where Mrs. Cora Oliver had called for help from Panama. We put forth every effort to obtain a connection in the states that would send us here, but it seemed all roads were closed. During that time our importing business, which we had started in Brownsville took a very decided decline because of many unavoidable reasons. We then decided to go to Pittsburgh and obtain temporary employment until such time as we had earned enough money to get to Panama. The rest of the story is contained in our first letter. We are certainly anxious to do anything we can to help the Baha’i faith and whether we are considered as pioneer teachers or merely assist Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell in any way we can, we will leave to your own discretion”.*

By April 5, 1942, the administrative transfer of the Hamilton from the US to Panama was concluded.

## **THE ISTHMIAN GROUP**

By the end of April, the Isthmus group had risen to six, of which four were in the Army base of Canal Zone and two in Panama. Louise wrote to Mrs. French:

*“Bert Wernecken, of Detroit, Norma and Claire Hamilton of Texas are working on the Isthmus. Bert as a soldier and Norma and Clare in Panama Air Depot as civilian army employees. And to top the good tidings, Ben Schreiber of Philadelphia has just flown in with a three months contract as civilian worker for the army. He is near us, and we get new inspiration by seeing him often. Now there are six Baha’i pioneers on the Isthmus, four stationed at army posts and two in the Republic of Panama. We hope to have them at the Naw-Ruz<sup>287</sup> feast, May 2<sup>nd</sup><sup>288</sup> and will be with the friends at the Convention in Spirit”.*

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287. Naw-Ruz, New Day, 21 March, the first day of Baha’i year.

288. May 2, the 12th day of Ridvan. The festivity of Ridvan starts 21 April to 2 May, celebrating the Revelation of Baha’u’llah.

She also acknowledges the receipt of 25 copies of the Baha'u'llah and the New Era books in both languages, and asks for a copy of the Baha'i World for the Balboa Heights<sup>289</sup> Canal Zone Library, where all the Central American countries benefit from:

*"This is a most important library and is for the use of people all over the Canal Zone and even some parts of Panama. In fact, it is the only library in Central America where books are loaned. Think of it! Here we have Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and [El] Salvador to say nothing of our own Panama without a lending library either free or commercial".*

Cora mentioned in her letter to the Committee, a month later, making a special mention of Ben Schribman:

*"We are delighted to have Ben with us. He is an inspiration, detached, radiant, forceful and filled with the love of the Faith, which distinguishes him from all others. Would that there were many more like him".*

## **BAHA'I ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP**

The Isthmian group organized themselves and elected Alfred Osborne as the secretary of the group. This group met and made some decisions to be forwarded to the Inter America Committee or the National Spiritual Assembly. The group did not anticipate that to form such an entity, they should be staying all in one location. This matter had some correspondence with the National Spiritual Assembly Secretary regarding its legitimacy. Cora wrote:

*"On May 16, 1942, we held a meeting for declared believers only and organized our group with the result that Mr. Osborne is now the Secretary. It was a thrilling meeting, confirmed from the beginning. This is another step in our slow progress, and we hope for a quickening of the spirit. We are holding one meeting in Spanish and one in English. Thanks again for the assistance given the pioneers in Panama and the generous supply of literature".*

The group, now confident, suggested of having a Spanish speaking pioneer from Costa Rica:

*"Would it not be of great value to finance one or two of the outstanding Latin Americans on a tour thru some of these countries. Mr. Ulloa, of San Jose, is an example and I am sure that he would be of great service to the Faith if he could make a trip to Panama or other nearby countries. You will remember him as being the first chairman of the Assembly of San Jose and later of the splendid work he did in assisting with the development and establishment of another Assembly in his own country".*

Historic act of writing the first letter by the Isthmian Group to the National Spiritual Assembly, on July 20, 1942, signed by Mr. Alfred E. Osborne, the Secretary of the Group. The letter to the National Assembly of the US also mentions of Cora's falling accident and being at hospital:

*My dear Mr. Holley:*

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289. Balboa Heights in Ancon, is a hill on top of which was the Administration building of Canal Zone, Library, etc.

1. *I take great pleasure in informing you that on May 16 the first Baha'i group of six believers met at the Baha'i Center, the home of Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell, to organize in the proper way. At this first meeting, Cora Oliver was elected as treasurer and I, secretary.*
2. *Since then we have been observing the Nineteen Day Feasts and meeting at other times in study groups. We are all taking the Faith seriously. We [the] new believers believe in the underlying principles of the Faith, and we are zealously striving to understand and appreciate its tenets.*
3. *At the meeting held on July 12, 1942, I was instructed to remit fifty dollars to the National Treasurer as a gift from Panama Baha'is to the National Spiritual Assembly. You will find enclosed, therefore, a money order for fifty dollars (\$50), which you will please turn over to the National Treasurer. Panama Baha'is are pleased to make this humble contribution to the great work.*
4. *I was also instructed to request from the National Assembly the bulletins, which contain information for Baha'i believers subject to the draft. I should appreciate it, if you would have these bulletins forwarded to my address.*
5. *Our pioneer Cora Oliver, a very faithful and devout believer, has been ill for some time now and confined to the Gorgas Hospital. The fracture she sustained in a fall is healing nicely. We pray for her speedy and sure recovery.*
6. *Now that contact has been established, I am requesting that correspondence for the local Baha'is be sent to my address.*

The same day, July 20, 1942, Mr. Osborne also wrote to Mrs. French, with almost the same content as the above letter to the NSA, except for acknowledging the picture of Abdu'l-Baha that was sent to him personally by the Committee.

Mr. Horace Holley responded to Mr. Osborne on July 28 putting the foundation for questioning the proposed group as an administrative institution, which the National Assembly was concerned about. Such a question followed this answer to Alfred:

*"For the National Spiritual Assembly, I am very happy to acknowledge your letter of July 20, written as secretary of the Baha'i group. It is very inspiring to realize that there are now six believers and that you have a secretary and treasurer and are observing the Nineteen-Day Feast as well as carrying on teaching work. The members of the National Spiritual Assembly will be deeply grateful for your generous contribution of \$50.00 to the National Fund from the Panama Baha'is. A receipt made out by the Treasurer's office is enclosed herewith".*

Mr. Holley also confirmed the National Spiritual Assembly's prayers for the quick recovery of Cora's sustained fracture. Mr. Holley informs Alfred that:

*"Hereafter we will send copies of BAHAI NEWS for the group in your care".*

Three days later, the National Assembly Secretary wrote to Louise, clarifying the concept of a Baha'is Group, as it is understood within the Baha'i Administration:

*"We have received a very beautiful letter from M. A. E. Osborne, dated July 20, which I acknowledged July 28. Mr. Osborne announced that he is secretary of the group of six believers. This may be all very well for general purposes of conduct of correspondence, but the six believers live in different cities and there is not the basis of one local Baha'i community such as is required*

*for groups in the United States and Canada. No doubt you have already explained this point to other believers, but I am mentioning it so as to avoid any possible misunderstanding later on. Ordinarily a group is recognized only when its members all live in one civil area, and therefore could later on participate in the formation of a local Assembly. The group, which Mr. Osborne describes would be the believers of the country of Panama rather than a local group such as we recognize up here. We will continue communicating with the believers through Mr. Osborne but cannot list the six believers of Panama as a group in our official records”.*

Mr. Osborne wrote a letter on November 20, to Mr. Horace Holley, as anticipated by Louise, indicating the clarification of their living area as per concern of the National Spiritual Assembly. In the letter, Mr. Osborne mentions that every six members of the Community live in Panama City Municipality:

*“I wish to thank you for your fine and prompt reply of July 28. The believers down here are happy to learn that we are in communication with the NSA, for we believe that our work will be more abundantly blessed by this action.*

*“In your letter of July 31 to Mrs. Caswell, you called her attention to an important point: “...the six believers live in different cities and there is not the basis of one local Baha’i community such as is required for groups in the United States and Canada.”*

*“I have been instructed by the group to clarify this point. All of the six believers actually live in one civil area, but some of them happen to have post office addresses on the Canal Zone because they work on the Zone and find it convenient to get their mail through the Zone post offices.*

*“For example, Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell do not live on the Canal Zone, but in the city of Panama, which is the civil area; but they work on the Zone and find it rather convenient to get their mail at the Ancon post office, which happens to be a short distance from their residence. In my case, I actually live in Pueblo Nuevo, which is a precinct of the City of Panama (the civil area); but as I work on the Canal Zone, I find it convenient to have my private mail sent to my official post office address, which happens to be in Balboa, Canal Zone. In short, the six believers are living in the same civil area (Municipality of Panama), but they may have Canal Zone postal Addresses.*

- 1. Sra. Rosa Ochoa, 89 Central Ave. Panama City, Civil Area is Municipality of Panama.*
- 2. Rosendo Ochoa, 89 Central Ave, Panama City, Civil Area is Municipality of Panama.*
- 3. Joseph Wantuk, Box 19 Balboa C.Z. (Post Office Address), Vista Heromsa, Panama, R.P. (Residence), Civil Area is Municipality of Panama*
- 4. Mrs. Louise Caswell & Mrs. Cora Oliver, Box 1296 Anon, C.Z. (Post Office Address), 10 Tivoli Ave., Apt 18, Panama City, R.P. (Residence) Civil Area is Municipality of Panama.*
- 5. Alfred E. Osborne, Box “K” Balboa, C.Z. (Post Office Address), 4249 Pueblo Nuevo, R.P. (Residence), Civil Area is Municipality of Panama.*

*“In view of the above, we are asking that the NSA recognize us not as six isolated believers living in the country of Panama, but as a group of six believers living in the same civil area.*

*"We are working hard to get three more believers who live in the Municipality of Panama in order that we may have the required number of organizing an Assembly".*

The Inter America Committee, following the example of the National Assembly, also did correspond on all the administrative issue directly with Mr. Osborne:

*"We are very happy to have your address and to become acquainted with you as the local correspondent for the group in Panama. We shall remember to send all official communications to you and in this connection, let me mention that we have received Mrs. Oliver's letter containing her directions so that Mrs. Collins may find her easily".*

By late December Mr. Osborne wrote to Mrs. French concluding this matter:

*"You will be glad to hear that we have recently received lovely letter from Mr. Holley concerning our group status and that the whole matter has been satisfactorily clarified and settled. We hope to have the required number for the Spiritual Assembly".*

Mrs. Collins could never make it to Panama, as her ship to South America only crossed the Canal and the friends were disappointed of having missed her in that occasion.

## **SLOW AND DISTRESSING PROGRESS**

Louise Caswell wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, but mailed her letter on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August, directing it to Corresponding Secretary, Mr. Horace Holley. The tone of the letter is very straight forward, and disappointing. She describes the current situation of the small Baha'i group of Panama, in response to the letter Mr. Holley wrote to Cora. The community of Panama is not a normal community as any other country. There are two countries in one. The inhabitants are Latin and Spanish speaking, but the pioneers are American and English speaking. The dilemma is great. This is an important communication with the National Assembly of the US. She wrote to Mr. Holley and described the actual situation of Panama:

*"Did you ever see a film that had been exposed to different views? Panama is like that. Your letter of July 31 was read to Cora and Alfred Osborne, and we have been talking, thinking, studying and writing about our problems of uniting the scattered believers here and especially that of painting the picture of the National Spiritual Assembly to visualize. Our combined thoughts will be written to you in a letter by Alfred Osborne. Now, I will tell you what I frankly feel in my heart. The Guardian wants a Panamanian assembly made up of Panamanians. So far, we have failed in this his cherished desire. I really believe that if Tony Roca or Marvin Newport had come with us, of alone what there would be an assembly in Panama now. I also think that if Gayle Woolson accepts our invitation to visit us and can remain with us six months that there will be an assembly. However, we are carrying on alone as instructed by the Inter America Committee after sending endless requests for another pioneer. We will continue to do so to the best of our ability and hope for the best. The six active believers in our locality are United States citizens. They include Alfred Osborne, secretary (resident of the Republic of Panama), Norma and Clare Hamilton and Bret Wernecker, Canal Zone resident and Cora H. Oliver and Louise Caswell, Panama residents. Of our three other believers who reside in Panama, one Sra. Ochoa seldom attends meetings, whole two Rosendo Ochoa and Joseph Wantuk (United States citizens)*

*never attend. Another Panamanian resident, resident of the Zone is firm believer but rarely attends Feasts. You can see from this, that so far, the activity is carried on by United States citizens. This is not our aim, but it is what we have and it is better than nothing. Probably it is a stop in the evolution of the future first Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama”.*

And she added the following lines to Mrs. French. At the time Louise was already working in the Panama Canal Company. She is quite distressed because of lack of proper pioneers to come to Panama for the formation of the Assembly. The short note says:

*“Dear Nellie: am working for Panama Canal. Wish I had news of [the] Cause but all the new is: We are persevering”.*



## THE GUARDIAN'S MESSAGE - WARTIME

The raging war had caused some of the pioneers to return to the US. In their meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, the Inter America Committee, quote from the letter of the Guardian concerning their specific function. This relevant message for during the wartime shows how Shoghi Effendi was concern about the pioneers and the work of the Faith in Latin America. He deplores the return of the pioneers and wants them to stay at all cost:

***“If you find that your strength does not permit of your carrying on with both I-A Committee and Baha’i world work, he would certainly advise you to devote your energies to the I-A tasks as these are of critical importance at present. In this connection he feels that the two main things to keep in mind are maintaining the pioneers in South and Central America AT ALL COSTS and reinforcing their work with new ones whom you can arrange to send out. He strongly deplores the return of pioneers unless it is for reasons that are so imperative as to make their remaining there impossible. However, far from the ideal nature for such work some of these devoted friends may be, the fact remains that they hear the Call and answered it at great sacrifice and inconvenience to themselves and the reward for their labors will surely be very great. Later workers in the field, in fact, in all Baha’i fields of activity, may be better adapted to their tasks and better qualified for their work, however noble and fruitful, will still be overshadowed by the radiance of the first sacrifices and first victories of those earliest in the field”.***

Obviously, such a message from the beloved Guardian would make the pioneers in Panama even more conscious of their great duty, though the challenges that they were facing were of great magnitude and tests they had to pass, were multiple. They had to overcome the test of learning a foreign “language” and get wholly acquainted with a new “culture”, which both were sizeable and deterrent obstacles for their on-going activities. In Panama in particular, there has been developing a deep cultural resentment against Americans in general due to the marked different lifestyles. They desperately needed pioneers or teachers who would speak the local language. The pioneers had to confront all these and overcome them by faith and love for Baha’u’llah. The constant encouragement of the beloved Guardian while corresponding directly with the pioneers were in fact, the powerful engine that made them see their on-going challenges rewarded. They had to remain fast in their pioneering goal and try to achieve their goal of forming their Assembly.

The distressing condition of Panama during the war, which had discouraged pioneers-to-be, to go to Panama, prompted Louise to make a special contribution of a thousand dollars to the NSA to find one or two pioneers to be sent to Panama. Mrs. French wrote to Louise on November 27, about some available funds to be spent for new Panama pioneering. The Inter America Committee secretary wrote:

*“We have just been informed by the NSA that they have a thousand dollars, which may be used to deputize someone to go to Panama. They instructed us to take the matter up with you, they say “the best available teacher”. I do not know if you have someone in mind, and I do not know whom to suggest in case you have not, but together we should be able to find someone.*

*“Apparently, you are at liberty to ask anyone whom you believe would be suitable and would*

*help you well. In the meantime, I suggest you write to Mason Remey at the Cosmos Club in Washington D.C. as he could be of great assistance if he would go to you for a while as he knows so many Army and Navy people and can do so much socially to get you to know people there who would help".*

## **SURFACING SIGNS OF RIFT**

For some time, the relationship of the two lady pioneers had become of the concern of the young Community. The dormant personal hiccups between them were awakening and taking momentum. The first person – whistle blower - mentioning this anomaly was Dorothy Sholtis, the Venezuelan pioneer who stayed with Louise and Cora at their apartment, who wrote to the Inter America Committee . It was recorded in their minutes:

*"Letter from Dorothy Sholtis en-route to Venezuela. Letter was written from the home of the pioneers in Panama dated Sept. 9<sup>th</sup>... She also mentioned with great sorrow a serious state of disagreement existing between the two pioneers in Panama. The Committee deeply deplors this situation but cannot act since Miss Sholtis' communication was of a personal nature and not official".*

It was unfortunate that the Inter America Committee could not act on a 'personal letter' to remedy such an issue at its inception, that later on was blown up to a real problem. The above subject dragged on for the rest of the time these two pioneers stayed and lived in Panama. In the proceeding pages more of this subject.

## **PURSUING FOR TRAVEL TEACHERS**

In early December Louise wrote back to Mrs. French acknowledging her letter. There are several names of men pioneers mentioned. She wrote:

*"Your two letters were received. The latter referring to the fund to send someone to Panama has absorbed my entire thought since its arrival this afternoon. I will write to Mason as you suggested. He has been approaching on the matter before but not as the one to be deputized. Time is short and there are two things, which I hope can be done in 1942. Philip Sprague is in South America and may return to Panama if his funds are sufficient. I would suggest that some this money be offered him to come to Panama on his return trip if he needs it. If he could spend a month here, I feel confident that an assembly would be the result".*

From her trip to Costa Rica, Louise has two names to suggest to the Committee:

*"There is a second thought, which has been in my mind this evening. There are one- or two- men teachers in Costa Rica, Sr. Ulloa and Sr. Miranda, either of whom would be excellent here. I wish that one of them could be sent for three or six months or to get work if he so wishes. Gayle could give the information about the possibility of their coming. I have already written to her about Sr. Ulloa as she had said he might pioneer. I do hope that both Philip and one these men from Costa Rica, both of whom I know, can come and SOON".*

Louise closed her letter with the quotation of the beloved Guardian:

*"In closing let me give you an excerpt of a letter to Louie from the Guardian, May 12, 1939:*

*"First, as regards your plans for the opening of Panama, the importance of establishing the Faith in the Republic [of Panama], as already stressed by the Guardian in his last general letter, cannot be over-emphasized, and whatever the obstacles that will have to be faced by future Baha'i pioneers in that country, the task of insuring the spiritual conquest on that territory, of whose far reaching possibilities as a radiating center for the diffusion of the light of the Cause throughout Central and South America 'Abdu'l-Baha has so explicitly written in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, must be vigorously and systematically pursued. The Guardian views with approval your suggestion, that in consideration of the special social and political conditions prevailing there, it would be more advisable to engage the services of Baha'i men teachers rather than women, and particularly those men pioneers who have the widest experience in teaching and the best possible qualifications".*

The year 1942 was almost over and all the efforts of the pioneers and the Committee to try to get more pioneers for Panama resulted fruitless. Need for pioneers were everywhere and Panama was not alone. If there was a travel teacher, he or she was already engaged in some other country and the Institutions were reluctant to disturb the good work in one place to remedy the other. December 15, Mrs. French addressed Louise again on the Panama pioneering, mentioning the Committee's discussion on this matter:

*"...I wish very much you could arrange with Sr. Ulloa to pioneer. Sometime ago Gayle Woolson told us that later on he would have a vacation when he would be able to pioneer. We have mentioned him for Guatemala...We do not know Sr. Miranda, but between the two we hope very much that you can secure some help. Regarding Viana, he is doing very fine work in Honduras and the Committee did not feel that they should remove him from that place, especially since they are still a little in doubt, as to his understanding of pioneer service. But I believe Sr. Ulloa would be very fine for you. In the meantime I have written again to Mason Remy begging him to go down as soon as possible and giving him your address. I think I told you that he is to be reached at the Cosmos Club in Washington".*

Neither Miranda, nor Ulloa, or Viana and not even Remy made it to Panama. The reiteration of the funds available was brought to the attention of the Committee again:

*"Mr. Holley also informed the Committee that \$1000 had been contributed by some individual for the purpose of sending some pioneer to Panama".*

And the Committee commented to Louise that:

*"The contributions toward a pioneer for Panama is certainly a wonderful thing and we will emphasize your call again in the Newsletter".*

The suggestion to bring Philip Sprague didn't work either, nor of Edward Rutledge!

December 30<sup>th</sup> marks the 'yield up' hope from outside and try to do from within. Cora Oliver agrees with the Inter America Committee that they should be working on their own and not expecting help from outside. This is a growth point for the pioneers. She wrote to Mrs. French:

*"The news to Louise in your letter was disappointing as we had so planned to have the*

*valuable assistance of Philip for a short time at least. However, we must be content, and know that it is for us to carry on and not expect assistance from others. We are getting assistance now through two new believers. On November 29<sup>th</sup> I wrote you of Philip Bartick and I expect that by now you have received the registration card...The other is a lovely Panamanian girl to whom Louise has devoted much time. She will be of great help because of her understanding and beautiful spirit".*

## CHAPTER V- 1943

### A POSSIBLE THIRD PIONEER

A whole chapter explained of the presence of Julie Regal to Panama. Here, there are the details of the circumstances of her arrival and her involvement in the issues of Panama community.

In the Minutes of January 11, 1943 of the Inter America Committee, the following are recorded under Panama of the imminent coming of the third pioneer to Panama, Miss Julie Regal, who requested to be sent to Panama. The Minutes records:

*"Letter from Miss Julia Regal requesting to be sent to Panama".*

Cora also received the news of Julie Regal's coming:

*"...A letter came from Julie R. after yours, which gave the hope of her coming in the spring. In as much as it takes a few months for arrangements to be made I had an application sent to her and trust that by the time all is in order for a position she will have fulfilled her duties in the National Teaching field and be permitted to go elsewhere. Of course, she has the right to accept a position any place she wishes".*

In late January there was another declaration – Miss Benilda Angulo - which Mr. Alfred Osborne on behalf of the Panama Community wrote to the Committee in early February:

*"She is one of our lovely Panamanian girls, very intelligent, and serious in everything".*

And then he adds: *"We expect that many thru her will be brought to the Faith".*

In the meanwhile, Cora was asked by the Committee to go to Bogota to help with the teaching, yet, she wrote back to Mrs. French on the 8 of February declining the request, indicating that she is not going to go to Bogota, but will concentrate in Panama, where:

*"...There is much work to be done here and if I do take some vacation think, it is best to concentrate upon the work here. Our last two 19-Day-Feast have been held in Philip's apartment. He has taken a residence in Panama to assist with the work here. There are several new people who are seriously studying but think it is best for them to take time and be sure. Our goal for an Assembly is too near to allow for anything less than a wholehearted devotion of the part of those who declare themselves".*

Cora mentions that at the Center there now is a reading room open twice a week:

*"...in order to attract new souls who are seeking the goals of the Baha'i Faith."*

And again:

*"...Recently the Group established a reading room at the Center for Monday and Thursday evenings. There has been response already. This Group is constantly adding to the library and tries to keep on hand at all times a generous amount of literature for inquirers. A place to go and read quietly, as well as to inquire about the Faith, is not easily found here in this noisy and busy land. More new people are coming to the study classes. Do wish there were some enthusiastic person here who knew Spanish and the Spanish people. Our new believer is lovely and devoted to the Faith. May more like her soon be with us<sup>290</sup>".*

## COLON

Louise Caswell wrote the following letter on February 24, 1943, to Mrs. Stewart-French about the distribution of books and pamphlets in the libraries both in Colon and Panama, as well as Canal Zone Library, hoping that:

*"...someday there will be a harvest".*

She wrote:

*"Finally, I went to see the librarian at Colon. The one whose name you sent was not in charge, but the book was in the Mateo Iturralde Library where you had sent it. The school principal looked at the book with me while I explained some of the teachings to him and he said it was a fine idea but, you know the usual story. However, he did promise to write a letter to you in appreciation. I do hope it will be suitable for your purpose".*

Louise goes on saying with dismay that books deposited in the local library, for whatever reason unknown to her -or maybe known, but not mentioned- are being removed from the access of the public:

*"Over a year ago three Baha'i books were placed in the Panama library. The Minister of Education was changed, and the library was moved and when I went to check on the books they were not to be found. Three more were given and a few days ago I went to check on them. Again they were not to be found but the names and numbers were shown to me in a book. I was told that they were being catalogued. I shall go again soon to see. The books in the Balboa Heights library are in excellent condition. It is indeed a splendid library. It is to be hoped that the library in Panama will be better organized".*

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290. It is not clear who is she referring to, might be Benilda Angulo

## PASSING OF MATHEW KASZAB

*"He certainly lived and died the life of a martyr".*

On January 13, 1943, Mathew Kaszab passed away at the age of 38, the youthful enthusiastic pioneer, the first one to go to Panama. Mrs. French communicated the sad news to Cora on March 24, she wrote:

*"You seem still to be in doubt about Mathew Kaszab. These are circumstances. Mathew must have passed away in Bronnsville about the 31<sup>st</sup> of December. The last word we had from him in the Committee was a postcard written there Dec. 30<sup>th</sup> in which he said he would write soon, as soon as settled. The postcard was written in a very feeble way, and we think he must have been ill, but where or how long, we do not know. When he passed away the people there, going through his papers, discovered the name of the NSA and wired to know what to do with his body. The NSA instructed them to carry out the interment there and forwarded money for the expenses of it, and now Mrs. Matthews is planning to have a stone put over his grave with a suitable inscription. There is no doubt at all that Mathew has passed on, but how we are ever going to learn the facts concerning his last days I don't know. We have written to Managua, to Srta. Mejia and also to Mr. Wheelock, neither of who can shed any light on the situation at all. In going over the files of Mathew's letters, I realize more fully what a splendid person he must have been and how earnest and active in his teaching work. He certainly lived and died the life of a martyr".<sup>291</sup>*

Cora's letter in early February to Mrs. French indicates of this great loss where she writes:

*"He was devoted, and the traces of his good work will live after him".*

Mrs. French also wrote in early April on Mathew's death:

*"...we are discovering that the sad news of Mathew is something, which will require careful thought for the future".*

In the same letter, Cora hopes the arrival of Julie Regal for which all the doors would be open and not closed again. It is interesting that the application of Julie Regal to become a pioneer to Panama was left upon the decision of the Panamanian pioneers, namely Louise and Cora and availability of their funds. Mrs. French wrote in 9<sup>th</sup> of April:

*"We have recently received a letter from Julie Regal in Chicago who, as you know, had volunteered to pioneer, and wished to go to Panama. Because of the pressure of need in this country, the National Teaching Committee took her over and she was to have gone to Laramie, Wyoming, but ill health prevented that, and now Laramie no longer needs her. She is now applying to us to be reconsidered for Panama and in writing to Mr. Holley about this matter, he replies that if the fund, which you had intended to expend for pioneers to Panama is still sufficiently large after you finance Sr. Ulloa, that we might consider sending Julie Regal there. This, of course, is a matter for you to consider and notify us and if you will let us know immediately. Your reaction to this suggestion, we will be able to put the matter through at the*

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291. For more information on Mathew Kaszab his biography by Anne Sadeghpour, visit:  
[https://bahailibrary.com/sadeghpour\\_life\\_mathew\\_kaszab](https://bahailibrary.com/sadeghpour_life_mathew_kaszab)

*forthcoming NSA meeting”.*

A short letter in answer to Mrs. French’s question on the availability of funds for new pioneer, i.e., Julie Regal, to Panama is written by Louise Caswell on 19<sup>th</sup> of April, where she remits some more fund for Julie’s coming:

*“In response to your letter asking whether the fund I offered would be sufficient to send Julie Regal... I am sending today \$500.00 to the National Assembly to be used for sending Julie to Panama if they wish to... Since Julie can come it is best to send her at once... Since all requisitions have been cancelled (at least so we have been informed) due to reduction of force, Julie cannot be requisitioned and the only way she can come is on this money. I hope all will succeed in this plan.*

### **COMBINED FORCES**

The collective Divine, Institutional, Pioneers, and the applicant’s will, made it possible for Julie Regal to go to Panama. She wrote on May 11, a very enthusiastic letter to Mrs. French indicating that she ardently wishing to embark to her Panama destiny. She is ready to sacrifice anything to get to her Panama destiny. Julie wrote:

*“I am anxiously awaiting some news regarding steps being taken about my going to Panama. For my part, I wish to lose no time or spare any effort in the matter. I am constantly and fervently praying that God will ordain it so that I may go. At the present time I have \$250 in the bank and \$ 200 more in bonds and I would be willing and glad to spend all this to get to Panama if at all possible. Together with the money Mrs. Caswell so generously gave, you see there are ample funds. I am pursuing my study of Spanish more diligently than ever now with the prospect of teaching the Cause of God in that tongue”.*

Julie’s enthusiasm had no bound, seemed the perfect match for such an endeavor. She ends her eagerness and passion to get to Panama by saying:

*“I am also enclosing a stamped return envelop, and shall exceedingly appreciate your letting me know as soon as possible what is being done about sending me to Panama, and what steps should I take to ensure as prompt a departure as possible”.*



## GWENN SHOLTIS

### The battered pioneer

Mrs. Caswell's aid to Gwenn Sholtis has provided us with the unexpected pleasure of having a firsthand account of the teaching work being done in Panama<sup>292</sup>.

Gwenn Sholtis was a wonderful American pioneer and very active in the field of teaching in Caracas, Venezuela. Due to her intense activities, the Catholic Church together with the help of the State –possibly police- made a violent campaign against the Faith, as a result she got some injuries and was forced to leave Venezuela in an undignified manner. She had to be airlifted to Panama's Canal Zone. The extent of details is not recorded, except what is available through the correspondence with the Panamanian pioneers. This prompted Louise and Cora volunteered her to be transferred as a pioneer to Panama. Louise would have loved her to join the community of Panama, especially now that most probably Sr. Ulloa from San Jose, Costa Rica would not be coming as a Travel Teacher to Panama, therefore, together with Julie Regal, they would have much better prospect of forming soon their Assembly.

While Louise wrote a short letter to Mr. Holley, on May 18 regarding the funds for Julie Regal, and not heard any response, she wrote again mentioning the case of Gwenn:

*"Since sending the check for \$500.00 to be used in sending Julie Regal to Panama (if arrangements were agreeable to all concerned) I have not heard from you"... "Meanwhile Gwenn Sholtis has come from Venezuela and wishes to stay in Panama. I am perfectly willing to have the amount of money used to help her get established if it is available. Since Sr. Ulloa has not sent a word of when he can come, I am beginning to feel that he may not come at all and that would release the rest of the fund. So perhaps there is enough money to send Julie and keep Gwenn till she regains her health. Gwenn is much better since she got her reply from the NSA and the Guardian. She wanted to stay in Panama, and I believe she will get well here in spite of the dampness".*

Louise suggests an alternative for the use of the funds she has forwarded to the NSA:

*"If the fund I sent is not to be used by Julie I am perfectly willing to have it used for Gwenn Sholtis. She is liked by all and would be an excellent addition to our struggling group of teachers".*

Yet, the Inter America Committee would also like to use of the wonderful services of Gwenn in another pioneer needing country, Dominican Republic helping Margaret Lentz, thus, Mrs. French wrote in late May to Gwenn while in Panama, indicating that the Committee wants her for Santo Domingo to help the sole pioneer there. Both Louise and Cora in the meanwhile were taking care of her to get her health improved and to remain in Panama. Louise wrote by end of May:

*"Gwenn Sholtis is getting better and wants to stay for a time. She has been in the hospital and has suffered some violent attacks. She is at the apartment now and slept last night without coughing once. She is a strong and courageous character and I place much faith in her*

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292. IAC, Baha'i News, September 1943

*ability to act in a way, which will promote the best interests of the Faith. God grant that her stay may mark the releasing of those spiritual forces destined for this country”.*

In her letter to Nellie French written by end of May, Louise mentions several points of interest:

*“Doesn’t it seem strange that no one has come in response to my request of six months ago? Did you ever stop to meditate on this”?*

The coming of Julie Regal was for real, but the specific time for the formation of the Assembly has passed<sup>293</sup> and the goal was not fulfilled for the year, which was of much concern to her. Louise in her letter also mentions praising their new Panamanian believer, Benilda:

*“The Spanish meetings are held every Friday. Two weeks ago, about ten Spanish speaking people were present and no English was spoken. Benilda Angulo, a Panamanian Baha’i acted as chairman, and it was a heavenly meeting. I was impressed by the confirmations of the meeting where the Panamanians held the torch of the teachings aloft for one fleeting moment. The soul gains hope at such times”.*

In her letter she also mentions of Gwenn’s health condition and hopes that she stays in Panama. The last point Louise comments on in her letter is on the recent cable of the beloved Guardian, who is the commanding general.

*“I love the Guardian’s cable. What a new tone he is taking with the believers. No longer does he supplicate us to action, but he directs us like a commanding general. Have we earned it? I hope so”.*

The Minutes of the Inter America Committee dated May 31, sheds some light to the above correspondences, especially over the case of Gwenn. The Minutes acknowledges Louise’s generous donation for Julie’s pioneering to Panama:

*“The Sec’y mentions that Mrs. Caswell has written that she has not received word of the acceptance of her offer to pay \$500.00 for expenses of Julie Regal. If Miss Regal cannot go, she offers \$500.00 towards the costs of Miss Sholtis. The matters contained in the letter of Mr. Holley have been immediately put into execution and Miss Regal has been written to suggesting that she write Mrs. Caswell and that her, for the privilege which her gift provides for her to go to Panama”.*

*“After the consultation on Mr. Holley’s letters the Sec’y read a letter from Gwenn Sholtis saying she had been confined to Gorgas Hospital in Panama for 19 days and that she was then being released and was expecting to try and find employment and that the Minister in Venezuela who had caused her so much trouble had been dismissed, which gave Miss Sholtis the hope that she could return to Venezuela to pursue her teaching work. The Committee felt that Miss Sholtis should not return there partly because of the trouble and also because of the effect of the climate on her health. It was voted to send Miss Sholtis’ letter to the NSA before any definite arrangements were completed with Miss Sholtis”.*

Though the call for pioneer was raised by the beloved Guardian to rise and go, yet this

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293. Formation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies is on the 21st of April each year.

movement had to be done with the knowledge of the institutions and to be handled by them. If an individual decided to go to any country as pioneer, had to be with the complete knowledge and support of the Institutions. The case of Mathew Kaszab was a clear example of such a movement. Because he did not inform the Institutions and simply took off and went to Panama, he was institutionally re-assigned to Nicaragua and was not considered for Panama, although he was an effective pioneer with all the characteristics of a true pioneer. Louise and Cora were institutionally assigned pioneers to Panama. In the case of Gwenn Sholtis, neither her nor the Panamanian pioneers could decide for her to stay in Panama, unless the National Spiritual Assembly approved upon the decision of the Inter America Committee, the only authorized institutions to function in this regard.

On June 1, Mrs. French wrote to Louise regarding Julie Regal and Gwenn Sholtis as pioneers for Panama:

*"A letter from Mr. Holley tells us that you have not heard that we were instructed to proceed with Julie Regal in her project to go to Panama in accordance with your very generous assistance. I think the fact that you were not notified is probably due to neglect on my part, although I supposed that Julie would write to you herself, but she is so excited about the prospect of leaving that she probably overlooked it. The National Spiritual Assembly has approved this move and she was to get in touch with Edna True at once and as soon as possible to take off for Panama. I had a chance to talk with her at the Convention, and I like her very much. She is young and quite good looking; seems to me rather a Spanish type in appearance, and I am told that she is deeply devoted to the Cause. She has not been very well, having suffered some sort of strain to her back and has been having a course of treatment, which the physician assures her will correct things in a very short time, and I think she will be able to leave as soon as her passport affairs can be completed. I have written her to write you, and this, I feel sure, she will do".*

And she continued on the case of Gwenn:

*"We were very much disturbed yesterday to receive a letter from Gwenn Sholtis, the first that we have had since she reached Panama, telling of her confinement in the hospital and incidentally of the loss of her clothing. I think we must have lost some letters because there was nothing between this letter from the hospital and the last one, which she wrote before leaving Venezuela, which reflected such a spirit of disappointment and grief at her supposed failure that it left us all very sad and very sympathetic. I would be very happy, and so would all the Committee, to have an opinion from you and Cora as to how Gwenn seems physically. The Committee feels that we must capitalize on her knowledge of Spanish, and we are very anxious to have her go to Trujillo to assist Margaret Lentz to fulfill the obligations, which as yet are almost untouched. One thing that we must be careful about with Gwenn is that however wonderful her zeal, it must be curbed to meet the conditions of a somewhat prejudiced society. We have no doubt that in her zeal she was rather too insistent in her methods of teaching. But perhaps this is the way that some of the doors have to be opened, and we all appreciate deeply the work that she did, the sacrifices that she made, and the suffering which she has undergone. Anything which you write to us will, of course, be very carefully guarded, but we do not wish to urge her to undertake further pioneering if her health would be seriously jeopardized. She said that the hospital people advised her to return home, but I believe that if she were quite away and in the atmosphere of San[to] Domingo she might find it quite congenial and find herself*

*restored to health and happiness..."*

And the National Spiritual Assembly secretary Mr. Horace Holley confirmed the above letter's contents, he wrote to Louise on June 3:

*"Your letter of May 18<sup>th</sup> has been received and I would like to explain that after we received your generous contribution for sending Julie Regal to Panama, we asked the I.A.C. to work out her the necessary arrangements. No doubt they are proceeding as rapidly as possible, and a Miss Regal told me during the Convention of her anxiety to go as soon as possible I am sure that she will join you within the next few weeks.*

*As regards your statement that Miss Sholtis wishes to stay in Panama, I can only say that the I.A.C. is working out an arrangement for her to serve with Miss Lentz in San[to] Domingo and I trust that this excellent arrangement can be carried out. Meanwhile, for the purposes of record, I note that the \$500.00 you sent can be used for Gwenn Sholtis if it is not used for Julia Regal".*

The Committee also recorded in July, what Louise said about Gwenn:

*"...she is very well liked, that her character is much admired, and that they believe she will be very helpful if she remains in Panama".*

But the main reason for which Louise was trying to keep Gwenn become apparent in her letter to Mrs. French in mid-June, which in fact is quite a relevant point:

*"Mrs. Oliver cabled Mr. Holley when I went to hospital. Wish I were able to tell you why L. Caswell wants me to stay. Pray for unity".*

She also mentions that she is active in going after the inactive Baha'is:

*"Had 16 at Spanish class last night. I persuaded one inactive member who hadn't been for a year and a half... I am going after other inactive members and Panamanians – there seems to be action and confirmation. Today, I spent three hours with a Panamanian lady who is going to interior – Chiriqui – one hour of study and two hours of conversation and questions".*

She enjoys being with the people who are a bit interested in the Faith, she is not working and can dedicate her time to them.

*"Each day several people are brought here by non-Baha'is. Seems to get along with Panamanians – educated – unschooled – rich or poor. Me seem to find easy and friendly, joy in being together".*

She pleads for prayers for Panama, as the disunity between the pioneers is getting even deeper.

*"Pray the Tablet of Ahmad and Remover of Difficulties for Panama".*

Louise is trying to get whomsoever possible to help with bringing unity to this new and small community. The Local believers can sense in an instant the smell of disunity and distance themselves from the community. She knows the cause of the problem and tries everything possible to solve this annoying matter. She is so very concerned. In her correspondences there is also a mention of Hascle Cornbleth who is applying for pioneering to Panama, of whom more will be said in the following pages.

On June 15, 1943, Louise wrote to Mrs. French, mostly related to Gwenn Sholtis and the wonderful work she is doing with the inactive Baha'is:

*"Gwenn Sholtis has been out of the hospital several weeks and has been getting steadily better until last night. She coughed all night. Perhaps she caught a cold, but she was quite miserable and finally had to take a hypodermic, for the first time since she left the hospital. Frankly, I believe that time will tell whether she can go on to Santo Domingo. I cannot".*

Louise mentions that being in the rainy season now, it could worsen further her health. Yet, according to the letter of the National Assembly:

*"...the letter suggested that she remain here and endeavor to recover here instead of going to the states to get well".*

Louise goes on by saying:

*"You will want to know of the good work Gwenn has done in Panama. She has given the message to many. All the students of the Faith adore her. She gives so much of herself to them and is generous with her time. One has already expressed a wish to be a Baha'i. Another believer was going through a sea of doubts, and she is helping him. There are both Americans, (please don't publish this in the bulletin). She brought Sra. Ochoa back to the meetings and it is to be hoped that she will continue to come. She is also bringing new people to the meetings and is working on publicity".*

Louise is quite hopeful that: *"We must have an assembly by April 1944".*

In her letter Louise reveals the icon cause of the discontentment. She is always being criticized by the other pioneer and the presence of new Baha'is in the community helps to *"bolster up"*. This is how she ends her letter:

*"Between the people that Mardie Joseph and Gwenn have brought to the meetings, and also a young man who heard of the Cause from the Hamiltons, many people have heard of the Message in the last few months, and it will be taken by them to various circles. I am beginning to come to life myself after a long period of criticism and being told that others felt uncomfortable in my presence. Thanks to Mardie and Gwenn I am overcoming a lot and am able to give out more as I come to realize that many people do not feel uncomfortable in my presence but even like it. We all need someone to bolster us up once in a while and give a little praise instead of criticism".*

## **ON THE RIFT**

### **Inter America Committee**

Due to this letter, the Committee invited Louise to attend in person in their meeting to clarify the situation of the two pioneers in Panama, to which Louise answered in mid-July that she is to:

*"Plan to arrive in Los Angeles Monday morning taking train from San Francisco Sunday night... I am looking forward to a meeting with the Inter-America Committee".*

Seemingly, Louise left Panama together with Gwenn, leaving her in Chicago.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of July Louise met with the Inter-America Committee. The outcome of that meeting clarifies the real situation in Panama, the relationship of the two pioneers that is quite detrimental to the progress of the Faith, as well as on the health condition of Gwenn, as the institutions are so much concerned about. Her report was recorded in the Minutes of the Committee dated July 19, 1943, where she reports on Gwenn.

Louise recounted Gwenn's activities in Venezuela and her consequent transfer to Panama:

*"Miss Sholtis suffered her first attack of asthma after her arrival in Venezuela. She had never been afflicted with this trouble before. When she recovered from this attack she worked with great enthusiasm and zeal and her first believer whose name is Srta. Elinor Magda Moring, is definitely devoted to the Faith and has even memorized the names of the Baha'i months in English, Spanish and Persian. Before leaving Venezuela, some hundreds of more persons had received the Message and some would have signed the cards but Miss Sholtis felt that it was a little premature. No reason is known why the Minister of Foreign Affairs made things impossible for her to remain. The Bishop of Venezuela is functioning in the Church independent of the Pope and Rome. It is possible that he and the Minister of Foreign Affairs conspired to remove Miss Sholtis but of this Mrs. Caswell was not aware. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has been removed from office. On arrival in Panama Miss Sholtis was so ill that she went directly to the Hospital where she remained (according to her statement to the Committee) 28 days. After being released she worked in Panama and was very helpful, very much liked and had a kind and loving approach to the people, which attracted greatly. When the asthma returned the doctors insisted that she return home. She stood the journey very well and is now under the doctor's care and in the home of her sister...Miss Sholtis would like to return to Venezuela when recovered".*

Mrs. Caswell's report on Panama as recorded in the Minutes of the Inter America Committee:

*"Mrs. Caswell stated at the beginning that she had not spoken of conditions in Panama to anyone as she wished to make an official report to this Committee. She prefaced her remarks with the statement that conditions in Panama between the two pioneers were so unhappy that they were influencing the growth of the Faith there and causing an as yet intangible separation among the members of the group there." Mrs. Caswell arrived in Panama two days before Mrs. Oliver, in 1940<sup>294</sup>. At first, they found quarters together in an unsatisfactory place. Later they moved and finally when Louise was able to get an apartment in their present building, she was very happy as it is very desirable and modern. The rent is \$70.00 per month, which she and Mrs. Oliver share. They each have a bedroom with two beds, a good-sized room where meetings are held. A competent Nicaraguan girl keeps house for them. They are able to entertain visitors as they have done in the past.*

*"Mrs. Oliver is employed at the Gorgas Hospital, which is a government institution, is well liked and doing excellent work of which she is very proud. She does not speak Spanish. Mrs. Caswell is employed in some Government office, is well paid and like Mrs. Oliver, has two months' vacation at full pay and a reduction in price of air travel. She will have to use up her two months by the time she reaches home... Texas, until she takes off for Panama on August 10<sup>th</sup> from*

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294. In fact, she arrived in September 1939.

Brownsville... where she will endeavor to visit the grave of Mathew Kaszab and have a photograph taken of it for the NSA and Mrs. Matthews.

*"The Committee expressed the hope that Mrs. Caswell would be able to meet with the friends in the various cities in Central America en-route and Mr. Wolcott was to ascertain whether the American Airways could advise these centers of the time of her arrival as she cannot do this because of censorship. A list of addresses of the secretaries of the different centers has been supplied to Mrs. Caswell in case advance notice is not possible and in case she is "out-boarded" or has sufficient time she will make every effort to see the friends. She is requested especially to try to see Srta. Blanca Mejia in Managua and find out all that she can about Mathew and how many believers are there and what are the possibilities for future work..."*

*"Continuing with her narrative, Mrs. Caswell says that things have come to a deadlock, and something must be done as there is no unity at any time in Panama, not even at the Feasts, and all are feeling it, some sympathize with one and some with the other. Mrs. Oliver has not spoken civilly to Mrs. Caswell for months. At the time of Miss Sholtis' first visit, conditions were improved by her influence, but soon lapsed back. This time Miss Sholtis also came under the ban of Mrs. Oliver's disfavor.*

*"Mrs. Oliver is afflicted with a serious inferiority complex; she is very nervous, and this condition is not improved by the fact that she may be giving blood to the blood bank, though Mrs. Caswell knows nothing of her private life. She says Mrs. Oliver has a nervous twitching of the shoulder and feels that she would be a subject for psychiatric treatment due to her strange attitude of mind.*

*"Mrs. Caswell hopes her statement will not be viewed in the light of gossip. It is a serious condition, which others have observed and commented upon in letters to this country and she feels that it should be dealt with at once for the protection of the Faith as every remedy has been tried and every concession made without result.*

*"It was suggested that the two pioneers should live apart and to this Mrs. Caswell stated that this would not heal the breach. The apartment where the pioneers live is the Baha'i Center, the believers contributing in part to its upkeep. It is in an ideal location and is one of the few really desirable buildings in Panama City. Mrs. Caswell believes that a Spiritual Assembly will be formed during the remaining months of the Plan, but she feels that without unity there can be no real joy in service and no united effort.*

*"The Committee then asked if she would consider going to Colombia and Venezuela on a tour of "inspection" to secure information as to future work in these countries and report on present conditions, which information is very much desired. Mrs. Caswell said she would do whatever was required of her, but that she would not wish to take any step without having first appealed to the Guardian for direction. The Committee then asked how affairs could be arranged if she were to go, and she said that if she could receive a leave of absence from her present position, she would be able to get into the other countries without difficulty as being an employee of the Government there would be no question about passport, etc. She would have to be deputized by this Committee and provided with a budget for travel, etc. Mrs. Caswell is fluent in Spanish, and it is very necessary that a teacher making limited stay in these places should be able to speak the language. She is provided with the list of addresses, which Gwenn Sholtis had.*

*“Asked if Mrs. Oliver were sent on a teaching mission also if she would be able to go and she replied that Mrs. Oliver has quite a long vacation coming to her as she has saved up her time and that she did good work at the time she went to Costa Rica two years ago where she had someone to interpret for her. The Committee feels that Mrs. Oliver should have a change but that she could not fill the requirements of the teaching work because of lack of Spanish. A real change would be most beneficial for her if she were willing to take it and could afford to do so. If asked, specifically to go anywhere, she would have to be assured that her expenses would be paid. She has several times resented the fact that Mrs. Caswell has been assisted and that she herself was not assured that she could be reimbursed...”*

*“Mrs. Caswell is very eager to see an Assembly by May 1944 and believes that there are several who would come into the Faith if conditions were improved, but they are alienated now and some of the believers themselves do not attend the meetings. Asked if Mrs. Caswell could offer any solution to the problem of San[to] Domingo, she said that after Julie Regal becomes established and if by that time others have accepted the Faith, she would be glad to facilitate Julie Regal’s going to Trujillo.*

*“The Committee has taken the whole matter under advisement and will endeavor through prayer and consultation to arrive at recommendations to submit to the NSA at the September meeting. This statement was referred to Mrs. Caswell on July 21<sup>st</sup> before she left for Texas...”*

The case of Panama had little solution with the two pioneers with a deep rift between them. Both pioneers were active in the teaching field and quite dedicated in their service to the Cause. Both were working with good income, thus no burden on the Fund. Both were striving to get the Assembly be formed by next April. Both needed to be there for the nurturing of the believers and their future administrative functions. Both had already spent their good few years in forming the Baha’i community at their pioneering post. Louise was fluent in Spanish, but Cora was not. Both needed to be in the community and each doing her own function. Louise had already started with some preliminary activities in Colon at the Atlantic side. All these, plus many other details made the move of one of them from Panama impractical. That is why both remained in Panama even after the formation of the Assembly. Though Louise found herself an escape from the unfavorable situation and as soon as she felt the Assembly was strong enough, she moved to Colon at the Atlantic side.

While still she was in Texas, Louise wrote to Mrs. French on July 28, 1943, the following letter:

*“The evening of the first of August I shall be with you in prayer. I am sure you are as anxious as I am for the growth of the Cause in Panama, and I hope I have given a clear and accurate picture of the growth of the Cause there. You may wish to get another angle from the other pioneers and the secretary of the group there you may write them”. My strong guidance is that I should remain in Panama for the present. However, if you and the National Spiritual Assembly have other plans for me I would consider them...A letter from a new Baha’i, who has not yet been registered has described the situation since I left. This letter confirms my guidance that I should remain for a time”.*

She indicates that:

*“Meanwhile let us all pray much for the establishment of a strong Spiritual Assembly in*



Panama”.

And she is detached from her personality issues and questions:

*“In our holy task we endeavor to rise above all personalities, and we should be able to. What Cause will enable us to do so if not the belief in Baha’u’llah?”*

She is prepared to leave Panama as soon as the other pioneers arrive:

*“The fact the Ed Rutledge and Julie Regal are both going to be there may change the situation by the introduction of a new element, which will change the interest to someone else. I do hope so. If both Ed and Julie reside in Panama there will be enough Baha’is for an assembly”.*

She adds a final meaningful statement:

*“Then you dear people will be relieved of us”.*

In this letter, Louise tries to find late Mathew Kaszab’s grave while yet in Texas. She looks for any clue to find it:

*“If you can send me any suggestions about finding Mathew’s grave, I will follow them. Loulie has not written to me as yet. I thought of inquiring from the Health Department? If you have any suggestions send me a line...”*

## **ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW**

It was now Cora Oliver’s turn to put forward her point of view on this complicated and somehow abstruse problem. For this, the Committee’s Secretary, Mrs. French wrote on 5<sup>th</sup> of August to Cora Oliver asking her to put forward her point of view to evaluate and remedy the situation of disharmony in Panama. A very kind letter was written, starting with the good news of the imminent arrival of Julie Regal to Panama community but Edward Rutledge has received another service call:

*“We have been intending to write to you for some time to assure you that not for a moment have we forgotten or relaxed in our efforts to find some additional believers to send to you in Panama, so that you will have reached the status of a Spiritual Assembly within the limits of the Seven Year Plan. If you could know the eloquent appeals, we have sent out and the number of disappointments we have suffered, you would forgive us and would be assured of our love and prayers. Now however we have at long last some good news for you as we are just informed that Julie Regal will soon be with you, as an employee of the Navy, and Edward Rutledge has been requested to answer some other service call, we do not know yet the particulars.*

*“When we learned of Louise’s presence in this country the committee decided that by talking things over with her, we would come closer to understanding of the needs of Panama and so she was invited to be present at our meeting of July 19. It was great joy to see her, but we all felt how much more wonderful it would have been if we could have had both of you two dear pioneers to sit with us round the consultation table and all together frankly discuss the needs and how to direct our efforts toward the realization of them.*

*“In our interview with Louise questions brought out the feeling that, there exists some*

*inharmony in Panama and this grieves us very much because it is sure to affect the believers. When we remember what 'Abdu'l-Baha said of the importance of Panama and how the Guardian has stressed the need for perfect unity in order that the Cause may progress we feel that we should leave no stone unturned to remedy any condition existing between the pioneers, which will so seriously jeopardize the Cause of God. Unless the spiritual bond between the two continents is strengthened and firmly knit together the whole world will suffer and that unity, which all are striving so diligently to establish will be dangerously delayed. The responsibility for this, rest upon the shoulders of our pioneers. The glory or the failure of it would be limitless.*

*"We do not feel that we should take only the one statement on conditions, which seems to prevail there, and I have been instructed to write you and ask you to convey to us as soon as possible your feeling in the matter and to suggest any remedy, which may occur to you as a solution. We all think of you so lovingly and long with all our hearts to help in the realization of the spiritual ideals, which you have given so much to establish, so while there is yet time will you please write us that we may view the whole picture from an entirely impersonal angle and strive to weld together the elements, which are preventing a true amalgamation of the hearts and a unity of action. May we get you to reply at once so that no time may be lost in these last critical months"?*

It took Cora Oliver 11 days before she could make herself to write the following letter to the Committee on August 16, describing her points of view, irritated and hurt because of not being invited to be present at the consultation of the Committee with Louise. She calls her friendship as "dead" and pleads for prayers to accompany her, to be "forgiving" at all conditions. Indeed, it has been an unfortunate situation between the two pioneers and no doubt that it has had great effect on the new believers, outsiders as well as those pioneers and travel teachers who passed through Panama and stayed for any period of time with them. Cora's letter informs the Committee:

*"Your letter of August 5<sup>th</sup> arrived the day after Louise's return from the States, and I feel deeply concerned that a matter of misunderstanding between two people might not have been adjusted without adding to the heavy burdens and responsibilities of your committee. You have been untiring in your efforts to be of assistance and, disappointments have no doubt been greater than ours and now this makes it even more difficult for you. There is no need of an apology about writing me as I know that you have kept in touch with Louise and therefore knew about the activities here. As to the matter of pioneers I feel that no one else will be allowed to come under existing conditions.*

*"It makes it especially difficult for me to not have been a part of the consultation and been given the advantage of being at least asked the same questions. However, I realize that you are doing the best you can with an awkward and serious situation. It is impossible to give the committee the advantage of a true consultation and since neither you nor most of the committee if not all, do not even know me, and since you did have consultation with one of the parties concerned, who has not given that consultation here, the burden of responsibility is left upon my shoulders.*

*"I can only attempt to give a suggestion as to the reasons underlying the cause of dead friendship. At all costs the removal of obstacles, which prevent the growth of the Faith must be removed and justice done".*

Cora puts her argument that she and Louise could either be a counterpart of each other, as they were at the very beginning, or be separated, using the word 'repel each other', which is the story that developed in a later stage, she puts it as 'unimportant irritations':

*"Two people of such widely different temperament and abilities should and do either complement each other or repel. The first condition existed at the beginning and the latter now. The reasons for this are innumerable, unimportant irritations, which came about from one leaning on the other until it reached the breaking point. Life has made me independent and practical, and much too serious. I am not the glamour girl verity and do not expect others to assume my burdens. Would that were otherwise indifference could be changed to a positive love and recapture a friendship, which at one time promised so much. I felt that the responsibility of the burdens of another adult at a time when the procuring of bread and butter took so much physically, was too much and not being sufficiently developed spiritually did not recognize the type of person who leans on another and did not meet the situation in the way it should have been. Fortunately, these last weeks alone have given me rest and a peace I have not had for many, many months. The change saved me from a complete breakdown".*

Cora counts five reasons for her annoyance that have reached the present situation, basically, to be too critical on somehow remediable situations. She continues:

*"Attempts to have a true consultation when consciousness of something being killed was happening futile as they were met with a smiling silence, and condescending looks. The censorship of an outsider in the presence of outsiders of my being deputized and not returning the money; the consciousness of my own limitations and defects as a pioneer, not speaking Spanish, a feeling of being tolerated as a pioneer; and my own critical attitude because of lack of response or attempt at understanding have at times been all but surmountable. It is true that these things should not have annoyed me and that I should have accepted them and been submissive.... for months I believed that the wrong was all on my part....and then it was discovered that several others had also been affected.*

*"Only by being that which I disliked myself for being, gave me a respite from the everlasting torment, which seemed to have descended upon me. The final result of censorship of my qualifications and fitness at being here was reflected when an outsider was asked to carry on during these past weeks without even consulting with the group – and telling me after the arrangements had been made.*

*"I can only ask your prayers that my soul may be so filled with love that all barriers will cease to exist. Pray that I may be humble, forgiving and loving under all conditions and that I may be able to feel that the changed attitude toward me is this time sincere and genuine and that trust may replace doubt. During the past weeks there has been continued growth and interest, which gives promise, Julie has written me direct, and I do pray that this illness may be healed so that she soon will be here to assist with the Seven Year Plan".*

Cora's letter carries a message of mistrust upon trivial matters, which as the passage of time, had taken a very sharp turn. Once two loving companions, have let their love to stretched too thin to the point of breakage. This situation for two adults of middle age, indeed is not strange but somehow far from maturity. Not being able to consider their immediate environment, their community, the new believers, and be less careful to the point of

repellence. They were striving to form a group so much desired. Mrs. French though mentions briefly of Cora's letter after writing to Louise, but sure, there is no immediate solution to the problem of the pioneers:

*"This morning we received a letter from Cora. I do not wish to comment on it other than to say that I regret that it does not hold out the hope for peaceful solution that we expected and hoped to find".*

## **VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA**

As a possible provisional solution to this complex problem, the Inter America Committee thought to keep the two pioneers away from each other. For this, in her letter to Louise, Mrs. French proposed to her once the Spiritual Assembly is formed, to consider travelling to some Latin Countries for the Committee:

*"We have acted on your suggestion at once to write to Mr. Osborne and the Committee is banking on your assistance in Colombia and Venezuela".*

The lack of progress in both Venezuela and Colombia, indeed was a good excuse to have one of the two pioneers travelling, while the other would remain for consolidation of the community and the Assembly. Between the two, Louise did not need to work to earn a living therefore, she was a better candidate for the job, especially because she was a better help with her Spanish.

Mrs. French wrote to Alfred Osborne, the Secretary of the Panamanian Group on August 30, asking the Group to undertake a visit to the Venezuelan and Colombian Baha'i communities and report back, although the letter leaves the decision of who might take such a trip was left to the Group. Seemingly, the two mentioned countries were lack pioneers in that stage. Mrs. French wrote:

*"I am sure the Group, will appreciate the very great responsibilities, which confront this committee during the rest of this year and that we may be able to count on your assistance in the case of Venezuela and Colombia where we are not being sufficiently represented nor kept informed of the work there. We would especially beg you to keep in touch with these centers by correspondence and if it is possible and we can secure the needed consent of the National Spiritual Assembly we would like to beg that someone of your community visit these places and send us complete information as to the teaching work, which is being done... May I ask you that you write us at once if there is any prospect of anyone of your members paying a visit in the near future to Bogota or to Caracas? It would be a real Godsend to know that the few friends in these places are to receive the comfort of closer association with you in Panama".*

The letter also indicates the happiness of the Committee:

*"...to know that you will be able to establish a Spiritual Assembly, and just this morning we have received a letter from Julie Regal saying that she is soon to leave so she will add greatly to your work there. She is a lovely young woman and deeply devoted to the Cause.*

Mrs. French mentioned in her letter to the Group's Secretary, the possibility of forming the

Local Spiritual Assembly if the status is correct before April 21, as per Shoghi Effendi:

*"...now that you know the Committee and know how it functions, may we beg you to keep us informed of the increase in your numbers so that we may know as soon as you have reached the status of Spiritual Assembly. I hope the new regulation, which the Guardian allows us to apply for this year to organize before April 21<sup>st</sup> if there are sufficient believers may apply in your case so that you shall have your Spiritual Assembly there".*

Then a letter to Louise with the core of the matter of leaving Panama at least for some time, that is, after the formation of the Assembly:

*"Just as I am writing and without consultation with the Committee, I am prompted to ask you whether or not you should be willing now since your work will have been accomplished in Panama, to make of your work in broader field in case we should wish to send you to other countries besides Colombia and Venezuela. Just what would you feel about leaving Panama or would you prefer to retain your residence and remain there permanently? Your knowledge of the Latin people and your fluency of Spanish would make you very valuable to assist in other places and we hope that something will come of it".*

Alienating one of the two pioneers from Panama they thought, might temporarily help to calm the situation in the local Community.

The Committee wrote again to Alfred, seeking help for the two countries. On September 24, 1943, the reiterating letter mentions the previous letter as "a very important letter" and request an early reply:

*"Some time ago at the request of the Inter-America Committee I wrote you a very important letter, but since we have had no reply, I venture to write again in the belief that the letter never reached you".*

The letter goes further explaining that:

*"...The purpose of that letter was to express the hope that this committee, which is so interested in all the activities and events connected with the work of the Baha'i Faith, might hear more frequently from you and that you might keep us informed of any visitors who pass your way and are able during their sojourn in your midst to render some slight service to your group in the way of furthering the teaching work".*

Seemingly, Louise has not shown any inclination toward such a trip, as, the Committee again and again writes for assistance from the Panamanian Group.

It is quite ironic that the desperate Inter America Committee requests from a languishing community as Panama, with its own problems to take additional load as:

*"...The committee has instructed me also to ask if the group will keep a watchful eye over the prospects in Venezuela and Colombia and if perhaps some of the believers may be able to assist in the teaching in those countries. We are very much in need of Spanish speaking teachers of whom we have so few, and if it were possible for someone to visit Caracas or Bogota or even Barranquilla it would be of immense assistance to us. May I beg you to submit this letter to your group, which we all hope will very soon have attained the statues of an Assembly, and also to*

*convey to them each and every one, our loving greetings and prayers for their success. Begging the favor of an early reply I remain”.*

In response to the request of the Inter America Committee, Mr. Osborne wrote in his fine handwriting on October 6, to Mrs. French truly with Baha’i spirit, acknowledging their first and the second letters. He needs to discuss the matter first with the Group. The letter shows the distressful community, he wrote:

*“...have simply played havoc with our finest intentions...”:*

*“I hasten to reply to your very kind letter of September 24. I regret that through my inability to answer your first letter sent as the request of the Inter-America Committee it was necessary for you to send me another. At our last 19-Day Feast I read your first letter to the Group, and we have begun making plans to see that there is closer association and inter-communication with the Latin American friends around us. No definite action could be taken concerning the possibility of someone’s visiting Caracas or Bogota at that time.*

*“We all share the belief that we should write more often with our dear Baha’i friends in other parts. I really do not like to make excuses, Mrs. French. But somehow or the other the past few months have simply played havoc with our finest intentions and plans. We are all hard-working people, and after doing the million and one things necessary on the regular job, some of us apparently are not able to “catch up” with some of the other things, which are just as important.*

*“We need your prayers so that we shall learn to do first things first, to sift the real & the important things from the trivial and less important. We need to learn to organize our affairs a little better, and above all we in our group need to learn to share the duties and the responsibilities of the group a little better. Our work is a cooperative enterprise, and it must be borne by all.*

*“However, I am not complaining. I hope that as the Secretary of the Group I shall be able (I am willing!) to keep in close touch with the Inter-America Committee.*

*“As our next Feast, I shall be glad to read the letter of September 24 to the Group. And I hope that in my next letter to you I shall be able to tell you more definite, specific and positive things.”*

In response to the help call of the Committee from Panama to go to Colombia, Mr. Osborne wrote on November 24, 1943, to Mrs. French, addressing her with some good news of a new believer and a volunteer to visit Bogota. He writes:

*“At the last meeting of the Panama Group I was instructed to inform you the proposed business trip to Colombia of Mr. Clare Hamilton, one of our most loyal and trusted members. Mr. Hamilton expects to leave early in January 1943 [1944]. He would appreciate getting Miss Winnie Lou’s address in Colombia and addresses of any other Baha’is there.*

## JACK FRIEDMAN

In the same letter Mr. Osborne encloses the registration card of a new believer, an American, but not living in Canal Zone, but in far off northern Province of Chiriqui, close to the border of Costa Rica, a town called Boqueron, where there was a small American colony. His name was Jack Friedman, intelligent and very enthusiastic middle-aged man. There is not much information of how he got in touch with the Baha'is and where. Presumably through Louise and in Panama City.

Sometimes later, Louise wrote of Jack:

*"You probably have received the registration card of Jack Friedman who has gone to the province of Chiriqui to his farm to live and to carry the Baha'i message to the people there. He wrote me after his return there that he had interested several people there, one of whom was an elderly who was respected in the community. He has invited us all to visit him and hopes to have a Baha'i School on his property. He plans to build a nice house for the Baha'is to come there and visit"<sup>295</sup>.*

## CRUCIAL DECISION

Just before Julie Regal's arrival to Panama, who did not know the problem of the two pioneers, Mrs. French wrote on October 1, 1943, on behalf of the Inter-America Committee to the two pioneers to convey a crucial decision of the National Assembly, indicating that Louise and Cora to live separately:

*"To our beloved pioneers in Panama  
Mrs. Louise Caswell  
Mrs. Cora Oliver,*

*"The Inter-America Committee has sincerely and conscientiously discharged its obligation to you and to the National Spiritual Assembly by forwarding to them sufficient copies of the statement of each of you so that each member of the NSA could have before him the whole picture and thus to able to render a decision with a completely unbiased judgment.*

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295. Note on JACK FRIEDMAN:

The writer remembers very well Jack Friedman, while pioneering in Panama in 1971, in 1973, after marrying his wife, Manijeh Hashemi, they moved to live in the Baha'i Summer-School Farm in Capira/Ceremeno, 40km from the Panama City. Mr. Friedman with his American wife – Hanna, - then lived in La Chorrera, some 25km from Panama on the same road. Mr. Friedman was a Vegetarian know-it-all who cured all kinds of maladies. He was 80 years old and quite a witty person at the time.

Jack used to make trips back and forth to the US. From his first marriage to a Panamanian in the early days, he had a son called Effendi, not a Baha'i tough. He thought the first name of the Guardian was Effendi and Shoghi his second name. And he named his son after Shoghi Effendi.

Jack's way of curing his patients was body and soul. He would tell them that as the body and the spirit of a person are inseparable, therefore, curing the body only would not solve the problem, and then he would cure the spirit by giving him the Message of Baha'u'llah. In this way, he had passed the Message to hundreds of people. Tough the National Spiritual Assembly had discouraged him of not mixing the two-remedy courses and only stick to one, as it may bring confusion to the people.

Jack was a staunch believer as well as Hanna, a Jewess who accepted the two-remedy course wholeheartedly and became a believer in Baha'u'llah. Even at that age, they would not miss any activity. They left behind a good legacy.

Jack must have been born around 1893 and at the time of his declaration in 1943, he would have been around 50 years old. - author.

*“The Committee made no recommendations other than to say that as soon as a Spiritual Assembly can be organized, we would earnestly request that Mrs. Caswell who is familiar with Spanish be urged to go to Venezuela and Colombia for a while to assist in the Teaching work in those countries. Today we are in receipt of the instructions devised for us at the recent meeting and we are therefore conveying to you the message with which we have been charged. The National Spiritual Assembly advises us to “arrange for these two teachers to live apart and to get an independent location for the Baha’i Center. The National Assembly feels that the unity of the group is more important than the physical headquarters at the present time”.*

*“The words, which appear within the quotes are the words and the only words, which have been used to us in dealing with this matter. But there is a very important element in the whole matter, which is that the Guardian has given special permission for any group to organize a Spiritual Assembly as soon as they have the required number and need not wait until April 21<sup>st</sup>. This is of course a special dispensation and applies only to this particular and vital year. The committee hopes sincerely that you have by now a sufficient membership roll to warrant your organizing and that then, as soon as possible, we may have the services of a Spanish speaking teacher to assist us in those centers where they are still short of the requirement.*

*“We would appreciate hearing from you at the very earliest moment regarding the consummation of this plan in all its details and we feel sure that great blessings will descend upon you when have met these requirements with radiant acquiescence”.*

## **ARRIVAL OF THE THIRD PIONEER**

*“Julie is a steady flame burning with intensity<sup>296</sup>”.*

All matters related to Julie Regal are being written in the section dedicated to her separately. But because there is an intricate early relationship of these three pioneers, briefly some facts are mentioned here.

Julie Regal, arrived in Panama on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1943, at Albrook Navy base, Canal Zone, already having a secure job with the US Navy, as she indicated to the Secretary of the Inter-America Committee from Panama. During the first week of her stay in Panama, Cora took her to the University of Panama to see Dr. Mendez Pereira, the Rector of the University. The Rector gave permission to Julie to attend, free of charge, a history class for her to improve her Spanish language. Later, Julie also attended literature class given by the Rector himself.

Julie put an ad to the newspaper for lodging, where only a Spanish refugee family answered to the ad. After only three weeks of living together with the pioneers, she moved out and stayed with the refugee family. She describes her new environment in a Spanish home, and how much she is appreciative of her hosts. Cora too, moved out of the apartment yet in the same building. Louise stayed alone for several months in that apartment, only to share it later with a German refugee couple.

Seemingly the instructions of the National Spiritual Assembly to the pioneers to get

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296. Cora Oliver to Nellie French, Feb. 9, 1944



separated as soon as possible became a tormenting alert to both Louise and Cora, especially the face they lost before their small community, affecting their social integrity as well as their comfortable Center. The outer community already knew about it. A dating Panamanian mentioned this to Julie. The effect of this rift was deep, and neither of them wrote to the Inter America Committee for quite a while. Not having heard from Louise, who was commissioned to take a trip to South America, and report back to the Committee, Mrs. French wrote to Louise:

*"We are at a loss to know why we have not heard from either of these pioneers since we are so eager for some extension work to be carried on under the auspices of your group and we have been hoping to hear that Mrs. Caswell would go to Venezuela to further the interests of the Faith there. As the NSA meets this coming week, we still have no report to make to them from Panama, which we regret very deeply and hope that between now and then the mail may bring us some word from you".*

Louise got herself a new postal address in Canal Zone, thus the long-time shared post box was no more, as well as all other shared things. The impact of the National Assembly's decision has been quite shaking especially on Louise. She wrote to Mrs. French, telling her that she will not be able to go to neither Venezuela or Colombia:

*"...The possibility of my going to Colombia or Venezuela seems remote if the trip depends on the formation of an Assembly here but I shall be happy to go to one of these countries, or to Peru, when feasible. Now does not seem to be the time".*

## GERARDO VEGA

“Sr. Gerardo Vega, of Costa Rica, first Latin-American pioneer teacher, has carried out an intensive teaching campaign, with the enthusiastic support of the Panama Baha’is, during the months of his service in this post”<sup>297</sup>.

As there was no more a Center for public meetings, the meetings were held in the houses of the believers conducting their study groups, etc. Louise also mentions in one of her letters to the Committee of the coming of Gerardo Vega from Costa Rica to help with the teaching work in Panama. Gerardo’s coming to Panama was all sponsored by Louise, a service she gladly performed. Consequently, added to deepen the pioneers’ relationship with each other of this, will be mentioned later. She wrote:

*“We are looking for a center for public meetings and so far, have none but will soon. Cora has a lovely apartment in the same building. We both have friends in informally but no public meetings. So, with Julie’s place there are three homes in Panama where small groups can meet to study the teachings but alas how few there are who are interested. But there is a bright side to the picture. At long last Costa Rica is sending one of her teachers, a young man by the name*



Some of the Baha'is of San Jose, Costa Rica, taken at the home of Dr. and Mrs. David Escalante December 1943

From Left to Right:

- |                        |                   |                 |
|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Humberto Miranda    | 2. Gayle Woolson  | 3. Gerardo Vega |
| 4. Consuelo Miranda    | 5. Raul Contreras | 6. Rosa Quesada |
| 7. Dr. David Escalante | 8. Mrs. Escalante |                 |

297. IAC, Baha’i News, November 1944

*Gerardo Vega whom I remember with keen appreciation. He has the flame of true devotion burning brightly in his heart and since he is a native Costa Rican, he will have no language difficulty. He has permission to leave his job for three months. In that time, he can do much here. I have been to the office of Foreign Relations this morning to see whether I could do anything to expedite his visa. He expects to come the first days of January”.*

Two days later on December 13, Louise wrote again to the Committee, this time agreeing to make the trips to the South American countries as it is the wish of the Committee before going to the Convention in the US. The reason for the change was the imminent coming of Gerardo Vega who would help with teaching, and it will leave Louise free to go to either country:

*“Since we are far from forming an Assembly here, I had not made any definite plans for offering to go to either country. However, if the Committee wishes me to go now, I will gladly start making arrangements. Since I am deputizing Gerardo Vega’s to come to Panama to teach for three months, I certainly will have discharged my responsibility to the teaching campaign here and could feel free to go to Colombia and Venezuela both as the committee suggested when I met with them in July. Gerardo expects to arrive early in January...If you wish me to go as soon as possible I will inquire about entering Venezuela as well as getting my passport renewed.*

To embark on this trip, Louis needed to take the next important step:

*“My next step would be to ask permission to resign from my job in the Canal Zone”.*

Indeed, this is worthy of praise that one would resign of her job for the sake of the Faith and attach herself to the plan of the Committee. It was a sacrifice for better.

By the time the change of mind occurred, the National Assembly had also changed its plan of sending Louise to the South American countries. Mrs. French wrote to Louise on December 18, concerning her decisions and the decision of the National Assembly regarding her trip to the South American countries:

*“...the NSA had voted in September that you were not to be sent elsewhere until there was a Spiritual Assembly in Panama...So the plan is then for you to stay where you are until you have landed the ninth member and then when that is settled we can and shall be very happy to have you assist us wherever things need bracing up”.*

## **CENTENARY CELEBRATION**

During this period, the other very important matter discussed by the Committee, was the upcoming celebration of the Centenary of the Faith to be held in Chicago. Mrs. French, wrote to Mr. Osborne on the same day of December 13, concerning the possibility of forming the Assembly any time before April, as per specific instructions of the Guardian:

*“...A letter from the Guardian approves the organization before April for the Latin friends also. You know we were not sure, and the National Secretary told us that he had not received this permission. But now we have had a letter direct from the Guardian.”*

She also mentions the Centenary of the Faith to be celebrated in Chicago, for which all the Latin countries to send a representative. She hoped Alfred would be participating:

*"We are anxious to know definitely the names of those who will attend the Centenary and hope you will be one of them".*

Mrs. French presumed that having a new believer and with Julie's arrival the number of the believers would get close to the formation of the Assembly:

*"We have been wondering when we got a registration card recently from Mr. Osborne, and we knew that Julie was there and hoped that Edward Rutledge was also, that perhaps you had your nine. Do you hear from Edward and is he really going down or not? We are glad that you have someone from Costa Rica coming to you and if you people run short of funds let us know and we will take it up with the NSA".*

Edward Rutledge never made it to Panama!

## CHAPTER VI – 1944

### GERARDO'S ACTIVITIES

The first letter of the year of 1944, the Centenary of the Declaration of the Bab, goes from Gerardo Vega B. the short-term pioneer to Panama from Costa to Mrs. French Rica, written on January 6, the flowery language letter – difficult to decipher though – was of course being drafted in Spanish with strong Latin flavor. The letter gives hope to the Committee that the teaching work will start immediately. Gerardo mention in his letter:

*“By invitation, which was extended to me by Mrs. Caswell through Mrs. Woolson, I am in the city of Panama studying the best way to spread the Baha’i Faith.*

*“Because of a totally adverse atmosphere of life in this city, the spiritual activity is very difficult, and the few believers who are in the Cause find it undoubtedly hard work for all who represent this place. I am very optimistic for the future of the Cause in this locality, although there are many obstacles ahead, but it is a fact that the splendor of light shines more brilliantly wherever the darkness is great.*

*“It is possible that tonight I shall give the first lecture before those persons interested in the Baha’i Movement. It is my wish and also Mrs. Caswell’s that I may be able to be in Panama for three months. Surely, I shall continue to write to you about my activities as teacher in Panama. Possibly the Assembly in Costa Rica has informed you of my appointment to the Baha’i group in Panama.”*

Julie Regal wrote on January 26, to Mrs. French regarding Gerardo’s activities:

*“Since then, Gerardo has been the speaker at Cora’s regular Friday night meetings. Last time there were 17 present, mostly non-Baha’is. As he speaks only Spanish, Cora has had me at these meetings, translate his speech into English, but to tell the truth, this is difficult for both him and me. Last Friday night I was especially sorry because of my inability to adequately translate, because what he said was excellent. We fervently hope that thru his especial efforts we shall have an Assembly by spring.”*

## LEGAL STATUS OF THE FAITH IN PANAMA

Gerardo Vega's second letter to the Committee was on February 19, 1944. In the letter Gerardo believes through his efforts a strong Assembly will be formed in Panama. He believes that his work in Panama has been very intense and although the Panamanians do not respond as they should, yet:

*"...since my arrival here as Mrs. Caswell may have told you, there has been quite an awakening in interest for the Baha'i Faith".*

He writes that he is also educating the Baha'is of Panama on how to get their legal incorporation. Even in his third letter of February 29, he still laments that:

*"In the short time I have been in Panama City, I have done everything possible to form a Spiritual Assembly, but the people do not respond as to the one's wish. However, there are some new people who are interested in the Baha'ism, and it is possible that they sign the affiliating cards".*

Gerardo's initiative in writing the draft for incorporation, lead Panamanians ultimately to obtain the legal status in the Country. Gerardo writes:

*"Yesterday I started to pen down the necessary items, which are to give to the Baha'i Cause its legal status. These, for sure will be seen and checked by Mrs. Caswell and Mrs. Oliver and then will be presented to the Ministry of Government and Justice for their official approval. The legal status for the Baha'i Cause, seems to me, very important for the future of our Faith, to have strong foundation in the bosom of the humanity".*

Gerardo also mentions in his letter of a talk he has planned to give at the Masonic Club in Panama City, for which there are newspaper clips. His work has been quite of interest of the Committee. In response, Mrs. French wrote on March 7 saying:

*"I am deeply interested in the work, which you are doing...I wish very much you had sent an original photograph as I would like to have used it in our Annual Report from which excerpts are taken for the "Baha'i World" and you are our first Latin American pioneer teacher to travel to another country for the purpose of teaching the Faith."<sup>298</sup>*

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

On March 12, Julie Regal wrote to Mrs. French, giving her a comprehensive and well-written report on the activities of the Panama Group. She indeed has been a good addition to the community from every point of view, where her happy and youthful spirit had brought joy to the community. In this letter, Julie writes that she enjoys being with Cora and "loves her deeply". Yet surprisingly, there is no mention of Gerardo's activities in her letter, on the other activities she wrote:

*"The last month saw much good work accomplished by our little Baha'i group. In the letter I wrote you for our secretary, Alfred Osborne, I mentioned the plans being made by him and Clare*

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298. Emphasis added

*Hamilton for the observance of Brotherhood Week, and now I am happy to say that the performance was carried out splendidly. Cora and I accompanied the Hamiltons to Cristobal, on the Atlantic side, which was my second time across the Isthmus, and we returned just in time that evening to join all the other Baha'is who turned out almost en-masse to hear Alfred deliver his talk at the USO, which was also broadcast over the Army radio. Clare gave a short message of greetings before the gathering of colored folk, at which Alfred was chairman; and Alfred was one of four speakers, including a priest, a minister, and a rabbi, who spoke at the large Brotherhood meeting at the USO. He was supposed to represent a minority race, but we all chuckled at his being also a Baha'i, and in his talk, he gave a Baha'i quotation."*

Julie goes on writing of the Youth Day's activities:

*"To round out the month, the 27<sup>th</sup> was Baha'i Youth Day, and we observed it by a meeting of young fold in Cora's apartment. Philip Bartick, Bert Wernokur and Alfred gave brief talks, and I was chairman. Two of the Panamanian friends came with a guitar and furnished music, and in all, the affair, I believe, was quite a success".*

On some further activities she wrote:

*"Last Thursday, Cora invited friends in to hear a talk on Education by the Rector of the University. It was my fortune last term, thru Cora's guidance and assistance, to attend his classes on Spanish-American literature, given in Spanish, and so I was able to secure him for this meeting. The Rector was an excellent speaker, and we had an animated discussion afterwards".*

Still more activities come in her letter:

*"This evening I am giving a party in Cora's apartment for Carmen Ochoa, a Baha'i girl who just returned from a six months' stay in Ecuador. And on Wednesday evening Louise is going to speak in Cora's apartment on Comparative Religion. Cora and I are planning regular fireside meetings once a week. Perhaps some evening we will invite a rabbi as guest speaker, or the secretary of the USO, etc., besides our local Baha'is".*

Then Julie touches lightly her initial contacts with the two pioneers while still being with Cora Oliver:

*"It took me a while to get my bearings here. When I arrived, Cora was sad, and Louise answered me lightly. Now I am very happy to be busy planning parties and meetings. I turned to Cora to help me with them, because I can so easily work with her, and I love her deeply. Having no center now, the Group decided last November for the time being too simple hold private fireside meetings. Cora had had friends in regularly to discuss the Baha'i Teachings, but there had been no real English meetings."*

She ends her letter by remembering her dear friends back home:

*"I hope in my next letter, Mrs. French, to give you more good news of our Baha'i activities. I am sending a copy of this letter to Edna True and one to my dear friend Margaret Kunz Ruhe".*

In response to Julie's letter, Mrs. French congratulated Julie for her excellent work in her letter of March 20<sup>th</sup> she also refers to some valuable administrative points for the group to observe. Interestingly she mentions that the case of Canal Zone, the National Spiritual

Assembly secretary thought:

*"I do not think a Spiritual Assembly of believers in the Canal Zone ever be recognized".*

Yet, many years later Canal Zone formed a strong local Assembly in Panama, making much valuable services to the Cause, having some of its pioneers as members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama as its right hand.

Mrs. French also mentioned in her letter to Julie the feelings of the Committee:

*"The Committee has been extremely interested in the report of the work, which was done by Mr. Osborne and Mr. Hamilton in Brotherhood Week and also in the matter of your activities, which seems to be carrying on so well. In your former letter you mentioned the formation of a committee for the purpose of consultation and teaching. Some of the members of this Committee felt that this might not be in accordance with the Administrative Order and we took the matter up with the National Spiritual Assembly merely for our information, and as a result of our inquiry we find that the NSA highly approves of this gesture but makes this statement, which it may be advisable to refer to you: "There is no reason why for informal teaching purposes they cannot proceed to act in unity and consultation. As long as the eventful civil boundaries are recognized for formation of the Assemblies, unity in teaching now is fully justified and will no doubt contribute greatly to their collective strength. It should be pointed out, however, that the NSA does not recognize the Canal Zone as equivalent to the state or territory of North America. It has not the same status as Puerto Rico because it is a military zone and not a civil area. This being the case, we provide for a representative from Panama but not from the Canal Zone and I do not think a Spiritual Assembly of believers in the Canal Zone ever be recognized". You probably understand this, but we wanted the information, and we pass it on to you just as it was received by us. We certainly hope that a Spiritual Assembly in the Republic of Panama will shortly come into being and we are looking with eager anticipation to learn the one you have elected as your Representative from the group of Panama. With congratulations on your excellent service and loving greetings to all".*

On April 6, Cora Oliver addressed "Nellie", while indicating of her plans to attend the Centennial and some summer schools. She highly values the presence of Julie Regal as the point of attraction for youth and the future foundation of the Faith in Panama:

*"...It is good that Julie is here to take the initiative in planning for the celebration in Panama. She is attracting new people, both in the Canal Zone and in the Republic of Panama. It is healthy to find these young Panamanians becoming friends as the future depends upon them to a large degree. Her sincerity is attracting quality, and upon it a firm foundation can be built".*

## **OUTSTANDING SERVICES**

And on April 4, Mrs. French wrote a short letter to Louise Caswell, inquiring mostly with the work Gerardo Vega has done in Panama:

*"We have had several interesting communications from Sr. Vega regarding his efforts to establish your legal status with the Government and about the various things, which he has taken up in the way of teaching, but we have had no assurance from you that you have been*



*pleased with his work nor how much he knows of the Teachings”.*

And she continued by saying:

*“The time might come when we would have to call on some of these native believers to do more pioneering work and we would like very much to receive some assurance from you that you are satisfied with what he had done”.*

Gerardo wrote again to Mrs. French in early April, informing her of the extension of his staying in Panama for the month of April as per Louise’s request, and the possibility of his return for a longer period. He says in his letter:

*“...I am very happy and grateful for the value you give to my work in Panama. To be frank, I have done all in my power in order to spread the Baha’i Cause as much as possible for its future development”.*

The extension time remaining in Panama was done not voluntary but:

*“Mrs. Caswell asked me it would be convenient if I would stay for one more month, therefore I will be here the entire month of April. Mrs. Caswell indicated to write the enclosed report, which I had done without mentioning any specific detail of the performed work here, instead, I made some suggestions for the future development and dissemination of the Baha’i Faith. Once back in San Jose, I will try my best to arrange my ways to return to Panama for a longer period than now, as I think, more time and effort need to be spent here in order to have a good Baha’i group worthy of an example of spirituality in this restless section of the world”.*

## **FIRST LATIN GROUP TO BECOME BAHAI’S**

Gerardo’s teaching work was mostly done amongst the Theosophist and Masons. Those who were attracted to the Faith were from such a background, which Cora totally disapproved and caused some misunderstanding among both pioneers and Panamanians. As it was mentioned in Julie Regal’s memoirs in this specific regard:

*“Louise now began to push more vigorously for the enrollment of the Latin people who had been drawn to the Faith by Gerardo Vega. There were several who avowed their belief in Baha’u’llah and wished to be enrolled, but Cora strenuously argued that they really didn’t understand the Faith, that they were more Theosophists than Baha’is, and therefore it would severely injure the Cause to admit them. She seemed so sincere, so zealous for the Faith, and she opposed their admission so intensely that members of the Group were profoundly perplexed. Month after the acrimonious battle waged between Louise and Cora. It crushed our spirits...Slowly our group, unanimously except for Cora, became convinced of the candidates’ worthiness and one or two at the time we accepted them: Jose and Beatriz Villalon, Blanca de Campos<sup>299</sup> Elsa Rohrmoser...Cora strenuously opposed them all”.*

Julie Regal goes on mentioning a very interesting step had to be taken in order to enroll a new believer, she writes:

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299. Later an outstanding teacher of the Faith.

*"In those days, before a new believer was enrolled, he had to read and thoroughly comprehend the Guardian's Dispensation of Baha'u'llah, besides having a thorough knowledge of all aspects of the Faith and its Teachings. Often Louise and I studied this particular book, line by line, with new believers".*

Cora disagreed to Gerardo Vega's way of teaching and his pushing for the 'Legal Status' of the Panamanian group. Her becoming a stumbling block in his way, made Gerardo to leave Panama by the end of April with no prospects of coming back. He wrote his last letter on April 19, 1944, to Mrs. French, indicating that he tried his best to get the legal status for the Faith in Panama but due to some hindrances it became impossible. He would leave on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April for good. Gerardo indirectly mentions this 'hindrance' is none other the person of Cora from Canal Zone! He wrote his farewell letter to Mrs. French on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April explaining his efforts done in Panama:

*"...I have written the basis for the Faith to acquire the legal status in Panama, but it seems to me that the Canal Zone Baha'i group is not interested in this aspect, where to me is of utmost importance for the further development of the Faith. This is why I could not have this legal status of the Cause to be concluded while serving here".*

Gerardo hopes Louise would take the matter further and the National Assembly would solve the obstacle:

*"... Maybe Mrs. Caswell will talk to you regarding some important matters related to the progress of the Faith in Panama. Mrs. Caswell and myself, agree on some obstacles, which prevail here, that should be corrected by the National Spiritual Assembly. Surely Mrs. Caswell will talk to you about it when she meets you at the Convention".*

Gerardo thanks for the given opportunity:

*"...Surely this is my last letter to you as a delegate to the Panamanian group, and I would like to take advantage of this last opportunity to offer my appreciation to all those friends who have made possible for this trip and my staying in Panama City".*

Julie wrote of Gerardo's activities. She indicates that 'she was not impressed by Gerardo' as he was 'unhappy and lost'. She writes:

*"...I feel very sorry for Gerardo Vega because he seems so unhappy and so lost here. Sometimes, in some ways, he was impressed me well, but on the whole, candidly, I am not well impressed with him".*

Somehow, Cora's influence could be seen in Julie's remarks about Gerardo. She closes her letter by saying:

*"I am very glad to be here".*

Louise Caswell, wrote to the Committee on April 23 postponing the answer to the Committee on evaluation of Gerardo, she needed to talk to Mrs. French directly. She wrote:

*"...I did not answer your letter sooner, but the truth of the matter is that I could not give you*

*an answer until the work was done. Now Gerardo's stay here is nearly over as he leaves on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April, this week. Only now can I give you the results of his work. The method is only secondary. It is the results that count, right? There are three people living in Panama who have declared their intention of becoming Baha'is and they are enthusiastic about working for an assembly in Panama. Others are interested in studying and there is a nucleus for an assembly. Careful and tactful attention is important for the development of these new believers".*

Louise wants to talk this matter over: *"... at the convention I want to talk to you, perhaps we can talk with the N.S.A. on the important work here.*

Before his departure on April 29, 1944, Gerardo Vega wrote quite a comprehensive account of his four months activities in Panama. He evaluated its conditions and its pioneers, where he rightfully writes:

*"...Almost everybody works either all day or all night, hence, the free time, which should be dedicated to spiritual activities, is eminently devoted to worldly interests".*

This was the truth of the matter. As long as the pioneers were totally dedicated to the promotion of the Faith, there was unity, love and lots of activities. But as soon as material obligation intervened, it brought with itself disunity, detestation and the Faith's activities dropped to its minimum degree. The comprehensive and three-page report of Gerardo well analyses the situation. Though from Louise's point of view Gerardo had a successful trip who tried to harmonize the lot, yet from Cora's perspective, his teaching method did not impress her, as she believed in a straight teaching path and promoting the Faith without going through philosophical alleys. The interesting report of Gerardo is being compiled below in full:

## **GERARDO'S REPORT**

*"Since my arrival in the City of Panama on January 3, 1944, two meetings a week, Tuesday, and Friday, have been held at the home of Mrs. Caswell and sometimes at the home of Mrs. Oliver. In my understanding and according to Mrs. Caswell's judgment, the attendance at the meetings by the friends interested in the Baha'i Cause has been better since my arrival in Panama. At the first meeting that I led, it can be said it was necessary to harmonize the Baha'i Message with other ideas, philosophical principles, and beliefs. This period of my work was arduous as some comprehended little the efforts and responsibilities that this work implies. They presented rare and curious questions regarding the meaning of the Baha'i Faith and other spiritual philosophies. This aspect of work, which could be called critical part, has helped to foster an atmosphere, which has stimulated those interested in the Cause to sincerely investigate the Teachings. One of the great obstacles in the development of the Faith is the time absorbed in 'working'. Almost everybody works either all day or all night, hence, the free time, which should be dedicated to spiritual activities, is eminently devoted to worldly interests. Although it is not impossible to materialize the formation of an Assembly, but certainly it is difficult, much patience and perseverance is needed.*

*“The name of those most interested in the Baha’i Faith, since I began to lead the meetings is:*

- Mr. Jose Villalon (Chilean)
- Mrs. Betty de Villalon (Colombian)
- Mr. Isaac Fernandez (Panamanian)
- Miss Elsa Rohrmoser (Naturalized Panamanian)

*“The above-mentioned are those (who) are seriously studying the literature of the Baha’i Faith in order to take an active role in this Movement. Mrs. Matta and her daughter, who are Colombians, also come regularly to the meetings. They were somehow interested in the Faith prior to my coming to Panama. There are others who do attend the meetings but not as regularly, which might be due to the type of their work. Those who are interested in the Faith do admire the high spirit and perseverance of Mrs. Caswell in spreading of the Teachings. Her work here is indeed commendable. Undoubtedly, due to absence of specific traditions, the Cause in Panama has good possibilities for the development of its activities.*

*“Panama is relatively a young Republic, which does not have the factor of tradition in her national life. It is my strong belief that the supreme destiny of this section of the world is undoubtedly due to this lack of tradition. When Panama has had several generations, she will have a strong cultural foundation, which will be the synthesis of the most elevated cultures of the age. Logical reasoning shows that Panama started to form her culture and tradition in a period of the world when education and customs already imply the liberation of prejudices. In former times these prejudices were considered indispensable to the culture. The Baha’i Cause, even though it is not visible yet, will be more widely accepted in this nation, which theoretically has many religions, but in fact, has none. When the structure is established after this war<sup>300</sup>, the new world organization will be the initial step to the New World Order of the Baha’i Faith. It is certain that the religious system, which will adjust readily, not only in Panama, which lacks tradition, but also in other sections of the world, will be the Baha’i Religion.*

*“It seems to me that the task of spreading the Faith should not be limited only to the Teachings of Baha’u’llah, but in certain phases, the work should, at the same time, clarify the various aspects of other philosophies or religions, which are little understood. From the point of universality of the Cause, this must be considered, clarified, and taught; it is certain that the harmonization of thoughts of the members of different groups and the consideration of all the ideas “as facets of truth” gradually will produce unity of thought and action in all the dissimilar groups. Naturally, this harmony will strengthen the principle of Unity of Mankind. It can be seen that what I have said in considering the philosophies and religions as means to substantiate and proclaim the universality and power of the Teachings, need not be the general way to diffuse and establish the Baha’i groups in all Continents. But it does seem so that it is necessary in the spreading and establishing groups in Latin America.*

*“Now that we have the assurance that the Baha’i Cause is the philosophical and religious movement of our age, we ought to have the liberality and the strength to initiate the comparative study of other religions and philosophies, because it is true, having by the Grace of God become the heralds of the new Dispensation, we ought also to recognize and evaluate all*

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300. Referring to the WWII

*the restlessness, which signifies the hopes of betterment.*

*“In Panama there has developed a situation, which is reasonable of the local idiosyncrasies are considered. This becomes a special and unique complexity in regard to foreigners, which is also true of North Americans. This is also seen and understood to be an obstacle in the promulgation of the Faith here. Thinking about this fact, what I have said becomes clear. The retarded understanding, which the people have of spiritual changes and adjustments, which humanity is undergoing under the influence of the different dispensation, makes them show an attitude of distrust to accept as the Divine Message, the Message of Baha’u’llah. Perhaps what I write will be better understood from the point of view as a psychological complexity, which involves the majority of people, and which is manifested in what is called “national soul” or “regional soul”. Perhaps each section of the world has its own way of comprehending its own conditions. This is a factor to be considered greatly in the teaching of the Baha’i Cause in Latin America. Also, in order to teach the Faith in this continent, we ought to have a profound knowledge of the Spanish language because the knowledge of the language of each section of the world is the principle of knowing the various ways in order to understand.*

*“As expressed by Mrs. Caswell, I will briefly tell about the lecture, which I gave in the Masonic Temple in the City of Panama, not only as a Baha’i delegate but also as a volunteer, I took upon myself the responsibility of knowing all the factors that have in some way a bearing on the spiritual restlessness. It was, therefore, after talking with certain persons, that I was invited to give a lecture in the Masonic Temple under the auspices of Lodge “For the Benefit of the World” No. 5. According to the publicity of the newspapers and the comments of those who attended, this meeting was the largest ever held. I spoke on the subject, which was advertised “The New Era and its Economic and Social Projections”. This subject was assigned to me two days before the announced date of the lecture. I spoke also about the new path, which ought to be opened to the new power of spirituality. Many questions were raised, some persons argued about some of my concepts. But after explaining the meaning, I was interrupted with applause of approval by the majority. A lady, who attended the lecture, told me a few days ago that she became emotional when she heard me pronounce the term “Baha’i” because when she was in California many years ago, she had met two Baha’is who had left a deep impression by their spirit of understanding and service. It seems to me I have said enough about my lecture.*

*“Well, even though this is not a complete report of my activities in Panama City, I thought it best to bring up some of the modest indications of the successful unfoldment and the spreading of the Baha’i Teachings, not only in Panama in other sections of Latin America. This is not a detailed report of my work; I intended this to be a resume of my work and experiences, which I have had during the last three months of teaching and observing the development of the Cause in Panama. Also, it seems important to me to say that even my work as a delegate has not given the desired result – that is, the formation of the Spiritual Assembly. However, I believe that I have done everything possible according to my capacity for the better understanding of the Cause in its universal aspect as the dominant factor in the new culture of the New World Order.*

*“It seems to me essential that the Inter-America Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly do all that is possible to publish a bulletin or newspaper in Spanish fortnightly or monthly. In this publication should be printed all the impressions of the process of promulgation of the Baha’i Faith in the various groups of Latin America. Also, this publication can be used to*

*publish the commentaries of the Baha'is of the Americas. Naturally, this should be carried on until every Spiritual Assembly has sufficient economic resources to do this for themselves. Such a publication will be a great step in the promotion of the Cause and an instrument for unification.*

*“Another suggestion, which seems important to me in order to improve and coordinate the work of the different sections of Latin America, is to have periodical visits made by a Baha'i or Baha'is of outstanding capacity to all the groups of this Continent. According to my former statement, these are my personal ideas, which I have recorded in this report, as it seems to me that to consider them earnestly can lead to the means of at least to give a real idea of what is necessary to promote the diffusion of the Baha'i Faith in the Spanish speaking America. This is a special opportunity in which I wish to express my gratitude to the members of the Spiritual Assembly of San Jose, Costa Rica, for having elected me to fulfill this unique mission as a participant in the historical unfoldment of the Cause in Latin America.*

*(signed) GERARDO VEGA B. April 1944*

Mrs. French answered Gerardo Vega on the next month, May 1944 with the following short note. Obviously, the Committee was quite impressed with the report to the point of sending a copy to the Guardian:

*“Your very fine report has been received and translated and the Committee thought so highly of it and the intelligent and unprejudiced way in which you have presented it, that they have voted to send a translated copy to the Guardian. We are very grateful to you, and we shall discuss this matter with Mrs. Caswell at the Convention.”*

On the May 30, 1944, Louise Caswell wrote from Chicago to the Inter-America Committee's Secretary, Mrs. French a long-handwritten letter, describing her concept of Gerardo Vega's teaching in Panama. The letter is a kind of defensive, taking Gerardo's side as an 'excellent teacher', vs. other pioneers who were not impressed with his way of teaching the Baha'i Faith. Obviously, some internal talking has been taking place within the community for Louise to write such a letter, although not between Louise and Cora. She wrote:

*“Our meeting was too short to answer the questions in your letters & I did not want what I had to say to go through censorship so I will now endeavor to tell you more fully about Gerardo's work. I hope Cora has given you her opinion, which she never expressed to me. It would be most valuable to have it as her influence is an important factor in the Baha'i Isthmian Group.<sup>301</sup> I could see from the first that our American pioneer Baha'is did not understand Gerardo nor his methods, for four months Gerardo conducted informal meetings of a social and philosophical nature, discussing many things not Baha'i. Gerardo said you have to meet people where they are. Gradually he led them to the Baha'i Teachings and three of them have read the Will and Testament and requested membership in the Faith. Two weeks before Gerardo went away, I told Julie about the three who wanted to become Baha'is. Julie had been to two of Gerardo's classes during that four month period, Cora had been to one, Alfred to none, the Hamiltons to none. They had every opportunity to come but they did not attend. Julie said she didn't think the people were sincere. The following week Julie and Cora came one evening to get acquainted with them. They knew they were being given the once-over and were sensitive enough to grasp the*

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301. Emphasis added.

situation. After that meeting Julie said she liked them and would like to cultivate them. She even agreed to invite them to the Centenary meeting although it was to be all in English. During our absence the responsibility of these new believers' rest with Julie. Alfred<sup>302</sup> has expressed a wish to study and practice his Spanish and to work for an Assembly in Panama. This is the best thing that happened at the Convention. The night of the banquet I talked to him<sup>303</sup> and congratulated him on his success at the Convention. I further told him that my heart was sad that the three residents of the City of Panama had not been given Baha'i membership while their teacher Gerardo Vega was there. I asked him to please work with them when he returned. Thank God, he promised that he would. There is also a fourth who was sick, part of the time Gerardo was there.

*"If one can get a fare understanding between these humble people in Panama and the five pioneers & Alfred, and other less active members of the Baha'i Isthmian Group then we will have the unique glory of being among those who write the East & the West, the North & the South. I count on Alfred to play a part in this vision I wish could talk with you at length about how the Latin feels about the North American. Gerardo told the Isthmian Group that one of the difficulties of teaching there was that the Latins were needed to teach the Latins. Great sacrifice is needed on both sides.*

*"Gerardo would like to return to Panama, at least, he spoke of it when I last saw him. ...He is responsible for our best work with the Latins in Panama. The Baha'i Isthmian Group did not give any recognition to him of his work.<sup>304</sup> Alfred however, did promise to write him a letter of appreciation. I hope he has done so. He was not in any way feted so he did real pioneering work. Someone outside the Cause gave a lovely farewell party for him. Knowing how the Latins shower love on a traveling Baha'i, I wonder how he felt. Whatever the reasons for the pioneer Baha'is not understanding him, we are the ones to make the sacrifice to listen to a language we do not understand to come and bring others. Have you written a letter of appreciation to Gerardo? I hope you will do so as his work is outstanding. He laid the foundation with the Latins of Panama."*

Mrs. French wrote on June 1, to Gerardo Vega a letter of appreciation for the work performed in Panama, in which she says:

*"I want to congratulate you on your work, which was reported by Mrs. Caswell...We, the Inter-America Committee, feel that you have done excellent work and we are very grateful to you for your first venture in the pioneering field".*

And on the same day Mrs. French also wrote to Louise Caswell, regarding her letter on Gerardo Vega:

*"I have today received your letter sent from Chicago regarding the matter of Sr. Vega's labors in Panama. To me the whole situation is perfectly incomprehensible because I cannot understand why the friends did not rally round you in your effort to build up the knowledge of the Faith in Panama. It seems to me that with proper consultation this should have been a very successful way of teaching and even if Sr. Vega did not use methods such as we use, he must have*

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302. Alfred Osborne was from Caribbean background where the English language prevailed.

303. Referring to Alfred Osborne, the Panamanian representative to the National Convention.

304. Emphasis added.

*been very earnest in his approach to the Cause, and I am delighted that he has convinced those three or four people of the truth of the Faith. Did you consult Alfred and Cora and Julie and the others before sending for Sr. Vega, or did they interpret this as a purely personal gesture on your part and that they were not consulted and therefore not interested in his efforts? That is the only explanation that I can see of their very strange attitude”.*

And she continues, putting some of the blame to herself:

*“Hereafter, I shall communicate with Alfred only so that all the friends will come in for consultation in connection with the instructions, which the Inter-America Committee must send out. But I am replying to your letter in a personal way before even submitting it to the Committee because we have discussed it so much, you and I together, and I had so hoped that with the understanding that we reached at the Temple that all the slate was washed and there would never arise any further difficulties. I still believe that we have turned over a new page and that the work will progress now as we have longed to see it, but I take to myself much of the fault in that I have written personally to the pioneers and have not sent communications through the Secretary as I should have done. If this is the cause in way of any of the misunderstandings, I am grieved to hear of it”.*

It was such an unfortunate situation at the time where no harmony existed among the pioneers to put the interests of the Faith above their own for such an excellent work, sending away Gerardo Vega broken hearted.

## **PANAMA DELEGATE**

On March 23, Julie Regal handwrites – she certainly had a beautiful handwriting – a short letter to Mrs. French, introducing Mr. Osborne as the delegate of the Panama Group to the Centennial celebration of the Hundredth Year of the Declaration of the Bab to be held in Wilmette:

*“Our little group met last Sunday and elected Alfred E. Osborne<sup>305</sup> as our delegate to the Convention. He has already begun making preparations for the trip. Alfred enjoys the admiration and affection of every member of our group, for his loyalty, his devotion, his kindness and his wisdom. While not a Panamanian, he has lived on the Isthmus most of his life, coming here as a small child from a nearby island, and became a Baha’i here. He is supervisor of all the Negro schools in the Canal Zone. We are anxious for you and all the other Baha’is at the Convention to meet our delegate”.*

The rest of this story is being written in the chapter of Alfred Osborne, on page 277.

The matter of Alfred Osborne to become the delegate of Panama Group for the Centenary almost took a twist in favor of no one. The fact that he held US citizenship and not being a Panamanian neither by birth nor by nationality, and now he was working in the Canal Zone, did disqualify him as a Panamanian delegate to the National Convention. Mr. Horace Holley wrote and asked for clarification from the Isthmian group. Though this matter was clearly stated in the group’s introductory letter, that Alfred was living in Panama and not in the Canal

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305. The full name was Alfred Elderfield Alexander Osborne.



Zone and that he has been in Panama since his childhood, and in fact sometimes earlier he had married to a Panamanian girl and owned his home in the heart of Panama City, yet, Alfred had to write a letter to Mr. Holley on April 10 and explaining clearly his situation. The whole episode of Alfred representing the Panamanian group is being discussed in the section pertaining to Alfred Osborne. On April 19, Julie Regal wrote to Mrs. French:

*"...we are all most happy because Alfred is planning on going to the States; there had been a great obstacle in his way."*

During that period of time, as per Cora's invitation Julie moved to her apartment while she planned for a two months' vacation. Julie mentions of morale of Cora being quite low. Cora as well as Louise were both going to the Centennial celebration. Julie wrote of Cora that:

*"...Because of the increased distance to my work, I left the Spanish family with whom I had been living and came to live temporarily with Cora in her apartment. During the two months that she is gone I will be living here alone. Then I plan to take advantage of the circumstance and entertain frequently. Just now Cora's resistance is terribly low (I certainly do hope her vacation will build it up), and I have to restrain myself; still, we have been entertaining friends two and three nights a week and this Friday we are having a party. That is still quite a bit of entertaining, isn't it? In a day or two I'll start hunting an apartment to move into when Cora returns – one suitable and conveniently located, but I know it's almost like searching for hen's teeth. Won't you please hope for my success"?*

June 7, 1944, Julie, acting Secretary of the Isthmian Group, received the following letter from Mrs. French, where she highly praises Alfred Osborne and at the same time hopes the differences among the pioneers disappear, after their consultation at the Centenary gathering in Chicago. Mrs. French writes:

*"You can never know the delight of the Inter-America Committee on its making the acquaintance of your Alfred Osborne and associating intimately with him and with Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell at the Centenary Convention. I am sure Alfred Osborne would blush if he could know the compliments that have been paid to him for his kind assistance in translating, his outstanding joyousness in his participation in the events and his true sociability with us all. He will always be remembered, and we feel sure that the inspiration, which he received at the Centenary and the very valuable consultation, which members of the Committee had with him and with Mrs. Oliver and Mrs. Caswell will result in the happiest kind of solution of the problems, which have affected you. We hope that this association will draw us all closer together and that we may often see Alfred in our midst as he can be of inestimable value in bringing the races together".*

On August 16, 1944, Mr. Osborne wrote to Mrs. French. Indeed a splendid letter showing the great impact the Convention has had on him, giving him much confidence as the Corresponding Secretary of the Isthmian Group.

*"I wish to apologize to you for not writing sooner since my return to Panama the last week in June. I had hoped to arrive on the Isthmus around the 10<sup>th</sup>, but unfortunately, I was off-loaded at New Orleans because my passport did not come in time. Although I was somewhat disappointed at not being able to continue the trip to Panama, I must say that I had a fine, spiritual time with the New Orleans friends. I was able to give the message to several people of*

*my race in that city. A seed has been planted, and it may bear fruit later. It was so nice meeting and working with you at the Convention. For me it was a rare and great privilege meeting you torch-bearers of the Faith of Baha'u'llah. I hope that I shall be able to exemplify in my life the ideals, the enthusiasm, the tenets, which I was in the lives of the fine believers I met in Wilmette...You can count on us also to cooperate with you by sending our humble contributions for the BAHAI WORLD COMMITTEE, Volume 11. Your letter will be read at the next 19 Day Feast and acted upon".*

The minutes of the Inter-America Committee dated October 25, states the clarification of the relationship of Panama City and Canal Zone as far as the administration concerns:

*"Reading of the Guardian's most recent statement concerning Panama and the Canal Zone, in which he states clearly that Panama must have its own Spiritual Assembly, which is apart from that in the Canal Zone, this latter really being in the United States."*

## CHAPTER VII – 1945

### THE INTER AMERICA COMMITTEE ON PANAMA

The year 1945, gave way to the formation of the first Assembly of Panama City. For this to take place, the coming of the new Panamanian believers was crucial. The Minutes of the Inter-America Committee of March 25, records the receipt of the membership cards of new Panamanians:

*Recorded: Letter from Alfred Osborne dated March 12, enclosing a membership list, and 3 membership cards for Beatriz A. De Villalon, Jose Villalon, Balnca de Campos, and raising question concerning the status of 4 inactive believers and of his own residential status.*

*VOTED: To reply to Mr. Osborne, thanking him for the list and the cards, and explaining that it is the feeling of the Committee that all 9 members of the Assembly should be on the active list, but expressing the hope that the Isthmian Group will be able, through loving consultation to win back the 4 inactive members to full participation before April 21<sup>st</sup>.*

*To further explain that the matter of residence must be determined according to Civil ruling: that is, the city in which Mr. Osborne would cast his vote in Civil Affairs is the city of his Baha'i residence.*

*Recorded: A cablegram from Alfred Osborne, dated March 12, stating that there are 7 active believers in Panama City including Sra. Ortuna, whose transfer from Costa Rica has been questioned, and further stating that Julie Regal is willing to move to Panama City.*

*VOTED: To send our thanks and appreciation to Julie Regal through Mr. Osborne and to state that Sra. Ortuna has been accepted by the National Assembly as an enrolled believer in Panama City.*

*Recorded: That the first bulletin issued in Panama has been received and placed on file.*

In the minutes of April 11, 1945, of the Inter-America Committee the following extracts concern Panama:

## **FORMATION OF THE ASSEMBLY**

The formation of the Assembly in Panama City was quite overdue. It was hoped by the Institutions as well as the Community of Panama, that by 1944, the Centenary of the Faith would in fact be the historical date for such a formation. But the strong differences between the two early pioneers, robbed the opportunity from the Panamanians to boast the formation of their Assembly at that Holy Year. The Secretary of the Assembly of Panama, Julie Regal, wrote to the Committee. The following is recorded in the Minutes of July of the IAC:

*Recorded: Letter from Julia Regal, Secretary, Panama Assembly, reporting the members were an extremely happy group and that since the formation of the Assembly, there were evidences of a new spirit and life in Panama. Regular meetings were held Thursday evenings and they were planning the following week to start weekly meetings in English. Julie spoke enthusiastically about the talks, which Gwenn had given and the publicity, which she had obtained in Panama. They were planning future radio programs and mimeographing of excerpts and articles, which they had translated. They were, also, mailing packages of Baha'i books to several libraries in the interior. Julie asked the question, "How is teaching outside of Panama City to be conducted. It is our belief that it should be through the Mother Assembly, and the Isthmian Teaching Committee has proposed. We would suggest our holding conferences to discuss teaching procedures, perhaps monthly, to which all believers on the Isthmus would, also, be invited."*

## **THE FIRST LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERSHIP**

The membership of the first LSA of Panama was consisted of: Louise Caswell, Cora Oliver, Jose Villalon, Beatriz de Villalon, Blanca de Campos, Elsa Rhormoser, Celia de Madrid, Isabel Ortuno and Julie Regal. Louise wrote to the IAC and the following extracts of her letter was recorded:

*"Letter from Louise Caswell, Ancon, June 28<sup>th</sup>, reporting the wonderful activities since the formation of the Spiritual Assembly of Panama. Already, there were three new applications for membership, and people of capacity are daily being attracted". Louise reports that there are new three believers in the Canal Zone and four in Colon".*

Observe the absence of Alfred Osborne!

## THE ISTHMIAN TECHING COMMITTEE

By December 1944, the Isthmian Group stopped functioning, where all the efforts were spent to form the Assembly in Panama City. After the dissolution of the Group, a self-appointed Teaching Committee consisting of the following membership was formed. Gwenn Sholtis, who then was residing in Panama wrote to the Inter America Committee and the following is recorded in the Minutes of July 1945:

*Recorded: ...After the dissolution of the Isthmian Group, there was a self-appointed committee, consisting of Alfred Osborne, the Hamiltons, Julia<sup>306</sup> Regal, Cora Oliver. This Committee assumed all teaching obligations; took over the group in Colon, started by Louise Caswell, and also the Baha'i Fund, with Cora Oliver as treasurer.*

After the formation of the Assembly, Louise left for teaching activities to South American countries. She already had started to form a community in Colon, the prominent city on the Atlantic side. The Isthmian Teaching Committee, proposed to continue Louise's work and probably to hold more other teaching activities, which were over and above the responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama City. In the same Minutes of the Committee mentioned above, it is recorded:

*Recorded: The enclosure from Horace Holley of a letter from Alfred Osborne, June 5<sup>th</sup>, recommending to the N.S.A., that a Baha'i Isthmian Teaching Committee be organized to function outside the jurisdiction of the Panama City Assembly, and that its membership consist of Norma Hamilton, Chairman; Clare Hamilton, Alfred Osborne, Cora Oliver, Julie Regal. Horace adds that this letter is referred to the I.A.C., with the request to obtain further information as to the scope of the proposed teaching group and to submit a recommendation to the N.S.A.*

In the meanwhile, teaching was an ongoing activity in Colon. On July 8, Norma Hamilton sent to the Committee membership cards of three believers from Colon.

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306. Somehow Julie's name is pronounced by its Latin way, Julia.

## **DISTRIBUTING COMMITTEE**

Then there was the Distributing Committee formed by the National Assembly of the US, based in Canal Zone under the coordination of Cora Oliver who was in forefront of its activities, and two local believers. The Committee struggled for a long time with its membership. Spanish books would be shipped from Argentina to Panama for distribution in Central America. The Committee also received English literature from the US for the same purpose. Overburdened, Cora, after organizing the Committee and its finances, offered her resignation but she was always helpful in its proper functioning no matter who was in charge of the Committee. Usually, the Committee counted on Cora's help though she never stopped helping, but as a non-member, she was reluctant to do so. It was an arduous and tedious and purely administrative job. For a period of time Gwenn Sholtis was in charge of this Committee. She suggested to the Committee that in order to have this Committee function properly, it should be under the responsibility of the newly formed Local Assembly of Panama. Her letter to the IAC had two points:

*"Gwenn suggests that the Distributing Committee be appointed from the members of the Panama Assembly" and "the Bulletin be gotten out by Gerardo Vega of Costa Rica, who owns his own printing press".*

### **Inter America Committee's special meeting on the drifted pioneers.**

Cora had travelled to the US and had asked the Committee for a special meeting for clarification of some points. The matters to discuss according to the Committee were numbered as follow:

*"A frank and free report with Cora on the problems, which she wishes to discuss."*

There already were some correspondences of Julie as the Secretary of the Local Assembly of Panama and as an individual member of the Community, with the Committee concerning the aggravating disharmony between the two pioneers, which kept affecting the newly formed community. The meeting with Cora would solve some misunderstandings. The urgent meeting of the Committee was held on September 17, 1945. The Minutes of the Inter America Committee records:

*"Because of the extreme urgency of consultation about the conditions existing in Panama, the Inter-America Committee met in special session, at the home of Mary Barton, 1018 North State Street, Chicago, at 7:00 on the evening of September 17, 1945.*

*Present: Dorothy Baker, Mary Barton, Amelia Collins, Edwin Mattoon and Edna True. Virginia Orbison and Gayle Woolson were also present at this consultation.*

*The meeting was opened with a prayer by each one present.*

Seemingly, the meeting read the letters received from Julie. The Minutes taken by Miss Edna M. True reflects the following:

1. Recorded: A letter from Julia Regal, secretary of the S.A.<sup>307</sup> Panama City, September 12<sup>th</sup> reporting a distressing circumstance in their last nineteen-day Feast (Sept. 9). When the members of the S.A. were corrected by Cora Oliver for "holding their S.A. meeting during the Feast immediately after the readings." This procedure had been decided upon by the majority vote because of the difficulty of getting the S.A. members out to two meetings. So affected were all of those present at the Feast by the spirit, which was done that they had "no heart to consider the real business at hand". The secretary then and there composed her letter addressed to the N.S.A. and had it approved by all present, including Cora.
2. Recorded: The reading of a letter addressed to the N.S.A. from Julia Regal, written as an individual and not as secretary of the S.A. Julie stated that she had kept silent for two years about the growing in-harmony between Cora and Louise and of its affect upon the whole community but that now she felt it would be wicked not to submit fully and frankly the result of her observation, which she asked us to submit for verification if we desired to any of the others who had been residing in that community. Julie felt that the growth of the Cause was definitely at stake if some actions were not taken quickly to clear up the spirit of rancor and discord, which existed there. In her opinion Louise was working arduously and constructively with the Spiritual Assembly of Panama City, while Cora Oliver seldom participated in the activities and produced a spirit of in-harmony whenever she was present. Julie stated quite frankly that she felt Cora could be the one most responsible for the lack of unity and that the condition would not be bettered as long as she was there. After a lengthy and prayerful discussion of this whole situation, the Committee decided on the following action:
3. VOTED: That the Secretary should write exactly the same letter to Cora and Louise calling their attention to the patient consideration that had been given them in the hope that they would dissolve the differences between them but that now the gravity of the situation had grown beyond personal considerations and had become the problem of all of us, specifically charged with the responsibility of furthering the Baha'i Faith in Panama; that the Committee now feels the time has now been reached when they can no longer serve in the same place and that therefore they submit to them the following three alternatives: 1. Would they both be willing to accept other posts of pioneer service? 2. Would one be willing to leave if the other stay? 3. Would it be possible for Cora to move to and live in the Canal Zone and devote herself entirely to the Bulletin and Distributing Committee work; while Louise would live in Panama City and devote herself entirely to the spreading of the Faith in the Republic? This last would have to be predicated on the assurance that their places of residence and spheres of activity would be completely separate. The Committee feels that one of the above alternatives is required at this time and asks that they may hear promptly in reply.
4. VOTED: That the Secretary should write the S.A. of Panama City, explaining the proper procedure about holding the Spiritual Assembly meetings separately from the Feasts. This vote was taken in spite of the fact that the correspondence in this connection had been addressed to the N.S.A. because the I.A.C. felt it was too long to wait for a reply until the next N.S.A. meeting in November.

Mrs. Virginia Orbison, a prominent teacher of the Faith, made a trip through Panama to Ecuador. While in Panama, she stayed with Louise and studied the conditions of the community, taking her time to talk to Cora. What she reported is reflected in the Minutes of the IAC dated November 10.

*Recorded: Letter, Oct. 21, from Guayaquil, reporting fully on her impressions of Panama. In her opinion, Cora is the disturbing element baffling and confusing the other believers by her strange attitude and having alienated two members of the S.A. so that they would no longer attend meetings. Virginia stayed with Louise, but talked with Cora, finding her completely uncommunicative about what she was willing to do in the present situation, stating that she (Cora) considered the only solution was to dissolve the present Assembly, as it had been founded on wrong kind of teaching and was dominated by Louise. From her (Virginia) observation, she feels that Louise should not be moved from Panama because of the valuable work she is doing, but that Cora, if possible, should be invited by Alfred Osborne and the two Hamiltons to move to the Canal Zone to help them form a group and then develop this into an Assembly, assisting as well with the Bulletin and Distributing Committee work. From her findings, Virginia feels that it would be possible for Cora to move into the Canal Zone, providing she really wanted to.*

And in the Minutes of the Committee the same was reflected:

*"...reports that Cora Oliver is disturbed about the Baha'i Center being in an individual's (Louise Caswell's) apartment".*

As a result, finally, Louise moved out to perform international travel teaching activities and later moved to Colon, residing there, helping to form its Assembly. Cora moved back to Canal Zone and dedicated herself to the Distributing Committee. Therefore, both chose the third suggested alternative by the Inter America Committee.



## CHAPTER VIII - 1946

### THE FIRST LATIN AMERICAN CONGRESS

Pioneers have recorded in their correspondences about the activities of the first ever Latin-American Congress held in Panama City, especially in the section on Julie Regal, it reads some in detail about this eventful event. Yet this All-Latin-America Conference, which was to cover the whole Latin-America, from Mexico to Chile and Argentina became the highlight of the Inter America Committee, considering a total success. In their Annual Report the following is recorded:

*The most important event during the year in Panama was the recent Baha'i Latin-America Congress, from January 21<sup>st</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup>, at which ten countries of Latin America were represented by native believers and in which seven of the pioneers participated. All visitors from the various countries took some part in the program, an attendance at the evening meetings of from forty-seven to one hundred persons. There were classes each morning on "God Passes By", "Administration", and teaching methods in Latin America; and each evening there were Public Talk on various tenets of the Faith, the last meeting held in the large hall of the Inter-American University. This conference is being reported in detail in the special Spanish Bulletin and in Baha'i News, but the Inter-America Committee wishes to report that it was truly an historic occasion, surpassing the highest expectations of everyone. The Committee deeply appreciates all the devoted efforts, time, and strength that were given so unstintingly by the committee in charge, by James Barret, Hugo Arteagabeitia, and other visiting friends. Gayle Woolson was in Panama from February 5<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup>, assisting the Spiritual Assembly in Baha'i activities and teaching work, and contributing greatly to the Publishing and Bulletin Committee work and to the arrangements for the Conference. Cora Oliver visited the United States and met with the Inter-America Committee when she passed through Wilmette on July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Gwenne Sholtis, Virginia Orbison, and Elisabeth Cheney stopped over in Panama en-route to new posts, and Mrs. Amelia Collins stayed over for special consultation with the Spiritual Assembly, after the Conference. Both the Salas and Mason Remey included Panama City on their itineraries.*

The year 1946 marks more institution-to-institution communication rather than institution to pioneer or other way around. The establishment of the Spiritual Assembly has been a blessing for both sides. Indeed, the power of consultation at the Assembly, gives more harmony and unity to the Community, as, no one feels being left out or having special privileges over others. But overall, the Inter America Committee had proposed to the first Latin American Conference to be held in Panama, was well on the way.

The Inter-America Committee had expanded its distribution of literature through the

Panamanian Distribution Center since the Assembly has been formed and Cora Oliver has become in-charge. The Argentine Baha'i Community printed all the required literature in Spanish and forwarded to be distributed for the Central America and the Caribbean islands of Spanish speaking.

Also, Louise Caswell had started her travel teaching activities in Colombia and Venezuela, where she made valuable contributions in the promotion of the Faith. She returned to Panama in mid-January to help with the preparation of the Conference. Gayle Woolson also came to help. She reported to the Committee:

*"Gayle also speaks of the wonderful newspaper and radio publicity they were receiving for the approaching Latin American Congress".*

It was recommended to the National Assembly to keep Gayle in Panama for a while, at the same time she could also help with Cora's activity in Distributing Committee. Though, she was again called to go back to San Jose C.R.

Julie Regal wrote a brief report for the Committee on the First Baha'i Latin American Congress and enclosed some photographs for their records too.

She also mentioned to the Committee about the teaching activities in both Chiriqui and Colon provinces, to which Committee recorded:

*"To commend the teaching work, which is being undertaken in Chiriqui and suggest to the Panama Assembly that they make Colon and Chiriqui their two special goals for the current year".*

The one other afterwards result of the Conference was the enrolment of a new believer as Louise wrote:

*"It is with pride that I enclose the registration [card] of Sr. Jose Vilas Granada. I think you and Millie Collins recall the very enthusiastic middle-aged man with blue eyes who attended many meetings at the Congress. Well, this is his card."*

More on the First Latin American Congress is described on the section of Julie Regal, who has recalled quite few interesting instances.

## **NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY – PREPARATION**

The beloved Guardian in his message to the National Convention of the US implies in the next five years, there should be one National Spiritual Assembly in Central America and one for the South America. This message has given all the Baha'i Communities of the Latin America a new impetus. With this message a new life and a challenge was given to the newly formed Latin American communities and enthusiasm to the pioneers. The IAC recorded in their Minutes of May 18 referring to Louise's letter of May 10:

*"Panama is a source of daily joy to me now. The vitality of the Faith is making itself felt. A letter from the Guardian said that Panama is beginning to show signs of the great future the Master foretold for it".*

Some questions were brought up as to the limit where the Central America's borders, is in the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America. The NSA to write to the Guardian and this it was reflected in the Minutes of the Committee too:

*"To refer to the N.S.A. for clarification by the Guardian of (1) The status of the West Indies, Mexico, and Panama in the New Objectives; Do they fall under Central America, in regard to the National Spiritual Assembly to be formed in that Area? (2) The interpretation of his Convention Message in regard to the National Spiritual Assemblies, -is there to be one National Assembly for South America, and one for all Central America, or does the Guardian mean that there should be one National Assembly established in any one Republic of these two Areas? (3) The status of the Canal Zone and Puerto Rico, in regard to these National Assemblies. All these geographical borders had to be defined, only and only by the Guardian.*

## **SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

The change of the Inter America Committee membership in 1946, has changed its headquarters from California to Ohio. The Secretary of the Committee – now Elisabeth Cheney<sup>308</sup>, addressed the Spiritual Assembly of Panama on July 16, concerning the "great Conference" whose venue being chosen by the beloved Guardian:

*"We are proud and happy to tell you that our Guardian has again chosen Panama City to be the scene of a great conference, and the Committee has instructed me to write to you on their behalf and inquire as to your preference of time. Their thought was that you would perhaps like to have it again in January, as this was so successful before".*

The letter indicates a contribution of Louile Mathews for \$250 towards the conference. The Committee also:

*"...requests that you supply six copies of the best pictures of the conference that can be obtained. Two of these will go to Haifa".*

The IAC asked for any suggestion that might arise from the Local Spiritual Assembly for the Conference and the Committee would be ready to help. Also, it is mentioned that Dr. Edris

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308 .Previous pioneer to Paraguay

Rice-Wray would be participating the up-coming Conference in Panama. Their letter includes the knowledge of borders of Central America:

*"The Committee feels that Panama demonstrated last year the tremendous need for just such conferences as these, and now, in the light of the Guardian's new plan, it is all the more evident that a basis must be laid for future conventions and for elections of National Assemblies. It is now established that all of Central America, Mexico and the West Indies, including Puerto Rico and the Canal Zone, will combine to form one National Assembly, while South America will form another. How wonderful that the friends are to have these opportunities to come to know one another! While no prohibitions are to be made, it is evident that it is preferable for the friends to attend the conference that is to be closely related to their later National Assembly life. It is evident however, that there will be instances of nearby countries attending the Panama Conference, because attendance at Buenos Aires would be impossible".*

The committee needs also to know:

*"...the date that you choose, but also the names of the Committee whom you appoint to carry forward your conference plans".*

The Committee wrote to Louise in mid-July with anticipation of the upcoming Conference:

*"We are looking forward to a strenuous and happy period, as you may well imagine, and not the least for our happy expectations is that the coming Panama Conference ; you Panamanians set a pretty high mark to live up to, and both Buenos Aires and Panama itself is going to have to hustle, I can tell you"!*

The news of Panama being chosen again by the person of the Guardian to house the Conference, was truly an unimaginable gift. Julie wrote:

*"We are thrilled that Panama has again been chosen by the Guardian for another Latin-American Conference".*

The Assembly immediately put together an Executive Committee for making all the plans and preparation for the Conference. The membership of the Committee was:

*"Blanca de Campos, Miss Mabel Sneider (of Canal Zone), and Miss Julie Regal".*

This Committee had to cooperate with the other two committees of Publicity and Teaching in staging the Conference:

*"The date is sometime in January. As soon as possible, announcements of the Conference shall be sent all the communities in Latin America".*

And for a possible venue for the Conference, which would also be the new Center of activities, she wrote:

*"Our Assembly has been promised commodious quarters for a center in a building soon to be erected. We even hope they might be ready for the Conference. As space is terribly hard to find, and what we are promised is very desirable, we feel we have been very fortunate".*

## COLON – EXTENSION GOAL

By the end of July Louise wrote to the Committee acting secretary, referring to the internal problem regarding the two pioneers wrote:

*“It seems that all the clouds have been dispelled”.*

She also mentions about the goal set by the LSA of Panama:

*“Our Assembly set a goal to have an Assembly in Colon by next April... I plan to go over there in August 10<sup>th</sup> and stay an indefinite time to help the few sincere friends there fulfill their wish to have an Assembly. I will come back here for some of the Assembly meetings in Panama City. After we are assured of an Assembly in Colon I could travel elsewhere. I had even thought of going to the interior of Panama”.*

Louise mentions about some travel teachers who have been helping in Panama:

*“Evelyn Larson is here and full of youthful enthusiasm. She could get a youth group going here if she stayed. Marcia was with us, a great privilege to have her. Hascle Cornbleth spent one evening with us. A new Baha’i from Quito will be here Monday...Was able to get good publicity for Evelyn. Our Baha’is make interesting news. We have broken down three more newspapers. All we need now is more Baha’i News writers.*

*“It seems that all the clouds have been dispelled and only the radiant sun is shining on our little community, at last”.*

Elisabeth Cheney answered Louise’s previous letter on August 1, addressing her as “Beloved Angel Louise”. Although a personal letter with no official character, yet it still has some glimpse of activities of mass teaching through the Masonic Lodges of some 19 Latin Countries:

*“The Committee was delighted to receive your good letter of July 1<sup>st</sup> enclosing the registration card of Sr. Jose Vilas Granada. Millie and this servant remember him very well and wish to welcome him very lovingly in the Abha Kingdom. All of the Committee joins in this welcome. Have asked the Publishing Committee to try to find two temple mats without English lettering and send to you. Publicity from Panama has always been 100% plus”.*

The example that was set by Gerardo Vega in Panama teaching the new Baha’is from the Masonic Lodges, had prompted the Committee to try in other countries the same kind of people, who are more universal and ready to accept the Message of Baha’u’llah. Elisabeth continues in her letter to Louise:

*“The Committee has given me the go-ahead signal on opening a course of teaching by correspondence in 19 countries. Prior to this time, such teaching was tried, as you know, in Colombia last year, and resulted in a second assembly and some six additional groups. With the Masonic help offered to dear Gayle, we are hoping that some of these groups will make assembly strength this year. Now we are going to try to a modified and amplified form of this plan throughout Latin America as a means of trying to reach the most capable of the universal*

people, also the more intelligent members of the masses.<sup>309</sup>

*“The Grand Masters of the Grand Lodges of Masons in Venezuela and Cuba have promised us the cooperation of 40 Venezuelan lodges, and 16,000 active Cuban Masons to study and disseminate Baha’i literature. Corresponding with that many people plus the Masons and other universal people, which we hope will be visited by the pioneers (Especially Louise) and willing to receive and study literature on the Faith, is going to be a tremendous job. But wouldn’t it be fun, if by some strange quirk of fate, we should have upwards of 5,000 Latin American Baha’is, when the time comes to elect National Spiritual Assemblies in 1951? We certainly need that many scattered throughout 19 countries, if these N.S.A.s are to be at all stable and representative.*

### **LOUISE ON COLON**

Louise handwrote a letter to Elisabeth on August 3, going into some details in answering her recent letter, and advising the Committee of her next trip to Colon for two months for the sake of forming an assembly next April.

*“...In my next 2 months in Colon... I have several speaking engagements already & will ask for names & addresses of those who would like the study course. I have a feeling that two months in Colon is going to bring results to ensure an Assembly in April. If not, I’ll have to stay longer... Speaking of Grand Masons, our friends & helper in Cali is the Grand Master of the Masons of the West of Colombia. That is wonderful offer of the Cubans & Venezuelans”.*

Louise intended to have Julie be also engaged in the formation of Colon’s Assembly. She wrote:

*“Julie is back & got herself a job right away. I would have gone to Colon sooner but was waiting for her to take over.*

A day later, August 4, Louise wrote to Dorothy mentioning that soon the Cause will be incorporated in Panama. She is very happy and full of enthusiasm in her service in Panama:

*“You must sense my happiness at having this opportunity and immense privilege...I am not really a worker, just an enthusiast but I am learning how to work from little lessons and examples of other pioneers. It is certainly a wonder to have a woman (and you) at the helm in this new Seven Year Plan...We are having our S.A. meeting this afternoon. We are incorporating. I am straining at the leash to get to Colon, expect to go this week, perhaps Wednesday. Speak to Lions & Rotary<sup>310</sup> there. Am expecting success due to the fact that Colon read Panama City newspapers & they must have sown many seeds. I am so anxious to do the job in two months as there is much else to be done”.*

Such a decisive spirit!

*“I feel a second bigger & better crop for Panama City about to appear. Nothing dramatic for the present but wait until we are incorporated. Our lawyer expects to get full acceptance of*

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309 .Emphasis added

310. Lion International Club and Rotary International Club.

*our By-laws copying New York City. It is so thrilling as he is doing the work as our friend”.*

And she also mentions that the Guardian wrote to her regarding on the veteran pioneers will be released to continue their services elsewhere:

*“You will be interested to know that I wrote to the Guardian about going to Spain and he replied that the sooner we get the work consolidated in Latin America...the sooner veteran pioneers can be released for further service. He would be delighted to have me go to Spain”.*

And she ends her letter by saying that she will:

*“...probably get down to Conference business this afternoon. I hope so”.*

In her letter of August 10 again to Dorothy, this time from Colon, Louise describes demographically the black city in Atlantic side, and what a great job to bring the races together:

*“Here I am in Colon, although the Hotel is in Cristobal, C.Z. I am looking for a room in Colon, as I can have colored friends call on me. Population here is easily 80% colored I believe more<sup>311</sup>. A very tiny group of light Panamanians & foreigners and of course lots of Americans in Canal Zone. The whole Cristobal, Colon section covers only a few miles. I could encircle it on foot in about two hours, so you can imagine what a congested little place it is. Much good work has been done to bring Americans and Panamanians together especially for war service. One of the American ladies who was active in war service has kindly put me in touch with program chairman of women’s club (English C.Z.). They would like a speaker on non-religious subject in November. Among the topics I offered them was of “7 Wonders of the World” (your talk, Ruth Shook Fendell<sup>312</sup> told me about). I am relying on you to send me notes because I think they will select this topic. It has much appeal. Send all the material you can. Also, I expect to speak to a current event study group (English) you must have some very snappy up-to-date notes an since you offered to help, why not send me something to brighten up the inner workings”.*

She is to deliver a speech at the Lions’ Club and Women Club but not at Rotary:

*“My Rotary engagement did not materialize but will speak to Lions Tuesday. As this talk will be in Spanish and much will depend upon its success, want you to pray for me that my short, sweet talk will be effective in awakening opportunities and souls”.*

She also mentions of the two new declarations in Panama:

*“We have two new believers in Panama City. Just what we need, one very humble black woman, a mid-wife. Sounds humorous! Then a sweet little man, very lovely. I think these two will bring in the masses. Now don’t let me down on the Seven Wonders of the World. Many thanks for all your loving thoughts & prayers, especially next Tuesday, August 12<sup>th</sup>”.*

The contents of Louise’s letters were also reflected in the Minutes of the Inter America

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311. Colon city at the Atlantic side of Panama Canal, was formed by mostly the descendants of the Caribbean inhabitants who came originally to build the Panama Canal from late 1870s when the French company started with the project and upon their failure, the Americans took over and finished the job from 1903 to 1914. More information read *The Path Between the Seas*, by David McCullough, Simon & Schuster 1977.

312. Ruth Fendell, later pioneer to Costa Rica. She helped with the beautification of the Panama Temple by importing hundreds of her nursery plants for the gardens of the Temple in 1971/2.

Committee dated August 16/17, 1946, receipt of three letters from Louise Caswell is being recorded:

*Record: Letters from Louise Caswell, Panama, July 26<sup>th</sup>, August 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, announcing her arrival in Colon to assist in bringing the group to Assembly status this year, and reporting that she already has an invitation to speak to the Lion's Club for Colon. Louise states that in answer to her letter to Shoghi Effendi, expressing a desire to pioneer in Europe, he has replied that he prefers that she go to Europe only after the consolidation of Latin American work is further developed. Louise feels that she should give at least two years more to the Latin field. She comments favorably on Evelyn Larson's work in Panama and suggests that Evelyn be given youth work to do".*

Evelyn Larson spent two weeks in Panama and Managua, where she has mentioned to the Inter America Committee that she:

*"...feels that she has accomplished more in these two weeks than in the other seven months in San Jose".*

*VOTED: To write and encouraging and happy letter to Louise, expressing our joy in her new teaching work, and particularly our appreciation of her quotation from the Guardian's letter to her.*

The Divine Plan works different from whatever our concept would be. The mere problem between the two pioneers, made a possibility for one to totally take off and set herself another teaching plan, where souls were expecting to receive the wonderful Message. Otherwise, what would be the result of Louise and Cora both working in Canal Zone? Jewel believers such as James and Maisie Facey from Colon, were the result of intensive work of Louise. James became the member of the first National Assembly of Central America, and together with Maisie and their daughter Alicia, rendered tremendous services to the Faith both in Colon and in Panama.

## **LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY ACTIVITIES**

Cora Oliver wrote rather a long letter to Elisabeth Cheney on August 18, talking about her own affairs as well as some teaching news. She also mentioned some of the members of the Community and their work:

*"All the friends here are busy with one activity or another and I have witnessed a spirit so beautiful, that it brings tears to my eyes, in our assembly meetings. It is like another world. There are many signs of the development of the Faith here".*

She also mentions of the work in Colon:

*"The work in Colon is progressing with new openings and excellent publicity. Louise has given some of her time to this project".*

Though, there is no independent Baha'i Center in Panama, but she writes:

*"Many people are talking of the newspaper articles and I am sure with an independent*



*center a greater number will attend meetings. Regardless of what is said strangers feel shy about coming to a home and something the meetings are not for everyone. Little by little they will understand but an independent place will wipe out that barrier”.*

Then Cora talks about Evelyn and Marcia, the travel teachers who spent sometimes in Panama:

*“Evelyn stimulated the friends with her enthusiasm and youth. The friends remember her with joy...Marcia left a memory of love and understanding, which will never be forgotten. Her services are invaluable. All my concern for the consolidation of the work in Central America has gone since she has been assigned that work. Her understanding, faith and sacrifice leave a never-to-be-forgotten impression, an example of complete devotion. I came to know her during those days when she was with me and feel as if I had been allowed a most precious gift”.*

*“Several new people are studying... You will recall Gayle’s success with the plan of individual teaching. The plan is still outstanding in my mind and brings better results than any other I’ve heard of. The individual gets intensive teaching and those little points, which so many times are lost in a group are clarified...I find it, is an easy plan to follow if one is willing to give time and the effort to do the going”.*

Then Cora writes of her own case of teaching:

*“In my case Baha’u’llah has been extremely generous in sending friends to my door. When my spirits get low, and I feel dissatisfied with the results and the smallness of my service, He sends someone to me. How very patient and kind He is with His weak ones...I pray that the way will open for me to reach some more of these hungry souls”.*

And she ends her letter wishing more success in the upcoming Conference:

*“We are ready to participate in the next Conference we have so generously been allowed to have again. There are many things to accomplish this time and I long for the fulfillment of the goals. With the assistance and prayers of all much will be accomplished”.*

## INCORPORATION OF THE ASSEMBLY

August 20, 1946, Julie Regal wrote to Elisabeth Cheney, on the incorporation of the Panama Assembly, where she enclosed the By-laws articles. In the same letter she also wrote about the upcoming Conference for the Central America to be held in Panama:

*“Our Assembly has decided to incorporate. The “Baha’i Procedure” says that communities should forward a copy of their proposed By-laws, together with a copy of the laws of their state, which apply, to the NSA, and so we are acting accordingly although we are not sure that this is necessary for us. Will you please, therefore, present the enclosed letter to the NSA”.*

Julie in her informative letter wrote of Louise’s activities in Colon:

*“Mrs. Caswell went to Colon, on the Atlantic side, August 7, and has found many people receptive to the Teachings there. She has spoken to the Lions Club and will speak to the artists’ club on Thursday, and Saturday Miss Regal will give an illustrated Temple lecture at a USO in that city”.*

For the arrival of Mr. Charles Ioas Julie wrote:

*“We are anxiously waiting the arrival of Charles Ioas tomorrow night. A special meeting has been arranged for him and we hope he will speak. Articles about his coming and about the meeting have been placed in the three daily papers, which we hope will appear tomorrow”.*

Closing her letter, she mentioned of the flow of activities in the houses of the friends, also she enclosed two declaration cards of new believers, Brigida de Beitia and Arturo Cimorra.

The letter of the By-laws of the Assembly of Panama is being address to the National Spiritual Assembly of the US & Canada, has the date of August 20, 1946.

The letter to the National Assembly is reflected here:

*National Spiritual Assembly  
Of the Baha’is of the U.S. and Canada  
c/o Inter-America Committee  
Wilmette, Illinois*

*Esteemed friends:*

*The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Panama, in conformity with the existing laws, has prepared to incorporate. The by-laws we wish to adopt are the by-laws of the Spiritual Assembly of New York City, a Spanish translation of which has been approved by a prominent lawyer who offers us his service gratis and promises action immediately on receipt of our papers of incorporation.*

*Article I reads: (translation) “The Republic of Panama has been considered one of the most important countries, according to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, because of its advantageous geographical location. He wrote: ‘It is a center for travel and passage from America to other continents of the world; in that point the Occident and the Orient find each other united through the Panama Canal, and it is also situated between two great oceans...The teachings, once established there, will unite the East and the West, the North and the South’. Therefore, the*

*Baha'is of the City of Panama adopt this Corporation in order to supply proper legal status to the conduct of the affairs of the religious community founded in 1945, it being the first Baha'i community in the Republic of Panama. During this period the community has been recognized, encouraged and instructed in letter and communications to it by the Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi, and by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada.*

*"The Spiritual Assembly is at present enrolled in the list of Local Spiritual Assemblies of Latin America recognized by the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada."*

*Throughout the document: The name Panama has been substituted for New York, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada has been substituted for National Assembly, Latin America for North America.*

*Article XIII has been omitted for obvious reasons.*

*Article III, p. 378 of Vol. XI in Baha'i World, line 6, the phrase "national in scope" has been changed to read "national or international".*

*Enclosed you will find an English translation of the law governing incorporation. We asked our lawyer friend whether it was best for us to use the form for foreign companies, and he answered that this was the law that applied to us, and he has a good understanding of the Faith and our community.*

*Please inform us of your approval as soon as possible so that we may proceed without delay to incorporate.*

*With warm Baha'i greetings,*

*Julie Regal - Secretary*

## **FROM COLON**

Mrs. Caswell is still working there and will stay on until an Assembly is assured<sup>313</sup>.

On August 30, the following letter from James Facey from Colon, was written to the Secretary of the Inter America Committee. Apparently, James and his wife Maisie became Baha'is during the visit of Louise Caswell to Colon and formed their group, where James became the Secretary of the group. Ever since, to the end of their lives, these two precious souls served the Faith in many different ways and always remained staunch in their belief to the end<sup>314</sup>. In the letter, James encloses three declaration cards, as the new members of the community of Colon. James mentions of Louise:

*"As you know, Miss Louise Caswell has taken up temporary residence on this side of the Isthmus and is working actively giving lectures before prominent clubs in Colon and radio talks*

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313. Letter of Julie Regal to the IAC, Sept. 19, 1946.

314. The writer had the privilege of getting to know this beautiful couple in his early days of pioneering in Panama.

*in English and Spanish, also interviewing different persons who have shown interest in the movement”.*

The Inter America Committee acknowledged his letter by saying:

*“We were most happy to receive your fine letter telling us about the extension teaching work now being done in Colon by yourselves in cooperation with Louise Caswell. As always, the three enclosed membership cards will bring joy to the hearts of the Committee members”.*

Julie also wrote to the Committee in her letter of early September about Louise’s activities in Colon:

*“Mrs. Caswell has been working in Colon since the 8<sup>th</sup> of August under the direction of our Assembly and in cooperation with the friends in Colon. A new believer has declared himself and three other people are close to doing so. Four 15-minutes radio programs have been given, two in English and two in Spanish. Several influential people have been contacted and have offered their cooperation, including the Governor and the Mayor. A public meeting, in Spanish, will be held September 24 on the fourth floor of the Government Building”.*

The National Spiritual Assembly of the US wrote to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama, dated September 13, answering Julies letter on different topics and the upcoming Conference, where their representative Dr. Edris Rice-Wray would be participating:

*“Thank you for your fine letters reporting progress of the teaching work in Colon, and also reporting the action of the Panamanian Government. We are eager to know the exact date of the Panama Conference as soon as you can let us have it. Dr. Edris Rice-Wray, one of the new members of the IAC this year, will be attending as our representative, and plans to call on a number of communities en-route. She will begin to make her preparations as soon as we can advise her of the definite date. Dr. Rice-Wray is a good speaker and extremely successful, especially with younger people. She speaks some Spanish, but hardly sufficiently for a formal talk in that language. One of her best topics is “Science and Religion”. She is a physician and therefore comes to the Faith from the scientific side”.*

And Julie wrote to the Committee in mid-September informing them of the date of the Conference:

*“The date of the next Conference to be held in Panama has been set as January 19-25, inclusive. Perhaps our new Center shall be ready for the occasion. We are so glad that Dr. Rice-Wray plans to attend it. Also, Loulie Mathews, her husband and Miss Crum are coming. We are confident the second Conference shall far outshine the first. Letters announcing it are being sent to all communities in Latin America. Marcia Steward has sent us several excellent suggestions, and we are keeping in close touch with her”.*

Julie very actively pursued the teaching activities in Colon and Cristobal on the Atlantic side helping Louise. In her report of September to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama, she enumerates such activities as during her two weeks unpaid vacation she helped in teaching and giving talks in the USO, visiting the newspapers and calling on the Governor, who introduced both Julie and Louise in a public meeting. The office of one of the believers was used as the Center, Louise and Julie engaged themselves actively in the promotion of the Faith by organizing talks on different topics. They also visited the libraries offering them

books and leaving pamphlets. The two-women team, together with the new friends of Colon, i.e., Maisie, her daughter Alicia, called on prominent people and also visited schools such as Escuela Abel Bravo, giving the message to the staff. Thus, they found many sympathizers among the population and prominence. Julie wrote:

*"The Governor of the Province is interested & has invited Luise & me to speak in the Govt. bldg. Sept. 24 when he will personally introduce us".*

She also mentioned of the possibilities such as:

*"Col. Almedo Alfaro, son of one of Ecuador's martyr presidents, Eloy Alfaro who separated State & Church, is our friend, adviser. He said he would ask the President of the Republic to rent us land at \$1.00 X 99 years for religious purposes".*

And finally, Julie closes her report by remarking on the Colon populace:

*"Fanaticism, ignorance, racial prejudice, keener than in Panama City, I regret to say that Spanish speaking people on the whole do not like to come to a Center held in a place directed by West Indians. Our 4 believers are exemplary in their lives".*

## **MOVING TO COLON**

Louise Caswell wrote to Elisabeth Cheney by the end of September, indicating of her intention to stay on in Colon, moving from Panama City to the heart of their project in Colon. She wrote a nice description of the Colon's environment in those early days:

*"I have spent most of my time since August 8<sup>th</sup> in Colon and will take an apartment here on October 15<sup>th</sup> moving my furniture. It is necessary to have a resident Baha'i here. The center now is in the office of the husband of a believer, a doctor of Jamaican birth. I believe that there are many Latin people who have not the habit of going to meetings in the quarters of a people whom they feel have taken over their country. The population here is 80% black and I do not know what proportion is West Indian but I believe the majority. They are English speaking although many of them speak Spanish but there is definite mark of distinction between the Latins and the West Indians. You can see what a delicate problem is here...In nearly every wholesale store you will see a white man is with a lot of colored men working for him. The white men are the capitalists, and the colored people have a very hard time. Their living quarters are crowded, and they are poor in comparison with the others. Then there are the Americans in Cristobal who add another element. You can see that it will be valuable for me to have an apartment where I can invite people socially and to study with me, people who would not go the center. In spite of the fact that we wish to get all people to know of the Cause, especially the native Panamanians, I believe the West Indians have the qualities of steadfastness and responsibility rare to find. How we are going to get the Indians is still a task. In that respect I have been told that many of them go to the Normal School at Santiago [of the province of Veraguas]. When Evelyn [Larson] was here she could get a job, but I think it would be a place where she could do good work and would contact all the future teachers of Panama. I should like to see her try to get a teaching job in Panama. I am sure she would try if the IAC suggested it as she seems to wait on their instructions even for her vacation. I think it would be nice to have her in Colon for a while but right now I cannot say when. She is coming for the Conference so why not have her investigate a teaching*

*job then and also spend some time in Colon”.*

Then Louise mentions to Elisabeth of her intention to cut off from the community of Panama:

*“As to myself, don’t you think it would be nice to write a letter to Mr. James Facey... Secretary of the Group here and tell him what my status is? I will no longer serve as a member of the Panama Community. I have been acting as chairman of the teaching committee of Panama and the Panama Assembly choose as its main project for the year the formation of an Assembly in Colon. I wish to avoid making and administrative mistakes so please let me know whether you wish me to make my reports to your committee and send me any necessary information.*

*“Julie spent a week here in Colon and did excellent work. Elsa Rohrmoser<sup>315</sup> is here now for a week and is making good contacts. It is her first experience teaching outside of her city and bids fair to be a very confirming one”.*

Elisabeth wrote on October 1, to James Facey. This letter is an answer to the letter written to the Committee where it contained three declaration cards, inclusive of James and Maisie Facey. The letter includes the quote of Abdu’l-Baha concerning the importance of Panama requested by Mr. Facey. She wrote:

*“The Committee was very happy to receive your fine letter of August 30<sup>th</sup>, enclosing the membership cards of yourself, Gladys M. Facey and Iola Jones Edwards. We have been hearing fine reports of the teaching work in Colon.*

*“In answer to your question regarding the Master’s Tablet to Panama... “All the above countries have importance, but especially the Republic of Panama, wherein the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans come together through the Panama Canal. It is a center for travel and passage from America to other continents of the world, and in the future, it will gain most great importance.*

*“On Pages 532 and 533 of Baha’i Scriptures, the Master refers again to the importance of Panama, when He writes: “Ye must give great attention to the Republic of Panama, for in that point the Occident and the Orient find each other united through the Panama Canal, and it is also situated between two great oceans. That place will become very important in the future. The Teachings once established there, they will unite the East and the West, the North and the South”.*

James Facey wrote again to Elisabeth on behalf of his group in Colon on October 9, enclosing a new membership card as well as the activities carried on by Louise and Julie in September in Colon:

*“As a token of our steady if slow progress, I enclose herewith signed card of Mr. Leonard Ernest Beckford, newly pledged member of the Cause bringing our number to what will make the pledge. Our campaign is continuing with vigour. During the second half of September, we had a Temple display at different points of the city, and a book display at the Radio Center (A book, radio and novelty store centrally located) and most of the displays are still in the windows.*

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315. The new Mason believer.

*There was also a discourse by Julie Regal and Mrs. Caswell at the Gobernacion<sup>316</sup> on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, the Governor attending. There were not many in attendance, but all the Baha'is were there, and more and more people are discussing things Baha'i".*

James Facey, himself and his wife staunch believers, made a valuable suggestion to the Inter America Committee:

*"As you suggested in a previous letter, I am attaching a list of names of some of some visitors to our Group meetings, who I believe it would be worth encouraging in any way possible. Perhaps a card or pamphlet from headquarters would make some difference to them. Will send more names later".*

And Julie reported to the National Assembly that:

*"A few days ago, Louise Caswell moved to Colon in order to prosecute more vigorously the teaching there, and is no longer a member of this Assembly. Colon has given the Baha'i Message a warm reception, and we look forward to seeing an assembly established there next April."*

Yet, the Committee wrote to Louise, who was doing an excellent job in Colon, due to her high caliber, suggested her to become an international travel teacher representing the North American Community. The letter October 20 said:

*"The Committee is asking if it might be possible for you, even at this late moment, to turn completely international and attend the first South American Baha'i Conference scheduled to open in Buenos Aires November 7<sup>th</sup>, continuing through the 11<sup>th</sup>? At the request of the dear Guardian, Milly Collins has given up her trip to Buenos Aires, even though her heart was set upon it...It would be wonderful if you could be there as a North American representative. Returning from Buenos Aires, it would be wonderful if you could do some itinerant teaching, hitting as many spots as possible. Am enclosing a list of secretaries to notify in case you can do this, so that the friends will be expecting you at the right times. Valparaiso, Chile; Sucre, Bolivia; Callao, Peru (adjacent to Lima), as well as Cali are all new Communities. It is quite possible that you may also plant seeds in other places which, sustained by correspondence, will flower and fruit later as Cali has done. We would want you to visit Cali, of course. We know that whatever you can do in the way of visiting and teaching will be greatly confirmed and deeply appreciated at any time".*

On the other hand, Louise was not too keen to the suggestion of the Committee, embarking to such a project of going international. She wrote to the Inter-America Committee on October 26, expressing her surprise for the decision of the Committee for her to represent them at the Buenos Aires Conference. Indeed, she just moved to Colon with one sole goal in mind, to get the LSA of Colon established by April 1947. She says it is imprudent for her to leave, yet the final decision would be with the Committee. In her letter she says:

*"...I just received your letter last night and have hardly recovered from the surprise of the request of the IAC that I go to the Conference at Buenos Aires. I should surely love to do so and carry out your wishes but at this late hour it would be very inconvenient for me to leave Colon. I have just...moved here and came with the approval of the Panama Spiritual Assembly as a*

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316. Governorate

*resident. Although I had spent the better part of the two previous months here it seemed necessary to have a resident teacher and I am really just beginning. Some public talks have been given but the hard slow work is to get nine believers. We have five with me and it would be very bad for me to leave at once when I have just come for the purpose of establishing an Assembly. Julie is keeping up the apartment in Panama where I lived and paying the full rent, thus we are both paying about double rent that we did before. We have contracted for a new \$85.00 Center and then Julie will give up the apartment, which she is keeping solely for the purpose of public meetings and get a room some place. I don't know whether all this is pertinent, but I thought you would be interested in knowing it. The important reason I feel I should not leave Colon is that I just came here to work for an Assembly, and I think it would endanger our chances for me to go away at this time. You, with your larger view, may still feel that I should leave Colon and my apartment, or you may have someone who could replace me here (Panama does not have). If you still feel that I should go after reading this letter, let me know and I will see what can be done. We did not receive an announcement of the November Conference in Buenos Aires”.*

## CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

The Publicity Committee was a new institution working under the LSA of Panama. The newly declared Panamanian, Raquel Francois<sup>317</sup>, who received the Faith in San Jose, Costa Rica from Gayle Woolson and remained active throughout her life, being a very enthusiastic believer, had found her right spot in the promotion of the beloved Faith in the Publicity Committee. She was elected as a member of the Assembly for the year 1946 and in October 9, she wrote to the Inter America Committee:

*“As by every passing day, our Publicity is becoming more developed, we feel the urge of writing you this letter in order to put us in contact with the Baha’i News Service to get propagating means such as setting tools, essays for media and paid notices [clippings], also from the Radio Committee we need recorded English talks for Radio. It is of utmost importance to have these in English because the newspapers publish in this language. We need to receive whatever means of propagation you use so we would be able to go forward every day”.*

And Julie added:

*“...these clippings are customarily sent direct to Baha’i News Service, but we thought you would like to see what fine newspaper publicity we’ve been receiving”.*

And on the matter of the upcoming Conference, Julie wrote to Elisabeth on October 21, asking the names of those who would attend the Conference in Panama. There are here two interesting points in the letter:

1. They want specifically Marcia Steward<sup>318</sup> to attend and the copy of the letter is being mailed to her. This is quite significant.
2. They had newspaper column for Thursdays marked as “Baha’i Activities”, such a brilliant idea to have the public know where the Baha’is are and what are their activities. She

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317. Later, Raquel F. de Constante.

318. Pioneer and travel teacher.



wrote:

*“We would greatly appreciate your letting us know who, to your knowledge, is coming to the Conference. Our Conference Committee will meet November 3 and will then choose teachers and speakers for that occasion. We plan then to write these persons immediately and have our program confirmed by December first so that we can go ahead at that time with the printing of announcement circulars and the preparation of newspaper publicity. We especially hope that Marcia Steward will be able to attend the Conference”.*

Julie also asked for the list and addresses of the assemblies in Latin America. And as a part of their activities, she mentions:

*“The correspondence study course is being offered for free distribution in our radio broadcast in Colon every Saturday and also in our new “Baha’i Activities” column in the newspaper on Thursday”.*

Julie also wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of the US on the same date of October 21, with a copy to the Inter America Committee and Marcia Steward. The most interesting point in this letter is the fact of the adoption of the by-laws of the Local Spiritual Assembly of New York to be used for the Assembly of Panama and as per the suggestion of Marcia Steward, this to be used as the template for all the Local Spiritual Assemblies of the Latin America. Once the National Assembly gives its approval, it becomes historical that the by-laws of all the Local Assemblies of the Latin America are in fact the carbon copy of the Local Assembly of New York, showing once more the unity of action even in this kind of administrative work. Somehow the National Assembly has delayed in approving these:

*“As yet we have received no reply to our letter of August 02 sent to you in care of the Inter-America Committee, which concerned the by-laws we wish to adopt in order to incorporate. The lack of your approval to these by-laws is the only reason delaying our proceeding with this matter. We are anxious to incorporate as soon as possible. Marcia Steward has requested us to send copies of our translation of the New York by-laws to all the other assemblies of Central America, and we have promised to do so as soon as your approval to them is received”.*

## CORA IN A DILEMMA

In the meanwhile, Cora Oliver, was involved with her own activities of Distributing Committee in the Canal Zone, and of her own volition was not much in the hob of the activities of the community. With Louise gone to Colon, it had left Julie to be the organizing unit and all the help she could get from other local community members, such as Raquel Francois. Yet, Cora having heard of Louise's probable representing the American Community in the South American Conference, did try to put a blame on the Committee that such an opportunity is being taken away from the Panamanians.

She wrote a rather long letter to Elisabeth on October 26 mentioning that:

*"Mable Snider hoped to attend the Conference in Buenos Aires and Norma Hamilton has also been considering attending. I write this in the past as Julie just told me that a special delivery letter had been sent Louise advising her of the date of the Conference and asking her to attend. As you no doubt know by now Louise has just moved to Colon to strengthen the work there. It left me a bit speechless as it is too late for any of us to plan to attend and no doubt too late to send someone from Panama as we might have been able to do. We have a believer here who is a flame and would have been an excellent representative of the Latin Americans and brought much enthusiasm for the Panama Conference in January. I am quite aware that it is none of my business what has been sent to a believer in any Baha'i community, but I do feel that the Baha'i community here has not been given any opportunity to participate in the Buenos Aires conference. It may be that Central and South America are not to exchange representatives for conferences, but we understood that while the Panama Conference is to be primarily for Central America all Latin American believers were to be invited".*

Because of whatever reason, Cora was not planning to take part of the upcoming Conference in Panama, and instead, wanted to use her accumulated vacations for more important matters, which she does not mention for what, but the tone of her letter indicates that she hoped the Inter America Committee would give her an international assignment. At the same time, she was concerned about the progress of the Faith in Panama:

*"The work here both in Panama and Colon is attracting new people and several are close to registering...Each and every one is endeavoring to strengthen the work...the flowers are in bloom and show promise of bearing the fruit we all long for. We are trying to develop responsibility among the Latin American believers so that they will be able to carry the ever-increasing load, which we must all carry to fulfill our objectives. It is indeed heartening to watch the sincere ones develop and strive to quicken the work in every field. The celebration of the Birthday of the Bab was an especially happy gathering...Naturally we are eager to take another step in the advancement of the publicity in connection with the next conference".*

Cora apologetically requests the Committee to clarify which areas are considered to be inclusive for the election of the National Assembly of Central America:

*"Some months ago, in a letter from Dorothy Baker to the Panama Assembly, relative to forming the National Assembly for Central America, the Canal Zone and Islands of the Caribbean were included. However, in announcements about Regional Committees this area includes only Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. If I am out of order in writing certain points in this letter, I*

*will understand and appreciate your advice. Since no one appears to be concerned I am mentioning this primarily as the Faith is all-inclusive to me and I am deeply interested in consolidation the work to establish the National Assembly of Central America. Since the Canal Zone believers have not been informed (to my knowledge) of their being included and no steps have been taken to include them and Cuba, Puerto Rico, etc. I would like to know the proper way to get this information to the friends in those areas. Again, I may be stepping out of place and beg pardon if I am in error in mentioning these points. From my points of view, I feel that which will affects one part of this entire project contributes to the sum total of the final accomplishments”.*

Cora couldn't find much satisfaction from the monotonous work in isolation. The administrative work of Publishing & Distributing Committee did not fulfill her desire to be active in the field of teaching. She offers her resignation from the Committee and asks the Committee to convey her this matter to the National Assembly. In her letter of November 4 to the Committee, Cora talks about herself and her upbringing:

*“From early childhood I was trained to be prompt and thorough. My work has also called for these qualities. I was taught “that which is worth doing is worth doing well” and I find no contradiction in the Baha’i teachings. Because of the training and my natural temperament, a high degree of accuracy and punctuality result in meticulous work. This naturally gives me satisfaction and challenges me to even greater effort...The Faith means much more than any work possibly could, therefore, I am constantly trying to achieve results, which cannot be reached without the cooperation of the Inter-America Committee ...The apparent lack of concern about the things, which means efficiency and effectiveness kills my enthusiasm and puts me under a strain, which may be felt by others”.*

Then she continues:

*“A release from this committee would allow me to concentrate upon the teaching work, which must be intensified. Since Louis left the work done by her, must be absorbed by others. The friends here all know that I stand ready to assist wherever and whenever I can. I am deeply interested and concerned about teaching and training the native believers to carry their own load and encourage them to do so at every turn. The response is excellent. They are eager to do and only kept back when no effort is made to develop them. We North Americans must retire more and more from the front lines and put them out front so they may fulfill the destiny of this land of promise.<sup>319</sup> There is ability. It needs to be developed...therefore ask you to recommend the acceptance of my resignation, which I now offer, to the National Assembly”.*

The Inter America Committee on 14 November wrote to Cora dealing with her resignation letter from the Publishing Committee. Cora was being highly valued for her careful services in the Publishing Committee and for this, the Committee had called “*Panama is our model!*” In this apologetic letter, the Committee tries by all the means possible to accommodate Cora keeping her in the Distribution Committee, asking her to act as the chairman of the Publishing Committee. The Committee also suggests Cora find an extension-teaching project for herself either in Central America or in Puerto Rico for her vacation period. The Committee was quite proud of the service she was providing to the Committee.

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319. Emphasis added.

In answer to the Inter America Committee, she wrote in late November of her acceptance the chairmanship of the Distribution Committee:

*"I will accept your recommendation that I be Chairman of the Distributing Committee but will serve as secretary until a new secretary can be found".*

Then she expresses her satisfaction with the work performed by one of the local believers with deep faith, Sr. Granada for the Publishing Committee. She also mentions that both Sr. Granada and Raquel Francois are the best speakers in the public meetings. Cora also mentions about the activities in Panama:

*"You may be interested to know that our weekly public meetings are being given in English and Spanish and that last Sunday at a joint meeting in Colon, held at the Bolivar USA Club<sup>320</sup> three talks were in English and three in Spanish. This seems to be the best plan to date, and no apologies are made or comments to make on more aware of the bilingual aspect of these two communities. Sr. Granada and Raquel Francois are our best speakers. Wish you could hear them".*

On the pressing matter of the situation of the Canal Zone, she wrote her concerns as well as the response from the Guardian on the matter:

*"Just how are the believers of the Canal Zone to be represented in the Central American development of the Faith. The Guardian wrote that they had no representation<sup>321</sup> and while I am not now living in the Zone I may someday, am concerned about those who now live there – the attitude of others here does not seem to consider the Zone part. The believers in the Zone have a part in our programs etc., but I mean that inclusive spirit which takes in all the believers in the Central American Area".*

The Inter America Committee clarified to Cora in their letter of December 17, the position of Canal Zone, which according to the Guardian, that, it should be treated as Washington:

*"Regarding Canal Zone, the Guardian wrote that this is to be treated the same as Washington. Wahsingtonians do not have a civil vote, but they do have a Baha'i vote just like any other believers...Therefore residents of the Canal Zone will elect their delegates to the future national conventions and these delegates will help to elect the future National Spiritual Assembly of the northern Latin Americas".*

## **THE ASSEMBLY**

Julie Regal reported to the Inter America Committee the new membership of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama after the departure of Louise to Colon on November 4, 1946. Very interesting is indeed her two-page report of the activities and requests for the Conference to come from the Committee. Julie has been a fine, thorough and faithful to all her Secretarial work and as a Baha'i:

*"Here is the registration card of a new member of our community, Higinio Malove, he is a*

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320. Seemingly it has been a sport club with branches in other Latin-American countries.

321. Emphasis added.

*young Ecuadorian. At the election during the feast last night, he was chosen to fill Louise's place in the Assembly. The membership of our Assembly at present is as follows:*

*Cora Oliver, Chairman  
Carlos Porras, Vice-Chairman  
Julie Regal, Secretary  
Blanca de Campos, Treasurer  
Elsa Rohrmoser, Recording Secretary  
Jose Vilas Granada  
Raquel Francois  
Arturo Cimorra  
Higinio Malove".*

The new changes in the community are also mentioned:

*"Jose and Beatriz Villalon have moved to Chorrera<sup>322</sup>, a nearby town. Rosa Ochoa was written a letter requesting us to consider her a friend of the Cause and not a member. A believer in the distant province of Chiriqui<sup>323</sup> has written us a fine letter telling us that he has been distributing Baha'i literature among his friends, which has provoked some interesting discussions".*

Julie wrote about the Assembly of Panama:

*"We had a fruitful Assembly meeting yesterday afternoon and a lovely feast last night. A letter to the Guardian is being written telling him of our activities and our spirit of harmony and zeal to serve. The believers in Colon have asked us to take part in a public meeting there on the 24<sup>th</sup>. We are planning to have all the Baha'is of this side go over there in a body on that day. This united effort, we believe, shall be productive of great results. Elsa Rohrmoser spent ten days with Louise last month and shall stay with her a week or so again soon. Also, various of the others make visits to Colon now and then to aid the teaching work there".*

And some matters related to the publicity for the forthcoming Conference:

*"In "Baha'i News" for October we notice that the National Publicity Committee has prepared a "Public Relations Kit". We should very much like one of these, for we believe we could use it to great advantage. On October 9 we wrote you, requesting direct contact with the Publicity and Radio Committees. Is there any objection to our writing to any national committee directly? Often if releases are not sent out immediately, they grow stale. We have a great field here with newspapers, radio, and store windows.*

*"A few days ago, we received some letters from Buenos Aires, and we note that certain people who plan to attend that Conference are specified as delegates, while others are not. Is this system to be followed in the case of our Conference? In the circular letter, which we mailed a month ago to all assemblies in our territory, we suggested to them that if no believer was able to attend from their community, they choose one person and help him with his expenses. Within a week we shall write these assemblies again and ask them what progress they have made along this line. As yet we have heard only from Nicaragua, which will be represented by two believers. It is*

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322. A town 25 kms to the north of Panama City.

323. Most possibly Jack Friedman of Boqueron.

*our earnest desire that all the countries of our territory be represented at the Conference.*

*"We have approved a design for a large window exhibit to be printed on heavy cardboard, for use during the Conference and afterward. Also, we are working on exhibits to be placed in the Center during that week. If you are able to contribute any exhibit material, will you please let us know as soon as possible. Also, can you supply us with any movie film? We earnestly hope that several of you will be able to attend, and take part in, our next Conference".*

## **MORE ON THE CONFERENCE**

Julie wrote again to the Committee's Secretary a week later, on November 11, regarding the Conference planning and naming favorite speakers for the Conference to attend:

*"Our Conference Committee met this morning and decided to ask the following people to be speakers at public evening meetings: Marcia Steward, Gayle Woolson, Dr. Walter Blomquist (Cuba), Flora Hottes, and Dr. Edris Rice-Wray. We earnestly hope that all of these persons can attend our Conference, though none has told us definitely that he is coming. As I have explained in my letter to Marcia enclosed, it is necessary for us to know our speakers and program early next month so that we can take advantage of all our opportunities for publicity at that time. If we do not work hard now on articles, exhibits, circulars, etc., we will have failed to take advantage of all our golden opportunities. We hope that you will help us in going ahead without delay. If it is possible, we hope that you will immediately encourage the above-named people to attend the Conference. Also, we fervently hope that Mrs. Collins can come again, even though she could not go to Buenos Aires. And, of course, we are counting on Loulie Matthews, Mr. Matthews, and Miss Crum. We have not heard of anyone else coming from the States".*

But the Committee had the other people in mind as speakers, as these names appear in handwriting over Julie's letter to the Committee, these were: Marcia, Blomquist, Gayle, Flora, Eucloses, Edris, Mason Remey, Loulie Matthews, Joyce and Evelyn.

## **THE PROGRAM**

Julie's letter to Marcia Steward has also the same date of November 11, where she gives a detailed program of speakers and urging Marcia to attend. She uses the wording of 'we are anxious' at least five times. This shows how much her dedication bared on the success of the Conference. She says:

*"...we are not going to let our best opportunity of the year pass by without being justly exploited".*

Her letter to Marcia is quite informative as to how the Conference is being structured:

*"It is wonderful to hear that your health is much improved. Your letter of the 31<sup>st</sup> has been received and will be read to our Assembly at their next meeting, on Sunday. However, our Committee for the Conference has met and discussed the program, and we are especially anxious that you should take part in it. We hope that being so near, in Costa Rica, it will not be too hard for you to come. We agree that it is of paramount importance that the various countries of our*

*territory be represented at their own Conference by native believers, but we are most anxious to have you, too.*

*“We would like you to be the Baha’i speaker at the closing session of the Conference, Friday, January 24. Also taking part on the program will be six-5-minute speakers, representing various races and classes in Panama and the Zone. We suggest that your address be about 20 minutes long. Vocal numbers will be rendered by one of our believers, an excellent tenor, Carlos Porras. The subject we have chosen is the same as that being used for public meetings in the States this year, “World Unity through World Faith”. We would suggest this as the general theme of all the public meetings of the Conference, but we would prefer that you would select one.*

*“Also, we would like you to speak at another evening meeting – possibly every night. Would this be too much? You see, we do not know yet on whom we can count to speak, and we have decided to use only star speakers, not just to strive for a variety. Today we are also writing to a few others whom we hope can attend and can speak. We are anxious to have our program lined up by December. The reason is that we are anxious to take full advantage of our wonderful opportunities for newspaper publicity during the Conference, but while it is in progress there shall not be much time for writing articles, nor many hands available. And we must write our own articles; the papers will accept them, but they will not send out their own reporters. Newspaper publicity during the Conference, we believe, is invaluable, and if we are not going to let our best opportunity of the year pass by without being justly exploited, we must write the articles up before the event.*

*“In addition to choosing the subject for the Conference’s public meetings, we would appreciate your selecting minor topics for the various evening: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. (Wednesday shall be for Baha’is only, and various distinguished visitors shall be asked to speak, informally). You may choose what evening you would prefer to speak, and if we are fortunate in securing several other speakers, they shall be placed on the program the other evenings. Also, some evening we may have two speakers. The second talk (it might be first on the program) need not necessarily follow the general subject. Other speakers are being asked their preference of subject. Another evening, the program might include the showing of slides or movies of Baha’i schools and activities.*

*“As soon as we know on which speakers we can count, we shall draw up our program and write these people to send us a short biography and a paragraph covering their speech, so our Publicity Committee can get immediately to work. It doesn’t matter if this paragraph covers only a small part of what they will say. As for yourself, we already have sufficient data on your biography. Also, we are anxious for clichés or photos, at least four.*

*“A study outline on the Administration, which has been used at Louhelen is being translated into Spanish and will be the basis of our study during the morning classes. These shall last from 9 until 12, beginning with 15 minutes of devotions. In addition to being a speaker at our evening public meetings, we are anxious for your participation in these classes.*

*“A reception for Baha’is and visitors will be held Sunday at 8 P.M., January 19, and a banquet is being considered for the following Saturday, to which would be invited prominent people of Panama and all those who have cooperated with us, including editors, professors, etc. Have you invited any newspapermen of other Central American countries?*

*“We hope that you will be able to travel through Central America on your way to Costa Rica*

*and stimulate the Baha'is there to send delegates to our Conference. And we eagerly wait to hear from you that you can be with us at the time".*

The Committee wrote back to Julie on the matter of the upcoming Conference to discuss various point raised in her letter:

*"We think it is fine for you to submit news releases about the Panama Conference to the A.P.<sup>324</sup> representative in Panama. We are writing to the National Publicity Committee asking them to send you a "Public Relations Kit" and notify Publicity and Radio Committees to please make their services available to you because of the bi-lingual condition in Panama.*

*"Regarding movie film, the I.A.C. voted at its meeting just closed to purchase for lending purposes only \$50.00 worth of film. This will include the beautiful film in color of Haifa and the sacred shrines and the also lovely color film of the Centenary. We are asking Charles Mason Remy to bring this with him to the Panama Conference, perhaps showing it a few times in the Islands en-route and using it again on his trip up through Central America and Mexico on his way home so that all the friends may have an opportunity to see something, which is so lovely and impressive. We hope that he may consent to do this. We hesitate a little about merely shipping it, since it is very easily destroyed, and transportation is very uncertain at present.*

*"The I.A.C. has recently learned that you were the one who last year made possible the coming of some of the Central American delegates to the Panama Conference. We wish to express our loving appreciation of this sacrifice on your part and to express the hope that the Communities will arise this year to assist their own delegates to come without special gifts from any of the devoted Panama friends. The Central Americans are no poorer than the South Americans and the distances are much less. We have asked dear Marcia Steward to talk up the Conference on her way south to San Jose.*

*"So far as we know, the North American visitors whom you may expect, include Charles Mason Remy, Mrs. Loulie Matthews and her husband, Marcia Steward and Gayle Woolson. Edris Rice-Wray has just notified us that she will not be able to come. We will give your urgent invitation to dear Milly Collins, when she returns. She is still absent on a special mission for the Guardian, which prevented her attending the Buenos Aires Conference as she had planned to do. Flore Hottes, just written us that she will not be leaving Uruguay until the end of January. She will then be doing travel teaching up the west coast, being the only one able to visit these communities this year. However, with Mason, Loulie, Marcia, Gayle, your own dear selves, and Louise from Colon, you really have a spiritual army capable of winning the hearts. We are suggesting to Evelyn Larson that she come over from San Jose to help with Youth work, help with the Conference, and, if possible, obtain suitable employment in Panama and settle there.*

*"We think that your suggestion about choosing the date of the Conferences a long time ahead, so that people can reserve time to attend them, is very good.*

*"Exhibit material up here seems to be limited to pictures of the temple of which you already have four of the best. There is an embargo on express packages so that we could not be certain of an arrival date. For this reason, we thought that the beautiful films might be the most helpful thing, if Mason can get them through all right.*

In the informative letter of the Inter America Committee of December 17, to Julie Regal,

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324. Associated Press



Elisabeth informs her of many points regarding the Panama Conference to be held in January 1947. She mentions that neither Loulie Mathews nor Amelia Collins would be able to participate in the Conference. Mrs. Collins have been called by the beloved Guardian for a special mission to Haifa. And Loulie, will forward some funds for the Conference, the excess of which should be contributed to the Publishing Committee. But Mason Remey would be attending the Conference. The Committee has already mailed:

*"...the films of the Haifa gardens and the Centenary in color"*

to be presented at the Conference.

*"These are lent especially for the Conference and are please, to be returned to us by insured mail immediately after...They will be used at the Buenos Aires Conference next year".*

The Inter America Committee has also:

*"...written to the centers in the northern zone, urging them to elect their delegates and to help them financially, if necessary, in order to have representation at the Panama Conference, for this will be the year when plans will be laid for the coming four years of great activity in preparation for electing the National Spiritual Assembly. Every center should have at least one representative. It would be good if you could write them indicating that they are to put on the programs this year; that it is in reality their Conference, not something got up to entertain them".*

Elisabeth mentions of the native Baha'is of South America:

*"... put on all the programs including the public ones in B.A.<sup>325</sup> and did a good job of it. Only one round table was directed by a pioneer. This gave them the feeling that they should shoulder their own responsibilities, and they are really trying to do it".*

She mentions that the delegates had made very good suggestion such as:

*"...interchange of teachers, sending a student to the Baha'i summer school from each country each year, starting a National Fund for teaching purposes, which they have done and made a respectable beginning".*

The Committee informs Julie:

*"...that Gerardo Vega has been elected delegate from San Jose. Vega is intelligent. He might be a good man to work into the program".*

Elisabeth notifies her that:

*"In a couple of days we will be sending you special material for the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the beloved Master, followed by the celebration of the beginning of the Guardianship of the 40<sup>th</sup> day, should furnish a spiritual dynamic for the first year of the new seven year plan".*

She also writes that a special publicity kit is ready to be sent, which has been prepared by Horace Holley and William Henning:

*"...Can you share one with Colon? The National Radio Committee has a series just out of dramatic presentations, which are not bad. These are lent for use and must then be returned.*

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325. Buenos Aires

*We are trying to get a set for you. During the Conference, I think the interview type of program, with questions and perhaps answers planned ahead, is the most effective and interesting thing”.*

Julie wrote back to Elisabeth rather a long but enthusiastic letter in late December, telling her how anxious they are to have the complete representation of all the Central American countries in their Conference and for this they have made a special fund, etc. Indeed, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama has planned a wonderful Conference with much sacrifice to make it a total success. Indeed, such a spirit of love, cooperation and full of enthusiasm, made it possible for the Conference to be such a success. She outlined everything about their plans and activities. She coordinated and managed single handedly almost all aspects of the Conference:

*“Our Assembly ardently desires that all of the centers in our territory be represented at the Second Baha’i Latin American Conference of Panama, and as we are convinced that most of them will be unable to send a delegate without financial help, we have established a fund for this purpose. Your truly is authorized to accept contributions to this fund and to spend the money at her discretion for travel fare, hotel expense, etc., in assuring the representation of as many centers of our territory as possible at the Conference. Last year Gayle told us of the financial inability of these people; this year Marcia has done so. Only Nicaragua has written that believers from there will attend, and indirectly we have heard that someone is coming from Costa Rica. Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador have elected their delegates, but inform us that they contribute anything at all to their expenses. If we can solve this problem, the delegate will come. Jamaica says that they can contribute something but will need help. None of the other countries have yet answered our letters. Except the Dominican Republic, which I shall mention later.*

*“Our special fund boasts an even \$1000, which at the very least will assure the representation of all of Central America, Mexico, and two of the Antilles. Perhaps some countries not yet heard from will be able to send delegates at their own expense, so that our funds can stretch further. At the most, we believe, we are short about \$900. We hope you will approve our using \$250, which Loulie Mathews sent us “for the Conference” for this purpose. We hope that these funds will prove sufficient, but if they should not, we should very much appreciate your helping us to attain complete representation of our territory at our Conference in the same way that help was given to South America.*

*“Elena Marsella writes from the Dominican Republic that she is the only one there who could leave her work to come to the Conference. She has saved enough money for the trip, but after January she can no longer be sure of her employment. So, being a Baha’i teacher, she will stay until the Inter-America Committee considers her work in the Dominican Republic finished, meanwhile living off her savings. We would be happy to finance all, or part of her trip, this leaving untouched her savings.*

*“I will write at once to Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Jamaica, offering to give the necessary help and putting plans underway for the coming of these delegates. Meanwhile, we think it would be well if you would write to those centers, which have not written to us, and to Elena Marsella. We last wrote to them on December 1<sup>st</sup>, asking them, in case they could not send a delegate, to inform us of the maximum amount they could contribute to a delegate’s expenses.*

*“Should you be able to assist us with financing delegates, how would you like to do this? It is*

*suggested that perhaps the simplest and safest way would be to send the funds to our Assembly. Then they would be used only after our own resources are exhausted, as needed, and the balance would be returned to you.*

*“At last, the Conference program has been approved. Each evening we shall have three 10–15-minute talks (no longer). The first two shall be by Central Americans, the last by Marcia, Gayle or Artemus. The final number shall be the showing of movie reel. In the morning study classes, we shall follow an outline on Administration used at Louhelen one year, but ample opportunity shall be given the delegates to discuss their experiences, opinions, and problems. Discussion directors every morning shall be Central Americans.*

*“At our regular weekly meeting last Thursday, we were fortunate to have the use of a movie projector and the services of a skilled operator, so we showed the films, which you have sent us for the Conference. What a treat they were! The Group in Colon has also been able to secure a machine and skilled operator, so the films have been loaned to them for two meetings this week. However, we are taking supreme care of these precious films and will return them to you immediately after the Conference, by insured mail.*

*“We are going to make eight posters, following the design of one of the exhibits prepared by the Visual Education Committee. Posters are more practical here than exhibits. We are thrilled that Mason and Artemus are coming.*

*“The closing session of the Conference will be held in the main hall of the Inter-American University, same as last year. Various outstanding people representing different races who live in Panama, will speak, and lastly Marcia will give a Baha’i address.*

*“The following night, Saturday, a banquet shall be given in one of the hotels for all the Baha’is and delegates, to which will also be invited 50 to 75 key people of Panama – men of the press and radio, professors, businessmen, etc., who have cooperated with us. Perhaps this shall be the first such affair on the Isthmus attended by people of various races and social strata.*

*“Two weeks ago, a joint public meeting was held by the believers of both sides of the Isthmus in the Government Building of Colon. A delegation of twelve from this side went over together in a body, in order to attend. Six 5-minute talks were given, upon the theme “True Civilization”. The Governor of the Province was present, and afterwards reiterated his willingness to aid us in any way he can. Such a wonderful spirit of enthusiasm and happiness prevailed, that the meeting was a great success. Its primary purpose was to provide a united endeavor in teaching the Cause in Colon.*

*“We shall anxiously await further word from your regarding plans and suggestions for the Conference. Just heard from Haiti. They cannot contribute either. We shall write to them.”*

## **MORE ON INCORPORATION**

Inter America Committee wrote to Julie on November 15, discussing several issues related to the Local Spiritual Assembly incorporation, which still lies on limbo:

*“We have learned from the N.S.A. that the papers you forwarded relative to incorporating*

*the Cause in Panama have been sent to the Legal Committee for review. We do not have them at hand for ready reference, but it is our recollection that they referred to approval of your use of the New York By-laws, which were, of course, approved long ago, and that some reference was made to the decree under which you proposed to incorporate in Panama. I do not recall seeing a complete copy of your application to the government written in Spanish and with an accompanying translation in English. I find that this is the only thing, which really goes to the N.S.A. for approval. You will find in Baha'i World the approved petition form. The only special point in this seems to be to try to incorporate the Assembly rather than the Community. No one can present a reason for this except that the first North American incorporation happened to be in this form, the Guardian approved it, and it has become standard form for the States when it can be done that way.*

*"If there is some good reason why it is desirable to incorporate in Panama, without waiting a couple of months for the legal department to get around to reviewing your petition, Latin American countries have been permitted to go ahead. If you are using the New York By-laws and the form approved in Baha'i World, adapted, of course, to the laws of Panama, and if Assembly can use its own good judgment about whether to go ahead at once, or type out the application in Spanish and English and sent it to the N.S.A., who will send it in turn to the legal department, whereupon in a couple of months you may expect to receive a reply. If you act without this review, please take very special care. It is amazing how many silly mistakes some North American attorneys make in following a very simple form. Latin American attorneys may be more accurate but check your petition carefully".*

The last letter for the year was written by the Louhelen Baha'i School addressed to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama on December 31, 1946.

To: Our Brothers and Sisters

In the Faith of Baha'u'llah!

We count it an honor to greet you upon this most significant occasion of the Baha'i hemispherical conference you are inaugurating at the crossing-point of the world's highways.

Our hearts are hastening over the spiritual routes of Baha'i love to join hands with your minds and spirits as all of turn to Baha'u'llah for divine inspiration. We must reinforce our efforts with the realization of the significance of the Guardianship and of our relative place within the framework of our glorious Faith.

We, who are enjoying the privilege of sharing a true and heavenly companionship at the Louhelen Baha'i School here in the United States, are so overjoyed to stand with you at the moment you are initiating the first step in the completion of Baha'u'llah's institutions, which will form a frontier through the western hemisphere stretching from pole to pole.

These spiritual assemblies will act as dynamos for our united teaching efforts as we march forward with instant response to our beloved Guardian.

With deepest Baha'i love to you, we are,

Unitedly in His Service, Signed by 30 of the winter session.

## CHAPTER IX – 1947

### SECOND INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE

The Inter America Committee wrote to Julie Regal on 4 of January answering to her questions:

*“In answer to your questions: yes, it is quite all right to use the \$250.00 contributed by Loulie Matthews in whatever way will accomplish the most good in promoting the coming conference of the northern Latin Americas. We do not have a fund to help in sending delegates, since none has been contributed in this case, but we had already put our heads together on how we might be able to help a bit. We do have a small fund to help with regional projects, and, since the northern region of Central America, comprising Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, has not been able to get together for consultation, due to disturbed conditions in some of those countries, we had voted to send a regional representative from each country to Panama, both for regional consultation and to make sure that their countries are included in the Conference. As it changed, the delegates elected in Honduras and El Salvador are regional committee members in those countries...Drafts of \$100.00 each for passage have already been sent to Natalia Chavez, Ofelia Montalvo and Sr. Grundig. This should be sufficient for the three, especially if there is help on housing and perhaps some meals at the other end.*

*“Mexico City has been trying hard to finance their delegate. They figured that \$400.00 would be needed and have raised \$300.00 in the Community. With \$100.00 more they can make it. Out of your fund would you like to send \$100.00 to Sr. Carlos Vergara...earmarking it to complete fund for their delegate to Panama Conference? ...The South American Communities are also poor, but all members made great sacrifices. The plan worked out well.*

*“Regarding the Antilles, would suggest wiring those centers you wish to assist, sending by night letters an offer of free passage to one native delegate, and requiring answer by wire. I believe that others than the pioneers would become available under those conditions. Attendance of native delegates would mean much more to these countries. The B.A. Conference went over because it was genuinely a conference of native delegates, run by them instead of merely for them.*

*“Sra. Viva Lismore, Havana, Cuba would make a delegate, is of much capacity. She was born in Paraguay on parents originally European but has lived in Cuba since her marriage. She is one of the more recently born Baha'is, but has been teaching the classes there, and has a lot of fire, enthusiasm and capacity.*

*“A letter has just come from Gayle Woolson saying she feels she should give up coming to*

*Panama, because of certain conditions in Venezuela. We have already cabled her, urgently requesting her to go to the Conference, sending her a prepaid round trip ticket from Caracas to Balboa and return, and we think she will get there all right, so don't worry if you receive a letter similar to the one that came to us".*

Julie Regal wrote in her memoirs:

*"Our first Latin-American Conference having been such a splendid success, a second conference was called by the Inter-America Committee, to be held in January 1947, exactly one year later, and also in Panama".*

But this time, the scale was quite smaller and more realistic, as it was only for the Central America, Mexico<sup>326</sup> and the Caribbean. Julie wrote:

*"No funds were sent to us this time...and knowing full well that very few delegates would come from the neighboring countries if they had to pay their own way".*

Julie proposed to the Assembly a fund for travel fares, to which all the Baha'is could contribute:

*"Upon my assurance that I knew for certain of persons who would contribute sufficiently, this motion carried and I was given charge of this fund...We soon had sufficient (\$800 plus needed). Louise alone had promised me all that and more".*

As the Secretary and the Treasurer of the Congress, Julie sent out letters and wires to all those countries who supposed to send their delegates, informing them the their flight expenses will be paid to Panama. All the countries were represented except the Dominican Republic:

*"...which sent a cablegram stating that the delegate would come if his wife's way were paid too", recalled Julie, who never answered to such a proposition!*

Besides many delegated, several distinguished Baha'is attended the Conference among them was Mason Remy who:

*"...had many interesting things to tell us about them and about his association with Abdu'l-Baha".*

Julie wrote: *"...also Gayle Woolson and Marcia Stewart came".*

Marcia stayed behind for couple of months and always gave nice talks on the Wednesday evening meetings. Julie hosted some delegates in her home.

And for the final night of the Conference Julie recalls:

*"Our Assembly also decided to hold a banquet as the crowning finale of the Conference, and I was given responsibility for making all arrangements".*

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326. A note is added here that geographically, Mexico is not in the Central America, it is in Meso-America. And Panama due to the Canal, which divides the continent in two, one part in Central and the other part in South America, also is not considered as part of Central America per se. Central American countries are Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Therefore, it is called: Meso America, Central America and Panama.

Hotel Colombia on the Bolivar Square, which was situated in the oldest quarter of the city, was the chosen site says Julie. She recorded for that auspicious occasion:

*"Fifty-one persons were invited and came. They included the Publisher of the "Star & Colon, an ex-ambassador, and university professors, as well as rich and slum-dwellers, black, white, Indians and Chinese, Panamanians, Zonians and North-Americans, Baha'is and non-Baha'is and delegates from all the Central America, Mexico, Cuba, Jamaica and Haiti. Probably Panama had never before witnessed a gathering of such diversity".*

The expense of this banquet was shared between two friends only, and of course most probably it was herself and Louise who had made such a promise. And she also wrote:

*"...She and I decided to seating arrangements and chose the chairman and speakers. Herself she placed near the end of the table – away from the center and notables. But she insisted I should sit beside the publisher of the Star and Herald, Tomas Gabriel Duque..."*

She wrote:

*"The publicity we received in the newspaper for this Conference was equal" to what it had been the year before".*

All the articles for the occasion were again written by Julie herself, who practically did most of the arrangements of the Conference, though her name did not appear anywhere. Then Julie recalls the reprimand she received from Gayle, wrote Julie:

*"The Conference over" "Gayle...turned upon me severely, coldly, sternly demanding that I promise that the next year I would do less of the Conference work and let others do more".*

Her unfair words were quite hurting, probably even she did not realize how dreadfully she wounded the heart of this young pioneer who was given the task of the whole arrangements and trying to do her best for the Conference to be as successful, again spending her savings to its promotion with abnegation, without expecting any kind of recognition. If one is passive, would be criticized because of inactivity and sloth, and if is active would also be criticized, as she was for not giving others the chance of service! Such lessons should be remembered always. Unfortunately once the gossip and backbiting is not filtered in one's self, then the result is unfortunate:

*"Her accusation I considered unfair, and with what little breath I could command I strongly defended myself. But she ignored my denial and repeated her demand..."*

To Julie, the association of Gayle with Cora had influenced her to react like this, otherwise there were other ways of expressing one's displeasure or giving some advice. Soon after the Conference Julie noticed:

*"Cora harbored a deep animosity towards me (despite all of Millie Collins' efforts). It created serious difficulties for me through all the rest of my days in Panama, including Conference and banquet arrangements, and was eventually the reason for my leaving Panama".*

From the Minutes of the Committee, it becomes clear that Mrs. Amelia Collins would also be present at the Conference of Panama, and Gayle Woolson would remain in Panama for some time after adjuring the Conference.



Julie informed the Inter America Committee that delegates from Central American countries are participating in the Conference. And a letter from Haiti indicated that there will be no one from their community to participate in the Conference. The same kind of response was received from the Dominican Republic. All were especially happy to learn of Gayle Woolson's coming. Indeed, she was a star in any community she served:

*"A million thanks for your prompt reply and very helpful suggestions, which were received today. Immediately, I sent a wire to Puerto Rico, Haiti and Dominican Republic, following your suggestions. Cuba has indicated that they can contribute something, and I have written to them, asking how much. Also, am expecting a reply soon from Jamaica. It is good to learn that Mexico has raised \$300 (American money I presume). This according to our calculations should be sufficient for their delegate. I wired them this information and have also written a letter. Round trip from Mexico City by air is \$225. Hotel and meals for eight days should not run over \$50. Not a first-class hotel, but a good one. However, I said we were willing to help if they need it.*

*"With the \$100 draft you have sent them, Honduras needs no more for a round trip by air, El Salvador needs \$18.80 and Guatemala \$33.20. I just have written these delegates. To the letter too, we will send drafts for the difference, as they have already promised to give them a round trip. They say they are unable to contribute anything, and I rather take them at their word than to squeeze them. We are overjoyed that Gayle is coming. Also, we are delighted with slides; both sets have arrived safely and will be taken care of with greatest precautions, and returned by insured mail immediately after the Conference...*

*We have secured radio time gratis on one of the leading stations, Saturday before the Conference, 9:15 – 9:30 P.M., and Sunday through Saturday of the Conference week, 1:15 – 1:30 P.M., during the siesta hour. We are counting on Artemus to organize these programs. We are working hard to make this Conference far eclipse the last."*

The Inter America Committee were quite keen on the Panama Conference. Elisabeth wrote to Julie, indicating '12 points consultative task' for the Conference delegates to be discussed and suggestions gathered to be sent to the Committee:

*"Your program sounds wonderful. Congratulations! ...Hope that Ruhyyih Khanum's letter on the history of the Guardianship came in time for your celebration. It might be interesting to take up at one of the sessions for Baha'is only, as it came too late to get out translations to the purely Spanish speaking centers. ...We are glad that you have enjoyed the films. They are the loveliest ones available...The Inter-America Committee asks that the Panama Conference Committee will, please submit to the attending delegates for discussion and suggestions the following 12 points relating to general participation in regional work for the coming year. We ask that their considered judgment on these matters and their suggestions be sent to us for our guidance.*

- 1. Size of regions from point of view of efficiency.*
- 2. Committee locations with possible quorums in one city.*
- 3. Cooperation with assembly extension teaching.*
- 4. How to finance some projects through the regional committees themselves.*
- 5. Possible directors in the Northern Latin American and the South American areas, who could coordinate the work, or overall committees in each area, the outgrowth of which will be the major teaching committees after 1951. (Please do not choose the*

*latter without actual location and personnel in mind, as it is possible to have a principle or theory that is quite correct but perhaps premature to carry out).*

6. *Wise choice of goal cities.*

7. *Use of literature budgets to the best advantage.*

8. *Ways of stimulating the sale of literature.*

9. *A considered view of what the groups should be able to expect of their Regional Committees, such as general letters containing regional news, publicity helps, itinerant teacher helps, consultation on existing problems, etc.*

10. *Setting up of local and regional funds, bearing in mind the problem of losses from monetary exchange between countries.*

11. *Suggestions for the gradual transfer of responsibility to the friends in Latin America in order that no break in the flow of work be incurred, when South American and Northern Latin American National Assemblies are formed in April, 1951.*

12. *Immediate advices to the Inter-America Committee itself.*

*“Answers on these points will be taken into consideration in formulating a Regional Committee policy throughout Latin America. When the answers and suggestions have been received from the Panama Conference. The Inter-America Committee will send out a form letter to all centers, based upon these. It is generally known, of course, by the pioneers from the United States, that in the north regional committees are responsible for assisting groups until they attain assembly status, for passing upon applications for membership in all regions outside the civil limits of the cities where there are assemblies, for assisting weak assemblies, and for cooperating with assemblies on extension teaching projects. Their general purpose is to promote and coordinate teaching the Cause in all areas outside the jurisdiction of the active assemblies.*

## **IAC REQUESTS**

The Inter America Committee recorded their requests from the Panama Conference in their Minutes of January 12-13:

*“...to request flash light pictures of the banquet in such size and quality as can be reproduced effectively for Baha’i publication and slides, also ask them to send us joyous news items, to share with us any recent message from the guardian and request them to provide hotel accommodation for the Mexican delegate”.*

The Committee added:

*“...to appoint the two secretaries to draw up a message for the Panama Conference and include our hearty congratulations”.*

The concern also was the proper functioning of the Conference in order to get into its true purpose:

*“...to send Julie the following points to emphasize regarding elections during morning classes:*

1. *The sacred obligation of elections and abstinence from mentioning personalities.*
2. *Observation throughout the year of worthy service of individuals without consideration of either personalities of friendship on the one hand or prejudice and dislikes on the other.*
3. *Effort on the part of the assemblies to provide written notices of the time and place of the election about two weeks in advance to each registered believer and to make such calls as may be necessary to re-inspire activity.*
4. *To notify the friends that the N.S.A. is not permitted to honor other dates of election than April 21 or the evening of the 20, from sundown to sundown, as the Guardian has stipulated this as a universal practice.*
5. *Stress the need of sending us immediately their filled out forms regarding elections.*
6. *to follow the enclosed procedure.*

On January 13, Julie sent out the following "Memo" to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador:

*"Dear Baha'i friends,*

*To assure the participation of your delegate to the Second Latin American Conference of Panama, which is of utmost importance to us, and as you have indicated that up to the latest days, the bank draft has not yet come to you from the Inter-American Committee, this afternoon, we have paid to the office of the Pan American Airways a round trip passage for your delegate. There is an advantage to pay here for the ticket as it is free of all taxes. We ask you that when and if you get the promised bank draft to bring it along with you or send it by mail, as well as the bank draft that we have sent you. We are all ready to receive your delegate. Marcia Steward is here and is helping us marvelously with the Conference program. This coming Conference will shadow the last year's Conference".*

And the following was added for the IAC:

*"Mexico has wired us that they have raised 400 pesos (\$80 U.S.). As it is late, we have paid for their delegate's trip here, wiring them this information and requesting them to bring the \$80 to us. Jamaica's delegate offered \$50, and the community another \$50. We are giving Cuba full help. None of the other islands can send a delegate".*

A very moving and inclusive message to the Panamanian Conference<sup>327</sup> was dispatched from the Inter America Committee on January 14, 1947, where the Committee inspires the delegates to consult on the proclamation and expansion of the Cause, giving them list of subjects to consult upon and consults with them on different matters and asks them to consider these while returning to their countries and consult with their groups. Very inspiring message said:

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327. It was written in Spanish, and the above is its translation by the Committee.

*"Beloved friends of Central America, Mexico and Antilles:*

*"We are sending you our congratulations and deep love in this important day of spiritual history of the West. We pray that the experiences of the delegates in this Conference would be the cause of great inspiration for our brothers [and sisters] in each part of the Northern Latin America; the cause of solution to the urgent problems, which prevent the rapid expansion of the Faith; the cause of creating of a new way of fraternal unity, spiritual and total cooperation over which could be edified the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Central America, Mexico and Antilles that would be elected by April 1951.*

*"In this crucial time, our hearts and souls are with you and our sincere prayers will accompany you. We pray that the spirit of your friendly consultation will unite and solve any problem. We hope that the united effort of every Baha'i will lead this year to the formation of Spiritual Assemblies in each country, as you and ample foundation of representation for your own National Assembly independent from the National Assembly of the United States & Canada.*

*"The hour has come to answer to the call of the beloved Guardian of the sacred Cause to rise for the love of Baha'u'llah and serve the humanity. The time has come where all the Baha'is of the Latin America should fulfill their highest destiny by proclaiming to all parts the healing divine message. Today you are the Baha'i teachers and will teach this holy Cause only in your own countries but later on, in all over the world. You are the pioneers of a movement of great importance in the world, without which the humanity will perish.*

*"The hour has come for the masses to rise up and learn about this Cause. The indications are obvious from each side. For example, recently an article was published in one of the Chilean newspapers and the Spiritual Assembly of Santiago received 45 letters from people who were asking for more information. There are small groups in 10 different cities who want to study the Faith. An entire family asked permission to enroll all its members in this noble Cause".*

The Committee, in order to inspire the delegates, added the recent letter they have received from Gayle Woolson mentioning her successes in South America:

*"Mrs. Gayle Woolson wrote us on past October 18: "The recent success found in Quito during the last three weeks was so overwhelming that I am feeling like a person in a dream. Baha'u'llah opened all the doors and hundreds of Ecuadorians from the President and his wife to the poor Indigenous person listened to the Message of the Beloved through the conferences, the newspaper and radio. I was invited to present the Cause in 9 different clubs and other groups and received the cooperation of the city's six newspapers and assistance of many capable and fine Ecuadorians. The general receptivity surprised me and showed me that the masses are ready to listen to the Message of Baha'u'llah. The formation of a spiritual assembly in Quito is ensured.*

*"When Mrs. Woolson arrived in Quito, there were only 3 active Baha'is and some others that new something about the Faith. When she left, there were 10 active Baha'is. This spiritual miracle was repeated later on last year both in Cali and Medellin, Colombia when, Mrs. Caswell made some contacts. Mrs. Woolson visited Cali and left there a community of 17 declared adults and 2 youth; among them one renown medical doctor and great master of the Masons. In December she visited Medellin where a Baha'i, called Mr. Francisco Orrego Restrepo, who had a club of some students. And after her visit, she left behind the fourth assured Assembly in*

Colombia.

*“The native Baha’is take their part in the activities in each country, not only in their own city but in some others too. For example, some friends in Guayaquil went to Quito every now and then to plant seeds of which now there are fruits. Hascle Cornbelth also helped them there. In El Salvador, the Baha’is sisters Ofelia and Clara Luz Montalvo, presented the book of “The New Era” and a special document to Dr. Guerrero, president of the Universal Court of Justice and his wife; and Mrs. Marcia Steward could greet him during her recent trip to the Central America. Dr. Guerrero said to the Baha’is [who visited him], “I feel totally united with you, can you give me the honor of considering me from now on as a member of your organization?”*

*“Mr. Victor Raul Acosta, the Secretary of the Montevideo Assembly wrote and gave us a useful suggestion and that was to establish a Baha’i school where the friends to become improved as teachers of the beloved Cause. The delegates at the Buenos Aires Conference consulted upon this suggestion, resulting with starting in this day two such a schools in South America, one close to Buenos Aires and the other close to Santiago, where the first Assembly of Chile founded by the sacrifices of dear Marcia Steward. Today, there are three Assemblies in Chile, because of the work of Marcia, Artemus Lamb and some other local friends. We hope that the friends in the Northern Latin America would also establish schools to prepare native friends to become teachers of the Faith.*

*“The members of the Inter America Committee ask the delegates to also consult over some issues concerning the proclamation of the Faith. For example, we need a bulletin, which would be doing a correct comparison between the Baha’i Faith and all other theories and philosophies, especially the Communism, where the Baha’is can clearly see that in their Faith, they have the fountain of the all truth, free from egotism and wrong and limited concepts that are found in all the economic theories and philosophies. In such a bulletin, we do not want to criticize anyone on the contrary we want to appreciate what is good and real. The fact that every Baha’i should know that in the books of his own Movement, he has the true explanation of every important matter given by the Divine Authority, practical for its era”.*

The Inter America Committee expected a full consultation of the delegates in Panama Conference for similar opportunities:

*“We also need your consultation over the opportunities to establish in one of your countries a Publishing Center, because you will have such a center in your own country one day. We would like to know if the published books in such a country would be cheaper than what we have from Buenos Aires. When there is a price surge in Buenos Aires, it affects the rise on the Baha’i book prices in all the countries. Only up to 15<sup>th</sup> of March this year books of lower prices could be purchased. We need the urge of raising the prices of the books and we cannot prevent it under today’s circumstances. Those delegates who want to help their Assemblies by purchasing books of cheaper prices and do not have the sufficient money to do so, they can reserve them by leaving an order with Mrs. Cora Oliver, the chairman of the Distributing Committee of Panama. She will keep the orders up to March 15 and the treasurer of the Assembly can send a bank draft later on.*

*“We also ask you to consult on the practical methods of the Regional Committees. We see that you do not have the opportunity to get together and consult on the regional problems. Is it*

possible for the coming year appoint one person from each country for the regional committee, but the chairman of the committee in the country where he lives, he would appoint three members in order to consult together? Any believer knows that a friendly and inclusive consultation will carry more light than the ideas of one only person. We plead you to consult on the following 12 points:

1. *The long distance of the regions, is it effective?*
2. *The name of the cities where we should appoint regional committee members. From which city of which country should we appoint the chairman of each region?*
3. *Cooperation of the Regional Committee with the Assemblies in teaching endeavor of in areas outside of the limits of their cities.*
4. *What are the best ways to manage the expenses of the regional projects?*
5. *What do you think of the chairmen to coordinate the work of the Regional Committee of the North and of the South?*
6. *Choose the cities where logically the new assemblies should be established in them during the coming year. (At least one city in each region. This should be a city of a country that travelling through it would be free).*
7. *How the Regional Committees should use their literature?*
8. *Methods of selling more books to the friends and to the public.*
9. *What should the groups expect from their Regional Committees? For example:*
  - a. *[To receive] letters containing news from other regions.*
  - b. *Publicity*
  - c. *Helping the Travel Teachers*
  - d. *Consult on the problems of the day, etc.*
10. *System arrangement of Local and Regional Funds under the actual circumstances of great differences of monetary values in different countries.*
11. *Practical suggestions on methods to give more responsibility to propagate the beloved Faith by the local friends, in such a way that when April 1951 arrives, there would not be any interruption in the continued progress of the teachings.*
12. *The way to send urgently all the practical suggestions to the Inter-America Committee.*

*“We also ask the delegates to consult on education of the communities over the correct methods of running the elections so that these would be totally free from any personal influence and fulfill the spirit of pure service.*

*“The International Archives Committee pleads to you to help them with three copies of chosen photos of your Assemblies and of your Communities this year, which is the start of the New Seven Year Plan. Some communities have already sent us such photos, but the majority has not yet done it. The Archives Committee would also like to receive all good photos that show the Baha’i activities in different countries. The Committee will arrange this the way that all the Latin Countries can see the examples. The Committee would also like to receive from the believers, the letters of the beloved Guardian that he as responded to the individuals. The International Committee will carefully keep these historic letters until such time the National Assembly is formed in future with their own committees and Archives, capable to keep such important*

*documents. It is possible to send such letters and photographs to the Inter-America Committee marked for the attention of 'International Archives Committee'.*

*"Our ardent prayers will accompany you. We hope that you will take from this Conference unforgettable inspiration, which would help you to proclaim the beloved Faith throughout the American countries of the North with new and marvelous ways.*

*We are forever your affectionate brothers [and sisters],  
The Committee"*

## **CONFERENCE PROGRAMME**

The Local Assembly of Panama prepared a very interesting A-6 size booklet in Spanish for the Conference, where it had only 8 pages inclusive. On the cover it indicated:

*The Second Latin-American Baha'i Congress  
19 – 25 January – 1947 - Panama, R. de P.*

### **PAGE 1**

On the first page it announced the Public Meetings at the Baha'i Center, Tivoli Avenue, No. 10, Apartment 18, from 8 – 9:30 P.M. following with the statement of *'Free Entrance'*.

The itinerary of the Conference was given systematically for the whole week, starting with Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January, and the theme of the speeches was *"A World Order, Organic or superficial?"* And the speakers were:

*Raquel Francois from Panama  
David Escalante from Honduras  
Marcia Steward pioneer at large*

It also announced presentation of a film reel of Haifa, Palestine, where explanations to be given by *Charles Mason Remey*. It is interesting that the name *'Charles'* was Hispanized as *'Carlos'*!

### **PAGE 2**

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> of January the theme was *"Peace and Universal brotherhood"*, and the talk givers were:"

*Ofelia Montalvo from El Salvador  
Roberto Hooker from Nicaragua  
Gayle Woolson pioneer at large*

The film reel to be shown was the Centenary of 1944 in Wilmette, Illinois in full color.

### PAGE 3

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> of January the theme was *"The Guardianship Institution as a transcendental symbol of the World Unity"*. Those to speak were:

*Antonio Bonilla from Nicaragua*  
*W.A.W. Mitchell, from Jamaica*  
*Artemus Lamb from Chile*

The film reel to show was *"The Centenary in Wilmette, Illinois"*.

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> of January the program's theme was *"The Real Significance of Detachment, or the Heroic Life of a New Day"*. The speakers were:

*Jose Granada from Panama*  
*Alejandro Baldizon from Guatemala*  
*Gayle Woolson pioneer at large*

The film reel shown was *"The First Baha'i Congress of South America in Buenos Aires"*.

The booklet announced at the bottom of the program: *"Singing every night by tenor CARLOS PORRAS"*, following in smaller letters a quotation from Abdu'l-Baha saying: *"This is a new cycle of human power"* – *Abdu'l-Baha*

Closing up session was held at the 'Aula Maxima' at the University of Inter-American on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> of January at 8:30 P.M. Again, it announced: *'Free Entrance'*, followed by:

On the Closing up session of the Latin American Baha'i Congress of Panama, there was a presentation by different non-Baha'i representatives of various races that have materially contributed to the Culture and the Progress of Panama and of America. These topics were presented by:

*"Chinese Philosophy on World Unity"* by *Dr. Tu Yuen-Tan, the Minister of China to Panama.*

*"The Indigenous contribution to the Culture and Progress of America"* (the speaker will be announced)

*"Education for World Unity"*, a talk by *Baltazar Isaza Calderon, Professor at Latin-American University*

*"Some Spiritual Consideration for Education"*, a speech by *Harold Sosted, Superintendent of the Instruction Division of the Canal Zone Schools*

*"World Unity for World Brotherhood"* talk by the Editor of the *Panama Tribune, Sidney A. Young*

*"A Re-evaluation of the Historic Process of the Modern Terminologies"*, talk by *Marcia Steward, Baha'i Pioneer*

*Songs by Carlos Porras and Emilio Cadet, Alcides M. Davila pianist, and*

*Students of the National Conservatory*



At the bottom of this second page, a quotation from Baha'u'llah adorns by:

*"Ye are the leaves of the same tree and fruits of the same garden." – Baha'u'llah*

#### **PAGE 4**

On the fourth page of the program-pamphlet it is printed *"Expressions on the Baha'i Faith"* starting with the illustrious comments of Queen Mary of Rumania, following by what Leon Tolstoy has said and finally words of Eduardo Benes the President of then Czechoslovakia.

#### **PAGE 5**

There is the announcement of "Study Classes" at the Baha'i Center, Tivoli Avenue, # 10, Apartment #18, on weekdays from Monday to Friday between 8:30 A.M. to 12 M. Claiming the following:

*"Building the New Social Order is our Responsibility".*

The coordinator of the session was Natalia Chavez from Honduras, and Administrative Counsellor is Artemus Lamb from Chile.

Then there is a comment on the Christian Faith of the divinity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Bible being the word of God, and that the Virgin Mary was immaculate mother of Jesus, and St. Peter as the Prince of Apostles, are all accepted by the Baha'i Faith. And finally, "The one who does not accept Christ cannot become a Baha'i".

#### **PAGE 6**

There is an explanation of the First Congress of the Isthmus in Panama a year ago was the very first Congress of the Latin America, which inspired Argentina to hold their first Congress in the past November 8, 1946. And then it describes the primary reason of such a Congress is bring together the Baha'is of the Latin America to know each other and inter-change their ideas and experiences. This object of this kind of international meetings is to prepare the path for the election of the First National Spiritual Assembly of Central America, Mexico and Antilles in 1951. This is why in such a conference people from Central and South America as well as the United States have gathered together.

At the bottom, there is a quotation of Abdu'l-Baha on the importance of Panama that it will unite East and West, North and South.

#### **PAGE 7**

On the seventh page of the invitation program/pamphlet there is a quotation from Abdu'l-Baha on the historical day and era that we are living; following by the Baha'i Message as the Master describes saying *'the Baha'i message is a call of unity of religions and not an invitation*

*to a new religion, it is not even a new open path to the immortality.... is the same old path cleaned from impurities of man-made imagination and superstitions...is a path that today has become an ample road radiant for those who seek sincerity and enter in it convinced and see that the word of God is the same, even though through many preachers. Abdu'l-Baha*

## **PAGE 8**

On the eight and last page, there is an outline of the twelve fundamental Baha'i principles, which have been established over eighty years by Baha'u'llah.

## PROGRAM IN ACTION

There are Minutes taken from the Panama Conference held from 19 – 25 January 1947, which are quite interesting to see and compare the kind of activities held then in different Central American countries, delegates participated, and consultations conducted. The following is a report of the Second Latin-American Baha'i Congress of Panama, where interestingly shows how this was conducted, who participated, who were the delegates of each country, who were the speakers, etc.:

*“The Second Latin-America Baha'i Congress of Panama held from January 19<sup>th</sup> through the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1947, was a joyous, fruitful and impressive occasion with the following friends present representing Mexico, all of Central America, Canal Zone, Cuba, Jamaica, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile and the United States:*

- *Sr. Carlos Vergara* -Mexico City, Mexico
- *Sr. Alejandro Baldizon* -Guatemala City Guatemala
- *Srta. Ofelia Montalvo* -San Salvador, El Salvador
- *Dr. David Escalante* -San Salvador, El Salvador
- *Sra. Natalia Chavez* -Tegucigalpa, Honduras
- *Dr. Antonio Bonilla* -Managua, Nicaragua
- *Dr. Robert M. Hooker* -Managua, Nicaragua
- *Sra. Isabel Porras* -San Jose, Costa Rica
- *Sr. James Facey* -Colon, Panama
- *Srta. Mabel Sneider* -Canal Zone
- *Sr. Alfred Osborne* -Canal Zone
- *Sr. Santos de la Torre* -Havana, Cuba
- *Sr. William Mitchell* -Kingston Jamaica
- *Sr. Pablo Bonilla* -Cali, Colombia
- *Sr. Antonio del Villar* -Caracas, Venezuela
- *Sr. Charles Mason Remey* -Washington, D.C.

*Pioneers present:*

- *Artemus Lamb* -Chile
- *Cora Oliver* -Panama
- *Louise Caswell* -Panama
- *Julie Regal* -Panama
- *Evelyn Larson* -Travelling pioneer.
- *Gayle Woolson* -Travelling pioneer.

*“The Congress officially opened Sunday evening, January 19, with a reception held in the Baha'i Center during which all the delegates and pioneers present were presented, each giving the greetings of this respective country.*

*“During the entire week of the Congress, morning sessions were held each day from 8:30 to 12, dedicated to consultation on the different problems of each country within the area designated for the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America. A detailed account of the consultation and the resolutions arrived at will be submitted by the secretary of the Congress, Srta. Elsa Rohmoser of Panama. Sra. Natalia Chavez of Honduras was the coordinator of the consultation periods and Artemus Lamb, the administrative advisor. The consultation was held with marvelous dignity and spiritual maturity, and all the delegates manifested that wonderful unity of purpose, firm determination, sincere devotion and a deep consciousness of their great responsibility.*

*“Every evening a public meeting was held in which three different Baha’i speakers took part each night.*

*-The first speaker of the Monday evening program was Srta. Raquel Francoise of Panama, who, in her topic, “Baha’i World Faith” gave a general outline of the aims of the Baha’i Faith, showing the need of it to meet the requirements of this age.*

*-The second speaker, Dr. David Escalante, spoke of “World Unity”, and explained the Baha’i Peace Program for achieving this, pointing out that a true universal peace is not only possible but essential if the human race is to continue its existence on this planet.*

*-The third speaker was Artemus Lamb who spoke on “A World Order, Organic or Superficial” He differentiated between organic and superficial and explained that something organic is something that has life and is a result of the operation of the natural universal law; it is a creation of God and not of man. An organic World Order has already been created through the pronouncement of the Word of God through Baha’u’llah, and it was left up to human beings as instruments to carry it out. After the talks, slides of the Shrines were shown, an explanatory remarks were made by Mr. Charles Mason Remey.*

*“On the program for Tuesday, January 21, the speakers were:*

*-Srta. Ofelia Montalvo of El Salvador who spoke on the “History of the Baha’i Faith” tracing the development and growth of the Faith from the time of the Bab to the Present-day Administrative Order.*

*-Then Dr. M. Hooker of Nicaragua spoke on “Fanaticism” pointing out the existence of fanaticism of all categories and how it is one of the greatest obstacles in the way of achieving our goal of world unity and peace.*

*-The following speaker, Mrs. Gayle Woolson, in her subject “World Peace and Fraternity” showed graphically how the world had entered into an international age and how the present problems facing the world could be solved only with a universal and spiritual remedy – that which Baha’u’llah has given us. Moving pictures of the Centenary celebrated at the Temple were shown and also slides of the Temple and views of Mexico.*

*-The speakers on the Wednesday evening public meeting were: Artemus Lamb who dealt with the subject: “The institution of the Guardianship, as a Transcendental Symbol of World Unity”. He pointed out that the unity is the most urgent need of the hour, but that everywhere exists division, especially in the most fundamental field – religion. The greatest reason for this division is that the Prophets of past did not leave explicit instructions in writing as to their successor,*

*giving someone exclusive right to interpret their teachings. This weakness has been corrected in the Baha'i Dispensation through the appointment of Abdu'l-Baha then the Guardian. Through the institution of the Guardianship, we have unity of the Faith of God and, consequently, the unity of mankind is now assured. The Institution of the Guardianship is the only means by which the unity of mankind can be established.*

*-The following speaker, Dr. Antonio Bonilla of Nicaragua, spoke of the subject: "The True Baha'i". He explained the relationship between the Baha'i Faith and the other religions and stated that to be a good Baha'i, is not enough just to sign a registration card or be constant in attending meetings. It is indispensable to carefully study all the books and pamphlets written about the Cause and develop our faculties of understanding and analysis so that our cooperation in the material and spiritual betterment of the world may carry a seal of conviction.*

*-The third speaker, Mr. William Mitchell of Jamaica, dealt with the subject of "World Unity through World Brotherhood" emphasizing how people in this age had to learn to be brothers and how this need was being carried out by the Message brought by Baha'u'llah for unity among all races and religions.*

*"On Thursday evening, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the speakers were:*

*-Sr. Jose Granada of Panama, subject: "Universal Love", Sr. Alejandro Baldizon of Guatemala, subject: The Light of the New Day", In dealing with the subject of "Universal Love",*

*-Sr. Jose Granada brought out that the essence of all that God had created in the world was love, and that the highest expression of which man is capable is love. One's spiritual evolution is shown by the measure of love, one has for others.*

*-Sr. Alejandro Baldizon, in his topic, pointed out that with the birth of Baha'u'llah, the Promised One of all nations, was manifested upon the earth and a new spirit was infused in the world. Baha'u'llah has laid the foundation of the Golden Age, which is to come. Through the practice of the teachings of Baha'u'llah, we find the key to the happiness of the world and the achievement of world brotherhood, peace and justice.*

*-Sr. Carlos Vergara in his subject "Heroic Living in the New Day" pointed out that living according to the high standards of conduct as set down by Baha'u'llah for the new age required a true spirit of heroism as these standards are a sharp contrast to the spiritual degeneracy and moral corruption of our times. This heroic living is expressed both in our individual lives and in our relationship to society. After the talks, slides of different Latin-American Baha'i groups were shown and movies in color of the Holy Shrines at Mount Carmel.*

*"These foregoing conferences were held at the Panama Baha'i Center, and they were all very well attended. In all of these meetings, the talks were interspersed with beautiful songs sung by Carlos Porras.*

*"The closing session of the Congress was held in the main auditorium of the Inter-America University of Panama. Close to 200 persons were present. The program was opened by the Chairman, Sr. Jose Granada and the meeting began by a musical selection sung by Carlos Porras. The speakers' platform was represented by all races:*

*-Dr. Tu Yuen-Ran, Minister of China in Panama;*

*-Sr. Jorge Corgas, Indian of the San Blas Islands;*

*-Sr. Sidney A. Young, Editor of the Panama Tribune, representing the Negro race;*

*-Mr. Harold Sosted, Superintendent of Instruction of the Canal Zone Schools;*

*-Sr. Baltazar Isaza Calderon, Professor at the Inter-American University; and*

*-Mrs. Gayle Woolson, Baha'i Pioneer. Next to the speakers stand was a beautiful bust of Abdu'l-Baha, which was made by,*

*-Sr. Antonio del Villar of Caracas, Venezuela, for the Congress. The program was broadcast over station HOQ.*

*"The first speaker,*

*-Dr. Tu Yuen-Tan, spoke on "Chinese Philosophy concerning World Unity". He said that due to the influence of the philosophies of Confucius and Lao-Tze in China, the Chinese people for hundreds of years have cherished the ideal that the world should be as one great community. The Chinese people are known in the whole world for their religious tolerance and their love for peace. They always uphold international cooperation, the reign of law and justice and the equity of states, and condemn power politics, imperialism and racial discrimination. All religions have found a fertile field in the Chinese soil where their seeds can be planted.*

*The following speaker was,*

*-Sr. Jorge Corgas<sup>328</sup> who read words of Abdu'l-Baha concerning the Indians. This was followed by a few words by Professor,*

*-Blatazar Isaza Calderon who spoke of the need of educating the youth in the schools with universal ideals and "concepts, commending the Baha'i Faith for the important work it is doing in the world.*

*-Then Mr. Harold Sosted spoke on "Some Considerations in Education for World Citizenship". He said, "it is admitted today that civilization has reached a critical point, crossing the threshold into a new era, which may develop for the welfare of all mankind and provide and even more abundant and richer life or it may develop in a way that may bring about chaos and a veritable doom for the people of the world. "The effectiveness of destruction has been increased by a factor of 10,000,000 to 1. There is and can be no effective defense against atomic bombs – only against the source of the bombs. These sources are human, and the solution we seek must be on the human, not the mechanical level. Education for world citizenship is necessary. We do not have time to educate only the youth of the world for this concept of world citizenship, which has been forces upon us so suddenly by developments of the past few years but must carry on a program of adult education and enlightenment also. Time is running short. This adult program should and must be carried on by other agencies in addition to formal schools. This includes all religious groups, study groups and organizations, the radio and press, movies, and current literature to mention a few. This education for world understanding can be accomplished only through full participation by all nations." The following speakers,*

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328. The name is Jorge Manuel Gorgas.

*-Mr. Sidney A. Young, spoke on "World Unity through World Brotherhood", pointing out that the unity of mankind can come about only through spiritual unification – world unity through of man through the Fatherhood of God. He praised the Baha'i Faith and said it was a necessary force in the world today for the salvation of mankind.*

*"The last speaker on the program was,*

*-Mrs. Gayle Woolson whose subject was "A Re-valuation of the Historical Process in Modern Terms". She showed how the historical process of evolution logically leads up to the goal of this age – world unity, and how the principal factor and motivating impulse of human progress is the appearance of the great Prophets upon the earth with their Divine Revelations each according to the needs of the epoch in which each Prophet appeared. Baha'u'llah has brought the Message of God for humanity for this age. The Baha'i teachings provide the means for the re-valuation of our universe in accord with modern scientific discovery and gives us the platform for the reconciliation between science and religion.*

## THE BUST OF ABDU'L-BAHA

*“The Congress officially closed with a beautiful banquet held Saturday evening, January 25<sup>th</sup>, at the Hotel Colombia. Fifty-one persons were present among whom were Sr. Victor Navas, Governor of Colon, Sr. Tomas Gabriel Duque, manager of the newspaper “Star and Herald” of Panama; Dr. Javier Lasso de la Vega, prominent lawyer of Panama, and Dr. Tu Yuen-Tan, Minister of China. During the course of the dinner, the Baha’i delegates and pioneers were called upon to say a few words. Miss Raquel Francoise acted as chairman. Then the delegate of Cuba, Sr. Santos de la Torre, recited a poem composed by himself, entitled “New Life”, and Carlos Porras delighted the guests with a song. Later, Mr. Charles Mason Remey told of his visits to Akka and Haifa to see Abdu’l-Baha. The Governor of Colon, Sr. Victor Navas, was then introduced and he said that he sympathized very much with the Baha’i teachings and that he already felt as a Baha’i. Sr. Tomas Gabriel Duque was called on next, and he said that he had become acquainted with the Baha’i Faith through the newspaper articles brought to his paper by the Panama Baha’is for publication, and that now through explanations made by Mr. Remey in his talk, he had a clearer picture of our ideals, which he considers transcendental. He offered the continued cooperation of this newspaper, which is one of the principal newspapers of Panama, to the fullest extent that their space permits. Dr. Javier Lasso de la Vega and Sr. Carlos Troetsch, president of the Theosophical Society of Panama also spoke, expressing their high appreciation for the Baha’i Faith and offering all of their cooperation in its work.*



Gayle Woolson, Knight of Baha'u'lah. The photo is taken circa 1947 at the International Conference in Panama City. The bust of Abdu'l-Baha in front.



*“The closing touch to the banquet was the presentation of Sr. Antonio del Villar of Caracas, Venezuela, who told of his moving experience of knowing Abdu’l-Baha in 1912 in New York, and how he tried to portray in the bust he had sculptured, that lasting impression that the Master had made upon him. He related how a few days before the Congress he started his work on the bust, finishing it in an amazingly short time and bringing down by plane for the occasion. The bust was on display at the banquet, and it is truly a beautiful piece of work expressing life and a true likeness to the Master. Mr. Villar is sending the bust to the Temple as a souvenir of the Second Latin-American Baha’i Congress of Panama<sup>329</sup>. The banquet was closed with the prayer of Abdu’l-Baha for the unity of all nations.*

*“During the entire Congress, wonderful cooperation was offered by the radio and press. Newspaper articles appeared every day principally through the untiring efforts of Julie Regal and Evelyn Larson. The Radio work was under the direction of Artemus Lamb who handled the work very efficiently, using different delegates every day to take part in the radio programs. Fifteen minutes were given every day from 1:15 to 1:30 p.m. by station CPR<sup>330</sup>. A few radio broadcasts were also given over station HOQ. This radio time was given gratis. Both the newspaper and radio work had the invaluable cooperation of Sr. Higinio Malave of Panama.*

*“The whole Congress was well conducted, and much work was accomplished by the delegates who returned to their respective countries with greater unity and spiritual maturity and a clear vision of their common objective”.*

*“The Conference was a tremendous success”,*

wrote Julie to the Inter America Committee on January 30<sup>th</sup>,

*“The pervading spirit of fellowship and consecration and the marvelous triumphs, which we achieve inebriated with joy the delegates and the Baha’is of Panama and have left us in rapture”.*

And when enclosing the official report of the Conference to the Inter America Committee on February 14, she wrote:

*“Of momentous significance, we believe, has been the Second Baha’i Latin American Conference – for the volume of work accomplished by delegates in consultation sessions, for the enkindlement and inspiration received by delegates and the welding of strong bonds of friendship among them, and for the vast and superb publicity, which it gave to Panama. Beyond*

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329. The bust of Abdu’l-Baha by Mr. Villar stayed for a long time in Panama instead of being sent to the Chicago Temple, the act that hurt Mr. Villar deeply. He had brought with utmost care the sculptured bust from Caracas, Venezuela to Panama at his own expenses, when he was quite limited in his budget. The NSA of the US however, did not agree to keep it at the Temple, arguing that this will open the path to the artists with more sculptures heading to the Temple, ultimately making it a gallery. The bust through travelling back and forth into the exhibition circles was damaged. Finally it was taken to Chicago but not to display it at the Temple as per artist’s intention, but at the National Center. Once it was decided to send the bust to the NSA, Mr. H. Holley wrote to the LSA of Panama on March 9<sup>th</sup>: *“Please try to send a photo of the bust before you ship the bust itself. The National Assembly ought to have opportunity to consider it before it lands on us up here. There is no procedure of handling Baha’i art, and each case is taken on its own merits. This bust may be a real treasure, but the NSA doesn’t want the Temple considered as a museum for exhibiting pictures, statutes, etc., later in August ’48, the NSA decided to keep the bust for the future NSA of the Central America and exhibit it at the National Center.* In Mid-September Cora wrote an admonishing letter – probably addressed to the IAC – regarding the bust, and urged the Institution in charge to have the courtesy of acknowledging the gift, which was done with care and dedication, and out of love for Abdu’l-Baha. She wrote that she had visited Mr. Villar together with Mrs. Fendel and his attitude has not been friendly, but indifferent towards Baha’is.

330. Probably Colon Public Radio.

doubt, it far surpassed in scope the first Latin American Conference and marks a new advance for the Faith in Latin America.

*“Our community is overjoyed because of this triumph for the Cause, which we have just witnessed, and humbly grateful for having been allowed by Providence to have assisted in its realization. The primary reason for the Conference’s success, we believe, is that all the delegates and local believers strove to contribute to it all they could. With extreme regret the delegates parted from each other, fired with intense zeal to labor for the speedy establishment of the Faith in their respective countries and hopeful of beholding another similar Conference next year”.*

In her report Julie mentions the name of the delegates and the visitors, all the principal points discussed. She also mentions the Public Evening meetings and the closing session. She then writes on the matter of the Banquet:

*“Never in Panama, perhaps in all Latin America, had there been held an affair like the Banquet with which the Conference closed, Saturday, January 25, in the Hotel Colombia, finest in Panama. Around the table among the 51 guests of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Panama, were seen the very rich and the very poor, influential and humble, old and young, black, white, Chinese, Indian, Panamanian and American, representatives of every continent and of more than a dozen countries of this Hemisphere, all united in the utmost harmony and love. All of the Baha’is of the Isthmus and all of the Conference delegates had been invited, as well as all of the non-Baha’is here who had helped the Cause...”*

And she goes on describing the talks that were given and the songs by:

*“...our able singer, Carlos Porras, added greatly to the beauty of the program”.*

Julie mentions in her report:

*“A beautiful bust of Abdu’l-Baha made by a renowned sculptor, Antonio de Villar, on his own initiative and especially for the Conference, was placed at one end of the table. Sr. del Villar had met Abdu’l-Baha in New York and plans to donate the bust to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the Unites States”.*

The following day, Sunday friends had prepared a picnic:

*“...among the picturesque ruins of Old Panama, a few miles distant from the present city. On arrival at the spot, devotions were held in the Old Cathedral ruins. Afterwards, the friends, 18 in all, grouped in doorways, windows, and on broken walls of the old masonry, while others took pictures. Later, a lunch was spread under some trees. Gaiety and merriment were the order of the day”.*

The report also mentions of the articles regarding the aspects of the Conference were free of charge published in all three dailies, sometimes on the first page of each paper:

*“All were written by our Publicity Committee, with the help from Evelyn Larson and Gayle Woolson...these articles frequently explained the principles of the Faith”.*

Among many other activities for publicity, the report mentions of,

*“...a thousand 8-page circular were printed and distributed”.*

## ASSEMBLY INCORPORATION

The year 1947 also had an important issue recorded by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama, the Inter-America Committee, and the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, that is the incorporation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama as an official entity for not gain, which was accomplished by May of this mentioned year. Thus, Panama became the second Central American country and fourth in Latin-America to be incorporated.

Elisabeth wrote to Julie on February 10 the following:

*“Regarding incorporation, I finally have an official answer to you through the NSA. They request that the Panama Assembly study the applications for incorporations that have been made in the United States by various communities. You will find a number of them in practically any number of “Baha’i World”. And they request that you model your application as nearly as possible on these. Since you are using the New York By Laws, approval of these is automatic. The only thing that does need approval is your petition to the government, giving the name of the organization and the type of incorporation. The important point to bear in mind is to ask for incorporation in the name of the “Baha’i Assembly” and not in that of the Baha’i Community.*

*“You will note in looking over the models in “Baha’i World” that in North America Assemblies have been incorporated as “non-profit corporations”. In some parts of Latin America the equivalent of this is “una entidad preferentemente espiritual”...your attorney can advise you on this. The NSA is interested in seeing that the Assemblies are incorporated so that they can hold properly under limited liability. In other words, the individuals on the Assembly are not responsible financially for the actions of the Assembly, but the Assembly as a corporation is responsible up to the amount in its treasury and up to the amount that it can reasonably expect to assess from its membership...Will you please send Horace Holley a copy of your petition in Spanish with two translations of it into English and an English translation of the laws of Panama under which you will incorporate?”*

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama sent off a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the US, i.e., Mr. Horace Holley all the documents necessary, inclusive of copy of the letter to the Minister of Government Don Carlos Sucre, signed by the Chairman, Cora Oliver, expecting all for the incorporation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama.

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, Julie wrote to the Inter America Committee thanking them for the National Spiritual Assembly approval of the by-laws:

*“We are very glad to receive the NSA’s approval of our by-laws. A copy was given to our lawyer yesterday and he will take it to the Minister this week...”*

In her letter she also gives an update of the Baha’i membership of the Panama City, where there were fifteen altogether:

- Sra. Brigida de Beitia
- Sr. Alejo Arturo Cimorra
- Sra. Blanca de Campos
- Sr. Jose Lalama
- Sra. Raquel Lalama
- Sr. Jose Vilas Granada
- Sra. Celia de Madrid
- Sr. Higinio Malave

- Sra. Benilda Anguld de Green
- Sra. Maria Luisa Nazen
- Sra. Cora Oliver
- Srta. Julie Regal
- Sr. Carlos Porras
- Srta. Raquel Francois
- Srta. Elsa Rohrmoser

The Inter America Committee wrote to the Local Assembly of Panama, congratulating them for the incorporation. In their letter of September 11, they recorded:

*“Most hearty congratulations to the believers of Panama City on being the second country in Central America and the fourth in Latin America to receive their incorporation! This is one of the very important steps that the beloved Guardian is urging upon all the Latin countries, and we are so happy that Panama has successfully accomplished it. We are enclosing the triplicate a declaration of confidence, which the first assembly to become incorporated in each Latin American country has the privilege of filling out and signing. It is equivalent to the National Spiritual Assemblies Declaration of Trust and forms a spiritual bond between the incorporated assembly and the Guardian and his administration. It has been approved for use in Latin America by the National Spiritual Assembly and the Guardian. One copy should be retained in your archives, one sent to us for the International archives and one sent to the Guardian”:*

The Inter America Committee in their letter also asked for extra copies of the decree granting the incorporation, plus some other documents and pictures to be sent to be published in the ‘Baha’i World’.

## HASCLE CORNBLETH – COLON

A sickly young man, Hascle Cornbleth, pioneer in Ecuador, had been travelling to Panama, helping to the growth of the community, especially in Colon. His smooth character had attracted many and he was asked to stay in Panama for sometimes. He was quite a staunch pioneer and would not move unless he was told by the Institutions. Yet, his weakness as a result of his longtime sickness, required him to go back to the States. Louise had asked him to move to Colon and help the community there to grow, at the same time, to enjoy the warm climate of Colon to ease off his sickness. She wrote to Elisabeth in early April:

*“Won’t you send Hascle Cornbleth here? I hear he is leaving Ecuador because of his health. I think the climate here would agree with him and he could probably get work. I once got a job for him with the commissary, but he could not come then. At any rate, he is needed here...We are still struggling and praying and working for an Assembly”.*

Julie also on behalf of the Local Assembly of Panama wrote to Elisabeth on the same issue:

*“We have learned that, because of continued illness, you have suggested to Hascle Cornbleth that he either go to Trujillo, Peru, or return to the States. We believe he would be of great service to the Faith on this Isthmus, where also opportunities for securing employment are good, and it is our hope that you will be able to suggest to him that he come here”.*

The Committee wrote of approving Hascle to go to Colon:

*“We have consulted very carefully about your request for the coming of Hascle Cornbleth...The Committee decided...to transfer Hascle to Colon provided he can be assured of employment there”.*

Hascle had successfully achieved the station of Quito having an Assembly and now:

*“...a change is indicated for him since he cannot earn his living in Quito and both altitude and inactivity are very bad for him”.*

As Louise herself needed a change of climate and some rest, planning to go to San Jose, Costa Rica, the Committee wrote:

*“If Hascle comes to Colon then you could feel free to take the needed change of climate for yourself”.*

Yet the suggestion of the Committee for Louise was different:

*“We would love to have you visit the friends in Cali, Colombia and perhaps in Caracas and Maracay, Venezuela. The friends in Caracas need inspiration and you are certainly the bearer of that...”*

In May 19, Louise wrote to the Committee with the good news that Hascle was on his way to Colon:

*“Hascle is coming!, I received a letter from him last night in which he said he was definitely coming to Colon...I want to have everything settled here in Colon, and see Hascle well established...”*

Louise thanks the Committee for their suggestion, she might take one of the two places for a visit of one or two months.

There was one more declaration in Colon, George C. Thomas, the seventh believer. Louise was pushing forward for having the Local Spiritual Assembly of Colon to form even after the stipulated date of 21<sup>st</sup> April. But of course, it was not possible. The Committee wrote back to Louise's question:

*"You may be happy in knowing however that Colon will be recognized as having fulfilled the Guardian's plan, for the plan of completing a new assembly in each country was to extend over a two-year period closing April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1948. By that time under your able guidance, Colon will be a large and strong community. When there are 9 members, it would be very good to have assembly practice as a method of studying administration but without using any title other than that of an organized group, which is entitled to its chairman, secretary and treasurer".*

In her letter of May 21 to Elisabeth, Louise wrote:

*"The Guardian has written to the Panama Spiritual Assembly that Colon is very important. Our believers here are very trustworthy and faithful. It would be a strong assembly if formed when Hascle comes in June".*

Hascle Cornbleth announced his arrival to Panama to Elisabeth on June 18<sup>th</sup>. He mentions in his short letter that on his way to Panama he has visited in Colombia, seven cities. He had made a report and sent it to Gayle Woolson, where she in her letter to the same, speaks very highly of him. His visits to the seven cities have been very helpful in all the communities he has visited. Elisabeth wrote to him:

*"Gayle Woolson has written us in hearty appreciation of the fine teaching work that you did in Colombia. Someone who understands administration as you do, can be of utmost value, especially during these formative years in Latin America".*

Thus, seemingly, Colon is to receive a wonderful pioneer to help-up the community. Louise wrote before she left for Costa Rica:

*"Hascle is here and is already winning hearts. He is taking my apartment for three months while I go to Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala...Hascle is improving daily here...I notice an improvement already".*

Elisabeth in her letter made it clear to Hascle the difference between Louise and Cora, although she did not mention any name. But this knowledge would prepare him to understand both, without prejudice:

*"There are two pioneers who are exact opposites in temperament. One of them is very much on the personal plane and supersensitive as are most people on that plane. The other one is extremely impersonal and rather tends to lean upon people. The very impersonal one cannot comprehend why the extremely personal one resented her leaving, resented the fact that she was very much loved and admired and finally came to practically hate her. This misunderstanding between the two affected everyone around them, who tended to blame the one or the other instead of heartily blaming both equally".*

Here, Elisabeth quotes a very important statement of the Guardian who has said:

“...that the universal love required of Baha’is is not a personal love of one another but consists in their loving God so much that they are able to love all human beings for His dear sake. ...Since Baha’is represent a cross section of the world, and as such a cross-section, include necessarily very diverse types, who probably would never choose one another as personal friends. It is most important that they should learn Baha’u’llah’s type of unity in accord with the Dear Guardian’s guidance, otherwise the Baha’i communities would become the epitome of disunity and chaos...You see how great a task the Divine Beloved has placed in your hands<sup>331</sup>”!

Hascle, signing as ‘Hack’, had written to the beloved Guardian and he had assured him that:

*“...he would pray that I would be given the strength to overcome all obstacles”.*

How sweet of the Guardian being there whenever the pioneers needed him, encouraging them, giving them guidance and assurance of his loving prayers at the holy Shrines.

Elisabeth, the former pioneer in Paraguay, who had herself gone through difficult health problems, could well understand Hascle. She wrote to him in mid-July, encouraging him to persevere and battle with his sickness:

*“Take courage! Persevere and have great faith! God will bless that faith and bring you through according to His first choice for you and for those about you”.*

And tells him of her story and mentions of the spiritual illness in Panama:

*“I remember that for a number of weeks in Paraguay, He permitted this servant to be so weak and ill that I could not rise from my bed and dress. There was much fever and pain. The doctors told me that I was dying. Twice a week the friends and students came for their lessons just the same. There would be perhaps 25 or 30 of them sitting around my bed, sometimes with tears in their eyes. At those times Baha’u’llah permitted the fever to abate, the pain to pass, and I was enabled to sit up in bed and teach the Cause...As you meet your suffering and tests with radiant acquiescence, the Divine Beloved will use this very fact to heal the spiritual illness in Panama...<sup>332</sup>”*

And at the closing her letter Elisabeth writes mentioning important facts of service:

*“It is our entire lives, which the Beloved needs in service to Him, and not a premature martyr’s passing, when this is not necessary, nor a crippling of our capacity to serve for a long period, if this can be avoided. Be both practical and spiritual for His dear sake”.*

James Facey from the Colon group also wrote on Hascle the following, after Louise left Colon for travel teaching:

*“Mrs. Caswell possessed admirable qualities in this respect but was immobilized to a certain extent by age and the climate. Now she is away we have in the person of Mr. Cornbleth a very admirable man, with whom people seem to feel free and at ease, and it would be a good thing if he could be persuaded to stay here for a while. But his health seems to be somewhat of*

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331. Emphasis added.

332. Emphasis added.

*a worry to him, although he has shown much improvement since his arrival and says he feels stronger every day. If it should prove practicable, our Group would much like to have him stay here for a while longer, and you may consider this in the nature of request”.*

There was a real crisis in the National Fund in 1947, after the end of the WWII. Pioneering budget was cut, at the same time, the Guardian urged individual to rise to conquer the remaining countries of Latin America and Europe, taking the curing message of Baha’u’llah to their inhabitants. The publishing of books especially in Spanish and Portuguese languages were pressing. The Chicago Temple was standing many years consuming a big chunk of the National Fund and had not been finished after many years, which Shoghi Effendi was urging the friends around the world to help even more to finish it up. The Committee wrote to Hascle on September 13:

*“There is a most acute crisis in the National fund, which has the National treasurer at his wits’ end to know how and where to obtain the money to send out needed drafts for subsistence to pioneers in Europe as well as to the few what still receive a partial assistance in Latin America”.*

Effective September 1, 1947, the National Spiritual Assembly of the US discontinued funding the pioneers and wrote to those who were still receiving remuneration to start looking for permanent jobs to sustain themselves. This was due to:

*“...the fact that the National fund is terribly depleted by the needs of Europe and of the Temple...”*

Hascle was one of these pioneers who were on the National Assembly’s payroll. He suggested going to Santiago de Veraguas<sup>333</sup> together with Julie to teach the Cause and may stay there as pioneer if he could find a suitable job. This idea was accepted by the Committee too. But if that wouldn’t work, he would go back to the States for medical treatment, as soon as Louise returns and, in the meanwhile, he would try his best to get part time job to survive.

Hascle stayed in Colon even after Louise returned in late November from her few months’ teaching trip to Central America at the request of the Inter America Committee. Hascle was not able to form the Assembly in Colon, due to moving two members of the community –Mr. & Mrs. La Loma- to Maracaibo, Venezuela. They even were not able to practice a mock assembly<sup>334</sup> for few months before the election in next April. This, Louise confirmed in her letter to Elisabeth on November 20, advising the Committee that it would be best if she remained in Colon for few months, consulting with the Regional Teaching Committee. Hascle became very sick by mid-December and his insurance was cancelled, forcing him to go back home as per recommendation of the doctors. He finally left Panama by the end of January ’48. The Committee, however, wrote to him for financial assistance. The Secretary of the Committee mentioned some precious facts and advice:

*“How are finances, dear Hascle? Do you need assistance in getting home...You are very precious in the sight of Baha’u’llah. It will never be forgotten and through you as the faithful, persistent, self-sacrificing channel...you have great spiritual destiny, dear Hascle...There is a*

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333. Santiago de Veraguas, one of the central provinces of Panama.

334. It is not clear what it is meant by Mock Assembly, or how is it possible!



*mystery about physical illness...Each soul attracts the type of tests, which it can handle best and through which it can grow spiritually...[however] the valiant soul who in spite of physical suffering serves greatly, touches the hearts in a very special way and often is of greater service than someone who is as strong as a horse. This does not mean that doctors' orders should be disobeyed! On the contrary! It simply means that a few people, with about a nickel's worth of health, have somehow managed to nurse that bit of health along and to serve in important ways despite this handicap. Martha Root was of this group. The positive and certain thing about physical healing is this. If you ask God through Baha'u'llah for such a measure of health as you really need in order to serve Him according to His first choice for you. That is perfection, even though it may or may not be completely restored health".*

## **NATIONALISM vs INTERNATIONALISM**

Sometimes in early October 1947, Hascle brought to the attention of the Committee on the rising nationalism sentiment among the local communities. The country of Panama was well divided into three distinct groups, namely Americans, Jamaicans<sup>335</sup> and Panamanians. The privileged group of course was the Americans, following by the Jamaicans who spoke English and were subservient to the white Americans. They did not feel the need to mingle into the Panamanian Latin culture, as they spoke English and tried to emulate the American way. Due to the language facility, they were more able to get jobs in Canal Zone rather than Panamanians who did not speak the language. The resentment Panamanians had for the Americans, were even fiercer when it came to the black Caribbean population, although the second group lived in abject poverty and in poor slums of Panama and Colon. The dividing lines among these three-groups remained quite effective before the Caribbean population started to learn both languages and the culture of Panama, but in a very inadequate way. Such was the Colon Baha'i community, which its entirety was Caribbean membership only spoke English.

The Latin group blamed this division on America in general. Unfortunately, the resentment feelings also affected the new Baha'i community. There were the affluent Americans and poorer Panamanians who felt discrimination. Both Louise and Julie, and even Hascle spoke fluent Spanish and could get along well with the Latin group, but Cora did not, and this also added to the problem. She was a senior member of the community, one of its founders and the Chairman of the Assembly of Panama City.

The Inter America Committee knew the rising of this enigma, which was wholly contrary to the spirit of the Faith, wrote to Hascle, acknowledging the problem in a well spelled statement below, which lack of racial prejudice is the aim and ultimate goal of the teachings of the Faith among the general population:

*"Yes, it is strange what the United States has done to poor Panama and poor Puerto Rico in the way of importing intense racial prejudice into Latin countries, which have never suffered from this spiritual cancer until we arrived. Perhaps if we could present it to the in Panama and Puerto Rico as a false importation from North America not at all natural to the generous hearts*

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335. By Jamaican, it is understood as West-Indies, comprising of most Caribbean islander inhabitants who came during the construction of the Canal of Panama and remained in the country for good.

*of the Latin friends, and non-existent in all true Latin American countries, this might help to cure them of the false concept, which our people have given them. It is strange that one of the few politically free countries has imposed such spiritual manacles upon itself and upon countries with which it is closely associated. In general, Latin Americans do not like Northern importations, and if the Panamanian once recognizes racial prejudice as a Northern importation, this may speed his recovery as no logical argument could do”.*

Marcia Stewart’s letter to the Committee bore a similar message, though its contents were more institutional rather than racial or political. In the Minutes of the Inter America Committee of December 14 is recorded:

*“Marcia calls attention to the very definite danger that when NSA’s are elected in Central and South America, these will be definitely divided in their consciousness spiritually from the NSA of North America especially, and from other similar NSAs. There is need of careful Baha’i education, not of the rather naive North American sort, in order to lead the Latin American Baha’is to see for themselves that the present anti-North American movements now rampant in Latin America are among the enemies of the Cause and that Baha’i thought should be superior to any geographical, racial or economic division. Great patience is needed to bring about a true Baha’i concept in the Latin American mind, which is very subtle, sensitive and quite different in its experience and concepts from the Northern American mind. Marcia feels that the first point to start is through the members of the NTC<sup>336</sup> demonstrating the reality of a Baha’i, and that much care should be taken by the IAC, NSA and pioneers to try to understand the Latin American points of view, to assist them with great tact from the points where they are now and to avoid errors, which may cause needless irritation. Marcia reports that the New York bi-laws are being used in Guatemala and will be used in Honduras in place of the very undesirable type of incorporation application, which had been made by a previous assembly and filed by the government but never acted upon...”*

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336. NTC for National Teaching Committee.

## **CEBMA<sup>337</sup> - REGIONAL NATIONAL TEACHING COMMITTEE**

Louise has always been a front-row soldier and always ready to serve. She indeed didn't know anything else, except serving the Faith of Baha'u'llah selflessly, not as it was expected from her, but as she felt the Faith should be served. In her letter to Louise, Elisabeth wrote in May 22:

*"You are a real soldier of Baha'u'llah. There are not many who can write letters about their problems and then drop them all in the waste basket and finally post the letter in the mail saying "Everything is all right now...If blowing off steam to the waste basket when things are very difficult really helps that is splendid, but we can take a lot and understand a lot whenever it is needed. Some of the pioneers give us a permanent wave free of charge every now and then, because it really helps them to blow off their troubles in this way. Wherever one works with people there are always problems and sometimes extreme ones".*

After the Conference of Panama, by the suggestion of the Committee and sanction of the National Assembly, Central America Teaching Committee was formed. Similar institution also was formed for South America. Natalia Chavez of Honduras was the coordinator of the Committee. By the end of May, the Committee consulted to appoint Louise as:

*"...an inter-regional teacher acting as a special consultant with the Central America Teaching Committee".*

Elisabeth wrote to Louise on May 27, 1948:

*"We had planned to appoint Panama's regional committee for this year with a quorum in Colon so that you could readily have consultation and act upon plans made...May we consider you an official inter-regional teacher for this year and special consultant to the National Teaching Committee for Central America, Mexico and the West Indies? We know that your advice and service would be of the greatest assistance".*

To this suggestion Louise responded:

*"Thank you for your letter asking me to accept the appointment as inter-regional teacher and consultant to the National Regional Committee for Central America, Mexico and the West Indies. I am honored to accept and will do all in my power to serve in this new capacity. I plan to go to Costa Rica as soon as Hasclé arrives. Later I may be able to go to Honduras and Guatemala and would like to attend the Mexico session".*

In late May, Louise wrote to Elisabeth recommending the following believers as the members of the Regional Teaching Committee of Panama:

*"Srta. Raquel Francois, Srta. Elsa Rhormoser, Sr. Higinio Malave and Julie Regal".*

She did not recommend anyone from Colon, as the believers all were English speaking, as wonderful as they were, but it would be better for them to work in their own area. In a later stage, she recommended Iola Edwards from Colon, who was bilingual.

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337. CEBMA, Comité de Enseñanza Baha'í de Mesoamérica (Teaching Committee for Central America, Mexico and West Indies).

From the recommended members, Raquel Francois declined the membership, but she did recommend Blanca de Campos in her place. Blanca was a new Baha'i with lots of enthusiasm for teaching the Faith. She was a widow, with certain monthly income. The other gift she had; she could cure people with the power of prayers. She was very much in demand in the neighboring country of Venezuela as well. The Committee consulted with the Local Assembly of Panama for this appointment.

Raquel Francois however, according to Cora's letter to the Committee, September 9, 1948:

*"...she is teaching a class every week to the Spanish speaking friends to deepen them in the Faith. The classes have been held in my home but during my absence Blanca de Campos has offered her home. It made me extremely happy to see this development, which indicates that they are able of carrying their own loads".*

Julie wrote to the IAC, informing them that Higinio Malave also is pulling out of the membership due to heavy responsibilities he has with the Publishing Committee. In his place, the Assembly was recommending the appointment of Sr. Angel Beauchamp, another new and enthusiastic believer of Panama and a former church minister. The Local Assembly endorsed both Blanca and Angel for the Regional Teaching Committee. Julie expresses that Blanca is the most reliable person. The Inter America Committee appointed Blanca as the Chairman of the Regional Teaching Committee.

Cora Oliver would also become an international travel-teacher as once Louise was called to be. On August 5, 1948, Cora received similar call as Louise, by the Committee. She was addressed in their letter:

*"We have been very happy to learn through the National Teaching Committee of Central America that you will be free to spend your vacation in International teaching work this year. We are recommending to the National Spiritual Assembly that you be appointed as a special consultant and traveling teacher under the National Teaching Committee of Central America".* They suggested Cora to go to Jamaica, an English-speaking country. Cora did not speak Spanish throughout her pioneering carrier.

## **SANTIAGO DE VERAGUAS**

The city of Santiago, about three hours driving distance to the north of Panama City, is located halfway between David in Chiriqui and Panama City and four hours to the Costa Rican border. It is deeply Catholic in all its environment, has almost no special attraction of any kind<sup>338</sup>. The famous Indian Urraca<sup>339</sup>, who made life difficult for the early Spanish settlers in the New World, was from Santiago. His tribe was uprooted by the Spaniards, and today, there

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338. The writer and his family lived in Santiago de Veraguas for a period of 30 months.

339. Wikipedia: **Urracá** or **Ubarragá Maniá Tigrí** was an amerindian Ngäbe chieftain or cacique who fought effectively against the Spanish conquistadors. Captured at one point, Urracá managed to escape a Spanish bound ship and rejoin his own people, thus continuing to lead the fight against the Spanish until his death in 1531. He is also remembered as *el caudillo amerindio de Veraguas*, (*The American indigenous leader of Veraguas*) adversary of the Spanish Empire, the great rebel in the current territory of Panama, and the one who faced the Spanish conquistadors. His face can be found on the smallest-denomination *centesimo* -equivalent to one American cent- coin of Panama.

is no trace of that noble indigenous people.

The city has the largest Normal School in Central America and once it housed many students from all over Central America.

A friend of Julie, Forrest Smith, who was a professor at the Normal School of Santiago, arranged for Julie to travel to Santiago and give a talk on the Baha'i Faith to the student body at the Aula Maxima. Julie recalled:

*"The Panama Assembly also sent along as a second speaker a newly enrolled Puerto Rican. He was dynamic, but he was an ex-Evangelist minister and only superficially a Baha'i, and that's the kind of talk he gave, which of course, I secretly deplored. However, I was cheered to hear indirectly afterwards that one of my hearers had been particularly impressed by Baha'u'llah's words that "Ye are the leaves of one tree and fruits of one branch".*

Of course, Julie made many other trips, sometimes with Louise, which:

*"...eventually she brought in the first Baha'i enrolled there, Virginia Fabrega".*

The Catholic Church, once hearing of the new Faith's activities within their dominion, successfully put end to such an activity, persuading the school not to hold meetings for the Baha'is anymore and at the Church, rebuked severely those who showed sympathy with the Faith. By Louise being in Colon and Julie's definite plan to leave Panama for Chicago, accepting the honor of becoming the new Secretary to the Inter-America Committee, the attracted handful people of Santiago were withered away, though Virginia Fabrega stood firm, moved to Panama City and for some time she was an active believer as far as the records show.

In her letter of August 17, 1946, Julie also informs the Inter America Committee that there is an interest in the city of Santiago de Veraguas, with a very Catholic environment, to the northeast of Panama, of some 300kms distance. She wrote:

*"Some interest in the Teachings has been aroused in the town of Santiago and possibly a public talk shall be given there this week. We shall try to follow this up with the formation of a study class and try to send teacher there from time to time..."*

Julie herself was in the forefront of this special activity and travelled to give talks at the Normal School of Santiago. She described the talks given by both herself and Angel:

*"In the Aula Maxima of this school, on Saturday night...Sr. Beauchamp and I spoke on "The New Era of Universal Peace". The hall was filled to capacity (500) with the four upper grades of students, some professors, and a few townspeople. Among them was a newspaper correspondent, on which we called next morning, and two half-column articles of our talks appeared in his paper the following week. Our audience was most attentive (which the teachers said was unusual) and gave us much applause. Several people suggested our returning to give more talks several times during the next semester..."*

Over the Thanksgiving weekend, together with Louise they spent another 4 days in Santiago:

*"...where a friend, not yet a Baha'i, an American teacher in the School there, has been promulgating the Cause with the zeal of a pioneer. The plan [is] to go back this Friday".*

Louise kept on going to Santiago de Veraguas and at times spending a week with those interested. Louis in her short note of January 18 wrote to Elisabeth:

*“This is my third trip to Santiago where Julie and her friend, Mr. Smith, have laid a wonderful foundation. I will be here for some time”.*

## JULIE LEAVING PANAMA

According to Julie, life in Panama with the presence of the other particular pioneer became unbearable for her and she reckoned it would be best for the community if she left. She desired to go back home sometimes early in 1948. She wrote to the Committee, without mentioning the real reason for her decision, also knowing of her mother being bedridden and chronically sick, desired to make a family visit. Elisabeth Cheney, of course knew of her real intentions that she would leave Panama for good, did consult it at the Committee, and she wrote to Julie on September 11:

*“Of the younger pioneers, you are one of the very few who have shown real pioneering capacity, i.e., language facility, steadiness, knowledge of the Cause and true devotion. You have served the most arduous apprenticeship in one of the really difficult posts, and the Inter-America Committee feels that you are now well prepared to perform most important services in the larger countries where no pioneers are now available”.*

Elisabeth even pushes harder to describe the reason for her wording: “most important services”, she continues:

*“This committee now faces a great difficulty in sending pioneer teachers to Latin America, since we are permitted to use only those who already understand Spanish or Portuguese at least to a reasonable extent, who are adapted in those countries”.*

And she mentions how the Inter America Committee has been effected economically:

*“Our budget has been cut \$4,000 and is likely to be further cut before the end of the year, thereby gravely imperiling the publishing work, which the Guardian feels is so important, and making it impossible to assist new people to go to the twelve Latin countries that are still without assistance. You and we know that the North American has quite ability to push buttons, to organize, and to keep things moving, which the majority of the Latin friends lack. That is why it is so important to try to have at least one pioneer in each country, especially during this era of building and stabilizing independent Latin American Baha’i administration. Not many pioneers are adapted to assisting in doing this, but you have shown yourself to be so adapted”.*

The Committee then asked Julie:

*“...to prayerfully consider accepting a post as pioneer in Venezuela, Ecuador or Bolivia”.*

And then Elisabeth continues further:

*“The only countries of South America, which have even one pioneer are the following: Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina and Brazil. The only countries of the twelve northern Latin Americas, which have a pioneer are the following: Panama, Cuba, Dominican Republic and possibly Haiti...Louise Caswell, Marcia Stewart and Natalia Chavez are doing some travel teaching in Central America, which helps a lot, but a resident pioneer is really needed for stability”.*

The Committee describes the problems in different countries and again asks Julie:

*“Will you think over this request very prayerfully and ask the beloved Guardian for his first choice for you?”*

The Committee applauds Julie:

*"You have been a comfort and a joy to this committee throughout your pioneer service in Panama. We hope to see you transfer that service to another country where we are sure that your sacrifice will meet with great rewards".*

Although Julie reckoned that it would be best for her to leave Panama, but she was not going to go before she secured the community in good hands. She wrote back in mid-September:

*"Although it has seemed to me most advantageous for the Cause that I leave Panama just as soon as our community here has been securely established, at the same time it has appeared clear to me that I ought to stay until that time, unless another pioneer relieves me, or a native Panamanian believer rise to the task. We have several very devoted and extremely able people in our community; they give magnificent talks and contribute in a great measure, but as yet they do not "push buttons, organize, and keep things moving".*

Julie had the plan of having a good Center for the meetings of the community before she left Panama. In her letter she described thoroughly this matter and tried to find a suitable place to rent as their permanent Center of activities. She set her time to leave:

*"...I had hopefully set the time for my departing Panama in February, but I have seriously doubted if I could conscientiously leave then. Together with Louise they considered deputizing:*

*"...a believer here, so that she could give up her work and devote her time exclusively to the Faith. But the Guardian counseled Louise to continue teaching herself, rather than deputizing someone".*

Then Julie turned her attention to a proper Baha'i Center for Panama and is ready to pay for the future expensed with the Center, as:

*"Cora, I don't believe, can carry the burden alone. In my judgment...I feel I should stay on here until the community is fairly strong, but if in your judgment, I should leave before that, I shall abide your decision".*

Julie in her letter mentions the immense difficulties of the community of Panama:

*"There are varied and immense difficulties here with which I but poorly cope, and many, and wonderful opportunities that I can exploit in only a limited degree. Perhaps another abler teacher can advance the Cause much more effectively here".*

Julie has suggested:

*"Gayle or Marcia make this her headquarters".*

She also mentions of Gwenn Sholtis that has indicated of her willing to travel to Panama:

*"She is a torrent of energy. Last time she passed thru here the Cause was at low ebb and she gave us an enormous boost. Our regular radio and newspaper publicity dates from that time. Yes, she would do marvelous working Panama".*



Julie was frank saying in her letter of the relationship between Gwenn and Cora:

*"...are you aware of her attitude towards Cora? And her way of expressing it? There was active hostility between the two last time she passed thru here, and that is what I would expect if she returns".*

Julie, as a mature peace-loving person foresees the upcoming problem if Gwenn comes to Panama:

*"...disregarding my own knowledge and sympathies, I should try to preserve peace, and take no side, but nonetheless, I think trouble would be inevitable".*

The Committee in response to Julie on this specific matter wrote back:

*"She is indeed...a torrent of spiritual energy. We don't believe that she will do Panama any harm if she does come there but quite helpful, even if there are some personal adjustments to work out in certain respects".*

Julie closes her letter by expressing that though she is ready to abide by the requests of the Institutions, to send her wherever they feel like it, her sick and bedridden mother also needs her more than anything else. The Committee however, in this stage considered Venezuela to fit more to Julie's next pioneering place. Though Elisabeth on behalf of the Committee still gave Julie an alternative of choice, as they had also received a request from the National Teaching Committee of South America based in Chile asking for Julie to become their secretary. The Committee, however, had already received her acceptance letter of becoming the secretary for the Inter America Committee. The letter said:

*"Both are positions of trust and major teaching importance. The South American post would mean living in Santiago, Chile" ...As IAC secretary you would be serving all 22 countries or Latin-America. You would be expected to reside in the Temple area, that is Chicago..."*

And the rest of the long letter recounts all the functions that would be expected from the new Secretary to the Committee.

Finally, Elisabeth wrote on behalf of the Inter-America Committee that Julie was chosen to be the new executive secretary of the Inter America Committee. She wrote:

*"You might be surprised if you knew how much in demand you are ever since the Inter-America Committee learned that you are considering leaving Panama. Of all the things that you have been asked to do, the request is being sent through us from two continents, the service, which the Inter-America Committee finally chose as being the most important and also well adapted to your special capacities is the following: "Effective as of May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1948, you are most urgently invited to take over as secretary of the Inter-America Committee in my place. I have promised to carry one of the correspondence teaching works for as long as may be necessary, so that the secretarial work will not be too onerous".*

Elisabeth described briefly what would be necessary for the new secretary to have, which were gathered in the person of Julie:

*"A good I.A.C. secretary is tremendously important; one who knows sufficiently the two languages needed and is aware of at least some of the Latin American conditions. The secretary*

*is the executive of this committee, seeing to it that all the matters of importance are called to the Committee's attention at meetings, voicing carefully, accurately and lovingly all of the Committee's decisions in the form of letters to the concerned; carrying out various decisions of the committee in various ways, none of them difficult, but really important to the work of two continents".*

The Inter America Committee – the spiritual parents of the pioneers - in fact could not find anyone better matching the qualities of Julie in full, knowing the Latin culture and language, having perfect secretarial background, be kind and generous with the Latins, be attentive and prompt and many other qualities, which were gathered in her.

Elisabeth wrote that once Edna True was to fulfill the Guardian's instructions regarding Europe, she was called to occupy her place, and now, she was to be fully engaged with correspondence course she prepared and being well received by the Latin-America, Julie is called to take her place. Surprised Julie wrote in her diary:

*"This meant that I would work at the Baha'i Headquarters in Wilmette, in the Chicago area, on the same committee as Millie Collins, Dorothy Baker and Ed Mattoon. It was a thrilling prospect that took my breath away, at the same time that it astonished me that they would consider me for the post. Gladly accepted and made ready to leave".*

She humbly wrote back to Elisabeth about the shocking and perturbing request:

*"The Inter-America Committee has honored me far above my merits in requesting me to be their secretary and I can attempt the task only with their help and patience...I rather expect you to change your minds before accepting me definitely. However, if you still wish me to be it, I will do the best I can".*

The mere thought of leaving Panama community, which:

*"...still leans on me heavily, both for my "button pushing" and financial support",* alarmed her.

She recognized that such a situation is not healthy for Panama, and the community should stand on her feet once for all and not depending on pioneers, but in case of Panama, she strongly thought there is a need for another pioneer. She suggested the return of Louise to Panama:

*"Dear Louise would fit here ideally, but she is not strong and prefers to live in Colon".*

Or even Hascle:

*"Perhaps Hascle could change his job and move over here. Everyone here admires him highly, and he could be fine...perhaps Gayle or Marcia could make a visit here".*

Julie was very much concerned about the empty space she is going to leave in Panama and still insisted:

*"Perhaps you can sympathize with me in my concern not to leave this community until is it safely on its feet, unless adequate measures are taken to replace me. Otherwise, my departure would cause me extreme anxiety and regret".*

Though Julie has been planning to leave Panama because of the circumstances prevailing in the community, and she believed and was encouraged by the capacity and excellence of the believers, yet she thought she should stay for a considerable while longer than what she planned with the hope of some fortunate developments soon to happen to resolve the obstacles for her departure. Of course, working with the Committee, and being close to her family, especially her sickly mother, appealed strongly to her, which would ultimately make her decision to leave.

One last service Julie to perform in Panama was working on having one delegate from Panama to participate in the Third Congress of Central America to be held in Mexico in early January 1948. The Committee appointed Hascle and Julie to organize a conference for the community to choose its delegate. Elsa Rohmoser was voted for to participate and the alternate became Raquel Francois. Unfortunately, none of them were able to take part in the Congress. Julie and Hascle organized another general meeting to elect another representative and in the meanwhile, Colon decided to send one representative too. Julie sponsored the delegate from Colon. The result of the second round of voting for the delegate was Blanca de Campos and Higinio Malave as the alternate, however, if funds were available, both would be participating.

Julie was well remembered by the community. Most of them wrote personal letters to her telling her of how they missed her amongst them. The new secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama Mr. Angel Beauchamp wrote to her:

*"...always remember you with great affection for both your example and contribution have helped to bring about the existence of this spiritual community".*

Manuel Corgas<sup>340</sup>, the first Indigenous wrote an emotional letter to her asking for her picture to have it always present on her wall. Raquel Francois wrote to her with love and affection, looking forward having her back in Panama.

## **FAREWELL PARTY**

Julie did not have a farewell party in Panama City, where she served so diligently, but Louise informed her that the community of Colon would have a picnic at a park outside the city in her honor and the friends of the Pacific side – Panama City – would also be invited. Julie recalled in her diary:

*"It was indeed a lovely gathering of the friends that last Sunday that I was in Panama. How much I had always loved going to Colon and visiting the dear believers there! They were so warm, so genuine, so radiant, and harmony reigned among them. All of them were present...as were most of the believers from the Pacific side. We had our picnic lunch together on long tables on the porch of the park building, and after wards a program of Baha'i readings..."*

*"The Governor of the province, Victor Navas, who had so greatly befriended the Baha'is, drove out to our picnic and visited amiably with us. He chatted a while with me, and on leaving*

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340. It is also being written Gorgas

*gladdened my heart by saying that he had come especially to bid me goodbye.*

*“Various of the friends made special farewell visits to my apartment in the remaining days before my departure. Came the last night; how deeply affected I was by the affection shown me then! Three of the Panamanian Baha’is came with guitars and sang to me. How I loved these unpretentious, warm hearted, radiant people! And the Spanish-speaking Panamanians, who knew no English, gave me special joy because their affection towards me was unclouded by any influence from Cora”.*

*“Also Alfred came and joined the company. When he took his leave, standing in the hall just outside the apartment door, he uttered words, which I hope I merited. Coming from him, they tremendously surprised at the same time that they thrilled me, as I had not imagined that he, such a strong admirer of Cora, thought so well of me. “We sometimes do not know,” he said, “until it leaves us what a good thing we had with us”. “Those words have ever since gladdened me: even though perhaps it was only briefly, Alfred had then thought well of my work in Panama”.*

*“Beloved Louise also was present with me company on that last night.*

*“At noon the next day she and darling Aida<sup>341</sup> accompanied me to the airport and saw me off. With sharp pangs of sorrow, I left this land, which had been so receptive to the Baha’i Message and where I had many dear friends”.*

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341. Julie’s roommate.

## **CHAPTER X - 1948 / 1949 / 1950**

### **CHALLENGE ON THE VACATED SOIL**

Truly, by Louise moving out permanently from Panama City to Colon and Julie gone back home, both to the deep regret of the Panamanians, the obstacles on the path of dear Cora were cleared, made the community of Panama to take the challenge into its own hands. The tensions between them and the dominant pioneer who did not speak their language persisted for a long time, making the community somehow stronger. At least the previous dislikes among the pioneers, which caused so much disharmony was not there anymore, but the nature of challenge remained among the members of the community.

Finding no potential resistance, dear lonely Cora continued her services as she deemed fit. She planned her long vacations – two months per year – as she wished them to be, often financially supported by herself, she made the best of it by visiting the countries where deepening need was high, and she dispensed of her time as necessary. Though there was no demand from the Inter America Committee or the CEBMA for her travel teaching plans as mentioned earlier, she made herself available for such services. She needed to be considered at the same level as other pioneers. Louise was already high in demand on the international level visiting as many countries as possible for the Inter America Committee. Julie was also in high demand for her profession as an executive secretary for the Committee. Gayle Woolson, many times in Panama, was also like Louise in a very high demand on the international level, as well as her other colleagues in the field of pioneering. But lonely Cora was stuck working in Canal Zone. She only could dedicate herself in the pressing work of Distribution Committee, which she was tired of it and had repeatedly resigned from it, as well as spending the rest of her time with the Panama City community, which already was in disharmony and due to her established character could not be remedied. The existence of CEBMA in Panama, even limited more of her desired activities. Her only escape from the existing situation, was planning her own vacations, bring them to the attention of the Guardian, get approval and act upon them. She was an isolated but very faithful soldier acting alone and hoping for high achievements! Though she became member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of Central America for two years before she left Panama for good to Belize, by the approval of the Guardian and continued for another 20 years in Belize, quite active in the administration.

Cora could never change her attitude towards Julie, a very un-Baha'i attitude, even after she left Panama. In a letter to Elisabeth, she criticized unnecessarily her work, though she was well known to the Committee, hence her appointment for the new mentioned position, of not understanding the process of the election of the delegate to the Congress in Mexico and

later on by hearing that she is now the new secretary of the Inter America Committee, she wrote:

*“While she is the most competent secretary and is devoted and faithful, giving abundantly of herself – time and money – it seems like giving one who has demonstrated a lack of understanding of respect for confidences and community action or Assembly action instead of individual action – a lack of consultation with the institutions provided by making plans with an individual thru private conversation, phone or otherwise then advising others of the plan adopted, and using phone for discussion of matters, which are out of place (as has been attempted with me again and again on a business phone), a position, which cannot but place her so she will be the recipient of all confidences south of U.S. May Baha’u’llah so heal her of this condition that no other community or believer will suffer as a result. The force given to insist upon her own idea is difficult to cope with and frequently the entire group suffers while her idea has to be tried out...”*

And she goes on and on speaking to the members of the Inter American Committee with her detrimental comments about Julie. As thorough as Julie was in all aspects, yet she was asked to be careful with the gossips even among the Baha’is and keep the confidentiality of matters, especially within the institutions as a sacred obligation, which of course it was more than obvious for Julie.

This veteran pioneer preferred to write to other members of the Committee, marking her letters as ‘personal’, rather than to use the proper channel of sending them through the Secretary of the Committee. In her two-page personal letter addressed to Mr. Mattoon, she discusses matters pertaining to the growth of Panama’s Community by requesting more American teachers to be sent to Panama, those who know the culture and the language, as well as being deep in the Faith, to restore the faith of the community in Americans. Unfortunately, she never learned Spanish despite her long staying in Panama, nor did she become acquainted with the Latin culture and certainly distanced the Panamanians from herself. Such a matter was discussed in the Committee over and over again, but no solution could be given to this important matter. She cleverly would write to the Guardian and get his consent in what she had in mind! The beloved Guardian knew everything but left such problems to the institutions to solve rather than himself to get involved in personal matters.

## SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF COLON

The year 1948<sup>342</sup> counts with three distinct matters of significance to the communities of Panama and Colon. First was the leaving of a founding pioneer from the midst of the community, namely Julie Regal in February, taking the job of secretary of the Inter America Committee in Chicago. Second the formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Colon on April 21, and the third, leaving of Louise Caswell, another founding pioneer of the Panama community, to continue her services internationally.

In response to enthusiastic letter of James Facey, secretary of the Baha'i group of Colon, where the names of the nine members appear. The Inter America Committee in a congratulatory letter dated April 24, 1948, indicated:

*"Your letter containing the names of the historic nine members of the beloved Faith in Colon just arrived yesterday, bringing great joy to our hearts through the knowledge that Panama will now have her historic second assembly, and be marching in the vanguard with those who are so nobly serving Baha'u'llah in the Americas. This news will assuredly bring joy to the heart of the dear Guardian, burdened as he is by the reign of terror in the Holy Land now extended to the City of Haifa itself and to the holy Mountain of the Lord...Little by little the world is awakening and the day will come when a war-weary and desperate humanity will turn for guidance to the spiritual light-houses represented by the Spiritual Assemblies of the Baha'is in each land. Colon is greatly blessed by having one of these points of spiritual light and hope".*

On May 4, Louise wrote to Elisabeth giving her the news of the formation of the Assembly too. She is dismayed that in general, there is not much progress in Panama unlike other countries in Latin America. She wrote:

*"Our Assembly formed on time and with a fine spirit. I think that we shall see steady but slow progress in Colon. As soon as we have more members, I want to resign as chairman as the Guardian wants local believers to take responsibility".*

According to the Minutes of the Inter America Committee of May 4, the membership of the first Assembly of Colon is as follow:

- Mrs. Louise Caswell	Chairman
- Mrs. Iola Jones Edwards	Vice-Chairman
- Mr. James Facey	Secretary
- Mrs. Gladys M. Facey	Treasurer
- Mr. Leonard Beckford	Librarian
- Mr. George Thomas	
- Mr. Nathan Bryan	
- Mrs. Clarissa Bryan	
- Miss Gladys C. Davis	

Julie Regal, the new Secretary of the Inter America Committee, who labored for the formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Colon wrote on May 10<sup>th</sup> to the newly formed

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342. This date coincides with the commencement of the building of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Bab in the middle of upheavals of the announcement of the independence of Israel as a Jewish State, where the Guardian was quite concerned about the disturbances of the Holy Land.

Local Assembly of Colon:

*“Beloved Baha’i brothers and sisters, it gave us great joy to learn of the formation of your Assembly, which forms another link in the chain of Baha’i communities encircling the earth and strengthening us in our labors to establish a New World Order of peace and brotherhood. We hope that your Assembly will bring joy to every one of its members and stimulate your spiritual growth and that it will shine like a torch in your city. We hope that the unity, harmony and love among you will be so great that, like a magnet, they will attract others to cast their lot with yours in this glorious Cause”.*

The members of the Assembly slowly but surely were catching fire and themselves becoming teachers of the Faith, as Louise observed in one of her letters to Julie. The incorporation of the Assembly was soon to follow.

It took one more year – 1949 - for the Assembly of Colon to become incorporated and at the same time to obtain their own local Center.

The fact remained that all the nine members of the Assembly of Colon were from Caribbean background, speaking only English. The Inter America Committee recorded in their Minutes:

*“In spite of the fact that the LSA of Colon is strong, that community has only 9 members and all of them speak English rather than Spanish, so that they are unable to teach the Faith to Latins. The Latins who attend meetings in Colon wish to meet people who can speak to them in their own language, but they do not have this opportunity very often”.*

Louise was always on the demand and the vanguard to help with the deepening of the communities in both Central and South America, but especially in Central America, that was due to her good and loving character, her deep knowledge in the Faith, her dedication and patience in conducting her classes with the humble Latin friends and for sure, her full knowledge of Spanish language and Latin culture. All these characteristics helped to her availability and readiness in the teaching field, which the Committee could always count on her. Once Louise wrote to the Committee:

*“Pray that I may find that “word”, which had “Been written down and recorded by the Pen of the Most High in the Crimson Book, which is capable of fully disclosing that force, which is hid in men, nay of redoubling its potency”<sup>343</sup>.*

Maybe she had already found that “word”, which had recreated her in full. When she was asked to go to Jamaica by the request of the Inter America Committee to travel teach, she answered:

*“I do not feel in condition for going there, -due to their slowness. However, if there is an urgent need, I will comply...”*

She did not want to slow down her enthusiasm in the field of teaching.

By the end of July, she received a call from the Committee to go to Guatemalan communities during her vacations. The invitation records that the Guatemalan community

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343. Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.



has specifically asked for Louise because she

*“...has all the characteristics of a Baha’i teacher. She loves the Guatemalan and them love her!”*

Louise had to decline the invitation however, due to her delicate health, which had not recuperated yet. Once Louise left for good in 1948, first resettling in Costa Rica and then to Honduras, the community of Colon had a vacancy in their community that soon it was filled by the ninth person, Miss Amy McAllister.

In September 1948 the two communities of Panama and Colon met at the new Baha’i Center in Panama City for an inter-community meeting, discussing the deepening and progress of the Faith in the Republic. Their activities through radio and press were not satisfactory enough and they had to engage more strongly in the factual teaching. Both full members of the two sister communities participated in the meeting. The main objectives of the consultation were the points singled out by the beloved Guardian for Panama, which were:

- Radial and press publicity.
- On-going contact with the Leaders of the Republic.
- Developing contact with the Indigenous groups and leading them to the Faith; and, - Strengthening the bonds of unity between the North-Americans and the Latin-American communities.

Similar meeting was again held at the Baha’i Center of the Panama City in late October and many matters related to the progress of the Faith in both cities were discussed among the 18 participants of Colon and Panama. The two communities’ hand in hand conducted meetings to deepen themselves in the annals of the Faith and program of their teaching activities. All Colon members were quite active and enthusiastic about their newly found Faith and endeavored to learn the Latin culture ever more to be able to freely communicate with their brethren in Panama in all their activities. Again, on the occasion of the visit of Mrs. Amelia Collins in late February 1949, another joint meeting was held to celebrate the occasion, where the two all-stars’ Panamanians, Raquel and Blanca took charge and practically run the program. Louise wrote on the visit of Mrs. Collins:

*“The believers in Colon deeply appreciated her short visit to a special meeting of consultation. She always inspires confidence”.*

## LOUISE LEAVING PANAMA

In November Louise wrote to Mr. Mattoon saying that she is selling or giving away all her furniture, as:

*"I don't think I will return to live here. I am praying for guidance".*

With this statement, she made sure that her return to Panama was not going to happen. In her next letter she mentioned how she felt after CEBMA paid little attention to her. She was clearly heartbroken after having served a country she loved so much for ten years. She wrote to Mr. Mattoon that the CEBMA has made no attempt inviting her to their meetings but have asked her to write her report, obviously she was upset:

*"Raquel wrote a very clever letter answering me. She said the Committee would like to hear my report...so that the Committee could work on it. I was not urged to attend the Committee meeting, nor was I denied an audience but certainly the letter was not full of love. Since I have been here the Committee has made no effort to benefit from my proximity and my experience in Central America. I do not want to meet with them now...please do not make any attempt to arrange a meeting with CEBMA and me. I feel the less I do here & the sooner I leave the better".*

The obvious tone of the letter shows how irked and unhappy she was after her return to her home country.

In another letter to Julie, which was written also in November, Louise mentions of the cable she sent on behalf of both herself and Julie to Thomas Gabriel Duque the ex-president of Panama and the owner of the newspaper Star & Herald, who helped the Baha'is during the first and second Congresses, on the occasion of the loss of his brother.

She also mentions in that letter, of the enigma of disharmony in the Panama community, which now has extended to Colon as well. Those who work closely with that colleague pioneer, are constantly under her influence and clearly and loudly undermine the service of the other members. She had her grip on Raquel and Iola; hence, Natalia and Blanca in Panama and Maisie Facey in Colon are slowly being pushed to side. Julie wrote back on behalf of the Committee, calling it:

*"...the shocking misunderstanding and inharmony existing in Colon and Panama".*

Elisabeth Cheney in her trip to Panama was asked to tackle this problem:

*"We trust that Elisabeth, with her understanding and kindness, can to a large extent dispel the misunderstanding now plaguing the Baha'is on that strategic Isthmus".*

Louise, however, would not leave Latin America. She wrote to Julie in late March 1949, a short letter, in which one can see the zeal and drive of this pioneer. She would sacrifice everything for the sake of the Faith. She had the spirit of a true pioneer, which history would always be proud of.

It is noted that after six months of hard work in Colon, Louise Caswell, moved first to Costa Rica, then to Honduras and Guatemala. Later, she took Mexico as the last pioneering country of her choice, where her heroic life was ended. Panama will long remember her as one the highly appreciated founding members of its communities and institutions. She wrote:

*“These days are so important and so intense that I do not dare leave the Latin American field for even a short visit to the States. While my strength is so terribly limited still, I feel somehow, I can do something where there is no one else to do the task I can. Where is it that Baha’u’llah write: **“We have the power to restore the force that has spent itself and perished.”** “...Such passages give us inspiration to do the impossible”.*

## **CORA’S INTERNATIONAL TRIPS – CHALLENGES TO CEBMA**

There is some correspondence regarding Elisabeth Cheney’s activities, after being released from her secretarial job at the Inter America Committee in May 1948. She made a trip throughout Central America to promote her correspondence course for the new believers highly acclaimed and approved by the National Spiritual Assembly and the Inter America Committee. She passed through Panama and in February 1949 sent an urgent report to the Committee, regarding Cora’s carefully made plan to visit the Central American countries to disseminate the administrative character of the Faith according to her own strategy, a work which should have been done by the CEBMA or at least with the knowledge of such institution. According to Elisabeth, this move by Cora, would undermine the whole concept of the new Central American institution by unilaterally making plans and would be disastrous for the intended countries. Elisabeth recommended the Committee to stop Cora of such a plan, as none of the countries have requested the Committee or the CEBMA, neither any one of the pioneers to embark upon such a plan.

According to Elisabeth, Cora did not have the tact nor the wisdom of how to deal with the new Baha’is of the intended countries, as she seemed to have small liking the Latin people and instead of teaching with love and patience, there would be some harshness, that the matter had raised many complaints, requesting the travel teachers not to recommend her to go to their communities anymore. Cora received a letter from the Committee to consult with the CEBMA before starting her traveling plan. Cora sensing the reason for such a decision, wrote again directly to the Guardian and asked permission to do what she exactly had planned and received his approval before she asked the CEBMA for consultation. When at the meeting she was asked instead of going to the Central American countries, she should go to the Caribbean Islands because of knowledge of language, she produced the approval letter of the Guardian, which was the highest institution supporting her plan<sup>344</sup>.

At the same time, it is only fair to mention that Cora was genuinely concerned about spiritual progress of the Latin believers, as she was quite a practical person, especially with the Panamanians. She, time and again criticized the North American pioneers who materially cover every aspect of any activity and do not teach the Latins, to also get to understand the bounty of giving and becoming generous in material life and reap its bounties, after all, Baha’u’llah said:

***“To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth***

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344. Beloved Guardian always answered the letters of the pioneers, and always encouraged them to serve and promote the Faith in their best capacity. If, however, she was not referred to consult with the local institutions, there must have been for a reason known to him or it was done out of wisdom unknown to others. After all, the Guardian was infallible and knew of matters usually beyond the comprehension of normal believers.

*himself with My virtues*"<sup>345</sup>.

She wrote to Mr. Mattoon and asked him to bring this matter to the attention of the institutions that both pioneers and travel-teachers speak openly about this specific divine bounty and describe to the friends the spiritual character of giving to the Fund, offering feasts and other celebrations, as through their sacrificial contributions they would progress spiritually. Often, she pronounced her thoughts forcefully, which others became resentful. True, she might have lacked tact and wisdom while bringing a point to the attention of the audience, but her contributions in educating the friends have been quite remarkable.

The CEBMA accepted her travel-teaching plan for twelve weeks from February 1950 to May 5<sup>th</sup>, visiting Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Such an extensive and thorough plan of visiting ten countries, though remarkable, yet it raises question of its wisdom, which only Baha'u'llah would know the personal plan. This was done just a year before the election of the Central American National Assembly, would raise eyebrows! The rest of this story is written in the section corresponding to CEBMA.

#### **MORE ON CEBMA'S CHALLENGE**

Another report was sent by Elisabeth Cheney to the Inter America Committee dated February 1950, which talks frankly on the survey she has done on the communities of Central America, just prior to the election of the Regional National Assembly. On her report concerning Panama however, she calls Panama community spiritually ill. The following is what she has mentioned about this most important Latin-American community:

*"The community of Panama is spiritually ill. Three groups have formed, all of, so far, within the Faith. One, a small one circling around Cora, consists of people she has favored and whom she has not yet alienated by ill-treatment. The second, rather larger, circling around Blanca de Campos, consists of people who do not like Cora and who sympathize with Blanca, who is Cora's newest scapegoat. The third, circling around Raquel Francois, consists of people who want a little peace and don't want to listen to Cora's backbiting concerning Blanca, nor to Blanca's honesty justified, but unwise complaints against Cora. Under the surface, the community is a maelstrom of cross-current and cross-purposes; a very bad condition for any community and especially dangerous for CEBMA".*

In any community, where there is backbiting, gossiping, and criticizing, is the recipe for disintegration and stagnation in spiritual progress. At any cost this malady should be eradicated once the root cause is found. This is the most annoying matter.

Elisabeth requests the Committee that believers should refrain from writing personal letters to the individual members of the community, asking for information. Such a behavior only aggravates the situation, giving more to backbiting. Both Alfred and Blanca had received such individual letters, which have not helped the situation. Letters should only be written through proper administrative channels in existence.

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345. Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words, Persian, 49.

In her letter, Elisabeth mentions one solution only:

*“The only hope for CEBMA in Panama and the only ultimate hope for Panama and Colon, is the removal of Cora to the United States and the coming of a pioneer, who can understand the Latin friends and who is not afflicted with either mental or temperamental illness over which he or she has no control and for which he or she is not responsible. Cora is a psychopathic personality of the type, which always chooses a scapegoat upon which to inflict continual and subtle torture, in order to relieve the inner storms of an unbalanced nature. There is no known cure for this, either spiritual or medical. These people usually have excellent minds, sometimes unusual capacities, but these are aborted by their genuine ability to control themselves and to see clearly... Louise Caswell was her first scapegoat and underwent nearly 10 years of martyrdom because of it. Julie was her second and fortunately escaped to the US. With Louise gone, Natalia Chavez became the third, and with Natalia away most of the time, Blanca de Campos has become the unfortunate fourth. Someone of capacity is always chosen as the scapegoat”.*

Elisabeth mentions:

*“Unity and strength are impossible in any country where Cora remains for long. It is tragic, because she really wants to serve, but is unable to change herself... Cora always says that she must stay here because Guardian told her to. Meantime, CEBMA needs to be treated very delicately because it is very weak”.*

And again, she continues this delicate problem:

*“CEBMA did a brave thing in cancelling Cora’s territorial trip, when they say...that the communities are simply not ripe for the kind of hammer and tongs administrative teaching, which Cora gives, and that this would do harm and not good. They had not reported the trip to IAC, thinking they did not need to report anything to IAC except where North American funds were required. This misconception has been duly and happily corrected. It was fomented by Cora, who is beginning to oppose not only the IAC but also the NSA in her usual subtle way. She still believes in the Guardian, and he may be able to help her before she goes too far...”*

There is another letter of Elisabeth of February 12, 1950, to the Inter America Committee that she reveals even more of the unhealthy conditions of CEBMA’s function in the Panama community while this pioneer being present. The points being discussed in her letter are the facts that if the pioneer would not respect the administration procedure, then the institutions cannot function properly, and it brings chaos. The case of this pioneer’s planned to travel to the Central American countries and the Caribbean Island, where still no real functioning institutions in existence, according to Elisabeth, is detrimental to these communities to have someone dominant as her, try to hammer her point of view. She mentions that a special consultation was carried out with her, and in spite of acknowledging this truth, adamantly, with approval or disapproval of the CEBMA, the Inter America Committee, or the National Spiritual Assembly, she would still carry out her plans, because she is having foreseen the interference of the institutions with her plans, had already written to the Guardian and has his approval for her plans. And when she was asked if the CEBMA could cable the Guardian explaining the untimely planned visit, which should be left to the next year, where at least there are some stronger communities established under the guidance of the Regional

National Assembly, she rejected the idea:

*“She made it plain that she meant to carry out her own plan regardless of what anyone might advise, including the Guardian”.*

Indeed, it has been quite a dangerous situation with such a dedicated pioneer to undermining the institutions, nevertheless, Elisabeth writes on her other qualities:

*“In spite of being a dominant lady, Cora has some magnificent qualities such as generosity, kindness within her limited understanding, constancy (as long as she gets her own way, but still sincere enough), a tremendous willingness to work hard. It is tragic that she has this psychopathic veil, which impels her to choose one victim after another to torment, and it is the torment of hell, which each one endures, the whole atmosphere being poisoned against her”.*

Elisabeth ends her letter touching the matter of ‘unity’ in Panama, where she says:

*“A united community in Panama is impossible until Cora goes. Only the Guardian can effect this with his own immense, loving tact. Cora might possibly be saved from the crack up through which Gerrard Sluter<sup>346</sup> passed. If Cora were gone, CEBMA could do very well with Natalia here most of the time. Otherwise, I think CEBMA will have to be transferred again...She cannot do this in Panama for she is one of Cora’s victims”.*

## **OBEDIENCE TO INSTITUTIONS IS THE KEY FACTOR**

There are many pages of correspondence and Minutes of the Committee regarding the problems in Panama, which these truly were such a stumbling block for over ten years, preventing the establishment of a totally united community at its initial stages in this promised land, majority of which concern the role of one single dominant pioneer whose character stood on the way. In the Major Plan of God, there were reasons why Matthew Kaszab had to leave Panama, meeting his tragic end, or Louise Caswell, had to vacate her place due to constrictions she encountered in the land she loved and served, or Julie Regal, had to escape the situation she found herself unable to function.

Elisabeth Cheney, the previously executive secretary of the Inter America Committee remained in Panama as a pioneer for almost a year, together with Larry Kramer, another ex-member of the Committee, helped the CEBMA to function properly while Natalia was making her trips around the Central American countries. She acted as the secretary general to the CEBMA. These two, both tried their best to resolve the difficult problem in Panama. After the election of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of Central America in April 1951, Elisabeth returned to her travel teaching activities both in Central and South America and Larry Kramer back to the US. Once Elisabeth approached Cora on behalf of the CEBMA for filling up forms as pioneer of Panama, referring to the letter of the beloved Guardian of March 1946 of a significant importance regarding the pioneers, in her response Cora refused collaboration:

***“The pioneer, as soon as an administrative body has been established, ceases to***

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346. Gerrard Sluter, a German Canadian citizen and previously a pioneer in Guatemala, arrived in Colombia, the first Baha’i to settle in the country.

***have any unique status in the community. But, of course, the services he has rendered remains very great and should continue to do this utmost for the Cause in conjunction with the Assembly and the other believers***<sup>347</sup>.

In spite of all the efforts, finally, the CEBMA had to be relocated to El Salvador, as it could not function properly in Panama with the present situation.

By January 1951, just few months before the election of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of Central America, the Inter America Committee recommended CEBMA to make:

*"...special publications for the Conventions, using a dedication sheet as follows: "Published in the year 1951 in Commemoration of the Election of the first Latin American Spiritual Assembly".*

Indeed, it was going to be a very special occasion not to be repeated again in history. There would be much more National Spiritual Assemblies throughout, but this, the first Regional National Spiritual Assembly, was of course a special one.

The Inter America Committee also answered the question of the CEBMA as to the matter of Canal Zone Baha'is, if they are eligible in the membership of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly, the answer was:

*"...since they do not as yet have a Local Assembly in the Canal Zone, they are not eligible to vote for delegates nor to be elected as delegates to the first National Convention...They have the same rights as believers anywhere else in the Territory".*

In general, CEBMA has done an outstanding work by preparing deepening institutes in all the Central American communities, having the friends go through the special deepening sessions on the administration as well as the teachings of the Faith. The Inter America Committee encouraged CEBMA to dedicate two months solely to:

*"Take the world for God".*

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347. Baha'i News #181

## VISIT TO THE PRESIDENT

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama had planned to formally present the Faith to the President of the Republic Dr. Arnulfo Arias, internationally acclaimed personage. To do this, the Chairman and the Secretary of the Assembly were chosen, though both had excellent Public Relation capacities as well as deep appreciation in promoting the Faith to the VIP<sup>348</sup>. On December 9, 1950, Cora together with Raquel Francois, fulfilled this plan by paying a visit to Dr. Arnulfo Arias Madrid, who had expressed his appreciation of the benefits derived by the people of Panama through the campaign that the Local Assembly had put on behalf of the Cause. The President had expressed that some of the teachings of the Baha'i Faith have been very useful to him, who already knows the Principles of the Faith. Dr. Arias had made the following suggestion to the Baha'is:

*"...it would be well to present the Baha'i Faith to the public through the press, from the point of view of the international success, which it has attained in the world, such as that in the Non-Governmental Organization of the United Nations. That the campaign for the Unity of Religions should be promulgated and that effort should be made to demonstrate the reality of the Baha'i Principles, etc."*

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348. Very Important Person



## CHAPTER XI- 1951

### REGIONAL NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY – CONVENTION

Ridvan<sup>349</sup> of 1951 marks the date of the birth of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of the Central America and Antilles.

At the Convention held in Panama City at Hotel Central, 46 delegates together with Mr. Horace Holley and Mrs. Dorothy Baker as the representatives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the USA were present.

Thus, the turbulent period of establishment of the Faith in Panama from 1939 to 1951 came to its end and from then on, the individual character of the services of the Baha'is under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States were delivered to the elected regional administrative system of the Faith, although elected Local Assemblies of many different regions were functioning well as before, yet, the Regional National Spiritual Assembly became the coordinating institution of all the regional activities, directly under the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi in Haifa. This system continued until the National Assemblies of different countries came into being, mostly in the early 1960s.

Cora wrote of the victory achieved:

*“It was a wonderful victory after those years of dedicated service, firmness in the Covenant, sacrifice (which never in reality is a sacrifice), and the growing pains, which accompany all such achievements. The spirit that pervaded that Convention prevailed during the election procedure, resulting in an atmosphere truly exemplary of the Baha’i spirit. The two representatives from the NSA of the United States, Dorothy Baker and Horace Holley, were there to guide and assist us, and as a special gesture, Shoghi Effendi, through Mrs. Amelia Collins, presented to the new Assembly a lock of the blessed hair of His Holiness Baha’u’llah. Needless to say, we all felt blessed to be part of that rarified atmosphere that is produced when everyone responds to the spirit of Baha’u’llah”.*

At this Convention, Raquel Francois, the young and dedicated young lady from Panama, became the convener for the first meeting of the newly elected Regional National Institution. The membership of this elected institution was recorded:

1. Miss Raquel J. Francois, Chairman (Panama)
2. Mrs. Cora Oliver, Vice Chairman (Panama)

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349. Ridvan is the period of the year between 21 April to 2 May, is the celebration of the Proclamation of Baha’u’llah, where Baha’i administration also, i.e. Local, National Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice are elected.

3. Mrs. Elena Marsella, Secretary (Dominican Republic)
4. Mr. James Facey, Treasurer (Panama)
5. Miss Natalia Chavez, Recording Secretary (Honduras)
6. Dr. David Escalante (El Salvador)
7. Miss Zenayda Juarado (Mexico)
8. Mrs. Louise Caswell (Honduras)
9. Mr. Artemus Lamb (Costa Rica)

They agreed to have five meetings per year<sup>350</sup>.

At the Convention held in Panama City at Hotel Central, 46 delegates together with Mr. Horace Holley and Mrs. Dorothy Baker as the representatives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the USA were present.

Thus, the turbulent period of establishment of the Faith in Panama from 1939 to 1951 came to its end and from then on, the individual character of the services of the Baha'is under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States were passed to the elected regional administrative system of the Faith, although elected Local Assemblies of many different regions were functioning well as before, yet, the Regional National Spiritual Assembly became the coordinating institution of all the regional activities, directly under the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi in Haifa, Israel. This system continued until the National Assemblies of different countries came into being, mostly in the early 1960s.

## INCORPORATED

According to Cora's diary, the Regional National Spiritual Assembly was incorporated under the Panamanian laws in September 1952, as a Religious Body of International Character, and President Arosemena signed Resolution No. 678, approving the "Constitution of the Central America National Assembly on July 16, 1951".

It was indeed a great leap from 1939 to 1952 to attain such a goal for the Faith. The Guardian, who ushered the pioneers throughout, guiding their steps towards such a success, seeing the triumph the Faith has achieved, and from this special date onward, the institutions take over the work of the pioneers, he must have been relieved.

For the occasion, the secretary of the beloved Guardian wrote:

*"He was delighted to receive the documents concerning your incorporation and feels this is a great step forward".*

And in his own handwriting:

***"The two-year Plan you have spontaneously initiated, the vigor with which you have prosecuting it, the noble aim that has animated you ever since its adoption, the vigilance and thoroughness with which you endeavor to safeguard the interests of the nascent institution of the Faith, to promote their welfare and***

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350. Picture of the First Regional National Assembly is printed on the Cover.

***consolidate their foundations, merit the highest praise”.***

As soon as this institution and its sister institution in South America were born, then the other three institutions i.e., Inter-America Committee, the CEBMA, the National Teaching Committee of Central America, and CEPASA, the National Teaching Committee of South America, by the sanction of the beloved Guardian were dissolved.

Cora Oliver remained as active in her role as before and again on January 15, 1952, Shoghi Effendi, learning of her trips to Jamaica and Haiti, wrote approving these trips:

***“He is happy to hear that you plan to go to Jamaica and Haiti; and hopes that this will materialize”.***

### **CORA LEAVING PANAMA**

The Ten-Year Crusade commencing Ridvan 1953, also marked the end of almost a 14-year services of Cora Oliver in Panama. In July of the same year, she sent a message to the Guardian asking him a new goal to be fulfilled and he cabled back with only four words:

***“Advise Virgin Territory. Shoghi”***

Cora wrote at the end of her diary:

*“With this as my directive, I gave the Panama Canal Government two weeks’ notice, resigned from employment, which would have lasted until retirement, and left Panama for British Honduras (Now Belize) 15 September 1953, staying overnight with Louise Caswell in Guatemala City. The next day, 16 September 1953, I arrived at my post in a virgin area, fulfilling an important goal of the Ten-Year Crusade, and bestowing upon me the appellation, “Knight of Baha’u’llah”.*

## CHAPTER XII

### STARS ARE BORN

All during the years 1947 and 1948, many Panamanians were rising to serve the Faith. These all-new souls, who were slowly being nurtured by the permanent teacher and pioneer, Cora Oliver, who in spite of not knowing Spanish, did organize classes where the Latin friends would conduct. Among those who constantly were engaged in such deepening process, were Raquel Francois, Natalia Chavez (though not Panamanian) and Blanca de Campos, in Panama City and, James and Maisie Facey, Iola Edwards, Clarice Bryan in Colon. Clarice together with her husband Nathan, did a splendid teaching trip to Jamaica, where she stayed for two months deepening the friends there. At continuation a brief story of some stars are mentioned:

#### ALFRED OSBORNE<sup>351</sup>

February 2015

After the declaration of the first believer, Joseph Wantuk in August 1939, it took the Panamanian pioneers almost two years before the second person declared his faith in Baha'u'llah. Alfred Osborne, an American citizen, but originally born in St. John, Antigua in the British West Indies or better known as the Caribbean Islands. Alfred was born on the same date as the day of the Declaration of the Bab, and the birthday of the Center of the Covenant of the Faith, Abdu'l-Baha, and that was May 23, 1907. The year that the construction of the original Shrine of the Bab was completed in Haifa by the Master.

The construction of the Panama Canal, which transferred from the French to the hands of the US Government in 1903, attracted thousands of job seekers from the Caribbean Islands, who were mostly fluent in English language, though their own specific version of Caribbean English! The Panama Canal Company would employ all the immigrates it could, as the mortality rate



Mr. Alfred Osborne. The second Baha'i of Panama circa 1943.

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351. Special appreciation to Miguel Osborne for having checked and approved the following article.

was very high due to yellow fever and Malaria diseases, ever present in the Darien jungles, which took the life of thousands upon thousands of people in the hot tropical land of Panama. Alfred's parents were among those emigrated to Panama during the construction period, which ended in 1913, with the inauguration of the inter-oceanic waterway, connecting the two oceans of Pacific to Atlantic in 1914, coinciding with WWI.

The Panama Canal Company sought provisions for the housing and education of the immigrants' children, however inadequate. Alfred studied in the Panama Canal Zone, and he was only 16, when he left for furthering his education in Chicago, Hyde Park High School. Excelling in all the subjects, he could go to the University of Chicago, acquiring his bachelor's degree in philosophy and there, he became a US citizen. After only eight years, he returned to Panama and in La Boca, Canal Zone, he founded the first Normal School for furthering the education of the native Caribbean people. Miguel Osborne, Alfred's second son wrote in the obituary of his father:

*"it marked the beginning of his distinguished carrier as teacher, principal, supervisor of instruction and eventually assistant superintendent in charge of Latin American schools in the Canal Zone".*

This distinguished professional and embodiment of dignity and manners:

*"on the occasion of his retirement in 1969, the governor of Canal Zone presented him with a "Master Key to the Panama Canal Award" citing him as educator emeritus".*

In the World Order Magazine, vol. 7, n. 1 of April 1941, Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver's 'Panama Diary' there is a mention that Alfred Osborne's school was visited and it says:

*"The three schools we visited this month were: La Boca (colored) in the Zone whose superintendent, Mr. Osborne, is interested in the Teachings...The La Boca group is radiant and an inspiration to anyone coming in contact with them. The sudden arrival of Lorol Schopflocher has further stimulated their interest, some coming to the three meetings during the week and literally hanging on to every word. They are really Panamanians, so we feel we have made a greater inroad into the Republic than we would have thought possible at this time. Surely God will make this downtrodden race glorious. Such faithfulness is enviable and to be commended. Truly they will become a great power and will, in turn, arise and assist in establishing the banner of Baha'u'llah in this most great land of promise".*

In the same volume but n. 2 of May 1941, same pioneers, after having much success in their proclamation activities mention the following:

*"...We feel that much credit is due Mr. Osborne, superintendent of Silver Schools in the Zone as it was, he who not only organized the La Boca group, which is an ever-increasing joy and inspiration to us, but he also arranged for the meeting with the club on the Atlantic side. The La Boca group is now studying Esslemont<sup>352</sup>, and each member is preparing and discussing a special chapter with the group. They are also spreading the Teachings among their friends, thus fulfilling 'Abdu'l-Baha's words:*

***"May this down-trodden race become glorious".***

The two pioneers would take their guests to almost all their activities to give public talks

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352. Esslemont, author of Baha'u'llah and the New Era.

as was the case of Lorol mentioned previously. When John Stearns came to Panama, he was also taken to Mr. Osborne's school where he gave an outstanding talk.

Mathew Kaszab, the first pioneer reach in Panama in April/May 1939, had visited many schools in Canal Zone, and other departments to give them the Message and at the same time to see if there would be any spark in any person's eyes, then he could do a follow-up with the group or the person.

Wrote Miguel in his obituary: *"According to his own account, he (Alfred) first encountered the Baha'i Faith in 1939. The American pioneer Mathew Kaszab was in an audience attending a talk Alfred gave on immortality. The talk was from a humanistic point of view and challenged traditional religious concepts. Mr. Kaszab approached Alfred afterward and asked if he really believed in what he had said. Alfred answered, "no" and explained that his remarks were intended to provoke thought"*.

In a joint letter of Louise and Cora dated January 14, 1940, the following is recorded:

*"When Mathew left, he told us to go to see Mr. Osborne, Superintendent of La Boca School in the Canal Zone as he was interested in the teachings. We postponed visiting the school until December with the aim of contacting people of as many different racial groups as possible and concentrating on the Republic first"*.

Then the story continues:

*"...As a result of our visit to the school Mr. Osborne selected a group of splendid men to study the Baha'i Cause. He arranged every detail for the meeting Tuesday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, when we met with his group of NINE intelligent, interested Jamaican men who have a copy of Baha'u'llah and the New Era for study. Mr. Osborne will get books from the Balboa Library<sup>353</sup> to use with the group to supplement the reading. Some of the men are students at the Universidad Nacional and have access to the Baha'i books there"*.

Louise and Cora, who always did all their initial activities together, reported fully to the Inter-America Committee, Mrs. Louile Mathews. In their January 27 joint letter, it is reported:

*"We have had our third weekly meeting at La Boca with Mr. Osborne's group and are studying the Goal of a New World Order with them as a result of their consultation"*.

In this way, the two lady pioneers nurtured Alfred. As Miguel has written:

*"Alfred was later introduced to the Baha'i pioneers Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver, whom he later credited as being his "spiritual mothers". They had nurtured him through his acceptance of Baha'u'llah in 1941. He became the second Baha'i in Panama – a fruit of the first Seven Year Plan of the Guardian"*.

In their joint letter of April 13, the La Boca group is again being mentioned:

*"The members of the La Boca class are progressing and spreading the message among their friends. They are an illumined group as we can expect from Abdu'l-Baha's words: **"May this down-trodden race become glorious"***.

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353. Interestingly, the author found in his library a copy of a book, originally of Canal Zone Lending Library, The Promise of All Ages by Christophil, published in 1935 by Baha'i Publishing Committee, N.Y. It is stamped: Representante Baha'i, Telef. 2993-Panama, Apt. 1296-Ancon- C.Z. It is unknown how it got into his hands!!

In the “Baha’i Observations – Panama” dated September 1940, it is recorded:

*“The La Boca friends are studying Fundamentals for Baha’i Membership. Mr. Osborne, the Supervisor of Silver Schools<sup>354</sup> in the Zone has been in the State during the summer studying at Columbia”<sup>355</sup>*

## DECLARATION

There should have been a letter from the lady pioneers of Panama to the Inter-America Committee between June and August, indicating the enrollment of Alfred Osborne to the Faith, as, the Secretary of the Inter America Committee indicates in her letter of September 5, 1941, addressing Cora only saying:

*“My dear Cora, it is with great rejoicing that we can enter the name of Mr. Osborne on our list of believers. I am sending Mr. Osborne under separate cover a photograph, which we took of Abdu’l-Baha in the Garden of Bahji in 1921”.*

Indeed, enrolling of Alfred has been very special and was treated unlike any other individual Baha’i, and Louile continues:

*“I have been trying to make this little personal gift to each one of the early believers in all of the countries and I feel that Mr. Osborne is certainly an important addition to your community”.*

With the above indication, Alfred should have accepted the Faith sometimes in late August 1941 and most probably when Louise was not in the country. Alfred would be 34 years of age.

## HAMILTONS

It was during the early 1942 that Clarence and Norma Hamilton, new Baha’is, from the US, without knowing much of the administrative procedure, moved to Panama and helped in founding the Baha’i Community together with the other three Baha’is, Louise, Cora and Alfred. Cora wrote to Mrs. French, the Secretary of the Inter America Committee on February 17:

*“And now the Hamiltons: They are joy bringers and have radiant spirits. They have lived as isolated believers and last year when a notice was inserted in the Baha’i News, they wrote to me in response to the plea for pioneers and made inquiries about employment. He followed the advice I sent him and for months we did not hear from them. In fact, we did not know they were on their way or about their arrival until Louise met them on the Atlantic side one day. Their story is one of real courage and faith such as would be a great test to even the most earnest seeker...Anyone one may travel to any country quite independently. They are kind of people I have longed to see here. At present we are dashing back and forth across the Isthmus weekends to get better acquainted (they have never had the privilege of being in a community and long for that experience) and share the fragrances of the teachings...Praise be that they are here to*

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354. Silver Schools vs other normal schools were referred to the schools of coloured attendance.

355. Miguel Osborne records in his obituary that Alfred: “...returned to the United States to complete a master of arts degree at Columbia University in 1946”.

*assist us. All of us are benefiting as a result of this move and I am sure this news will gladden the Guardian's heart. They are students and their lives show their devotion to the Faith..."*

## **FIRST BAHAI PANAMANIAN GROUP**

Cora mentioned to Mrs. Nellie French, of the Committee on May 30, 1942:

*"...On May 16, 1942, we held a meeting for declared believers only and organized our group with the result that Mr. Osborne is now the Secretary. It was a thrilling meeting, confirmed from the beginning. This is another step in our slow progress, and we hope for a quickening of the spirit. We are holding one meeting in Spanish and one in English.*

Of this meeting, Alfred wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly Secretary, Mr. Horace Holley on July 20<sup>th</sup>:

*"My dear Mr. Holley:*

- 1. I take great pleasure in informing you that on May 16 the first Baha'i group of six believers met at the Baha'i Center<sup>356</sup> the home of Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell, to organize in the proper way. At this first meeting, Cora Oliver was elected treasurer and I, secretary.*
- 2. Since then, we have been observing the Nineteen Day Feasts and meeting at other times in study groups. We are all taking the Faith seriously. We new believers, believe in the underlying principle of the Faith, and we are zealously striving to understand and appreciate its tenets.*
- 3. At the meeting on July 12, 1942, I was instructed to remit fifty dollars to the National Treasurer a gift from the Panama Baha'is to the National Spiritual Assembly. You will find enclosed, therefore, a money order for fifty dollars (\$50), which you will please turn over to the National Treasurer. Panama Baha'is are pleased to make this humble contribution to the great work.*
- 4. I was also instructed to request from the National Assembly the bulletins, which contain information for Baha'i believers subject to the draft. I should appreciate it, if you would have these bulletins forwarded to my address<sup>357</sup>.*
- 5. Our pioneer Cora Oliver, a very faithful and devout believer, has been ill for some time now and confined to the Gorgas Hospital. The fracture she sustained in a fall is healing nicely. We pray for her speedy and sure recovery.*
- 6. Now that contact has been established, I am requesting that correspondence for the local Baha'is be sent to my address.*

Mr. Holley on July 28 addressed him acknowledging his letter wrote:

*"For the National Spiritual Assembly, I am very happy to acknowledge your letter of July 20, written as secretary of the group. It is very inspiring to realize that there are now six believers and that you have a secretary and treasurer and are observing the Nineteen-Day Feasts as well as carrying on teaching work".*

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356. The sixth believer was Burt Wernokur of Canal Zone.

357. His postal address was, Box "K", Balboa, Canal Zone



Then Mr. Holley gratefully thanks the generous contribution of the Panama Baha'is for which he encloses the receipt for the Treasurer:

*"...as well as one each of the bulletins containing information for believers",*

offering prayers as well for quick recovery of Cora, passing their:

*"...best wishes and loving sympathy".*

He assures that the Baha'i News for the group will be sent through him.

And on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July, Mr. Holley addresses Louise Caswell in another letter in which he reminds her of his previous letter to Alfred, yet there is the concern of the NSA:

*"This may be all very well for general purposes of conduct of correspondence, but the six believers live in different cities and there is not the basis of one local Baha'i community such as is required for groups in the United States and Canada. No doubt you have already explained this point to other believers, but I am mentioning it so as to avoid any possible misunderstanding later on. Ordinarily a group is recognized only when its members all live in one civil area, and therefore could later on participate in the formation of a local Assembly. The group, which Mr. Osborne describes would be the believers of the country of Panama rather than a local group such as we recognize up there. We will continue communicating with the believers through Mr. Osborne but cannot list the six believers of Panama as a group in our official records".*

Alfred wrote on the same day another letter to Mrs. French of the Inter America Committee, reporting her of the formation of the Group with six believers and in the letter on the point three he mentions:

*"I wish at this time to thank you for the splendid picture of Abdu'l-Baha-Abbas, which you were so kind to send me with Baha'i greetings and welcome in his name"<sup>358</sup>.*

And he asks all the correspondence to be directed through him. And on August 2, Mrs. French also wrote to Alfred acknowledging him as: "...the local correspondent for the Baha'i group in Panama".

The first communication is on the sudden trip of Mrs. Collins to Latin America, who might find the Panamanian group on her way, once in Panama. There is a wish in the letter mentioning:

*"...hoping that you may soon have the requisite number for a Spiritual Assembly".*

The letter of the National Spiritual Assembly, obviously distressed the newly formed group in Panama, and Louise wrote back to Mr. Holley on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August (but mailed it on the 30<sup>th</sup>):

*"Your letter of July 31 was read to Cora and Alfred Osborne, and we have been talking, thinking, studying and writing about our problems of uniting the scattered believers here and especially that of painting the picture of the National Spiritual Assembly to visualize. Our combined thoughts will be written to you in a letter by Alfred Osborne..."*

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358. According to Miguel to the writer, the photo of Abdu'l-Baha still is in the possession of the family.

Right from the time Alfred enrolled in the Faith, he found himself in the hub of activities and deep consultation to solve both administrative and otherwise difficulties of Panama's newborn community was facing. Louise continues her letter saying:

*"...I will tell you what I frankly feel in my heart. The Guardian wants a Panamanian Assembly made of Panamanians. So far, we have failed in this his cherished desire...I also think that if Gayle Woolson accepts our invitation to visit us and can remain with us six months, that there will be an assembly..."*

According to Louise, so far all the members of the group are US citizens and there were only three Panamanian inactive believers so far who had accepted the Faith. In comparison with Costa Rica, where Gayle Woolson pioneered, there already were more than twenty believers. Louise makes a mention of the six believers in Panama:

*"The six active believers in our locality are United States citizens. They include Alfred Osborne, secretary (resident of the Republic of Panama), Norma and Clare Hamilton and Bert Wernecker<sup>359</sup>, Canal Zone residents, and Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell, Panama residents. Our three other believers who reside in Panama, one, Sra. Rosa Ochoa seldom attends meetings, while two Rosendo Ochoa and Joseph Wantuk (Unites States citizen) never attend. Another Panamanian citizen, resident of the Zone is a firm believer but rarely attends feasts".*

She acknowledges that this is not their aim to attract only US citizens, but this is what they had, which:

*"...it is better than nothing. Perhaps it is a step in the evolution of the future first Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama".*

Alfred wrote to Mr. Holley after a long delay of few months, on November 20<sup>th</sup> to clarify the situation of the believers in Panama. He defends the condition of Panama by saying:

*"All of the six believers actually live in one civil area, but some of them happen to have post office addresses on the Canal Zone because they work on the Zone and find it convenient to get their mail through the Zone post offices".*

Alfred mentions that Louise and Cora, actually live in Panama City and himself lives in Pueblo Nuevo,

*"...which is a precinct of the City of Panama".*

Although the six believer Alfred speaks of, including of the Ochoa couple and Joseph Wantuk living in Vista Hermosa, is different from the list Louise mentions in her letter, where the other three are American, i.e., the Hamilton couple and Mr. Wernokur. Nevertheless, satisfied with this new list, including of non-active members, Alfred questions:

*"In view of the above, we are asking that the NSA recognize us not a six isolated believers living in the country of Panama, but as a group of six believers living in the same civil area. We are working hard to get three more believers who live in the Municipality of Panama in order that we may have the required number for organizing an Assembly".*

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359. It is written as Burt Wernokur by Julie Rdegal, then the Local Spiritual Assembly's secretary.

## THE MOTTAHEDES

Mildred and Rafi Mottahedeh<sup>360</sup>, made a trip throughout Latin America, evaluating the condition of every country for the sake of the Faith, reporting back to the Inter America Committee and the National Spiritual Assembly of the US. They also spent a week or so travelling in Panama and visiting active and non-active Baha'is and seeing for themselves the opening gap between the two main pioneers, which by now was well known problem in the institutional circles of the Faith in Haifa as well as in the US, causing a delay on the progress of the Faith particularly in Panama City. When the Mottahedes left Panama, on November 11, 1941, they chose to write a letter to Alfred, recognizing the potential within him in that early stage of him becoming a believer. Due to the importance of the letter, the whole page and a half is recorded here:

*“Dear Mr. Osborne, it has taken us a long time to write to you because we have not been able to locate the book on Art of the Kingdom of Benin. It was privately printed and the gallery that published it has only their file copy. However, we have left our name with the dealers in fine art books, and they will advise us when a copy turns up. We do so much want to get it for you as it really shows the greatness of African art.*

*“You yourself, do not realize what a great thing you are doing for your people. When they have some conception of their past greatness and future potential ties, they will be better able to mingle with all other peoples of the world. Half the battle for recognition lies in the attitude of the one who seeks it. When Mr. Gregory<sup>361</sup>, African American Baha'i lawyer and member of the Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly of the US, has gone with us to the theatre and other places, we never had to cultivate a special way of acting. We treated each other as interesting fellow beings and others accepted us as such. Your work in making your people realize that they are an integral and valuable part of the human race with definite contributions to make is an excellent way for paving the road for them to meet other people on equal ground. Of course, we all realize that there is much work to be done to make the other side realize that there is nothing so superior about them and that their prejudices largely consist of ignorance and the covering of a guilty conscience to justify the wrongs they have imposed on the Negro race. Neither logic nor science has ever been able to lift the veil of prejudice. Only the teachings of a great prophet have been able to do that. Mohammed successfully broke down this artificial barrier among all the people who followed his Faith. Today the Faith of Baha'u'llah promulgates the teaching of the oneness of mankind all over the world to put down the ogre of prejudice for all time.*

*“In so much of the inter-racial work that I have done the difficulty has been not in finding warm-hearted intelligent Baha'i without prejudice but in gaining the confidence and cooperation of the Negroes, not that I much blame them, for they have frequently found such*

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360. Mildred Ruth Mottahedeh was an American collector of ceramics, businessperson, and philanthropist. With her husband, Rafi Y. Mottahedeh, she co-founded Mottahedeh & Company, a designer and supplier of luxury porcelain based on historical models or direct replicas. [Wikipedia](#)

Mildred Root Mottahedeh, 1908 - 2000 was an American Bahá'í who served as the first representative of the Bahá'í community at the United Nations, an Auxiliary Board member, and as an elected member of the [International Bahá'í Council](#). In her personal life she was a collector of Chinese porcelain and founded a company that produced porcelain reproductions.

Rafi Y. Mottahedeh, she co-founded Mottahedeh & Company, a designer and supplier of luxury porcelain based on historical models...

361. Louis Gregory (1974 – 1951), the first African American Baha'i being posthumously elevated to the rank of the Hand of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi.

*confidence misplaces. But those like yourself, who know the Baha'is can do much to serve as a bridge. It seems to us as though you have been specially chosen for this work in Panama both because of your own ability and because of your position.*

*"There is so much you can do to help Mrs. Oliver and Mrs. Caswell in this regard and certainly there is no one in Panama better equipped to do. From what we heard at La Boca school, we gathered that you are preparing your students not only to take their places in the world as it exists now but also in the better world, we all believe is coming. We hope that someday you will have such children's classes as we now have at the Baha'i Center where all the children plan and work together without any race consciousness whatever. This is the day when world-shaking events happen with lightning rapidity. Who knows but that such classes will be established in Panama before the end of the next two years.*

*"Four Baha'is have just left for Puerto Rico where they will stay a few months and then go on to Panama to stay for a year or so. They are all members of one family of whom we are all very fond. We know you will enjoy them too.*

*"We both join in sending your mother and yourself our warmest Baha'i greetings and we would be so pleased if you would convey our regards to Mr. Hutchinson and Mr. Beecher and to the many capable people of your teaching staff. Please do tell your normal school that they were much better behaved and more receptive than we were at school. I did come of my funniest drawings and loudest whispering when we had guest-speakers, but your students all behaved beautifully. And tell them, too, that it was my first talk to students other than Cornell art students and I was scared stiff. Students see through speakers so much quicker than most of us adults.*

*"Please do write to us if you can find a minute. We would be so pleased to hear from you".*

*Mildred and Rafi Mottahedeh*

In his letter to the Inter American Committee of December 27, Alfred encloses another registration card of Philip Bartick, another US citizen of Canal Zone who accepted the Faith in November 25, 1942, who soon moved to Panama City to reside for institutional sake.

There were two basic difficulties –or three for that matter – that the Faith did not progress initially in Panama:

1. Work: The pioneers were working at Canal Zone, most of their contacts and new Baha'is were from Canal Zone.

2. The Language barrier: Though they maintained an active Center in Tivoli Avenue in Panama City, the residence of Louise and Cora to actively entertain the Panamanians, but none of the pioneers spoke fluent Spanish and Panamanians with whom they had contacts with, were handicapped in English. To these two matters should be added the growing disunity problem between the two main pioneers, a matter, which Panamanians loathed and the main problem of their becoming inactive, as a loving nest, which they were promised, was not visible there. It is not clear how much this last problem did affect Alfred, though he was quite friendly with both pioneers especially with Cora as being mentioned by Julie Regal. Nevertheless, Alfred closed his letter by saying:

*"Many Baha'i pioneers have been stopping off at the Baha'i Center and have been most happy to have them and to associate with them. The local Baha'is are delighted to have these pioneers stop off at the Center".*

In another letter dated February 2, 1943, Alfred was able to send Miss Belinda Angulo's registration card to the Inter America Committee.

Yet somehow Alfred's communication with the Committee had slowed down for sometime. The Inter-America Committee wrote to him on September 24, 1943, referring to a similar letter written previously, mentions:

*"The purpose of that letter was to express the hope that this Committee, which is so interested in all the activities and events connected with the work of the Baha'i Faith, might hear more frequently from you and that you might keep us informed of any visitors who pass your way and who are able during their sojourn in your midst to render some slight service to your group in the way of furthering the teaching work".*

In this same letter, the Committee Secretary requests Mr. Osborne to submit the letter to the group and inquires if there is anyone from the group willing to take a trip to Venezuela or Colombia. On October 6, Alfred with his exquisite handwriting answered Mrs. Nellie French of the Committee, in which he writes:

*"...I hope that as the Secretary of the Group shall be able (I am willing!) to keep in close touch with the Inter-America Committee".*

And he promises to read the letter in their next meeting to consult about the help Panama can extend to the South American countries.

Alfred by now, an active member of the Baha'i Community of Panama, keeps up with the correspondence with the Institutions. In his letter to Nellie French of the Committee, he wrote on November 24, enclosing a new membership card, this time Jack Friedman, a US citizen but living in far northwest of the Country, the province of Chiriqui. Jack had attended the meetings at the Center and:

*"...from the outset manifested an intelligent and enthusiastic interest in the Cause. He has recently returned to the American colony in Boqueron, Chiriqui, where it is expected that he will carry the Faith to his fellow colonists in that region".*

Alfred also mentions in his letter that, his is to inform the Committee:

*"...the proposed business trip to Colombia of Mr. Claire Hamilton, one of our most loyal and trusted members. Mr. Hamilton expects to leave early in January, 1944..."*

By then, at the request of the National Assembly, the two pioneers parted their mutual residence, which was used as their Center of activities and therefore, Alfred informs the Committee:

*"We have no official Center now, but rotate our meetings at the homes of the Baha'is friends".*

Julie Regal, the new pioneer to Panama since October 1943, in her diary confirms the above:

*"The active Baha'is in Panama at this time were Louise, Cora, Norma and Claire Hamilton, Philip Bartick, Alfred and I. We constituted a group, and we met on feasts, and perhaps on other occasions, in Louise's or Cora's or the Hamilton's apartment, and in Alfred's also after he was married, and later on in mine".*

Nellie French of the Committee, wrote back to Alfred, the Secretary of the Panamanian Group:

*"We are eagerly awaiting news from Panama regarding the arrangements, which you have made in your group following the instructions of the National Assembly. The Committee needs to know of the two estranged pioneers for further communication".*

## **ALFRED'S MARRIAGE**

Julie Regal writes in her memoirs:

*"Alfred Osborne was married early in December in Colon, on the Atlantic side, and all (or nearly all) of the Baha'is attended. This was the first time that I crossed the Isthmus; we all took the train together: Louise and Cora, Norma and Clare (and I believe Philip and Burt), and I. Perhaps Benilda Angulo went too; I don't remember. She was the only Panamanian believer, besides Aura Rudy, but we didn't see much of her. During the wedding supper in a hall, while we sat around and chatted..."*

And Miguel wrote his father's obituary:

*"In 1943 he married Ditta Barnett Shirley of Colon... a union that produced four children, Alfred Jr. Sheila, Miguel and Melva".*

At the time of marriage, he was 36.

And for the year 1944, Julie has recorded the following concerning Alfred:

*"Early in 1944, an important matter came before us to decide. The first Baha'i Centennial was going to be celebrated on May 22<sup>nd</sup> at the House of Worship in Wilmette and all of the Latin American countries were asked to send a native delegate. Whom would we send? Louise strongly urged Benilda Angulo, because she was a Panamanian, our only Panamanian believer, but the other members of the Group could not consent to her because she had become so inactive. Finally, it was decided to send Alfred. He wasn't a Panamanian, but he lived and worked in the Canal Zone, which was really a part of Panama, and had become a Baha'i there.*

*Alfred at first hesitated to accept the honor, principally because he had just been married and he knew Ditta would strongly object. But at last, he yielded to our urging. As I remember, we all contributed to his expenses for the trip.*

*Alfred went, and when his turn came to address the convention, his eloquence and radiance electrified everyone; he was the star of that historic event.*

*Indeed, Alfred had a most pleasing personality. There was a never-failing gentleness and kindness, a nobility and courtesy about him that made his presence always a benediction. Besides, he had great tact, wisdom, and humility.*

*As we had no active Panamanian Baha'i then, Alfred was our only possible choice, but at first, we had not considered him because he was not a Panamanian citizen. He was an English-speaking Negro from a Caribbean Island, well educated in the United States, where he had become US citizen, and now he was superintendent of Canal Zone colored schools. Our sole choice for delegate he was, but what a superb choice"!*

On March 23, 1944, on behalf of the Isthmian Group Julie wrote a letter of introduction to the Inter America Committee:

*"Our little group met last Sunday and elected Alfred E. Osborne as our delegate to the Convention. He has already begun making preparations for the trip. Alfred enjoys the admiration and affection of every member of our group, for his loyalty, his devotion, his kindness and his wisdom. While not a Panamanian, he has lived on the Isthmus most of his life, coming here as a small child from a nearby Island, and became a Baha'i here. He is supervisor of all the Negro schools in the Canal Zone. We are anxious for you and all the other Baha'is at the Convention to meet our delegate".*

Nevertheless, the cautious Alfred didn't just take the nomination for granted, he wrote on April 10 to Mr. Holley of the NSA, enclosing Julie's introduction letter, saying:

*"I have been instructed to inform the NSA through you that action will be taken by the delegate to clarify the status of the Canal Zone with respect to the Faith. Arrangements will be made through Mrs. French for discussing this matter in the NSA".*

Julie mentions in her memoirs that Alfred frequently called on Cora to hold long talks with her and:

*"...discuss his job and everything of greatest interest to him".*

After all, both Alfred and Cora were both teachers, they had much in common. Alfred had, Julie writes:

*"...tremendous appreciation for Cora and appreciated her sympathy and counsels". "Although he showed great respect and love towards Louise also, he never conversed with her as he did with Cora. It seemed that Cora was his most revered and dearest friend".*

Cora had sympathy with Negroes, says Julie and:

*"...very courageously associated with them. Once she accompanied Alfred to a performance at the National Theater, which for a white American women in those days was an extraordinarily heroic act".*

Once in Chicago, the Panamanians, Louise, Cora and Alfred visited Julie's parents and her mother wrote of Alfred:

*"We were much impressed by Alfred, and we were so glad to have him in our home".*

On June 7, Nellie French of the Inter America Committee wrote to Julie Regal acting Secretary of the Isthmian Group re Alfred:

*"Beloved friends and co-workers: You can never know the delight of the Inter-America Committee on its making the acquaintance of your Alfred Osborne and associating intimately*

with him and with Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell at the Centenary Convention.

*"I am sure Alfred Osborne would blush if he could know the compliments that have been paid to him for his kind assistance in translating, his outstanding joyousness in his participation in the events and his true sociability with us all. He will always be remembered, and we feel sure that the inspiration, which he received at the Centenary and the very valuable consultation, which members of the Committee had with him and with Mrs. Oliver and Mrs. Caswell will result in the happiest kind of solution of the problems, which have affected you. We hope this association will draw us all closer together and that we may often see Alfred in our midst as he can be of inestimable value in bringing the races together".*

On his turn, Alfred wrote a fine letter on behalf of the Group mentioning among other matters concerning the normal business the following:

*"...For me it was a rare and great privilege meeting you torch-bearers of the Faith of Baha'u'llah. I hope that I shall be able to exemplify in my life the ideals, the enthusiasm, the tenets, which I saw in the lives of the fine believers I met in Wilmette".*

He also mentioned that on his way back while awaiting his passport, he had:

*"...fine, spiritual time with the New Orleans friends. I was able to give the message to several people of my race in that city. A seed has been planted, and it may bear fruit later..."*

Further on Julie recalls of a certain Brotherhood Week meeting held in Balboa, Canal Zone:

*"...attended by Baha'is in masse, as Alfred was one of the four speakers, including a priest, a minister and a rabbi, and in his remarks, he gave a Baha'i quotation. This program was broadcast over the Army radio; also, the text of Alfred's talk was published in a local newspaper".*

On March 20<sup>th</sup> Nellie French wrote to Julie Regal, substitute secretary of the Group:

*"The Committee has been extremely interested in the report of the work, which was done by Mr. Osborne and Mr. Hamilton in Brotherhood Week..."*

As the problem between the pioneers was getting ever-bigger Julie recalls:

*"One time when Alfred had me to Sunday dinner in his home, with Ditta, he confided to me the grief that the inharmony among the pioneers had caused him. "I am baffled by it", he said. That was his word "baffled". "You know" he added "it has led me to doubt their sincerity!" "And me too, Alfred?" I couldn't help asking. He hesitated, then reluctantly admitted, "Yes, you too." I was hurt, but I understood; I did not blame him. I was not baffled anymore, but how could I enlighten him or defend myself without "breathing the sins of others?" So I kept still."*

Alfred meant a lot to everyone in Panama, his words were always fair words and he looked at everything with the eyes of impartiality. Julie wrote in the closing page of her memoirs in Panama, recounting the farewell gathering that was held for her on the eve of her departure from Panama:

*"Also Alfred came and joined the company. When he took his leave, standing in the hall just outside the apartment door, he uttered words, which I hope I merited. Coming from him,*



*they tremendously surprised at the same time that their thrilled me, as I had not imagined that he, such a strong admirer of Cora, thought so well of me. "We sometimes do not know," he said, "until it leaves us what a good thing, we had with us." Those words have since gladdened me: even though perhaps it was only briefly. Alfred had then thought well of my work in Panama".*

Years later Julie wrote:

In late 2014, it came to the writer's attention through the US Archives, that Julie Regal was living in Mexico. After couple of attempts, she was located in Australia. It meant so much to the writer to have found the one pioneer of the '40s whose letters were being read and her memoirs analyzed<sup>362</sup>. She very kindly answered to the correspondence just started and among other things discussed, she was let know of Alfred's short association with the writer while he became pioneer in Panama in 1971. It thrilled Julie especially when she came to know how Ditta had accepted the Faith and how Alfred's children also have all acknowledged the Faith of Baha'u'llah. Miguel wrote of his illustrious father:

*"Alfred served the Faith as teacher, speaker, promoter, administrator, and Counsellor...As member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Panama, he participated in the election of the first Universal House of Justice in Haifa and attended the first World Congress in London in 1963". He was privileged to assist Mr. H. Borrah Kavelin<sup>363</sup> in the pressing work of securing the site for the Panama Temple".*

## **COUNSELLOR OSBORNE**

Once the Universal House of Justice came to realize that appointing members to the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, who served for life, was out of their functioning scope, the new institution of Continental Counsellors was created in its stead in 1968, keeping the Hands of the Cause to help in the promotion of the Faith, assisting the Universal House of Justice. The newly appointed members of the Continental Counsellors were effectively replacing the functions of the Hands of the Cause in propagation and protection of the Faith for a period of five years and re-appointed if necessary by the House of Justice, yet in a smaller scope determined by the House of Justice, only on Continental level, unlike the Hands who were functioning at the world level.

Miguel Osborne wrote in the obituary of his father, Alfred: *"Alfred was appointed to the first Board of Consellers in Central America in 1968, and he served as Trustee for the Continental fund based in Panama. This period of his life was particularly fruitful as he was able to focus completely on service to the Faith following his retirement from the Canal Zone schools. He travelled often to remote parts of Central America and the Caribbean, encouraging the friends and assisting the pioneers".* Miguel adds: *"The Osborne home and generous hospitality were always available to the many pioneers and other distinguished visitors who traveled to Panama*

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362. Indeed, she had left Panama the same year when the writer was born.

363. Howard Borah Kavelin (1906 – 1988), was Russian-born American Baha'i, who served as a member of International Council in 1961 and two years later was elected to the first Universal House of Justice in 1963 and served until his death in 1988. He was member of the National Assembly of the US from 1950. He was partner, executive and vice-president of real estate company man in New York. And in the historic occasion of inter-continental conferences writes Miguel: "In a first of its kind, exchange greetings by telephone among six intercontinental Baha'i conferences held in 1967, he spoke on behalf of the Baha'is gathered in Panama".

*to serve the Faith*"<sup>364</sup>.

The writer recalls well back in June 1973, when Alfred and Ditta Osborne, not yet a declared Baha'i together with their absolutely delightful daughter, Sheila who only recently declared her faith in Baha'u'llah through her friend, Shirin Borumand another Persian pioneer to Panama, decided to make pilgrimage not only to Haifa, but to Iran too, a journey that would take them well over a month's time. The writer being a youth of 26, and relatively new pioneer in Panama, their trip coincided with his marriage to the Iranian pioneer to Paraguay, Manijeh Hashemi, at the newly dedicated House of Worship of Panama. The Osborne family, kindly let their house to be looked after by the newly wed for the period of their absence. It was a precious gift for their honeymoon. Miss Myrtle Mulcare, one of the early Baha'is of the 1940s, also used to live in the vicinity of the Osbornes, quite an active lady in all the activities of the Faith.

Another episode, which the writer recalls is of 1976, when my brother Faruq Izadinia, and his newly wed wife Parivash Ebrahiminia came to Panama and after a short visit with Alfred, offered being pioneers to the St. Lucia of the Caribbean Islands, how it delighted the heart of Alfred, who drove them personally in his blue Dodge to the airport and saw them off to the Island. The matters of the Faith were always of highest value to him.

It might be the opportune place to write of an episode, to record in the history of the Faith in Panama, the declaration of faith of Ditta Osborne.

## **DITTA AND HER FAMILY**

Ditta's brother Lemuel Barnett Shirley was the Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Panama, quite a high social position in the Panamanian society. She was indeed raised in a staunch Christian environment since her childhood. Julie Regal, who mentions in her memoirs of the wedding of Alfred and Ditta, does not mention of any Baha'i ceremony parallel to the Christian one being conducted there. But whatever the case maybe, Ditta knew well of Alfred's belief and his involvement in the Baha'i Faith. Yet, Alfred, as a real gentleman, had never pressed his faith upon his family, but only had taught them through his spiritual manners giving them the real Baha'i example. Possibly, the family, since the inception had been observing the kind of meetings Alfred had had in his house, as his doors have always been open for the Baha'i activities as the other pioneers recall, but the four children might have not been quite acquainted with the Baha'i belief, except few such as Myrtle Mulcare, a colleague and a neighbor as Miguel remembers. Alfred used to talk about the Baha'i Principles to his children at the dinner table, as Miguel remembered. Miguel had occasional visits to the Baha'i Center in Panama City as Sheila's frequently did. We all had a fine and friendly relationship with both Ditta, Sheila and even whenever Melva would be present.

Ditta used to accompany her husband, Alfred to almost all the Baha'i meetings. Sheila becoming the goal of Shirin, who ushered her mostly to the youth activities, and soon she declared, signing her card when the youth were present, what a happy occasion. Sheila had

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364. The writer remembers how delightful a person he was, when he made, a trip together with Mr. Osbone to the Kuna Yala indigenous group of San Blas. He had a superb personality, full of love and compassion to every person crossed his path.

taken much of her father in manners and dignity. Her becoming Baha'I, delighted Alfred's heart, which paved the path and soon other siblings except Alfred Jr. a good friend of the Baha'is, declared their faith in Baha'u'llah, including Miguel's wife. They were all living in the US.

Counsellor Hedayatollah Ahmadiyyih of Belize, Central America, every time travelled to Panama, stayed with his colleague, Alfred. Being an avid promoter of the Faith and a wonderful teacher, whose audience would never get tired of listening to his sweet way of conversation and speech, recounted to the writer, that one warm day after lunch, at the Osbornes, when Alfred was taking the afternoon nap, Counsellor Hedy and Ditta sat on the outdoor terrace of the house taking the fresh air of the hot afternoon of Panama City, talking about many things, as usual, seeking the right opportunity, when Hedy asked Ditta the reason why she has not accepted the Faith of Baha'u'llah, being married for over thirty years to Alfred. Surely, she, by now, knew everything about the Baha'i Faith. Ditta answers very simply "she has never been asked to so". Counsellor Hedy always had declaration card handy in his pocket. Taking one, offering it to Ditta saying "do you want to become Baha'i?" Ditta took the card and asked "Isn't that too late?" Taking the answer for 'yes', and having his pen ready in his hand, handed it to her, thus, Ditta declared her faith in Baha'u'llah right then and there and as simple as that! Counsellor Hedy could not contain his happiness, rushed to where Alfred was taking his nap and woke him up by shaking him and calling his name. Bewildered Alfred surprised of this act, could not believe his eyes to the waving declaration card of Ditta, his wife in front of his eyes! The moment he has been waiting all these years! Rushing out to the terrace, took Ditta's hand and pulled her to the hall, played a waltz music and celebrated the occasion by dancing with Ditta, who was quite bewildered for the fuss of her becoming a Baha'i, as she had believed that she has always been a Baha'i, with the exception of some meetings that she was not allowed to participate! To all the Panamanian Baha'is surprise, Ditta attended the Nineteen Day Feast celebrations at the Baha'i Center from then on!

After this occasion, Alfred wrote to Mildred a short note giving his condolences for the passing of Rafi, her husband, added the following: *"You will be glad to know that Ditta (wife), my two daughters, and one son & his wife have accepted Baha'u'llah and all are working with much dedication for the Faith in Southern California...Alfred"*.

Miguel writes at the end of the story of his father:

*"Alfred and Ditta moved to Irvine, California, in 1982, to be closer to their children and grandchildren. Alfred continued to serve the Faith as his health allowed; he was member of the Local Assembly of Irvine, a supporter of Interfaith Council activities, and an articulate speaker on the Baha'i Faith"*.

Then he amusingly added *"He continued to serve as an assistant to the Auxiliary Board members Edward Diliberto and Miguel Osborne, his son"*.

## HIS PASSING

*“Saddened learn passing outstanding resolute promoter Faith God Alfred Osborne. Record his distinguished services, especially as Continental Counsellor Central America, imperishable. Praying fervently Holy Threshold advancement his noble soul in Kingdom On High. Kindly extend our heartfelt sympathy and condolences members his distinguished family. Advising National Assembly Panama arrange befitting memorial meeting his memory Mother Temple Latin America”<sup>365</sup>.*

Miguel wrote:

*“Alfred passed away at home on August 14, 1992. He is warmly remembered as husband, father, grandfather, educator, friend, teacher, administrator, and Counsellor – as a person dedicated to the Faith, thoughtful, accomplished, and steadfast – a person with a warm sense of humor”<sup>366</sup>.*

## HIS FAMILY AND THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The writer asked Miguel to pen his declaration story, the following is what he wrote:

*“Alfred Osborne, Sr., was the only Bahá'í in our family for over 30 years. Then my sister Sheila, declared in the early 70s, followed by my mother, Ditta, several years later. When I heard of my mother's declaration, I was very surprised, as she had been a devout Anglican (Episcopalian) all her life, had us attend the Anglican church as children, and her brother, my uncle, the Right Reverend Lemuel B. Shirley, was the Anglican Bishop of Panama.*

*“But things were about to take a turn for me too. Shortly after my mother declared, I found myself in my wife's American Baptist church in Fountain Valley, California, where she was singing in the choir in an Easter Cantata, in April 1977. The songs were very moving, with intermittent declarations by believers explaining what had been missing in their lives, and how faith in Jesus Christ had filled that void. At the end of the music, I remember the minister asked everyone to stand, and he said, “If you feel your heart beating, that is Jesus calling! Come forward!”*

*“Had I not known about the Baha'i Faith from my father from the time I was a child, been prepared by an encounter with the Nation of Islam in Oakland during my college years or been challenged by Ruth Pringle<sup>367</sup> about my spiritual health, I might well have gone forward. But the years of discussions around our dining room table of religious concepts and explanations by my father about the oneness of God, of religion and of mankind, made becoming an American*

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365. Message of the Universal House of Justice on the passing of Alfred Osborne, August 25, 1992.

366. Ditta passed away in May 2000, and Melva only six years later followed her mother in 2006, and in 2012 dear Sheila followed them. At the time of writing this episode Miguel and the family live in Panama, serving actively the Faith they cherish to be part of. Since, they have moved to the US.

367. Counsellor Ruth Yancey Pringle, long time pioneer of Nicaragua and Panama.

*Baptist impossible. That very afternoon I declared to my wife that my years of sitting on the religious fence were over, and I wanted to be a Baha'i! My sister Sheila was by then in California, and she put me in contact with the Baha'is in Fullerton, where I declared in a fireside at the home of Connie McFarland. To the Baha'is present it was a very happy occasion, and for me as well, but it must have seemed like I had fallen from the sky, as I did not know any of them at the time. They gave me a prayer book, which I still have. So, I like to tell people, "I was moved to become a Baha'i in an American Baptist church".*

*"My wife, Hannah, declared three months later, as she was attracted to the teachings about science and religion and was influenced by the spirit of faith she saw a dear Baha'i friend, Nosrat Sohljoo, and then finally my little sister, Melva, declared in Panama. So, my Dad's family went from him being the only Baha'i to everyone declaring, except for my older brother, Alfred, Jr., who is a defender of the Faith.*

*"I learned to appreciate my father's wisdom and incredible patience because of this severe test he had endured in his family for so long".*

*Miguel Osborne*

*27 March 2015*

## RAQUEL FRANCOIS

*May the Beloved guide, bless and sustain you, remove every obstacle from your path, and enable you to win great victories in the service of His Faith in the days to come.*

*Your true brother, Shoghi*<sup>368</sup>

One of the foremost believers of that the soil of Panama produced was Raquel Francois later de Constante. She was born on December 2, 1921 in Panama from a French immigrant family, being one of the ten siblings. Studied accountancy at the university of Panama and practiced her profession actively. In 1946, at the age of 25, she accepted the Faith through Gayle Woolson in San Jose, Costa Rica. At her return to Panama City, she got in touch with Louise, Cora and Julie, the American pioneers in Panama, and since, she pursued her immediate involvement with the activities of the Faith.

*“From an early age” her daughter Rachell wrote, “she longed for the presence of God, and throughout the years understood that proximity to God was only possible through devotion to Him, through the entrance to the Kingdom, and through service to humanity”.*

Once she met with the Baha'is in San Jose, Costa Rica, due to her inquisitive mind and courageous character – rare for a young girl in those days – *“and without need of support, she acknowledged the Manifestation of Baha'u'llah and did not hesitate to accept Him with great joy”.*



Rachelle J. F. de Constante

Being an active youth and an able speaker, she was elected as the member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama City and in 1948, she became its secretary. The same year, the National Teaching Committee of the Central America was transferred from Mexico to Panama, and she became an assistant to Natalia Chavez, the coordinator of the Committee and soon its secretary.

In 1951, when the first Regional National Spiritual Assembly of the Central America and Antilles was formed, she was elected as a member. Ever since, she was member of the national body and when in 1961, Panama elected its own National Spiritual Assembly, she

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368. Letter of the Guardian to Raquel Francois. September 15, 1951.

became the member, serving for almost 40 years straight as its coordinator. During her services, she also got socially active in some spheres, where she could promote the Faith openly. Although some of her kin also accepted the Faith, yet it was Raquel who was outstanding in the activities.

Raquel married Jorge Constante and became known thereafter as Raquel de Constante. According to the tribute written on her first passing anniversary, she served the Faith for 66 years without interruption in many different capacities, representing the Faith in the national and international spheres. Of many different services she rendered to the Faith one example stays to many generations in future, which is the donation of the Greatest Name symbol installed in the interior dome of the House of Worship prepared at their furniture factory in Panama City where it also produced all its teak benches.

At the early days, Raquel offered to become a fulltime Baha'i teacher for a wage, as she was the breadwinner of the family. In the Minutes of the Inter America Committee of February 7, 1949, it is recorded: "*Mrs. Baker conferred with Cora Oliver and Raquel Francois the delegate from Panama. Cora thought that only a Panamanian should be deputized as a teacher for Panama and that Raquel was it.*"

When Mrs. Collins was in Panama in early April 1949, she suggested that Raquel's talents in teaching the Faith should not be wasted, therefore, she approached her and proposed she leave her afternoon job, dedicating herself to the Faith, yet during the morning she could go ahead and keep her job to support her brother. Raquel's mother also consented to this proposal and with the help of Mrs. Collins, Raquel dedicated her afternoons to assisting in full of the Faith and doing secretarial work for Natalia Chavez as the member of the National Teaching Committee, while later Raquel was also was appointed into this same Committee in 1950.

Raquel had high respect for Mrs. Emilia Collins, who would inspire anyone listening to her talks. After Mrs. Collins returned to the States, dedicated, and sent a Prayer book to Raquel, which this special gift has always been kept as a special relic by her daughter Rachell.

Raquel's story is well intertwined with the stories of her other contemporaneous colleagues up to the election of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of Central America, and it continues further and as it evolves, her services become more outstanding, which is beyond this study<sup>369</sup>.

In August of the same year of the election of the first Regional National Spiritual Assembly, her daughter Rachell wrote:

*"...she was designated Panama's representative at the Third Regional Conference of the United Nations celebrated in Managua, Nicaragua, representing the International Baha'i Community, a non-governmental agency accredited to the United Nations, along with Mr. Artemus Lamb from Costa Rica and Mr. Julio Hernandez from Nicaragua".*

Shoghi Effendi sent her a letter dated September 15, 1951, congratulating her success saying:

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369. Read for more information: Rachell Constante, *Una Vida Ejemplar (An Exemplary Life)*, Panama, 2020.

***“May the Beloved guide, bless and sustain you, and remove every obstacle from your path, and enable you to win great victories in the service of His Faith in the days to come. Your true brother, Shoghi”***

As a member of the National Assembly of Panama, she constantly participated in the elections of the Universal House of Justice held in Haifa, Israel.

Raquel’s achievements in the service of the Faith are numerable and often she was Panama’s representative of the Faith in the International celebration as well as to the Regional and National governmental conferences, such as World Conference on Human Rights, United Nations Women Conference.

She was as recorded by her daughter Rachell:

*“A devoted promoter of the interests of the Cause, she served with perseverance in the Baha’i World Community for 66 years, both at a national and international level; and her service appear recorded in several editions of the “Baha’i World Books”, which include interviews with several Presidents of the Republic of Panama, to whom personally delivered the message of Baha’u’llah and His New World Order”.*

In acquisition of land for the Temple and throughout its construction and its access road, until its inauguration, Raquel played the most important roles. Being Panamanian, knowing laws and legal matters of the country, knowing many prominent officials throughout the years and being certified chartered accountant by profession, helped the projects of the National Assembly and its finances. Her fluency in both Spanish and English languages would open her path to the set goals of the Faith, especially during the selling the original land of the Temple and purchasing the new land, going through all the legal matters, getting the access right to the Temple, both in the first and second access roads, she always played crucial role.

In the history of the Faith in Panama, the name Raquel Francois de Constante always shines as a luminous star.



## NATALIA CHAVEZ

Natalia Chavez, a Honduran, who being member of the Regional Teaching Committee for Central America, which it became known as CEBMA (Comite de Ensenanza Baha'i de Meso-America), was another Latin star who served to her utmost ability in promoting the Faith especially in the Republic of Panama, accompanying Louise in her teaching trips during her stay in Panama from 1948.

Louise was very fond of her. Natalia helped to establish the Latin spirit in the Faith not only in Panama, but in the whole Central America, wherever she travelled to, she thought the Faith and deepened the friends with heart and soul. The Inter America Committee acclaimed her efforts in the establishment of the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America, where she also became a member in 1951.

Natalia had deep love and dedication for the Faith. She prepared a very simple teaching course for the beginners, which was widely used in different countries by the teachers such as Louise, who highly admired it. Natalia had good impression on both Cora and Louise when she visited Panama in November. Cora wrote to Mr. Mattoon:

*"Natalia left today after nearly two weeks here. She was the right one to come to make the survey. For the first time we all feel that Panama's need have reached a receptive ears, heart & soul. Her report will not convey a message of joy & happiness but of realities. So long, so very long has the true picture been hidden...We appreciate her deeply and feel that Panama has a friend who will sincerely represent the facts..."*

Yet, Natalia was a challenge for Cora and unfortunately, she would discredit her in other areas.

Louise wrote of her after her visit to Colon:

*"...Natalia Chavez paid us a very nice visit. We certainly needed her visit and I sincerely hope you all will be able to let her come back to us after the Conference. We have three new Spanish people as a result of her visit. She met the children group, and she feels as I do that, we need a committee here in Panama to work with the children".*

In her trip to Panama, Natalia had some observation on the two communities of Panama and Colon. She wrote about Panama:

*"...there is a lack of unity and harmony in the Panama Community...The Assembly is well organized; the members are all very responsible; they celebrate the feasts and anniversaries regularly, as well as Assembly meetings. They have a magnificent Center; there is much love for the Cause, but differences among the members".*

The impact of the already mentioned disharmony between the pioneers had deeply touched her.

Natalia also voiced out the urgent requirement of Panama:

*"...They desire a pioneer who speaks Spanish, preferably a Panamanian".*

She recommends Raquel Francois:

*"...who is willing, and desires that she be sustained with \$200 a month. RTC and Colon approve. Although she: "...feels Raquel is consecrated, devoted and able".*

And her comments on the Community of Colon: *"... has a magnificent Assembly made up entirely of Negro people; they desire to attract also people of other races. [She] praises their RTC as the best she has seen.*

Raquel Francois, secretary of the LSA of Panama wrote to the Inter America Committee that how fortunate the Panamanian Community has been to get to know Natalia Chavez. She had listened to their problems, where she had promised to give each and every one of them a solution in order to be able to keep ahead for the unfoldment of the Faith and its progress. She wrote:

*"Natalia has been loving, faithful and understanding, ready to help every community, who needs her help".*

## BLANCA DE CAMPOS

### The healer lady

*“Concerning my behavior in healing, I have never used the Baha’i Faith connected with this matter. In no way I have either approved any kind of publicity. But it is beyond my power to avoid the newspapers comments about myself and my healing”<sup>370</sup>.*

She was called “miracle woman”! When she visited Caracas, Venezuela, she would be expected by thousands of lame and blind people crowded at her door. The Star & Herald newspaper in its August 14, 1949, wrote:

*“Fast spreading rumors that she had cured the incurable by prayer and the touch of her hand created a week’s sensation in this capital. All the more so because she refused payment or gifts, however small from her ministrations”.*

They referred to her as “*The Illumined one*” and mentioned that she is a Baha’i. She claimed that there are three ways of curing the sick. The reporter added that she is not an impostor:

*“The material system which the doctors follow; that of suggestion, used by hypnotizers and the spiritual system, which is mine. Her treatment has no trace of superstition or witchcraft”.*

The way she cured was very simple:

*“She put her hands on the patient, after asking the Holy Ghost (some said Divine Providence) for the blessings on the sufferer. That is the only thing needed for the person to be well”.*

As a dedicated and staunch believer, she served the Faith with fervor and passion. Though she had the curing power, but she never exploited it for material gain, only to serve the people. She argued that this is a gift of God to her, therefore, she had to channel this gift to His creatures.

Blanca became a believer through the series of talks given to the Theosophists by Gerardo Vega, from Costa Rica, when Louise invited him to Panama in early 1944, episode which was mentioned earlier in this study. She had just become a widow and was seeking the Truth by knocking at different doors, until she found the Faith and remained firm till the end.

She always thought the Faith wherever she could and also performed her gift to cure people whenever there was a need. The matter called attention of the institutions, which did not approve of the fame she was gathering as a Baha’i Illumined Lady, who performed miracles. Mr. Mattoon, member of the Inter America Committee invited her to the States to cure her sick daughter who was suffering from cerebral palsy. She travelled but was not very successful, and the cure did not work entirely, though she was certain of the ultimate cure will be conferred upon the young girl.

Blanca’s matter was referred to the beloved Guardian by Mr. Mattoon, and described her

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370. Blanca’s letter to Mr. Mattoon, Nov. 21, 1949, Panama.

short history of how as a child she was quite sick. In a later age, she prayed that she would be able to help the sick. Soon after she became a believer in Baha'u'llah in 1944, she had a vision that He gave her special power to the cure sick. She considered herself only as an insignificant instrument through which the power of the Holy Spirit may flow for healing and His Will would be done. She would only pray and put her hand on the body of the sick, sometimes the cure is immediate and other time it is gradual. Some people who the doctors have pronounced as incurable, she had healed. She never accepts any payment for her healing. And anytime she is asked about her healing power, she admits that the power is from Baha'u'llah and His teachings. Thus, many have become interested in studying the Faith in Caracas. But she avoids any kind of publicity.

Mr. Mattoon wrote:

*"The North American pioneers in both Caracas and Panama were very fearful that this publicity would be unfavorable and might injure the Cause in these localities and they wrote to the IAC and the Panama Assembly to the NSA about it...The IAC wrote to Blanca in Caracas to return immediately to Panama. At the time...an attempt was being made by a millionaire of Caracas to force Blanca to come to his home to heal an afflicted child...she was forced to take refuge for several days in the Panamanian Embassy".*

After the receipt of the letter, Blanca refused to see any more people and returned to Panama. Then the publicity started in Panama. Her own Assembly was quite cold and did not welcome her, though many of them had previously requested her to do healing of a kin, etc.

Blanca, at the invitation of Mr. Mattoon made round trip to Chicago for ten days to see her granddaughter. Although her cure did not happen immediately, but Blanca was certain that within a few months the cure would be accomplished. While there, she also had an opportunity to heal some other friends. Yet, both Mrs. Dorothy Baker and Amelia Collins fearing that Blanca might start curing through spiritual means, suggested Mr. Mattoon to write to the Guardian and expect a response. He wrote to the Guardian on September 30, 1949, and response came on October 26. Ruhyyih Khanum wrote on behalf of the Guardian:

*"Dear Baha'i brother: Your welcome letter of September 30 was received by our beloved Guardian, and he has instructed me to answer it on his behalf.*

*"The Guardian has already heard about Sra. de Campos' seemingly remarkable power of healing and he wrote the friend who communicated with him that he feels that she is naturally free to use this power, so far beyond our understanding, but not a unique phenomena in history by any means, for the good of others, but that it is better not to directly associate it with the Faith.*

*"In other words, this dear soul is a Baha'i, and we are all proud that she is one. But she should not give the impression she is a Baha'i healer, for we have no such thing, but rather that she is a Baha'i by faith, whom God seems to have blessed with this precious bounty individually of being able to often heal others.*

*"He hopes this blessing will be extended to your grandchild, and certainly Sra. de Campos, who is so humble and conscientious about this gift, and who quite rightly accepts no money for*

*helping others, should never be treated with any coldness from her Baha'i brothers and sisters because of it. On the contrary they should rejoice that such a soul is a devoted believer. Certainly, she should be known as a believer. There is no reason to hide the fact".*

Blanca's case became a deeper problem for the Medical Association of Panama, when Dr. Arnulfo Arias Madrid, the president of the Republic –himself a medical doctor- got involved in this matter in favor of Blanca.

She wrote to Mr. Mattoon in December 1949:

*"...I have to face all kind of impediments and ill-will, especial on the Medical Board's part, which tried to stop me from doing my healings. But fortunately, beside the public protests, which went so far as to apply to the president of the Republic on my behalf, the local authorities, including the President Dr. Arias himself ordered me to go on with my work and not to worry...The radio also has talked a lot on my favor..."*

Blanca, with the permission of the Inter America Committee and using her own funds, travelled to Venezuela and Ecuador to teach the Faith under the guidance of the CEPASA<sup>371</sup> of South America. She even informed the Committee that she has decided to ignore her desire to serve sick people and abandon her practice in this regard, for which she already had established her small clinic to attend people's physical problems at no charge. In her teaching trips that were carried only for the love of Baha'u'llah, she even sponsored another believer to get deepened in the Faith for future.

Blanca was quite a sincere, hardworking and dedicated soul in Panama, active member of the Local Spiritual Assembly and member of the Regional Teaching Committee. She also helped the Caracas community whenever she was called upon, though some local difficulties prevailed by the American pioneer residing there. When in 1950 the National Teaching Committee<sup>372</sup> moved to Panama, she also became a member by recommendation of Mrs. Collins, serving together with Natalia Chavez, Alfred Osborne, James Facey and Mabel Sneider, and the added member Raquel Francois.

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371. CEPASA stands for Comité de Enseñanza Para Sudamérica.

372. CEPMA, standing for Centro-America, Panama, Mexico y Antillas, and CEBMA, standing for Comite de Ensenanza Baha'i de Meso-America.

## JAMES AND GLADYS FACEY

In the Atlantic side, the rising stars were James and Gladys Maisie Facey, Panamanian stars of Caribbean background, steadfast as a rock! These two souls from the moment of accepting the Faith throughout their lives were among the most active members of Colon as well as on the National level. The writer came to know and associate with these two beautiful souls from his early days in Panama; their high standards of dedication and their love for the Faith and for the friends and much more, was a visible reality during the sessions of Summer Schools, Conventions or other inter-community gatherings whenever they were present. They were very unassuming couple, and their lives were completely dedicated to Baha'u'llah as if they both were Baha'is for generations.

In James' obituary<sup>373</sup>, it is written:

*"His goal was total commitment to the Cause he loved so dearly and which he contributed his utmost for thirty years. Jim and his wife Gladys – called Maisie by his friends – accepted the Baha'i Faith in June 1945 and were among the first harvest of souls who responded to the teaching efforts of... Louise Caswell who opened Panama to the Faith in 1939."*

Indeed, this staunch couple were the backbone of the community of Colon. Jim arranged for books and pamphlets be always available to the community members and to promote the Faith for those who showed interest in the Faith. Both Louise and Hascle Cornbleth spent time with them, deepen them in the Faith and in the administration principles of the Faith.



James Facey

James was born in Jamaica on August 8, 1896, who accompanied his widowed mother as a young boy. Mother had to work to support herself and James, while he remained in the home of an Anglican priest and went to school. He grew up in the Church, where both his mother and the Pastor encouraged him to study for the ministry. The doctrinal teachings of the church increasingly dissatisfied him, and he decided that it was not for him as he was a freethinker and could not be molded into some limited mindset thoughts. James looked for job and found one in an export-import company in Colon, where he remained as an accountant for over fifty years, thus he left the pastor's hospitality and became independent. He was 28, when he found Gladys Abrahams, another freethinker, and they married in 1924. They both agreed not to affiliate themselves with any church. They remained as such for twenty years, though they had high moral standards that they practiced strictly at home and at work. Their four children followed their parents' principles.

When Louise and Cora travelled back and forth to Colon in mid-1940s, Gladys met with them and became attracted to the Baha'i teachings. Soon the couple, after seriously studying the Faith, realized that such teachings are for them and this has been their way of thought, therefore they applied for membership. As soon as Iola Edwards, another serious student of

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373. Baha'i World, vol. XVI, pp. 556/8

the Faith enrolled as a Baha'i, the first Colon community was born. And as soon as the Assembly of Colon was formed in 1949, they both became members. James became the treasurer, although he also signed the official letters as the secretary of the Assembly too. Their two older daughters, Kathleen and Alicia soon followed their parents, also became members of the elected Assembly in 1953 and 1954. Their son Cedric, an architect, though never enrolled as a Baha'is yet rendered his services as the designer of the administrative buildings around the Temple of Panama.

James Facey also became member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of Central America, which was formed in 1951. He functioned as its treasurer for many years. The National Spiritual Assembly of Panama was formed in 1961 and James just continued as its treasurer till 1968.

Under the guidance of the House of Justice, the ad-hoc committee to find a suitable land for the future House of Worship, had among its membership James, who dedicated himself wholly to this end and continued supporting its subsequent construction. This membership made him very happy, and his devotion knew no bounds. He was also one of the readers at the dedication of the Temple in 1972.

In his obituary it is mentioned:

*"Jim's total commitment to the Cause of Baha'u'llah was readily apparent to all those who came into contact with him. To him, the Cause was like an ocean, and he was a fish swimming in this ocean. He taught the Faith for thirty years with a steadfastness, which was as natural as breathing. The stranger sitting beside him on a public park bench, his fellow passenger on a bus, train or plane, within seconds would hear, however briefly, of the Baha'i Faith. His ever-burning zeal to present to others the verities of Baha'u'llah's teachings was perhaps his greatest weakness in that his patience with anyone reluctant to recognize or accept was often thin. Being totally convinced himself, he could not understand how anyone could fail to see the truth...He would never write a letter to a non-Baha'i, which did not contain some reference to the Faith".*

He studied the administration of the Faith quite deeply and applied this aspect of the Faith with other members of institutions he was a member:

*"Always an outstanding example of loyalty to these divinely inspired guidelines, he expected the same loyalty from others",* is being mentioned in his obituary.

He was quite young in the Faith when he participated in the dedication of the mother Temple of the West in Chicago and,

*"...he was also present at the All-America Intercontinental Teaching Conference in 1953 when the Ten Year Crusade was launched".*

James was member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama when the Universal House of Justice was elected in Haifa and he was extremely happy to witness this new institution come into being by the votes of the members of the National Assemblies around the world, thus fortifying the Covenant of Baha'u'llah for the generations to come.

Both James and Gladys, after their embracement of the Faith, became the target of ridicule from their own friends and the clergy, who was observing them constantly, calling the Faith:

*“...the strange cult”, and they predicted that their membership will be short lived and “...they would soon abandon it in disillusion”!*

They passed this test quite easily by their steadfastness, loyalty and resoluteness in the Faith and their persistence in teaching the tenets of the Cause to all those friends.

James was also a prominent member of Freemasonry, of which he was a member for many years. When the beloved Guardian announced the Baha'is should quit such a membership:

*“Jim unhesitatingly disassociated himself from this fraternal tie. For him, there could be no other course; the Baha'i Faith was the most important thing in his life”.*

No doubt, the contribution of the Faceys in the establishment of the Faith in early days in Colon and in the Republic of Panama in general is deigned of high mention and regard.

James was almost 80 when he passed away, after three months of illness in his pioneering town of Puerto Pilon where his dear Maisie was sitting next to him, marking the day of the martyrdom of the Bab, July 9, 1975.



Baha'is of Colon, (Panama), standing left Mrs. Iola Edwards standing right, Mrs. Macie Facey Kneeling, Mr. James Facey.



## LEOTA LOCKMAN

Though she was an American, but well established in Panama for many years. She truly was a symbol of humble in heart yet, being part of privileged echelon of the society. The writer came to know her first in late 1971, when he became pioneer in Panama, but she really belonged to the early 1950s. She met with Cora Oliver and later on she became an ardent believer, remaining steadfast throughout her life in the field of service of which only 17 years as the Secretary of the NSA of Panama.

Leota wrote to the writer her short story of how she became a believer in Baha'u'llah and because of the impression Cora left on her and sew the seed of faith in her in the early 1950, her story is being recounted here as one of the Stars of Panama. She was distinguished member of the NSA for all her years of service.

And Leota's effect on the Baha'is of Panama of all walks of life was so intense that some named their daughters after her, inclusive of the writer. She was truly loved and highly respected by everyone. One of the most generous, dedicated, loveable and appreciated believers in Panama.

She wrote the following story and shared it with Raquel F. de Constante, as part of the trio taskforce of the NSA:

*"It was in 1950 that Joe<sup>374</sup> and I learned of the "World Club". There was a meeting each Friday held at the Balboa Y.M.C.A. It was chaired by one of the professors from Balboa Junior College. That is where you would find us, along with friends, Betty and George Bates.*



Rachelle F. Constante and Leota Lockman

*"A short introduction of purpose and policy was given, then a brief overview of the weeks current events throughout the world. Following was an open discussion. It was a sizeable gathering with lively participation. There was a small group, four of five men and women, who presented different opinions and approaches to solving the worlds' problems. We would stop at the Club House before going home and discuss what we had heard.*

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374. Joseph Lockman, Leota's husband was a successful insurance broker.

*Wondering who the small group was because Joe would say "their ideas are quite different."*

*"Betty asked us to come over one Saturday night because she had met one of the ladies in the Commissary. A short conversation ended with a plan to meet a guest from Puerto Rico who was a member of the World Health Organization. It was Mable Snyder, the guest Dr. Edrice Rice-Wray.*

*"Joe was interested in what they had to say. I believed none of it! I had been to Chicago many times. Never saw a Temple nor heard of the Baha'i Faith. My first request was for a documented history. The next time we met I was given "Dawn Breakers". Reading that, assured me that I wanted nothing to do with these people. Shocked at the incredible cruelty.*

*"By now we had the names of the people. Alfred Osborne, Raquel [de] Constante, Elena Marcella, Cora Oliver, Mable Snyder, and quite often, Artemus Lamb.*

*"Next we were invited to a public meeting. Alfred spoke on "The Cultrual Lag". He touched on problems of the world – poverty, racial prejudice, lack of education, labor conditions, to name a few. He went into "Progressive Revelation". Joe was interested. I was sorry for these people and prayed for them! The next meeting Elena spoke on the story of "Adam and Eve" as told by Abdu'l-Baha in Some Answered Questions. I added her to my prayer list!!*

*"To my surprise Cora Oliver called following this second meeting and invited me to her home for lunch. She worked at Gorgas Hospital and lived in their apartments. First a nice lunch. Then she said, "I would like to know more about you." She listened silently and patiently as I poured out my pain, my grief, my agony. What a relief someone cared! Strange I felt free to share my sad story with someone I scarcely knew.*

*"In 1947 I had planned to go to Panama. In November my father died. I decided to wait until the following June. Just before was to leave, my brother Orville, who was 31, took his life. Shot himself in his car in the park. He was my best friend. As a Baptist, suicide is an unforgiveable sin. It was the first of February 1949 when I left for Panama. I promptly went to speak to the Pastor of the Balboa Baptist Church seeking some solace, some comfort, just a bit of hope that Orville could be forgiven. Succinctly, not verbatim, I was told "well your brother is gone, lost, what about your own soul?" it was almost more than I could endure. Cora said in a firm loud voice "he is wrong, he is wrong, he is wrong. God loves His creation. Your brother is part of his creation, and He loves him. We will say prayers for him". She later told me she felt my grief. She was my grief in my face and heard it in my voice. The fact that Cora cared brought some consolation.*

*"The Baha'is kept us busy. There were meetings, teas, picnics, and the World Club. Cora shared my story with the other friends. The love with which they surrounded me began to heal my broken heart. Each one assured me they were saying prayers for my brother. This was my first experience with saying prayers for the departed.*

*"In 1953 we went to Albuquerque, New Mexico where Joe returned to finish his education. I immediately contacted the Baha'is, and it was there that I knew I could wait no longer. One month after I declared my faith in Baha'u'llah I was elected to the Local Assembly and as recording secretary. From that time my life has been in service to the Faith. What a bounty that I met those strange people at the "World Club" meetings in Panama Canal Zone."*

The example Cora Oliver showed, spoke of the caliber of a believer she was.

Joe Lockman, though never openly declared his faith in Baha'u'llah, but was a Baha'i in heart. He was instrumental in guiding Leota to the Faith<sup>375</sup>.

Everyone in Panama loved Leota, as she had a very generous heart, she loved the indigenous people. The writer knows of two young ladies whose names are Leota.

She took part of most International Conferences and Conventions in Haifa for the election of the Universal House of Justice.

The Lockmans left Panama after Joe retired from his Mutual of Omaha job in the 1980s.

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375. Personal email from Leota to the writer, August 11, 2006.

## RUTH YANCEY PRINGLE

After her passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote<sup>376</sup>:

*“Her magnificent career, spanning a full half century and including two decades of splendid, resolute service as a Continental Counsellor, has shed new and fresh luster upon the American Baha’i community’s historic world mission.”*

*“May her devoted and energetic life inspire present and future generations to emulate her shining example”.*



While serving at the World Center, the writer and his wife Manijeh, were invited for dinner at Mr. and Mrs. Von Czekus<sup>377</sup>. Telephone rang and Mr. Hooper Dunbar was called to speak on the telephone, after a while he came back, not particularly sad, in fact he was just as normal as one can be, then turned to the present guests and announced that Ruth Pringle has passed to the Abha Kingdom. We, who knew her for very long time, could not believe what we heard. We said a prayer for her noble soul. Indeed, a special soul has left us and joined the Concourse On High.

As a Continental Counsellor, Ruth Pringle performed outstanding services for a period of 23 years. She passed away on 22 August 2003, aged 83.

The Baha’i World News on 28 of September 2003 gave the following brief on the life of the ‘Intrepid Champion of the Faith of God’ – as the Universal House of Justice called her after her passing:

### CIUDAD COLON<sup>378</sup>

Long before segregation of the races was outlawed in the United States, Ruth Pringle stood up in support of the oneness of humanity. It was in the late 1930s and Ruth Yancey arrived as a student for her first lecture at a school of nursing in the American south. Unlike the other African American students, Ruth firmly refused to sit in an area set apart for those who were not white.

It was more than a decade before she was to become a Baha’i and start her life’s work of

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376. The Universal House of Justice, 2003.

377. Mr. Roelf Von Czekus was then member of the International Teaching Centre.

378. BWNS (Baha’i World News Service), Costa Rica, 28 September 2003. Not to be mistaken with Colon city of Panama.

spreading the teachings of unity, especially to the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

As a Continental Counsellor, Ruth Pringle performed such outstanding service that after she passed away on 22 August 2003, aged 83, the Universal House of Justice praised her as an *"intrepid champion"* of the Faith of God.

In the 1930s, and even up to the 1950s, victims of racism in the United States were expected to accept oppression without complaint. That was not in Ruth's character. She made it very clear to her fellow African American students that she would never comply with segregation in the classroom. She refused to do so - even when called to the Dean's office to explain herself. As a result of her principled stance, other students gradually moved out from the fenced-off area.

After completing postgraduate courses in surgical nursing and operating room technique in Chicago, Ruth practiced as an operating room nurse, and graduated with a degree in zoology and chemistry.

She became a Baha'i the first time she read the writings of Baha'u'llah. She wrote in an autobiographical sketch:

*"Such marvels were unveiled before my eyes that both my heart and mind were kindled and set afire - now I knew what I must do"*.

In 1953, two months after her acceptance of the Faith, she left for Puerto Rico as a "pioneer" to assist in building up the Baha'i community there. In 1956 she moved to Honduras, spent a year in Guatemala, and then returned to Honduras. In the evenings, after working long hours as a registered nurse, she conducted weekly Baha'i youth activities at her home. They often attracted some 100 young people from all strata of society.

Ruth participated in projects to establish Local Spiritual Assemblies, including in Nicaragua where she pioneered on the eastern coast of that country. In 1961 Ruth was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of Nicaragua, prior to her pioneering to Panama in the same year.

Her marriage to Alan Pringle, Canadian pioneer to Panama in 1961, was the first Baha'i wedding to be legally recognized in the country. In 1962, she was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, and in the Ridvan of 1963, together with Alan, they went to the Holy Land, First International Convention, for the election of the Universal House of Justice, followed by the first World Congress in London, where both participated. At the World Congress in London, Ruth Pringle had the honor of giving an address on the topic of "Victories of Pioneers". She was on the same panel as Hand of the Cause Enoch Olinga<sup>379</sup>.

Following the passing of Shoghi Effendi, in November 1957, at least five Hands of the Cause visited Central America, Ruth said:

*"All these Hands had a profound influence on my formation and perhaps the direction of my Baha'i life"*.

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379. Enoch Olinga, (1926 – 1979), Ugandan by birth. Knight of Baha'u'llah for Cameroon and appointed as Hand of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi in 1957.

She said that one of them, Dr. Rahmatu'llah Muhajir, had introduced her to what she and her co-workers had been searching for: *"the sweetness of witnessing"*, the establishment of the first all-indigenous Baha'i community in Nicaragua.

Ruth was appointed as an Auxiliary Board Member<sup>380</sup> after she returned to Panama in 1963, serving and travelling extensively in pursuit of her duties, until her appointment to the Continental Board of Counsellors in 1980, which lasted until her death in August 2003 in San Jose, Costa Rica, the country she last moved to together with Alan.

She spoke at international and inter-oceanic conferences. In 1975, she was invited by Hand of the Cause Madame Ruhyyih Khanum<sup>381</sup> to accompany her and her entourage in what was called: "Green Light Expedition", what she described as "the inestimable privilege", which was a major journey for the Baha'i Faith undertaken in South America and Amazons.

Back in the earlier days

Taking the Baha'i teachings to indigenous people became their principal aim in life, and they made strong links with the native Ngobe-Bugle (Guaymi) people. She wrote: *"Results were immediately forthcoming, and hundreds of indigenous believers were enrolled, and all-indigenous assemblies were formed"*.

In 1980, Mrs. Pringle was appointed to the Continental Board of Counsellors, a position involving sustained hard work and constant journeys overseas. In this capacity, she traveled to some of the remote parts of the world, guiding and encouraging young Baha'i communities. She worked for the rights of women and dedicated herself to the establishment of the Ngobe-Bugle<sup>382</sup> and radio station in Soloy in the province of Chiriqui of Panama, which is operated by the native Baha'is.

Her next-door neighbor in Ciudad Colon<sup>383</sup>, Costa Rica, for the past 15 years, Jere McKinney, said she was known for her quick wit, her ready laugh, her superb hospitality, and her grasp of where Baha'is should direct their efforts.

Mr. McKinney described how Ruth Pringle would travel in remote parts of the country on very basic transport and arrive full of enthusiasm to assist the Baha'is and speak about the Faith.

Just two weeks before her death, Ruth went to Jamaica to attend the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the first Local Spiritual Assembly there.

In her typical fashion, and despite suggestions that for her health's sake she might slow down, she had a series of meetings with Baha'is -- especially youth -- spent an hour discussing

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380. Auxiliary Board Member (ABM) is an appellation given to those individuals, originally being appointed by the Hands of the Cause of God whose term was for life, to help them in their heavy functions in a certain geographical area. Later, when the institution of the Continental Board of Counsellors was created by the Universal House of Justice in 1968 for a span of five years renewable, therefore, their functions became specific under the new board, either for protection or propagation of the Faith also for a period of five years renewable, and they function in national level. Their appointment became the function of the Board of Continental Counsellors.

381. Mary Maxwell (1910 – 2000), after her marriage to Shoghi Effendi in 1937 she was given the appellation of Ruhyyih Khanum. She was appointed as Hand of the Cause of God in 1952.

382. Known as Guaymi Cultural Center

383. Ciudad Colon in Costa Rica not to be taken for the city of Colon in Panama Atlantic side.

the Faith with a senior officials and gave a talk about the early days of the Faith's activities on the island.

After returning home to San Jose, Ruth passed away, which was immediately reported to the Baha'i World Centre. In a message of tribute to her, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

***"Her magnificent career, spanning a full-half century and including two decades of splendid, resolute service as a Continental Counsellor, has shed new and fresh luster upon the American Baha'i community's historic world mission."***

Noting her promotion of the Faith among the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the message continued:

***"May her devoted and energetic life inspire present and future generations to emulate her shining example."***

The Universal House of Justice asked National Spiritual Assemblies of the continent of America to arrange befitting memorial meetings in her honor throughout, and in both Houses of Worship of Wilmette and Panama, Mother Temples of the West .

## **INTERVIEW WITH RUTH PRINGLE**

The following is an extract from an interview with Ruth Pringle<sup>384</sup>.

### **BRIEF HISTORY**

Ruth (née Yancey) was born to Edward Solomon and Minnie Smith in 1921<sup>385</sup> in a family of 8 children, 5 brothers and 3 sisters, which she was the third born as an identical twin<sup>386</sup>. None except Ruth did ever became Baha'i, though almost all the members of her family knew of Ruth's newly found Faith.

Her father passed away a year after she became Baha'i, in 1954 and her mother only five years later. The rest of the siblings were active in other Christian churches. Ruth pioneered to Panama in 1961. In the same year, she married Alan Pringle and ever since she was known as Ruth Pringle. Ruth and Alan's marriage in the same year was in fact the first Bahá'í wedding to be legally recognized in Panama. In 1962 she was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama. The members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama were:

- Harry Hays Anderson (American from Chiriqui-Rep. de Panama),
- Rachele Jean Francois de Constante, known as Raquel (Panamanian),
- James Vassal Facey (Panamanian/Jamaican Descent, from Colon),
- Kenneth Frederics (American from Canal Zone),
- Leota E. M. Lockman (American),

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384. Recorded by Jeremy McKinney, in San Jose, Costa Rica in altogether 14 tapes.

385. She declared in the interview that she was born on June 15, 1920.

386. Ruth commented to the writer that her identical twin sister never showed any inclination towards the Baha'i Faith,

- Alfred E. A. Osborne (Afro American/Panamanian),
- William Alan H. Pringle (Canadian),
- Ruth E. Yancee Pringle (Afro American),
- Donald Ross Witzel (American).

Ruth and Alan served in Panama for almost 35 years before they moved to San Jose, Costa Rica in 1996, where their fate was sealed in that country. Thanks to the dedicated friends of San Jose who gathered the possibilities and tape-recorded Ruth and as the courtesy of Ms. Mary Lucas, the details of her pioneering, travels, activities and services are being shared with all those who came to know this wonderful soul.

## HOW DID SHE BECAME A BAHÁ'Í

*"Nobody had cards at that time. This was at a time when [one] had to go to the local Assembly. Wrote a letter or informed the Local Assembly your desire to become a Bahá'í, then the Local Assembly would invite you to meet and inform you what you had to do to be enrolled as a Bahá'í. After you had fulfilled that, you were invited in again for an examination. After all of that they would say, "We accept you". I was thoroughly and completely opposed to placing any kind of obstacles in the path of a seeker. That for me, if somebody said, "I believe. I want to be a Bahá'í" and seems to be sincere, you don't question [his] sincerity, you enroll him. "And then comes the responsibility of helping that individual to grow in his understanding, to become involved in Bahá'í activities, that's one-on-one teaching, we can do that. But we cannot do that anymore today. The time for one-on-one teaching has pretty much passed. If we are going to reach masses, we have to use other teaching approaches".<sup>387</sup>*

Coming from a strong Christian background, Ruth heard of the Faith in 1946 while living in Chicago. It took her some seven years before she became Baha'i through the marvelous teacher, Mrs. Betty Coyle in 1953, who later became pioneer in Norway. In the interview she said:

*"But during the course of those seven years, through her persistence and loving care I learned a great deal about the Faith, the Covenant, the station of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Administrative Order as the offspring of the Covenant."*

It was in a fireside in the home of Ruth and Ellsworth Blackwell, which she described the event:

*"I went on the spur of the moment, no one knew I was coming, I hadn't informed anyone. But on that night, Ruth and Ellsworth had a book they had already inscribed to give to me, and Betty arrived at that fireside meeting. She had a book for me and Dr. Houshang Javid arrived, and he*

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387. Ruth's comments in an interview in 2003, San Jose, C.R.



*had a book for me. But it was the first time anyone had ever offered me any of the Revealed Word or the authoritative writings of the Faith interpretations”.*

Though other books were wonderful books and can help many to understand the tenets of the Faith, but Ruth only wanted to read the word of God. The books that were given to her were *Gleanings of the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, *The Kitab-i-Iqan*<sup>388</sup> –The Book of Certitude– and *The Advent of Divine Justice* of Shoghi Effendi. She says that in a glorious Sunday morning in her apartment in Chicago, where she had not much to do:

*“I picked up Gleanings first and just opened it at random, and happened to open it to the page where it says, “and now concerning your question as to the soul after its departure from this world or after death. Why didn't anyone ever tell me this before”?*

Her curiosity took her immediately to the second book, the Iqan:

*“...and just opened again at random, the book opened to the second part where Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the 'unknowability' of God, that He's above ascent and descent, egress and regress. By this time, I'm beginning to get a little bit agitated”.*

When a thirsty soul gets into the fountain of pure water cannot drink enough to satiate the craving and eager body. In this condition, Ruth’s curiosity took her to the third book, ‘The Advent of Divine Justice:

*“I opened it, and it is opening to the section where Shoghi Effendi speaks of the requisites for teachers going into Latin America. Because the whole book is devoted to the teaching work and principles and concepts involved in opening Latin America to the Faith”.*

Ruth was awestruck by the beauty of words and phrases used in the book:

*“But there is one thing about The Advent of Divine Justice that struck me, and that was the language - the beauty of the language and the manner in which the Guardian had used it the selection of his words, the beauty, the poetry”.*

In the state of bewilderment, she was not sure which book to take first and start reading. She chose the second book, The book of Certitude:

*“I selected the second book [though] I found myself in a terrible state of turmoil, all of a sudden it dawned on me, “Well, this is it. It's time to enroll as a Bahá'í”.*

Baha’u’llah had touched her heart in that moment:

*“I went to the telephone and I called the secretary of the Local Assembly. I said, “Is the Local Assembly meeting tomorrow night?” “ Yes.” “Would you put my name on the agenda? I would like to enroll as a Bahá'í.” “...time went by - probably about six weeks or so, and I heard nothing! One day I saw one of the members of the Local Assembly and I approached this member of the Assembly and I said, “Do you remember whether my name was mentioned as an applicant for enrollment as a Bahá'í?” “Oh, yes, oh, yes.” And I said, “Would you be permitted to tell me what the Assembly decided?” “Oh, well, the Assembly decided that lots of people are getting excited about becoming Bahá'ís now because they've heard about the Continental Conference that's*

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388. Baha’u’llah, The Book of Certitude

*coming up in May and the dedication of the House of Worship and everybody wants to be part of the excitement. So, we decided if you really want to be a Bahá'í, after all of this is over, you will still be around".*

Ruth wanted to respond to the call of Shoghi Effendi and go as a pioneer, but here, the first test was wait! Yet, Ruth did not lose hope that one day she would be enrolled as a Baha'i, but in the meanwhile after the second attempt calling the LSA secretary and telling her of her intention of going on pioneering she started to look of a job:

*"I didn't care where I went just someplace, anyplace in the world there was a possibility that I might get employment. And decided that whoever answered first, that was the direction in which I would go."*

## **GOING ON PIONEERING**

To be detached and relying on God is what the pioneer should do first and this is what Ruth did when she decided to go on pioneering, though she had many other things that could have distracted her in achieving her goal of pioneering:

*"First come, first serve. Now I found myself on the horns of a dilemma. What am I going to do? How am I going to do this? Because at that time I had applied for entrance into various universities as a graduate student in various fields and I was also waiting for those answers. And I had also applied for enrollment in the next pilot class that they would open. And we were just waiting for enough people to want to take the course to open it up. And I thought, I decided that there was only one way to solve it and that was not to worry about it. And whatever positive answer came first go!*

Soon she got her first job as a nurse:

*"And the first positive response I got was from Puerto Rico that there was a job available, I accepted the job and began to make my plans. I had some debts I had to pay, and that taught me: Don't go into debt. Whatever you need, unless it's a matter of life and death, you can live without it until you have saved the money to pay cash. So, I was delayed by about six months, departing for my pioneer post, which was not a new goal; it was a consolidation goal.*

At that time she was not yet formally enrolled as a Baha'is, neither was she familiar with the Baha'i administration and how it functioned yet, she considered herself as a Baha'i. This was truly an important feeling that one makes consolidating his or her connection with Baha'u'llah and dedicates his or her life to Him. Ruth revealed this fact for herself:

*"To me that was unimportant<sup>389</sup>, whether they accepted me or not. My feeling in the matter was, it was a relationship between me and Baha'u'llah, number one and that no one and no institution has the right to keep any individual from becoming a Baha'i and serving the Cause of Baha'u'llah, simply because no one has said, "Well, yes, we accept you. You are a Baha'i." Being a Baha'i transcends that level".*

In 1953, the year of her allegiance to Baha'u'llah, the Guardian had called for five

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389. She is referring to the Administration of the Faith.

Intercontinental Conferences, in Stockholm, Sweden; in Kampala, Uganda; in New Delhi, India; in Santiago, Chile and in Wilmette, Chicago, where the House of Worship would be also inaugurated. She was 42.

Ruth came to know some of the Hands of the Cause of God, the chosen individuals by the beloved Guardian, whose function was to help the propagation and protection of the Cause. Ruth remembered:

*"...during that time, I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Khádem and his lovely wife. And also, I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Samandarí. As a matter of fact, I didn't understand who these people were<sup>390</sup>, at that time. I knew that they were very special people within the Baha'i Faith, but I didn't know enough about it to be really and truly appreciative of it".*

Not yet being enrolled yet as a Baha'i, she went to the Baha'i Center in Chicago:

*"I went to a public meeting where Mr. Khádem also Mr. Samandarí was present. And about two blocks away from the Baha'i Center there was a restaurant where the Baha'is -- the young folk at that time -- we were all in our 30's, the young folk used to go there following the meeting and sit out and drink coffee and so on and talk about things and laugh and have fun until the wee hours of the morning many times and I went that night. Mr. Khádem was there and so was Mr. Samandarí. And I had the privilege of walking down the street with Mr. Samandarí. He was a very small man, so humble and so self-effacing. I had never met anyone like him before".*

In that time Ruth had already established correspondence with Dr. Edris Wray in Puerto Rico. Nothing would deter her from her decision of going pioneering as requested by the beloved Guardian. Accordingly, Dr. Wray was:

*"...head of the Public Health Unit in Río Piedras in Santurce, and a professor at the university in Public Health. She wrote back copied to the W.H.T.C.<sup>391</sup>. I thought there must be some organization some way I should be in touch administratively because it didn't make sense that you could call for people to go all over the world, but you don't know where they are going. One day I met Mr. Horace Holley at the soda fountain in the drugstore and I said to him, "Mr. Holley, I'm planning to go pioneering. With whom should I establish contact, I'm a new Bahá'í; he said, "My dear, if you want to go pioneering, just pack your bags and go! And when you reach your post, send me a cable, good enough." About a couple days later I got a sweet, loving letter from the secretary of the Western Hemisphere Teaching Committee who happened to be Katherine McLaughlin".*

The letter was not particularly pleasing to Ruth, because she did not consult with them before taking off going for pioneering:

*"...a very small tiny lady, and a wonderful Bahá'í. But at this particular point I don't think she was too pleased with me. It wasn't the sweetest letter in the world. Basically, it was, "Who do you think you are, making plans to go pioneering and you haven't been in touch with this Committee?" I had my timetable set for when I would be leaving when everything would be cleared up and I would be free to leave, it was set for September. So, I drove from Chicago to my home in Pennsylvania and spent a few days with my family... and from there to Washington, D.C.*

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390. Mr. Samandari and Mr. Khadem were both Hands of the Cause of God appointed by the Guardian.

391. Western Hemisphere Teaching Committee

*Betty Coyle came with me because she was leaving Chicago to go pioneering in Arkansas”.*

Ruth’s family knew of her becoming a Baha’i by then. Her family had a full confidence in her she recalled:

*“Well, probably for me they were happy. My family has never interfered with my decisions. My mother says my father used to say, "Don't worry about Ruth. She has common sense. She will make good decisions". He said, "Of all my children, she's the one about whom I never worry because I know that she's on solid ground".*

Ruth drove to New York and after checking in a hotel, she called the Baha’i Center finding out that the WHTC was in session, she called and a female voice answered,

*"Just a minute, you say you're going pioneering?" Just a minute, "If you're not too far away, come immediately". I walked over to the Baha’i Center and I went in. Katherine McLaughlin was seated at the big table with the other members, and she stood up, put her hands on her hips and she said, "Young lady, come here. "She looked me over from head to foot, from foot to head and back again from head to foot and she said, "I just want to take one good look at you! And she whirled me around I came back face to face with her and she said, "Now, tell me, who do you think you are that you just go pack up and go off pioneering as you please and the Committee knows nothing about it?" And I said to her, "Well it really wasn't quite like that. You know, I'm a new Baha’i and I didn't know the Western Hemisphere Teaching Committee exited”.*

She told her about her encounter with Mr. Holley, after that they became good friends for life.

She got her flight to Puerto Rico to reach there on September 26<sup>th</sup>.

*“It wasn't until December, that I actually went to work. And it wasn't until March that I got my first paycheck. So, when I finally was able to go to work, I had to leave the San Juan area and I would be working in a hospital, at a school of nursing in Arecibo. I went to Arecibo to look for a place to live. I had no place to live there, and I had no real contacts there. There was just the local community of San Juan”.*

She was guided to a lovely area of the town over the hill and could manage to stay in a family house with no furniture, and she did not have money, except a sapphire ring which she offered to the family. She had already made an acquaintance with the filling station where they took care of her car and they also had a furniture shop next door, which at her leisure taste, the good-hearted man loaded the empty house with nice furniture, extra beds, etc. which she could not have even thought of. She had really been taken care of by Baha’u’llah to all her needs, even the supermarket man opened an account for her to buy whatever she needed and pay after the first paycheck!

Ruth stayed in Puerto Rico for some six years. Some other pioneers also came in. She recalled:

*“...this would have been in 1959, among them the ones I remember most fondly and was closest to, were Donald and Barbara Barrett. Donald Barrett was the Baha’i attorney who negotiated the treaty between the Universal House of Justice and the government of Israel”.*

## HONDURAS

For a Christmas break she:

*"...along with a young German girl from Guatemala -from Antigua in Guatemala- decided to go to Haiti to spend the Christmas holidays. And we happened to turn up at the same hotel in which they had just completed a summer school there and Artemus Lamb, Sheila Rice Wray and Elizabeth Cheney were still there. The three of them were members of the National Assembly. One afternoon we were sitting on the veranda drinking tea, and they were talking about some of the problems or challenges they were facing in Central America. With the time moving along and coming so close to when they would have to elect independent National Assemblies in all of the Central American countries and their unpreparedness for it and some of the requisites, the prerequisites that had been established for it. And it seemed like a pretty dull picture. As I sat there and I listened to it, all of a sudden, a tremendous wave of magnanimity swept over me. I said, "Well, you know, I'm just at a consolidation goal in Puerto Rico and Puerto Rico is not one of the countries or one of the areas where they will establishing independent National Assemblies during the World Crusade. Nothing is happening there now anyhow, and there are other Baha'is and pioneers there. If you would like I could go to Central America. Wherever you would like me to settle.*

By the time Ruth got back home to Arecibo, Puerto Rico, there was the letter from the National Spiritual Assembly Secretary, where there was the indication of the happiness of the institution, accepting the offer going to Central America, the decision was to go to La Lima, Honduras. By mid-February, after arranging all her affairs with her students at the Nursing School, she left for Honduras. She remembered:

*"I think it was Bahá'u'lláh's hand that guided that. I did it. I don't know how." I was off to Honduras. I arrived in Tegucigalpa April 1st. (1959?) Margot Miessler was there by then. They had asked Margot to go to Honduras a couple of years before".*

Ruth gave her first impressions of her new pioneering place:

*"As we overflowed Tegucigalpa and looked down, everything looked barren. It looked as though we were going into a desert, except for the terracotta rooftops. But everything seemed to blend in with the soil and so on, and it was dusty, and it was very hot. And then I went down by bus to San Pedro Sula twelve hours of dust. Trip down to San Pedro Sula was relatively eventless. It was a dirt road from Tegucigalpa to San Pedro Sula. It went up through the mountains and down, except that it was very slow drive by bus, not that old. It was a very slow trip because the road was not paved".*

Ruth goes on describing her new pioneering place:

*"Tegucigalpa was the capital of the country and San Pedro Sula was the most important industrial city of the country. I arrived in San Pedro Sula, and I couldn't believe my eyes. It was like going into a frontier town in the days of the wild-west, guns slung on each hip a machete in one hand, or a machete slung across their shoulder".*

And she describes even further how the city looked like in those early years:

*"The city itself, they called it a city, but you could hardly consider it as a city at that time, was*

*kind of a rambling place, only one paved street in the whole of the city, the rest were dirt streets which of course became lagoons of mud during the rains. Everything was dusty, gray with dust, and you breathed it in, you could feel the grit between your teeth. The area around the railroad tracks was where most of the industry, business places and so on were clustered. And that was the great metropolis of San Pedro Sula at that time. There was one bright spot there though, however, and that bright spot was a very bright spot, and it was a pioneer who had settled there a couple of years earlier, a schoolteacher in an American school there, her name was Louise Nelson. She was the sister of Don Roger's wife from Canada"<sup>392</sup>.*

## **LA LIMA**

Even after passing of over half a century earlier, Ruth remembered well the fascinating story of La Lima of those days:

*"From San Pedro Sula I took a bus to La Lima. And most of the people traveled not by bus but by jitney, it wasn't terribly expensive. They're regular automobiles but usually very dilapidated. I finally reached my destination. Well, then Lima was a lowland area, flat, beautiful green expanses of grass perfectly level and from the town everything looked very lovely and beautiful. But it didn't take me very long to discover that the town was divided into three sections. There is a section for the Anglo-Saxon Northern type, there was a section for the Latinos and then there was a section for the blacks. And progressive in their in the degree of the luxuriousness of the accommodations, and the section where I had to go -because of my skin color - all of the sewage drained through open gutters. The houses were built up on stilts and within the house itself you had the family living quarters, that is, a little sitting room and the bedrooms, no sanitary facilities, used the old-fashioned outhouse. The kitchen was apart. It was a sort of lean-to built from the main living quarters a little way across the way into the kitchen area it was down on ground level. And no windows, except at the so-called sink, which drained directly into the gutter below. There was an opening that opened out, it was wooden, propped it up. At least I had a room for myself! I had a bed a very lumpy, it was a straw-filled mattress and an iron post bed, a very roughly fashioned table and one straight-back chair. No closet, some nails driven in, of course I had pay for it. A dollar a day would've been almost as much income as I would be having. And this would be home for a while.*

*"Before arriving I had been informed that a pioneer from Costa Rica had settled there just a few days before my arrival, Roberto Chinchilla<sup>393</sup>, he had already started to work. But we were starting with no believers and the goal was, we had to have a Local Spiritual Assembly by Ridván. It was a prerequisite for establishing the independent National Assembly; they had to have a certain number of Local Assemblies, and Honduras had to have six, the lion's share for the whole territory.*

*"And so, La Lima was one of the goal communities for the establishment of a center and a Local Assembly. We were more or less led to understand that there would be no excuse for not*

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392. Louise left San Pedro shortly after that. She had developed muscular dystrophy disease and was practically an invalid. She had married, had several children and a very, very devoted husband. He carried her around like a baby to the meetings and so on. They lived in Japan for a while but then she had left Honduras.

393. Roberto Chinchilla married the daughter of a man from Lebanon who had a business there and they eventually went to Miami. Last I heard they were living in the Miami area.

*forming that Assembly by Ridván. We worked and we tried. The night of the 20th of May<sup>394</sup>, we had eight believers. We decided that it was beyond our power to win that Assembly, and that if we won the Assembly, it would be through the bounty and the blessings of Baha'u'llah. We went to the Center and decided we would pray until the ninth member of the Assembly came along.*

*"Well, the Baha'i Center was a very small room. It had a couple of benches around the walls. We began to pray. About midnight the door was open and a gentleman a little worse for the wear and tear of the earlier hours of the evening stopped at the door and very thick-tonguedly asked what we were doing. We said that we had to form a Local Spiritual Assembly. This man has no idea as to what we're talking about and that we have to do it that night. And he said, "Well, I'll be a member of the Assembly! I don't mind! And we grabbed him, and we hugged him; we were so delighted; we were so happy! And we by a declaration<sup>395</sup> we formed the Local Spiritual Assembly. There has never been a Local Spiritual Assembly in La Lima since that time".*

Ruth recalled that eventful midnight occasion and the formation of the first Local Spiritual Assembly. She also remembered having met again the ninth member:

*"However, this man knew nothing about the Faith and was obviously under the influence of hard booze. I had the opportunity to meet him on several occasions in my travels up through Central America and he considered himself a Baha'i and he said from that day forward he had not returned to drinking anything, no alcoholic beverage. There were two whom I met occasionally in my travels, and they considered themselves Baha'is."*

## **NICARAGUA**

Because of the expiry of her visa, Ruth had to leave the Country heading to Guatemala to work with the indigenous population there. While in Tegucigalpa, she found with Artemus again, who now was member of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly, who told her to go to Nicaragua instead:

*"And there was a wonderful family in Nicaragua that would be happy to receive me the Witzels, Donald<sup>396</sup> and Mignon. So, I changed my plans, and I went to Nicaragua, meanwhile I applied for a visa that would give me the opportunity to stay in the country long enough to get residency. I got it".*

It is not clear the date should when she moved to Nicaragua, she does not mention that any date:

*"I went to Nicaragua. Residency in Nicaragua was no problem. The Witzels had become very friendly with the man who was head of Immigration in Nicaragua. I spent a year living in the Witzel household, a very interesting household, I must admit".*

In Managua, she experienced tremors and earthquakes, which she describes as *"terrifying and nasty, as one totally is helpless"*.

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394. Must have been 20th of April, just prior to Ridvan the due date to form the Local Assembly.

395. Local Assemblies are formed by election if there are more than 9 members, otherwise, the nine members just declare the formation of their Assembly.

396. Years later Donald Witzel, was appointed as Counsellor for the Americas.

## IN BLUEFIELDS

Shortly after Ruth arrived in Managua, she was offered a job at the Inter-American Cultural Center, where she worked for almost a year. Towards the end of the year, she also made a trip to Bluefields – Atlantic Coast and environs. She had rather a nice experience while sitting in her hotel:

*"I went back to the hotel, and I got the Time magazine I had purchased en-route and went out on the veranda which faced the street and began to read the latest edition of Time magazine when a gentleman came by and he stopped and walked up to the railing around the veranda, made himself at home "Good morning, Miss! You're a stranger here in town?" "Yes." "And what is your mission, may I ask?" I told him I was with the Baha'i Faith "Oh, what's that?" And we talked a bit about it, and he said, "All right. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go out and I will arrange things. You be ready and I'll be by about six o'clock to get you and take you to where meeting will be held." Sure enough, that's exactly what happened.*

*"About six o'clock he came by to fetch me and we went to the meeting. We had a meeting of probably close to eighty people. And we talked about the Faith. I was elated. I was so sure this was going to be a wonderful place and we're going to have masses of people coming into the Faith. However, I didn't know that it was also a Moravian<sup>397</sup> stronghold. I sometimes speak of the hard-shell, hard-core Baptists. Well, the Moravians are even more difficult! They're even harder. And so, nothing really much came of that, except that, I became known in the town and the word Baha'i was mentioned and they heard something about Baha'u'llah. A few years later when the first pioneers went there to settle... Hooper Dunbar... the name Baha'i wasn't a completely new word; it was still strange and Baha'is were still looked upon as devil workers, to be avoided at all costs. Their breath might even be poison".*

## THE CASE OF AN ISOLATED BELIEVER

Ruth goes on with her narration of the memoirs in Nicaragua, where she met with someone who considered himself a believer. It is quite curious:

*"The first reception of the Faith in Bluefields was neither rejection nor hostile. That came later, of course, through the influence of the ministers. I remained in Bluefields about eight days, then I made a visit to Puerto Cabezas. I met a young man, who considered himself a Baha'i. Many years before, during the Second World War somewhere along the line he got hold of a paper from the United States in which there was an announcement about the Baha'i Faith and some activity. And he didn't know what this was, and he was curious. It gave an address, and he wrote to the address, he said it was Horace Holley who responded and had sent him a copy of Baha'u'llah and the New Era. And from that time forward, he considered himself a Baha'i. But he had never met a Baha'i. The only other Baha'i he had ever met was during the War a ship docked in Puerto Cabezas. There were members of the crew on that ship who were Baha'is, but they were from Iran, and they spoke no Spanish nor English, so all they could say to one another was Allah'u'Abha, Allah'u'Abha".*

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397. The Moravian Church is one of the oldest Protestant denominations in Christianity. Wikipedia



Here Ruth points at an important matter, which to be considered by all who actively teach the Faith:

*"That had been the extent of his Baha'i experience, but he was firm in his belief in the Faith and belief in Baha'u'llah, and had remained steadfast and firm for all of these years, completely isolated. The lesson is that we never know what little thing we might do, some book that might be left behind, a pamphlet that might be given that will get into hands of a seeker, someone who is really, sincerely seeking. The name itself will just sink deep into their hearts, and even though they have no knowledge of what the Faith is all about, spiritually they accept it. Then just waiting for the opportunity to know other Baha'is and to become involved in activities. Later, Hooper went up to Puerto Cabezas and found this man and he worked with him".*

## **DREAMS**

Ruth had some dreams in that period of time. One dream is about Ruth being engaged in making clay human figures when Shoghi Effendi pays a visit:

*"...the Guardian visited Nicaragua and I was with the Guardian. I was the only one person there with him at the time and he inquired about the teaching work, "how was the teaching work going?" I said, "Well, not very well, Shoghi Effendi." He said, "Well, why not?" I said, "Well, the people aren't interested." "Then you must create an interest." I went through the list of excuses we all used to make about why the teaching wasn't going on, not that there was anything wrong with me, but it was all "the people." Finally, Shoghi Effendi became very, very impatient, and he said very abruptly and reviewed all of the excuses I had made. "If none of these thing work, then get busy and make them work" I spent the rest of the night bashing bodies and extremities, body parts out of clay and putting them together, looking at them and wondering, "How will I ever breathe the spirit of life into these clay forms?" I woke up the next morning. Mignon Witzel saw me and said, "What happened to you last night?" I said, "I don't know", and she said, "Well, you look as though you'd been working all night and you look so bedraggled and haggard". I told her what had happened. I had worked all night. But the work wasn't so much fashioning the bodies out of clay, but it was the preoccupation with how to breathe the spirit of life into these dead bodies?"*

Ruth found her answer to the question of her dream:

*"I think that we have found the answers, for the time being through the development of the institute process. It is a certain, a sure thing that the institute process is reviving and revitalizing countless people around the world today".*

Sometimes later she again dreamt with the Guardian, a very interesting dream:

*"...he was inquiring about the status of the Faith. He said, "Well, you need money to work with in this area". So, he instructed me to send a cable in his name to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States requesting the Assembly to make a deposit of a certain amount of money in the name of Shoghi Effendi. The cable went two days later, and the Guardian inquired, "Have you received an answer?" I said, "No, nothing has come through". He said, "Send another cable". I sent a second cable and a few days later, still no answer, and he said, "Send a cable and in the cable state: 'please respond immediately'". He got an answer. The answer was: "There has*

*been a complete economic collapse and there is no money. We were trying desperately to get it, and as soon as we can, we will send the money you have requested". Shoghi Effendi said, "I must get back to Haifa. Let's go back immediately. This may be the beginning of the end of everything". That was it. There was no money".*

## **BACK TO HONDURAS**

After Nicaragua, she went back to Honduras with the determination of settling there:

*"Ere my visit to Bluefields I went back to Managua, got my belongings together, returned to Honduras on a tourist visa again and decided that I was going to stay this time, no matter what happened. And even though the consul had never received permission to grant me the visa for residency, I went back. By this time my money was running out. I was running very low. I had no job, nor any prospects of a job. I didn't know what was going to be happening. But I had enough money to pay for a room in a pension for one week, at the pension the price of the room included the three meals a day; so, I was set, what more did I need, really, and what more could I ask for?"*

On her travel back, she lost the little suitcase she had which did not arrive to the airport. Only six months later, it came via Tokyo, where it has been kept in a warehouse! And in the meanwhile, with no money available, she had to just use, wash and re-use her clothing over and over again.:

*"The same thing you wash. You wear it today, you wash it out, you put it on tomorrow. It dries overnight and you put it on tomorrow, we don not really need all of the paraphernalia that we think we need, and it is amazing how well one can get along with just a change of clothing".*

## **FINDING A JOB IN HONDURAS**

Baha'u'llah works on many different ways and His ways would never occur to anyone. His ways of taking care of His servants, especially those dedicated in His path are often very mysterious. The following story is one of those intricate ones:

*"Alan told me there was a Baha'i<sup>398</sup>. She had a lot of difficulty with her eyes, and she just had surgery on her eyes. Alan suggested that I go and see her. So, I went to the hospital to see her; while I was there, a woman came in very distraught. They had just brought her father into the hospital, and they were going to do emergency surgery on him. I saw how upset she was. I said to her, "If you like, you can go home, and I will come and stay with your father overnight. If there's any reason to bother you, we will get in touch with you during the course of the night, but I don't expect there will be any problems." I stayed and took care of him that night. And in the morning, I called the woman. I told her that her father was doing very well, and that I would go back the second night to be with him. I went back the second night. I noticed that during the night the nuns kept sticking their head in the room. They had come to see what was going on. In the morning, one of the nuns came to me and said, "Before you leave why do not you stop in*

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398. One of the earliest Baha'is and one of the first Baha'is of Central America to arise to travel teach, her name was Mary Rivera.

*the office, the Mother Superior would like to see you". And I was thinking, "I don't care about seeing the Mother Superior and I left, I did not go. This woman called me and said, "Are you going back tonight?" I said, "No, I do not plan to. Your father really does not need special care anymore. He's doing fine. He will be up walking around probably tomorrow or the next day". She begged me, finally, I said, "All right. I will go again tonight. But, please, do not ask me to go another night". I went back. And in the morning the nuns came to me and said, "You did not stop by to see Mother Superior before you left! I said, "No". They said, "Please do. Go now. "I went down to see Mother Superior. She said they had been watching and observing, how I took care of this man. They were looking for an instructor for their practical nursing program and she offered me a job, on the spot! I said, "I didn't want to appear too anxious, I said, "Well, you know I think there is something you need to know about me before we say 'yea' or 'nay'. I said, "I am a Baha'i, and that's why I am here in Honduras; I am here to promote the interests of the Baha'i Faith and we have certain holidays during the course of the year, there are nine of them, nine days on which we should suspend our normal work, I could not come to work unless you could guarantee that my nine Holy Days in year would be honored and I would have those days off". "Oh, yes, I think we can arrange that". She said, "But you will not teach your religion here in the school?" And I said, "No, of course not, I will not teach the Baha'i Faith in the school, but principles yes, because it is, I believe the principles of the Baha'i Faith are to be lived by. I cannot divorce principle from what I do". She says, "Oh well, "I understand". She understood that. She said, "No problem, no problem". Then it came to how much they would pay I said, "No, I can't survive on that. "It was going to be a six-day week and I said, "No, I could not work more than five days. I had to have time for the Baha'i Faith". They gave me everything! And I started working for about two and a half years.*

*"The nun under whose supervision I worked directly was a very fine woman. Had a very pure heart. And we were very much in tune one to another. I remember when Dr. Giachery came to Honduras for his first visit, I had not said anything to her about any visitor coming. But I was thinking, "Oh I wish I could get time off so that I could accompany Dr. Giachery, do whatever errands he had that need to be taken care of, but I cannot ask for the time off. The morning before Dr. Giachery was to arrive, I went to work and the sister, Carmelia, came to me and said, "I have the feeling that you need some time off". She said, "I will take your classes. And why do not you just take time off tomorrow and come back on Monday?" She frequently did that. When the time was approaching that I was about to leave she came down to the office one morning, she greeted me, I returned her greeting and she turned and left. She did not come back for three or four days. When she came back I said, "I am glad you came. I have something I need to tell you", she said, "I know. You're going to tell me you are leaving. That is why I have not been back". She said the other day when she came in and she greeted me, she knew just intuitively. She said she just could not bear the thought. After I left, I learned that for about six months before I left, they had her paying penance because they were going to ask me to leave, and she didn't want me to go. She was the buffer between Mother Superior and me".*

## **AN EPISODE IN HONDURAS**

Ruth remembered well the details of her staying in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and it was the year 1957. One should have a wonderful memory to remember with accuracy, the details of

over forty year earlier. The important matters as far as they were related to the Faith, she remembered well and accurately. The following is one of them:

*"I moved out and was living with Margot Miessler. We shared the apartment. I first met Margot Miessler in the Chicago area prior to my departure for Puerto Rico."*

*"About a year and a half later she left Puerto Rico and at the request, of the Central American Teaching Committee, she went to Honduras and was fairly well established there when I arrived. Now our paths crossed once again. She was a seasoned pioneer. She and her family came into the Faith through Dorothy Baker.*

*"We got along very well together. I hated housework. Margot didn't mind cleaning, but she didn't like to cook, and I didn't mind cooking. So, we worked well together. She was working, always managed to get a job, and managed to get pretty good jobs doing secretarial or clerical work. She talked about the Faith to her employers and the employees, as a matter of fact it was through her teaching efforts that Carlos Vásquez - the father of the present Counsellor - who resided in Honduras, gradually guided him into acceptance of Faith".*

## **THE PASSING OF THE GURADIAN**

Ruth describes how she and her community received the tragic news of the loss of the beloved Guardian in November 1957, who at the age of 60 left this earthly life and deprive the Baha'i world of his constant guiding through his messages and personal letters:

*"It was during this period that we received the terrible news -the tragic news- of the passing of the Guardian. Alan Pringle<sup>399</sup>, who was our mailman had picked up the mail and brought it to the apartment. I remember standing in the kitchen and we read it so many times, trying to understand what this message really was saying. What? No Guardian? How can that be? Shoghi Effendi is no longer in this world we really couldn't quite grasp it. And that he left no Will therefore he had appointed no Guardian to succeed him. But how could we be without a Guardian? We began to speculate. "Oh, maybe there was somebody." Margot remembered that there was an Afnán<sup>400</sup> one of the Afnán- had been loyal to the Guardian "Maybe he would be the next Guardian?" But we silently carried this hope within us. We didn't discuss it out in the community. Rúhíyyih Khánúm<sup>401</sup> sent two messages. The first message she felt that it would be too severe a blow, so she sent a message stating that the Guardian was very ill. He was desperately ill, and she thought maybe that would soften the blow. And then the same day, shortly afterwards, she sent out the message that he had passed away. Now, in some countries they received the second message before they received the first.*

*"And this was November 4th in 1957. Margot had been granted permission to make the Pilgrimage and would have been in the last contingent of pilgrims to visit the Guardian, or to visit the Holy Land before his passing. But she didn't get the message in time. She decided that, would go to the Regional Convention in Panamá City, at which time the Regional National*

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399. Alan Pringle later became her husband.

400. Afnan, relatives of the Bab as Shoghi Effendi also was. All the next to Kin of Shoghi Effendi had broken the Covenant and there was no male relative of Shoghi Effendi –among the brothers or cousins, who would have remained faithful to the Faith.

401. Widow of Shoghi Effendi.

*Spiritual Assembly for Central America, Mexico, Panamá and Islands of the Antilles was formed<sup>402</sup>. Then she travelled with Mr. Khádem<sup>403</sup> who was the representative of the Custodians<sup>404</sup> to that Convention and travelled with him back to Tegucigalpa. I remember of Mr. Khádem from that time was that he was such a quiet, very humble, self-effacing man and that he was constantly tearing on the verge of tears, wiping his eyes, saying Ya Bahá'ul-Abhá, Ya Bahá'ul-Abhá<sup>405</sup>, in a state of constant prayer, but very gentle and so kind.*

*“Margot decided to go to the Convention in 1957, at which time the division was made, the one National Assembly for Central America, Mexico, Panamá and Islands of the Antilles was separated. And it became the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Central America, Mexico and Panamá there was another one in the Antilles. It was in Ridván of '57<sup>406</sup>”.*

Ruth goes on describing the period when even the Local Spiritual Assemblies had difficulties to be elected during the Ridvan period. They were just a handful people and almost everyone was new in the Faith. There were no National Assemblies, only the Regional National Assemblies and the affairs of the Faith were handled by the Custodians group of nine Hands of the Cause residing in Haifa:

*“So that when the friends feel downhearted and feel that we really aren't progressing, I think back to these early days and the progress- not perfect- but it has been significant since that time, just a handful of people were doing it”.*

She compares then and now with such a hair-splitting analysis:

*“But things are very different today. We have the Institute process now we are beginning; we are just beginning to accept the charge that Baha'u'llah placed upon mankind. "Arise to serve His Cause", "The most meritorious of all deeds". Teaching the Cause, this is very significant. His first message went to the kings and the rulers of the world then to the ecclesiastics. Neither group responded. And from the hands of these two groups, power was seized and placed in the hands of the people. The people? What people? The Baha'i people! The world, the masses of the peoples of the world, has not assumed their responsibility. They still remain as passive recipients*

402. The Regional National Spiritual Assembly for Central America was formed in 1951.

403. Mr. Zikrul'llah Khadem (1904 – 1986), one of the appointed Hands of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi,

404. Nine Hands of the Cause of God were selected from the total of 27 existing Hands after the passing of Shoghi Effendi. These nine Hands resided in Haifa to take the affairs of the Faith in their hands until 1963 when the Universal House of Justice was going to be elected, the rest 18 Hands were travelling around the world consolidating the friends and protecting the Faith in the absence of the beloved Guardian, a job they would do until the election of the Universal House of Justice at the end of the Ten Year Crusade, 1953-1963.

405. A Baha'i invocation meaning: O Thou Glory of Glories.

406. \*Her used terms in her memoirs differ a bit from that found in our standard authority on the subject of NSA founding: “Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies – Revised to Ridvan 1975,” compiled by the Information Processing Department, Bahá'í World Centre:

“Central America and the Antilles, 1951 □ 1957 / Seat: San Jose, Costa Rica

Jurisdiction: All of Central America and the Greater Antilles, including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica

1957--Dissolved to: NSA of Central America and NSA of the Greater Antilles” \*\*

“Central America, 1957-1961 (seat: Panama City, Panama)

Sometimes incorrectly referred to as the NSA of Central America, Mexico and Panama \*\*\*

Jurisdiction: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama

1960: Dissolved to: NSAs of Costa Rica ... El Salvador ... Guatemala ... Honduras ... Mexico ... Nicaragua ... Panama.”

\*\* above appears to be what she referred to as “another one in the Antilles.”

\*\*\* above seems to refer to the term she used -- technically incorrect

Source: Lewis V. Walker for the US National Bahá'í Archives

*of the actions of the powerful, the mighty, the self-serving. Through His Law, it is incumbent upon everyone to teach His Cause. He now is placing in our hands our destiny. We become the determiners of our own destiny; this is one of the things that Shoghi Effendi constantly said. All must be involved, the neophyte, the young people, children, black, white, - everyone - young, old, without exception. And now at this particular point in the history of the evolution of the Faith, it is exactly what we are being called upon to do: This universal participation, which goes far beyond just prayer - praying for the Faith- because the prayer is worthless unless it's followed by action. You have the plea and the guidance but no one to receive it. We were like babies. We still are. I was in Tegucigalpa at that time. And the resources were so limited”.*

## **ON SHOGHI EFFENDI**

Ruth's connection with the beloved Guardian was only through his writings:

*“Through Dr. Giachery I received the first glimpses of Shoghi Effendi as a person; fellow sufferer in this world. The level at which I could begin to identify with him, from the outset, I had fallen in love with Shoghi Effendi's writings. I marveled at his command of the English language -as a second language for him. His perceptiveness, his ability to analyze and put in perspective things that were happening and to carry them forward in terms of the consequences that would and how they would impact, and the poetry of his language, the descriptiveness. I fell in love with mind and intellect. But I couldn't relate to a person because I knew nothing about Shoghi Effendi<sup>407</sup> other than that we named the Guardian. Had no idea as to what were the things he liked to do. Was he interested in sports? Did he like music? What kind of music did he like? If he had time for pastimes, what was his favorite. Once Rúhiyyih Khánum asked me if I loved the Guardian. Well, first of all, I had never met him. So, this is what I told her. And I said I'm sorry to say, but I couldn't relate to him, he was too remote, and I could not relate to him as a person and a fellow sufferer in this world. And it was not until after he had passed away that from Chile a little pamphlet came out that gave a little bit about Shoghi Effendi and spoke of his time that he was an alpinista<sup>408</sup> and that he was an outstanding student. He was a tennis player. But it began to give me some insight as to what the Guardian was like as a person”.*

## **ON DR. HUGO GIACHERY**

After giving her insight on the beloved Guardian, Ruth spoke of Dr. Giachery<sup>409</sup> and described him in few lines:

*“Dr. Giachery was a count<sup>410</sup> and at one time he was captain of the royal guard in Italy. And I don't know exactly how this fits in, but the King of Spain, who passed away about a year ago,*

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407. In fact, Shoghi Effendi loved classical music and ballet -Madame Butterfly was his favourite. He mastered languages, i.e., Persian, Arabic, French and par excellence, English. His writings in these languages indicate with what fluency he handled these tongues.

408. Alpinista, from Alpine Mountains in Switzerland, where he used to climb. He also liked cycling. See the Priceless Pearl by Ruhiiyyih Khanum.

409. Dr. Ugo Giachery, (1896 – 1898) Hand of the Cause of God appointed by Shoghi Effend, he was doctor in Chemistry. The writer remembers him when he visited Panama in 1972, truly a dignified gentleman.

410. Count is a historical title of nobility in certain European countries, varying in relative status, generally of middling rank in the hierarchy of nobility, but also that the count had specific responsibilities or offices. Wikipedia

*the father of the present King, Dr. Giachery mentioned, served under his command. At any rate, Dr. Giachery was a very, very dignified man. Very proper, very dignified”.*

Ruth continued with her story on Dr. Giachery who on his visit to Tegucigalpa, was invited into a wedding whose majority of the participants were undisciplined youth:

*“During the time that Dr. Giachery made his first visit to Honduras. When he saw this group of youth, he was rather horrified. Some of the girls, their very tight little skirts, he wasn't at all impressed. Some three years later when I was about to leave Tegucigalpa he came for another visit. At this time the youth insisted they wanted to have a lunch for Dr. Giachery. He was skeptical about the idea of this lunch, and at first, he said no he wouldn't go. I said, "But Dr. Giachery, they really want you". I begged a little bit and finally he said, "All right. I will go. I will stay exactly one hour, and you check the time when we arrive and that when five minutes before the hour is up, you let me know, so that I can make preparations to leave". The upshot of the matter is that he came for lunch, which was supposed to be at one o'clock in the afternoon, it was well after four o'clock when he finally said, "I think we should leave". As we were walking back to his hotel, he said to me "What a wonderful group of young people that was!" They are so sweet and so thoughtful, so kind! Where did you find them?" I said, "Dr. Giachery, these are the same youth you met when you were here a couple of years ago." He stopped dead in his tracks and said, "I don't believe it! This can't be!" I said, "They were." I told him the story of things that had happened and how we had handled some rather touchy situations and how the youth who were of the standard of living that was a little bit different and knew how to handle themselves how they had worked along with the ones who had problems and helped to bring them forward. This activity continued during all of this time never one weekend when there wasn't a meeting uninterrupted during all of this time. And he said, "This is incredible!" He said, "Don't worry about whether these youth have become Baha'is or not. You have given them something very important that they will carry with them the rest of their lives." One of these youth has been a firm, staunch almost fanatical believer, very enthusiastic and ever since”.*

Ruth recounted many of her personal stories in Honduras, when she had to move from place to place to find an adequate venue to hold firesides, sharing her house with another Baha'i, namely Grace Dean<sup>411</sup> and doing youth activities, attracting many young people, but seldom anyone became a believer. It was during the Country Revolution, and nothing was in order. The two ladies did together what they could to save some youth from being recruited or being target of the political upheavals or being killed.

## **ALAN PRINGLE**

Then she recounts how she got to meet her future husband, changing from Ruth Yancey to Ruth Pringle, as she is known in history.

*“I meet Alan when I first went to Honduras, living down in La Lima. I arrived in Honduras in April and Alan was delegate from Honduras to the National Convention that year, which was held in, Havana, Cuba. After the Convention, the delegates travelled from community to*

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411. In one stage during the late 1970s, Grace Dean became pioneer in Panama and settled among the Ngobe-Bugle indigenous group in Chiriqui Province.

community, sharing with the friends their experiences of the convention, trying to share with the friends also the spirit of the Convention and the importance of why the Convention and what took place at the Convention. After the Convention was over, he returned to Honduras, he came to La Lima for a visit and to share news of the Convention and. That was when I met Alan.

*“I settled in Tegucigalpa because there was no work for me in La Lima, they made it quite clear I didn't quite meet the standard”.*

## **RUTH'S MARRIAGE**

*“Then I met him again when I went up to Tegucigalpa to leave the country. I don't know why I left him in charge of getting my papers for me and he willingly accepted to do this. He went faithfully every week. After I was back in Honduras, we saw quite a bit of each other, and we decided that we should get married. But it was just a question of consent on the part of my mother because my father had already passed away. And she gave her consent.*

*“But Alan's mother said, “No way”. His father gave his consent, but his mother said “no way, no way”. I think she made it very clear that it was a racial issue. After about a year when nothing happened and it seemed that it was a lost cause, the National Assembly asked Alan if he would go to Panama. And so, he accepted, and he resigned from his job at the American School and packed his bags and went to Panama. And I stayed in Honduras.*

*“The National Assembly -Regional Assembly at that time - asked Alan to go to David and see what he could do about moving the Faith in David<sup>412</sup>. He accepted and packed his bags, his belongings and what he could not take with him he sold and got rid of and went off to Panama. I was asked if I would take on a travel teaching circuit in Honduras, which meant I would leave Tegucigalpa and move to the North Coast, which I did. And ostensibly I settled in La Ceiba”.*

## **COLLIS FEATHERSTONE**

Ruth described how the Regional National Assembly asked her to travel teach around the northern part of Honduras, where most of the time she was on the road. Then the same institution asked her to go to Nicaragua to help Hooper Dunbar<sup>413</sup>, to form Local Assemblies. Once In Nicaragua, she was asked just to stay, and she went to Bluefields.

She remembered:

*“In 1961 the independent National Spiritual Assemblies were formed, and Mr. Featherstone<sup>414</sup> was the representative of the Hands of the Cause at that Convention. But he arrived before the Convention, and he came to Bluefields to visit us. Well, I must say he was kind of horrified when he saw our living arrangement. There was Hooper and Jorge and Olga*

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412. The second biggest city in Panama, and the capital of the Province of Chiriqui, neighboring Costa Rica.

413. Hooper Dunbar years later was elected as a member of the Universal House of Justice, after being appointed as member of the first Int'l Teaching Center by the House of Justice.

414. Collis Featherstone (1913 – 1990) Hand of the Cause of God appointed by the Guardian, he was from Adelaide, Australia.



Harper<sup>415</sup>, Cecilia King<sup>416</sup>, Juan Vargas and yours truly all living in the same household.

*"You have to know Bluefields at that time to understand. It was the only suitable arrangement. Mr. Featherstone wasn't aware of what the situation was, but he was quite horrified by this living arrangement, and he said, "Oh no, you have to separate. This is not good; this is not a Bohemian college community in New York City. This is the Bahá'í Faith in Bluefields". Then he surveyed the situation, and he decided that I should get married. And he said, "Why don't you and Hooper get married?" And I said no, I didn't think so, it would be sort of marrying my son, because there were quite a few years of difference in our ages maybe at that point it would not have made much difference, but by now, it would have made a tremendous difference! "Well," he said, "I'm going to pray about it. And I'm going to pray that Baha'u'llah will send you a husband." I said, "Fine". That I could accept.*

*"I was so fascinated by Mr. Featherstone that I couldn't bear to have him leave Bluefields and I would remain there, so I decided I would go to Managua for the Convention. I was a delegate anyhow. Mr. Featherstone was going from there to Honduras for their Convention. I managed to scrape up the money I needed to get to Tegucigalpa to be there for the Convention. But as I was leaving Honduras a cable message came for me -- which I didn't receive until I returned. And the cable message was from Alan, saying that finally his mother repented and gave her permission for us to marry, if we wanted to." And at the end of three years, his mother finally gave consent. I didn't meet her until after we were married. When we were living in David, she came to David to visit; she and her daughter Gay, and they spent about a week or so with us in David. But we became good friends, very good friends. To me that was the important thing. I think I gained acceptance of the rest of the family".*

She recalled that:

*"There was lots of movement of Hands of the Cause throughout the territory at that time. Shortly after this Mr. Olinga<sup>417</sup> came and then we received a visit from Hand of the Cause Dr. Muhajir<sup>418</sup>. At the Convention in Nicaragua, I was elected to the National Assembly and, in the first meeting of the National Assembly I was elected Recording Secretary of the National Assembly. I served as Recording Secretary for the National Assembly of Nicaragua until June, about six weeks".*

Upon the recommendation of Dr. Muhajir, Ruth wrote to Alan to come to Honduras and then travelled to Panama reaching there on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1961. Their planned marriage for early July due to complication of paperwork, did not materialize until much later. Ruth loved to work with the indigenous people, as she said:

*"...there were a lot more indigenous people in Panama than there were in Nicaragua, and that was my purpose in going to Panama to work with the indigenous people".*

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415. Jorge Harper from Panama and Olga from Costa Rica. They settled in Panama and offered valuable services. Presently Olga lives in La Concepcion, Chiriqui. Jorge served as the National Assembly secretary for few years.

416. When Cecilia King came to Panama sometimes in the 1970s, she went directly to the city of David and she taught the Faith to a group of people and formed an Assembly, only to know that the believers of David had already elected their Local Assembly. That year, the city of David had two Local Assemblies elected, which became quite a headache for the National Assembly to dissolve one.

417. Enoch Olinga (1926 – 1979) Hand of the Cause of God from Uganda, Africa.

418. Dr. Rahmatu'llah Muhajir, was the youngest Hand appointed by the Guardian in 1957.

Ruth and Alan had their wedding rings ready, engraved with their names and the date of the wedding. Yet, despite all the obstacles, they were happy to have gotten married and they could use their wedding rings, though she said:

*"Alan's ring was lost in the Darién and several years later, I lost mine in the Guaymí<sup>419</sup> area the two ends of the country".*

## **DAVID, PANAMA & THE FIRST BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE**

The interesting episode of getting the last obstacle out of the way, which was the matter of getting the license to get married. She recounted:

*"Well, anyhow what was I going to do? I went up to (the city of) David and moved into a little pensión up there. Alan continued with the little English language school he had established in David, which the income was sufficient for him to live on. One day the obstacle in our path seemed to be a woman who was a judge in David at that time. And in order to get our license we had to go to her to get our license to marry. She apparently was not about to issue the license to us. And she kept putting so many obstacles in our path, and finally I said to Alan, "Well, why don't we just forget it?" It appears that maybe Baha'u'llah doesn't want us to get married, otherwise we wouldn't have so many difficulties constantly facing us".*

*"Meanwhile I met a man - his last name was Del Cid - he was like a traveling salesman into the (Ngobe Bugle) Guaymí area and through on a trip into the Guaymí area to the Plan de Chorcha<sup>420</sup>, which is the first place we visited. On that visit we made arrangements for a return visit, the return visit would start in about mid-July and would probably be a trip that would last between a couple of weeks, maybe to a month. Alan was out on some errands, and he ran into an old friend of his. This man inquired of Alan if he had finally gotten married and so on, and Alan said no, "You have not!? What happened?" Alan told him the sad story and he said, "Look, don't worry about it; she's not here anymore". He said, "I'm the judge! You want to get married come down today and I'll issue license for you.". Alan rushed back and was all excited and he said, "Well, let us go!" and I said, "OK, we will go."*

*"Alan scrounged up a couple of witnesses to testify to the fact that he was not married and had not been married previously, then we went to the judge, and he issued a license. But before issuing our license he said, "Now, what kind of license would you like? Do you want a license to marry in a religious ceremony or civil ceremony?" I looked at Alan and Alan looked at me, we both said, "Religious". So, he gave us the license. Then we rushed back and called the National office and said that we had permission, we had our license to marry by religious ceremony. Could they send somebody to represent the National Assembly because it was the only Assembly that was legally incorporated. Donald Witzel came up and Harry Haye lived in La Concepción, which was not too far away, he was contacted, and we got married in Alan's little school. Thursday evening the day we set for the wedding, which was the 27th of July. I found a woman who baked cakes and I had her do a wedding cake for me a simple wedding cake.*

Ruth talks about her simple wedding dress that the material was bought in Tegucigalpa

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419. Ngobe-Bugle Tribe. The appellation of 'Guaymi' has been wrong and is not used anymore.

420. Plan de Chorcha, name of one of the Indigenous reservations of Ngobe Bugle in Chiriqui.

for a masquerade in raspberry red color and shoes of pointed toes that she only used once. She said:

*"...the big day came and the guests at the wedding were students from the school, very simple, nothing new everything old. The next morning, we packed our bags and set off with Harry Hays for a meeting of the National Assembly because that was when he had been elected to the National Assembly. So, we shared our honeymoon with the National Assembly in Panama. We took the documents into Panama to register them. Following that, we decided to drop by the office of the lawyer who had done a lot of work for the Baha'is - Dr. Javier Lazo de la Vega. He says, "Oh, so when are you two getting married?" We said, "we did! We got married! And guess what? We had a religious ceremony!" And got sort of pale and very quiet and said, "Oh then you're not married! Legally you're not married. They will never accept it in the civil registry if you just had a Baha'i ceremony." "Yes! It's already been registered. We have just come from there!" He couldn't believe it. He picked up the phone and called. They confirmed the fact that this marriage had been registered.*

*"And when he hung up he said, "Do you realize what you have done? On the base of Panamanian law where things can be based on precedents and through precedents, you have legalized the Baha'i marriage ceremony here in this country"!*

## **OPENING THE GUAYMI (Ngobe-Bugle) AREA TO THE FAITH**

Ruth described her fascinating story of how she arranged and travelled on foot through trails in the tropical mountainous jungles of Chiriqui:

*"I had about three days then to get ready to make this trip into the Guaymí area because it had been promised, and I had to keep my word. Bernabé Bejarano<sup>421</sup> -- Guaymí -- had offered to be guide for me. "I will have a horse for your equipment and supplies. There will be three horses available on that day." When the day came, got ready and made the trip up to Bernabé's place. He was there, he greeted us very warmly and invited us in. A young fellow Baha'i who lived in another community, Kirby, "do not remember Kirby's last name, he was a young fellow Panamanian, who was going along with me".*

*"Alan could not go because he had his English classes to take care of. It was the time of the year when the rains always come around one o'clock in the afternoon. We got to Bernabé's place early in the morning. We sat and we waited, and we waited and Bernabé went out and disappeared, finally he reappeared with two horses. "Is this your equipment?" He took them all out and arranged them and put them on the horse and he jumped into his own saddle -- it's about one o'clock now and the rains are coming. He looked up at the sky and he said, "Well, let us go." I said, "But my horse!" "There's no horse for you. If you want to go, walk, if you really want to go, then just walk". "All right!" I wasn't happy about it, but what could I do? We started out. We hadn't been on the trail for more than fifteen minutes when the skies opened up. I didn't have an umbrella and it began to rain. I am wearing these ugly, heavy boots because I thought that's what I need in the way of equipment, it was the only thing I could get anyhow. In those*

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421. Bernabe Bejarano, probably the first Baha'i of Ngobe-Bugle. A truly wonderful and dignified man. The writer had the honour of meeting him in his older age.

days ladies were ladies! They wore fancy dresses and fancy shoes. No woman at that time would dare to put on jeans. The only kind of jeans you could get were men's, and that's what I was wearing. They didn't fit quite right and they kind of twisted and rubbed, they were uncomfortable and then the boots were heavy, they were uncomfortable, they were a weight. We were going into an area that became rather steep. It was one of those torrential, tropical rains soon the trail itself was like a river rushing down from above. We walked and walked, in five minutes time I am soaked to the skin, shivering. And I thought, "Well, Baha'u'llah do You really want me to do this?" We were going up one embankment, it was really very, very steep, I fell, and I couldn't make it. "All right, Baha'u'llah, if You want me to stay here and die, I'll do it; I'll be a martyr for Your Cause". I was crying. I had never been in anything like this before. Then I thought, "No, it is too easy to die. I won't die". I started to get up. I looked up and I could see the crest of the hill was almost in front of me. And I thought, "Well, if I take maybe six or eight good steps, I can reach the top." It would be so much better than lying here in all of this mud; just kept going. They just ignored you. Finally, I got up and I made it to the top. I was exhausted. We had been on the trail maybe about four to five hours by this time. It was getting late and getting dark. It was too late to go on anyplace else. Then we came to a little village. I don't remember the names of all the places we visited at that time. And the people saw us, and they said no, we couldn't stay there; they wouldn't give us any place to stay. By this time Bernabé was beginning to soften. And he said, "Well, they won't give us any place to stay." I said, "But I can't go on anymore, I'm exhausted. I can't go any further today. We will just have to stay here." He said, "All right." And he went out and he cut palm leaves and put them down on the ground."

"It has stopped raining by now, but the ground was wet and soggy. And I had a couple of pieces of plastic, and I put those down on the ground on top of the leaves and rolled out a sleeping bag and settled in for the night. It was a beautiful night! The stars were so bright and shiny. Look up to the sky, it was beautiful blue you couldn't see a single cloud in the sky. It was a gorgeous night. But we slept out. They had their own hats they had supplies for the two of us. The next morning, we got up and Bernabé says, "I guess we should start off".

Ruth talks about never making a trip like this before and knowing what to take - something about not carrying food but eating what the people have - *if they have food you eat, if not you don't eat!*

"It was a little village not really organized, some houses around? The people from there had to go into town to get their supplies. I said to Bernabé, "Bernabé, would you go into their kitchen and start the fire?" He did. He says, "Well, what are you going to use? I said, "I am going to make some oatmeal, I'll make enough so that the people here can have some oatmeal too". So, he said, "What are you going to cook it in?" I said, "They have pots. Do not ask; we will just go on". It was a little village and there were maybe three or four houses of people, their houses, what where they, four posts and a thatched roof. I made up a pot of oatmeal. Powdered milk, you don't have to have milk to cook oatmeal. I said, "Now, get the big totuma<sup>422</sup>, and filled it and asked Bernabé if he would take it to the oldest person in the group, a man and his wife, they would not eat it. Bernabé had to be my interpreter too. I asked Bernabé, "What's the problem? Don't they like oatmeal? Don't they know what oatmeal is? Is it something new to them? He said, "No" and with a twinkle in his eye, he said, "You put salt in it when you cooked it, they don't like salt. They don't

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422. Totuma. a bowl made from gourds, Calabash Tree, frequent in tropic jungles.

use salt. And the oatmeal had a different flavor because it was salted". I said, "Let's see if we can do a bit of negotiating here. Tell them that if they will give us a place to stay today and overnight, then I will make oatmeal tomorrow morning, but I won't put any salt in it." We had sugar. They accepted the idea!

"It's not a question of having a room to sleep in, it's more a question of whether you have a roof, some thatch over your head so that you are protected at least from the rain. It is just four posts, one, two, three, four and thatched roof. Under the thatching maybe they had a little another level built in a floor where they stored their corn and rice. It was like their storage area. And that was usually built over the kitchen over the area where they had their fogón<sup>423</sup>, so that the smoke would go up and keep the little animals and insects away. I was given a place in the rafters in which to sleep and so was Bernabé. Everybody else slept on the ground and the chickens would come in and the dogs would come in and the pigs would come in, you were generous and shared your space with the animals. That is the way life was in those days. The next morning, I got out my camera and I asked if they would like to have some pictures of themselves. And I took some pictures of them. And that really did the trick. They asked, "Will we get the pictures?" And I said, "Yes. If I don't bring them back, I will send them to you, but you will get the pictures. I said, "I am not a very good photographer, but whatever comes out, I will send it to you."

"We went on, continued for fourteen days. And it is just my estimation that in those fourteen days we covered an area of approximately sixty to eighty miles. I walked all the way! And as we were on the return trip, and had just about reached Bernabé's house, fifteen minutes he paused, he got off his horse and he turned to me and he said, "Now you can ride." And I said, "Thank you, but I prefer walking". I walked back on the way down to David. I turned to Bernabé and asked, "Bernabé Are you a Baha'i now?" And he said, "No", rather hesitantly. He said, "No not yet." He said, "When we started out, I was Catholic. Now I am not Catholic anymore. I don't think I am a Baha'i yet. But do not worry, all of these places that we went, they will all become Baha'is. Do not worry. Be patient, just be patient, they will all become Baha'is." He said, "And I promise that I will raise up nine communities in this area." He was still not a Baha'i.

Ruth mentioned:

*"...it was not easy being a single woman in this kind of environment".*

There were all kinds of gossips, especially among those Latin salesmen men watching such a scenario. She had to show that she did not go for fun but for Baha'u'llah, taking His message to certain group of people that otherwise, they would not hear and be deprived of God's bounties. After all, Baha'u'llah's message is universal, and everyone has the right to hear it. If all others are busy and have no time to do it, she was the one, relying on Baha'u'llah, would go ahead to fulfill what was required, taking all kinds of risks. That was Ruth.

## **REMEMBERING PREVIOUS PIONEERING POSTS**

Time and again, Ruth remembered her previous pioneering posts. In each episode her

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423. Fogon, an earthen oven.

experiences have something to teach us, especially to get the matters sorted out from the day one. If one goes for pioneering for the sake of Baha'u'llah to disseminate His message, it should be clear to him/her that this goal should not be easily manipulated or mixed with some other matters, which would take the pioneer away from the ultimate goal. She said:

*“When I lived in Tegucigalpa, it was one struggle after another just to keep body and soul together. And after I had accepted to go on this teaching circuit for the National Assembly, job offers began to come in. One was with U.S.B.I.D. and it was a very lucrative proposal. No one could understand why I would turn it down. They thought I must be crazy. I couldn't hold down a job and be traveling up and down almost constantly. Then there was an offer by a young man - a doctor - who had just returned to Honduras after completing his specialty studies in the United States and England. And he was looking for a nurse to work with him. His offer was very tantalizing. But I had made a decision and a course of action I had followed from the days prior to becoming a Baha'i and up to the present time. When there was more than one option, whichever comes first is the path that I select and the path I follow. And it has worked very well for me. Who needs that much material wealth? The wealth I have acquired is in a different kind and in a different species. God willing will be mine throughout all eternity”.*

Ruth dealt with the matter of pioneers rather deeply, putting forward her own experiences as a dedicated pioneer wherever she went:

*“Pioneers come and pioneers go. Some come and stay for a lifetime and bury their bones. And others come, take a look at the field and decide the tests are too great and then return home. I say "return home" because they never cease to consider their point of origin as anything except home. It was still home to them. It seems to me the successful pioneers are those who leave with the idea that they're going to a new land to establish a new home. And this then becomes home to them. And what they left behind was perhaps family and friends whom they love, they cherish, admire and sometimes long to see. But they no longer are home to the pioneer, in the sense that we often think of home. It is the refuge, the place we go when we are tired and we are exhausted, a place where we go when we feel that we need encouragement, we need support and that we must look for these things within ourselves. And this is not easy. It is achieved through constant study of the Writings, prayer and then establishing proper attitudes to our new environment”.*

And she goes on:

*“When I left the United States to pioneer to Puerto Rico, I was really a very new Baha'i. And I had no really deep, basic knowledge of the Faith. I had never attended a Summer School. I had never attended a conference in the United States, I did not know what a large gathering of Baha'is was like or could be like. My contact with the Faith had been primarily through the handful of zealous young Baha'is who lived in the Chicago area at that time, practically all of whom left in early 1953 to pioneer posts on the home front and around the world, some going as far as the African continent, Saint Helena, Alaska, some to South America. They were dispersed all over. I went to Puerto Rico. When I arrived in Puerto Rico, I thought I was really taking something to the Puerto Ricans. I had no idea. And my first job although I had been promised a job and offered a job with the Department of Health, was in a private hospital. The interminable red tape continued to grind through the system. It was merely six months after my arrival before my appointment was firmly confirmed and my name was placed on the payroll. Meanwhile I got a job in a private institution, and I was horrified on the one hand at some of the*

*medical practices and at the lack of materials and things that we sort of took for granted where I came from. And the substitutions that had to be made. Many times, in my opinion, violating principles of sanitation, of sterile procedures.*

*"I suffered on the one hand, but on the other hand, I began to learn that I really didn't know it all. That the nurses in Puerto Rico had as much to teach me as I had to share with them. This was a rather rude awakening for me because from the time I can remember, as being consciously indoctrinated, or taught, I was led to believe that we of the United States were really quite superior in our technology, in our abilities and capacities to the rest of the world. I found out, little by little, shock after shock, that this was not so at all. And I had to begin to change my whole mental outlook towards who we are and what we are and began to look at myself and my people with entirely different eyes and to become impartial, recognize qualities, good qualities, and also weaknesses on both sides of the fence.*

*"Then there was the question of food, the likes and the dislikes. And when I finally got into my job - the working situation - and found that it was necessary to take part of my meals anyhow at the hospital, I was really hard-pressed. And most of the time I was rather hungry. The idea of rice and red beans for breakfast did not set very well. Or the idea of dried codfish and rice and beans did not score a very big hit either. The fragrance of the food that was being prepared, the strong odor or strong fragrance of garlic -I love garlic and I use garlic- but in not such great amounts, the little piece of beef that had been well impregnated with garlic that was periodically served at lunch and the smell of the garlic was almost more than I could bear.*

*"Once I asked one of the Puerto Rican doctors, "What do you eat at home? What do the Puerto Ricans eat at home?" He said, "If they are poor, they rice and beans. And if you have a little more money, you eat things like we have here and rice and beans, but if the rice and beans are absent, the meal is not complete!" I resigned myself to inevitable. I learned a way to deal with it. My way of dealing with it was, whatever the circumstances are, forget what you knew previously and what you had previously, and just think: now you are in a new experience; you are out in the jungle so to speak and you don't know what's coming next. Whatever it is, be grateful".*

## **RUTH'S OWN PIONEERING CASE**

Ruth remembers her own case for over thirty years:

*"Now I would say that after all of these years, Baha'u'llah has been very, very good to us. For thirty years we lived, shall we say, from pillar to post and just until this year, I used the same cooking utensils that I had been using for thirty years, which we had purchased in the package of things that a pioneer who was leaving and going back to the United States was offering for sale. I think we paid about 35 dollars for the package with included the bed and the sofa, the cooking utensils, and the dishes. It has just been this past year that those have been replaced and now I have a set of cooking utensils that are mine that I selected and, God willing, will serve my purposes until I leave this world.*

*"But, along with the utensils we were finally permitted, by the grace of God and Baha'u'llah to have the modest home that we have today. It is not luxurious, but it is adequate for two old*

people who mosey<sup>424</sup> around and cannot do too much anymore. I am grateful for it and regard it as really a great blessing. But I don't feel attached to it, we have it today tomorrow it could belong to somebody else. Hopefully when the change of ownership comes, it will pass on to the Faith, to do with it whatever the Institutions feel is best, or that the property can best serve the Faith. It is easier to be relatively detached from the material things of life”<sup>425</sup>.

She gave the example of some pioneers:

*“I have seen so many pioneers come in and, like a terrible blow, have had to face drastic changes in their way of living. Some of them have made the changes very successfully some could not and returned to their former residence. I was introduced to change so gradually, it was also a sign of capacity and Baha’u’llah, no doubt, was aware of the fact that had I had to face all of these changes in one at the same time, it would have been beyond my capacity at that time to respond positively. As I look back over the years, it seems to me that my life and my life experiences have been directed and guided -not that I didn't make decisions, which of course we all have to make, but there has been a pattern and it has been a progressive pattern, a process leading from one thing to another, to another, to another, up to the present time. Many times, it required decisions on the way, but the events and the activities of my life seem to come together as a piece of well-woven fabric. I look at it and it seems to me there is sort of a parallel here.*

*“Perhaps I could make a parallel between my own life and what we are called upon to do in the development of the Faith. We make a plan, we decide on a course of action, we build, step by step upon the accomplishments. There are moments when we have reverses, we have to look back to what we have done, to try to understand what went wrong but not dwell on it eternally but learn the lesson from it and move ahead to the next step on the foundation that already exists. And it seems to me that has been pretty much the pattern of my life”.*

## **FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION – HAIFA 1963**

In 1963<sup>426</sup>, both Ruth and Alan were elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama. The eventful year of the election of the Universal House of Justice, coinciding with the end of the Ten-Year Crusade (1953-1963), as planned by the beloved Guardian, from whose ascension almost six years had already passed. The International Convention was to be held in Haifa, Israel. Ruth recounts the rest of the Story:

*“We had the bounty and the blessing of being eligible to attend the first International Convention and the first election of the Universal House of Justice. The election was carried out in the Master's house. It was a wonderful experience. We didn't have the money to go anyplace with and, providentially an unknown relative of Alan's in England passed away and left him sufficient money for three people to travel to Haifa.*

*“We were terribly excited about the whole experience! About the second day we were there, and we were walking in the Gardens on Mount Carmel Rúhíyyih Khánum showed up, we*

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424. Mosey is walk or move in a leisurely manner. Wikipedia

425. The writer and his family, stayed in that house for few days, nice and comfortable, and it became known that, after Alan too passed away, the property was passed to the National Assembly of Costa Rica.

426. The date must have been 1962.



approached her. Alan pulled from his pocket a post card of the Kuna<sup>427</sup> women - very excited - and showed it to her. She looked at it and she shook her finger in his face and she said, "Don't you dare change them!" And Alan just went flabbergasted right in his face".

Ruth recounts of some of her experiences during that special period:

*"We had about three days of Pilgrimage prior to the Election. And the night before the election we decided that the members of the National Assembly of Panama who were present decided to go up to the Shrine of the Báb for prayers. After having been in the Shrines and prayed, we milled around outside meeting members of different National Assemblies from around the world. We were unable to go inside the Shrine because they were preparing it for the morning of the election. And while we were milling around outside, the door the Shrine of the Báb opened and Rúhíyyih Khánum walked out. She looked so tired. She approached us and greeted us and said, "I don't know why you don't all go back to your hotels and go to bed. You can't go into the Shrines now until our task is completed, and I don't know when that will be". And I looked at her and I thought, "Oh, she's so tired!" And I felt the impulse to say, "May I help?" Later on, when I was with Rúhíyyih Khánum on the Green Light Expedition, we were reminiscing about the night before the election of the House of Justice, and I mentioned this to Rúhíyyih Khánum. "Yes", she said, "I know, and I was expecting you were going to offer to help." That was a lesson. Follow the promptings of your heart. Don't look to what the others are going to think or what they will say - if it's good, do it.*

*"But the morning when we went to the Shrines for dawn prayers, how beautiful! The inner sanctuary of the Shrine of the Bab was completely carpeted with red and white carnations. But it was a gorgeous piece of art. Several of the other Hands were helping her. Mr. Olinga was one; I don't know who else. But it was under her guidance and direction that it was being done. She is an amazing woman. And then the next morning she convened<sup>428</sup>. When the results of the election was announced, I happened to encounter Violette and Alí Nakjavani<sup>429</sup> in the corridor, they both were sobbing as though the hearts were being torn out. She said because Alí had been a member of the International Council and had to leave his pioneer post in Uganda, and they were heartbroken, they had one desire and that was to return to Africa to their pioneer post. Since then, it has been almost forty years of sacrificial service. A young man when he was first elected to the Universal House of Justice. Now with greying hair and a bit of faltering footsteps he continues to serve".*

## CONFERENCE IN LONDON

After the election of the Universal House of Justice, there was an International Conference, which according to the plans of the beloved Guardian, it was to be held in Baghdad, but due to the impossible circumstances, the Custodian Hands in Haifa had decided to have it held in London. Many of those who went for the International Convention did also go to attend the

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427. Kuna people, from the Kuna-Yala tribe in Panama, the indigenous group who live on the seashore or the Atlantic Ocean on over five hundred islands. Many have left their customs as they moved to the cities.

428. She was the convener of the First International Convention and guided the direction of the election for the first House of Justice.

429. Ali Nakhjavani (1919-2019), the ex-member of the Universal House of Justice served for 40 years (1963-2003), Violette was his wife, who accompanied Ruhíyyih Khanum through the African Safari.

Conference. Ruth remembered:

*“We arrived in London. The Congress itself was very exciting. So many people; it was really a wonderful, wonderful thing. The largest gathering ever of Baha’is up to that point. But perhaps there are two events that stand out particularly in mind. One of these was the day when I had the privilege to give one of the talks on the victory of the pioneers. And I remember Alí Nakjavaní was the chairman of that session. And I remember that he introduced me as “the Child of the Crusade<sup>430</sup>”. I became a Baha’i just as the World Crusade was being launched. That was very exciting. Then the final session, when Rúhíyyih Khánum addressed the gathering and she spoke of the Guardian. She was moved to speak of the Guardian. She was suddenly overcome by tears, overcome by emotion, the African friends very softly began to sing Allah'u'Abhá<sup>431</sup> and soon the whole audience joined in and sang Allah'u'Abhá and continued to sing until she was able to get control of herself and continued her talk. The love that flowed through the Royal Albert Hall<sup>432</sup> at that particular moment, I will never forget. It was an electrifying moment. And then there was Mr. Samandarí<sup>433</sup>, who spoke. This frail old man. I cannot find words to describe Mr. Samandarí, his humility, his self-effacement, but he roared like a lion! And from this, what appeared to be a very delicate, little old man came this tremendous voice that was so tremendous they had to turn off the amplifying system, and then turn it on again for his interpreter who happened to be Marzieh Gail<sup>434</sup>. There was this back and forth. I can’t remember what Mr. Samandarí’s talk was about. But the amazing thing was that this delicate, little old man had such tremendous power and force. And he was well into his nineties at that time”.*

## **KUNA-YALA INDIANS**

The opening of the Kuna-Yala Indigenous group, also called Guna, who live in over 500 islands, in the Atlantic Ocean also sharing a mainland in an area between Panama and Colombia, was again done by Ruth and this time Alan also partook in the opening the indigenous culture to the Faith, after the Ngobe-Bugle indigenous group was opened to the Faith. This group is very intelligent and artistic people and the women’s ‘Mola’ patchwork is world-wide known work. Ruth recounts her experience of 1961 when she and Alan pioneered in Panama:

*“Donald Witzel<sup>435</sup> attended the annual congress of the Kuna Indians in representation of the National Spiritual Assembly and apparently, he had the opportunity to speak to the congress. The second cacique<sup>436</sup> invited the Baha’is to return to come to the islands to teach. Was all that unusual! The Catholic Church was there, and the Baptists were already in the islands. I believe the Catholic Church had been established in the islands approximately 60 years, the Baptists approximately 40 years. Now, they were pretty much concentrated in the islands of Ustupo, Alegandí and Narganá. These were their strongholds. The Kuna people were a very open people.*

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430. The Ten-Year Plan of the Guardian (1953-1963) is also known as ‘The World Crusade’.

431. Allah’u’Abha – God is Most Luminous, is Baha’i greetings when they meet each other.

432. Royal Albert Hall, London, the venue of the first International was held in 1963.

433. Tarazollah Samandari (1874 – 1968) was a Hand of the Cause, appointed by the Guardian in 1951.

434. Marzieh Gail (1908 – 1993), born Marzieh Nabil Khan, was a Persian American Baha’i writer and translator, daughter of Ali-Quli-Khan and Florence Breed.

435. Donal Witzel, pioneered to Panama and then to Venezuela. He was later appointed to the Continental Board of Counsellors for Americas.

436. Caciques are the Chief of the Tribe in any given Island of the Kuna Yala.

*They were curious about everything. And so, they welcomed everybody who treated them respectably. As secretary of the National Assembly, Donald had been trying to encourage someone to arise to go help promote indigenous teaching. These were in the final years of the Guardian's World Crusade. And the Guardian's last message directed to the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Central America, Mexico and Panamá said they should give utmost importance to the teaching of the Indians. Pleas that were made but no one responded to the pleas. And one night Donald suddenly realized that he had been asking someone to do it and that someone was him.*

*"Shortly after that, we consulted - the two families of the Witzels and the Pringles - it was decided that the Witzels would go to live in David where Alan had a school established -an English school. They would go to David and that they would take over the school and Alan and I would go to San Blas Islands. And so, in early September 1961, the Witzels moved to David and the Pringles moved to the San Blas Islands. And we arrived in Ustupo about the first of October of 1961. We were sustained, of course!*

*"When we arrived in San Blas we were very warmly received, and the second cacique had an interview with us. During the course of the interview, he stated that their great leader in modern times, Nelecantuli had told them that within twenty years -this was according to them around 1944 - that he made this statement that white strangers from the North would come to San Blas speaking of a new religion. And he indicated the questions, the Kunas should ask.*

*- "What is the name of this religion?"*

*- "Is it a new name?"*

*- "Is the founder of this religion, does he have a new name,*

*- "Does he teach on the basis of the Bible, or did he bring new teachings, when did it begin?"*

*"These were four questions that they should answer. And when all four questions were in the positive, they should listen to these people, and they should accept what they were teaching. The new name was Baha'u'llah. The new date 1844. He did not teach on the basis of the Bible but brought His own book. The four conditions were met. We were given a place to live, and we were assigned a family to be our caretakers. That is to say, to be sure that we had food to eat, that our meals were planned, and they became the cooks, that we had water to meet our needs, because at that time there was no potable water. No water on the island and it had to be gotten in the mainland. While we had brought our own food, but, we had no means for cooking it. Also, the family was responsible for doing our laundry, if we wanted, and we would pay the family something.*

*"At this particular time the Islands were just beginning to open to outsiders and the community unity was very strong. The idea that whatever wealth one had was to be shared with others. Money had inordinate value as candy also had. Shortly before our arrival the government had established its first school in Ustupo and assigned to the schoolteachers mostly from the mainland, there were two Kunas who were assigned as teachers, others were from the mainland. And of course, they had a salary. This was a new system coming into the area. They weren't accustomed to this. They didn't understand that this is how things are done, people are employed to do certain jobs, they receive pay for it and that pay is what they live on.*

*“The schoolteachers in that area had no farms; they had no way of meeting their expenses except with the salary they received for the services they rendered. But this was not exactly in conformity with the Kuna traditions. The Kuna congress decided that this was an unfair situation that the schoolteachers were earning hard cash and this hard cash was all going to the same people. It should be shared. They had passed through a stage where they dismissed the schoolteachers and decided that their salaries should be parceled out to various families who lived on the Islands for a certain period of time, in other words, a process of sharing the wealth.*

*“This was a very fine family, and they became very staunch believers in the Faith. They were awakened by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. And Tomás Nelson de Leon<sup>437</sup> was the first Kuna to accept the Faith at that time. Since this, over the years little by little the family has migrated to the city and as has happened and is happening in so many places, the Kuna Indians have joined this what we might consider a massive movement of people from rural areas into urban areas. But the Kunas, in the process of moving, have not lost their culture. Adjustments have had to be made, and many changes have taken place but, basically, their organizational structure has remained the same. As the Kunas moved into the city, the immigrants from different islands settled in specific locations within the city. And those who came after them, joined them, and along with this they have set up within the urban areas their Traditional Congress and their activities that were pretty much managed by the Congresses. They have their Sailas<sup>438</sup>, they have their meetings where they chant their traditions and continue to pass on the traditions to the younger generations. They have, in a sense, maintained a great deal of their cultural identity in this process. With the family of Tomás Nelson de León we discovered that we had good cooks. Tomás Nelson himself was an excellent cook. He had learned the art of cooking in the non-traditional Kuna fashion through employment in the Canal Zone at that time. And their leader Nelecantule was a far-seeing man and he visualized the time when the Islands would no longer be capable of supporting the population. And he entered into a contract with the officials at the Canal Zone area whereby they would give employment to the Kunas who came and sought employment and Tomás had been one of those. And he was a good cook. And we shared things together every once in a while, shared recipes. He did a good job. For example, taught them how to make biscuits over an open fire and they were good! There were some other things that I taught them or showed them how it could be done on an open fire by controlling the amount of fire or the glowing embers that were left. We had developed a wonderful relationship and we spent so many hours with that family, especially with Adelina<sup>439</sup> who didn't speak Spanish or English, but she was a bright woman, she learned very quickly, and she was a good mother. She knew how to gather her children together in the evenings to say prayers. The children were going to school, and they were learning Spanish, they would learn the prayers and she began to learn the prayers also in the Spanish language and began to understand the meaning of the prayers. We would sing songs together and just have a delightful time many evenings”.*

Ruth also described how change started to disintegrate the Kuna culture. Throughout the years in Panama, they could see how the social and cultural values were giving place to the fast approaching ‘western civilization:

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437. Nelson Tomas de Leon also served as member of National Spiritual Assembly in various occasions, as understood, Tomas was grandson of Nelecantule mentioned above.

438. Sailas are the chiefs, the managers.

439. Adelina was the wife of Tomas Nelson de Leon/

*“Change began to move to come in during this period of time. Radical changes we could see with our eyes! No one had to tell us. The social disintegration was tremendous! A good portion of it introduced by the schoolteachers and the churches. They were being introduced to things that they hadn't even thought of before, completely foreign to their culture that had no meaning in their culture. But the children would be inclined to imitate. However, again there were certain cultural restraints, which made it very difficult. Attempts were made to establish the Ruhí Institute<sup>440</sup> as a viable self-sustaining entity in the Islands and it was very difficult. The material itself was found difficult to understand, we tried the Ruhí courses about 1984 when Mojgan Hashemí<sup>441</sup> and her husband Jose Morales were there on the Island for two years”<sup>442</sup>.*

*“They raised up a group of youth, carried them through, they travelled with them to some of the other islands and they did some nice teaching work, but they were unable to sustain it. After two years of very devoted, dedicated service, Mojgan and Jose felt that they had to return to the city and resume their normal lives, Mojgan to continue her university studies which she did with considerable distinction, impacted very positively on the faculty and Jose to seek work in the hopes that he could support his family”<sup>443</sup>.*

*“On a later occasion when Alan and I both went to Ustupo<sup>444</sup> and we were invited to speak in the congress, when we spoke there was a big burst of excitement, and everybody decided they wanted to be Baha'is. Well, this was a great triumph we thought. And we tried to get the names of the people who wanted to enroll. The Saila of the island announced that the whole island now was Baha'i, that is one half of the island; the island was already divided between Baptists, Catholics and that was one section of the island, which was referred to as Sasardí, the other half of the island was Mulatupo. There were people who said they were Baptists or Catholics. They tried everything. And of course, whoever gave the most gifts and the biggest gifts were the ones who got the largest following.*

*“As Baha'is we were offering nothing and on one occasion I was asked quite pointedly, “Well, what are you going to give us? Now we are all Baha'is; what are you going to give us?” And we said, “We are not going to give you anything, except we will share with you the words and the teachings of Baha'u'llah, and you will take them in and according to your culture and what you*

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440. Ruhí Institute is a deepening course of many books on the tenets of the Baha'i Faith established all over the Baha'i world.

441. Mojgan and Jose, the dedicated couple, after their marriage in Panama, moved to the Kuna Yala region for over two years and rendered valuable services to the Kuna.

442. Though Ruth does not mention specifically, but the writer remembers from the beginning of the 1970s, Mexico supplied two pioneers for San Blas, Alfonso Escobedo a young man and Anacleto already an old man served from 1970 to 1972. Then there was the American pioneer in Santiago de Veraguas, Kit Goldstain would go anywhere she was sent to; and Cheryl Thomas a young lady also from the United States who served there from 1972 to 1974. In late 1970s there were again two Mexican youth, Victor... and Mauricio.... Who pioneered in the Islands. Each and every group tried their way to teach and consolidate the Kuna Yala people.

443. The writer remembers of an outstanding Kuna youth, Leopoldo Richards, who distinguished himself of being an international travel teacher from Panama to Venezuela, who performed with distinction. He went through certain difficulties and came out always with the cry of Ya Baha'ul-Abha. Once he was lost in the jungles while teaching the Faith to the indigenous people of that area, and he said that he called on Baha'u'llah asking Him to face His poor pioneer lost in the wilderness of the jungles, telling him “Baha'u'llah, let's face it, you wanted me to go teaching your Faith and here I am, I am lost, would you mind to help me out of my misery”, he said, soon he could see a light from among the trees, which lead him to a family house and he was saved. Leopoldo had a wonderful laughter and when he laughed, which he often did, his whole face would light up in happiness making everybody happy, his laughter was contagious. He represented the National Assembly in meeting the VIPs during those days. He was a wonderful travel-teacher too. In a later stage, he went back to his homeland settling down with his own restaurant attending the tourists visiting his island, while teaching them the Faith.

444. Capital of the Kuna Yala's most important island.

*understand of these teachings, you will let it grow and become yours. This is the gift we offer". I think this was a new concept to them. And it was quite some time even today I don't believe they really have captured that concept. There are still the whisperings and the questions, "Well, what are you going to give us?" "When are you going to give us something?"*

*"This is what the missionaries offered the people to win their loyalty and this was the concept then that the generality of the people had of what religion was. That religion was something that gives you something material, and that your material progress is affected by the religion and by the gifts that you receive".*

Ruth and Alan had the intention of staying among the Kunas permanently, but it was against the Kuna culture, therefore they left the Kuna Island of Ustupo and went back to Panama City, where Ruth was appointed as the Auxiliary Board Member in 1964 under the guidance of Dr. Giachery, though Ruth kept on travelling to Ustupo and visiting other islands as well. She commented on the Kunas as:

*"...excellent record-keepers. Some of the skills that we would do well to have in our local communities in many, many parts. They were well-organized and good businesspeople, and very shrewd. I would like to see the day when we have a pioneer who can outwit the Kunas on money matters."*

## **THE INSTITUTE**

In Panama, Ruth had many activities and was involved in many of them personally. Her whole time was dedicated in promoting the Faith in one way or another. One of these activities was the Institute process, something she created maybe sometimes in mid-sixties. She said:

*"Time on and we became involved in the Institute process, originally, they were repeated every six weeks then they reduced it to two weeks and then finally to ten-day sessions. The friends would come, and they would stay that length of time. In one of the early ones, there was a man who came, he was a Guaymí and he was an older man. I think he was partially blind. The first Institute sessions were held in the old - the original - national Haziratu'l-Quds where Alan and I were also living. It was a little bungalow, chalet, with two rooms, a living room, dining room, a kitchen and a maid's quarters apart, a porch that had been closed-in to be used as a bedroom. The national office occupied one room, the living room and the dining room area were used by the Local Assembly for their meetings. Kitchen was open fare. And the porch was pretty much open fare. And the first of these Institutes, there were about 21 people who came - and they all had to be housed there. So, we had folding cots all over the living room, a few in the kitchen, on the porch.*

*"The Indians, the participants themselves set up the rule. Somebody was assigned every morning to monitor the bathroom, and each person that went in, as he left the monitor would go in behind, make sure that everything was left in proper order, that the floor was dry, had been mopped if necessary and that everything was in proper order. And they kept it that way. Any casual visitor coming in would never have guessed that there were at least 25 people who had slept there the night before. I was the chief cook and bottle washer for this group. Well,*

*there were women in the community who came out and helped with some of the cooking.*

*“Typical Panamanian food more or less, they might have at lunch some fried fish and some vegetables of some kind, a salad, some cookies and something to drink. We had four different, five different cultures in these Institutes and certainly in the first ones we had the Kunas; we had the Guaymís there were a few Chocos<sup>445</sup>, the Latins of the dominant culture of Panama and the cooks. Besides me were Panamanian of Antillian<sup>446</sup> extraction, each one had their own food patterns and their food habits. It was impossible to cook to meet all of the needs. We decided that what was generally served would be what we would serve in the Institute”.*

Ruth indeed had started with a kind of deepening program for the new believers where she would bring together in one locality people of distinct backgrounds, Guaymies, Kunas, Chocos and even Latins who were recently enrolled in the Faith.

The writer remembers on one occasion, when recently married in 1973, and living in the Baha'i farm of Villa Virginia in Capira, some 40km away from Panama City, there was such an institute where there were Baha'i families from all the mentioned background, children, youth and grown-up men and women all together, amounting to some 25 to 30 people. Addition to what they would learn and become deepened in the tenet of the Faith, they would also learn how to prepare the land, how to irrigate and how to grow vegetables, etc. The women would be both in the kitchen helping Ruth preparing food and, in the farm, to learn about soil, water and the like. Ruth would engage governmental agencies such as Agriculture, Health and Education, in order to have their experts to come in and give practical courses to the group in the three-month course. There would be an ample time for any expert to plan and prepare enough material for their progress in different areas. Ruth would herself go to the governmental agencies and arrange for their experts to commit themselves for such courses. The Three-Month Course, which Ruth had prepared was designed in such a way that at the end of one course, the other course would start almost within a week or two and the vegetables grown by the previous group would well serve the forthcoming group. And this program would just continue one after another. Within these courses, the participants would not only come to learn about the History, Principles and the Teachings of the Faith, but they would also learn about health and agriculture, learn songs, music, drama and above all, socializing together interacting with different social groups.

It was a very effective course indeed. Even the more deepened friends from the other communities would also be given chances to participate by making presentations and courses relevant to the groups. In fact, the whole community of Panama City, Canal Zone and the adjacent communities would be involved in one way or another in such an institute. Ruth made sure in her absence doing her Baha'i administrative functions, there would always be responsible people to continue with the institute. The National Teaching Committee was quite involved in the whole process. In this way, both arms of the Administration worked hand in hand for the progress of the Faith.

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445. The Choco indigenous group live in Darien thick jungles close to Colombia. They live very natural in the nature.

446. Panama is a cosmopolitan country and there are many with Caribbean extracts from the days of the building Canal, especially in the area of Panama City and Colon, fully integrated in the Latin culture.

## FIRST CARETAKERS OF THE HOUSE OF WORSHIP

Ruth recounts in her narratives about Frances and Jane Czerniejewski, a retired couple from Chicago, who moved to Panama and served as the first Custodians of the Baha'i House of Worship in Panama, a service that they performed with excellence, especially remembering Jane, who always dressed up and ready to welcome the day long visitors to the Temple and explain to them its purpose. Though she did not manage Spanish well, but she always tried the best she could trying to answer to all the questions of the visitors. She truly was a lover of Baha'u'llah trying her best to be engaged in teaching the Faith with zeal and enthusiasm<sup>447</sup>.

Ruth goes on talking about her:

*"Early 1972 on a trip to Jamaica, I had the good fortune to meet Mrs. Jane Czerniejewski who was there visiting her son and we talked. I looked at her and I thought, "This woman will be an excellent teacher, one who will be able to walk many miles a day teaching the Faith. And I mentioned this to her that it would be wonderful if she could come to Panama and help with the teaching work there. It didn't take much to convince her. Her life was the Baha'i Faith. She returned home to Wilmette where her husband was working at the House of Worship. I guess he was in charge of maintenance of the House of Worship in Wilmette at that time. This was the time when Paul Thiele, the Supervising engineer for the construction of the House of Worship of Panama became very ill and had to leave - became too ill to be able to function. I don't know how the contact was made with Frances Czerniejewski, but at any rate, he came to Panama to complete the remaining tasks associated with the construction of the House of Worship and getting it ready for its inauguration and opening its doors to the public at Ridván of that year. Jane came along to my great joy. She was ready to go anyplace, travel off anyplace to teach the Faith. And she began to accompany me. And we walked and we walked so many miles into communities in the Central Provinces and into the mountains of Chiriquí among the Guaymí people.<sup>448</sup> Now, it rains in Panama about nine months out of the year. It was not at all unusual for us to encounter rain on our trips. We would get soaked. And sometimes we would have to stand out in the cold, soaked to the skin dripping rainwater all over shivering as the wind blows. We would sing and we would dance up and down and do-little jigs and so on, just to try to keep ourselves warm, and to keep our spirits high. But there was one of these trips we made into an area and the last five minutes of the trip we had walked all day. It had rained all afternoon. We got to the little river we had to cross. It is amazing how these little streams, look like little brooks anyplace else in the world harmless, just trickling along, rippling over the stones suddenly become raging torrents, and this one had become a raging torrent. We waited and nighttime overtook us and we were still waiting because we could not cross the river! Finally about eight o'clock one of the young boys who was with us said, "I think maybe I can get across on my horse now. I'll try." With great fear and trembling we said, "Well, all right; if you think you can do it" He made it across and let the people know that we were on our way and that we were stranded on the other side of the stream, river now. And he came back and went back and forth and back*

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447. The writer stayed with this wonderful couple at their house at the House of Worship in 1972 for over three months together with two other pioneers, Robert Little pioneer from the United States and Manuel Flores pioneer from El Salvador.

448. Writer remembers at his arrival to Panama, took a trip accompanying Ruth, Jane and Manuel Flores, late November 1971 into Darien to visit the Choco Indians, in the dense jungles of that tropical land, a trip to prepare the communities for the upcoming election of the LSAs and special invitation for the inauguration of the *of the House of Worship*, which was going to be in few months' times. It was the very first and hard experience for a youth in a new environment, very different from his home!



*and forth getting people and our belongings and provisions across. But it's a night probably neither one of us will ever forget. And we told stories, trying to keep our spirits high. We danced and we sang, we had exhausted all of the songs we knew, and we shivered. And finally, we made it across. On that particular trip I think it rained every day to such an extent that we finally came to the conclusion that every trail led to more mud. It was muddy! We waded through mud. When we came back, we got down to the Inter-American Highway covered with mud from head to foot dripping in our clothes and cold, shivering cold. We tried to hitch a ride. And of course, no one paid any attention to us. These two women looked like bedraggled, half-drowned rats out there on the road sopping wet, splattered with mud from head to foot and, you know, nobody in their fancy cars were going to stop to pick up such a load of people.*

*"We knew there would be no bus until probably about another three or four hours. We had had no breakfast, there was nowhere to get food, and to get back to the town of Boca del Monte<sup>449</sup> where we might have gotten some crackers and something to drink, was another fifteen- or twenty-minute walk. We were just too tired, had already walked about eight to ten miles, and the thought of walking that additional two miles from the Inter-American Highway back into Boca del Monte was just too much! But we decided that no one was ever going to pick us up if we did not do something about our appearance, which meant we had to change clothes. Now, there's no place to change clothes on the Inter-American Highway at that point. There was no kind of shelter. I was using capote<sup>450</sup>,d the kind you just slip on, no sleeves or anything. I had one of those. So, we consulted and decided we had to change there on the Inter-American Highway and hope and pray that no one drove by while we were in the process! So, I took off the capote and held it up and Jane got behind it and changed her clothes and then she held it up and I stood behind it and changed my clothes and we made it! And, fortunately, no cars went by. There wasn't much traffic on the Inter-American Highway at that time, especially at that hour of the day. And then finally a good Samaritan came by, a truck driver stopped and he gave us a lift into David. And then in David we visited some of the Baha'is there, probably Mahvash Hashemi<sup>451</sup> and were able to shower up and make ourselves relatively presentable sufficiently so to take a bus and later in the day, return to Panama City".*

## **TUTORIAL SCHOOLS**

The concept of Tutorial Schools was something quite new among the Ngobe-Bugle in the area. The rate of illiteracy was very high, and the majority of the people were not able to read and write, especially the younger generation. The concept of Tutorial Schools, I believe was initiated by the Baha'i institutions or it was sponsored highly in the Ngobe-Bugle territories. Ruth mentions how this concept started to be disseminated among the deprived aborigines of the Chiriqui's remote mountainous communities:

*"I remember another experience when we went to Boca de Soloy<sup>452</sup>. We camped out there*

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449. Boca Del Monte, the little town where now the Radio Baha'i is being located.

450. Overall raincoat.

451. Nasrollah and Mahvash Hashemi, Iranian pioneers of 1974.

452. Boca de Soloy, where the Muhajir Institute is, with a large nine sided gathering hall.

with the Sánchez family Cirilo and his wife Susana<sup>453</sup>. And they were the ones who made the property available where the Institute now stands. They were a very fine couple. We had no food with us, and they had practically no food and the little shop in the community had no food. It was during the rainy season, and they had fruit trees, especially citrus trees, orange trees. And I can remember Jane and I sitting under the orange trees, peeling oranges and we gobbled them up. No orange to me has ever tasted quite so good as the oranges did on that occasion. Manuel Flores<sup>454</sup> accompanied us at that time, a pioneer from El Salvador, later became the coordinator of Radio Bahá'í, which he served for many years. But this was in the pre-radio days. Manuel left us and took another trip over the mountains to another community, the community of Remedios.

“Remedios was an interesting community because it was from there that the young man who was illiterate came to Institute or one of the Institute sessions in Villa Virginia<sup>455</sup> in the early sixties. And during this Institute my husband, Alan, taught him the phonetics of Spanish and to recognize the sound groupings and then supplied him with notebooks and paper and pencils. When he left, he returned to his community, and he taught himself to read and to write. He started a school. The first of the Baha'i schools, tutorial schools to be established in the area. And it was like planting the seed. And the winds carried the seed from community to community and soon many other little tutorial schools began to spring up as the friends from one community would look at Boca de Remedios and say, "Well, they have a school. We need one too. Why can't we have a school? We can do the same thing. And so, it served as a stimulus for Local Assemblies to begin to consult about how they could establish a school.

“Tutorial schools to teach the children to read and write that is to the extent that the teacher could. And at that time there weren't very many Guaymies in the area who could read and write, the young boys and so on who had actually gone to school more than third grade level. One of whom later was elected to the National Assembly and became an Auxiliary Board Member<sup>456</sup>. What he lacked in, shall we say formal education, he, more than made up for in terms of spiritual education and obedience to the Laws. And he was very firm in his obedience to the Laws.

“During all of the years the twenty-some years that we lived in Panama<sup>457</sup> and the many, many trips we made into the hinterlands, the only time I really had a travelling companion was, Jane Czerniejewski who lived in Panama. They left Panama about 1976<sup>458</sup>.

“But it was such a delight and such a pleasure to travel with her. She was always so full of life and zest and really an ardent lover of Baha'u'llah. Among her many talents and virtues, she was also a superb cook. And when she wasn't travelling with me, then she served as a hostess at the House of Worship, and she was always alert to the arrival of visitors, whether there were guides present or not. And she made it her business to go out to meet and greet the visitors and so on, and frequently invite them into their living room for a cup of tea or a cookie and to talk with them and always with such love and such patience and such encouragement, understanding”.

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453. Cirilo y Susana Sanchez were the first believers in Soloy, their youngest son Bernardino Sanchez became Counsellor for the Americas. Cirilo and his brother Luis Cuevas served as members of the National Assembly of Panama for few years.

454. Manuel Flores was pioneer from El Salvador in 1971, during the Nine-Year Plan.

455. Villa Virginia, Baha'i Farm, place of Summer Schools, in Capira/Cermeno, 40km from Panama City.

456. Most probably he was Fidel Bejerano from Soloy, the only ABM that known at the time.

457. Ruth and Alan Pringle all together lived in Panama over 40 years.

458. Frances and Jane Czerniejewski were the first caretakers of the House of Worship from 1971 to 1976.

## INSTITUTES

Though Jane was a real helpmate to Ruth, but due to her own responsibility of being the caretaker of the Baha'i House of Worship together with her husband Frances. he following experience does not have much of Jane's involvement, but having a very close companionship with Ruth, no doubt she had contribution in the process:

*“There came a time when we became very much concerned about the development of families and the family life. And an idea was set forth and everyone thought it was impossible, it couldn't take place of holding a family development institute that would reach out to young couples and their children. And the first of these institutes was held with an average attendance of four to six Guaymí families attended. There was one Kuna family and I think there was one Choco family. But it was Guaymies who came and stayed. The others had difficulty adjusting to the idiosyncrasies of the others and integrating with the group, and they finally decided that they should go home. Well, with the Kunas and the Chocos, Amberas<sup>459</sup> it was a very interesting and very exciting experience of the parents and with their children up to six years of age. They came with the understanding that they would be there for three months, the entire months of January, February and March. It was anticipated that by the end of the six weeks, everybody would be pretty exhausted and that there would be the need for a change of pace, something to raise the spirits again and enthusiasm. On both occasions, it happened. The first institute was through a visit of Dr. Muhájir<sup>460</sup>. The National Assembly arranged a teaching conference, and the conference was held at Villa Virginia, the Institute property in that area. The second time it was the visit of Dr. Mulshlegel<sup>461</sup>. We decided to devote one weekend to just having fun and enjoying the company of everybody and relaxing, to just sort of get a fresh breath of air, to be ready to start again on Monday with new vigor and enthusiasm. It also covered the period of the Fast<sup>462</sup>, the Intercalary Days<sup>463</sup> and Naw-Rúz<sup>464</sup>. And this gave another stimulus as the friends got busy collecting seeds and whatever they could find in the environment to make things like prayer beads for friends, especially from the Canal Zone who supported the Institute most remarkably well. They invited all of the students into the Canal Zone community for an Intercalary Day party. And then the students decided that they should return the courtesy and invite the Canal Zone community to Villa Virginia for a Naw-Rúz party, which they did. It was really a wonderful evening of fun, of laughter and games. The whole concept of the Institute was to bring in family life, to introduce things that could be a source of variety in the diet of the people, which was pretty monotonous and consisted primarily of rice and beans and, some seasons of the year, corn, but always prepared in the same monotonous kind of way. They were staples that the people liked.*

*“And then along with this we tried to slip in some other things that they planted in the garden because part of the project was that they would establish a garden and cultivate the garden*

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459. Embera Indigenous is a small group, also known as Chocos or Katios, divided between Panama and Colombia, they live in the jungles of Darien.

460. Rahmatullah Muhahjir (1923 – 1979), physician and Hand of the Cause of God, very active with entry by troops projects around the world.

461. Adelbert Muhschlegel (1897 – 1980), German physician, Hand of the Cause of God.

462. Baha'i Fasting period for 19 days (physical and spiritual purification), the month of Ala, the last of the 19 months calendar (2 March-20 March), a period that one should abstain from eating or drinking from sunrise to sunset.

463. Intercalary Days, a period of 4 or 5 days prior to fasting, dedicated to charity work.

464. Naw-Ruz, (New Day), 21 March, Baha'i New Year. The first day of the month of Baha on Baha'i calendar.

during the course of the School. It was difficult because we didn't have quite enough days for the seed to mature... before the Institute closed. We tried to select things that had short growing periods and things that we felt possibly could grow in their own areas to help them gradually to become accustomed to the taste of new foods.

"We planted tomatoes, cucumbers, leaf lettuce, radishes. We experimented with watermelon, which didn't do very well, they were planted too close to the cucumbers and what came out it tasted like red cucumbers, but the tomatoes were beautiful. The cucumbers were also beautiful. The cucumbers were sold. Some of the tomatoes were also sold. They spontaneously saved seed from the tomatoes to take home with them to plant. They didn't have very good success with it, except in Boca de Remedios. But in Boca de Remedios they planted on the leeward side of the mountain, and they had good results. They became discouraged with that, and they didn't continue trying to cultivate. They were defeated or considered that they had been defeated. But they learned to like many of the products. Now, we didn't plant things like carrots or the root or the tubular vegetables because the growing season was too long. Each student was given a tree to plant. And the agricultural consultant for the area, with the Ministry of Agriculture came to the school and worked with each student grafting the trees. And then each student took care of his own tree. Each one had an orange tree that was a new experience for them.

"Women did not work in the gardens. That was the men's work. The women worked more or less in the house helping to prepare food, because we had no staff. And it was the tutors and students who handled everything the shopping, planning the menus, preparing the food, and the cleanup thereafter and the maintaining of the sanitary conditions in the living quarters - that was the work of the women. However, in very short order, the men began to gather up the dishes and to help with the cleanup work in the kitchen voluntarily. It was the women looked at this because this wasn't a school there were no regulations established, except that there would be prayers in the morning, at six o'clock in the morning. And everyone was expected to be at morning devotions. And there would be prayers before going to bed at night. And except for that, there were no rules or regulations. No one has made such a suggestion. The women observed this and they said, "Well, the men come in and help us with our work. It is only fair that we help them in the fields too. They would go out in the mornings immediately after breakfast and carry water, because this was the dry season - January, February, March, and carry water to water the plants in the garden. This was a wonderful experience to see how they came together and began working together in real harmony.

"Among themselves they decided that if they were going to be there, were going to be living together families in close contact for three months that there had to be some rules to the game. It was enough, just having devotions morning and evening. There needed to be something else. Something was missing. They consulted together and set up their own schedule of rules and regulations. There were not a lot of them but very well done and very appropriately done I believe. The school itself was organized as a Local Assembly or community with a Local Spiritual Assembly. They held an election for the members of their Local Assembly. The Local Assembly met any difficulties that arose were taken to the Local Spiritual Assembly. They had Local Assemblies in their areas, but it was reinforcing. Some of the women were elected to the Local Assembly. The women began to say," this is what my husband does when he goes off and he says he is going to a Local Assembly meeting. We were not too sure about this! Now we know; we will not object any more to their going to the Assembly meetings". It helped to strengthen the bonds

*of trust between couples. The children were there. We had daily classes for the children. When the parents were in class the children were also in class.*

*"They left it all in the hands of Baha'u'llah. This of course is the low season of the year. The harvest is in; they are just waiting for March and April when they begin to clear their fields and prepare for the next planting season. This is the time also when many of them go out harvesting coffee and into the cities and to earn some hard cash that they need for later on. It was the ideal time for this kind of thing. It could not have been at any other time of the year. I noticed at one night at one of the cabins it was about eleven or twelve o'clock at night and I noticed that the lights were on in one of the cabins and I noticed this for several days and then later on in early morning the lights were still on and I thought, "I wonder what's going on. I wonder what's happening there". I got up and I walked out and around the cabins to see what was happening. I discovered that there was this couple, and they were sitting together with their prayer books, and they were praying. So, the next morning I mentioned this and asked them. I said, "What were you doing, what happened? You were up practically all-night praying". They said, "They were worried about their animals, their crops and they didn't know they were concerned that they really didn't feel they could stay for the full three months to which they had committed themselves, they were praying for guidance. Should they stay or should they leave? "What did you decide?" They said, "We decided we'll put our affairs in the Hands of Baha'u'llah, and we will stay". And they did".*

*"We were able to offer facilities of health supervision, a fairly well-balanced diet, classes on health and hygiene and classes on sexual health and hygiene. And the women had their classes, and the men had their classes. But then they decided among themselves, well, they'd like to know what the men are talking about in their class and the men would like to know what we're talking about in our class. We opened it and we said, "Well, if you want to attend, that's all right". They both attended, and they found it not only interesting, but it was the kind of knowledge which they felt they really needed to have in order to establish better relationships and to understand better how families can function, how couples can function, etc. These were surprising things.*

*"We began to learn a little bit about some of the ideas and concepts they held about the relationship between married couples, their very private lives. It was amazing.*

*"They usually live under the same roof, and everybody gained weight during the three-month period and some very serious health problems were detected and we were able to get them adequate medical care. It probably saved the life of two of the participants. One young man was discovered to have a grossly enlarged heart.*

*"In the evenings we did a lot of game playing, but the kind of games that would help fix information, dates, events, locations in the minds of the people. And develop all kinds of Baha'i historical games. To teach geography, expand concepts of time and distance involved and we had little classes on astronomy the cosmology. We had one wall that was about at least twelve feet, and a big map of the world on that. On the map we placed the pins, color-coding for the Temples around the world, the National Spiritual Assemblies around the world.*

*"The government workers who went into the Guaymí area came to Villa Virginia during one of the sessions and they said, "We want to know what are you doing and how do you do this, that makes such a great difference between the Guaymies who are Baha'is and have been here*

*to this Institute and those who are not? When we go into the communities, we don't have to ask anymore who are Baha'is and who aren't. The way the people conduct themselves, the way they receive us, the way they respond, we know.*

*"We would like to know: how have you been able to achieve this?" We said, "Please come in be our guest". And they spent the day, and we had our classes go along with our routine as we normally do, and they were amazed.*

*"There were two of these for two years, whether it was this type of Institute or another type, that it could be continued would be self-sustaining and the people who have to work every day in order to have the pot of rice and beans on the stove would be free to do so.*

*"It was a human resource shortage, so the whole thing dried up. But it was a wonderful, wonderful experience, sharing together, being together, sharing together the Fast was marvelous".*

Apparently, Ruth's recorded memoirs stopped somewhere in mid-seventies. She was invited by Ruhiiyyih Khanum to help her with the second part of the Green Light Expedition Project 1974 - 1975, a job she did with excellence. Search should be conducted for at least 20 more years 1975 to 1996 when she left for Costa Rica. Below, her colleague Counsellors have covered to a certain degree the gap produced here.

Donald Witzel, Counsellor for Americas residing in Venezuela, wrote the following on Ruth Pringle, remembering their times together in Nicaragua and Panama, especially all those episodes already covered by Ruth, David, San Blas and Chiriqui Mountains. He wrote:

*"I knew her as a pioneer, an Auxiliary Board Member, a Counsellor and as a good friend.*

*"Ruth was both a practical and spiritual person. She never gave up in her perseverance and dogged determination in achieving the teaching and other goals of the Faith. She felt responsibility and had constancy, dedication and devotion, as well as complete detachment from all save God, together with self-sacrifice. She consecrated herself to Baha'i service. She never gave up unless she was asked to do so from higher authority".*

Loretta King, another colleague Counsellor from Alaska remembered Ruth:

## **CONFERENCE WITH GUAYMI PEOPLE**

*"Ruth and I met when the Board of Counsellors of the Americas was brought into one in 1980 and we had the first meeting in '80 with the presence of Ruhiiyyih Khanum and Hooper Dunbar.*

*"At that time Ruth had arranged with 'Amatu'l-Bahá<sup>465</sup> to [visit the] Guaymi [area] after the meeting of the Board of Counsellors and through circumstances and different events I was invited to go along with them. On that trip I think I had a chance to observe and get acquainted with Ruth's **tenacity**. There was nothing **that daunted her or that could not be overcome**. The Baha'i community was all prepared with a lot of love to greet Amatu'l-Bahá. Thousands of people had walked for days to welcome her most royally and lovingly. Ruth was busy seeing*

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465. The appellation 'Amatu'l-Baha' was the designation of Ruhiiyyih Khanum, meaning, The Lady of Baha.

procedures go forward. The Guaymi cooked, they had the facilities in immaculate condition for the arrival of all the group where people gather. She was just **untirable** but the **love** the people had for her and her **love for the people** [was formidable]. The characteristics of **absolute service** to the Faith were what shined through her.

*“[She] came to Alaska in the wintertime, [being in] tropical conditions for a number of years [and now] cold winter conditions in Alaska [but] whatever conditions were. She traveled to a few areas in Alaska and her spirit and outreach to people would make them respond so quickly. She was one of those that people felt a personal relationship with very quickly.*

## TRAILS OF LIGHT

*“Over the years including the conception and carrying out of the Trail of Light that went into Central America and then into South America a group including Ruth nurtured over the years through pioneers and travel teachers. The idea of the exchange was to bring pride to the people because so many American Indians had experienced a degree of degradation, [and] as they came into the Baha’i community there was that stigma. The Faith embraces the culture of people and we can share our culture with all of humanity in a very dignified way and can show and express the way the Faith influenced our lives in sharing the message of the Faith with other cultures can contribute the things we had in that heritage to the betterment of mankind and to the [growth] of the Faith.*

*“Ruth traveled with some of the groups, [and] I traveled with some and Raul<sup>466</sup> [Pavon] traveled, [too]. As the Trail of Light traveled from the north to the central and southern countries they were greeted by the people of the north, shared stories about how their ancestors used to visit the people of [other places], who were very dark for the native people to the point of almost losing their spirituality somebody that would come and give them pride in their background. That this had happened to them, and they now had the opportunity to travel. “...someday this would be overcome and a sign of it would be that they would be able to see their brothers from the north.*

*“The group of Counsellors of the Trail of Light teams was evaluated and one of the things that came from some of them was to return this compliment by making a visit to their brothers in the north. The flow of energy that was around this venture it was possible the following year to have the Trail of Light go to two different areas of the north. In naming it for the southern countries, it was named “Camino del Sol”<sup>467</sup>. So, there were two groups, one the northern and one the southern and Ruth of course was very much involved in these. The first Trail of Light convened at the Quito Conference. The return Trail of Light culminated in the meeting on the Blood Reserve in Canada where ‘Amatu’l-Baha was present, and Raul Pavon was there too.*

*“We had organized to have a native Council in the Guaymi area. The Counsellors were looking to see what would assist the community in moving forward and it was a different format with them. With the Native Council we had moved the things in a different format. Ruth talked to some of the community leaders involved in a way that they would share some of things that*

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466. Raul Pavon was Counsellor from Ecuador, absolutely a marvelous person.

467. Meaning ‘The Trail of Light’.

they thought would help their communities move forward, especially draw out the women to take an equal role and to speak out about the affairs of the community. It was going to be a difficult job. Some of them who were among some of the spokespersons tried to encourage the women again. It just wasn't common for the women to speak out. Baha'u'llah said that all women had to find a voice. It was midafternoon that one of the women stood up [and said] the story of Tahirih<sup>468</sup>. It was very difficult it was not the accepted way but because of what she learned about the story of Tahirih. She spoke out about how important it was to educate children. Another lady stood up, and then another, and then another. So, they used the story of Tahirih and the story of Badasht! Among the things we talked about that weekend [was that] we needed to teach the children Trail of Light activities as children had become estranged from their culture, had learned to sing and drum and dance. Among the things that happened were the people were dancing, bringing the dancing into their activities. Children were 7 or 8 years, maybe down to 4 years”.

### **RUTH'S QUALITIES**

“She contributed so many things throughout the Americas. Her **tenacity**, her **perseverance**, because she could see the long-range picture and there weren't any obstacles, her **selflessness** and **tirelessness**, **tremendous energy**, even up to her later years of her life.

“Serving as Counsellor for the Americas and a lot of stories of her ventures in different areas came through. When circumstances seemed so impossible -slippery mud to get back to some of the outer villages; things like this just **didn't daunt** her. It wasn't that she was the only one that was doing these things, but **she was the motivator** in order to get a project or venture accomplished.

“**Things that Ruth contributed were to the heart of things**, but most of the Counselors tended to do that. She listened to the needs of the people of the land.

“There came the time when we said, ok now, we've done Trail of Light. And it had really helped to instill that love for the Faith and to see how the cultural part of their lives fit in and could assist in carrying the message of Baha'u'llah and to begin the harder work of the education of children, and she made quite a number of trips to look at how that work could be reinforced, [and] moved forward these processes, understanding and moving them forward, assisting the National Assemblies [and] information flow for the Board of Counsellors. It was her dedication again. So quickly she could rally the things that were necessary to carry out the flow of information. It was quite a valuable tie. Her office worked from Costa Rica and did a remarkable job.

“Maybe one of the last things I would mention was her tie with Amatu'l-Baha, a strong tie. The Green Light Expedition cemented that friendship, that connection between them. Often as Amatu'l-Baha traveled she would ask some of those people who assisted to help behind the scenes to make that visit successful. Besides the Conference in Manaus, full Board of Counsellors met there and it was one of those intimate times. Her love for the Board work was so obvious.

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468. The poetess Tahirih, the heroine of the Babi Faith and the Letter of the Living, who courageously unveiled herself in Badasht Conference in Mazandiran, Iran in June-July 1848, among all men present at the occasion. She was given the title Tahirih, meaning 'the Pure'.



*Ruth was able to do personal things that Amatu'l-Baha asked of her".*

Jacqueline Left Hand Bull<sup>469</sup> a very close friend of Ruth wrote the following from South Dakota in August 2006<sup>470</sup>.

*"Ruth told me about her first trips to the Guaymi region -Chiriqui. When she first went to Panama her intent was to take the Message of Baha'u'llah to the Indians of that area. She found a person who would rent a couple of horses for her to ride into the mountains and to pack her tent, and food, as well as to serve as a guide and interpreter. On the day that they arranged to go, she was prepared and had her things outside ready to be packed onto a horse. Eventually, the guide appeared, but without the horses. She asked where the horses were, and he replied that there were none available at the time. She said, "Very well, then. You can carry some of my things, and I will carry the rest, and let's get started". And she picked up the essentials and together they began the walk of many miles into the hills. When they reached the first native **village**, the reception was very rude<sup>471</sup>. The people shoved her and told her to leave, calling her names. They walked on. At the next village, the same thing happened. And again, and again. On that trip of several days of walking in the heat of the jungle to the little villages, it rained and was also hot. As her bedroll had been left behind because there was not a pack horse, she slept on and under banana tree leaves to stay dry, as did her guide – who also served as a protector of sorts.*

*"They returned tired and a bit dirty, without having told anyone about the Faith. Undaunted, Ruth arranged to go again, and yet again. Each time the same thing happened. Finally, on yet another long walk into the mountains, she was received more warmly in a little village, and the people took some interest in the Message she brought. So, she stayed a couple of days, and formed some friendships and shared more and more of the Teachings of Baha'u'llah. Eventually, she returned to other villages and again the reception had changed from hostility to neutral to warm, until finally the people were eager for her visits.*

*"Her guide eventually assisted in the teaching. One day, years later, when she knew more about Panama and realized that there is never a shortage of horses to rent, she asked him why he had told there were none for those first trips to the Guaymi settlements. He replied that when he asked her why she wanted to go there, she told him that the people there were as members of her family and she wanted to meet them and get to know them and share what she considered a most precious gift. He said that he thought that if she were sincere in that statement, she would do anything to get there, even walk on foot and put up with hostility. After he realized that she was sincere, he went back on his own and told the people that they should welcome her and listen to what she had to tell them".*

*"When I first met Ruth when she was assigned to prepare our little "Trail of Light" team for several weeks of traveling to teach and share our own indigenous cultural arts of dance and song. I actually did not know that the team was expected to share dances and songs, and in fact had all my life refused to dance and sing for others. I'd seen Indians coming to the little off-reservation town where I lived as an older child, and they danced to the drum music, and tourists*

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469. Jacqueline Left Hand Bull (b. 1944) is an American Baha'i who served as a Continental Counselor for the Americas and a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States.

470. The story, albeit a bit different, was recounted here before by Ruth herself.

471. It is strange! The Ngobe-Bugle people are never rude, in fact very friendly.

tossed coins onto the ground. It was humiliating to have to dance and sing in a tourist area to earn a few much-needed coins. So, when we were preparing ourselves before leaving for the rural indigenous villages of Central America, she asked what I would do for my part in the performance. I said I was not going to dance, and I was not going to sing. While she initially seemed frustrated with me, I held my ground. What then would I do, she asked? I said I could tell stories that would preserve the dignity of my people. She said ok, tell one to us. So I did, but it was painfully difficult with the translation that I knew was not clear because the subjects I chose were not easy to translate into a language of people who had no similar history.

“The story would have to be told first in English, then translated into Spanish, and from that into Mayan or other local language. It was a bit tedious to the telling and more so to the translation. But she agreed that I could tell stories, if that was my decision, if it was what I felt was dignified and useful. During the trip, I practiced telling short versions of the stories and tried to find words that seemed easy on the translators. And I started sharing dances, engaging the audience in the fun and even sang some songs, and taught some Lakota words of friendship to the audiences. Eventually the other team members knew the stories by heart and would even correct the translators to rend a more accurate picture of what I was describing. So, by Ruth’s insistence on my participation because it was service that needed to be provided, and my own learning to love serving more than caring about protecting my imagined dignity, everything eventually worked out well for everyone.



Ruth (née Yancey) and Alan Pringle had the first Bahá'í wedding to be legally recognised in Panama, and both were members of the National Spiritual Assembly that formed in 1961. Ruth served in several other positions, ultimately becoming a Continental Counsellor. The members of the 1963 National Spiritual Assembly of Panama were Harry Haye Anderson, Rachelle Jean E de Constante, James Vassal Facey, Kenneth Frederics, Leota E. M. Lockman, Alfred E. A. Osborne, William Alan H. Pringle, Ruth E. Yancey Pringle and Donald Ross Witzel. By 1963 there were Bahá'í converts among the Cerrobolo, Guaymí and Kuna.

## THE HOUSE OF WORSHIP OF PANAMA

The beloved Guardian wrote on Special Position of Panama<sup>472</sup>:

***“Faithful to the provisions of the Charter laid down by the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, I feel it my duty to draw the special attention of those to whom it has been entrusted to the urgent needs of, and the special position enjoyed by, the Republic of Panama, both in view of its relative proximity to the heart and center of the Faith in North America, and of its geographical position as the link between two continents. ‘All the above countries’, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, referring to the Latin States in one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, has written, ‘have importance, but especially the Republic of Panama, wherein the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans come together through the Panama Canal. It is a center for travel and passage from America to other continents of the world, and in the future it will gain most great importance.’ Likewise, He again has written, ‘ye must give great attention to the Republic of Panama, for in that point the Occident and the Orient find each other united through the Panama Canal, and it is also situated between the two great oceans. That place will become very important in the future. The teachings, once established there, will unite the East and the West, the North and the South.’ So privileged a position surely demands the special and prompt attention of the American Baha’i community. With the Republic of Mexico already opened to the Faith, and with a Spiritual Assembly properly constituted in its capital city, the southward penetration of the Faith of Baha’u’llah into a neighboring country is but a natural and logical step, and should, it is to be hoped, proved to be not a difficult one. No effort should be spared, and no sacrifice be deemed too great, to establish even though it be a very small in a Republic occupying, both spiritually and geographically, so strategic a position – a group which, in view of the potency with which the words of ‘Abdu’l-Baha have already endowed it, cannot but draw to itself, as soon as it is formed, the outpouring grace of the Abha Kingdom, and evolve with such marvelous swiftness as to excite the wonder and the admiration of even those who have already witnessed such stirring evidences of the force and power of the Faith of Baha’u’llah”.***

In the article published in the Baha’i World<sup>473</sup>, it is written: One of the many goals assigned to the American Baha’i community in the beloved Guardian’s Ten Year World Crusade was to assist in the purchase of a site for the future Temple in Panama City. Land was acquired in April 21, 1954 and Shoghi Effendi cabled the United States National Assembly in October of that year:

**“HEARTFELT CONGRATULATIONS ACQUISITION TEMPLE SITE NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENT WORLD CRUSADE”.**

The National Spiritual Assembly of Panama put out a four-page information leaflet and called it ‘The Institution of the Baha’i Temple’. The leaflet is dateless, but it could be dated to sometimes after the dedication of the Temple in May 1972.

The word ‘Temple’ or ‘House of Worship’ though might be of the same meaning in any religion, but coming to the Baha’i Faith it is called Mashriqu’l-Adhkar, which it means literally

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472. The Advent of Divine Justice.

473. Baha’i World, vol. XV, pp. 493/494

“Dawning-Place for the Praise of God”. A Baha’i House of Worship is an institution, which is unlike churches or mosques of the past, it fulfills the original intention of religion in any period of time, being freely open to any worshipper from any religious or otherwise background on equal terms and no sermons are given because there is no professional clergy in the Baha’i Faith. The institution of House of Worship has dependencies such as schools, old-age-homes, libraries, orphanages, universities, etc.

On the leaflet put out by the National Spiritual Assembly, there are some information regarding the history of the Baha’i Temple of Panama<sup>474</sup>, these are:

1. The location is on the Trans-isthmian Highway, atop of high hill called Cerro Sonsonate, or, the Singing Mountain, of an elevation of 225m above the sea level<sup>475</sup>.
2. The size of the land is almost 12 hectares<sup>476</sup>. The land was purchased in 1967 by the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama. Originally it had difficult access of almost 2km from the road to the top. ‘It was extremely difficult to build as the sides of the Basalt Rock hill had to be excavated and this material had to be used to fill in the interlocking deep ravines. The original road, which started from an area called ‘Ojo de Agua’ –Eye of Water- took three months to build. The contractor was the construction company of Rolando Arango of Panama<sup>477</sup>.
3. The Universal House of Justice appointed their own consulting architect for the work, Mr. Robert McLaughlin, member of the National Assembly of the United States and Dean Emeritus of the School of Architecture of Princeton University. In addition to this, Mr. Ed Stevenson, a highly qualified civil engineer, serving at the US Army in Canal Zone, was also added to the Consulting Committee. In a later stage engineer Paul Thiele from Hawaii joined the group dedicating his last year and a half of his life to the construction of the Temple as consulting engineer for the National Assembly of Panama and just before its dedication he passed away in Hawaii of cancer that he was suffering from. Paul was the real builder of the House of Worship as well as the original access road in order to beat the hostile tropical climate of Panama.

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474. This same information was printed in the Baha’i World vol. XV, pp647/649 under the title of Panama Temple, Data and Statistics.

475. From the Report of the NSA of Panama to the Universal House of Justice dated September 28, 1966, it becomes clear that upon the visit of Mr. Borrah Kavelin, member of the House of Justice at the time, to Panama in mid-September 1966, he together with the NSA members they visit the site of the Temple under the name of ‘Cerro Oscuro –The dark hill’. Due to its very difficult access and small area even if it is lowered, Mr. Kavelin disregards the land and with the consent of the NSA of Panama, they visit a second site by the same owner some distance away. This site called Cerro Sonsonate –The singing mountain- was chosen and with some difficult negotiation, it became agreed that this would be future site of the Temple.

476. The correct size is 117,964m<sup>2</sup>, or 28.73 acres.

477. Kit Goldstein, long-time dedicated pioneer in Panama, in her small booklet ‘The Light over the Singing Mountain’ mentioned that prior to the above-mentioned land was purchased, in 1954, by the instructions of the beloved Guardian a piece of 2.5 hectares of land was purchased on Cerro Oscuro by the Regional National Assembly of Central America, represented by Mrs. Mabel Snyder, Mr. Alfred Osborne and Mrs. Raquel Francois de Constante. The urge of the Guardian was the purchase of the land even if it should be traded for a better one in future. He sent USD 1,500 for the acquisition of the land and later on he sent another USD 1,500 for general use. This land stayed idle for ten years until after the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963 that the long-standing dream came to reality. The new National Spiritual Assembly observed that the existing land was not adequate for the Temple site. Upon consultation with the Universal House of Justice, the hilltop behind the already purchased land, namely Cerro Sonsonate was more adequate for such a purpose. Upon negotiation the land was exchanged. Dr. Gustavo Tejada Mora was appointed lawyer for such a transaction and future negotiations. A piece of this land was given to the lawyer for his fees. Due to the change of the access road, that piece of land stood idle.

The House made a donation of USD 54,000 for a road to be built for the immediate and future access.

4. The top of the hill had to be flattened for the construction of the Temple for the lodge, public restrooms, meeting rooms, parking area and the surrounding gardens. A total of 11 meters from the top of the mountain was cut through dynamiting and using heavy earth-moving equipment and machinery to remove almost 75,000 m<sup>3</sup> of basaltic rock earth, depositing it on the south slopes to create the level required for construction work. This initial part of the work took five months to complete.

In 1965, upon the instructions of the Universal House of Justice, the National Assembly of Panama announced globally the opening of the contest of the design submission of the House of Worship among the architects. According to the leaflet of the National Assembly, some 54 architects participated in this contest<sup>478</sup>, which only one of them was a Panamanian, Raul Rodriguez Porcell, dean of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Panama.<sup>479</sup>

From above all the received designs, the British young non-Baha'i architect, Peter Tillotson's hyperbolic design was selected by the Universal House of Justice on 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1967. A contractual agreement was reached. On Sunday 8 of October of the same year, at the ceremony of laying the cornerstone, which was assisted by two Hands of the Cause of God, Amatu'l-Baha Ruhyyih Khanum and Mr. Jalal Khazeh<sup>480</sup>, and about seven-hundred of Baha'is, including 250 indigenous believers attending the Intercontinental Conference held in Panama City, Ruhyyih Khanum before laying the cornerstone deposited the dust of the Shrine of Baha'u'llah and dried flowers of Bahji under the cornerstone both in a small metal box, which she had bought in Turkey having the seal of the Ottoman Sultan who exiled Baha'u'llah to Akka.<sup>481</sup>

5. Upon the recommendation of the Architect, the firm Flint & Neill of London was appointed to be structural engineers of the project. For the local representative counterpart, architect Guillermo Palma and engineer Rolando Arango were selected. J.O. Noriega did the translation of the drawings, specifications and calculations into Spanish. All the work was completed by August 1969. The National Spiritual Assembly of Panama advertised the construction work to be carried by Panamanian company. On the special day of October 20, 1969, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Bab, the contract was signed with Diaz y Guardia, S.A. the best of the construction company of the time. On December 1, when Panama enters dry season of the same year the construction was started and this to be completed in three years' time. The House of Worship of Panama was inaugurated on April 1972.
6. The building is composed of two distinct units. One is the base, which is an elongated nine-pointed star in the center of which is located the auditorium area, hosting 600 persons. Connecting the nine-pointed star at its inner diameter are nine ornamental iron gates, which provide nine entrances to the Temple auditorium. A balcony covers the nine-pointed star and also connects the area in-between so that visitors can on the one

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478. According to the booklet of Kit Goldstein, there were only 43 participating architects.

479. Professor Rodriguez was the writer's lecturer from 1972 to 1977. Upon request, he wrote in two pages his comments indicating why his design was more adequate for the Panamanian tropical climate. Also commenting that he was not sure if this hyperbolic dome building would last for long without being damaged by the tropical climate. He was concerned that the design of this building is not in harmony with the Panamanian architecture and in fact it is a strange object over the mountain with a very difficult access even for vehicles. Architect Rodriguez design resembled an enormous cathedral with a small dome and lancet windows, accessible by covered walking areas from the bottom of the mountain to the top by many steps.

480. Colonel Jalal Khazeh, (1897 – 1990), one of the 27 Hands of the Cause appointed by the Guardian.

481. Kit Goldstein – The Light Over the Singing Mountain, p.9

side look down on the auditorium and on the other side enjoy the panoramic lush green view of the surrounding area for considerable distances in every direction.

The second unit is the parabolic dome, which begins at the balcony level and covers both the auditorium and balcony areas.<sup>482</sup> The Architect Peter Tillotson wrote: “The design of the Temple generates from the geometry of a nine-pointed star (symbol of the Baha’i Faith) in both plan and section, and the consulting engineers discovered some interesting mathematical facts on examination of the shapes involved. The dome, springing from a nine-pointed star pattern of walls, is parabolic in section. It incorporates eighteen arched vaults on the underside just below its apex. The arches around the base of the dome are inclined parabolic barrel vaults”.<sup>483</sup>

7. The whole building is made of reinforced concrete including the dome, for which guniting or shotcrete process was applied. This guniting system is where dry sand and cement is mixed and blown through a rubber hose where just enough water is applied to get the mixture barely moist.<sup>484</sup> By this method shrinkage of concrete is being prevented, therefore, no cracking and leakages occurs. This method of application was experimented for the first time in Panama.

The brownish decorative panels used over the outer nine-pointed walls are ‘exposed Verona Red marble chips to create a relief pattern based on pre-Columbian design.’<sup>485</sup> This was the architect’s design resembling the decorated Aztec and Inca Temples<sup>486 487</sup>. The Architect wrote: “The Baha’is requested that the Temple should evoke a pre-Columbian atmosphere, somehow reminiscent of the past civilizations of Central America. Panama itself has little cultural heritage but there is a wealth of precedent of archaeology of the surrounding countries. The surface relief pattern on the wall facing slabs is based on motifs recurring in ancient Peruvian textile designs and mud reliefs and in Mayan stone mosaics and wall decoration in Yucatan. The exposed aggregate finish of Red Verona marble chips in brown cement is similar in colour to the red sandstone prevalent in Mayan architecture”.<sup>488</sup>

8. The nine gates are unique in design of a three-dimensional self-supporting geometric shape. The Architect wrote: “Because the Panamanian climate is hot and humid, all openings in the structure are unglazed to permit free airflow through the building. For the same reason, gates are provided instead of doors”.
9. Though the inside of the dome including its 18 precast concrete ribs joined at the top where the wooden Greatest Name symbol is located is covered with acoustical plaster, the surface of the outer dome is covered with mosaic tiles imported from Japan.
10. The floor area of both the auditorium and the balcony are made of cast in-place terrazzo. “The veneer facing, and terrazzo floors have been executed by Compania de Noriega, of Panama. The marble chips of that work came from Italy”.<sup>489</sup>
11. There are no windows in the whole design, only nine huge open areas, which remain

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482. Baha’i World vol. XIV, pp. 647 – 649.

483. Concrete Magazine, 1972’

484. Protex Panama S.A.

485. Baha’i World vol. XV, pp. 647 - 649.

486. Kit Goldstein – The Light Over the Singing Mountain, pp.12/13.

487. Accordingly, Mr. Tillotson visited and studied Maya sites in Yucatan and national collections in Mexico Baha’is World vol. XV, p. 644.

488. Concrete Magazine, 1972

489. Baha’i World vol. XV p.644

- without restrictions of any kind, making the indoor and outdoor one unified complex<sup>490</sup>.
12. Because of the extreme uniqueness and complicated geometric pattern of the structure, construction was very difficult, and it taxed the engineering and construction capacity of the Contractor to the utmost, resulting a building of the highest quality.  
The symbol of the Greatest Name made of Panamanian Mahogany was made and donated by Mr. & Mrs. Raquel de Constante.<sup>491</sup> Design of the Greatest Name was obtained from the Universal House of Worship. The mentioned couple also made all the benches of the auditorium at their own workshop from Teak wood suggested by Ruhiyyih Khanum at one of her visits to Panama prior to the inauguration<sup>492</sup>.
  13. By the time of its inauguration in May 1972, the overall cost of the construction of the House of Worship hit one million dollars. There were many contributions made by the believers of all over the world and of Panama. The indigenous friends of Panama –who do not possess much of the hard money- did sell part of their harvests and contributed to the Panama Temple Fund to be proud participants in the service to humanity. Some Kuna Yala Indian ladies sent their artwork known as ‘mola’ to be sold and the monies contributed the same<sup>493</sup>.
  14. Mr. Robert McLaughlin mentioned the following: “The three stipulations of the Universal House of Justice were that the Temple should be nine-sided and surmounted by a dome, should seat between five and six hundred people, and have a character sympathetic to the indigenous people of America... Another principle involves the relation of technical means to art form. The dome of the Temple is an exceedingly sophisticated piece of structural design, involving a type of mathematical calculation that is practicable only with the resources of computer technology... A few decades ago, such a dome<sup>494</sup> would have been impossible, Instead, we would have had a far heavier and less efficient construction... Here is a single dome with both surfaces exposed to the eye, a splendid example of integrity of design. The interior ribs rise and interlace in the fine bit of mathematical expression”.

As to the environment to which this design pertains Mr. McLaughlin added: “...With its generous openings through which breezes can pass, and with its wide overhangs that shelter from beating sun and torrential rain, the Temple is superbly suited to the warm, humid climate of Panama... The nine panels of landscape framed by the nine series of openings could not be rivaled by stained glass or mural paintings... Here in Panama, the sea, as well as sky and mountain, are united into a oneness with architecture”<sup>495</sup>.

And on to the matter of pre-Columbian character of the Temple Mr. McLaughlin added: “An obvious but superficial response to the challenge of expressing the character of pre-Columbian architecture in the Temple, would have been to reproduce the detail of Maya or Inca building. What Mr. Tillotson did, in the facings of the wing walls and interior balcony, was to capture the spirit of the indigenous architecture, without lateral imitation. Moreover, this was accomplished with full awareness of modern means of

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490. Ibid.

491. Raquel de Constante was involved in the whole process of the Temple. She was member of the National Assembly throughout.

492. Kit Goldstein – The Light Over the Singing Mountain, pp. 13/14.

493. Kit Goldstein – The Light Over the Singing Mountain, p.15/16.

494. The thickness of the dome is ten centimeters.

495. Architect McLaughlin describes the opposite of what architect Rodriguez expressed.



producing cast elements in volume. Thus, the spirit of pre-Columbian America is logically executed within the contemporary idiom. The Indians of America, after centuries of suffering the destruction of their own highly developed architecture and the imposition of foreign styles, at long last have a House of Worship that expresses the great love in which the Universal House of Justice holds them and its admiration for their history.”

The Universal House of Justice in their message to the Baha’i World, wrote<sup>496</sup>: “The imaginative and inspiring concept of the architect, Peter Tillotson, has been wonderfully realized and we extend to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama on behalf of the entire world, loving congratulations on their achievement”.

15. “Most of the plants were the gifts of individual believers<sup>497</sup>, carefully nursed in pots before being transplanted to the permanent beds. A gift of cannas from Changuinola in Bocas del Toro<sup>498</sup> had unexpectedly burst into flower that very day...The actual labor was provided by volunteers among the Baha’is, one group crossing the Isthmus from Colon and working all day in the blistering sun, patiently mixing and pulverizing soil and peat moss”.<sup>499</sup>
16. The Mountain has been lowered by 36 feet to give large enough area for the Temple. Dynamite had to be used to lower the last 12 feet -400 holes of 12 feet were drilled and filled with dynamite. We now have a solid rock foundation. Lowering it does not change the fantastic view. Dirt from site was used to build parking lot for 50 cars. Ground was raised as much as 70 feet in one spot. Parking lot will be 9 feet below the Temple level so cars will not be seen from the Temple and will be separated by the gardens<sup>500</sup>.
17. The Chairman and the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama<sup>501</sup> on December 4, 1969, met with the President of the country Mr. Jose M. Pinilla and his vice-President Mr. Bolivar Urrutia to inform them of the up-coming construction of the Temple and asked for exemption of taxes throughout. The President welcomed with gratitude the construction of the Temple and appreciated that Panama has been selected as the first Latin country to have the Baha’i House of Worship. The book of ‘The Proclamation of Baha’u’llah’ was presented to him on behalf of the National Assembly, who accepted the book from the Baha’is with humility<sup>502</sup>.
18. In a letter dated March 2, 1970, addressed to All National Spiritual Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice informed of the excellent progress of the construction of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar of Panama, indicating of the contribution to this important undertaking where initially the beloved Guardian started with USD 1500, now urging a universal participation. The estimated final expenses would be one million dollars. The House indicated, as of 31 October 1969 an amount of USD 70,000 was contributed from the Baha’i International Fund, USD 85,000 from the National Spiritual Assemblies, USD 34,000 from the Local Spiritual Assemblies, and individuals and other sources aggregated USD 189,000. The House indicated in their letter that the construction will be

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496. Ridvan Message 1972.

497. Mostly donated by Mrs. Ruth Fendell, a long-standing American pioneer in Costa Rica.

498. A Province of Panama

499. Baha’i World vol. XV, p. 634

500. Letter of the NSA of Panama to Buren Douglas, Canal-Zone, dated June 24, 1968.

501. Mrs. Raquel de Constante and Mrs. Leota Lockman, respectively.

502. Letter of the NSA to the Universal House of Justice, dated December 18, 1969

completed before Ridvan 1972.

19. In one stage, Mr. Borah Kavelin<sup>503</sup> while visiting the Temple site in 1966 prior to its construction recommended to the National Spiritual Assembly that, “Tell the architect that air conditioning is indispensable in the Temple”. The matter that could never be realized<sup>504</sup>.
20. The corner stone of the building of the Temple was put in place on 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1967 – during the First Baha’i Inter-Continental of the Latin America, by Hand of the Cause of God Ruhiyyih Khanum, who was representing the House of Justice. The Hand of the Cause of God for the Western Hemisphere, Mr. Jalal Khaze’ was also present in the event<sup>505</sup>.

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503. Mr. Borah Kavelin, member of the Universal House of Justice at the time.

504. From the NSA report to the Universal House of Justice, dated September 28, 1966. Note: The constant blow of fresh air from all nine side openings and gates is so refreshing that it never needs air conditioning.

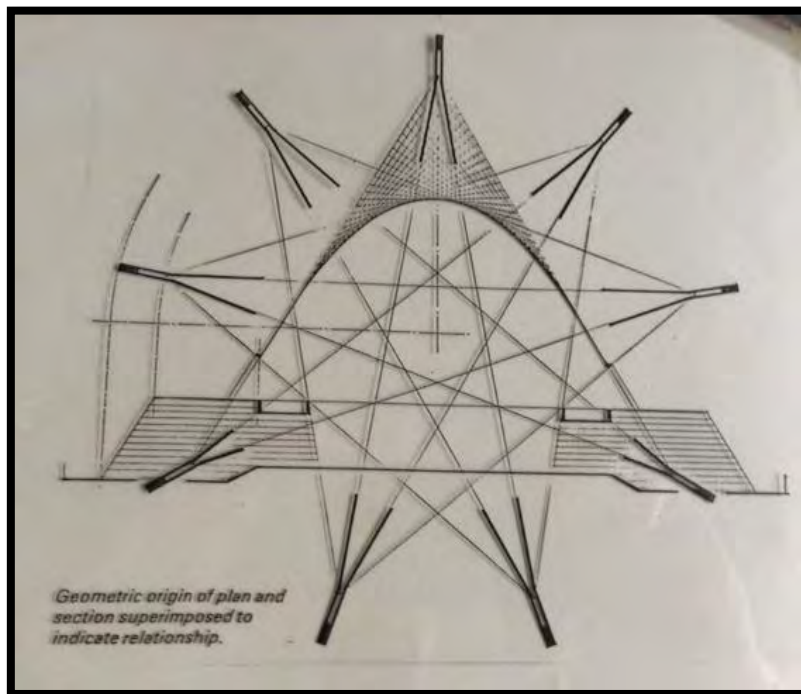
505. Donald Witzel, *El Maestro Silencioso*, p. 38 (The Silent Teacher)

## Annex 1

### Some anecdotes related to the Temple by Ed and Anita Dougan:

Upon request, Ed Dugan<sup>506</sup>, once Caretaker of the House of Worship together with his angelic wife, Anita, wrote the following relevant stories:

Ed and Anita were thrilled that Ed could be stationed in the Canal Zone, as the House of Worship was being built. It was just a year and a half after they became Baha'is. In 1971 they took their travel trailer and spent summer traveling across the U.S. and then heading south ending up in Panama City. Ed contacted the NSA to ask if there was anything he could do to help with the House of Worship. He offered to be the go-for for the team that was doing the construction.



Geometric origin of the plan and section of the Baha'i Temple of Panama, by the architect Tillotson

During construction Ed remembered of a Spanish fellow who was applying the decorative panels to the star points. The man told Paul Thiele, Francis Czerniejefski and Ed that the walls were not straight. They were sure he was wrong, but he insisted, so they measured them and found this was true. The problem was righted by adding more adhesive and hoping it would do.

While they were doing this measuring, a group of around half a dozen nuns came over to see what was happening on the mountain. They lived in a convent on a nearby hill. They asked what kind of building was being made. Since Ed was not important to the measuring process, he was asked to go down from the star points and explain about the Faith. The mother superior was well educated and spoke English well. Ed was intimidated by the whole idea, as he was a new Baha'i. He answered all their questions, which surprising himself. When he got home and he and Anita looked up the answers he had given, as he still felt incompetent. All the answers were 'right on'. This gave him confidence in the Holy Spirit's ability, as he still doesn't believe himself knowledgeable.

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506. Edward and Anita Dougan were the second caretakers of the House of Worship in Panama. Kern and Barbara Wisman were their assistants.

Because Ed was in the air force, he was able to take pictures of the progress of the construction from the air. Ed was ending his career in the service after 22 years, so he was offered retraining in photography and all the latest equipment to use as well.

When the House of Worship was completed, he was given the task of arranging transportation from the hotels downtown to services they were holding for the building dedication. He always remembers that no matter how much pressure he tried to apply, he couldn't get the bus company to sign a contract until the very morning of the dedication. The day was almost over when Ruhyyih Khanum noticed he had not been able to see the Holy Portraits that were on display. She insisted he leave his post getting people on and off the busses to do so.

A great rainstorm came up just as the last group<sup>507</sup> was going to see the presentation of the dedication ceremony. Many of the believers wanted to have Ruhyyih Khanum abandon the last service. Ed never forgot how she put on the shawl on her head and said: "If we said there would be a service at 4 o'clock then there will be one" and marched out into the downpour. With no glass in the House of Worship's window openings the rain whipped through the building as well as drenching her on the path up the hill from the caretaker's house. Ed was duly impressed.

The grounds were barren as the top of the mountain was chopped off when the excavation began. There was a woman pioneer from Costa Rica<sup>508</sup> that came to help with the design of the gardens Kenneth Rutan found many of the native palms and plants in the jungle. He would bring them up in bucket in Ken's car. Ed thinks that all the plants were given by Ken's searching through the jungle.

When Ed's tour of duty ended, they went to Omaha, where he got a job working with Ken Dagroo laying down the plastic stripes that mark the highways. This took them to western Nebraska where they stayed several years until they got a request from Panama NSA, asking them if they would take a three-month stint as caretaker of the House of Worship as the previous caretaker was ill and had to go back to the States, though he didn't speak Spanish.

Ed's job had ended so they were glad to go right away. When they arrived, Ed said he knew that the previous caretaker was not coming back as there was not one personal item left in the house. As the three-month's time ran out they were asked to extend their stay, which they did for a couple of years.

Richard Mirkowich was in charge of maintenance, when Ed was there at first.

Lightening hit the temple many times as the lightening rod with a red light was supposed to be on the top. When the mountain was lowered to level the top for construction the required height was changed so that the light wasn't required, and no one thought about the lightening rod that was still needed. When lightning struck there would be a hole the size of a dinner plate and as deep as the rebar.

Another problem with the dome was red spiders. At least once a year Ed would hook a cable to the cap on the dome and one of the 18 arches. A bosons like chair would be attached

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507. The dedication ceremony was held in two days and in four sessions each day. This is about the second day.

508. Ruth Moffet, as mentioned earlier was the one who offered all the exotic plants for the House of Worship.

to the cable and pulled up with block and tackle. There was a spray tank on the back of the chair for the bleach. A high-pressure hose came over the balcony railing to the chair. He would spray bleach up that section and rinse with water coming down. Then the cable would be changed to the next arch. One time when Ed was spraying the interior for spiders a storm came up. He was halfway down in the chair. When he looked down to have Esteban, the gardener, to lower the chair to the next level, he was nowhere in sight. He waited out the storm hanging halfway down, dreading the possibility of a lightning strike. During that cleaning the outside had 5 holes that had to be repaired. He was inside for only one of those.

The balcony inside had to be swept everyday as the strong electric lights<sup>509</sup> that used to be on the star points attracted bugs. One Sunday morning early he was sweeping when he saw a woman pulling the flowering plants out of the ground. With his sergeant roar he hollered "put it back". She thought she heard the voice of God, dropped the plants and ran. She may be still running! Another woman from the USA was upset when she saw us dumping a wheelbarrow of weeds over the edge of the cliff. She was a florist and saw the plants she could sell in the States for a bundle of money.

One time Ed came down the stairs and saw a car with the back door open and plants on the back seat. Around the corner of the star point a man came with his arms full of our plants. Ed walked up. Grabbed the plants out of his arms, grabbed the plants out of the back of the back seat. He slammed the car door and hurried to the caretaker's house to put the plants in a laundry tub full of water. The next day he asked Esteban to put them back around the House of Worship and found that he had plants that did not belong to us. Esteban asked where Ed had gotten all these new plants.

Several times the caretaker's house was broken into. Iron bars were pulled right out of the wall. Their dog, named 'Midnight' scared most of them away before they had a chance to move the things to their car. They worried about the portraits of Baha'u'llah and the blessed Bab, which were stored, wrapped in a precious rug in the closet in the air-conditioned bedroom.

We joked about Mount Sononate choir, which was a thousand frogs that inhabited the pool on top of the water tank. It was the rainwater from the roof of the House of Worship, and any brought up from a well down the mountain. It was all the water we had for any purpose.

At the end of the caretaker's house, Ed had cut down a tree at ground level while he worked there. When he visited 15 years later it had grown back to huge proportions. Ed always marveled at the fertility of the Panamanian soil. There were trees behind the caretaker's house that the woman pioneer from Costa Rica wanted to have it cut down. Kern Wisman, the man who was to replace Ed later thought he would have less trouble than Ed as he knew Spanish. However, when he asked that Esteban trim the trees, he found two of them looped off at the ground!

The floors at the Temple had to be mopped every morning. During the rainy season it had to be mopped after every time it rained. People were not allowed in if the floor was wet. Ed was very proud of keeping the floor shiny and clean.

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509. Originally there were two sets of light installed for the Temple, one set for outside to illumine the dome which were cool lights, and the other set were installed on the inside balcony to illumine inside of the dome, were yellowish warm lights. The inside lights were attracting too many bugs of every size, killing them all. Every morning the caretaker had bags full of insects to throw away. Finally, the inside lights were removed altogether. The existence of both sets would give the impression of a transparent dome during the night.

There was a little relief from the isolation on top of the mountain. Baha'is usually only visited on Sunday or when there was a crisis in their family. There were no other offices at the time. They rarely got to be with their community for Feast or to attend the LSA meetings, though they were just at the bottom of the mountain. Sometimes they would go to the bottom of the road to just watch cars go by when the hill was too quiet.

There is an amusing story that Ed Dougan wrote to the writer in 2004:

“The NSA asked Ed if he would take Ruhiyyih Khanum to get a lens for her camera. The only transportation he had was a Toyota 1000 (pick-up), a very small two-seater. He had taken Anita down to a friend's house in the Canal Zone while he did the errand. He picked her up at the hotel. After getting the lens Ruhiyyih Khanum wanted to thank him by taking him to lunch. He explained that Anita was waiting for him in the Canal Zone. Ruhiyyih Khanum insisted that they pick Anita immediately. She even wondered why they didn't have Anita with them while they shopped. Ruhiyyih Khanum scolded him. So, he went and picked up Anita. Ruhiyyih Khanum sat in one seat, Ed on the other. Anita had to imagine a seat with the gear shift between her seating on air. When we parked at her hotel, there happened to be some Persians there. They were appalled that at the way Ed had treated the revered figure of dear Ruhiyyih Khanum. He was told that if in the future she needed transportation, Ed should get a limo!!!”

## ANNEX II

### TECHNICAL DATA

#### A - Architectural: Nine Gateways to God<sup>510</sup>

Peter Tillotson, the winner architect of the House of Worship of Panama wrote his article for the Concrete Magazine.

“The word ‘temple’ is not a completely satisfactory definition of the building. The founder prophet and Guardian of the Baha’i Faith referred to the Baha’i Temple as the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar –a Persian word meaning ‘Source of the mention of God- a place of worship where all religions, races and sects may come together within its universal shelter.

“The Baha’i Temple of Panama is the fifth in the world. Previous Temples have been built in Wilmette, Illinois (North America); Sidney, Australia (Australasia); Kampala, Uganda (Africa); and Frnakfurt, W. Germany (Europe). Panama was selected by the Baha’is as an appropriate location for the Mother Temple of Latin America.

“This selection was not because of the size of the Baha’i community in Panama but rather because of the geographic significance. Panama has been described as the crossroads of the world where east meets west through the Panama Canal and north meets south. These symbolic associations are in accord with Baha’i concepts of world unity.

“The form of the Baha’i Temple itself is also symbolic. The nine-sided building surmounted by a dome asserts the essential unity of the nine major religions of the world. The site is three miles out of Panama City in a landscape of rolling hills. With certain limitations a free choice of site was available within a large area of land in a single ownership. A hilltop site was favored. In spite of anticipated constructions difficulties, the Baha’is selected one of the highest peaks and I endorsed the choice. The views over the Pacific Ocean and the Isthmus – particularly at dawn- were breathtaking. Early visits to the site –the last mile and a half uphill on foot were exhausting climbs in the tropical heat. A tortuous access road was constructed, and extensive site preparation undertaken as a preliminary necessity.

“The design of the Temple generates from the geometry of a nine-pointed star (a symbol of the Baha’i Faith) in both plan and section, and the consulting engineers discovered some interesting mathematical facts on examination of the shapes involved. The dome, springing from a nine-pointed star pattern of walls, is parabolic in section. It incorporates eighteen arched vaults on the underside, which intersect to create another nine-pointed star just below its apex. The arches around the base of the dome are inclined parabolic barrel vaults.

“Because the Panamanian climate is hot and humid, all openings in the structure are unglazed to permit free air-flow through the building. For the same reason, gates are provided instead of doors. The dome is like an umbrella and a ring of apertures near the apex are intended to assist cooling of the interior by convection. A promenade gallery on top of the walls, which form the base of the building offers maximum enjoyment of the surrounding views and extends outside the dome at each star point. The gallery also serves as a canopy to

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510. Concrete Magazine, November 1972

shield the main body of the Temple from driving rain.

“Acoustically it was expected that a public address system would be necessary, and one was installed. However, in practice many speakers do not feel the need to use it.

“In spite of the heavy rains, the lack of water supply to the site presented problems both during construction and in providing adequate servicing facilities for building. The dome is used as a catchment area, and the rainwater run-off is piped to an underground storage tank sized to maintain a supply of water throughout the dry season. Hopefully it will be unnecessary to lay a pumped water supply main to the site.

“From the outset I envisaged the design in terms of concrete. Other possible materials were considered but since the project had to be constructed by local contractors using the limited local resources as far as possible, the first choice proved most feasible. In fact, the entire building is an amalgam of cement and concrete products except for the gates and the dome cladding –an off-white ceramic pebble mosaic externally and sprayed acoustic plaster internally. Floors are in terrazzo. The walls are in situ reinforced concrete, which internally, is smooth rubbed and painted white. Externally, the walls are clad with 60cms square precast panels with a surface relief pattern and exposed aggregate finish.

“The Baha’is had requested that the Temple should evoke a pre-Columbian atmosphere, somehow reminiscent of the past civilizations of Central America. Panama itself has little cultural heritage but there is a wealth of precedent in the archaeology of the surrounding countries.

“The surface relief pattern on the wall facing slabs is based on motifs recurring in ancient Peruvian textile designs and mud reliefs and in Mayan stone mosaics and wall decoration in Yucatan. The exposed aggregate finish of Red Verona marble chips in brown cement is similar in color to the red sandstone prevalent in Mayan architecture. Both the hardwood molds and slabs were made in Panama. The molds were coated with a retarder and after casting, the aggregate was exposed by brushing the surface of the slabs. Credit is due to the subcontractors for the high degree of uniformity of finish achieved by this method.

“Landscaping is not yet finished but at the rate of vegetation growth in Panama the gardens could mature in one season.

“The recent dedication ceremonies were attended by a multi-racial gathering, which filled every hotel in Panama City. At the first view of the Temple from the air approaching Panama airport a whole aero plane load of hitherto anonymous people erupted into interested conversation.

“My own first close-up view of the completed Temple was late at night under floodlighting and many personal misgivings were dispelled. I was astonished to learn later that a legend has already grown amongst local Indians relating the floodlit Temple to the rising sun”.



## **B - Engineering:**

### **a. Concept of Engineering design**

In the same magazine the Structure Engineer, Arthur E. Low wrote his article:

“The Structure of the Baha’i Temple building consists of a concrete dome, 76mm thick, supported by nine massive masonry buttresses. Figure 1 shows diagrammatically the structural arrangement. The dome was conceived and designed as a shell springing from nine pairs of hinged bearings, stiffened by eighteen intersecting arch ribs, which were essentially architectural features. The building was designed to sustain, in accordance with Panamanian regulations, wind pressure on vertical projection of exposed surface of 0.96kN/m<sup>2</sup> (20lb/f<sup>2</sup>) and earthquake, assumed to act as a horizontal force, equal to 10% of the total (dead + live) load. The horizontal forces were resolved into radial components, which were resisted by a Y-shaped buttress wing walls, and tangential components, which were resisted in bending by a trough-shaped gallery slab linking the tops of the wind walls.

“Experience has shown that in order to obtain realistic tenders for surface structures with intricate curved shapes it is necessary to demonstrate clearly to the contractors the method of erection. In this building the stresses in the shell membrane were generally low and the main problems of structural design were concerned with the geometry of setting out the internal intersection arch ribs and the continuous arches around the perimeter of the dome. The contractors readily accepted our proposal to use gunite concrete for the shell, even though they have had no previous experience with this method of placing concrete and executed the construction successfully.

### **b. Form of the structure**

“At our first meeting with Peter Tillotson, the architect, towards the end of 1967, he showed us a model of eighteen intersecting ribs, set out from a nine-pointed star (Figure 2). At first we suspected that the profile of the ribs would be mathematically complex. However, we found that by choosing a paraboloid of revolution for the dome defined by the equation  $CZ=r^2$  (Figure 5a), the resulting profile of a rib at its junction with the shell soffit was a simple parabola.

Although for the purpose of stress analysis of the geometry of the shell was defined by its mid-surface, it was decided, from past experience that the most convenient reference surface both for setting out and construction of formwork was the soffit of the shell membrane.

“The tapered arch ribs and the inclined hoods over the perimeter openings were similarly set out with reference to their soffits. The method of setting out the internal intersecting ribs, 400mm wide, tapering from 600mm to 200mm and increasing to 600mm, is illustrated in Figure 3a. The surface of the concrete dome representing the soffit of the ribs was established and the material between the ribs was removed, leaving behind parallel-sided plane ribs (Figure 3b), with smooth transition at the intersections (Figure 3c).

“Because the continuous arches over the perimeter opening had to be tilted to form rainwater gutters, considerable problems were encountered in achieving the transition

between a small and large arch.

“The shape of an opening was defined by slicing the dome by a plane surface (Figure 4), surface B. A barrel of cylinder was fitted through this opening, and it was cut by another plane surface representing the front of the arch. Thus, the arch was generated by straight lines terminated by two plane surfaces.

### **c. Construction of the Dome**

“To construct the shell dome with steep sides by in situ normal concrete would have necessitated the use of double shuttering and high slump concrete. The possibility of pre-casting the shell in segments stiffened at the perimeter by the arch ribs was rejected because the large segments weighing up to 30t were too heavy and fragile for handling. Ferrocement was also examined but it was considered that the minimum thickness of the shell membrane should be 50mm and out experience showed that ferrocement for large shells was uneconomical when the thickness exceeds 40mm It was eventually decided to use gunite for the shell membrane, and precast concrete for the internal arches.

“The sequence of construction was decided at the design stage. The fair-faced precast concrete internal ribs were erected on centering and defined the shape of the structure. The formwork for the perimeter arches and the shell membrane was then erected and the entire structure was systematically gunited. The contractor elected to use a permanent shuttering of galvanized steel sheeting with press-out indentations for the from-work of the shell membrane.

“Gunite, or shotcrete in American terminology, was successfully employed by us in three major shell structures (References 1, 2 and 3) in which sand cement mortar was sprayed against flexible 3mm plywood shuttering or expanded metal permanent formwork. It is a well-established concrete material. For thin concrete sections a nominal 3:1 sand cement mixture has been found to be suitable. Clean washed sand with a moisture content of 3% to 5% is mixed with cement. Then the mixture is placed in the top chamber of a ‘Gun’, and by means of a system of air locks and rotating feeding device the dry material is fed into a hose and carried in an air stream to the nozzle where water is added in the form of a fine needle spray controlled by a valve in the nozzle body by the operator called the ‘Nozzleman’. The hydrated material is deposited in a continuous flow and builds up to a compact and dense mass of low water/cement ratio, high strength concrete.

“When spraying against steep surfaces it is rarely necessary to exercise control on mix proportions and water cement ratio because both adhesion and compaction is automatically controlled by the consistency of the mortar, while the strength of the concrete is determined not by the quantity but by the quality of the sand and the cement. A twenty-eight-day cube crushing of 50N/mm<sup>2</sup> can easily be achieved in practice. Gunite should not be used as a substitute for normally placed concrete without special attention to the design of the cross-section and the arrangement of the pattern of the reinforcement so as not to obstruct the deposition of the mortar or trap pockets of sand which rebound from the sprayed surfaces. Due to the richness of the deposited mortar exceptionally stringent control over curing and drying out has to be exercised if shrinkage cracks are to be minimized.

“The massive Y-shape buttress wing walls were constructed reinforced concrete.

#### **d. Structural Analysis**

“The stresses in the shell due to symmetrical loads were initially calculated by the Membrane Theory. The dome was then idealized into a space frame having infill panels represented by triangular planes stress plate elements to calculate the stresses in the arch ribs and the reactions at the eighteen point of support and to estimate the effects of local disturbances caused by the perimeter cut-outs and by the interaction of the arch ribs with the shell membrane.

“Conventional methods were used in the analysis of the buttress wing walls”.<sup>511</sup>

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511. The permission of printing purposes of this article was kindly given by the editor of the magazine.

Using this for a reference is fine with us. For the record, the article appeared in Volume 6, Number 11, pp.22–26, November 1972. James Luckey, Editor – *Concrete*. May 8, 2017.

## ANNEXIII

### THE STORY OF THE SYMBOL OF THE GREATEST NAME<sup>512</sup>

The short story on the Greatest Name's symbol hanging at the heart of the inside Nine-pointed star where the 18 concrete ribs meet together inside the dome of the Baha'i House of Worship of Panama:

"The Greatest Name of the House of Worship is being made of Mohagny wood of the Jungles of Darien, the dense tropical area dividing Panama from Colombia. There is no road connecting the two countries due to countless of rivers and constant tropical downpours.

"The main role-players in this episode are Mrs. Rachelle Jean Francois de Constante, known as Raquel de Constante, precious handmaiden of Baha'u'llah, who passed to the Abhá Kingdom on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2011 at 2:30pm in her home in Panama.

"Doña Raquel accepted the became a believer in 1946 and thereafter rendered unconditional and valuable services to the Cause of Baha'u'llah in Panama and in the region. In 1946 she became a member of the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Panama City and helped organize the First Latin American Conference held in Panama. In 1951 she became a member of the first Regional National Spiritual Assembly for Mexico, Central America, Panama and the Antilles. She was also the first Panamanian woman Coordinator for this Assembly. In 1954 Doña Raquel was a member of the Committee in charge of the purchase of the land for the future Panama House of Worship and was instrumental in monitoring the construction of the Temple, culminating in its dedication in 1972. In 1961 she was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the Republic of Panama, first Panamanian woman elected to this institution, in which she served for 45 years. In 1963 Doña Raquel attended the historical Convention held in Haifa, Israel for the election of the first Universal House of Justice.

"During the many years of service in the National Assembly she proclaimed the Faith to various Panamanian Presidents and prominent dignitaries and hosted numerous Hands of the Cause including, Madame Ruhyyih Khanum during their visit to this land. She became particularly close to Mrs. Amelia Collins, Hand of the Cause of God, and Mrs. Cora H. Oliver, Knight of Baha'u'llah.

"In her public life she was a Certified Public Accountant and businesswoman, member of the Panama Chamber of Commerce, APEDE-Panamanian Business Executive Association and the Industrial Syndicate of Panama, a highly esteemed member of these associations. This provided her with the opportunity to proclaim the Baha'i Faith, an opportunity she never failed to take advantage of.

"To the Baha'i Community in Panama, she was a pillar of strength and steadfastness, with a clear vision of the future of the Faith and a firm pillar to guide the community in the execution of the Plans for the expansion of the Faith, starting with Shoghi Effendi's Second Seven Year Plan in 1946.

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512. This article was originally written and published in the Payam-e-Baha'i Persian magazine.

With her passing, the Panama Baha'i Community lost a precious soul who exemplified the high standards and dignity to which every Baha'i is called to uphold.

The other role-player is Don Jorge Constante, husband of Doña Raquel, who was born in Ecuador and to a Catholic family. They married in 1951, the same year Doña Raquel was elected to the first Regional National Spiritual Assembly of Centro America. He was a successful businessman in the furniture business and had a factory of 200 workers (Taller Vista Hermosa). He was a simple man with very special qualities, such as: love, happiness, generosity, humility, detachment and service to mankind, always ready to sacrifice everything for his dear family and friends, serving mankind with high moral standards. In 1978, he and Doña Raquel were custodians of the Baha'i House of Worship of Panama for a period of two years, where he declared his faith in Baha'u'llah and died on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1990 as a Baha'i. Of their three children, Rachell, is taking after her mother actively pursuing the Baha'i activities in Panama.

### **The Special Wood**

The following story is a part of a speech by Mrs. Raquel de Constante where she was made a presentation to the Ngobe-Bugle (Guaymi) indigenous community of Panama, who were interested to know about the whole story.

“The history behind this piece of wood is very beautiful. It starts in 1951 when I came to know my husband, Jorge Constante and within one month we got married, following all the laws of the Baha'i marriage.<sup>513</sup> Jorge was not a Baha'i and the first thing I told him was that I was a Baha'i and of my full commitment with the new World Order of Baha'u'llah, in the field of the teaching and proclamation, helping the beloved Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi. I made him understand that because I was elected in the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Mexico, Central America, Panama and the Antilles, I had to make frequent trips every month in different countries in the region and deepen the Local Assemblies with the purpose that in the near future each country would have its own National Assembly.

“The Faith in the Central America was in its embryonic stage back then and the challenges were quite sizeable. Jorge accepted all my conditions with much love that he showed towards me. He himself would take me to the airport, would buy my tickets and would pay all my expenses in this regard. Without knowing, Baha'u'llah had put him in my path as an instrument so that I could serve His glorious Faith.

“Every time he picked me up from the airport, he had a surprise for me. Since he owned a furniture factory called “Taller Vista Hermosa”<sup>514</sup>. During my absence he would always surprise me with a beautiful piece of furniture made in the factory, having in mind that maybe I will reconsider and stay in Panama for a longer period. However, I always thank him for the beautiful gift and tell him: “Jorge, what a beautiful piece of work you have made with so much love but remember that my next teaching trip is such a date and I need you to take me to the airport”.

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513. Although the Baha'i marriage was not yet officially recognized in Panama due to the newness of the Faith.

514. Factory of beautiful scenery.

“Upon my return to Panama on one of my teaching trips, Jorge had bought a beautiful solid piece of Mohogany wood from the tropical jungles of Darien, which was just a cut of a huge legendary tree. Its cut and its diameter was quite unique. He gave this piece of precious wood as a gift to me so that in the future, I could use it for making a dining table for our home.

“Well, this piece of precious wood remained in the factory for over two decades until the construction of the House of Worship in Panama was about to end. A piece of native wood of the same thickness and diameter was required to make the round base of the symbol of the Greatest Name<sup>515</sup>. We tried everywhere to obtain such a piece of wood for this glorious purpose but with no success. Then I thought to myself: What about the piece of wood that Jorge gave me for the dining table, and to my surprise, its description coincided exactly with the piece of wood required for the Greatest Name. Then I prayed to Bahá'u'lláh and asked permission of Jorge to use it for the Temple. Jorge told me: “Raquel, that was my gift to you with all my love, you can use it as you please”.

“Jorge was not a Baha'i but all his life he lived a Baha'i life with radiant acquiescence and in 1978, while serving as custodians at the House of Worship, he declared his faith in Baha'u'llah.

“Through the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, the beloved Universal House of Justice was informed that finally we had the piece of wood and they sent us an approved copy of the design of the Greatest Name for this same purpose.

“The woodwork in its totality was carried on at the factory workshop of my husband “Taller Vista Hermosa”. During the carving of the design in the wood, the residing engineer of the House of Worship, the late Hawaiian Engineer Paul Thiele, the distinguished cabinetmaker Mr. Luis Urunaga, Jorge and I were present. Jorge gave orders to bring down the piece of wood, from where it was heavily chained for 20 years, with thick chains due to its very heavy weight. I was so happy that I offered some prayers in silence, giving thanks to Baha'u'llah, as this piece of wood had a special spiritual purpose, and it was meant for Baha'u'llah.

“The finished work was applied with three coats of varnish in order to bring out its natural color and to shine as such. After 39 years<sup>516</sup>, the shine of the finished work remains intact.

“All the benches of the House of Worship were also made of Panamanian native Mohogany, and all were prepared in the factory of my husband. Not a single nail was ever used to make the benches, but special wooden nails ‘called dowels’, were used from solid and strong wood called “Tarugos” to prevent rusting problem in the future.

“How happy, how very happy were both of us to be able to offer our service to the Cause of Baha'u'llah. Jorge with a total satisfaction and a dilated heart which he always possessed was proud of the way the invisible hands of Baha'u'llah directed him to get only a piece of that legendary precious tree in memory of the jungles of Darien for such a glorious purpose”.

“Don Jorge Constante passed away in 1990 at the age of 75, and 21 years later Madame

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515. The Greatest Name symbol is an invocation saying Ya Baha'ul-Abha, meaning O Thou Glory of Glories. Such a symbol adorns all the Baha'i Temples.

516. The finished work was done in 1972. 39 years later, is the date of this talk was 2011, the year of her passing.

Raquel Constante joined him in the Abha Kingdom. They are buried side by side in the “Jardin de Paz” (Garden of Peace) a beautiful Panamanian Cemetery in the heart of the capital city.

“Once during an interview Doña Raquel was asked: How has the Baha’i Faith influenced your life? To which she responded:

“The Baha’i Faith, since the day I accepted it with great joy ‘till this moment, has totally transformed my life, improving my moral and spiritual values, leading me to the fullness of my life, making me immensely happy and giving me the opportunity of long years of service...and....service...to this blessed Cause and to humanity, helping in the formation of a new society through the establishment of a New World Order designed by Baha’u’llah.”

In the handwriting of a letter of the beloved Guardian dated September 1951, Shoghi Effendi wrote to Doña Raquel the following words:

***“Dear Baha’i sister,***

***May the Beloved guide, bless and sustain you, remove every obstacle from your path, and enable you to win great victories in the service of His Faith in the days to come.***

***Your true brother, Shoghi”***

These words of the beloved Guardian written with his own hand, and whose original are kept today in the archives of the World Center of the Faith in Haifa, marked the life of Doña Raquel and her great commitment to the Cause of the Greatest Name.

## **CANAL ZONE**

### **Written by ARTHUR KRUMMELL**

On 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2005, Arthur (known as Arturo) Krummell, long standing pioneer of Panama, who ultimately buried his bones in his pioneering post, wrote some aspects of a Panamanian territory managing the Trans-Atlantic Canal administered by the US, at the request of Raquel de Constante:

“Arthur arrived in Panama City, as a Baha’i pioneer from Salt Lake County, Utah in November 1965. After some teaching trips with Canadian pioneer and National Spiritual Assembly colleague, Alan Pringle to the Central Provinces, Darien and San Blas Islands, he was assigned with another American pioneer to David, Chiriqui to teach the Faith in the Ngobe-Bugle (Guaymi), among the indigenous people to teach the Faith, where he served in that area for twenty-one months.

After his return to Panama City, Arthur married Maria Concepcion Arango known as Conchita, who was a new Colombian Baha’i. In September 1967, Arthur was employed in Canal Zone in Contract Administration with the US Navy in the Southern District<sup>517</sup> and only

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517. Balboa, Pacific side

two years later he was transferred to the Panama Canal Commission and moved to Coco Solo, in the Northern District<sup>518</sup> and worked in Warehousing and Supply, the work he carried to the time of his retirement in October 1991, when they moved to Panama City outskirts of Villa Zaita at the vicinity of the Temple.

Arthur and Concha had two sons, Amir and Russell. Amir moved to Dallas, Texas and Russell became pioneer in Asuncion, Paraguay.

Arthur wrote that sometimes before the passing of the Guardian of the Faith in 1957, the Canal Zone Baha'is requested permission to form a National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canal Zone. The Guardian denied their request. At one time, after the dedication of the Baha'i House of Worship of Panama, there were 95 pioneers living in Canal Zone of which mostly were Americans.

The US Canal Zone believers were the main donors in Panama to the Baha'i Funds. There were two Local Spiritual Assemblies in Canal Zone, Balboa and Cristobal. The Local Spiritual Assembly meetings and the 19-Days Feasts of the Southern District were held in a former two-story wooden fire station in Cocoli on the West Bank of the Canal. In the Northern District meetings were held in various Canal Zone rented houses and apartments.

The Canal Zone Baha'is participated in various activities of the Baha'i communities of Panama City and the City of Colon but did not teach much outside the Canal Zone and the two mentioned cities. Some of the Baha'is, however formed teaching teams with Panamanian believers of these cities and taught the Faith regularly in the eastern and western sectors of the Province of Panama, the urban and rural areas of the Central Provinces, and the towns of the Trans-Isthmian Highway in the Province of Colon and occasionally in the urban and Guaymi area of the Chiriqui Province.

With the implementation of the Panama Canal Treaty on 1 October 1989, most of the US Canal Zone pioneers returned to the US, resulting in a notable decline in membership in the Canal Zone communities, and a loss of experts in Baha'i Administration, Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, and loss of engineering and technical skills in maintenance and improvements to the Baha'i Temple and other Baha'i properties. The Panamanian believers, however, began to assume their duties and responsibilities for the administration and propagation of the Faith in Panama, and Spanish, instead of English became the norm for consultation and written reports.

Well remembered were the many 19-Day Feasts well prepared in advance with symbolic burning of candles, slide shows, classical music, short dramas, rehearsed readings, and creative refreshments and the joyous occasions when the Canal Zone believers joined the Panama City believers to celebrate Naw-Ruz and other Baha'i Holy Days. From the hub of activities, not many older believers and memories remain.

Note:

Arthur Krummell, an American pioneer to Panama, indeed was an example of purity and

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518. Cristobal, Atlantic side



service. During all the time the writer knew him – 1971 – 1990 – he was member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, serving as the Treasurer with immaculate accuracy.

Arthur was always at the service of the community, just like her beloved wife, Concha, affectionately called Conchita. These two beloved believers travelled to all the communities of Panama from one extreme to another, taking other friends along for teaching and visiting the remote communities. In all kind of services, they were at the front line.

Concha's older sister, Lucy, who married to Fred Berest, another American pioneer, who used to be a Hollywood movie actor, and later on Auxiliary Board Member, together with Concha and small kids -Barbara and Diane- , used to travel in the hot tropic weather of Panama to most of the communities. Many of the friends of those remote areas remember well these two sisters who did lot of sacrifice walking in mud, under downpour, crossing rivers and mountains, on foot or on the horseback, travelled back and forth, teaching and visiting the local friends.

The writer has memories of these two sisters who married two American pioneers, and truly served the Faith with love and dedication.

Now Fred and Arthur gone, Lucy in ex-Yugoslavia and Conchita remains Panama, all still serving the beloved Faith.

## **MANUEL DE JESUS FLORES RODRIGUEZ**

Manuel was born on 18 February 1945 in El Salvador and passed away on 6 March 2023 at the age of 78.

Manuel came to Panama as a pioneer in mid-1971, a year before the end of the Nine-Year Plan of the Universal House of Justice.



Manuel de Jesus Flores. He pioneered to Panama from El Salvador in mid-1971 and I arrived there few months later and has remained in Panama from the date of his arrival. We have been best friends ever since. For decades has been member of the NSA of Panama and well respected. Married Lorenza and have three daughters. Manuel was the travel teacher who knew all the corners of Panama, all the indigenous people of Ngobe-Bugle, Kuna-yala and Choco. He is the eminent pioneer who is well acquainted with the Panama geography, history, and the social order. He is one of the few Baha'is that is well versed with the Faith.

Since his arrival, he was at the service of the National Teaching Committee and the National Spiritual Assembly almost in all areas of service. His function was to visit the communities around

Panama City, Central Provinces, and later on any other community in country, especially the indigenous communities of Panama.

Manuel and the writer, who also arrived as a pioneer to Panama in the same year, shared many times and places together for almost a year. And as soon as the plan of the Teaching Committee was launched, Manuel was mostly on road, visiting the remote areas, wherever Baha'is resided in the country. In fact, certainly it could be said, no one knew the details of all the communities in the republic better than him. He also knew almost every believer in any given community.

At an early stage, when he was still single, Manuel did not have any restriction of staying with the friends in the remote communities for any period, and spending quality hours with them, sharing the messages of the House of Justice as well as the messages of the National Assembly, which other wise would not be possible to bring them to their attention.

Manuel lived very simply throughout his life, and of the comfort life known to many, he did not enjoy much but he did enjoy of many other richness of life that others were deprived of, as in his travels, Manuel deepened friends and the Local Assemblies, guided the communities in their children and youth classes. He shared the history of the Faith in detail to the indigenous communities and as he travelled most of the time on foot, he had ample time to meditate and converse with his Creator by reciting Tablets of Baha'u'llah and those of the Master. He was satisfied with little food but took ample share of spiritual aliment.

The writer remembers a trip taken at his arrival to the country, with him together with Ruth Pringle and Jane Czerniejewski to Darien, the virgin jungle of Panama's border with Colombia for a couple of weeks. As there were no roads or paths to walk, small wooden boats were paddled in streams that covered the land, by the young believers, taking the visitors from one community to the next. His qualities were exceptional, he was calm and patient and a genuine friend to all. All he had for the believers of the communities was love and compassion.

There were other trips that Manuel, Robert Little and the writer did together in the indigenous area of Ngobe-Bugle, in the lush mountainous areas, as well as in the Central Provinces of the republic. Everybody enjoyed of his stories and the way he thought the Faith with eloquence, with heart, soul and mind.

Manuel had good and strong voice, where he could sing the Baha'i songs with happiness and gestures and thus teaching them to the youngsters and youth. Even in the meetings, he always led the chorus, and all the rest followed him.

Manuel knew well the administration of the Faith very well. He was member of the National Assembly for over forty years, and seldom he was absent from meetings, unless he was thoroughly sick with malaria or other tropical maladies and or he was visiting a community commissioned by the institutions.

Once the Radio Baha'i of Panama was established in Boca del Monte of the Province of Chiriqui, mostly to serve the indigenous communities of Ngobe-Bugle known as Guaymies, Manuel was an active participant and for quite sometimes he was its manager. Even when he got married to his wife Lorenza, they made their home in Boca del Monte, where he ultimately buried his bones.

Also, for a period well over five years, Manuel and Lorenza were the caretakers of the Baha'i

House of Worship of Panama.

Manuel never stopped serving actively the Faith, which was the ultimate goal of his life, even when he was busy gaining livelihood, he was engaged in his travels and visiting the communities for the sole purpose of deepening them with the messages of the House of Justice and those of the National Assembly.

Every five years that there was election of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Manul made all the efforts to be there and not to lose such a bounteous opportunity.

At the passing of Manuel, the Universal House of Justice sent the following message to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Panama on 8 of March 2023:

Dear Baha'i Friends,

The Universal House of Justice regretted to learn from your letter dated 6 March 2023 of the passing of stalwart follower of the Blessed Beauty Manuel de Jesús Flores Rodríguez. His services to the Cause of God, including as a long-time pioneer to your country as well as a member of your National Assembly for four decades, are recalled with warm appreciation. Also remembered are his efforts in sharing the healing message of Baha'u'llah with the indigenous peoples of your country and his contribution to Radio Baha'i Panama. Kindly convey to his family members and other loved ones the condolences of the House of Justice and assure them of its supplications in the Holy Shrines for the progress of his illumined soul in the heavenly realms and that they may all find peace and comfort at this time of bereavement.

Manuel has left behind one daughter in El Salvador and three daughters with Lorenza who live in Panama, all active in the Faith.

## CIRILO SÁNCHEZ GONZALES (1930-2000)

Written by Counsellor Bernardino Sanchez

Don Cirilo Sanchez was one of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama during the 1960 to 1980s, quite an active Baha'i. At continuation, his biography as written by his youngest son, now member of the board of the Continental Counsellors Bernardino Sanchez.

Cirilo was born on March 4, 1930, in a small village called Boca de Balsa in the district of Besiko of the Indigenous reservation of Ngobe-Bugle on the north of Panama, within the Chiriqui Province.

While still 5 years old, he was given up for adoption to a family in the city of David. The foster mother made sure Cirilo would get a proper education, what the indigenous people of the time did not have any access to. Under the custody of the foster family, he got his name and family name; thus, he was called Cirilo Sanchez Gonzalez.

In the 1950s he decided to return to his own community and pay a visit to the family in Boca de Balsa, where he found an adverse reality of the life and conditions of the community. The lack of education, health, housing, deliberate excess of drinking of alcoholic beverages and polygamy was what he could not accept.



Mr. Cirilo Sanchez and Mrs. Susan Bejerano de Sanchez,  
early indigenous Baha'is of Ngobe-Bugle

During his staying he came to know his future wife, Susana Bejerano of Soloy who attracted his attention, being a responsible man, went to ask permission of her parents getting consent to marry her, who of course, would approve to their marriage. Thus, they became lifetime partners, of which, 9 children were born to them, five boys and four girls, (Thomas, Alberto, Petra Amelia, Isis, Rita, Marcelo, Vahid, Tahireh, Ramon and Bernardino).

Observing a total lack of schooling in the region, Cirilo started to share his acquired knowledge and education from the city. He aims at the children and the youth of the Soloy community, where his immediate family lived.

His pedagogic work was to teach how to read and write, how to pronounce words in order to understand short and long sentences. As a volunteer teacher, he did not have tools and material for proper schooling, nevertheless, as a creative person he could find a way to make the difficult easy in the teaching and learning of the pupils.

His patience and love for knowledge gave him the power to apply discipline, assurance to the students who were motivated to learn the everyday lessons that he would prepare for them. In this way he brought the art of reading and writing to dozens of youths and children of those days.

Once a certain man by the name of Moses Bejerano from the Plan de Chorchá, in the vicinity of Soloy in Chiriquí paid him a visit, observing his way of teaching, invited him to a meeting in the Panama City, where he might be able to get some help for buying educational material that his students need. Cirilo liked and accepted the invitation, especially to be able to present in the meeting his needs for sponsors to get all the help he can for his students.

In 1960s with great hope, he went to Panama and as a result, he was invited into a Baha'i meeting. Here, for the first time, he heard the new word 'Baha'i' and became curious to know more about it, though his intention of going to the capital city was not to go to such meetings. Some of the Baha'is approach him and share some literature with him. Cirilo commented later that he could not sleep that night, because of reading interesting themes that occupied him all night. Then and there, he decided to join the Most Great Name community.

As a result of this historic visit to Panama, his life changed totally. Once with the fire of the love of Baha'u'llah in his bosom, he returned to his own community, yet without any educational material, but with a renewed spirit, which grew in every moment and decided to dedicate himself to the service of the community. He announced to his family of the dawn of a new day, splendor and glory for his people, whoever becomes a Baha'i.

With the desire of announcing to all his extended family about the Cause, he goes to proclaim the newly received Faith, achieving entry of many of the members of his family. From among those immediate family members who accepted the Faith were Luis Cuevas<sup>519</sup>, Luciano Cuevas, Nicolas Cuevas, Calentin Cuevas and all their spouses and their children. And among those who rose to serve the Cause with fervor were Valeria Bejerano, Julia Bejerano, Feliciano Moreno, Alberto Perez<sup>520</sup> and Bernabe Bejerano<sup>521</sup>, who was considered as the first believer.

Cirilo could not stop teaching the Faith with fervor and with vigor. Once he took the wife of his wife –Susana– and both decide to make a teaching and proclamation trip to other neighboring indigenous communities of the region such as Embera-Waonán Reservation, which required walking 8 hours in the mountainous jungles, going through big and small rivers, under copious rain and sometimes under very hot sun, with very limited food to satisfy themselves.

One of his brothers, Luis Cuevas, also decides to accompany him in one of his trips to announce to other communities of the coming of the new Faith. A very intense service with much happiness and passion for Cirilo to see many of his co-religionists have made for themselves a new culture, calling it the Baha'i culture!

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519. Luis Cuevas was brother to Cirilo, also member of National Assembly for some years.

520. Known as Don Alberto, who was blind from both eyes, yet a fantastic teacher of the Cause. He would ride his horse, taking his youngest son along, would travel to different communities teaching the Faith.

521. Don Bernabe is the one who met with Mrs. Ruth Pringle in her maiden trip to the Reservation and helped her as a guide, although he did not declare his faith then, but when the message reached him by Cirilo, he had already declared.

In order to make sure of the permanent presence of the Faith in their community, Cirilo consulted his wife Susana, who was the owner of a piece of land in the vicinity where they were living, big enough to be hosting big Baha'i meetings to be dedicated to the Faith by the early seventies. By that offer, Soloy became the central seat of the Ngobe indigenous reservation. Naturally the institutions initiated the first building called Dr. Muhajir's Institute, named after the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Muhajir, followed by the Cultural Center of Ngobe-Bugle and the first Baha'i radio station of Panama in its vicinity at Boca del Monte.

Cirilo Sanchez used to gather big gatherings of 300 to 500 receptive participants as well as believers, for all night narration of the histories of the lives of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, their principles, laws and teachings, which would make great mentions in all circles in those days. His favorite book was Dawn Breakers, which contained many stories of the early heroes of the Faith. Friends remember him speaking in Spanish where his brother Luis Cuevas would translate his words into local dialect of Ngobe in this way, the narrated history would be comprehensible enough to be assimilated by the participants of what the Faith is all about.

I remember my father Cirilo always used to say his prayers at dawn, in midday and during the evenings. Under his eloquent voice, he would indicate to all the importance of praying before any other service, work or any other matter.

He taught all his children the principles of the Baha'i education and the desire of growing through full education to be able to earn their living through dignity. Through his loving guidance and along with that of his wife Susana, made sure that their children did participate in the celebration of the Nineteen Day Feast, the Baha'i Holy Days, the anniversaries of the Faith, Firesides, Conferences and Teaching activities.

Being one of the early believers of such a community along with his relatives, gave him the opportunity of building a new family, which transformed the character of the inhabitants, which is naturally the most advanced group of the Country.

To Look back, live in present and ensure the future of a people who would recognize the greatness of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, is the most precious gift that Don Cirilo and his wife Susana have left behind, and today we see hundreds of children that have been educated, youth, men and women who have scattered around the seed that has germinated from this powerful Faith of Baha'u'llah and has accepted it for eternity.

Cirilo Sanchez served as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of his community for many years. On one occasion, he was also member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama.

Beside his dedicated life to the Faith, he also dedicated himself to agriculture to maintain subsistence and be able to send his children to school. He used to always chant the prayer of Baha'u'llah '*Blessed is the house...*' He also used to sing the song of '*He is the King of kings, He is Baha'u'llah...*' He always listened to the Radio every morning after having said his prayers and other spiritual tasks, to know the news and during the evenings, he used to listen to the classical music to relax. His tool was to consult on every matter before taking any decision. He had a genuine love for all his children. He loved to read the Holy Writings during the morning and evening.

Don Cirilo would always dwell for justice, for unity, for leaving behind the old customs, applying the equality of right for men and women and for universal education for all in the Ngobe-Bugle community.

During his life of service, together with his wife Susana, they came to know many pioneers, some Hands of the Cause of God, later on they met with Counsellors of the Faith who visited their community. Among the Hands, we could mention Ruhyyih Khanum who made several trips to Soloy. In 1983 she inaugurated the Cultural Center and the Institute of Dr. Muhajir. In 1975 met Dr. Muhajir. And among the Continental Counsellors for America Ruth Pringle, Donald Witzel, Dr. Arbab and others could be mentioned<sup>522</sup>.

Reaching the last years of his life, he always used to say that he had fulfilled with his mission to promulgate and scatter the teachings of Baha'u'llah. For Cirilo, seeing then a much more advanced community with regional institutions such as Regional Baha'i Council, Joint Regional Institute, many Local Spiritual Assemblies established in many communities and good promises for a better future, would give him strength before he abandoned this world.

Finally, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November of 2000, at the age of 70, Don Cirilo took his last breath, and left this world at 17:00 in his community of Soloy. Present were his wife, Susana, his daughter Tahire and one of his grandchildren. All his children and family members of the community accompanied him to rest in his sepulcher, where the Regional Baha'i Council got in charge of performing the Baha'i funeral laws while he was being interred the very next day. His wife Susana followed him few years later.

The writer remembers two conversations with don Cirilo, in one of the visits to the Soloy Community, back in the seventies. In the first occasion, don Cirilo, with much fervor and passion told me that we love Baha'u'llah and the Bab, and you know, if they would have announced their revelation here among us, we would have given our lives for them, we would have helped them to take this message to all over the Chiriqui Province, to Panama, to Central and South Africa, to everywhere in the world. Their message is very precious for us.

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522. Little would he know that one day his own Bernardino would become member of the Board of Continental Conseller of the Faith for the Americas.

## LUIS CUEVAS

Written by Counsellor Bernardino Sanchez

Luis Cuevas was born in the community of Boca de Remedio, Province of Chiriqui in mid-1930. He found the Faith in 1962 in the community of Soloy. He was an agriculturist and together with his family they dedicated to this profession, producing corn, rice, cassava, banana and coffee, and thus, they would make their living.

Luis was considered a born leader of the community for his charisma and good relationship with all. Once his brother Cirilo invited him to a Baha'i meeting in Soloy, with the direct purpose of acquaint him with the Revelation of Baha'u'llah and effectively, he enrolled himself in the Faith. As a result, him and his family's life was crystalized around the teachings of the Baha'i Faith. Luis raised to teach the Faith to his own brothers and friends with tremendous enthusiasm, where all of them accept the Faith.

He establishes the Faith in the community of Boca de Remedio, where the first local institution of the Baha'i World Order came to existence, and himself became an active member of the community and member of the Local Spiritual Assembly, helping all the activities of the Faith, serving with distinguished excellence his community and its members.

Luis excelled as translator of prayers, quotations and even the sacred books from Spanish to Ngabere dialect. He was an able person to invite other communities to big gatherings where together with his brother Cirilo would teach the new Faith to all. He was known as a just arbiter to solve communal and family problems.

Together with his wife, Margarita Gallego, had six children, three boys and three girls, they were: Raquel, Virgilio, Kasin, Molito, Beatriz and Leota.

He was always the first to rise as Travel Teacher, meeting with other Baha'i families, arranging conferences and Firesides. According to him, the families would get together to know the verities of the new Faith, which has been prophesized by a certain "Sukia Banchi". The Sukias were visionary people -having an innate power- who could interpret dreams and foretell the future happenings. According to Sukia, God has said that a light will come from the Orient whose rays would illumine the Occident, a new divine message which to appear for the Ngobe people. Certain distinguished people will recognize the message, which promotes unity, would respect their language and would value their culture. Therefore, the



Mr. Luis Cuevas, member of the NSA of Panama, 1970-1974



message that Baha'u'llah was announcing, would in fact confirm this vision and they were to follow such a Revelation.

### **His Contributions**

Teaching and diffusing the principles of the Faith in all different parts of the Reservation was his passion, became his mission and his sole purpose of his life to announce the new message of Baha'u'llah, first to his own family and then to others. His love for the Faith made Luis to become a Travel Teacher and pioneer in teaching the Faith.

He was a patient man and deeply in love with the Faith, he was both simple and generous. These qualities were so attractive that he could easily win the entire Cueva, Rodriguez and Palacios families for the Faith.

In 1970 he walked through mountains and jungles, rivers, and valleys to the communities on the Atlantic side, in Boca del Toro region helping to take the Faith's message to the virgin areas and other communities. He was able to teach the Faith to Boca de Sagui, Quebrada Molejon, Soloy, Sabana Husso and each and every one of these communities reached the level of having their Local Spiritual Assemblies.

For Luis, the long distances would shorten by teaching the faith from community to community. He could easily communicate with the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, the institution from which he could receive documents, materials for teaching and would share them with his communities.

From the moment he accepted the Faith in 1962, Don Luis dedicated his heart and soul to serve the Cause and his people. One of the most distinguished services he rendered was his dedication to the teaching the children and the community how to read and write, how to translate from one language to the other, as he himself would do with important translations of the Baha'i Texts. In more than one occasion, he was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, where he would travel from his hometown together with his brother Cirilo, to go to Panama for the meetings.

Luis donated a portion of his land for the Local Spiritual Assembly's gathering in Boca de Remedio, where they could get together and consult how to disseminate the teachings of the Faith.

Don Luis passed away in 1992 – the Holy Year – in his hometown. The funeral was under the auspices of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Boca de Remedio.

## Mamachi<sup>523</sup>

In the other occasion, don Cirilo told us of the appearance of a prophetess among the Ngobe-Bugle (or Guaymí) people. He said that the Catholic Faith was not at all successful to teach the Christianity among his people therefore, they conceived a plan to make a fake religion based on the Catholicism calling it the faith of Mamachi which would be exclusively for the Ngobe people, and ultimately it remained as such, entered into the Constitution as the religion of the Ngobe people. Cirilo and Luis upon hearing this matter went to visit Mamachi herself and were successful in teaching her the Faith. She became a Baha'i and left her claim as a prophetess, herself becoming a teacher of the Faith. But for whatever the reason, her man-made religion remained behind, and some people accept her religion as the religion of the Reservation, being a kind of adopted Catholicism for the indigenous people. According to Don Cirilo and Don Luis, Mamachi died as a Baha'i sometime in the eighties.

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523. Mama Tata or Mama Chi is a **Christian syncretistic** religion found in parts of Panama. It is a mixture of Catholicism and animism that has become popular among the **Guaymí** people.

**Religious Beliefs.** Despite almost five hundred years of Christian—mainly Catholic—influence, the Ngawbe still retain certain traditional religious beliefs, which are manifest in their oral traditions and in certain rituals. Included are beliefs in a protector god, a god of lightning, various spirits of good and evil, and a number of culture heroes to whom the Ngawbe attribute godlike qualities. Wooden crosses placed on rooftops and on trails at the entrances to hamlets ward off evil spirits when someone is ill. The use of such crosses appears to be non-Christian in origin.

In 1961 a nativistic religious movement, known as the religion of Mama Chi (Little Mother) emerged among the Ngawbe as a result of the visionary experience of a young Ngawbe woman. This movement, at once transformative, revitalistic, and innovative, discouraged all contact with the outside world, prohibited the consumption of alcohol and the principal Ngawbe rituals at which alcohol is consumed (*balsér'ias* and *chicherías*), instituted periodic prayer meetings, and prophesied doom and destruction if the Ngawbe did not comply with the tenets of the new religion and great good fortune at the end of five years if they did. Throughout the 1960s, the Mama Chi religion had a profound social impact on Ngawbe culture. Today it has only a small following. Wikipedia

## Annex IV

### Brief sketch of Baha'i Administrative Institutions in Panama

The following report had been type-written by Louise Caswell, in mid-1940 and it was found in the papers left behind by Julie Regal. This sketch shows problem from the point of view of the residing pioneer in Panama, who later on moved to Colon trying to avoid deepening any misunderstanding within the newly formed community of Panama.

There are three stages of the development of the Baha'i Faith in Panama. First, the Panama Group, then the Baha'i Isthmian Group, and finally the Spiritual Assembly of the city of Panama, Republic of Panama.

The Panama Group of six members, all residents of Panama City, was formed November 1842, three years after the two pioneers, Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell, settled in Panama. Alfred Osborne was secretary.

In January 1943, Sr. Gerardo Vega, a Baha'i from Costa Rica, chosen by his assembly to come to Panama to help in the teaching work, was delegated by Louise Caswell to teach in Panama. He conducted bi-weekly classes in Spanish in the apt. of L.C.<sup>524</sup> At the end of four months, he presented the names of three declared believers for acceptance into the Faith.

Gerardo Vega was not understood by the other pioneers who had come to the Isthmus in the meanwhile, and they seldom came to the meetings. He asked for a meeting of prayers and consultation but had no success in this. He then asked for a special meeting in which he could give his opinion of teaching the Cause in Panama. When this meeting was called the main part of the time was taken up with dissolving the Panama Group and the formation of the Baha'i Isthmian Group, which was to include residents of Canal Zone and the Republic of Panama, two distinct civil communities. Alfred Osborne, now resident of the Canal Zone, was made secretary. At the end of the meeting, Sr. Vega was heard, and his talk was translated into English. He recommended many things for Panama, among others that the Baha'is visit the sick in hospitals and do charity work. The attitude of the members toward Sr. Vega was one of the tolerations rather than acceptance in the true spirit of brotherhood. Not once did one of the members of the B.I.G.<sup>525</sup> offer a constructive criticism to Brother Vega, although they disapproved of his teaching methods. Neither did they attend the meetings he conducted for teaching, except one of two times.

During the four months that Sr. Vega conducted bi-weekly classes in the apt. of L. C. the members of B. I. G. seldom attended and when they did it was apparent that they did not like his indirect method of teaching. He talked about many non-Baha'i subjects. His purpose was not understood. These meetings were in the nature of fireside group and were not held in a Baha'i Center as there existed no Baha'i Center after the two pioneers, Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell separated and lived apart in November 1943. This separation took place according to the instructions of the NSA through the IAC as per letter of October 1943.

Just before Sr. Vega returned to Costa Rica, he presented the names of three believers at a

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524. L.C. is Louise Caswell

525. BIG is Baha'i Isthmian Group

meeting in the study class. Louise Caswell presented these names to the secretary of the B.I.G. and asked him to call a meeting to consider their application for membership in the Baha'i Faith. This B.I.G. had been authorized by the NSA of the US and Canada. The secretary did not wish to call a meeting because he thought their acceptance was premature due to the attitude of the group toward Vega's pupils. At the next meeting of the B.I.G., Louise Caswell proposed the three names, but the group was too busy with making arrangements for the Centenary to give time to this important matter. The group was busy making arrangements for their delegate, a resident of the Canal Zone, to attend the Centenary.

Meanwhile, Sra. Blanca de Campos, a Panamanian, living in Panama, had been trying to be accepted into the Faith for several months but her name was not presented with the other three for different reasons. First, she did not press the point and felt that she was not wanted, in the second place, Louise Caswell knew that a certain member of B.I.G. considered her in an unfavourable light.

So, Panama did not have a recognized delegate at the Centenary because the Panamanian residents waiting to enter the Cause were not accepted.

Nine months passed. Elsa Rohrmoser, one of the three students proposed by Sr. Vega was accepted into the B.I.G. She is a resident of Panama.

Another month passed, Sr. y Sra. Villalon, also proposed by Sr. Vega and residents of Panama, were accepted.

In February 1945, Sra. Blanca de Campos, resident of Panama, who had been wanting to enter for a year, was accepted by B.I.G. At the first meeting at which her name was proposed a motion was made to table her petition for six months. This motion was not passed, and the maker of the motion left the meeting in a rage.

Five days before April 21, 1945, the date set by Shoghi Effendi for the assembly in every country in L.A.<sup>526</sup>, Celia de Madrid, resident of Panama, was accepted into the Faith. An Assembly was formed on the appointment day, then Baha'is voting. The result of the voting was as follows: Chairman, Louise Caswell; Cor. Sec., Julie Regal (who moved into Panama from the Canal Zone to form the nine); Recording Sec., Srta. Elsa Rhorsmoser; Cora Oliver Treasurer; Jose Villalon, Betty Villalon, Celia de Madrid, Isabel Ortuno (who became believer in Costa Rica), Blanca de Campos. The tenth Baha'i at the election was Benilda Angulo de Green. She has a small baby and cannot attend meetings.

It seemed advisable in order to show courtesy to a traveller who had helped the Faith here to postpone the first 19-day feast meeting. This was done in consultation with five members of the Assembly, but not at a duly called meeting of the Spiritual Assembly. An administrative mistake was made by all present at the Feast by holding a spiritual Assembly meeting. It considered that since only nine of us could meet that the Spiritual Assembly and 19-day feasts would be held together. All were notified of this meeting and eight came. After this the friends wished to have the 19-day feast and Spiritual Assembly combined as they could not go out more than one night for the meetings. The treasurer objected to the combined meetings and her point was well taken although expressed in a spirit of vindictiveness that was not

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526. L.A. is Latin America

understood by the new believers.

The treasurer attended the second meeting for a few minutes only, and at the third meeting offered her resignation as treasurer saying that she was not understood. Unanimously, the friends urged her to remain as treasurer. Alfred Osborne, a visitor from the Canal Zone, contributed to the consultation at this meeting of the 19-day feast and Spiritual Assembly.

Since the meeting, at which it was evident that there was inharmony among the believers, two Baha'is have not come to meetings. One is recording secretary. Efforts have been made to get the minutes from her, but she said she was coming to the next meeting. Then she moved and since then has left town.

At a later meeting the matter of having the Spiritual Assembly meeting and the 19-day feast together was brought up for reconsideration and although the point was correct and well taken, yet the spirit in which it was presented was so confusing that the friends were thrown off their balance. This took place in October<sup>527</sup>, and since that time, it has not been possible to get the friends together for a quorum meeting until January 1946, when Mrs. Collins came.

Raquel Flores was accepted into the Faith after the formation of the LSA but has never attended a meeting since.

In the short history of the BIG, five believers were accepted into the Cause who resided in Panama City. One believer from Colon, Mr. Geo. A. Bernal, was accepted in April 28. Mrs. Iola Edwards, Mr. and Mrs. Facey were accepted May 22 by the Baha'i Isthmian Group, or those who appointed themselves a committee for teaching on the Isthmus.

The writer of these notes, L.C<sup>528</sup>, knows of no weekly meetings held in the city of Panama or the Canal Zone except the ones held in her apt. If any such meeting have been held they have not been reported to the B.I.G. or to the Spiritual Assembly of Panama.

After the Spiritual Assembly of Panama was formed, the B.I.G. dissolved after several meetings. They appointed a committee composed of Cora Oliver, Julie Regal, the Hamiltons, Alfred Osborne to function as a teaching committee in the Canal Zone and all of Panama except the city of Panama City, which they considered to be under the jurisdiction of the Panama Spiritual Assembly. This committee also was to control the funds, place the library and take care of the unfinished business of the B.I.G. Apparently, this committee has not been given official recognition by the NSA of US.

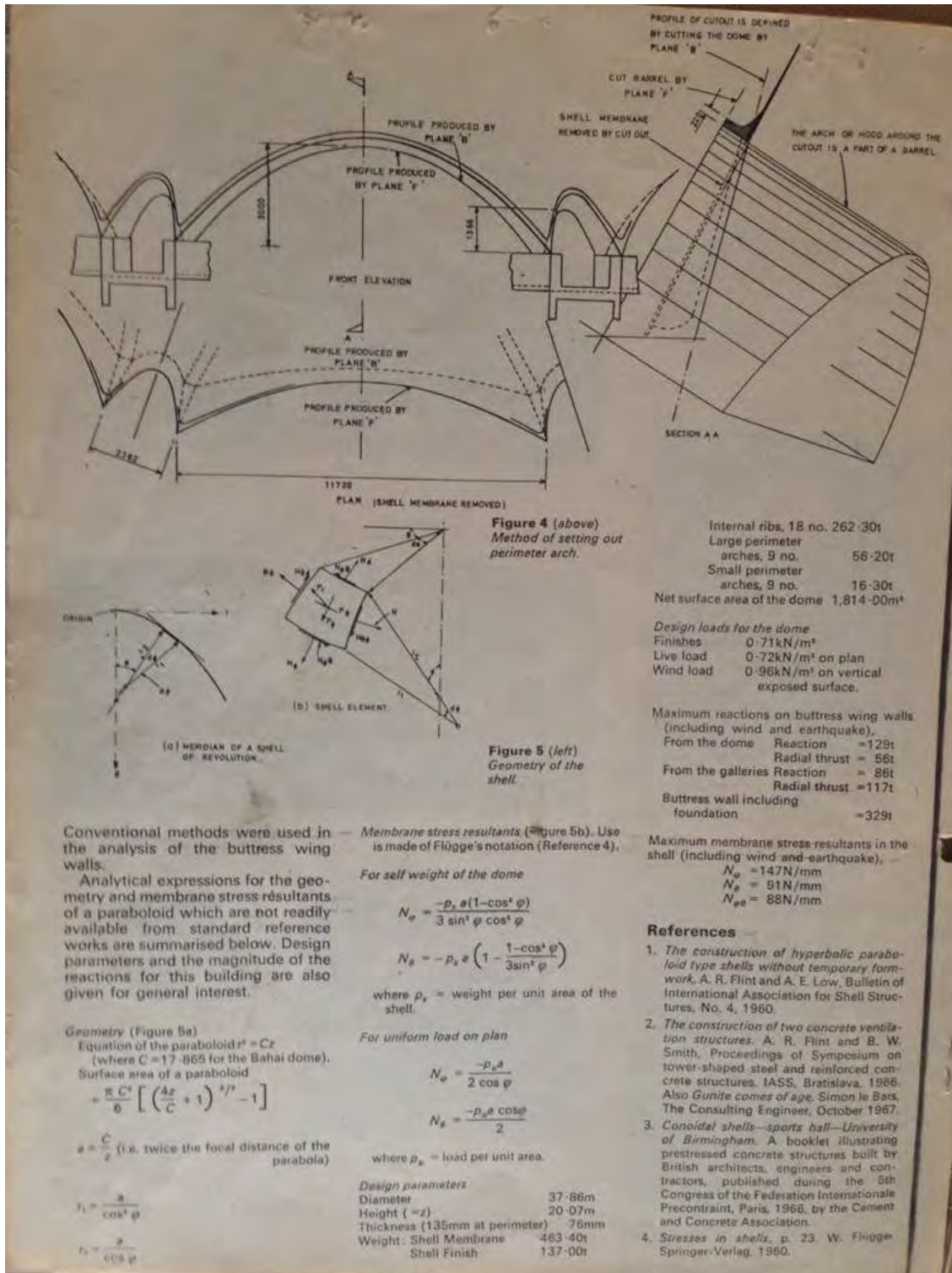
The notes of the B. I.G. offer details of this short report up until April 1945. Following that date the date can be found in the notes of the Spiritual Assembly of Panama now in the hands of Elsa Rohmoser and Julie Regal. The notes of the first three meetings of the Panama S.A. are not at hand, as Elsa Rohmoser is out of the city. Several efforts have been made to contact her.

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527. Note: It is handwritten: Should be Sept.

528. Louise Caswell

# Some technical drawings of the Panama Temple



# How the Temple rose on the mountain



## The work of Panamanian personnel

The world's fifth Baha'i Temple was built in Panama to symbolize the geographic significance of world unity at the crossroads of the world, where east meets west through the Panama Canal and north meets south through the Isthmus. The Temple is a nine-sided star-shaped building surmounted by a dome to assert the unity of the world's nine major religions.

The structure has an overall diameter of 200 feet at the base and is 92 feet high. It has a dome 92 feet in diameter at the base and 65 feet high. The auditorium seats 550 people. Construction was completed in December 1971 by Diaz y Guardia, S.A., Panamanian general contracting firm. **GC**

The Temple is built on Cerro Sonsonate (Singing Mountain, one of the highest peaks in Panama) 737 feet above Panama City. Its location provides broad views over the Pacific Ocean and the Isthmus of Panama. Around the top of the walls a sheltered promenade gallery for viewing extends outside the dome at each star point. From this gallery visitors can look inward on the auditorium as well.



The base of the structure is nine massive concrete buttresses that form a star and are connected by a ring beam that forms the promenade gallery.

AUGUST 1973/369

# UNITY IN DESIGN & CONCRETE



Architect: Peter Tillett, London • Structural Engineer: Flint & Neill, London • Major Contractor: Diaz y Guardia, S.A., Panama / René Orillac, C.E., Chief Engineer • Project Engineer: Paul Theilo, C.E., Hawaii • Ready Mixed Concrete: Concreto, S.A., Panama / Roberto Zauner, C.E., General Manager

## PROTEX Products Used in Each Phase of Baha'i Construction

The impressive Baha'i Temple in Panama combines a blend of many forms of concrete. The versatility of products for concrete manufactured by Protex Industries Inc. was challenged during the construction of this unique project.

Protex Industries met this challenge and successfully supplied products for all phases of the concrete construction.

**FORMS:** All forms were initially treated with Protex Silicone Seal to protect them against warping due to moisture absorption prior to their use. Pro-Cote, chemical form release agent, was used on all forms to insure maximum form life and positive form release.

All precast concrete forms were coated with Probond Epoxy WS-250 to insure the integrity of the shape and produce a smooth finish. The surfaces were coated with Pro-Cote, form release agent, to insure a clean, positive release.

**CAST-IN-PLACE CONCRETE:** All cast-in-place concrete contained PDA 25R, water reducing and set retarding admixture, to provide sufficient placement time, improved workability, placeability, finishing, increased strength and rate of strength gain.

All cast-in-place concrete was cured with Protex White Pigmented Curing Compound, PW-3.

**GUNITED CONCRETE:** The gunite for the dome was shot with Accel-A-Set, set accelerator for gunite and shotcrete. The use of Accel-A-Set produced rapid setting of the gunite and accelerated the rate of strength gain.

**PRECAST CONCRETE:** All precast concrete contained PDA Hi-Early, water reducing, set accelerating admixture, to improve workability, placeability, finishability, increase strength and rate of strength gain to accommodate early handling.

All precast concrete was sealed with Protex Silicone Seal to provide positive protection against humidity and staining.

All precast concrete grout contained Probond Vinyl bonding agent to produce a positive bond in the grout.

**MORTAR:** All mortar contained Probond Vinyl bonding agent to produce a positive bond for all masonry.

**CONCRETE REPAIR:** All concrete repair was performed with Probond Epoxy ET-150 bonding agent and PC-201 patching compound. Probond Epoxy ET-150-N bonding agent was used for bonding cold joints.

Protex Industries Inc. manufactures and markets worldwide a complete line of products for concrete. Your concern for quality is our concern. Contact your local Protex field representative for his assistance.



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# Nine gateways to God



## British design for a temple in Panama

A nine-sided Baha'i temple, consisting of a gunitite concrete shell dome on a podium in the shape of a nine-pointed star, has been erected on the 700-ft-high hill of Cerro Sonsonate north of Panama City. In the face of fierce international competition a young British architect, Peter Tillotson, was selected to design the unusual structure, and he was aided by a British firm of consulting engineers, Flint and Neill. Here Peter Tillotson reveals some of the thinking behind the design, and Arthur E. Low of the consulting engineers describes how the work was carried out.

### a symbolic form in concrete

by Peter Tillotson



Peter Tillotson, MCD, B.Arch. (Liverpool) ARIBA, has worked in Nigeria and in London, and has been in private practice since 1964.

THE WORD 'temple' is not a completely satisfactory definition of the building. The founder prophet and Guardian of the Baha'i Faith referred to the Baha'i Temple as the Mashriqu'l-Adhikar—a Persian word

meaning 'Source of the mention of God'—a place of worship where all religions, races and sects may come together within its universal shelter.

The Baha'i Temple of Panama is the fifth in the world. Previous Temples have been built in Wilmette, Illinois (North America); Sydney, Australia (Australasia); Kampala, Uganda (Africa); and Frankfurt, W. Germany (Europe). Panama was selected by the Baha'is as an appropriate location for the Mother Temple of Latin America.

This selection was not because of the size of the Baha'i community in Panama but rather because of the geographic significance. Panama has been described as the crossroads of the world where east meets west through the Panama Canal and north meets south. These symbolic associations are in accord with Baha'i concepts of world unity.

The form of the Baha'i Temple

itself is also symbolic. The nine-sided building surmounted by a dome asserts the essential unity of the nine major religions of the world. The site is three miles out of Panama City in a landscape of rolling hills. With certain limitations a free choice of site was available within a large area of land in a single ownership. A hilltop site was favoured. In spite of anticipated construction difficulties the Baha'is selected one of the highest peaks and I endorsed the choice. The views over the Pacific Ocean and the Isthmus—particularly at dawn—were breathtaking. Early visits to the site—the last mile and a half uphill on foot—were exhausting climbs in the tropical heat. A tortuous access road was constructed and extensive site preparation undertaken as a preliminary necessity.

The design of the Temple generates from the geometry of a nine-pointed star (a symbol of the Baha'i Faith) in both plan and section, and the consulting engineers discovered some interesting mathematical facts on examination of the shapes in-

Concrete November 1972

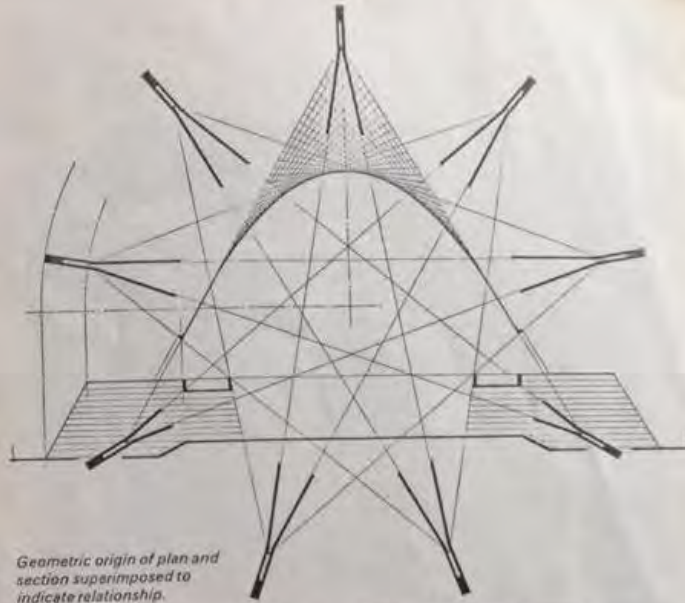
volved. The dome, springing from a nine-pointed star pattern of walls, is parabolic in section. It incorporates eighteen arched vaults on the underside which intersect to create another nine-pointed star just below its apex. The arches around the base of the dome are inclined parabolic barrel vaults.

Because the Panamanian climate is hot and humid, all openings in the structure are unglazed to permit free air-flow through the building. For the same reason, gates are provided instead of doors. The dome is like an umbrella and a ring of apertures near the apex are intended to assist cooling of the interior by convection. A promenade gallery on top of the walls which form the base of the building offers maximum enjoyment of the surrounding views and extends outside the dome at each star point. The gallery also serves as a canopy to shield the main body of the Temple from driving rain.

Acoustically it was expected that a public address system would be necessary, and one was installed. However, in practice, many speakers do not feel the need to use it.

In spite of the heavy rains, the lack of a water supply to the site presented problems both during construction and in providing adequate servicing facilities for the building. The dome is used as a catchment area, and the rainwater run-off is piped to an underground storage tank sized to maintain a supply of water throughout the dry season. Hopefully it will be unnecessary to lay a pumped water supply main to the site.

From the outset I envisaged the design in terms of concrete. Other possible materials were considered but since the project had to be constructed by local contractors using the limited local resources as far as possible, the first choice proved most feasible. In fact, the entire building



Geometric origin of plan and section superimposed to indicate relationship.

is an amalgam of cement and concrete products except for the gates and the dome cladding—an off-white ceramic pebble mosaic externally and sprayed acoustic plaster internally. Floors are in terrazzo. The walls are in situ reinforced concrete which, internally, is smooth rubbed and painted white. Externally, the walls are clad with 60cms square precast panels with a surface relief pattern and exposed aggregate finish.

The Baha'is had requested that the Temple should evoke a pre-Columbian atmosphere, somehow reminiscent of the past civilisations of Central America. Panama itself has little cultural heritage but there is a wealth of precedent in the archaeology of

the surrounding countries.

The surface relief pattern on the wall facing slabs is based on motifs recurring in ancient Peruvian textile designs and mud reliefs and in Mayan stone mosaics and wall decoration in Yucatan. The exposed aggregate finish of Red Verona marble chips in brown cement is similar in colour to the red sandstone prevalent in Mayan architecture. Both the hardwood moulds and the slabs were made in Panama. The moulds were coated with a retarder and after casting, the aggregate was exposed by brushing the surface of the slabs. Credit is due to the subcontractors for the high degree of uniformity of finish achieved



The surface relief pattern of the walls is based on ancient Peruvian and Mayan motifs.



One of the fair-faced precast concrete internal ribs is lifted into place as the dome begins to take shape.

by this method.

Landscaping is not yet finished but at the rate of vegetation growth in Panama the gardens could mature in one season.

The recent dedication ceremonies were attended by a multi-racial

gathering of people from all over Panama City. At the first view of the Temple from the air approaching Panama airport a whole aeroplane load of hitherto anonymous people erupted into interested conversation. My own first close-up view of the

temple dome was late at night under floodlighting and many personal impressions were dispelled. I was astonished to learn later that a legend has already grown amongst local Indians relating the floodlit Temple to the rising sun.

## The concept as an engineering design

by Arthur E. Low



Arthur E. Low, BSc (Eng), DIC, MICE is an associate of Flint and Neill, consulting engineers, who have used gunite concrete extensively. His recent work in the design of concrete structures included the National Theatre.

**THE STRUCTURE** of the Baha'i Temple building consists of a concrete dome, 76mm thick, supported by nine massive masonry buttresses. Figure 1 shows diagrammatically the structural arrangement. The dome was conceived and designed as a shell springing from nine pairs of hinged bearings, stiffened by eighteen intersecting arch ribs, which were essentially architectural features. The building was designed to sustain, in accordance with Panamanian regulations, wind pressure on vertical projection of exposed surfaces of  $0.96 \text{ kN/m}^2$  ( $20 \text{ lbf/ft}^2$ ) and earthquake, assumed to act as a horizontal force, equal to 10% of the total (dead + live) load. The horizontal forces were resolved into radial components, which were resisted by the Y-shaped buttress wing walls, and tangential components, which were resisted in bending by a trough-shaped gallery slab linking the tops of the wing walls.

Experience has shown that in order to obtain realistic tenders for surface structures with intricate curved shapes it is necessary to demonstrate clearly to the contractors the method of setting out and construction of the formwork and the method of erection. In this building the stresses in the shell membrane were generally low and the main problems of structural design were concerned with the geometry of setting out the internal intersecting arch ribs and the continuous arches around the perimeter of the dome. The contractors readily



Early stages in the guniting process on the dome.

accepted our proposal to use gunite concrete for the shell, even though they have had no previous experience with this method of placing concrete, and executed the construction successfully.

### Form of the structure

At our first meeting with Peter Tillotson, the architect, towards the end of 1967, he showed us a model of eighteen intersecting ribs, set out from a nine-pointed star (Figure 2). At first we suspected that the profile of the ribs would be mathematically complex. However, we found that by choosing a paraboloid of revolution for the dome defined by the equation  $CZ = r^2$  (Figure 5a), the resulting profile of a rib at its junction with the shell soffit was a **simple parabola**.

Although for the purpose of stress analysis the geometry of the shell was defined by its midsurface, it was decided, from past experience that the most convenient reference surface both for setting out and construction of formwork was the soffit of the shell membrane.

The tapered arch ribs and the inclined hoods over the perimeter openings were similarly set out with reference to their soffits. The method of setting out the internal intersecting ribs, 400mm wide, tapering from 600mm to 200mm and increasing to 600mm, is illustrated in Figure 3a. The surface of a concrete dome representing the soffit of the ribs was established and the material between the ribs was removed, leaving behind parallel sided plane ribs (Figure 3b), with smooth transition at the intersections (Figure 3c).

Because the continuous arches over the perimeter openings had to be tilted to form rain water gutters, considerable problems were encountered in achieving the transition between a small and large arch.

The shape of an opening was defined by slicing the dome by a plane surface (Figure 4), surface B. A barrel or cylinder was fitted through this opening and it was cut by another plane surface representing the front of the arch. Thus, the arch was generated by straight lines

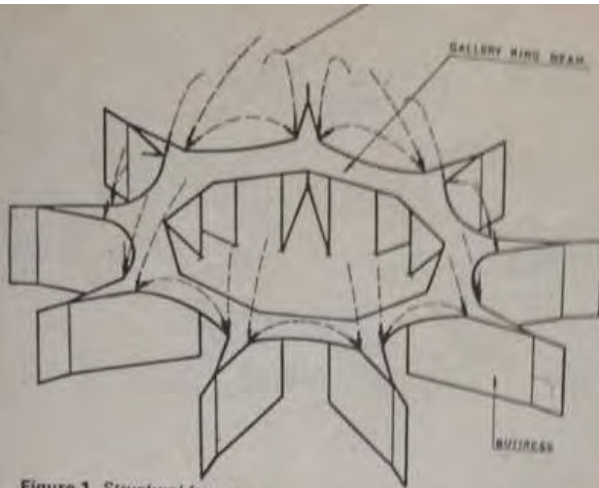


Figure 1 Structural layout



Figure 2 Model of eighteen intersecting ribs

terminated by two plane surfaces.

### Construction of the dome

To construct the shell dome with steep sides by in situ normal concrete would have necessitated the use of double shuttering and high slump concrete. The possibility of pre-casting the shell in segments stiffened at the perimeter by the arch ribs was rejected because the large segments weighing up to 30t were too heavy and fragile for handling. Ferrocement was also examined but it was considered that the minimum thickness of the shell membrane should be 50mm and our experience showed that ferrocement for large shells was uneconomical when the thickness exceeded 40mm. It was eventually decided to use gunite for the shell membrane, and precast concrete for the internal arches.

The sequence of construction was decided at the design stage. The fair-faced precast concrete internal ribs were erected on centering, and defined the shape of the structure. The formwork for the perimeter arches and the shell membrane was then erected and the entire structure was systematically gunited. The contractor elected to use a permanent shuttering of galvanised steel sheeting with press-out indentations for the formwork of the shell membrane.

Gunite, or shotcrete in American terminology, was successfully employed by us in three major shell structures (References 1, 2 and 3) in which sand cement mortar was sprayed against flexible 3mm plywood shuttering or expanded metal permanent formwork. It is a well established concreting material. For thin concrete sections a nominal 3:1 sand cement mixture has been found to be suitable. Clean washed sand with a moisture content of 3% to 5% is mixed with cement. Then the

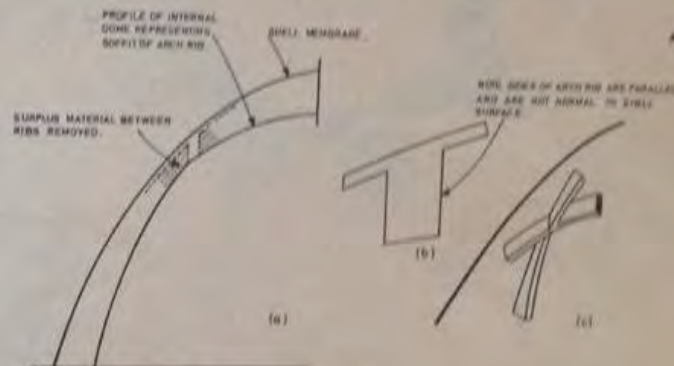


Figure 3 Method of setting out internal arch ribs.

mixture is placed in the top chamber of a 'Gun', and by means of a system of air locks and rotating feeding device the dry material is fed into a hose and carried in an air stream to the nozzle where water is added in the form of a fine needle spray controlled by a valve in the nozzle body by the operator called the 'Nozzleman'. The hydrated material is deposited in a continuous flow and builds up to a compact and dense mass of low water/cement ratio, high strength concrete.

When spraying against steep surfaces it is rarely necessary to exercise control on mix proportions and water cement ratio because both adhesion and compaction is automatically controlled by the consistency of the mortar, while the strength of the concrete is determined not by the quantity but by the quality of the sand and the cement. A twenty-eight days cube crushing strength of 50N/mm<sup>2</sup> can easily be achieved in practice. Gunite should not be used as a substitute for normally-placed concrete without special attention to the

design of the cross-section and the arrangement of the pattern of the reinforcement so as not to obstruct the deposition of the mortar or trap pockets of sand which rebound from the sprayed surfaces. Due to the richness of the deposited mortar exceptionally stringent control over curing and drying out has to be exercised if shrinkage cracks are to be minimised.

The massive Y-shaped buttress wing walls were constructed in reinforced concrete.

### Structural analysis

The stresses in the shell due to symmetrical loads were initially calculated by the Membrane Theory. The dome was then idealised into a space frame having infill panels represented by triangular plane stress plate elements to calculate the stresses in the arch ribs and the reactions at the eighteen points of support and to estimate the effects of local disturbances caused by the perimeter cut-outs and by the interaction of the arch ribs with the shell membrane.

370 CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION

Formwork for the shell was built in the space between ribs to define the shape of the shell. Reinforcing steel was then set over it. Concrete, made with an accelerating admixture, was applied to build up a thickness of three inches over most of the area, increasing to 2 1/2 inches at the perimeter. This was the first time shotcrete had been used in Panama.



The precast reinforced concrete rib is being lifted into place to support the dome. The ribs are 1 1/2 inches wide for most of their length but taper from a depth of eight inches near their lowest intersections with one another to 2 1/2 inches at bottom and top.



All openings were left ungrouted for use as flow. The formwork was constructed to form a space over the opening on the apex of the dome.



Other photos courtesy of Brock Barham, P. E. The Concrete Society (England) Photo courtesy of CONCRETE Journal

10 percent of the sum of the dead plus live load (assumed to act horizontally) amounting to 20 pounds per square foot on vertical projections of exposed members and for horizontal forces. The building was designed for a wind pressure of four pounds per square foot from any direction. Form a continuous series from base to peak with walls. When two ribs were joined to form one joint of linked beams on the interior of the model shows the relationship of the



The reinforcing steel being erected reveals the shape of the formwork in this view looking outward toward a point of the ribs.

# Photo Album

Photo Album



Panama- A vintage photo of a city street



Panama- FERROCARRIL – Plaza 5 de Mayo Square



Panama- AVENIDA CENTRAL



Panama- PARQUE SANTA ANA





Mrs. Louise Caswell  
At her apartment where the first four evening sessions  
were held.



Mrs. Cora Oliver, 'Later knight of Baha'u'llah for Belize'  
on the balcony of her apartment.



Julie Regal



Julie Regal's last photo at the age of 95



Julie Regal with her daughter Diane



Julie Regal with her grandson David



Rachelle and Cora at the Centenary of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah, (Haifa, 1992)



Julie Regal (left), Louis Caswell (right)



Luis Cuevas with his brother and Counsellor Donal Witzel.



Teresa Buckley, one of the believers of late 1960s of Panama



Working: left to right Jose Villalon (Panama), Hugo de Arteagabeitia (Chile), Gayle Woolson



From left to right  
Louise Baker, Clara Luz Montalvo, El Salvador, Alejandro Baldizon, (Guatemala),  
Alfred Osborne, (Canal Zone), Celia De Madrid, (Panama), Taken In Mrs. Oliver's  
Apartment where the morning sessions were held.



Singing the program for the guardian after the morning session

Mrs. Gayle Woolson and Dr. Walter from Cuba, Mr. Arteagabeitia





Miss Louise Baker and the representative of Chile  
Mr. Hugo Arteagabeitia



Four representatives from left to right  
Mr. Alejandro Baldizon, Guatemala, Miss Louise Baker, (Venezuela), Sr.  
Carlos Porras, (Costa Rica), Mr. Hugo Arteagabeitia, (Chile).





Seated from L. to R Ugo Arteagabeitia, James Facey.  
Standing L. to R: Mrs. Emilia Collings, Iola Edwards, Macie Galdys Facey and Gayle Woolson.



Mrs. Collins: I am going to tell you the most beautiful story of Haifa- to Mr. & Mrs Facey



SR. Arteagabeitia working on Radio Program Mrs. Oliver's apartment.



Hugo Arteagabeitia, Julie Regal, Louise Caswell

\*



The Closing session January 25, 1945, at The Inter America University



Carlos Porras, representative from Costa Rica, singing at a meeting.



Public meeting in English, January 28, 1946. Present Mrs. Collins, Louise Caswell, Cora Oliver, Julie Regal.



Two views of the Audience (110 present)



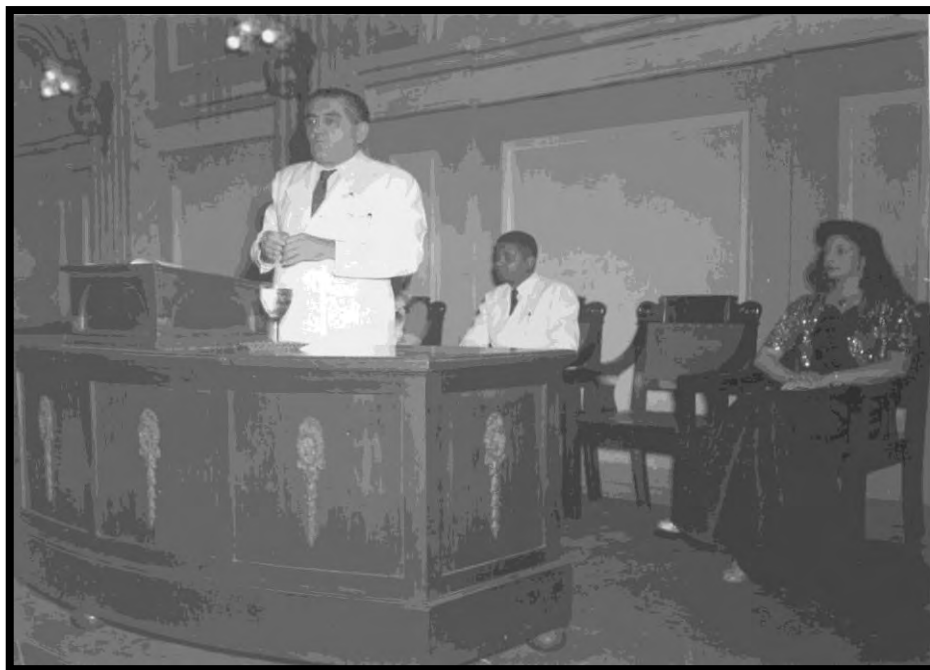
From left to right  
Miss Elizabeth Cheney, Mr. Alfred Osborne (Chairman) Mrs.  
Gayle Woolson, DR. Octavio Mendez Pereira, the President of the  
Republic of Panama



Closing session Pioneer, Miss Elizabeth Cheney  
Theme: The lesser Peace



DR. Octavio Mendez Pereira, the President of the Republic of Panama,  
Rector of the Inter America University delegate of Panama to the San  
Francisco conference.



The closing session  
DR. Octavio Mendez Pereira the President of the Republic of Panama speaking  
on the theme:  
The problem of the peace in the light of the San Francisco conference.



The last speaker of the closing session travelling pioneer, Mrs. Gayle  
Woolson

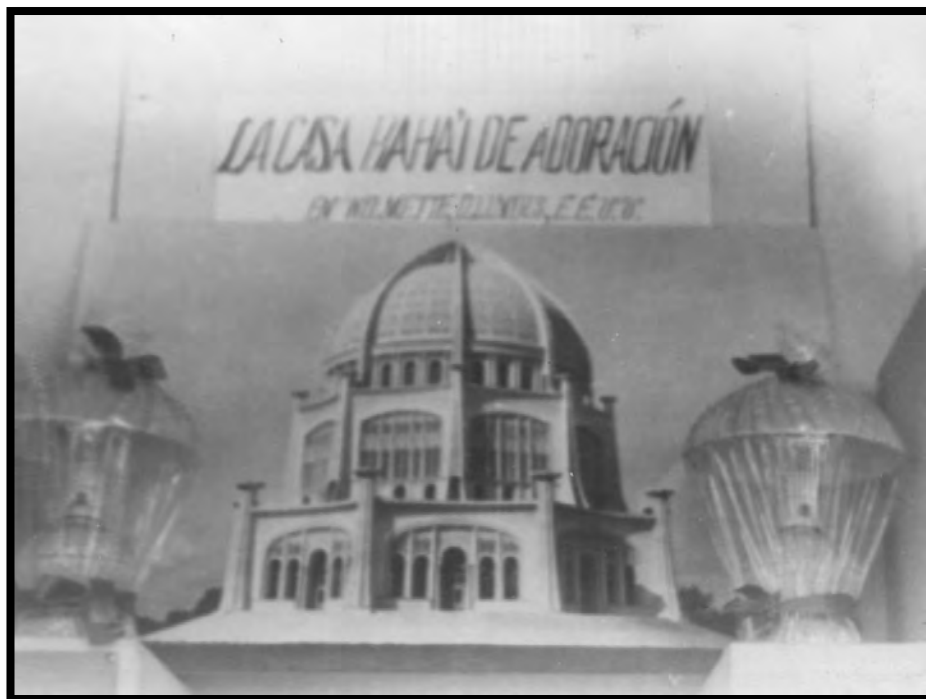


Baha'is at the congress after morning session





Display of picture of Baha'i house of worship in window of Cas Grant Panama.





From Left to Right:

1st row seated on floor:

1. Alejandro Baldizon – (Guatemala)
2. Hugo de Arteagabeitia – (Chile)
3. Gayle Woolson - Pioneer, (Costa Rica)
4. James Barrett – (Chile)
5. Carlos Porras – (Costa Rica)

2nd row:

1. Lola de Maya – (Panama)
2. Julie Regal - Pioneer, (Panama)
3. Iola Edwards - Colon, (Panama)
4. Cora Oliver - Pioneer, (Panama)
5. Yolanda Stronach – (Venezuela)
6. Louise Baker - Pioneer, (Venezuela)
7. Robert Hooker – (Nicaragua)

Back row:

1. Alicia Facey - Colon, (Panama)
2. Alfred Osborne – (Canal Zone)
3. Natalia Chavez – (Honduras)
4. Clara de Montalvo – (El Salvador)
5. Elizabeth Cheney - Pioneer
6. Blanca de Campos – (Panama)
7. Amelia Collins – (USA)
8. Louise Caswell - Pioneer, (Panama)
9. Macie Facey - Colon, (Panama)
10. James Facey - Colon, (Panama)



From left to Right:

1st row seated on floor:

1. Alejandro Baldizon – (Guatemala)
2. James Facey - Colon, (Panama)
3. James Barrett – (Chile)
4. Carlos Porras – (Costa Rica)

2nd row:

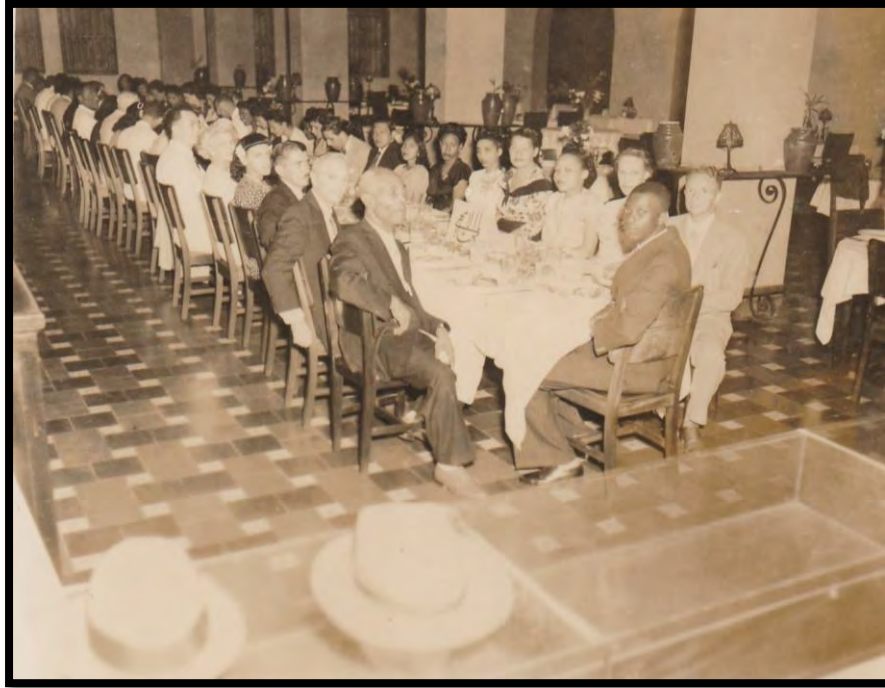
1. Julie Regal - Pioneer, (Panama)
2. Clara Luz Montalvo – (El Salvador)
3. Iola Edwards - Colon, (Panama)
4. Cora Oliver - Pioneer, (Panama)
5. Natalia Chavez – (Honduras)
6. Louise Baker - Pioneer, (Venezuela)
7. Robert M. Hooker – (Nicaragua)

Back row:

1. Alicia Facey - Colon, (Panama)
2. Lola de Maya – (Panama)
3. Alfred Osborne – (Canal Zone)
4. Elizabeth Cheney - Pioneer
5. Amelia Collins – (USA)
6. Norma Hamilton – (Canal Zone)
7. Clare Hamilton – (Canal Zone)
8. Blanca de Campos – (Panama)
9. Louise Caswell - Pioneer, (Panama)
10. James Facey - Colon, (Panama)







Baha'i community of the Republic of Panama (1948)



Panama (1949)





(LSA) Colon, Republic of Panama (1949)



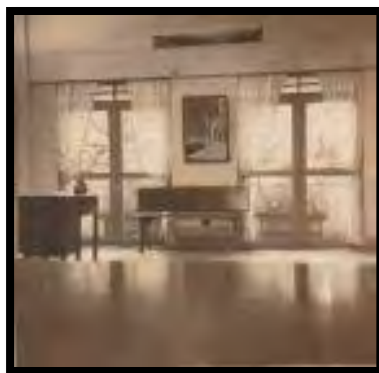
Baha'i community of Panama  
(1949)







Panama (1950)





National Spiritual Assembly of Central America:  
SITTING: L to R: Mr. Artemus Lamb (Costa Rica), Dr. David Escalante (El Salvador), Miss Raquel Jean-Francois (Panama), Mrs. Natalia Chavez (Honduras), Miss Elena Marcella (Honduras)  
STANDING: L to R: Mrs. Zenayda Jurado (Mexico), Ms. Cora Oliver (Panama), Ms. Louise Caswell (Honduras), Mr. James V. Facey (Panama)



Annual convention of Central America, 1951, (Costa Rica)



Baha'i community Panama (1951)





Baha'i community- Panama 1956



Baha'i community – Panama (1957)



Fireside at Keith's home in Curundu, Canal Zone, about 1956

From left to right:

1. Jean Berest
2. ?
3. Mary Ann Howard
4. Frank Keith
5. Eda Keith
6. Nano from Bolivia
7. Theresa Buckley
8. Annette Frederics
9. Ken Frederics



The First Local Spiritual Assembly of the Canal Zone, Panam April 1957 (Ridvan)

From left to right:

1. Edna Keith
2. Ken Frederics
3. Norma Hamilton
4. Annette Frederics Touleman
5. Buren Douglas
6. Linnie Pray (not Assembly member)
7. Mabel Snider
8. Elizabeth De Noma
9. Gene Cranz

Note: Linnie Pray mother of Norma Hamilton

10. Frank Keith the actual LSA member for taking photos not in the picture.



Some early believers of Panama about 1960 in Canal Zone area Panama.

From left to right:

1. Linnie Pray (Norma's mother)
2. Bill Spell
3. Norma Hamilton,
4. ?
5. Annette Frederics (at the end of first row)

Front row:

1. Ms. Thomas
2. Friend from Pedro Miguel(?)
3. Bureb Douglas
4. Alda Spell (holding Lisa Frederics)
5. Hazel Thomas
6. Carman Maynard





Soloy river during the rainy season - 1962. Right Donald Witzel, left Don Newby



Soloy river during summer season. Kit Goldstein far right playing flute 1980s

Pictures courtesy of Loeta Lockman who did a great deal of research.



About 1963-4 at Cermeño, Panama  
The Baha'i School with some indigenous Baha'i friends not identified except Fidel Bejerano number 10.

- From left to right:
1. Edna Moses
  2. Louis Caswell
  3. Frank Keith
  4. ?
  5. Annette Frederics
  6. Marty Rutan
  7. Lisa Frederics (About 3 years old)
  8. Alan Pringle
  9. ?
  10. Fidel Bejerano
  11. Leota Lockman
  12. ?



Baha'i school in Villa Virginia - circa 1963



About 1963-4 Cermeno, Panama (Villa Virginia), A Baha'i School with some indigenous Baha'i friends

Top row:

1. Leota Lockman
2. Joe Lockman (a seeker)
3. Alan Pringle
4. Donald Witzel
5. Annette Frederics with Lisa
6. Frank Keith
7. Jorge Harper
8. Ruth Pringle

Seated:

1. ?
2. ?
3. Edna Moses
4. Lucy Berest with 2 years old Barbara
5. Theresa Buckley

About 1963 at Villa Virginia,  
Cermeno, Panama

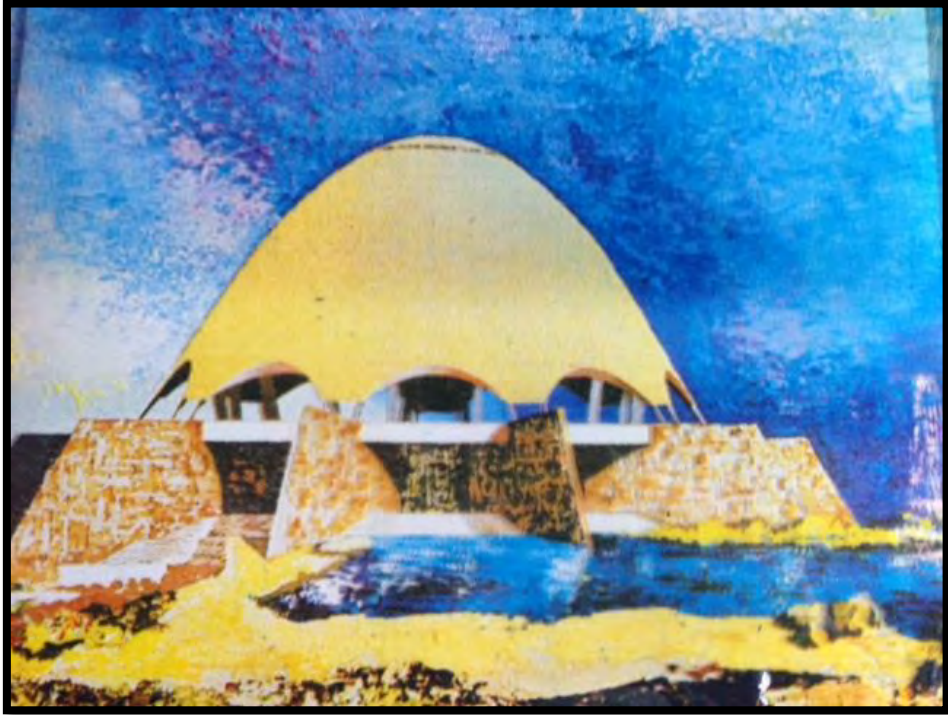
1. Virginia Siebert
2. Annette Frederics  
(Daughters Lillian and Lisa)





Inter -Community meeting in Canal- Zone





Architect Peter Tillotson's rendition of the House of Worship of Panama



Proposed design of the architect Raul Rodriguez Porcell of Panama



Cornerstone celebration 1968 with the presence of Ruhiyyih Khanum and Col. Jalal Khazeh



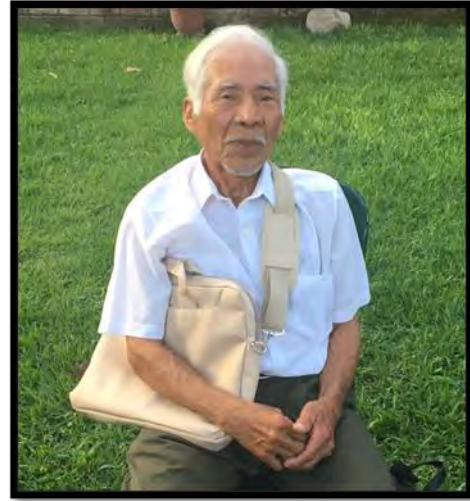


Ngobe-Bugle (Guaymi) indigenous participation in the Cornerstone celebration of the Temple, 1968

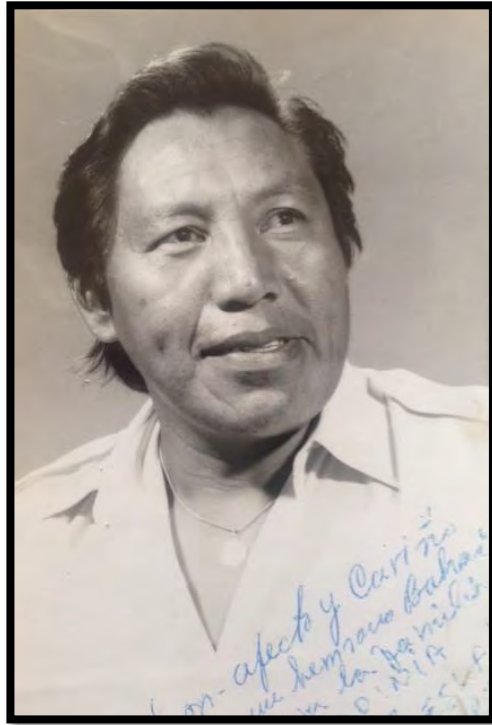


Baha'is participation in the celebration of the Cornerstone of the Temple, 1968

Juan Batista Reyes, pioneered from El Salvador to Panama in early 1970s and remained there for over 15 years. Juan was assigned to work with the Emberá - Wounam known Choco Indians in Darien, the most tropical and natural jungles of Panama. Very faithfully he remained there, got sick in many occasions and was lifted for treatment to Panama City. He was the most dedicated pioneer in the remotest places and had done marvelous job among the Choco. He also travelled to the rest of the Country of Panama teaching and deepening the friends. He was the most detached person I know. In mid 1980s he had to leave and go back to El Salvador to serve the Faith in his own Country. Juan passed away on July 23, 2019.



Baha'i Summer School 1973, Villa Virginia. Present also Counsellors Ahmadiyyih and Osborne and Artemus Lamb



Leopoldo Richard, Kunayala Indigenous, San Blas, Panama. Great teacher of the Faith.



Hand of the Cause of God, Dr. R. Mohajer, Leopoldo Richard, Fuad and Manijeh Izadinia, 1973, Baha'i Centre, Panama City, Panama.

Mr. Nicolas Bejerano, one of the early indigenous Baha'is of Ngobe- Bugle (Guaymi)

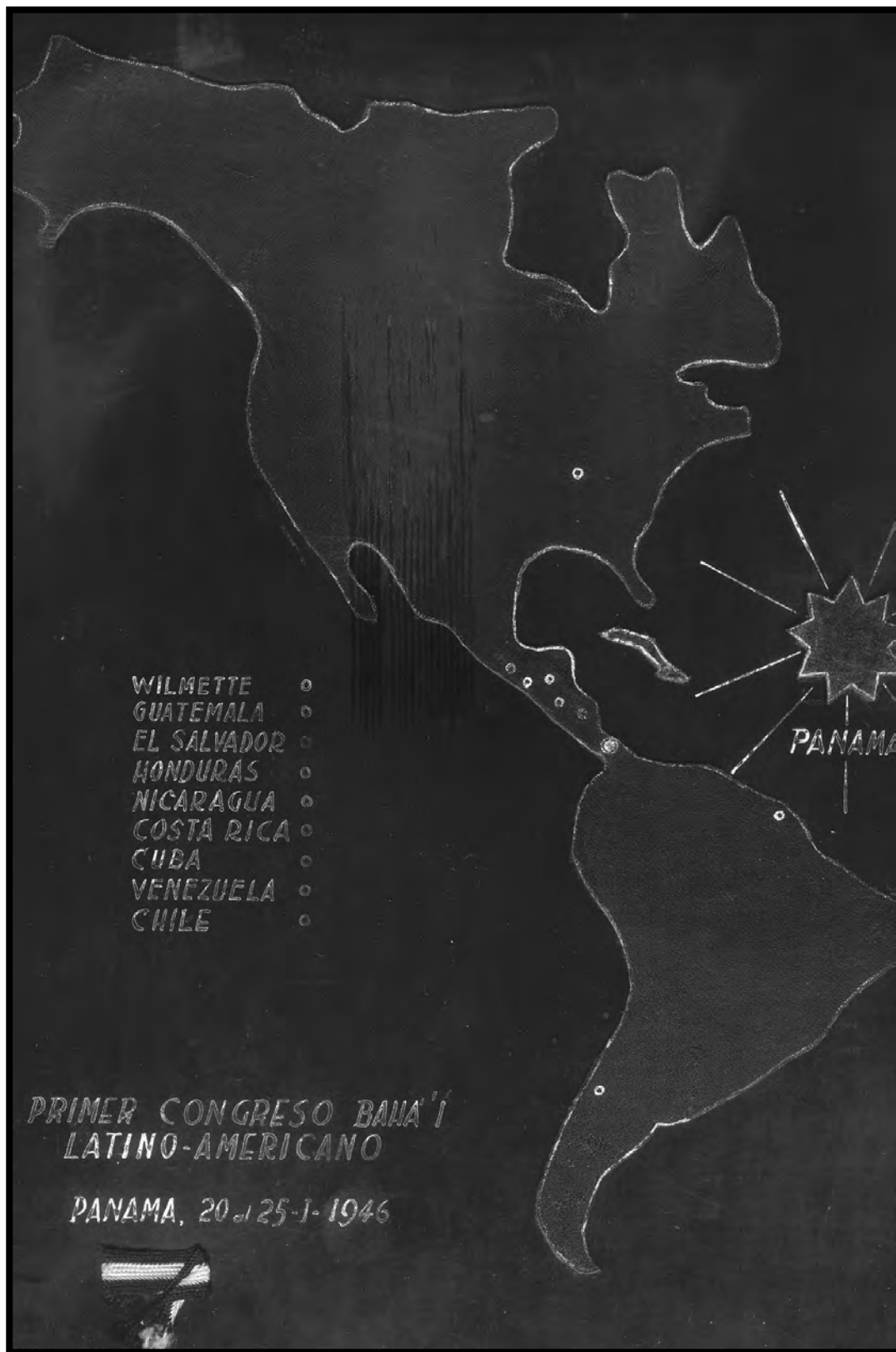


Mr. Gregorio Ortiz, one of the early dedicated indigenous Baha'i friends of Ngobe-Bugle



Mr. Manuel Jesus Flores, pioneer to Panama since 1971 from El Salvador together with the author circa 1974- Panama





- WILMETTE ○
- GUATEMALA ○
- EL SALVADOR ○
- HONDURAS ○
- NICARAGUA ○
- COSTA RICA ○
- CUBA ○
- VENEZUELA ○
- CHILE ○

PRIMER CONGRESO BAHIA'Í  
LATINO-AMERICANO

PANAMA, 20-25-I-1946



## SESIONES MATINALES

de 9:30 a 11:30

AVE. TIVOLI No. 6, APTO. 10.

*Lunes, 21 de Enero*

15 Minutos de Devociones

Tema: "GOD PASSES BY"—por Shoghi Effendi (Historia)

*Sra. Louise Caswell*

*Martes, 22 de Enero*

15 Minutos de Devociones

Tema: "GOD PASSES BY"—por Shoghi Effendi  
(El Nuevo Orden Mundial)

*Sra. Cora H. Oliver*

*Miércoles, 23 de Enero*

15 Minutos de Devociones

Tema: "LA ADMINISTRACIÓN BAHÁ'Í"

*Sra. Amelia Collins*

*Jueves, 24 de Enero*

15 Minutos de Devociones

Tema: "EL TRABAJO DE ENSEÑANZA EN AMERICA-  
LATINA"

Discusión de Mesa Redonda dirigida por  
*la Srta. Elizabeth Cheney*

*Viernes, 25 de Enero*

15 Minutos de Devociones

Tema: "EL TRABAJO DE ENSEÑANZA EN AMERICA-  
LATINA"

Discusión de Mesa Redonda dirigida por  
*la Sra. Gayle Woolson*

## CONFERENCIAS NOCTURNAS

*Recepción — Domingo, 20 de Enero*

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sr. José Villalón — Panamá

Tema: "EL SIGNIFICADO DEL PRIMER CONGRESO LATINO-AMERICANO CONVOCADO POR BOLIVAR"

*Lic. Isidro A. Beluche — Panamá*

"EL SIGNIFICADO DEL PRIMER CONGRESO BAHÁ'I LATINO-AMERICANO"

*Sra. Louise Caswell — Panamá*

*Lunes, 21 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.*

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sra. Norma Hamilton — Zona del Canal

Tema: "EL MENSAJE BAHÁ'I AL MUNDO"

*Srta. Elizabeth Cheney — Pionera viajante*

Exhibición de Películas del Templo Bahá'í

*con explicaciones por la Srta. Julie Regal — Panamá*

*Martes, 22 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.*

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sra. Natalia Chávez — Honduras

Tema: "EL HILO DE LA UNIDAD A TRAVES DE LAS RELIGIONES DEL MUNDO"

*Dr. Walter Blomquist — Cuba*

*Sr. Alejandro Baldivión — Guatemala*

*Miércoles, 23 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.*

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sr. Carlos Porras — Costa Rica

Tema: "EL ARTE DIVINO DE VIVIR"

*Srta. Clara Luz Montalvo — El Salvador*

*Srta. Louise Baker — Venezuela*

*Sra. Yolanda Stronach — Venezuela*

*Jueves, 24 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.*

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sr. James Facey — Panamá

Tema: "LA UNIDAD DEL GÉNERO HUMANO"

"LA UNIDAD RACIAL"—*Sr. Alfred E. Osborne—Zona del Canal*

"LA UNIDAD RELIGIOSA"—*Sr. Hugo de Arteagabeitia—Chile*

"LA UNIDAD DE LAS NACIONES"—*Dr. Robert M. Hooker—Nicaragua*

*Viernes, 25 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.*

Aula Máxima, Universidad Inter-Americana

Dirigente: Sr. Alfred E. Osborne

Tema: "EL PROBLEMA DE LA PAZ EN LA LUZ DE LA CONFERENCIA DE SAN FRANCISCO"

*Dr. Octavio Méndez Pereira — Panamá*

Rector de la Universidad Inter-Americana

y Delegado a la Conferencia de San Francisco

"EL PLAN BAHÁ'I PARA LA PAZ"

*Srta. Elizabeth Cheney—"LA PAZ MENOR"*

*Sra. Gayle Woolson—"LA MAS GRANDE PAZ"*

LAS CONFERENCIAS SON GRATIS



# Annex Periodicals

## Some articles in the Panama News Paper

EDICION DEL CONGRESO

# Noticias Bahá'ís

No. 3 FEBRERO DE 1946



# Interamericanas

AÑO 102 ERA BAHÁ'Í

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CABLE ENVIADO AL GUARDIÁN DEL CONGRESO  
21-25 DE ENERO DE 1946

*Exito Congreso. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela, Chile representados, también Amelia Collins, seis pioneras. Reuniones bien concurridas, reacción entusiasta, publicidad gratis por periódicos y radio sin precedente. Agradecimiento profundo por sus oraciones. Todos unidos enviamos sentido cariño y manifestamos determinación para acción unificada.*

### EL PRIMER CONGRESO

Una fecha histórica ha constituido el primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino-Americano que se llevó a efecto en Panamá, República de Panamá, durante el lapso comprendido entre el 21 y el 25 de Enero ppdo., bajo los auspicios del Comité Inter-Americano y la Escuela Internacional Bahá'í de Colorado Springs.

El Guardián escribió que a Panamá corresponde el honor de tener el primer Congreso Bahá'í de América Latina, el cual será seguido por muchos otros.

El Congreso se vió revestido de un gran éxito, mucho más halagüeño del que nuestras expectativas esperaban. Contó con representantes de los Estados Unidos, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela y Chile, encontrándose también presentes seis pioneras.

Todas las mañanas de 9:30 a 11:30 hrs. se celebraron sesiones íntimas de enseñanza para los Bahá'ís, y en las noches a las 8 hrs., una serie de conferencias para el público sobre diferentes temas Bahá'ís.

Un maravilloso espíritu de fraternidad, unión, regocijo y cooperación permeaba en todas las sesiones y actividades, y cada cual tomó su parte en perfecta coordinación con los demás, sirviendo todos como las diferentes facetas de un diamante para iluminar el trabajo de conjunto en la más completa armonía.

Toda la ciudad de Panamá fue saturada con noticias y anuncios del Congreso por medio de publicidad sin precedente en los periódicos, la radio, cartelones e invitaciones personales, hasta tal punto que cuando algunos de los representantes entraban en las tiendas, fueron reconocidos por los dependientes como Bahá'ís que habían llegado para asistir al Congreso, interesándose por saber algo de la Fé Bahá'í.

Para todos los asistentes, el Congreso fue un acontecimiento inspirador, emocionante e inolvidable, que fortaleció los lazos de amor y unión entre los creyentes de las tres Américas dando luz a una mayor determinación para una acción unida en nuestros esfuerzos en pro del adelanto de la Causa en todos sus aspectos.

Quedó demostrado que el mencionado Congreso ha servido de poderosísimo medio para uniros, inspirarnos y coordinar nuestras actividades y esfuerzos, y bañarnos en la luz del radiante espíritu que se derrama de tal asociación y amor Bahá'ís, así como también despertar en el público en general de la ciu-

*RESPUESTA DEL GUARDIAN*

*Regocijado. Aseguren a asistentes agradecimiento profundo, oraciones amorosas para la extensión del campo de sus actividades meritorias.*

*Shoghi Rabbani*

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dad un mayor interés y reconocimiento del gran alcance e importancia de nuestra Fé en el porvenir del mundo.

América, de norte a sur, se vió representada por los siguientes creyentes:

Sra. Amelia E. Collins	Los Estados Unidos
Sr. Alejandro Baldizón	Guatemala
Srta. Clara Luz Montalvo	El Salvador
Sra. Natalia Chávez	Honduras
Dr. Robert M. Hooker	Nicaragua
Sr. Carlos Porras	Costa Rica
Dr. Walter Blomquist	Cuba
Sra. Yolanda Stronach	Venezuela
Sr. Hugo de Arteagaheita	Chile
Sargento James Barrett	Chile

**Pioneras presentes:**

Sra. Cora Oliver	Srta. Elisabeth Cheney
Sra. Louise Caswell	Srta. Louise Baker
Srta. Julie Regal	Sra. Gayle Woolson

**Otros Bahá'ís que participaron:**

Sra. Norma Hamilton	Zona del Canal
Sr. Clare Hamilton	Zona del Canal
Sr. Alfred Osborne	Zona del Canal
Sra. Iola Edwards	Colón, Panamá
Sra. Mazie Facey	Colón, Panamá
Sr. James Facey	Colón, Panamá

El primer paso ya ha sido dado! América, radiante de entusiasmo, está en marcha por la senda gloriosa que nos dejó diseñada Bahá'u'lláh, para iluminar al mundo con el postulado de amor y confraternidad que determinará el advenimiento de una nueva era.

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### RECEPCION

Como un prólogo del Congreso, la Asamblea Local Espiritual de Panamá ofreció una recepción en la noche del domingo, 20 de enero, en honor de los visitantes Bahá'ís de otros países de América que habían llegado para asistir al Primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino-Americano. Fue un acontecimiento animado de un espíritu alegre y emocionante, estando juntos tantos amigos de diferentes países reunidos por primera vez en semejante ocasión en América Latina.

La Sra. Blanca de Campos, miembro de la Asamblea Espiritual de Panamá, abrió la reunión con una oración, y en nombre de dicha Asamblea dió la bienvenida a los representantes concurrentes como así también a las personas que se dieron cita a este acto de apertura.

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Después fue presentado el Lic. Isidro A. Beluche, de Panamá, simpatizante de la Fé Bahá'í, quien habló del "Significado del Primer Congreso Latino-Americano Convocado por Bolívar.

Dijo él: "Han acontecido los sucesos que algún día Panamá será reconocida como la cuna del derecho internacional moderno. Pero para que eso ocurra es menester que la mente de los hombres sea modelada conforme a nuevas bases; esperamos que eso ocurra pronto y demos las gracias a los Bahá'ís por contribuir a esa remodelación del alma de la humanidad."

Luego, se presentó la Sra. Louise Caswell, de Panamá, quien habló del "Significado del Primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino-Americano." Hizo énfasis sobre este primer paso de reunir Bahá'ís de las Américas en un país de América Latina. También puso en relieve la importancia primordial de la República de Panamá entre todas las otras latinoamericanas por su posición geográfica como el eslabón entre dos continentes, y por el canal que une a los dos océanos, el Atlántico y el Pacífico.

Después cada uno de los representantes y pioneros fue presentado y cada cual, conmovido hasta las profundidades de su alma, expresó los amorosos saludos fraternales en nombre de su Comunidad.

Se hizo mención especial esa noche del Sr. Matthew Kaszab, de sus grandes sacrificios y de sus labores fructíferas desempeñadas tanto en Panamá como en Nicaragua.

## ESPIRITU DE HAIFA

La presencia en el Congreso de la Sra. Amelia Collins, representante oficial de la Asamblea Nacional Espiritual de los Bahá'ís de los Estados Unidos y el Canadá, y del Comité Inter-Americano, fue muy grata e iluminadora para todos los asistentes.

Hizo muchos relatos relacionados con sus dos visitas a Haifa, y cada vez que ella hablaba parecía realmente que estábamos pisando el suelo de la floreciente ciudad, en un acercamiento espiritual más íntimo con nuestro Guardián, Shoghi Effendi.

Como la Srta. Collins ha viajado a todas partes del mundo, compartió sus interesantísimas experiencias con un círculo anhelante de Bahá'ís que no perdían una sílaba de las que ella empleaba para darlas a conocer.

Muy regocijada hizo ver una grata experiencia que había tenido en Panamá. Explicó que cuando se disponía a asistir a la sesión de la noche del lunes 21, poco tiempo después de haber llegado a esta ciudad, se imaginó que iba a participar de una reunión en la que estarían solamente algunas de las pioneras que trabajan en América-Latina, total unas cinco o seis personas. Al transponer la puerta, además de su asombro, se vio retratada la felicidad en su rostro al encontrarse con el apartamento repleto de gente incluyendo a representantes de varios países latino-americanos.

La unidad, regocijo y exultación que permeaba aquella reunión y las otras del Congreso, la impulsaron a decir: "El espíritu del Congreso me pareció identificado, más que ningún otro, con el que se aprecia en Haifa. Es algo que yo no había experimentado desde 1933, última vez en que visité al Guardián de nuestra Fé."

## SESIONES MATINALES

Se celebraron sesiones matinales todos los días de 9:30 a 11:30 a.m., comenzando cada una con quince minutos de devociones que consistieron de

oraciones y selecciones de la Escrituras Bahá'ís. Estas reuniones se llevaron a efecto en el apartamento de la Sra. Cora H. Oliver, Avenida Tivoli No. 6, apartamento 10.

LUNES, 21 de Enero.—La sesión de esta mañana se dedicó al estudio y discusión de pasajes relacionados con el Báb y Bahá'u'lláh en el importante libro escrito por Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By." Algunos de estos trozos fueron los siguientes:

"El 23 de mayo de 1844 señala el comienzo del período más turbulento en la Edad Heroica de la Era Bahá'í, una edad que marca la apertura de la más gloriosa época en el ciclo más grande que la historia espiritual de la humanidad haya presenciado." (p. 3)

"Sólo la pasión de Jesu-Cristo y, en verdad, Su ministerio público todo, ofrece un paralelo a la Misión y la muerte del Báb, un paralelo que ningún estudiante de la religión comparativa puede dejar de percibir o ignorar. En la juventud y mansedumbre del Inaugurador de la Dispensación Bábi, en la brevedad extrema y la turbulencia de Su ministerio público; en la velocidad dramática con que ese ministerio se acercó a su climax; en el orden apostólico que El instituyó, y en la primacía que El confirió sobre uno de los miembros de ese orden; en la intrepidez de Su desafío a las convenciones consagradas por el tiempo, ritos y leyes que habían sido agregados a la estructura de la religión en la cual El Mismo nació; en el papel que representó una jerarquía reconocida oficialmente y firmemente establecida, como instigadora principal de los ultrajes que se le hizo sufrir, en las indignidades amontonadas sobre El, en Su arresto repentino, en la interrogación a la cual fue sometido, en la burla inferida y el azote infligido sobre El, en los insultos que sostuvo y por fin, en Su suspensión ignominiosa ante la mirada fija de una multitud hostil—en todos estos puntos no podemos dejar de discernir la notable semejanza a los rasgos que distinguieron la carrera de Jesu-Cristo." (p. 56).

"Las circunstancias en las cuales el Vehículo (Bahá'u'lláh) de esta recién-nacida Revelación que siguió con tanta velocidad a aquella del Báb, cuando recibió las primeras intimaciones de Su misión sublime, hacen recordar, y en verdad superan en acerbidad a la experiencia grandiosa que movió el alma de Moisés frente a la Zarza Ardiente en el desierto de Siná; la de Zoroastro cuando fué despertado a Su misión por una sucesión de siete visiones; la de Jesús cuando, saliendo de las aguas del Jordán, vio abrirse los cielos y descender el Espíritu Santo como una paloma y posar sobre El; la de Mahoma cuando, en la Cueva de Hira, en las afueras de la santa ciudad de Mecca, la voz de Gabriel Le ordenó "proclama en el Nombre de Tu Señor"; y la del Báb cuando en un sueño se acercó a la cabeza sangrienta del Imám Husayn y bebiendo la sangre que caía gota a gota de su garganta lacerada, se despertó encontrándose ser el recipiente escogido de la gracia desbordante del Todopoderoso." (p. 93.)

"Aquel Quien en tales circunstancias dramáticas fue destinado a sostener el peso abrumador de tan gloriosa Misión no era otro sino Aquel a Quien la posteridad aclamará, y Quien es ya reconocido por innumerables seguidores, como el Juez, el Legislador y Redentor de toda la Humanidad, como el Organizador del planeta entero, como el Unificador de los hijos de los hombres, como el Inaugurador del milenio esperado por mucho tiempo, el Originador de un nuevo 'Ciclo Universal,' como el Establecedor de la Más Grande Paz, como la Fuente de la Más Grande Justicia, y el Proclamador de la madurez de la



Grupo de Congresistas y amigos en una de las sesiones durante el Primer Congreso Bahá'í Latinoamericano celebrado en la Ciudad de Panamá, del 21 al 25 de Enero de 1946.

raza humana entera, como el Creador de un nuevo Orden Mundial, y como el Inspirador y Fundador de una civilización universal." (p. 93).

"Para Israel, El era ni más ni menos que la encarnación del 'Padre Eterno,' el 'Señor de las Huestes' que descendió 'con diez mil santos'; para la Cristiandad, el regreso de Cristo 'en la gloria del Padre,' para Shi'ah Islam, el descenso del 'Espíritu de Dios' (Jesucristo); para los Zoroastrianos, el prometido Sháh-Bahrám; para los Hindus, la reencarnación de Krishna; para los Budistas, el quinto Buda." (p. 94)

"Una Revelación aclamada como la promesa y gloria coronadora de las edades y siglos anteriores, como la consumación de todas las Dispensaciones dentro del Ciclo Adámico, inaugurando una era de una duración de mil años por lo menos, y un ciclo destinado a durar no menos de cinco mil siglos, señalando el fin de la Era Profética y el principio de la Era de Cumplimiento, sin igual tanto en la duración del ministerio de su autor como en la fecundidad y esplendor de Su misión—tal Revelación nació, como ya se ha citado—en la obscuridad de una mazmorra subterránea en Tehrán—un foso abominable que en otros tiempos servía como un depósito de agua para uno de los baños públicos de la ciudad.

"Envuelto en las tinieblas estigias de esa mazmorra, respirando aire fétido, entumecido por su atmósfera húmeda y helada, Sus pies en cepos, Su cuello cargado con una cadena pesada, rodeado de criminales y malandrines de la peor clase, oprimido por darse cuenta de la terrible mancha que había caído sobre el nombre sin tacha de Su amada Fé, dolorosamente consciente de la horrenda aflicción que había agobiado a sus campeones, y los peligros graves que confrontaban el remanente de sus seguidores—en esta hora tan crítica y bajo tales circunstancias, el 'Más Grande Espíritu' como El Mismo Lo designó, y el cual es simbolizado en las Dispensaciones Zoroastriana, Mosáica, Cristiana y Mahometana por el Fuego Sagrado, la Zarza Ardiente, la Paloma, y el Angel Gabriel respectivamente, descendió sobre el alma agonizante de Bahá'u'lláh, y se reveló ante El en la forma de una 'Doncella.' (p. 101-102)

"No fue por Mí propia volición que Yo me revelé, sino Dios, de Su propia voluntad, Me ha manifestado." (p. 102).

MARTES 22 de enero:—La discusión de la sesión de esta mañana, a cargo de la Sra. Cora H. Oliver y el sargento James Barrett, giró alrededor de los siguientes pasajes tomados del libro del Guardián, "God Passes By":

"Un proceso dinámico, divinamente propulsado, poseedor de potencialidades aún no soñadas, mundial en su alcance y universalmente transformador en sus últimas consecuencias, fue puesto en acción aquella noche memorable cuando el Báb comunicó el propósito de Su Misión a Mulla Husayn en un rincón oscuro en Shiráz." (p. 237)

"Para dirigir y canalizar estas fuerzas libradas por este proceso celestial y asegurar su operación armoniosa y continua después de Su ascensión (de Bahá'u'lláh), era claramente indispensable un instrumento divinamente ordenado, orgánicamente vinculado con el Autor mismo de la Revelación. Aquel instrumento Bahá'u'lláh expresamente lo proveyó a través de la institución de la Alianza, una institución que El firmemente había establecido antes de Su ascensión... y la había incorporado en un documento especial el cual El designó como 'El Libro de Mi Alianza' en que se nombra a 'Abdu'l-Bahá como el Centro de la Alianza de Bahá'u'lláh, y Sucesor de la misma Manifestación de Dios. "En ninguna parte de los libros que pertenecen a los sistemas religiosos del mundo, encontramos algún documento que establezca una Alianza dotada con una autoridad comparable a la Alianza que Bahá'u'lláh Mismo había instituido.

"Tan firme y poderosa es esta Alianza' que Aquel Quien es su nombrado Centro ha afirmado, 'que desde el principio del tiempo hasta el día actual ninguna Dispensación religiosa ha producido algo igual.' 'Es indudablemente claro', ha dicho, 'que el pivote de la unidad del género humano no es otra cosa que el poder de la Alianza... Y otra vez: 'La lámpara de la Alianza es la luz del mundo y las palabras trazadas por la Pluma del Altísimo un océano sin límites.' (p. 237-238.)

"Sus tres años de viajar, primero en Egipto, luego a Europa y más tarde a América, marcan... un punto decisivo de suma significación en la historia del siglo. Por primera vez desde el comienzo de la Fé, sesenta y seis años antes, su Cabeza y Representante supremo reventó a pedazos los grillos que habían estorbado tan lastimosamente la libertad de la Fé durante el ministerio del Báb tanto como el de Bahá'u'lláh." (p. 279)

"Aquel Quien había entrado a la prisión siendo un joven, salió de ella ya viejo, Quien nunca en Su vida se había parado ante un auditorio público ni nunca asistió a ninguna escuela, ni se había movido en círculos Occidentales y era poco familiarizado con las costumbres e idioma del Occidente, se levantó no solamente para proclamar desde púlpito y plataforma, en algunas de las principales capitales de Europa y las ciudades importantes del continente Norteamericano, las verdades distintivas dentro de la Fé de Su Padre, si no también para demostrar el origen Divino de los Profetas anteriores a El, y exponer la naturaleza del vínculo que Los une a esa Fé." (p. 280)

"Nunca en el transcurso entero de la historia religiosa se había levantado alguna Figura de estatura comparable para desempeñar una labor de semejante magnitud y valor imperecedero. Como consecuencia de estos viajes fructíferos, se libraron fuerzas que ni aún ahora, después de treinta y cinco años, podemos ni medir ni comprenderlas. Ya una Reina inspirada por los argumentos poderosos aducidos por 'Abdu'l-Bahá en el curso de Sus conferencias en apoyo de la Divinidad de Mahoma, ha

proclamado su fé y ha dado testimonio público del origen Divino del Profeta de Islám. Ya un Presidente de los Estados Unidos, empapándose de algunos de los principios tan claramente pronunciados por 'Abdu'l-Bahá en Sus discursos, los ha incorporado en un Programa de Paz que se destaca como la propuesta más atrevida y más noble hecha para el bien estar y seguridad del género humano y ya, ay! un mundo que se mostró sordo a Sus advertencias y rehusó hacer caso a Sus llamadas, se ha zambullido en dos guerras globales de severidad sin precedente, las repercusiones de las cuales ninguno todavía, ni aún vagamente, puede visualizar." (p. 294)

Con el fallecimiento de 'Abdu'l-Bahá en 1921, "El momento había llegado para que aquel Espíritu imperecedero, universalmente vivificante, quien nació en Shiráz y que había sido encendido de nuevo en Tihrán, que fue abanicado en llamas en Baghdat y Adrianópolis y llevado al Oeste y que ahora estaba iluminando los flecos de los cinco continentes, se encarnara en instituciones designadas para canalizar sus energías esparcidas y estimular su crecimiento. La Edad que había presenciado el origen y levantamiento de la Fé ya se había cerrado... (es decir, La Edad Heroica o Apostólica de la Dispensación de Bahá'u'lláh).

"El período Formativo, la Edad de Hierro, de esa Dispensación, ahora vió su comienzo, Edad en la que las instituciones locales, nacionales e internacionales, de la Fé de Bahá'u'lláh fueron destinadas a formarse, desarrollar y llegar a ser completamente consolidadas, en anticipación de la tercera y última etapa, la Edad de Oro, destinada a presenciar la emergencia de un Orden Mundial que encierra el fruto culminante de la última Revelación de Dios a la humanidad; fruto cuya madurez ha de señalar el establecimiento de una civilización mundial y la inauguración formal del Reino del Padre sobre la tierra como prometido por Jesu-Cristo Mismo." (p. 324)

"La Carta que dió existencia, delineó los rasgos y puso en acción el proceso de este Orden Administrativo no es sino la Voluntad y Testamento de 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Su legado más grande a la posteridad, la emanación más brillante de Su mente y el más poderoso instrumento forjado para asegurar la continuidad de las tres edades que constituyen las partes componentes de la Dispensación de Su Padre." (p. 325)

MIÉRCOLES, 23 de enero:—Esta sesión matinal fue dirigida por la Sra. Amelia E. Collins quien trató el tema "El Orden Administrativo." Habló de varios aspectos de esta organización singular de la Fé de Bahá'u'lláh e hizo énfasis sobre la importancia de tener un Centro divinamente nombrado, el Guardián. Dijo que si no lo tuviéramos, la Causa no hubiera podido conservarse, siendo esta Institución del Guardián la llave de la unidad de la Fé.

"El Guardián nos ha guiado en cada paso, basando su dirección en lo que se ha escrito en el Kitáb-i-Aqdas, el libro de leyes de Bahá'u'lláh, la Última Voluntad y Testamento de 'Abdu'l-Bahá, y las Tablas de 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi dijo que en

**CABLE ENVIADO A LA SRA. LOULIE MATHEWS, ESCUELA INTERNACIONAL BAHÁ'Í DE COLORADO SPRINGS, EL 28 DE ENERO DE 1946**

Exito Congreso más allá de nuestras esperanzas. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela, Chile representados, también Amelia Collins, seis pioneras. Todos unidos manifestamos profundo y amoroso agradecimiento.



Los congresistas y amigos pasaron ratos de confraternidad cambiando impresiones durante su estadía en Panamá.

los 26 volúmenes de Tablas de 'Abdu'l-Bahá que tienen los creyentes persas, hay instrucciones que tienen que ser traducidas, una tarea del Guardián, antes que se forme la Casa Universal de Justicia.

"Hasta que el Espíritu de Bahá'u'lláh pueda funcionar a través de las instituciones visibles diseñadas por El, no podemos establecer el Nuevo Orden Mundial. Los dos más grandes pilares de la Fé son la Institución del Guardián y la Casa Universal de Justicia, el Guardián siendo la cabeza permanente de esta última. Por mil años, al menos, tendremos Guardianes bajo la misma guía infalible que tiene nuestro Guardián actual, guía prometida al Guardián en la Última Voluntad y Testamento de 'Abdu'l-Bahá, en su función de Intérprete de las Sagradas Escrituras Bahá'ís.

"El Guardián, como cabeza permanente de la Casa Universal de Justicia, tendrá solamente un voto así como los demás miembros de este organismo. Esta institución internacional establecerá leyes secundarias conforme a las necesidades de las condiciones evolutivas de la humanidad pero nunca puede cambiar las leyes del Aqdas, solamente leyes secundarias que cambiarán de acuerdo con los tiempos.

"Las Asambleas Espirituales Nacionales son las Casas secundarias de Justicia y con el tiempo, las Asambleas Espirituales se llamarán 'Casa de Justicia.'"

"Nuestro deber es mantener las Asambleas Espirituales de acuerdo con lo que se ha delineado en las enseñanzas. La Asamblea Espiritual Local es el núcleo de la vida de la Comunidad y a menudo es necesario para los miembros hacer ajustes y sacrificios hasta que aprendamos a funcionar de acuerdo con las leyes superiores de Bahá'u'lláh. Una Asamblea fuerte y unida es de suma importancia. La primera condición entre los miembros es amor y armonía, también se requiere pureza de motivo, espíritu radiante y desprendimiento de todo menos de Dios. La condición de unión, amor y armonía es imposible sin la ayuda de Dios, por eso, debemos invocar a Dios en cada momento por Su ayuda y fuerza divina. Así, en el momento de leer la oración para abrir la sesión de la Asamblea, los miembros dejan de ser nueve personas y sus espíritus se unen como en una sola alma. Bahá'u'lláh no prometió la infalibilidad a las Asambleas locales y nacionales, pero estas pueden perfeccionarse más y más cada día. Solamente a la Casa Universal de Justicia está prometida la infalibilidad en sus deliberaciones y decisiones.

"Antes de la elección de la Asamblea Espiritual, nadie debe consultar con otro acerca de las personas que deben o no deben elegirse, ni aún en el caso de marido y esposa. La elección de las nueve personas es un asunto entre el individuo y Dios solamente. El Guardián dijo que debemos aprender a ser impersonales y no elegir por la personalidad o simpatía sino por la capacidad de cada uno para servir a la Causa."

JUEVES, 24 de enero:—La sesión de esta mañana se abrió con la primera de dos discusiones de Mesa Redonda sobre métodos y problemas de enseñanza en América Latina. Esta sesión estuvo a cargo de la señorita Elisabeth Cheney. Entre los puntos que puso en relieve fué el hecho de que un instructor de las Enseñanzas debe comprender las idiosincrasias y condiciones de los países y gentes entre los cuales trabaje, y ser capaz de comenzar con cada estudiante de la Fé desde el grado de comprensión en que éste se encuentre, sin crítica de cualquier clase y encontrar cualidades en él y en su país que puedan ser honradamente alabadas y apreciadas. "La crítica aborta el desarrollo espiritual mientras que el aprecio sincero y el consejo sabio y amoroso basado en las Enseñanzas de Bahá'u'lláh, son como la tierra rica y los rayos calurosos del sol que habilitan a las plantas para crecer altas y fuertes."

"Fe profunda, amor impersonal y hondo que se extiende hacia todos igual, tacto, anhelo de escuchar con comprensión el punto de vista del estudiante y sus problemas, la capacidad de presentarle la Causa de Dios de tal manera que él pueda comprenderla fácilmente y aplicarla a su propia vida, gran paciencia, perseverancia, humildad, vivir fielmente la vida Bahá'í, obediencia completa a la Administración Bahá'í, generosidad, coraje, y la capacidad de encontrar en cada desastre nada más que una gran oportunidad de servir—considero estos puntos como requisitos fundamentales para un instructor Bahá'í."

Hizo énfasis sobre la importancia especial de la consulta dentro de la Fe Bahá'í, que es la base de la función de las Asambleas Espirituales así como también de la Comunidad. "La consulta tiene un proceso como el de hacer un queque, donde cada uno de los miembros aporta un ingrediente diferente y solo al tener todos estos elementos reunidos se puede tener éxito con el queque."

"Cada uno, en este proceso tiene el deber de expresar su opinión y solo al oír la combinación de todas las opiniones se puede obtener una decisión colectiva. A veces sucede que cuando se escuchan los diferentes puntos de vista, uno puede llegar a tener una opinión completamente diferente de la que tuvo originalmente. El resultado de la consulta es una nueva creación que nace del pensar colectivo."

"El consultar sobre cualquier asunto con los miembros individualmente, no es la verdadera consulta Bahá'í. Solo al estar juntos y ver el asunto desde el punto de vista colectivo, podemos poner en práctica el verdadero proceso de consulta delineado en las Enseñanzas."

VIERNES, 25 de enero:—En la discusión de esta mañana, continuando el mismo tema del día anterior, (el del trabajo de enseñanza,) dirigida por la señora Gayle Woolson, se trató los siguientes puntos: la importancia de vivir la vida Bahá'í como el primer requisito de un creyente y así enseñar a los demás y demostrar al mundo los sublimes reclamos de nuestra Fé; la necesidad de profundizarnos constantemente en las enseñanzas para poder explicar adecuadamente todos los aspectos de la Causa y hacer frente a las demandas crecientes, así como tam-



Vista tomada durante el acto de clausura del Primer Congreso Bahá'í Latinoamericano celebrado en el Paraninfo de la Universidad Interamericana de Panamá.

bién satisfacer el hambre espiritual que existe en el mundo de hoy día con las curativas enseñanzas regeneradoras que tenemos el privilegio de tener en nuestras manos; la importancia de asistir a las Fiestas de los 19 Días, de usar una de las oraciones obligatorias diariamente, y guardar el Ayuno; el carácter no-político de la Fe y el daño que se hace tanto a la Causa como a nosotros mismos individualmente, al meternos en ello; la diferencia entre lo psíquico y lo espiritual, haciendo énfasis de las advertencias de 'Abdu'l-Bahá de no entrometernos en las prácticas psíquicas y el peligro de esto; la necesidad de impedir la costumbre de renunciar cuando uno por algún motivo está disgustado con algo dentro de su Comunidad. Los retiros en la Causa son algo mucho más diferente y grave que retiros en un club. La firmeza en la Causa aún entre pruebas y dificultades es una enseñanza fundamental de nuestra Fé.

Acerca del funcionamiento de las Asambleas Espirituales, la señora Woolson dijo: "Las Asambleas Espirituales, siendo instituciones divinamente establecidas, tienen un poder, guía y protección especiales. 'Abdu'l-Bahá dijo: ('God Passes By' p. 332) 'Estas Asambleas Espirituales están ayudadas por el Espíritu de Dios. Su defensor es 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Sobre ellas, El esparce Sus Alas. Qué favor más grande hay que ésto? Estas Asambleas Espirituales son lámparas luminosas y jardines celestiales de los cuales las fragancias de la santidad son diseminadas sobre todas las regiones. De ellas, el espíritu de vida se derrama en toda dirección. Ellas, en verdad, son las fuentes potentes del progreso del hombre, en todos tiempos y bajo todas las condiciones."

"El presidente de la Asamblea Espiritual tanto como cualquier otro miembro de ella es solamente una novena parte de este cuerpo. El presidente no tiene más poder que los demás y su posición no es como la del presidente de una organización política o comercial."

Acerca del principio importante de la consulta, la señora Woolson dijo: "Podemos imaginar que cada miembro de la Asamblea se haya colocado en una puerta del Templo mirando hacia afuera. El panorama que cada uno observa es una parte del panorama total que rodea al Templo. Así que sólo al oír la descripción de lo que cada uno ve, se puede obtener una idea completa de la realidad. Así mediante el conjunto de los pensamientos emitidos por cada uno de los miembros en una reunión de consulta, la Asamblea puede obtener la visión justa del problema en discusión."

Se efectuó una serie de conferencias en el curso de las noches durante el Congreso. Las reuniones nocturnas, desde la recepción el domingo, 20 de enero, hasta la sesión del jueves, 24, se celebraron en el apartamento de la señora Louise Caswell, Avenida Tivoli No. 10, apartamento No. 18, y la clausura el viernes, 25, se llevó a efecto en la Universidad Inter-Americana. Los participantes en el programa de las sesiones nocturnas incluyeron a todos los Bahá'ís que llegaron de los diferentes países, como así también a dos no-Bahá'ís de la ciudad de Panamá, el Lic. Isidro A. Beluche quien tomó parte en el programa de la recepción, y el Dr. Méndez Ferreira quien participó en la clausura. A continuación hay un resumen de la serie de las conferencias nocturnas.

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LUNES, 21 de enero:—La señora Norma Hamilton, de la Zona del Canal, actuando como dirigente de la sesión de esta noche dió la bienvenida a todos los asistentes, y presentó a la señorita Elisabeth Cheney, pionera viajante, quien dió una conferencia sobre el tema "El Mensaje Bahá'í Al Mundo" en el cual trató los principios fundamentales y los fines de la Fe Bahá'í. Dijo que "la Fe Bahá'í es la aplicación de los principios cristianos básicos no solamente al individuo sino también a la colectividad mundial. Trata también de ciertos problemas municipales, como la solución espiritual de los problemas económicos, la unidad del género humano, la investigación independiente de la verdad, la comprensión de la unidad básica de todas las religiones, la armonización de la religión con la ciencia y la razón, y la paz universal. Por medio de la educación amistosa y colectiva el Bahá'í lucha para formar en el mundo una conciencia colectiva capaz de aplicar los principios de amor y justicia a las condiciones de hoy día de acuerdo con el diseño dado por Bahá'u'lláh.

"Hemos visto cuán fugaces son los triunfos de los hombres cuando los impulsa el egoísmo. El ejemplo está en Europa doliente, donde se han derrumbado con estrépito los sueños de conquista de hombres que retrocedieron miles de años en su afán de dominación. ¡Toda la riqueza destruida! ¡La espiritualidad de los pueblos debatiéndose en la incertidumbre! Es por esta razón que se hace necesario transmitir al mundo nuestro mensaje de Paz y Amor."

Después del discurso, se exhibieron vistas iluminadas que representaban diferentes aspectos de la Casa Bahá'í de Adoración. La exhibición fué acompañada con explicaciones dadas por la señorita Julie Regal de Panamá, desarrollando así la historia de la construcción, arquitectura y significado del Templo. La señora Cora Oliver manejó el proyector.

Se abrió entonces, la sesión para preguntas. Esta parte también resultó muy fructífera por los interesantes puntos que las preguntas dieron a conocer.

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MARTES, 22 de enero:—El tema de esta noche se tituló "El Hilo de la Unidad a Través de las Religiones del Mundo", expuesto por el doctor Walter Blomquist, de Habana, Cuba y por el Sr. Alejandro Baldizón, de Guatemala. Se abrió la reunión por la dirigente, señora Natalia Chavez de Tegucigalpa, Honduras, quien presentó al primer conferencista.

El Dr. Blomquist trató su tema desde el punto de vista de la unidad de las Revelaciones Divinas de las Manifestaciones de Dios, mostrando cómo las enseñanzas de cada una están de acuerdo con las ne-

sidades de la época en que cada cual se revele. Hizo ver cómo las Revelaciones Divinas son progresivas, y aunque difieren necesariamente en su aspecto exotérico debido a las condiciones cambiantes de la humanidad, son iguales en su parte esotérica o espiritual. Explicó gráficamente cómo todas las Revelaciones Divinas de los Profetas son unidas y complementarias, usando como ejemplo un edificio y comparó cada religión a un piso, siendo todos necesarios para el edificio completo, uno apoyando al otro sin posibilidad de suprimir alguno, o de otra manera, se arruinaría el edificio.

Siguió con el mismo tema, el señor Baldizón, tratándolo del aspecto de la unidad de los Profetas. Dijo que "el hilo de la unidad a través de todas las religiones del mundo es el Espíritu Divino que animaba e inspiraba a todos los Mensajeros de Dios, la Fuente de Su Luz y Poder. Los grandes Profetas como Abraham, Moisés, Zoroastro, Buda, Krishna, Cristo, Mahoma, el Báb y Bahá'u'lláh son los Mediadores entre Dios, el Absoluto, y el hombre, y aunque Ellos tienen diferentes nombres, manifiestan la misma Luz, el mismo Espíritu Divino. No hay conflicto entre Ellos puesto que Todos manifiestan el Dios único y revelan al mundo, en determinada época, en forma evolutiva y complementaria, la Palabra Divina. Sobre la base de la comprensión de este principio fundamental, se unirán todas las religiones en una Fé común."

Después que se cerró esta reunión, los asistentes se dividieron espontáneamente en grupitos en diferentes partes de la sala, compenetrados en íntima discusión.

## MENSAJES DE SALUDOS

### CABLES

Guatemala: "Bahá'ís Guatemala saludan convención.—Edelberto Torres."

La Paz, Bolivia: "Oraciones, saludos y éxito.—Asamblea Espiritual de La Paz."

Punta Arenas, Chile: "Rezando éxito gloriosa ocasión histórica. Cariñosos saludos Bahá'ís Punta Arenas.—Artemus Lamb."

Río de Janeiro, Brazil: "Saludos cariñosos, deseos éxito primera sesión histórica Bahá'í Latino-Americana.—Armstrong, Salas, Bodes, Sánchez, Sirah, Orbison."

### EXTRACTOS DE CARTAS

Lima, Perú: "Los Bahá'ís de Lima envían sus afectuosos saludos a todos los Bahá'ís que han de participar en esa convención.—Asamblea Espiritual de Lima."

Buenos Aires, Argentina: "Lamentamos muchísimo no poder concurrir a tan importante Congreso. No obstante, estaremos con ustedes en pensamientos, oraciones y deseámosles el más grande éxito.—Asamblea Espiritual de Buenos Aires."

Cartagena, Colombia: "Ruego a usted el favor especial de presentar en nombre de los Bahá'ís de Cartagena un fraternal saludo a todos los delegados y los votos sincerísimos por el mejor éxito de las deliberaciones.—Ernesto A. Florez."

Ciudad de México: Saludos cariñosos y mejores deseos de esta Comunidad para el éxito del Congreso fueron participados verbalmente a los asistentes por la señora Blanca de Campos, de Panamá, recién llegada de México.

MIÉRCOLES, 23 de enero:—La reunión fue dirigida por el señor Carlos Porras, de San José, Costa Rica, quien abrió la sesión e hizo la presentación de los conferencistas, la señora Yolanda Stronach, de Caracas, Venezuela, la señorita Louise Baker, pionera de Caracas, y el sargento James Barrett, de Chile, quienes hablaron de diferentes aspectos del tema "El Arte Divino de Vivir".

Comenzó la conferencia con la charla de la señorita Baker quien dijo que la vida delineada en las Enseñanzas Bahá'ís para los creyentes es de tal nobleza que no hay nada más bello o más sublime a que el hombre pueda aspirar. Hizo énfasis sobre la sabiduría de vivir de acuerdo con estos consejos, no solamente como el más alto medio de encontrar nuestra felicidad en este mundo, sino también como una amplia preparación para un exaltado estado espiritual en el mundo del porvenir. Dijo: "La vida humana sobre esta tierra es una preparación para la vida después de la muerte. El estado humano en este mundo puede compararse al del niño en el vientre de la madre, donde él se desarrolla para funcionar en este plano. Así también, el ser humano debe desarrollar aquí en este mundo las cualidades espirituales y perfecciones que son los órganos para el funcionamiento del alma en el mundo del porvenir. El alma comienza su evolución allí desde el mismo grado de desarrollo que haya logrado en esta esfera y continúa eternamente en el proceso de adquirir las perfecciones divinas que son infinitas en otros planos espirituales, pero nunca regresa a este mundo terrenal reencarnándose en otro cuerpo humano para lograr su perfección, sino sigue su evolución en otro mundo que es más allá de nuestro poder describirlo."

Continuó la conferencia la señora Stronach, tratando el tema desde otro punto. Se refirió a los prejuicios y sus funestas consecuencias, y puso en relieve la necesidad de la eliminación de éstos como base del arte divino de vivir. Dijo que los prejuicios son el más grande obstáculo que la humanidad tiene en su sendero hacia la unión y fraternidad. Eliminando ese escollo, el camino será fácil y seguro ya que los prejuicios, tan arraigados todavía, son los que impiden la evolución y el progreso de la raza humana.

El tercer conferencista que tomó parte en el desarrollo de este tema, Sgo. Barrett, habló de la importancia de la influencia del Profeta sobre la conducta y la elevación espiritual, moral e intelectual del hombre, citando como con la venida de cada Profeta en la historia, ha surgido una nueva civilización y cultura como resultado directo del poder del Profeta y Su Mensaje Divino. Así también en la época actual vemos el surgimiento de una nueva civilización mundial basada en la Revelación Divina de Bahá'u'lláh.

Después la señorita Clara Luz Montalvo, que acababa de llegar de San Salvador, dió los saludos en nombre de su Comunidad a los asistentes y expresó su felicidad en tener la oportunidad de asistir a este acontecimiento tan importante después de haber tenido también el privilegio de asistir a la Convención Centenaria en los Estados Unidos de 1944 como delegada de El Salvador.

JUEVES, 24 de enero:—Esta reunión tuvo el aspecto de mesa redonda con el señor James Facey del grupo Bahá'í de Colón, Panamá, actuando como dirigente. El tema "La Unidad Del Género Humano" fue tratado en tres diferentes aspectos: "La Unidad Racial", expuesto por el señor Alfred E. Osborne, de la Zona del Canal; "La Unidad Religiosa", por el señor Hugo de Arteagabeitia, de Valparaiso,

Chile, y "La Unidad de las Naciones", por el doctor Roberto M. Hooker, de Managua, Nicaragua.

El señor Osborne dijo que la diferencia de razas existe en la actualidad como una tara dolorosa que arrastra la humanidad, pese a su progreso y civilización actuales. Deberá desaparecer del mundo esta ignominiosa creación del hombre para que pueda reinar la paz en los corazones. La salvación del mundo depende de un poder superior capaz de arrancar los prejuicios raciales desde sus raíces, y este poder (La Fe Bahá'í) está demostrando que lo tiene, por la unión racial que ya haya establecido en sus núcleos de fraternidad que existen en 78 países del mundo.

En su tema "La Unidad Religiosa", el representante de Chile dijo que nada permanece estático. Existe una evolución constante en todo lo que nos rodea. Si vemos que todo progresa, debemos aceptar que la religión, alimento espiritual del hombre, también debe regirse por esta Ley. Más todavía, además de marcar ella un proceso evolutivo para la humanidad, proclama de común acuerdo la inspiración divina. Todas las Religiones por los labios de sus Profetas, complementándose, han traído la Ley Divina para los hombres. No está lejano el día en que veamos a los hombres unidos, estrechamente enlazados como hermanos, en una misma Fe ya que la Verdad es una, y entonando un himno de paz y amor. Desaparecerá el prejuicio religioso y la humanidad tendrá una sola patria—la tierra entera.

Al desarrollar el aspecto de la "Unidad de las Naciones", el doctor Hooker hizo un análisis de la historia a través de los siglos, destacando los principales acontecimientos ocurridos, señalando los defectos que se han ido quedando rezagados. Dijo que si tratamos de cambiar el procedimiento educacional del mundo, llegaremos a unificar los ideales de las naciones y construir por ende un nuevo orden armónico. El niño, el hombre del mañana, deberá crecer al calor de estos nuevos ideales que abrirán el camino hacia un horizonte mejor.

## CLAUSURA DEL CONGRESO

Se clausuró el Congreso con una conferencia basada sobre el tema de "La Paz," que se efectuó la noche del viernes 25 de enero, en el Aula Máxima de la Universidad Inter-Americana. El primer conferencista fué el doctor Octavio Méndez Pereira, rector de la Universidad Inter-Americana y delegado de Panamá a la Conferencia de San Francisco. Su tópico de esta noche fué "El Problema de la Paz a la Luz de la Conferencia de San Francisco." Después se expuso el tema "El Plan Bahá'í Para La Paz" en sus dos aspectos, con la señorita Elisabeth Cheney tratando el aspecto de "La Paz Menor", y la señora Geyle Woolson el de "La Más Grande Paz." El señor Alfred Osborne actuó como dirigente de esta sesión.

Dió el doctor Méndez Pereira después de analizar el plan de Dumbarton Oaks y la Carta de las Naciones Unidas: "Para mí la guerra no ha terminado. Para mí la paz no ha comenzado. Todavía hay peligro de otra guerra. Todavía la bomba atómica hace temblar a los pueblos del mundo. No han puesto todas las cartas sobre la mesa los grandes poderes."

"Qué es la solución? Para mí, es reeducar al hombre, ennoblecer su espíritu y enseñarle que los más grandes son los que están peleando por la paz. América, creo yo, es la esperanza de la paz. Aquí podemos iniciar la reeducación del hombre. Yo espero que aquí nazca con las enseñanzas Bahá'ís, el

catolicismo, o cualquier otro medio de impulso para que se forme una nueva humanidad que comprenda la paz y que traiga la paz a todos los hombres."

Siguiendo el discurso del doctor Méndez P., la señorita Elisabeth Cheney habló de "La Paz Menor" y dijo: "Según las enseñanzas Bahá'ís pasamos ahora por unos años formativos, durante los cuales es nuestro deber establecer firmemente la base de la primera paz universal duradera. Esta paz menor consistirá en la federación de todas las naciones del mundo, basada en un nuevo concepto de ciudadanía. Ahora, mirando al futuro, el hombre de mañana, infante hoy, deberá recibir la educación desde un nuevo punto de vista, nuevas enseñanzas que le servirán para vivir en paz y armonía con sus semejantes. La Paz, se alcanzará en esta única forma—educando al mundo de acuerdo con los principios de Bahá'u'lláh."

La última en tomar la palabra fué la señora Gayle Woolson quien, al desarrollar el tema "La Más Grande Paz," explicó que "esta paz suprema vendrá después de la paz menor y corresponderá al establecimiento de un Estado Mundial en el que todas las naciones, razas, credos y clases estarán estrecha y permanentemente unidos. Esto presupone la espiritualización de la humanidad porque solo el poder superior del espíritu puede alcanzar tal estado de unidad y comprensión. El hombre puede realizar la paz menor pero no la Más Grande Paz porque solo el Poder Divino puede amalgamar los elementos variados del género humano en una sola familia unida con amor. Es ésta la misión de Bahá'u'lláh y Su Revelación Divina,—la de unificar a todos los seres humanos e inaugurar una nueva época sublime de espiritualidad, paz, fraternidad y justicia.

Más de cien personas asistieron a esta conferencia, y todo el programa fué transmitido por los micrófonos de la radio Miramar.

### PUBLICIDAD

El Congreso gozó de abundante y magnífica publicidad en los dos periódicos principales, *La Estrella de Panamá* y el *Panamá-América*, y también en el *Mundo Gráfico*, apareciendo la mayor parte de ésta en *La Estrella*. Se contó con dos anuncios pagados dando a conocer el programa del Congreso, y 25 artículos gratis relatando el desarrollo de las diferentes sesiones; dándose además una breve historia de cada conferencista y un resumen de su charla.

También se hizo publicidad mediante 25 cartones de buen tamaño anunciando el Congreso y los títulos y fechas de las conferencias nocturnas, los cuales se colocaron en los escaparates de las diferentes tiendas y edificios céntricos.

Se exhibieron, en igual forma, dos grandes e impresionantes fotografías de la Casa Bahá'í de Adoración en los elegantes escaparates de dos de las principales tiendas de la ciudad de Panamá.

Hubo tanta publicidad que un lector envió al editor de "La Estrella" una carta en la cual preguntó por qué se había cedido tanto espacio, aún en la primera página, a ese "asunto Bahá'í."

### BELLAS CANCIONES

Una nota alegre y simpática la proporcionó el representante de Costa Rica, señor Carlos Porras, quien después de apreciar el ambiente fraternal que reinaba en el Congreso, se dió a conocer como un excelente tenor. Deleitó a los asistentes con preciosas selecciones de óperas y canciones semi-clásicas, siendo premiado con el aplauso sincero y espontáneo de todos.

### LA RADIO

Uno de los aspectos para dar a conocer la importancia que este Primer Congreso Latino Americano Bahá'í ha tenido, fué la organización de programas radiales, tendientes, además a difundir los principios fundamentales de la Fé.

Se contó para ello con la valiosa cooperación de la Emisora Panameña, "La Nacional", que cedió durante todos los días en que este Congreso funcionaba un espacio de quince minutos en forma gratuita para la divulgación de nuestra querida Causa.

Queremos dejar constancia del espíritu de unión que animaba a cada uno de los representantes, quienes, en forma totalmente impersonal, dejaban traslucir a través de sus expresiones, en estos programas radiales, el profundo arraigo dentro de la Fé sin demostrar ambición por destacar su concurso como delegado de determinado país. Todos trataron, en una u otra forma, de transmitir nuestro Mensaje iluminando el sendero con la Antorcha de la Realidad de nuestra época.

En la primera audición la señora Gayle Woolson y el Sgt. James Barrett dieron a conocer el significado de este Primer Congreso y la importancia que ha tenido como medio de unificación en nuestros ideales.

En el segundo programa el señor H. de Arteagabeitia, Bahá'í, Chileno en diálogo con el Sgt. Barrett continuó exponiendo el Plan de la Fé Bahá'í.

En la próxima audición el Dr. Walter Blomquist, representante de Cuba, hizo un estudio del futuro del mundo visto a través del nuevo cuadro presentado por la energía atómica.

En el programa del día martes 22, fueron presentados los delegados de Costa Rica y Guatemala, señores Carlos Porras y Alejandro Baldizón, respectivamente. Comunicaron sinceridad y fraternidad a las palabras de su mensaje dirigido a los oyentes.

Luego, durante el Jueves 24, los oyentes tuvieron el placer de oír a dos pioneras, las señoritas Elisabeth Cheney y Louise Baker, la primera, pionera viajante y la segunda radicada en la República de Venezuela.

Así continuó el programa hasta llegar al día viernes 25 en que finalmente fué presentada la señora Gayle Woolson, quien completó el ciclo dando a conocer a los auditores, las conclusiones obtenidas en este Primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino-Americano. Hizo resaltar la perfecta armonía lograda entre los representantes dejando de manifiesto el valor incommensurable de la Fé en el devenir de la civilización futura.

### PARTICIPACION DE CHILE

El país lejano de Chile se vió representado en el Congreso por dos creyentes, el señor Hugo de Arteagabeitia, de la Comunidad de Valparaíso y el Sargento James Barrett, de Santiago.

El señor Arteagabeitia fué enviado como el representante de Chile por medio de los esfuerzos unidos de las tres Comunidades de este País, las de Santiago, Punta Arenas y Valparaíso.

Por pura casualidad, el Sargento James Barrett se encontró en Panamá durante el periodo del Congreso debido a dificultades de transportación en ruta a Santiago desde los Estados Unidos.

Estos dos Bahá'ís de Chile prestaron valiosos servicios a las actividades del Congreso, especialmente sus contribuciones a las audiciones radiales.



## Se clausuró anoche el C. Baha'i

Anoche se clausuró el Congreso Bahá'í Latinoamericano con una conferencia sobre el tema "El plan Bahá'í para la paz" en el aula máxima de la Universidad Interamericana, la cual fué difundida por radio.

Concurrieron los delegados Bahá'ís de los diez países americanos representados en éste y muchas personas interesadas en estas enseñanzas de la fraternidad universal.

Fuó precedido el programa por una breve disertación del rector de la Universidad, el doctor Octavio Méndez Pereira, quien fué un delegado de Panamá a la Conferencia de San Francisco. Dijo el doctor Méndez P., después de analizar el plan de Dumbarton Oaks y la Carta de las Naciones Unidas:

"Para mí la guerra no ha terminado. Para mí la paz no ha comenzado. Todavía hay peligro de otra guerra. Todavía la bomba atómica hace temblar a los pueblos del mundo. No han puesto todas las cartas sobre la mesa los grandes poderes.

"¿Qué es la solución? Para mí, es reeducar al hombre, ennoblecere su espíritu y enseñarle que los más grandes son los que están peleando por la paz. En América, creo ya es la esperanza de la paz. Aquí podemos iniciar la reeducación del hombre. Yo espero que aquí nazca con las enseñanzas Bahá'ís, el catolicismo, o cualquier otro medio den impulso para que se forme una nueva humanidad que comprenda la paz y que traiga la paz a todos los hombres.

Siguiendo al discurso del ilustre doctor Méndez P. la señora Elizabeth Cheney, pionera viajante de la fe Bahá'í, habló sobre "La paz menor", y dijo:

"Según las enseñanzas Bahá'ís, pasamos ahora por unos años formativos, durante los cuales es nuestro deber establecer firmemente la base de la primera paz universal duradera. Esta paz menor será la federación de todas las naciones del mundo basada en un nuevo concepto de ciudadanía."

La última en tomar la palabra fué la señora Gayle Woolson, representante Bahá'í en Panamá, quien desarrolló el tema de "La Más grande paz". Dijo ella:

"Esta paz suprema vendrá después de la paz menor y corresponderá al establecimiento de un Estado mundial en el que todas las naciones, razas, credos y clases estarán estrecha y permanentemente unidos. Esto presupone la espiritualización de la humanidad porque sólo por el poder superior del espíritu se puede llegar a tal estado de unión y comprensión. La misión de la fe Bahá'í es precisamente esto: la de espiritualizar y unificar toda la humanidad. Las enseñanzas de Bahá'u'lláh da un nuevo impulso espiritual y un plan de unión para la humanidad en nuestra época e inaugura una nueva época sublime de paz, amor, fraternidad y justicia."

Se va a continuar anualmente con semejantes congresos Bahá'ís Latinoamericanos, pero el que acaba de efectuarse, para los Bahá'ís tiene importancia histórica especial por haber sido el primero.

LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMA

27 de ENERO de 1946

## Clausura del Congreso Baha'i



La señora Gayle Woolson, en el momento de hablar ante los concurrentes a la sesión de clausura del Congreso Bahá'í Latinoamericano que acaba de celebrarse en esta ciudad. El acto de clausura se efectuó en el paraninfo de la Universidad. El rector de la institución, doctor Octavio Méndez Pereira, aparece en esta fotografía.

1º de FEBRERO de 1946

STRELLA DE PANAMA — P.



Señora Amelia Collins

La señora Amelia Collins, de Phoenix, Arizona, E. U., fue la más notable de las distinguidas personas que de diez países vinieron al histórico Primer Congreso Baha'i Latinoamericano efectuado en Panamá desde el 21 al 25 de enero.

Dejará el istmo el 5 de febrero en avión para El Salvador y continuará por todos los países en el camino con rumbo a los Estados Unidos, quedando varios días en cada uno de ellos.

La señora Collins ha sido por varios años miembro de la Asamblea Espiritual Nacional de los Baha'is de los Estados Unidos y Canadá, y también del Comité Inter-Americano de éste. Asistió al Congreso como representante oficial de estos dos cuerpos.

Dos veces ha visitado al Guardián de la Fe Baha'i, Shoghi Effendi, en el centro Baha'i internacional en Haifa, Palestina, primero en 1923 y otra vez en 1938.

Anoche en la reunión semanal Baha'i en la Avenida Tivoli Número 10, Apto. 18, la señora Collins contó varias y muy interesantes experiencias de estos dos viajes.

Ha viajado también a la Argentina y a Chile e Islandia por la causa Baha'i.

La señora Collins se aloja en el hotel Tivoli.

FEBRUARY 1, 1946

ST. P. & HERALD — P.

## Mrs. Collins Is Baha'i Speaker



MRS. AMELIA COLLINS

Mrs. Amelia Collins, of Phoenix, Ariz., outstanding among the delegates from ten countries who attended the First Baha'i Latin-American Conference recently convened in Panama, will leave the isthmus February 5 by plane for El Salvador, and will make brief stays in each country on her way back to the United States.

Mrs. Collins has been for several years a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada, and also a member of the Inter-American Committee of the same. She attended the Conference as an official representative of these two bodies.

Twice she has visited the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, at the Baha'i world center, Haifa, Palestine, first in 1923, and again in 1938. Last night at the weekly Baha'i meeting at No. 10 Tivoli Ave., Apt. 18, Mrs. Collins related many extremely interesting incidents that occurred during these two visits.

She has also traveled to Argentina, Chile and Iceland in the interest of the cult.

Mrs. Collins is staying at the Hotel Tivoli.

AN INDEPENDENT **THE** DAILY NEWSPAPER

# Panama American

"Let the people know the truth and the country is safe" — Abraham Lincoln

PANAMA, R. P., MONDAY, JANUARY 14, 1946

## Conference For Baha'i Followers To Convene Here

Panama will be the site from Jan. 21 through 25 of the first Baha'i Latin American Conference, to be held under the auspices of the Baha'i Inter-American Committee of the United States and the International Baha'i School in Colorado.

The conference is an initial step toward the convening every year of similar Baha'i conferences in Latin America.

People from various countries of the Western Hemisphere will convene in Panama to take part in the Conference. Baha'is are expected to come from Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela, Chile, and the United States.

During the five days of the Conference, classes will be held in the morning and public meetings in Spanish in the evening. The morning classes will be held at No. 6 Tivoli Ave., Apt. 10, from 9:30-11:30 a.m. and will deal with the history and administration of the Baha'i Faith, the Plan for a New World Order outlined by Baha'ullah, and methods and means for teaching the "Cause of Universal Brotherhood."

The first four evening meetings will be held at No. 10 Tivoli Ave., Apt. 18, at 8 p.m.

The conference will terminate Friday evening, Jan. 25, with a public meeting in the Inter-American University beginning at 8:00 p.m. The subject will be "The Baha'i Peace Program."

The Rector of the University, Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, who was one of Panama's delegates to the San Francisco Peace Conference, will open the meeting with a discourse entitled, "The Problem of Peace in the Light of the San Francisco Conference."

Following this, Miss Elizabeth Cheney, renowned Baha'i pioneer, will present the Baha'i teachings on "The Lesser Peace," concerning aspects of the peace established by the nations among themselves.

Lastly, Mrs. Gayle Wooison, Baha'i representative in Panama, will expound the meaning of the "Most Great Peace," which she describes as "the peace that will come with the spiritualization and brotherhood of humanity when all men will recognize one another as members of one human family and the world as one common home."

These meetings, in Spanish, will be open and free to the public.

# LA ESTRELLA DE PA



FUNDADO EN 1853

PANAMA, R. de P., LUNES 14 de ENERO de 1946

Interamericano Bahá'í de los Estados Unidos y de la Escuela Internacional Bahá'í de Colorado. Este Congreso es un paso inicial hacia la celebración anualmente de similares Congresos Bahá'ís en América Latina.

Concurrierán a esta República que vio también el Primer Congreso Panamericano convocado por Bolívar, agentes de varios países de este hemisferio.

**Congreso que también será histórico**  
Se esperan asistentes de Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela, Chile y los Estados Unidos.

Durante los cinco días del Congreso, se celebrarán sesiones de estudio por las mañanas y conferencias públicas por las noches. Las clases prácticas se efectuarán en la Avenida Tivoli número 6, apartamento 10, de 9:30 a 1:30 y tratamiento de la historia y la administración de la fe Bahá'í, el plan para el nuevo orden mundial delineado por Bahá'u'lláh, y los métodos y medidas para la enseñanza de esta causa de la fraternidad universal.

#### Reuniones públicas

Las cuatro primeras reuniones pú-

blíquitas de este Congreso no sigue:

Lunes, el 21: "El Mensaje Bahá'í al Mundo". Señorita Elizabeth Cheney, quien ha sido pionera Bahá'í en muchos países latinoamericanos. Después se presentará una exhibición de vistas iluminadas del Templo Bahá'í cerca de Chicago, mientras que la señorita Julia Regal, representante Bahá'í de Panamá, contará "La Historia de la Primera Casa Bahá'í de Adoración en el Occidente".

Martes, el 22: "El Hilo de la Unidad a través de las Religiones del Mundo". Doctor Walter Blomquist, de La Habana, Cuba, y señorita Julia Regal.

Miércoles, el 23: "El Acto Divino de Vivir". Señorita Louise Baker y señora Yolanda Stronach, ambas de Caracas, Venezuela.

Jueves, el 24: "La Unidad de la Humanidad". Una mesa redonda en la cual tomarán parte el señor Alfred Osbórn, de la Zona del Canal; la señora Louise Cornell, quien vendrá de Bogotá; y el doctor Robert M. Hooker, de Managua, Nicaragua.

El viernes 25 de enero terminará este Congreso histórico con una conferencia pública en la Universidad Interamericana. Esta reunión también comenzará a las 8 p. m. Su tema será "el Programa Bahá'í para la Paz".

El sector de la Universidad, doctor Octavio Méndez Pereira, quien fue delegado de Panamá a la conferencia de San Francisco, abrirá la conferencia con un discurso titulado "El Problema de la Paz a la Luz de la Conferencia de San Francisco".

La señorita Elizabeth Cheney, reirá las enseñanzas Bahá'ís concernientes a "La Paz Menor", que trata con los aspectos de la paz entre las naciones y esta es la etapa de la paz en la cual el mundo está entrando actualmente. Después, la señora Gayle Woolson, representante Bahá'í en Panamá, elaborará lo que significará "La más Grande Paz", que trata con la paz mayor que vendrá con la espiritualización y fraternidad del género humano cuando todos los hombres se reconocen como los miembros de una

# Se reunirá en Panamá el Ier. Congreso Baha'í de A. Latina

Se celebrará del día 21 al 25 de los corrientes y asistirán delegados de varios países de este Hemisferio

Tendrá lugar en Panamá, del día 21 al día 25 de los corrientes, el primer Congreso Baha'í Latinoamericano, bajo los auspicios del Comité Interamericano Baha'í de los Estados Unidos y de la Escuela Internacional Baha'í de Colorado. Este Congreso es un paso inicial hacia la celebración anualmente de similares Congresos Baha'ís en América Latina.

Concurrirán a esta República que vió también el Primer Congreso Panamericano convocado por Bolívar, agentes de varios países de este hemisferio.

**Congreso que también será histórico**  
Se esperan asistentes de Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela, Chile y los Estados Unidos.

Durante los cinco días del Congreso, se celebrarán sesiones de estudio, por las mañanas y conferencias públicas por las noches. Las clases matutinas se efectuarán en la Avenida Tivoli número 8, apartamento 10, de 9:30 a 1:30, y tratarán de la historia y la administración de la fe Baha'í, el plan para el nuevo orden mundial delineado por Baha'u'lláh, y los métodos y medidas para la enseñanza de esta causa de la fraternidad universal.

#### Reuniones públicas

Las cuatro primeras reuniones pú-

blicas que se celebrarán en las noches tendrán lugar en la Avenida Tivoli número 10, apartamento 18, a las 8 p. m. Los temas y conferencias de estas reuniones son como sigue:

Lunes, el 21: "El Mensaje Baha'í al Mundo". Señorita Elizabeth Cheney, quien ha sido pionera Baha'í en muchos países latinoamericanos. Después se presentará una exhibición de vistas iluminadas del Templo Baha'í cerca de Chicago, mientras que la señorita Julie Regal, representante Baha'í de Panamá, contará "La Historia de la Primera Casa Baha'í de Adoración en el Occidente".

Martes, el 22: "El Hilo de la Unidad a través de las Religiones del Mundo". Doctor Walter Blomquist, de La Habana, Cuba, y señorita Julie Regal.

Miércoles, el 23: "El Arte Divino de Vivir". Señorita Louise Baker y señora Yolanda Stronach, ambas de Caracas, Venezuela.

Jueves, el 24: "La Unidad de la Humanidad". Una mesa redonda en la cual tomarán parte el señor Alfred Osborne, de la Zona del Canal; la señora Louise Caswell, quien vendrá de Bogotá; y el doctor Robert M. Hooker, de Managua, Nicaragua.

El viernes 25 de enero terminará este Congreso histórico con una conferencia pública en la Universidad Interamericana. Esta reunión también comenzará a las 8 p. m. Su tema será "el Programa Baha'í para la Paz".

El rector de la Universidad, doctor Octavio Méndez Pereira, quien fué delegado de Panamá a la conferencia de San Francisco, abrirá la conferencia con un discurso titulado "El Problema de la Paz a la Luz de la Conferencia de San Francisco".

La señorita Elizabeth Cheney, será las enseñanzas Baha'ís concierne a "La Paz Menor", que trata con los aspectos de la paz entre las naciones y ésta es la etapa de la paz en la cual el mundo está entrando actualmente. Después, la señora Gayle Woolson, representante Baha'í en Panamá, elaborará lo que significará "La más Grande Paz", que trata con la paz mayor que vendrá con la espiritualización y fraternidad del género humano cuando todos los hombres se reconocen como los miembros de una sola familia humana y el mundo es un solo hogar.

Todas las conferencias se

STAR & HERALD  
JANUARY 14, 1946

## Mendez Pereira To Speak At Baha'i Parley

Conference To Open  
January 21; Session  
For Four Days

Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, Rector of the National University, will be among the speakers at the First Baha'i Latin American Conference to convene in Panama January 21 under the auspices of the Baha'i Inter-America Committee of the United States and the International Baha'i School in Colorado.

The conference will initiate a program of annual Baha'i conferences in Latin America.

Delegates expected to assemble here, the historic site chosen by Simon Bolivar as that for the First Pan American Conference, will represent Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela, Chile and the United States.

During the five days of the conference classes will be held in the morning and public meetings, in Spanish, each evening. Morning classes will be held at No. 6 Tivoli Avenue, Apartment 10, from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. and will deal with the history and administration of the Baha'i Faith, the plan for a New World Order as outlined by Bah'u'llah, and methods for teaching the cause of universal brotherhood.

The first four evening meetings will be held at No. 10 Tivoli Avenue, starting at 8 p.m. The closing session will be Friday evening, January 25, at the Inter-American University, the subject to be "The Baha'i Peace Program."

It will be at the closing session that Dr. Mendez Pereira, a delegate to the recent San Francisco conference of the United Nations Organization, will be the speaker. Dr. Mendez Pereira will speak on "The Problem of Peace in the Light of the San Francisco Conference." Other speakers on the final program will include Miss Elizabeth Cheney, on "The Lesser Peace"; Mrs. Gayle Woolson, Baha'i representative in Panama.

The programs for the first four evening meetings, all of which will be open to the public, will be as follows:

Monday, Jan. 21: "The Baha'i Message to the World" — Miss Elizabeth Cheney and Miss Julie Regal to be speakers.

Tuesday, Jan. 22: "The Thread of Unity Through the World's Religions" — Dr. Walter Blomquist and Miss Julie Regal.

Wednesday, Jan. 23: "The Divine Art of Living" — Miss Louise Baker and Mrs. Yolanda Sirotsch, both of Caracas, Venezuela.

Thursday, Jan. 24: "The Oneness of Mankind" — a panel discussion with Alfred Osborne, Canal Zone; Louise Caswell, just returned from Bogota; and Dr. Robert M. Hooker of Managua, Nicaragua.

## Representative Of Baha'i Returns To Panama For Parley

Mrs. Louise Caswell, well-known Baha'i representative of this city during the last six years, returned to Panama Wednesday by plane after a two months' stay in Colombia, to take part in the first Latin American Baha'i Conference which will be held in this city Jan. 21 to Jan. 25.

While in Colombia, Mrs. Caswell visited Bogota, Medellin and Cali, and she is expected to relate some of her experiences while there in the reception which is being given her today at 8:00 p.m. at No. 10, Tivoli Ave., Apt. 18.

STAR & HERALD

JANUARY 17, 1946

## Baha'i Leader To Be Honored Tonite



MRS. LOUISE CASWELL

Mrs. Caswell returned to the Isthmus yesterday afternoon, arriving by air from Bogota, Colombia, to take part in the first Latin American Baha'i Conference which is to be held in Panama from January 21 through 25. Mrs. Caswell is well known in this city, where she has been active for the last six years as a Baha'i representative. During her two months' stay in Colombia she visited Medellin, Cali and Bogota.

At the weekly Baha'i meeting to be held this evening at 8 o'clock at No. 10 Tivoli Avenue, Apt. 18, a reception will be tendered in honor of Mrs. Caswell who will speak on her recent visit to Colombia.

EL PANAMA AMERICANO  
VIERNES, ENERO 12, 1946

## El domingo inaugurarse aquí el Primer Congreso Baha'i de la América Latina

El acto de clausura será en la Universidad el viernes y hablará el Dr. O. Méndez P.

La señora Amelia E. Collins, miembro de la Asamblea Nacional Espiritual Baha'i de los Estados Unidos y Canadá, y miembro también del Comité Interamericano Baha'i llegará a Panamá, el domingo, 20 de enero para asistir al primer Congreso Baha'i Latino-Americano que tendrá lugar aquí del 21 al 25 de enero. La señora Collins viene como la representante oficial del Comité Interamericano Baha'i de los Estados Unidos.

El Congreso Baha'i Latino-Americano se efectuará bajo los auspicios del Comité Interamericano Baha'i y de la Escuela Internacional Baha'i de Colorado. Concurrirán también representantes de Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela y Chile. Este Congreso es histórico, siendo el paso inicial hacia la celebración anual de similares Congresos Baha'is en América Latina.

Durante los cinco días del Congreso se celebrarán sesiones de estudio y discusiones por las mañanas y conferencias públicas por las noches. Las clases rituales se efectuarán en la Ave. Tivoli, No. 6, Apto. 10, de 9:30 a 11:30, y tratarán de la historia y la administración de la Fe Baha'i, el Plan para el nuevo orden mundial delineado por Baha'u'llah, Fundador de la Fe Baha'i, y los métodos y medidas para la enseñanza de esta causa de la fraternidad universal.

Programa de las reuniones nocturnas.

El lunes, 21, a las 8 p. m. Tema: "El Mensaje Baha'i Al Mundo" por la señorita Elizabeth Cheney, pionera viajante de la Fe Baha'i. Se presentará también una exhibición de vistas iluminadas de la Casa Baha'i de Adoración que está en Wilmette, Illinois, E. U. A., con explicaciones dadas a la vez por la señorita Julie Regal, de Panamá.

Martes, 22 Tema: "El Hilo de la Unidad a Través de Las Religiones del Mundo", por el Dr. Walter Blomquist, de Cuba, y el señor Alejandro Baldizón, de Guatemala.

El aspecto de la "Unidad Religiosa", y el doctor Robert H. Hooker, de Nicaragua, "La Unidad de las Naciones". Estas cuatro conferencias tendrán lugar en la Avenida Tivoli número 10, Apto. 18, a las 8 p. m.

La clausura del Congreso tendrá lugar el viernes 25, en la Universidad Inter-Americana en el aula máxima, a las 8 p. m. El doctor Octavio Méndez Pereira, Rector de la Universidad Inter-Americana de Panamá, quien fue delegado a la Conferencia de San Francisco, dictará una conferencia sobre el tema "El Problema de la Paz en la Luz de la Conferencia de San Francisco". Seguirá un discurso sobre el tema "El Plan Baha'i Para La Paz" por la se-

ñorita Elizabeth Cheney que tratará el aspecto de "La Paz Menor" de este Plan, y después la señora Gayle Woolson elaborará el otro aspecto que se trata con "La Más Grande Paz".

Se inaugura el Congreso el domingo, 20 a las 8 p. m. en la Avenida Tivoli, número 10, Apto. número 18, con una recepción para los visitantes a nuestro país, durante la cual el Lic. Isidro A. Beluche, de Panamá, hablará sobre "El Significado del Congreso Pan-Americano Convocado Por Bolívar", y la señora Louise Caswell, presidente de la Asamblea Espiritual Baha'i de Panamá, exhibirá "El Significado del Primer Congreso Baha'i Latino-Americano".

Las conferencias son públicas y gratis.



SABADO, ENERO 19, 1946

PANAMA AMERICA — DIARIO INDEPENDIENTE

### Delegada Baha'i que regreso de Colombia

Señora Louise Caswell reconocida representante Baha'i de esta ciudad durante los últimos seis años, quien regreso ayer tarde a Panamá después de una estancia de dos meses en Colombia, para tomar parte en el primer Congreso Baha'i Latino-Americano que se efectuará en esta del 21 al 25 de este mes. En Colombia visitó Bogotá, Medellín y Cali, y se espera escucharle contar sus experiencias en la recepción que los Baha'is le ofrecieron esta noche a las 8 p. m. en la Ave. Tivoli, número 10, Apto. 18.

Algunos aspectos de las Enseñanzas Baha'is tambien serán explicados por la señora Gayle Woolson, quien dictará una conferencia sobre "La Chispa Divina en el Ser Humano".

Se invita al público a asistir.

LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMA  
JUEVES 17 de ENERO de 1946

### De regreso



SRA. LOUISE CASWELL

quien regresó al Istmo ayer tarde por la vía aérea de Bogotá, Colombia, para tomar parte en el primer Congreso Baha'i Latino-Americano que ha de celebrarse en esta ciudad, donde ha permanecido como representante Baha'i durante seis años. Su estancia en Colombia fué de dos meses, y además de Bogotá, visitó a Medellín y a Cali.

En la reunión semanal Baha'i esta noche a las 8 en la Ave. Tivoli N° 10, Apto. 18, se ofrecerá a la señora Caswell una recepción en la cual se espera escucharla contar sus experiencias en Colombia.

También algunas enseñanzas Baha'is explicará la Sra. Gayle Woolson en un discurso titulado, "La Chispa Divina en el Ser Humano". Se invita al público a asistir.

# EL LUNES SE INAUGURA EL I.º CONGRESO BAHÁ'Í LA VENDRAN ASISTENTES DE VARIOS PAISES

Tendrá lugar en Panamá del día 21 al día 25 de los próximos, el primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino-Americano, bajo los auspicios del Comité Inter-Americano Bahá'í de los EE. UU. y de la Escuela Internacional Bahá'í de Colorado. Este Congreso es un paso hacia la celebración anual de similares Congresos Bahá'ís en América Latina.

Concurrirán sobre este Istmo, que vio también el primer Congreso Pan-Americano convocado por Bolívar, gentes de varios países de este Hemisferio, a este congreso que también será histórico.

Se esperan asistentes de Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras,



Señora Amelia E. Collins, Representante oficial del Comité Interamericano Bahá'í de los Estados Unidos al Primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino Americano que se celebrará en esta ciudad la próxima semana.



Señora Loise Creswell, representante de la fe Bahá'í que ha estado laborando con muy buen éxito en Panamá desde hace seis años. La señora Loise acaba de regresar de Colombia donde realizó durante dos meses una fecunda labor.

Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela y los Estados Unidos.

Durante los cinco días del Congreso, se celebrarán sesiones de estudio por las mañanas y conferencias públicas por las noches. Las clases matina-

les se efectuarán en la Ave. Tivoli No. 6, Apto. 10, de 9:30 a 11:30, y tratarán de la historia y la administración de la Fe Bahá'í, el Plan para el nuevo orden mundial delineado por Bahá'u'lláh, y los métodos y medidas para la existencia de esta Causa de la Fraternidad Universal.

### Reuniones Públicas

Las cuatro primeras reuniones públicas que se celebrarán en las noches tendrán lugar en la Ave. Tivoli No. 10 Apto. 10, a las 8 p.m. Las temáticas serán: "Historia de esta religión" y "El Plan para el nuevo orden mundial".

Los días 22 y 23 "El Arte Divino de Vivir" — Srta. Elizabeth Cheney, quien ha sido representante Bahá'í en muchos países Latino-Americanos. Después se presentará una exhibición de vistas luminosas que Teneo Bahá'í cerca de Chicago. Mientras que la Srta. Julia Regal, representante Bahá'í de Panamá, contará "La Historia de la Primera Casa Bahá'í de Adoración en el Occidente".

Martes, el 22: "El Hilo de la Unidad a Través de las Religiones del Mundo" — Dr. Willy Blomquist, de Habana, Cuba, y el Sr. Alejandro Baldivieso, de Guatemala.

Miércoles, el 23: "El Arte Divino de Vivir" — Srta. Louise Baker y Srta. Yolanda Strognach, ambas de Caracas, Venezuela, y la Srta. Clara Luz Montalvo, de El Salvador.

Jueves, el 24: "La Unidad de la Humanidad" — una obra redonda en la cual tomarán parte el Sr. Alfredo Osborne, de la Zona del Canal; el Sr. Hugo de Aricagabettin, de Chile y el Dr. Robert M. Hooker, de Managua, Nicaragua.

Clausura en la Universidad Inter-Americana

El viernes 25 de enero terminará este Congreso histórico con una conferencia pública en la Universidad Inter-Americana. Esta reunión también comenzará a las 8 p.m. Su tema será "El Programa Bahá'í Para la Paz".

El Rector de la Universidad, Dr. Octavio Méndez Pérez, quien fue un delegado de Panamá a la Conferencia de San Francisco, abrirá la conferencia con un discurso titulado "El Problema de la Paz en la Luz de la Conferencia de San Francisco".

Entonces, la Srta. Elizabeth Cheney, renombrada pionera Bahá'í, presentará las enseñanzas Bahá'ís concernientes "La Paz Menor", que trata con los aspectos de la paz entre las naciones y esta es la etapa de la paz en la cual el mundo está entrando actual-mente. Después, la Srta. Gayle Woolson, representante Bahá'í en Panamá, elaborará la que se titula "La Paz Mas Grande que Jamás". Se ha agrupado en ella lo mejor de nuestros maestros, han venido a contribuir "La Paz", que trata con la paz mayor que vendrá con la espiritualización y fraternidad del género humano cuando todos los hombres se reconozcan como los miembros de una su-

la familia humana y el ser como un solo hogar.

Todas las conferencias serán gratuitas.

Se inaugura el Congreso domingo, 20, a las 8 p.m. en la Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 10, con una recepción para los asistentes a nuestro país, a la cual el Lic. Isidro A. Luche de Panamá hablará.

# INAUGURA EL I.º CONGRESO BAHÁ'Í LATINO AMERICANO

## VENDRAN ASISTENTES DE VARIOS PAISES



Señora Amelia E. Collins, Representante oficial del Comité Interamericano Bahá'í de los Estados Unidos al Primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino Americano que se celebrará en esta ciudad la próxima semana.

Se efectuarán en la Avenida Tivoli No. 6, Apto. 10, de 9:30 a 11:30, y tratarán de la historia y la administración de la Fe Bahá'í, el Plan para el nuevo orden mundial delineado por Bahá'u'lláh, y los métodos y medidas para la enseñanza de esta Causa de la Fraternidad Universal.

### Reuniones Públicas

Las cuatro primeras reuniones públicas que se celebrarán en las noches tendrán lugar en la Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 10, a las 8 p.m. Los temas y conferencias de estas reuniones son como sigue:  
Lunes, el 21: "El Mensaje Bahá'í al Mundo" — Srta. Elizabeth Cheney, quien ha sido pionera Bahá'í en muchos países Latino-americanos. Les será presentada una exhibición de vistas luminadas del templo Bahá'í cerca de Chiapas, México, mientras que la Srta. Regal, representante Bahá'í de Panamá, contará sobre

Martes, el 22: "El Hilo de la Unidad a Través de las Religiones del Mundo" — Dr. Walter Blomquist, de Habana, Cuba, y el Sr. Alejandro Baldivieso, de Guatemala.

Miércoles, el 23: "El Arte Divino de Vivir" — Srta. Louise Baker y Sra. Yolanda Stromath, ambas de Caracas, Venezuela, y la Srta. Clara Luz Montalvo, de El Salvador.

Jueves, el 24: "La Unidad de la Humanidad" — una mera refonda en la cual tomarán parte el Sr. Alfredo Osborne, de la Zona del Canal; el Sr. Hugo de Artcagabeitia, de Chile y el Dr. Robert M. Hooker, de Managua, Nicaragua.

### Clausura en la Universidad Inter-Americana

El viernes 25 de enero terminará este Congreso histórico con una conferencia pública en la Universidad Inter-Americana. Esta reunión también comenzará a las 8 p.m. Su tema será "El Programa Bahá'í Para la Paz".

El Rector de la Universidad, Dr. Octavio Méndez Pereira, quien fué un delegado de Panamá a la Conferencia de San Francisco, abrirá la conferencia con un discurso titulado "El Problema de la Paz en la Luz de la Conferencia de San Francisco".

Entonces, la Srta. Elizabeth Cheney, renombrada pionera Bahá'í, presentará las enseñanzas Bahá'ís concernientes "La Paz Menor", que trata con los aspectos de la paz entre las naciones y esta es la etapa de la paz en la cual el mundo está entrando actualmente. Después, la Srta. Gayle Woolson, representante Bahá'í en Panamá, elaborará lo que significará "La Paz Más Grande" en el mundo. Se ha agruppado en ella lo mejor de nuestros músicos, han venido a contribuir "La Paz", que trata con la paz mayor que vendrá con la es-

ta familia humana y el mundo como un solo hogar.

Todas las conferencias son gratis.

Se inaugura el Congreso el domingo, 20, a las 8 p.m. en la Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 10 con una recepción para los visitantes a nuestro país, durante la cual el Lic. Isidro A. Beluche de Panamá hablará so-

bre el "Significado del Congreso Pan-Americano convocado por Bolívar, y la Srta. Louise Caswell, presidente de la Asamblea Espiritual Bahá'í de Panamá explicará "El Significado del Primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino-Americano".

Las conferencias son públicas y gratis.

SABADO, ENERO 19, 1946

EL PANAMA-AMERICA — DIARIO INDEPENDIENTE

## Programa del CONGRESO BAHÁ'Í LATINO-AMERICANO

Recepción — Domingo, 20 de Enero, 8 p.m.

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sr. José Villalón — Panamá.

Tema: "EL SIGNIFICADO DEL PRIMER CONGRESO  
LATINO-AMERICANO CONVOCADO POR  
BOLIVAR"—Lic. Isidro A. Beluche — Panamá

"EL SIGNIFICADO DEL PRIMER CONGRESO  
BAHÁ'Í LATINO-AMERICANO"  
Sra. Louise Caswell — Panamá

Lunes, 21 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sra. Norma Hamilton — Zona del Canal.

Tema: "EL MENSAJE BAHÁ'Í AL MUNDO"  
Srta. Elizabeth Cheney — Pionera viajante  
Exhibición de Películas del Templo Bahá'í  
con explicaciones por la Srta. Julie Regal—Panamá

Martes, 22 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sra. Natalia Chávez — Honduras

Tema: "EL HILO DE LA UNIDAD A TRAVÉS DE LAS  
RELIGIONES DEL MUNDO"  
Dr. Walter Blomquist — Cuba  
Sr. Alejandro Baldivón — Guatemala

Miércoles, 23 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sr. Carlos Porras — Costa Rica

Tema: "EL ARTE DIVINO DE VIVIR"  
Srta. Clara Luz Montalvo — El Salvador  
Srta. Louise Baker — Venezuela  
Sra. Yolanda Stronach — Venezuela

Jueves, 24 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18

Dirigente: Sr. James Facey — Panamá

Tema: "LA UNIDAD DEL GENERO HUMANO"  
"La Unidad Racial"—Sr. Alfred E. Osborne—  
Zona del Canal  
"La Unidad Religiosa"—Sr. Hugo de Arteagabeitia  
—Chile  
"La Unidad de las Naciones"—  
Dr. Robert M. Hooker—Nicaragua

Viernes, 25 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Aula Máxima, Universidad Inter-Americana

Dirigente: Sr. Alfred E. Osborne

Tema: "EL PROBLEMA DE LA PAZ EN LA LUZ DE LA  
CONFERENCIA DE SAN FRANCISCO"  
Dr. Octavio Méndez Pereira — Panamá  
Rector de la Universidad Inter-Americana  
y Delegado a la Conferencia de San Francisco

"EL PLAN BAHÁ'Í PARA LA PAZ"  
Srta. Elizabeth Cheney—"LA PAZ MENOR"  
Sra. Gayle Woolson—"LA MAS GRANDE PAZ"  
Las Conferencias son Gratis

LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMA  
DOMINGO 20 de ENERO de 1946

PROGRAMA DEL  
CONGRESO BAHAI LATINO-AMERICANO

Lunes, 21 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18  
Dirigente: Sra. Norma Hamilton—Canal Zone.  
Tema: "EL MENSAJE BAHAI AL MUNDO"  
Sra. Elizabeth Cheney — Pionera viajante  
Exhibición de Películas del Templo Bahai  
con explicaciones por la Sra. Julie Regal—Panamá

Martes, 22 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18  
Dirigente: Sra. Natalia Chávez — Honduras  
Tema: "EL HILO DE LA UNIDAD A TRAVES DE  
LAS RELIGIONES DEL MUNDO"  
Dr. Walter Blomquist — Cuba  
Sr. Alejandro Baldrón — Guatemala

Miércoles, 23 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18  
Dirigente: Sr. Carlos Porras — Costa Rica  
Tema: "EL ARTE DIVINO DE VIVIR"  
Sra. Clara Lux Montalvo — El Salvador  
Sra. Louise Baker — Venezuela  
Sra. Yolanda Stronach — Venezuela

Jueves, 24 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18  
Dirigente: Sr. James Facey — Panamá  
Tema: "LA UNIDAD DEL GENERO HUMANO"  
"La Unidad Racial"—Sr. Alfred E. Osborne—  
Zona del Canal  
"La Unidad Religiosa"—Sr. Hugo de Arteagabettia  
—Chile  
"La Unidad de las Naciones"—  
Dr. Robert M. Hooper—Nicaragua

Viernes, 25 de Enero, a las 8 p.m.

Aula Máxima, Universidad Inter-Americana  
Dirigente: Sr. Alfred E. Osborne  
Tema: "EL PROBLEMA DE LA PAZ EN LA LUZ DE LA  
CONFERENCIA DE SAN FRANCISCO"  
Dr. Octavio Méndez Pereira — Panamá  
Rector de la Universidad Inter-Americana y  
Delegado a la Conferencia de San Francisco

"EL PLAN BAHAI PARA LA PAZ"

Sra. Elizabeth Cheney "LA PAZ MENOR"

Sra. Gayle Woolson—"LA MAS GRANDE PAZ"

Las Conferencias son Grátis.

# LA ESTRELLA D



FUNDADO EN 1853

PANAMA, R. de P., DOMINGO 20 de ENERO de 19

## Comienza hoy Congr'so Baha'i L. Americano

Las reuniones tendrán  
lugar hasta el  
viernes 25

Comenzará el primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino Americano esta noche con una recepción a las 8 pm. en la Avenida Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18, que se tendrá en honor de los delegados llegados de todos los países Centroamericanos, de Cuba, Venezuela y Chile. También viene un miembro de la Asamblea Nacional Espiritual de los Bahá'ís de los Estados Unidos y Canadá, la señora Amelia Collins, quien es miembro también del Comité Inter Americano de esa.

El licenciado Isidro A. Belucha, secretario de la Sociedad Bolivariana de esta ciudad, dictará un breve discurso sobre el tema de "La Significación del Primer Congreso Pan Americano Convocado Por Bolívar", y después la señora Louise Caswell, representante Bahá'í, quien recientemente regresó de Colombia, elaborará "La Significación del Primer Congreso Bahá'í Latino Americano".

Este Congreso se celebra bajo los auspicios de la Escuela Bahá'í Internacional de Colorado, E. E. U. U. y de la Asamblea Espiritual Nacional de los Bahá'ís de E. E. U. U. y Canadá. Se va a seguir en el futuro con semejantes congresos actualmente.

Terminará este Congreso el viernes veinticinco con una conferencia en la Aula Máxima de la Universidad Inter Americana, en la cual el doctor Octavio Méndez Pereira dictará un discurso titulado "El Problema de la Paz y la Luz de la Conferencia de San Francisco". Entonces, dos representantes Bahá'ís, la señorita Elizabeth Cheney y la señora Gayle Woolson, expondrán: "El Programa Bahá'í para la Paz".

Todas las otras noches del congreso se efectuarán conferencias públicas en la Avenida Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18, a las 8. Los temas de éstas son:

Lunes 22.—"El Mensaje Bahá'í al Mundo" por la señorita Elizabeth Cheney pionera viajante de la Fe Bahá'í. Se presentará también una exhibición de vistas iluminadas de la Casa Bahá'í de Adoración que está en Wilmette Illinois, E. E. U. U., con explicaciones dadas a la vez por la señorita Julie Regal, de Panamá.

Martes 23.—"El Hilo de la Unidad" a través de las Religiones del Mundo", por el doctor Walter Blomquist, de Cuba y el señor Alejandro Baldivieso, de Guatemala.

Miércoles 24.—"El Arte Divino de Vivir" por la señorita Clara Luz Montalvo, de El Salvador y la señorita Louise Baker y la señora Yolanda Stroonach, de Venezuela.

Jueves 25.—"La Unidad del Género Humano"—una mesa redonda en la cual tomarán parte el señor Alfred E. Osborne, de la Zona del Canal, que tratará el aspecto de la "Unidad Racial", el señor Hugo de Arteagaheita, de Chile, el aspecto de la "Unidad Religiosa" y el doctor Roberto M. Hooker de Nicaragua, "La Unidad de las Naciones". La entrada a todas las conferencias es gratis.

# Star &

ESTABLISHED IN



FOR THE CAUSE THAT LACKS ASSISTANCE : FOR THE FUTURE  
FOR THE WRONG THAT NEEDS RESISTANCE : AND THE

PANAMA, R. P., MONDAY, JANUARY

## Bahais Convene For First Latin American Meet

### Miss Cheney To Speak Tonight At First Public Meeting

Amid great rejoicing and enthusiasm Saturday evening, local Bahais and those who have recently converged on Panama from all of the Central American countries, Cuba, Venezuela and Chile, inaugurated the first Baha'i Latin-American Conference with a reception in honor of the delegates, at No. 10 Tivoli Ave. Apt. 18.

This evening, Miss Elizabeth H. Cheney, distinguished Baha'i teacher, will explain "The Baha'i Message to the World," in the first public meeting of the Conference, to be held at the same address.

Miss Cheney sailed to South America as a Baha'i pioneer for the first time in 1949, and has worked with outstanding success in Paraguay, Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

Later, slides of the Baha'i House of Worship near Chicago will be shown, while Miss Julie Regal of Panama relates "The Story of the First Baha'i House of Worship in America."

LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMA

21 de ENERO de 1946

## Fué inaugurado el Congreso Baha'i

Con abundante regocijo y entusiasmo, los Baha'is que han concurrido en Panamá en los últimos días, de todos los países centroamericanos, Cuba, Venezuela y Chile, y los Baha'is de Panamá, inauguraron anoche el Primer Congreso Baha'i Latinoamericano con una alegre recepción tenida en honor de los delegados, en la Avenida Tivoli número 10, departamento 18.

El licenciado Isidro A. Beluche, secretario de la Sociedad Bolivariana de Panamá, expuso el significado del Primer Congreso Panamericano convocado por Bolívar. Dijo el licenciado Beluche:

"El Congreso convocado por Bolívar marca una nueva era, mas no sólo en la ciencia de Hugo Grocco sino en los destinos de la humanidad toda. Antes del 22 de junio de 1826 se habían reunido muchos congresos internacionales y muchas conferencias de plenipotenciarios, pero ni el móvil de ellos ni el origen de las credenciales de sus integrantes podían abandonarse con los respectivos de la Asamblea del Istmo."

Después, la señora Louise Caswell habló sobre el significado del Primer Congreso Baha'i Latinoamericano, e hizo resaltar la similar importancia de este primer paso a reunir a Baha'is de todos los países de la América Latina en un congreso anualmente. También puso de relieve la importancia primordial de esta República entre todas las otras latinoamericanas por ser el eslabón entre los dos continentes y por su canal, que une a los dos mares. Por esta razón ha sido escogido para ser la sede de este histórico Congreso.

Fueron leídas entonces saluciones de los Baha'is del Perú y del Brasil, a quienes, por desgracia, no les fué posible enviar un delegado al Congreso. Un párrafo de la carta recibida del Brasil expresa netamente los sentimientos de todos los Baha'is:

"Deseamos y pedimos ardientemente que la importante sesión latinoamericana a celebrarse en Panamá tenga efectos de gran alcance permitiendo el mayor incremento de nuestra gran causa en todos los países del hemisferio. Tenemos la seguridad de que el esfuerzo realizado por los Baha'is asistentes a esa sesión tendrá como consecuencia el cumplimiento de la gran profecía de 'Abdul-Bahá sobre esta importante tierra istmeña."

El mensaje Baha'i al mundo, explicará la señorita Elizabeth Cheney, renombrada pionera Baha'i, en la primera conferencia pública del Congreso Baha'i Latinoamericano, esta noche a las 8 p. m., en la Avenida Tivoli número 10, departamento 18.

La señorita Cheney salió para la América Latina como pionera Baha'i por primera vez en 1940, y ha trabajado duramente y con buen éxito en Paraguay, Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay, Nicaragua y Costa Rica.

Después se presentará una exhibición de vistas iluminadas de la Casa Baha'i de Adoración que está cerca de Chitago, con explicaciones dadas a la vez por la señorita Julie Regal, de Panamá.

Se invita muy cordialmente al público a asistir. La entrada es gratis.



STAR & HERALD  
JANUARY 22, 1946

### Peru's Delegate To Baha'i Parley



MISS ELIZABETH H. CHENEY

Miss Elizabeth H. Cheney, of Lima, Ohio, USA, who is attending the Baha'i Latin - American Conference which is being held in this city, is a writer and has been the editor of two newspapers: "The Lima Morning Star," and "The Lima Free Press." She was born in Philadelphia, Penna., and graduated from Bryn Mawr College. She arrived here after a tour of South America and a stay in Managua, Nicaragua, and San Jose, Costa Rica, in the interests of the Baha'i Faith.

She spoke yesterday on "The Baha'i Message to the World," and among other things said: "The Baha'i Faith is the application of basic Christian teaching not only to the individual but also to the world as a whole. It includes also certain new principles and teachings necessary to solve world problems, such as the spiritual solution of the economic problem, the oneness of mankind and the investigation of truth. She said the foundation of all religions is one and that religion should be in accord with science and reason, and universal peace.

Miss Cheney will take part in the Baha'i program Friday, January 25, at the Inter-American University, when the Baha'i will present "The Baha'i Program." The Rector of the University, Dr. Octavio Méndez Pereira, will speak on "The Problem of Peace in the Light of the San Francisco Conference."

ESTRELLA DE PANAMA

22 de ENERO de 1946

## La Conferencia Baha'i



SRTA. ELIZABETH H. CHENEY

La Srta. Elizabeth H. Cheney de Lima, Oeio, los Estados Unidos, quien asiste al Congreso Baha'i Latino Americano que se efectua ahora en nuestra ciudad, es escritora y ha sido editora de dos diarios: "The Lima Morning Star" y "The Lima Free Press". Nació en Filadelfia y se graduó en la Universidad de Bryn Mawr. Se halla de visita aquí después de una gira alrededor de Sur America y visitas en Managua, Nicaragua, y San José, Costa Rica, en los intereses de la Fe Baha'i.

Ayer hablo sobre "El Mensaje Baha'i al Mundo". Dijo la Srta. Cheney: "La Fe Baha'i es la aplicacion de los principios cristianos básicos no solamente al individuo pero tambien a la colectividad mundial. Incluye tambien ciertos problemas mundiales como la resolución espiritual de los problemas económicos, la unidad del género humano, investigación independiente de la verdad, la base de todas las religiones es una, la religion debe estar de acuerdo con la ciencia y la razón, y la paz universal. Por medio de la educación amistosa y colectiva el Baha'i lucha para formar en el mundo una conciencia colectiva capaz de aplicar los principios de amor y justicia a las concusiones de hoy día de acuerdo con el diseño dado por Baha'u'llah, el Fundador de esta Fe".

La Srta. Cheney tomará parte en el programa Baha'i, el viernes a las 8 p.m. en el Aula Máxima de la Universidad Interamericana, cuando los Baha'is presentarán "El Programa Baha'i Para la Paz". Entonces hablará tambien el Dr. Octavio Méndez Perera, Rector de esta universidad y delegado a la Conferencia de San Francisco, sobre el tema, "El Problema de la Paz a la Luz de la Conferencia de San Francisco".

Durante el Congreso Baha'i Latino-Americano, se están efectuando conferencias públicas todas las noches a las 8 p.m. en la Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18. Esta noche el tema será "El Hilo de la Unidad A Través de las Religiones del Mundo". Los conferencistas serán el Dr. Walter Blomquist, de La Habana, Cuba, y el Sr. Alejandro Beldizón, de Guatemala.

Todas las conferencias son gratis.

## La Conferencia Baha'i



DR. WALTER BLOMQUIST

ALEJANDRO BALDIZON

Anoche en el Congreso Baha'i Latino-Americano, dos delegados, uno de Cuba y el otro de Guatemala, expusieron el tema, "El Hilo de la Unidad a Través de las Religiones del Mundo."

El Dr. Walter Blomquist, presidente de la Asamblea Espiritual de los Baha'is de la Habana, Cuba, explicó la diferencia que existe entre un ser humano, y un Profeta. Dijo: "El Profeta viene a la Humanidad como Educador Divino, viene con aspecto de ser humano y parece limitado físicamente como los demás hombres, pero en realidad el Profeta trae consigo un poder, una fuerza, una revelación que son evidencias, pruebas e indicaciones, que nos muestra ampliamente la inspiración divina."

Añadió este representante de Cuba que es graduado en las universidades de Helsinki, Finlandia; Kingstead College; Columbia University, y la Habana, Cuba, que toda verdad, toda sabiduría era resultado de un Profeta, y que las enseñanzas de Cristo, Moisés, Ma-

homa, Buda, Krishna, Zoroastro, etc., están básicamente, completamente de acuerdo.

Después el Sr. Alejandro Baldizon, de Guatemala, Guatemala, habló sobre "El Acontecimiento Más Grande en Cada Época," y dijo que "en cada época el acontecimiento más grande es el advenimiento de un gran Instructor Espiritual quien trae el mensaje de la verdad eterna con el nuevo lenguaje del tiempo en que aparece a fin de que la humanidad pueda lograr un mayor desarrollo de su conciencia y comprender a Dios".

En la conferencia de esta noche el tema será "El Arte Divino de Vivir", en la cual tomarán parte dos delegadas de Caracas, Venezuela. Las conferencias nocturnas del Congreso tienen lugar en la Ave. Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 1, a las 8 p.m. y son públicas y gratis. La clausura del Congreso será el viernes 25 en el Aula Máxima de la Universidad Inter-Americana.

## Addresses Bahai



ALEJANDRO BALDIZON

## Two Delegates Address Bahai Meeting Here

Representatives from Cuba  
And Guatemala Make  
Addresses

Last night in the Bahai Latin-American Conference two delegates, one from Cuba and one from Guatemala, expounded the theme: "The Thread of Unity through the World's Religions."

Dr. Walter Blomquist, chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Havana, Cuba, explained the difference that exists between a human being and a Prophet. He said: "The Prophet comes to humanity as a Divine Educator; he comes in the form of a human being and appears to be limited physically the same as other men, but in reality the Prophet brings with Him a power, a force, and a revelation which are evidences, proofs and indications that reveal to us abundantly a divine inspiration."

Added this representative from Cuba, who is a graduate of the universities of Helsingfors, Finland; Kingstead College, Columbia University; and Havana, Cuba, that all truth, all advancement are the result of a Prophet, and that the teachings of Christ, Moses, Mohammed, Buddha, Krishna, Koranster, etc., are, basically completely in accord.

Following Alejandro Baldizon, of Guatemala, spoke on "The Greatest Event in Every Age," and said that "in every epoch the greatest event is the advent of a Great Spiritual Teacher who brings a message of eternal truth in a new language suitable to the time in which he appears in order that human kind may attain a greater spiritual development and understanding of God."

## La Conferencia Baha'i



SRA. YOLANDA STRONACH.

SGTO. JAMES BARRETT.

"El Arte Divino de Vivir", fue el tema de la conferencia efectuada anoche en el Congreso Baha'i Latino Americano. Dos delegadas de Caracas, Venezuela y uno de Chile tomaron parte.

La señorita Louise Baker, joven norteamericana que ha representado la Causa Baha'i en Bogotá, Colombia, la República Dominicana y ahora en Caracas, Venezuela, explicó que la vida humana sobre este planeta es una preparación para la vida después de morir, que la muerte es realmente el nacer en otro mundo superior y más allá de nuestro poder de imaginario, y que el estado humano en este mundo puede compararse al del niño en el vientre de la madre, donde él se desarrolla para funcionar en este mundo.

Entonces la señora Yolanda de Stronach, presidente de la asamblea espiritual de los Baha'is de Caracas, explicó: "El ideal más sublime es buscar la perfección por el amor a su Creador. Ser amante de Dios es el unico objeto del Baha'i, tener en Dios el más cercano compañero y el más íntimo amigo... Aun en momentos difíciles para un Baha'i su lema debe ser: "siempre feliz, siempre satisfecho". Infortunios, son útiles experiencias que vamos acumulando en nuestra evolución hacia la perfección".

Ultimamente, un soldado norteamericano quien nació en el Perú y vivió la mayor parte de su vida en Chile, sargento James Barrett, quien ahora se encuentra en regreso de Francia y Alemania, tomó la palabra. Comparó una persona en este mundo a un viajante subiendo una montaña, con un saco en su espalda, quien había sido ordenado por el Señor a coger y meter en su saco cada piedra que se encontrará en su camino. Al su-

bir la montaña el saco se hizo más y más pesado y cuando el viajante vio una piedra grande allí en el camino, quiso pasarla sin cogerla y ponerla en su saco, pero recordó la orden de su Señor y se inclinó, cogió la piedra grande y la puso en su saco. Al fin llegó a la cima de la montaña y entonces abrió su saco y qué sorpresa se presentó a sus ojos, el saco estaba lleno de brillantes y gemas de varios colores, y se destacaba entre ellas, una más grande q más bella que todas las otras. Entonces el viajante se regocijó por haber cogido todas las piedras en su camino y no haber pasado aun la piedra tan grande.

Las piedras significan nuestras penas, las cuales, si triunfamos sobre ellas aquí, serán nuestras gemas en el mundo verdadero.

El tema de la conferencia de esta noche será: "La Unidad del Género Humano". Tendrá lugar en la Avenida Tivoli No. 10, Apto. 18, a las 8 pm. y será pública y gratis. El Congreso Baha'i Latino Americano terminará el viernes veinticinco con una clausura en el Aula Máxima de la Universidad Inter-Americana.

## "Divine Art Of Living" Is Topic At Baha'i Conference Session



Mrs. Yolanda Stromach (left) and Sergeant James Barrett, U.S.A., were among the speakers at last night's session of the Baha'i Latin American Conference.

"The Divine Art of Living" was the topic of last night's session of the Baha'i Latin American Conference. Two delegates from Caracas, Venezuela, and one from Chile, were speakers.

Miss Louise Baker, a young American girl who has represented the Baha'i Cause in Bogota, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and now Caracas, Venezuela, explained that life upon this planet is a preparation for the life after death, that death is really birth into another, superior world which is beyond human power to imagine, and that the human condition in this world is similar to that of the unborn child in the womb of the mother, where he is being developed to function in this world.

Mrs. Yolanda Stromach, chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of Caracas, explained: "The most sublime ideal is to seek perfection by loving the Creator. A Baha'i should always be happy. Even in difficult moments, he should always be content and satisfied. Misfortunes offer us lessons on our path to perfection."

Sergeant James Barrett, U.S.A., who was born in Peru, grew up in Chile, and is at present on his way home from France and Germany, was the next speaker. He likened the individual to a traveler climbing a mountain with a sack on his back, who had been told by his Lord to pick up and put in his sack every stone that he encountered in his path.

As he climbed the mountain, continued Sergeant Barrett, the young man's sack grew heavier and heavier, and when he saw a very large stone just ahead of him he thought to

pass it by. Remembering his instructions, he knelt down, picked up the stone and put it in his sack. At last he reached the summit of the mountain and, on opening his sack, was greatly surprised. His sack was full of brilliant gems of various colors. One, the largest, was more brilliant and beautiful than all the rest. The traveler then rejoiced for having picked up all the stones in his way, even the very large one.

"The stones," Sergeant Barrett explained, "signify our hardships and trials, which if we overcome them here, will be our precious jewels in the world to come."

STAR & HERALD — PANAMA, R. P.,

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 1946

### Letter To Editor

#### — OBJECTS TO BAHAYS

Jan. 23, 1946.

Editor Star and Herald:

As an old reader of your newspaper I am wondering why you are giving so much space, even on your front page when more important news is printed inside, to this Bahai business.

Never have I seen so much space given to meetings of Methodists, Baptists, Catholics or other orders or sects. I think you were right in such cases and it is possible you have good reason for boosting Bahai until your readers, like myself are sick and tired of it.

They have been swooning for weeks over the opening of the Congress and now we get daily swoons. It maybe that your policy is commercial and you are catering to your numerous Bahai readers and advertisers, although you must have quite a few who are Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians or Roman Catholics like the writer.

#### CURIOUS.

Ed's Note: The last "swoon" will be tonight when Baha'is will close conference.

EL  
**Panamá América**

DIARIO INDEPENDIENTE

DIVULGAMOS LA VERDAD QUE LOS DEMAS OCULTAN

PANAMA R. de P., JUEVES, ENERO 24, 1946

**Clausura mañana  
en la noche el  
Congreso Baha'i**

Disertará el Doctor  
Octavio Méndez P.

Mañana a las ocho de la noche tendrá lugar en el Paraninfo de la Universidad Interamericana el acto de clausura del Primer Congreso Baha'i Latinoamericano.

El doctor Octavio Méndez Pereira, Rector de la Universidad, disertará sobre la importancia de la paz mundial, previa presentación que hará el señor Alfred E. Osborne, quien se referirá brevemente a la personalidad del conferencista.

Además del doctor Octavio Méndez Pereira, harán uso de la palabra las distinguidas precursoras de la causa Baha'i, señorita Elizabeth Cheney, quien se referirá a la "Paz Menor" y luego la señora Gayle Woolson, quien dará término a la reunión desarrollando el tema "La Paz Mayor."

A este acto queda invitado el público en general y especialmente aquellas personas que abrigan ideales de unidad mundial.



STAR & HERALD

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26, 1946

## Mendez Pereira Is Speaker At Baha'i Parley

### America, University Head Says, Lies Hope For World Peace

Last night the Baha'i Latin American Conference was concluded with a public meeting in the Inter-American University, which was broadcast on radio. The subject of this closing session was "The Baha'i Peace Program."

Delegates from the ten countries represented, together with many other people interested in these teachings of universal brotherhood, were present.

The program was preceded by a brief dissertation by the Rector of the University, Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira, who was a delegate to the San Francisco Conference, upon "The Problem of Peace in the Light of the San Francisco Conference."

Dr. Mendez said, after analyzing the Plan of the United Nations, "The Charter of the United Nations. For me, the war is not over. For me, peace has not begun. There is still danger of another war. The atomic bomb causes all the peoples of the world to tremble. The great powers have not placed all their cards upon the table."

"What is the solution? For me, it is to re-educate humanity, ennoble the human spirit, and teach men that the greatest are those who are fighting for peace. In America, I believe is the hope of peace. Here we can initiate the re-education of man. I hope that here will be born—with the Baha'i teachings, Catholicism, or any other means—an impulse to create a new humanity that shall understand peace and bring it to all mankind."

Following Dr. Mendez Pereira's discourse, Miss Elisabeth Cheney, travelling Baha'i teacher, spoke upon "The Lesser Peace," and said: "According to the Baha'i teachings, we are passing through formative years, during which it is our duty to establish firmly the basis of the first enduring universal peace. This lesser peace will be the federation of all the nations of the world based on a new concept of citizenship."

The last speaker was Mrs. Gayle Woolson, Baha'i representative in Panama, who discussed "The Most Great Peace." She said:

"The Most Great Peace will come after the lesser peace, when a world state shall be established, in which all nations, races, creeds, and classes will be closely and permanently united. This presupposes the spiritualization of humanity, because only the superior power of the spirit can reach this state of union and comprehension. The mission of the Baha'i Faith is precisely that—to spiritualize and unify all mankind. The teachings of Baha'ullah give a new spiritual impulse and a plan for the unity of mankind in our era and inaugurate a new, sublime epoch of peace, love, brotherhood and justice."

Similar Baha'i Latin American conferences will be held every year, but the eye just closed is for the Baha'is of special historic importance for having been the first.

STAR & HERALD

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 1946

## Dr. O. Mendez P. To Speak At Closing Of Baha'i Congress

"The Oneness of Mankind" was the theme of three lectures given at the Baha'i Interamerican Congress Wednesday night.

The delegate from Punta Arenas, Chile, Sr. Hugo Arteaga, spoke on "Religious Unity." He said that in a world with one God and one humanity it is no more than logical that there should be one religion, that all religions are really one in their origin but that man has divided religion into sects which separate men into opposing camps of religious belief. Thus have men destroyed the purity of the teachings of the Prophets.

Speaking on "Unity of Nations," Dr. Robert M. Hooker of Nicaragua informed the audience that the plan for world unity toward which the world is moving today was foreseen and recommended by Baha'ullah almost a century ago, that he had sent letters to the kings and rulers of the world inviting them to call an assembly of world rulers to settle international questions and establish a just and peaceful world order.

This evening at the "Universidad Interamericana," Dr. Octavio Mendez Pereira will speak on "The Problem of Peace in the San Francisco Conference." Miss Elisabeth Cheney will speak on "The Lesser Peace" and Gayle Woolson will speak on "The Most Great Peace." This meeting will be the last of the Interamerican Baha'i Congress.