

## The Gloriously Tragic Life of Mathew Kaszab Letters from a pioneer 1939-1942



Mate "Mathew" Kaszab in 1939

### Introduction

The unusual story of Mathew Kaszab has held an interest for me since I first heard his name in 1976, the year I arrived as a single Bahá'í pioneer to Nicaragua. I found that there was little about him in the archives, which I was able to access while serving in the office of the Nicaraguan National Spiritual Assembly from 1977 to 1983. I did find a copy of the Guardian's letter to him included in *The Bahá'í World*; a letter he received sometime after October 1939 upon being asked by the U.S. National Assembly to transfer from Panama to Nicaragua. This letter was shared at our national summer school in Managua, and the few other pioneers present were deeply moved. I never felt there was a thorough understanding about Mathew's sacrifices, and not much known about his life, either in the U.S. or in Nicaragua, where through his efforts, the very first group of Bahá'ís was formed and the first Nicaraguan Bahá'í, Blanca Mejía, enrolled and stayed steadfast until her death. Mathew was the first pioneer to settle not just in one, but *two* countries, Panama *and* Nicaragua. I determined to make his story known to the Nicaraguan community, and wrote a historical narrative in Spanish which summarized what I knew about Mathew at the time, leaving out some of the more delicate issues concerning his imprisonment and eventual deportation.<sup>1</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us that "Not everything a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sadeghpour, Ana *El Cuarto Acto: Una Pionera Bahá'í en Nicaragua durante los años 1976-1983 – un relato personal e histórico*. Impresión Digital Serfosa, Managua, Nicaragua 2015

<sup>2</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, Israel 1978 pp. 268-269

Regarding communications and directives to individual believers in 1939, Artemus Lamb, one of the early pioneers to Latin America and later a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas assigned to Nicaragua, stated only slightly more than two decades ago:

There is, in my view, a great difference in being a pioneer today in comparison with the period of the First and even Second Seven Year Plan. For one thing, in those days, the pioneer was often the only Bahá'í in a city or town, and, at the very beginning, in the entire country. There were no administrative bodies, and often no other Bahá'ís or even non-Bahá'ís, with whom to consult and receive encouragement and guidance, except for the Inter-America Committee and the Guardian, both far away. Generally, one had to make one's own decisions, resolve one's own problems and those of others, and fight one's own spiritual battles with whatever spiritual recourses one possessed. Many of the pioneers had very limited financial resources and had to live very sacrificially. Means of transportation and general living conditions were still quite elemental. On one hand, it constituted a cause of great tests and naturally there were those who could not pass them and returned to their homes. On the other hand, it was a great blessing, for it obligated a pioneer to dig more deeply into his or her own soul, pray more, develop more capacity and, above all, draw closer to Bahá'u'lláh and confide fully in Him. Personally, I will be eternally grateful for those days.

The other face of the coin is that the first pioneers were considered as special persons, viewed by the majority of Bahá'ís, and others as well, with sincere admiration for having had the courage, the faith and devotion to leave the security and comfort of their native country to go to an unknown place in the path of God. I remember, as a new Bahá'í, the great spiritual impact that I felt when I went with others to the dock in Los Angeles to meet Louise Caswell, one of the first pioneers to go out, now returning on her first visit back to the United States from her post in Panama. For many of us, she was the first pioneer from whom we heard, directly from her own lips, an account of her experiences in a foreign land: how she had begun her work, how she had found her first contact, who was the first Bahá'í, etc. How different from today!<sup>3</sup>

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Mathew's story is one begging to be told. It is offered here, mostly in the form of letters and through research over the years aided and assisted by others, particularly Mrs. Vicky Majewski of Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia and later by photo researcher Gyorgy Nemeth as regards Mathew's ancestors. Vicky's family lives near the resting place of Mathew Kaszab in Brownsville, Texas and friends in the area visit and take care of his grave site each year. To the Freeth and Pietrzak families I am grateful. All letters in this compilation have been accessed courtesy of the U.S. Bahá'í national archives.

Anne Sadeghpour  
Compiler  
Santa Monica, California 2019

### **November 1939**

*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*

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<sup>3</sup> Lamb, Artemus, "The Beginnings of the Bahá'í Faith in Latin America: Some Remembrances" Van Orman Enterprises, San Salvador, El Salvador 1995

*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 [Caswell] and Cora [Oliver] came to say good-by 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.<sup>4</sup>*

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This is the story of Mathew Kaszab, also known as Mate, a solitary figure who responded to the 1939 call from the Guardian to give special priority to 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...Preference, no doubt, should be given by all would-be pioneers, as well as by the members of the Inter-America Committee, to the spiritual needs of this privileged Republic...”<sup>5</sup> Mathew holds the distinction of being the first pioneer to settle in *two* countries, Panama *and* Nicaragua.

What were the circumstances that put Mathew on a cattle boat to Nicaragua, leaving the pioneering post in Panama to which he had dedicated his heart and soul in obedience to the Guardian’s call, without waiting for special instruction, much like Martha Root packing her suitcases in 1919 after the unveiling of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá? To what new circumstances was he committing himself, and what were the qualities of his character that allowed him to obey, sacrifice, and serve in both his temporary post in Panama and his new one in Nicaragua? What adventures, trials, and adversities did he face? Was he accompanied along the way; and if so, by whom and with what result?

This narrative will attempt to answer some of these questions and to give us some insights into the character of Mathew Kaszab, at different times called “saintly, Christ-like” and “without human passions” and at others seen as needing to curb his natural instinct to speak flippantly of those with whom he was attempting to share the ideals of his beloved Bahá’í Faith.

One must consider the period in which Mathew traveled to Central America, and the background from which he came, as these elements tie into his story and influenced the circumstances under which he lived in Nicaragua, a country in which he suffered both emotionally and physically, and a place included in those described by the Guardian himself as regions remote, backward, and inhospitable<sup>6</sup> mostly because of a suffocating climate, almost impassable terrains, extreme poverty, and a general lack of sophistication about the rest of the world. It was the time of World War II, and North American and other foreign visitors to Central America were few enough to be suspect if they did not hold a transparent view on politics. Phrases such as “world order” and the “unification of mankind” could well

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<sup>4</sup> Wegener, Daniel Nelson, *Divine Springtime: Louise Caswell Recalls the Early Years of the Bahá’í Faith in Central America and Panamá*, Union Press, Tegucigalpa, Honduras 1977, pp. 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois 1966 ed., p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947-1957*, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois 1965, p. 110.

have been misinterpreted, especially when spoken by someone who did not speak Spanish and whose second language was English.

Mathew died so young - he did not reach his 38<sup>th</sup> birthday - and in such distressing circumstances, that perhaps the saintly qualities which distinguished him stand out all the more because of the brevity and intensity with which he lived his pioneering life. We may never know the exact details regarding his last years, and the evidence available will not resolve many questions or necessarily present a coherent picture of Mathew's life as a pioneer. It can only be hoped that the reader is motivated to find out more or at the very least, to be in some way inspired by the "gloriously tragic"<sup>7</sup> life of Mathew Kaszab.

### **Early Days and Family Background**

Mate "Mathew" Istvan Kaszab was born on September 28, 1905 in Budapest, Hungary. His parents were Miklós "Nicholas" T. Kaszab [Kassab] and Ilona Telkes, aka Ilona De Telkes Kaszab. He had one brother, Tibor "Ernest" Kaszab and later one known half-sister, Judith Silvia Kaszab (later Judith Silvia Lara Telkes), born in New Orleans in 1922. Records for Mathew and Tibor indicate that they were baptized as Unitarians, the religious organization to which his grandfather Simon Rubin (Telkes) and his grandmother Maria (sometimes referred to as Sara) Szonnert had converted from Judaism in 1883. His grandmother was born into a Roman Catholic family before she converted to Judaism and was a descendent of German-speaking parents from the Burgenland region of the Austro-Hungarian empire.<sup>8</sup> Mathew's father was a well-known architect, photographer, inventor, and art-collector. Apparently, Mathew's parents separated at some point because 1910 finds him living with his grandmother and mother in Paris, where his grandmother settled around 1893. In April of 1911, just prior to turning six years old, Mathew accompanied his grandmother, Mrs. Maria Telkes de Kelenföld (from original Kelenföldi) his mother, his brother Tibor and other family members to Nicaragua. They traveled from Paris via New York and New Orleans to a banana plantation his grandmother had purchased on the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast. It is not clear why and how his grandmother obtained property in Nicaragua; she was fifty-eight years old and perhaps saw a business opportunity that would help her support her large extended family. She also may have been somewhat adventurous. She and her husband Simon Rubin (later Simon Telkes de Kelenföld) had eleven children. Two died in infancy and one, Éva Raab's mother Ágnes, died at sea in 1907. The eight living children were: Dezső, Ernst (Ernő), Aladár, Béla, Ilona (Mathew's mother), Ibolya "Violet", Magda, and Nóra. Her son-in-law, James Deitrick (married to Mathew's aunt Ibolya "Violet" Telkes) was a Kentuckian businessman who speculated in the development of agricultural lands and resources and the sale of farm equipment internationally including in Nicaragua.<sup>9</sup> Mathew's Telkes uncles were also involved in what was known as the Hungarian Plantation Company Ltd. Another company, the huge Cuyamel banana industry, begun in Mobile, Alabama by Samuel Zemurray, "Sam the Banana Man," a Russian immigrant, had its strongest foothold in the Atlantic coasts of Honduras and Nicaragua and operated from New Orleans. Cuyamel was later absorbed by the United Fruit Company. New Orleans was a major choice of destinations for Hungarians leaving Eastern Europe. Steamship companies, because of the trade in bananas, lumber, and other products from the Central American Atlantic regions, had regular transport between New Orleans and Bluefields on the Nicaraguan Coast. In fact, there is indication that at least once, passage for Ilona

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<sup>7</sup> Pringle, Ruth, "Historical Background of the Panama Temple" published in *Bahá'í News*, March-April 1972, pp. 2-5

<sup>8</sup> Nemeth, Gyorgy. (translation to English). Copyright of original baptism record owned by the Budapesti Unitárius Egyházközség; 1005 Budapest, Nagy Ignác u. 2-4.

<sup>9</sup> James Deitrick Papers, M0140, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California

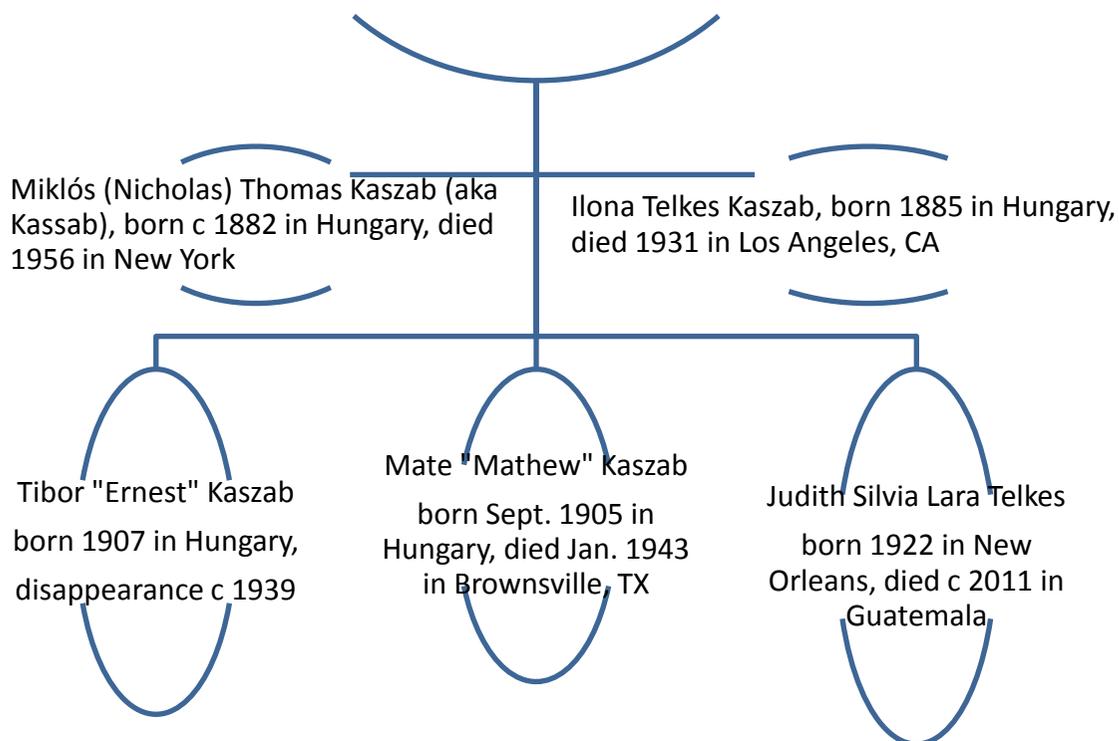
Telkes, Mathew's mother, was paid for by the Cuyamel Fruit Company<sup>10</sup> and it seems to have been she who struggled to make a living on the plantation near Bluefields once having gone there for her health in 1911 and subsequently losing all contact with Mathew's father, who remained in Hungary. Property managed first by Mathew's grandmother and later by his mother and possibly by his cousin Éva Raab, was outside of Bluefields, the country's most important Caribbean capital, a source of fish, shrimp, lobsters, wood, and bananas. Bluefields was used as a port by primarily the British West Indies and is populated by descendants of the slaves of Europeans as well as by a mixed indigenous population including Miskito, Sumo, Rama, and Garifuna. Languages are primarily a creole version of English as well as indigenous languages, with the mestizo population speaking Spanish as a second or third language.

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<sup>10</sup> Ship's manifest from the S.S. *Hibueras*, shows Ilona Telkes Kaszab arrived in New Orleans from Bluefields on March 10, 1921 and states that Cuyamel Fruit Company paid for her passage. A handwritten note indicates that she's visiting her son, Mate Kaszab in New Orleans [information courtesy of Vicky Majewski].

**Maternal grandparents: Simon Rubin (later Simon Telkes de Kelenföld)** born 1845 in Szeged, Hungary, died 1932 Fenyőháza [Slovakia] and **Maria Szonnert Telkes (aka Telkes de Kelenföld)** born 1853 in Hungary, died 1927 on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua where she lived from 1911 until her death. Simon and Maria married in 1872 but separated around 1893 and she moved to Paris.

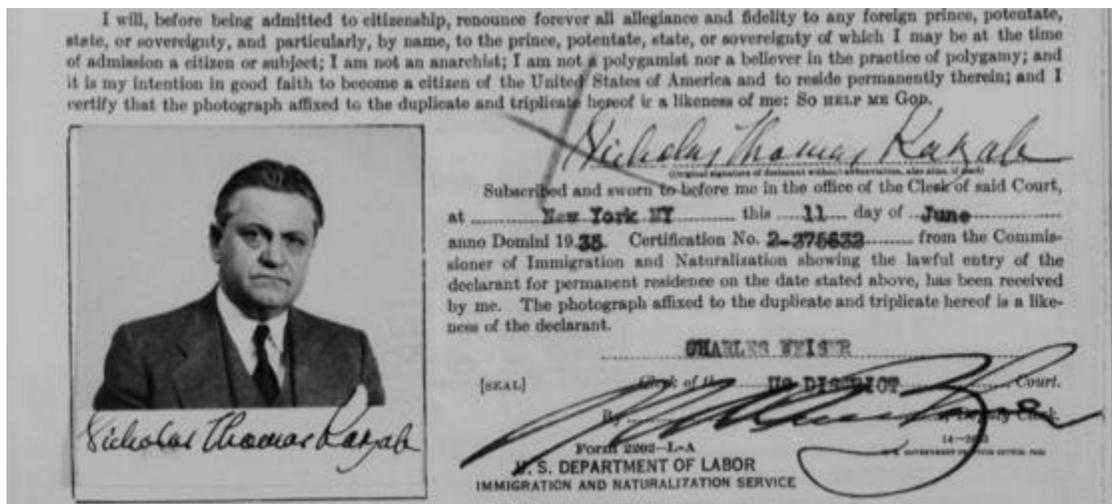
**Paternal grandparents: Samuel Kohn Kaszab**, born 1855, died 1909 in Hungary and **Laura Kohn Kaszab**, born 1858, died 1934 in Hungary.



**Telkes-Kaszab Family Tree:** Above information from *wikitree.com* managed by Vicky Majewski and from *geni.com* managed by Lea Tila Freiburg Olishuk, with additional information from Hungarian photo researcher Gyorgy Nemeth. Lea is related to the Kaszab family through a Max Goldstein, who was the uncle of her grandmother (electronic correspondence of December 31, 2017).

A November 25, 1915 ship's manifest shows Mate Kaszab arriving from Bluefields to New Orleans with a cousin near his age named Éva Raab. Apparently for a few years he and Éva, both about 10 years old, lived with their aunt Magda in Schenectady, New York. The 1920 U.S. census indicates Mathew lived in the household of his aunt and uncle, Adrian and Nora Dumas in New York. Nora, a photographer of some note in France, and her husband, a Swiss architect, returned to France shortly thereafter, and by

the beginning of 1921, Mathew's mother and brother also arrived in America and settled in New Orleans. Mathew attended the Maybin School and the Boys' High School (now known as Warren Easton High School) on Canal Street in New Orleans. In April 1921, his father reappeared after being incommunicado for years. It turned out that he was reportedly told the family had been killed in a shipwreck on the way to Nicaragua, and due to the upheaval of World War I was unable to confirm or send any messages at all. Sadly, the reunion would be short-lived. Mathew's parents divorced the following year. Records show that from 1922-23 Mathew attended The Webb School in Bell Buckle, Tennessee and left in 1924.<sup>11</sup> Mathew may have then joined his father in New York City when his mother returned to Nicaragua until September of 1928, when she again arrived in the U.S. Although they were divorced, travel documents list Nicholas Kassab as her husband living at 3000 5<sup>th</sup> Ave., Long Island City, New York. Records show Ilona De Telkes Kaszab died on January 24, 1931 in Los Angeles, California.<sup>12</sup> She and her daughter Judith had been residing in San Bernardino.



Above, from Nicholas Kaszab's 1935 Declaration of Intention to become a U.S. citizen

Miklós "Nicholas" Kaszab, Mathew's father, became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1937. He arrived in the U.S. in 1920 and briefly reunited with his family. Miklós left the Jewish Faith in 1903 and in subsequent documents lists himself as "without" or "not affiliated" with any religion. These and further insights about Miklós come from Gyorgy Nemeth who also says, "I talked to Miklós Kaszab's niece and according to her memory Miklós did not know what happened with Mathew and Tibor. He never ever got over the disappearance of his sons and he never ever talked about them. His niece told me this is what she heard from Miklós's second wife Maria. There must have been a deep sadness within him that he never spoke about."<sup>13</sup> It is known that Mathew himself never talked about his past after he embraced the Bahá'í

<sup>11</sup>Nemeth, Gyorgy, electronic correspondence dated June 27, 2019; Susan Coop Howell, Archivist/Librarian's Assistant, the Webb School, Bell Buckle, TN

<sup>12</sup> Above information gleaned from Majewski, Vicky, profile manager of <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Kaszab-1>. Also see Los Angeles Times, January 27, 1931 p. 16

<sup>13</sup> Nemeth, Gyorgy in electronic correspondence dated June 19 and June 21, 2019

Faith, and there is no mention of his family in any of his available letters. One wonders what deep and even painful emotions might have accompanied him on his spiritual journey, leaving him disconnected with his family and perhaps spurring the self-abnegation for which he became known.



**GROUP PICTURE** of the Kaszab family.. Nicholas Kaszab, famous Hungarian architect and artist, in the center, standing, and his wife seated in the foreground. At the right is their older son, Mate, and at the left their son Tibor. Lower picture shows Mrs. Kaszab on her banana plantation in Nicaragua.

Above from newspaper *The New Orleans States*, April 3, 1921<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Photo courtesy of Vicky Majewski through <https://www.genealogybank.com/>

**THOUGHT DEAD, FINDS FAMILY**  
***Hungarian Artist in Orleans, Reunited with Loved Ones***  
(excerpt)

*Before the war Mr. Kaszab conducted a large and important studio in Budapest for architecture, interior decorating, designing of embroidery and beautiful figures on rich fabrics. He had extensive, distinguished and wealthy clientele and had many employees on his payroll. Through his art and work he acquired considerable wealth and had his family happily about him in a handsome residence.*

*Then came the illness of his wife and the necessity for her seeking a milder climate which she found with relatives in Nicaragua, accompanied by her two sons Mate and Tibor. Meanwhile the world war flamed out and Mrs. Kaszab and her boys were cut off from returning to Budapest and from getting word to the husband and father. Followed the Bolsheviks' regime in Hungary. Mr. Kaszab's property was confiscated, his studio communized; he fled from his home at night time taking with him only three trunk filled with valuable art collections.*

*Today his wealth is gone and these art treasures are all the worldly goods he possesses. But he has his wife and two sons back again and the noted foreign architect is happy and says nothing else now matters. And he found and was reunited with his family in New Orleans.*

*"It was back in 1912 that my wife became ill," said Mr. Kaszab, "and her physician advised her to reside for awhile in a tropical climate. I was rushed with important communications at that time and we both felt I should not close up my business, for some of the work was promised and I was in honor and duty bound to complete it. My wife decided to take our two sons, Mate, who now is 16, and Tibor, now aged 14 and make a visit to her mother, Mrs. Telkes de Kelenföld and a sister, who own a large banana plantation on the Rio Grande river in Nicaragua and was gradually regaining her health and strength and as everything was comfortable she decided to remain in Nicaragua until I could join her later on. But in 1914 the World War broke out.*

*Last Letter from Wife*

*"My last letter from my wife was dated in the spring of 1914. I had no direct word from my family from that time until a few days ago when I arrived in New York and got through a cablegram to my mother-in-law and received a reply that my wife and our boys were alive and well, that my sons were attending school in New Orleans and that my wife would join me here at once...my wife arrived by the next steamer and today we are united and happy.*

*"...to support herself and our boys my wife acquired a banana plantation of about 500 acres on the Rio Grande in Nicaragua and managed to provide for herself and boys and also to place them in school in New Orleans."<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> Israel, Albert R., *The New Orleans States*, April 3, 1921 p. 1



On left: Mathew's grandmother Mrs. Maria (Szonnert) de Kelenföld and her granddaughter, Mathew's cousin, Éva Raab. Photo taken September 4, 1921 on the grandmother's banana plantation on the Atlantic Coast, which Mathew remembered as being near Bluefields. The grandmother's plantation was actually near Makantaka where the Makantaka River meets the Rio Grande de Matagalpa, somewhere between Makantaka and La Cruz de Rio Grande. It is possible that plantations were partially privately-owned and partially owned by a company, but exact records are not available. This particular plantation was 240 acres or more. There is evidence that Éva Raab may have inherited or purchased a smaller plantation near Bluefields and she traveled back and forth to New Orleans until about 1960. Mathew's uncles Béla, Dezső, and Ernő Telkes were involved in the Hungarian Plantation Company Ltd. which operated from 1911-1936 and most likely were instrumental in their mother's purchase in the Rio Grande area in 1911. Both Béla and Dezső Telkes died in Nicaragua; Béla in 1915 and Dezső in 1929.

(above information courtesy of Gyorgy Nemeth, retrieved from a private collection in California and from business correspondence between Maria Szonnert and her auditor dated February 23 to March 12, 1921)

In spite of the reportedly happy fairy-tale ending, all was not well with the Kaszabs after their long separation, troubles perhaps having begun early in their marriage. Mrs. Kaszab had during her travels to the United States met a Guatemalan lawyer in exile in the U.S. They met through a newspaper ad regarding English lessons; Ilona was the teacher and Juan Lara was the student. A romance began and in 1922 Judith was born, so she is Mathew's half-sister. Mr. Lara returned to Guatemala. Ilona was then sent by the United Fruit Company back to Nicaragua, ill with tuberculosis. She again needed the coastal climate and stayed in Nicaragua until her final return to the U.S. in 1928 with her six-year old daughter, Judith. She passed away in Los Angeles.<sup>16</sup>

It is conceivable that had circumstances and history been different, Mathew would have grown to be a well-educated, comfortable member of the European middle- or upper-class, possibly following his mechanical inclinations or perhaps assisting his father in one of Nicholas's (Miklós) many artistic and

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<sup>16</sup> Arias, Oscar, grandson of Judith Silvia Lara Telkes and grand-nephew of Mathew Kaszab, in a July 2016 electronic correspondence with Vicky Majewski.

inventive pursuits. His aunts and uncles appear to have been worldly and inquisitive. Some of his relatives became prominent in their fields and most of them appeared to have made their way west. His grandfather Simon Rubin was born September 16, 1845 in Szeged, Hungary and later had a favored position with the court of Emperor Franz Josef to the extent that he was given the nobility title of “de Kelenföld” which extended to his wife Maria (Szonnert) and their eight children. He also converted to Unitarianism and changed his surname to “Telkes.” Relative comfort in society, however, does not mean that Mathew’s Hungarian life would have been easy. Besides turbulence on the European continent, there is indication of troubled business decisions on the part of his father and significant mobility of several family members between Hungary and other countries. His aunts Magda and Nora were in an internment camp in France in 1914 as young women (later released). Members of his father’s family seem to have disappeared during WWII.<sup>17</sup>

Mathew’s aunt Nora Dumas (née Nora Telkes de Kelenföld), born in Budapest in 1890, married Swiss architect Adrien-Emile Dumas and became a celebrated photographer in France. She participated in international exhibitions in Munich, France, and Belgium. Mathew lived with his aunt and uncle briefly in New York around 1920 before they returned to France. His aunt Magda, born in 1888 in Budapest, became a medical doctor, rare for women in that time, married American Davidson Vance Myers, and died April 1966 in Dallas, Texas. His first cousin Dr. Maria Theresa Telkes, Ph.D., daughter of his uncle Aladár (Rubin) Telkes was born in 1900 in Budapest and had a remarkable career as a chemist and an inventor. She traveled to the United States to visit an uncle, Ernő Ludwig, who was serving as the Hungarian Consul in Cleveland, Ohio. Maria was a researcher at MIT and holds over 20 patents for solar technology. She is best known for inventing the first successful solar still to convert sea water into clean, drinkable fresh water. It was small enough to be used on life rafts by people waiting to be rescued at sea, saving countless American lives during World War II. Dr. Maria Telkes died in Budapest during a trip there in 1995.<sup>18</sup>

Mathew’s destiny lay in other arenas. He learned of the Teachings of the Bahá’í Faith through a nurse, Louise Talbott, shortly after studying mechanical engineering in the Newark Technical School in New Jersey where he was enrolled from Fall of 1929 to Spring of 1931. They met about April 1, 1932.<sup>19</sup> Louise Talbott herself had learned of the Bahá’í Teachings in Chicago.<sup>20</sup> According to the U.S. Bahá’í national archives, Mathew’s name first appears as a member of the Bahá’í community of New York in 1934 so he possibly enrolled at about that time. He also petitioned for naturalization in 1934, witnessed by Greenville Talbott and Louise Talbott, and was granted citizenship on July 8, 1937. His address at the time is listed as 41 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, a structure which at this writing still exists.

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<sup>17</sup> Nemeth, Gyorgy, electronic correspondence to the compiler between June 22 and August 9, 2019

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.gamma-rapho-expos.com/Photographes/Dumas-Nora> and

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nora\\_Dumas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nora_Dumas). Latter page managed by Vicky Majewski.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Petition for Naturalization No. 290779 of Mathew Kaszab dated September 28, 1934

<sup>20</sup> Louise Talbott is listed in “In Memoriam”, *Bahá’í News* No. 150 January 1942 p. 12. She passed away December 28, 1941 in Freeport, N.Y.



41 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street N.Y.  
Home address listed by Mathew Kaszab in 1934

Mathew Kaszab was passionate about the plight of animals, and wrote several eloquent letters highlighting and praising activities of the New York American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. One letter, written to the editor of the *Long Island Daily Press* on September 29, 1934, contained several quotes by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

*"You must not only have kind and merciful feelings for mankind, but ye should also exercise the utmost kindness towards every living creature. The physical sensibilities and instincts are common to animal and man.*

*"Man is, however, negligent of this reality and imagines that sensibility is peculiar to mankind, therefore he practices cruelty to the animal. In reality what difference is there in physical sensations! Sensibility is the same whether you harm man or animal: there is no difference. Nay, rather, cruelty to the animal is more painful because man has a tongue and he complains when he receives an injury; but the poor animal cannot speak, it can neither show its suffering nor is it able to appeal to the government...."*

*I trust that the publication of the above expressions of Abdu'l-Baha will not only be helpful to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but will also give publicity to one of the cardinal tenets of the Bahá'í Faith, whose members, both individually and collectively, preach and practice kindness to all animals.*

Mathew Kaszab  
Manhattan

Mathew's innate sense of justice and kindness is also evident in an earlier letter published in the *Long Island Daily Press* on November 15, 1932 in which he politely asks to enter a protest against the elitist practice of having horses' tails "arched" or broken" in order to gain a "plumed" effect and which causes torturous suffering to the animal.<sup>21</sup> As noted later, he rarely talked about himself, and most of his early history was unknown to the Bahá'ís with whom he formed close relations. He was gentle in his character yet persistent in his view; this latter trait would sometimes get him into trouble in the years to come.

By 1936 Mathew was 31 years old and had been actively involved in youth groups. His proclivity for using his writing skills in order to further the interests of the Cause continued. A letter dated 12/8/92 [he favored using dates according to the Bahá'í calendar, which began in 1844, the year of the declaration of the Báb, but which wreaks havoc for normal historical reference] states:

*I am sending for a copy of Bahá'í Youth bulletin although I am out of the youth class. I am sort of in-between and I was even thinking of organizing a young adult club for those who graduate from the youth group...I have two articles that I wrote which could possibly be used in the bulletin. One is a three page article on the consumers cooperation movement. I could dress it up to include some of the Bahá'í principles and present it from the Bahá'í point of view. The other one is a shorter article that could be entitled the Nucleus of a New World Order. This was intended for non-Bahá'í publications but the principles expounded are definitely Bahá'í...yesterday I had five new young people down at the youth group...<sup>22</sup>*

## **MATHEW'S CHARACTER**

It has already been shown that Mathew tended towards justice and kindness by examples of his concern for the plight of animals. Of his devotion and character, Loulie Mathews (Mrs. E.R. Mathews), who was to become a staunch friend and co-worker and to develop an almost maternal affection for Mathew, wrote the following.

*From that moment [of his enrollment], Mathew's real life began. The heroic age of The Báb 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 Bahá'í writings.<sup>23</sup>*

Mathew's views on suffering and sacrifice are reflected in an essay he wrote for *World Order* magazine which appeared in the October 1938 issue.<sup>24</sup> It is entitled "Pain as a Factor in Evolution" and was published six months before he left the United States for Panama. One can imagine that Mathew had

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<sup>21</sup> Kaszab, Mathew, "Torture Horses to Plume Tails," *Long Island Daily Press*, November 15, 1932, p. 14. At the end of this article Mathew lists his address as 224 W. 85<sup>th</sup> St., New York

<sup>22</sup> U.S. National Bahá'í archives, letter in 1936 file

<sup>23</sup> Matthews, Loulie, "Mathew Kaszab: Pioneer Bahá'í Teacher in Nicaragua" *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record* April Vol. IX April 1940-1944 Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, pp. 614-16.

<sup>24</sup> *World Order* magazine October 1938, Volume 4, Number 7, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, N.Y. pp. 281-284

already felt the pressure of pain in his life, but it is clear that he considered suffering and sacrifice as the only way in which an individual can develop his true potential. It is likely that this attitude and position of spiritual insight permitted Mathew to undergo the physical and emotional hardships he would face in Nicaragua, a little more than a year after this reflective article was written.

## **Pain as a Factor in Evolution**

Mathew Kaszab

**B**ahá'u'lláh states that the two pillars of justice are reward and retribution. Without these two pillars there can not be a just and integrated society because everything is thrown out of balance. Reward is pleasurable, retribution is painful. Pain is even more necessary than pleasure as a factor in evolution.

When someone asks: “If God is a loving God why does He make us suffer?” The answer is: he makes us suffer because of the very fact that He is a loving God, as pain is a factor in our growth and development. However, God is responsible for our pain only in this sense – that no conscious creature escapes pain in the course of a lifetime. God could have created us without a nervous system so we would be incapable of experiencing pain, but without a nervous system we would freeze to death in the winter or drop dead from all sorts of ailments without even knowing something was wrong with us or feeling any pain. With a nervous system we are forewarned if anything goes wrong with our body so that we may do something about it before it is too late.

To keep from experiencing mental pain we would have to be in the state of a drug addict who has taken an injection of cocaine. This is a very unreal world in which to live! The other alternative would be to have been created in the condition of a vegetable but this would defeat the purpose of being brought into this world since the whole purpose of the creation of human beings is to evolve consciousness. Of what value is an unconscious person?

Those individuals who have escaped struggle and difficulties seem to be weak and characterless. They are generally vain, egocentric, lack sympathy for the suffering of others and their higher attributes are undeveloped. Their spiritual muscles are weak and they are useless elements in any form of positive social integration.

Although pain is something that no conscious creature can possibly avoid, yet some pain is, in a sense, useless and avoidable. It is brought about by our own negligence and should be avoided. At other times we get into difficulties because of a lack of knowledge of what to do or what to avoid. In this case suffering teaches us how to handle the situation the next time we come in contact with it. We cannot be negligent about it because the pain increases and forces a person to face reality. In this way knowledge, courage, wisdom, and other attributes are evolved and strengthened. This is true both for individuals and groups.

Some people egotistically feel themselves so superior they think God is unjust because He subjects them to the test of pain. This is a purely blind and emotional reaction to pain, not at all logical or philosophical. These people do not meditate on what caused the pain and how it could be removed, or what experience could be gained by positive reaction to it. In fact suffering is largely an emotional reaction towards external

stimuli. The stimuli itself may or may not be painful or harmful but our fear of what may be the outcome and our imagination magnify the predicament.

## **Types of pain and suffering**

Pain is either physical or mental and emotional. Although suffering may have a physical basis, yet in itself it is psychological and comes about oftentimes through the collapse of our self-esteem or punctured pride. For example, one may be physically handicapped; and although he could function with his physical equipment, yet the attitude of others towards his deficiency reacts upon him and makes him sensitive. Egotism, selfishness, fear, prejudice, in fact, all the negative aspects of a personality, inevitably cause pain not only to the person himself but to others who come in contact with him. And as everything is interlinked the whole of humanity suffers.

The greatest and most tragic suffering comes about from a sense of frustration or a feeling of inferiority. When a person is prevented from developing his talents or if he is kept from expressing his capacities in the outer world, he feels at a disadvantage with other people and a sense of inferiority and frustration results. This is not merely a temporary predicament but it keeps on nagging the individual continually, sometimes wrecking his whole life unless he finds the way to overcome it.

## **How to overcome suffering**

The outer circumstances may not be under the control of the individual but may be environmental or hereditary. For instance, a woman may be born ugly. A combination of environmental and hereditary forces may be working against a child before he is old enough and mature enough to know what to do about it. He may not have sufficient knowledge at hand, the advice and sympathy of wise people may be absent and by the time he has grown up the damage has been done and he does not know how to cope with the situation. This tragedy of frustration is even intensified and causes inestimable suffering and loss both to the individual and to society when it is enacted on the higher plane and a person's highest attributes and loftiest aspirations are kept from unfolding.

Suffering is caused by negative qualities and a negative reaction to our environment as I have indicated before. However, dwelling and concentrating on them, only helps to aggravate them. The only way to overcome the negative attitude is to place yourself en rapport with the most positive and dynamic force in existence – the Manifestation of God. To do this, a very bold thrust is necessary. Through the power of your will, you must (at least temporarily) cut yourself loose from all previous modes of thinking and throw overboard all preconceived ideas, make your mind a blank, then read the Word that has been written by the Supreme Pen and meditate on it.<sup>25</sup> Bahá'u'lláh states, "Release yourselves, O Nightingales of God, from the brambles and mire of wretchedness."<sup>26</sup> This is difficult but you can do it for at least two or three minutes at a

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<sup>25</sup> Mathew is illustrating what the Blessed Beauty says in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*: "O My brother! When a true seeker determineth to take the step of search in the path leading unto the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge..." (p. 264).

<sup>26</sup> Paraphrase from *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*: "Release yourselves, O nightingales of God, from the thorns and brambles of wretchedness and misery, and wing your flight to the rose-garden of unfading splendor" (U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1990 ed. p. 320).

time and as you continue the manifested attributes of God (the positive and dynamic qualities) start to reflect in your soul and it becomes easy and joyous. Do not become discouraged by preliminary failure as the power of meditation is a cumulative process. You must “make of your will a door through which the confirmations of the Spirit may descend” [*Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*].<sup>27</sup> In spite of the preliminary difficulty it is better to do anything than to continue to suffer this sense of frustration and all the difficulties in which we involve ourselves through weakness of character.

No matter what your difficulty is, whether you are suffering physically or psychically, “God suffices *all* things above all things, and nothing in the heavens or in the earth but God suffices” [prayer of the Bab] ! This works both for individual integration and also for community integration. Spiritual Force emanating from the Manifestation of God is universal energy and can be applied in all situations and His Intelligence is All-Comprehending and can resolve all problems. “He is the King, the All-Knowing, the Wise” [from *The Tablet of Ahmad* by Bahá'u'lláh]. “The Word of God is the storehouse of all good, all power, and all wisdom.” So be sure that you read the Words of God that have been revealed by the Supreme Pen for this dispensation because you are not living in the past. Do not rely on your own imagination to try to escape your sense of inferiority and inadequacy, because merely to imagine that you are superior, powerful, beautiful and adequate is only egotistical. To use your imagination to try to escape reality in this situation is merely a defense mechanism and is again only a negative orientation. When put to the test it collapses. It is the cowardly way. It is like a toy balloon drifting in the breeze. As long as the gentle breeze carries it along, it survives, but when a violent wind starts blowing it explodes. Unfortunately for the little toy balloon of imagination, in this terrific age, “the winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction.”

The power emanating from the Manifestation of God is reality and the test of it is that it survives when human imagination collapses. Those who are weak are strengthened and those who are cowardly acquire courage. “When man is associated with that transcendent power emanating from the Word of God, the tree of his being becomes so well rooted in the soil of assurance that it laughs at the hurricanes of skepticism violently attempting its destruction.”

Once we have solved the problems involved with the inferiority complex we have done away with the source of the most acute suffering that afflicts a great portion of humanity. Once a person has felt this power from Bahá'u'lláh reinforcing him can he feel himself a weakling? All human beings are weak and all power is from God anyway so where does the superiority of other people come in? Once he associates himself with this Supreme Outlook how can he be inferior to those who do not?

Are other people rich? Their money purchases things only on the outer plane. It is not legal tender in the higher realm. Are other people beautiful? Reflect the Ancient Beauty. On this higher plane there is an entirely new set of criteria and the former vanities are meaningless. Your problems are resolved in a new light, a new consciousness and you are fighting with new weapons. When it comes down to a final analysis: “Is there any remover of difficulties save God?” [prayer of The Bab]

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<sup>27</sup> Mathew is paraphrasing from notes compiled by Elizabeth Fraser Chamberlain and published as *Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*, Tudor Press, Boston, MA. 1918. Notes are not considered an authentic text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words.

## PANAMA

*Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being. At that hour will the Mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of the Spirit, shine forth from the City of God resplendent as the morn, and, through the trumpet-blast of knowledge, will awaken the heart, the soul, and the spirit from the slumber of heedlessness. Then will the manifold favors and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind. He will contemplate the manifest signs of the universe, and will penetrate the hidden mysteries of the soul. Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude. He will discover in all things the mysteries of Divine Revelation, and the evidences of an everlasting Manifestation.*

- *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*

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“Faithful to the provisions of the Charter laid down by the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 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-Bahá, 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...*’ So privileged a position surely demands the special and prompt attention of the American Bahá’í community.”

Shoghi Effendi<sup>28</sup>

From the minute Mathew Kaszab heard the Guardian’s words in 1939, there was no hesitation. He knew that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, his ultimate purpose and goal was to follow the directives of the Guardian and give his “prompt attention” to the Republic of Panama. In 1919, the incomparable Martha Root, posthumously named by the Guardian a Hand of the Cause of God, did exactly the same thing. Upon hearing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s cry to “divest yourselves of the garment of attachment to this world that perisheth,” she, like Mathew twenty years later, packed her bags. On July 22, 1919 Martha set off for South America. By October she went north and spent one week in the Canal Zone, visiting the *Star and Herald* office, where Mathew later had success in publishing articles about the Faith. The editor was

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<sup>28</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, National spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, 1939, p. 59

friendly towards the Faith, having heard of it in California. Martha also gave many lectures, recounting what 'Abdu'l-Bahá had said regarding the importance of the Canal Zone.

In 1936 a committee was formed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States called the Inter-America committee, in charge of planning teaching activities in Latin America. Members of this first committee included Loulie Mathews (chairman), Myrtle Dodge (secretary), Leroy Ioas and Amelia Collins (these latter two later named Hands of the Cause of God). Much of Mathew's correspondence would be directed to and received from members of this committee. Mathew first wrote in 1939 from the New York Bahá'í Center at 119 West 57<sup>th</sup> St.

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19<sup>th</sup> day year 96 [March 19, 1939]

Dear 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 would get the letter if I wrote to you from down there. Alláh-u-Abhá.

(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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Apparently his expected trip on March 20 was delayed, because he wrote more letters soon thereafter.

17<sup>th</sup> Day Year 96 [April 8, 1939 - handwritten]

Dear Virgie,<sup>29</sup>

To be an effective agent of Bahá'u'lláh one must demonstrate instant, exact, and complete obedience to the Supreme Command.

I wrote a letter to the National Teaching Committee and they seemed to approve of me but they wrote that so many believers applied that they wanted further information concerning my health, Bahá'í activities, etc. and they said I should read the latest communication from the Guardian.

I gave them the required information and told them I would read the Guardian's pamphlet and write to them again.

I did read the pamphlet (*The Advent of Divine Justice*) which affected me so profoundly that I wrote them again telling them that I had been in Nicaragua (when I was a boy).

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<sup>29</sup> Mathew wrote several letters addressed to Mrs. Virgie (née Vail) Preston, a Bahá'í who lived at 1651 Gales St. N.E. Washington, D.C. Mathew had found lodgings in her home for a while after enrolling in the Faith.

I haven't gotten a reply yet and meanwhile I saw Roy Wilhelm and he said that the funds are rather low and that is why they are hesitating.

During this time one of the most mysterious and unexpected things happened. A Midwestern Bahá'í who happened to meet me here and listened to my pioneering aspirations sent me a \$100.00 money order out of a clear sky. I had met this Bahá'í only two or three times before and the money was entirely unsolicited and unexpected. Did you ever hear anything like it before?

That was Tuesday and then Wednesday I received your letter offering me \$15.00 per month and at the same time there is a layoff on my job and I get the air.

The fare to Panama is exactly \$100.00 and a Panamanian told me that one could live on \$15.00 a month in Panama. These three indications seem to be very definite and there are several other related phenomena but if I tell you all of them you may think that I am superstitious so will leave that for some other time. God's ways are very mysterious and we get our confirmations from unexpected sources.

I decided to go ahead without waiting for a reply from the Teaching Committee for these reasons.

- 1) Mrs. Maxwell told me that there was not a second to lose
- 2) If I wait longer the world war might break out (read the Guardian's latest cable).
- 3) I feel that the hesitation of the Committee was on account of a lack of funds, which I already have so it need not be a deterrent.
- 4) The Central American Republics are not under the jurisdiction of the North American Spiritual Assembly, although they should do everything in their power to help out. This I gathered from a recent *Bahá'í News*.

When everything is so clear and open and definite I feel that to hesitate is no longer permissible. Instant obedience is required.

In helping me out you will be a partner in the erection of a "landmark in the history of the Formative Period of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the New World" for which "no efforts should be spared and no sacrifice be deemed too great." Aren't you glad to have this privilege?

I will answer the rest of your letter on the boat. Time's a wastin'.

Yours for bigger & better landmarks,

(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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5<sup>th</sup> Day before Rizwan Year 96 [April 16, 1939]

To the National Spiritual Assembly and the Inter-America Committee.  
[typewritten]

This is my plan for my Central American expedition:

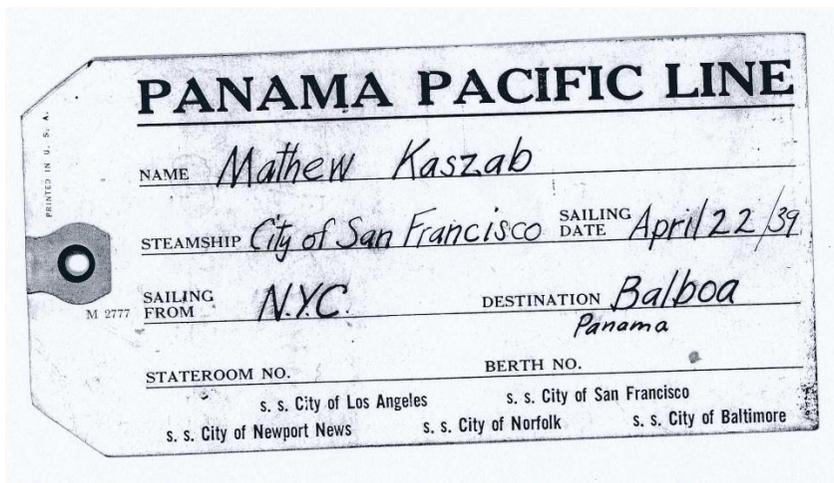
I have \$105 for my ticket to Panama and an additional \$170 for living expenses and with this and what my friends will send me I may have enough to live on for one year in case I do not find employment in the Canal Zone as it is less expensive to live in Panama. I will try to get employment with an American firm or with the U.S. government and if this does not materialize then I intend to go to Nicaragua to live on my plantation after a Bahá'í 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 that those who are apportioning the funds will let Panama come in for a generous share. "The resources of the Bahá'í treasury should be liberally expended on its behalf."

I will need Bahá'í literature in Spanish and a letter to show my affiliation with the Bahá'í Faith. Alláh-u-Abhá

(signed) Mathew Kaszab  
[copy sent to Mrs. Louie Mathews]<sup>30</sup>



Mathew's heart's desire was fulfilled on April 22, 1939 during the period of Ridvan, the "most great Festival" celebrating the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in 1863. Above is a copy of his luggage tag, courtesy of the U.S. Bahá'í national archives.

In April of 1939 Mathew arrived in Panama, the first Bahá'í to settle in that country. He immediately reached out to make the Faith known, wherever and whenever he was able, and by May had at least one article published in the *Panama Tribune*.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Bahá'í national archives, Inter-America Committee Pioneer file #860

May 1, 1939

Dear Virgie:

This is the second letter I am writing you today.

One quality I possess is patience and this comes in very handy because there seems to be a delay in every enterprise I undertake.

When I went out to mail the first letter I found that the post office the American Consulate and almost every agency was closed so I went around looking for a stamp (May 1<sup>st</sup> is a holiday).

I went into the shop of a West Indian woman who spoke English and I talked to her for two hours about the Bahá'í Faith. She is a Methodist but fairly liberal so we got along quite well. She is going to inquire about a place for me to live in that would be reasonable.

The women seem to be more spiritual and more active in the West than the men (in general). I felt that I shouldn't let the women do all the tough jobs, that is why I came to Panama. There are such brave pioneers as Martha Root who has pioneered all over the world for decades. Also Agnes Alexander, etc.

The Husted family is coming through the Canal next fall on their way to Honolulu; he is in a government job.

I talked to the Jewish woman you mentioned and she didn't think much of you. I don't like to talk to old fogies like her; they are too deeply imbedded in their particular rut in the mire of superstitions. However I did talk to a youth who was very much interested. He took pictures of me on the ship and of the Canal Zone and he said he will let me have some copies. I gave him the address of the Bahá'í Center in New York as my permanent address and told him to go there and talk to my friends. He will also stop over in Chicago to see the Temple and to get some pictures of it for me. I also talked to the young ship surgeon who liked the idea and a young Jewish woman from the Bronx who said she will see my friends in N.Y. when she gets back and tell them about the trip. Somehow I can talk better to people around 30, they are more receptive because they are old enough to talk sense and yet not too set in their ways.

In the afternoon the heat gets terrific. In the early morning it cools off a bit. It is cloudy now but it hasn't rained yet.

I know quite a bit about Bahá'í Administration. If you are in doubts about something look through "Bahá'í Procedure," a loose leaf book. Shoghi Effendi didn't write me to study Administration. He probably gathered from my letter that I was well versed on the subject.

Airmail costs 15 to 20¢ per letter from here while ordinary mail costs only 2¢. It does not make sense to me.

Today is Labor Day down here but tomorrow everything will be open and I can go about my business getting settled. I will let you know about my plans as soon as I get oriented. I get a kick out of riding the Toonerville trolley.<sup>31</sup> The scenery is nice when it gets out into the suburbs. The town itself is interesting. There are squares with palm trees and flowers and very large and ancient

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<sup>31</sup> Mathew is referring to a popular newspaper cartoon which ran in the U.S. from 1908 to 1955

Cathedrals on one side of the square. A band plays at night and the bands wear different colored uniforms in different squares, bright red or all white, etc.

I saw your Navy all lined up in the harbor. While they are around there is a Navy police that lines up in the square for inspection every morning. They wear white uniforms while the Panama police wear brown. They also have a Navy police wagon to pick up drunken and unruly sailors. Everything is organized.

The people in this rooming house do not speak English but I get along all right.

This letter may take a week but if anything important happens I will write by airmail.

Alláh-u-Abhá

MATHEW

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COPY – NEWSPAPER PUBLICITY

“The Panama Tribune” – Leading Weekly Newspaper in all Central America

Sunday, May 14, 1949

The Press and the New Social Order Panama, R.P. May 5, 1939

The Editor

The Panama Tribune

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 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 as it 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 a universal outlook and should veer away from national, racial, religious and class prejudice.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá the great Persian said: “Beware of prejudice, light is good whatever lamp it shines from.” 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 – Panamá

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While Mathew was busy establishing himself in Panama, there were others getting ready to follow the same directives of the Guardian. Louise Caswell was asked by the Inter-America committee to settle there, and she agreed to go after her lease expired on her home in Knoxville, Tennessee, which would happen in September. She left on September 29, 1939 joined by Johnny Eichenauer, a seventeen-year-old on his way to El Salvador, likewise galvanized by the words of Shoghi Effendi. The two of them arrived in Panama on October 4, 1939. Louise did not speak much Spanish and either, it must be mentioned, did Mathew, having lived on the English-speaking Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua as a child. Upon arrival to Panama, Louise went to the U.S. Consul to register. In the meantime, Mathew had been expecting her, as evident in correspondence between May-September of 1939 which follow. Mathew was also eager to be considered “the Bahá’í representative” to Panama, as he did not specifically receive that designation before leaving the U.S. It must be clarified here that Bahá’í pioneers fill international pioneering *goals* set by National Spiritual Assemblies worldwide, but that they are acting as individuals when they decide to establish themselves in foreign lands and serve the Faith in those goal areas. There are no official “representatives” of the Bahá’í Faith in this respect, but in these early days this is the term that was sometimes used, apparently, in correspondence both to and from Mathew. He was also under the impression, conveyed to him in writing <sup>32</sup> that the Guardian had specified that *men* were the preferred gender for making initial contacts in Panama, so he felt satisfied that his presence there was greatly needed and absolutely correct. There began rumblings of his being asked to go to Nicaragua instead of staying in Panama, and it is evident that there was somewhat of a tug-of-war on this issue. Another pioneer to Panama, Cora Oliver, was also poised to arrive, which she soon did, to assist Louise

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<sup>32</sup> See letter dated June 6, 1939, below, from Louie Mathews which states: “Instructions from the Guardian have arrived to the effect that only men are to be sent to Panama.” This may have been a temporary instruction. The subject is later rectified to Mathew’s satisfaction. See his letter dated October 6, 1939, below. “...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.” The original correspondence from the Guardian on this issue is not available to this compiler.

Caswell. She was a teacher and the probability of her earning a livelihood in Panama was relatively assured. Mathew throughout his time in Central America struggled to support himself. There being no Bahá'í clergy or other professionals, nor missionaries in the traditional sense, Bahá'ís are not supported by the Funds of the Faith, which are voluntary contributions made humbly by Bahá'ís *only*, locally, nationally, and internationally. However, in those early days there were temporary measures made to support travel to goal countries, if it were needed. In Mathew's case, he often asked for funds to cover literature, which he then gave away, or to cover the cost of a radio broadcast. His wants and needs were sparse. Perhaps the best way to convey the heart-rending adventure of his three and a half years in Panama and Nicaragua is to publish here, mostly verbatim with all grammar and expressions intact except where slightly changed for ease of reading, letters to and from and about Mathew from 1939 through 1943. All correspondence herein has been made available courtesy of the U.S. Bahá'í national archives. Again, Mathew was completely absorbed by his identity as a Bahá'í and by his love for Bahá'u'lláh, and almost exclusively used dates from the Bahá'í calendar, some of which have been transcribed to match the Gregorian calendar.

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3rd day, 4th month, year 96 [May 19, 1939]

[typewritten]

Mr. Horace Holley [secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States]  
119 Waverly Place, N.Y.C.

Dear Horace,

The letter that you wrote on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, I received on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

I have already made a preliminary survey of the field and have established friendly relations with the press.

There are two daily and one weekly newspaper. 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 *Bahá'í 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.

Last night I started my class in the Escuela de Artes Y Oficios. 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.

This Sunday I have been invited to talk in the Theosophical Society on the subject of Cycles of Civilization. Next Sunday I am invited over to the city of Gamboa to talk to a club composed of teachers and other progressive people on the Basis for a New Civilization.

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.

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

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 hour broadcasts in a week; one in English and one in Spanish after I get it translated. That would be \$5 a week. This is much less expensive than in the U.S. considering the territory this station covers.

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 *Bahá'í News* service could also cooperate with me by sending any important news releases, photographs etc.

Mrs. Caswell may be of help when she comes in covering this 46 [?] miles of territory.

Alláh-u-Abhá (signed) Mathew Kaszab  
98 Calle del Estudiante  
Panamá City, R.P.

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Anniversary of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, year 96  
[May 29, 1939 – typewritten]

Dear Virgie,

You are disconcerted that I suggested to the National Spiritual Assembly that I could use money for broadcasting. In this I am not asking anything for myself as I gain nothing by broadcasting nor do I personally lose anything if the message is not broadcast. I would be acting as an agent for the Bahá'ís and they ought to be glad to have an agent down here who is as proficient in giving the message as I am. If I had as much capacity and persistence in making money as I have in giving the Message, I would be a millionaire by now. They will send someone down here who will spend the money anyhow and that money should not be considered as personal property but spent to further the Cause. The Bahá'í Faith is a worldwide organism and everyone is responsible for its propagation so the whole burden should not rest on me in this important region. I am merely an element in that organism who is situated in a geographically strategic position. Shoghi Effendi wrote in *The Advent of Divine Justice* that the "resources of the Bahá'í treasury should be liberally expended on its behalf." However the National Spiritual Assembly is a very ponderous body and although they must have had this communication at the beginning of the year, nothing has been done about it at this writing and probably another month will transpire before they will obey Shoghi Effendi's request. I did not think that you should send me the money for that because you already have done more than your share and this is a collective responsibility. In fact, you and another Bahá'í from the middle west were the only ones who discharged

their urgent responsibility in this matter and I do not consider it proper that you should be asked to shoulder any further responsibility.

While you are typing prayers, send me the healing prayer on page 265 I think, of the book of prayers and meditations. Also prayers that could be read in public from the same book. I do not use the small prayer books because I want Shoghi Effendi's translation.

*Sunday, June 4*

Employment opportunities look very encouraging as they will increase the personnel of the zone within a few weeks so stop worrying about me.

Loulie Mathews just wrote me and told me that Mrs. Caswell will be coming down here in September but by that time there will be a flourishing Bahá'í Community here. The Committee may recognize me as an official teacher.

I have a full program for this week, four lectures and a radio broadcast. The broadcast is under the auspices of the Free University and if it attracts a large enough audience I may even be paid for my lecture. It will be cultural and philosophical in nature but it will prepare the minds of the audience for the Bahá'í Message. The newspapers are giving me cooperation, I get three or four announcements a week and last Sunday I got an article in the *Tribune* that was even more definite than the preceding one.

Mrs. Bishop wrote me and sent me 19 pamphlets in Spanish which will come in handy but the books will not be ready until September. Have you mailed me the *Bahá'í News* yet? I am somewhat isolated from what is happening in the rest of the Bahá'í world.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew  
98 Calle del Estudiante

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P.O. Box 1064  
Colorado Springs, Colo.  
June 6, 1939

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
98 Calle del Estudiante  
Panama City

My dear Mathew,  
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 the resident teacher and pioneer, with whom we are working in close cooperation.<sup>33</sup>

Instructions from the Guardian have arrived to 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.... 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.

(signed) L.A.M. [Loulie Albee Mathews]

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[letterhead Universidad Libre de Panama -handwritten date, typed letter]  
15th day month of Light Year 96

Dear Loulie,

I am carrying on my regular classes at this University, and the head of it is interested in the Bahá'í Teachings and can get me some good contacts among the Indians who live about 100 miles from here. I am enclosing 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 Indian language.

Yesterday, Sunday I met a group of six people who call themselves Christian Mystics [sic] of the 15<sup>th</sup> lodge, and were told to await the coming of the Great Atavar so I told them that their Atavar 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 Bahá'u'lláh that perchance they would be acceptable in His New World Order. 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.

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 in to them.

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

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<sup>33</sup> In "Uniting the Americas" by Garreta Busey, *The Bahá'í World* Vol. IX p. 192, the author says that "Mathew Kaszab, fired with enthusiasm, departed precipitately for Panama."

I have been reading a book on the Indians around here to get an insight into their customs. They have their medicine man 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 plane and I would like to help them in this endeavor, however that also involves traveling expenses so I will have to wait until I have some financial resources for this undertaking.

I will write to you whenever something interesting happens and will continue with my report whenever any advancement is made.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab  
98 Calle del Estudiante  
Panama City, R.P.

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6th day 6th month, year 96 [June 29 1939]

Dear Loulie,

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 Bahá'í fund may not be in such an 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 carfare and my teaching is restricted to a comparatively few people and I can not follow up the leads that I should.

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 can not 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.

The conditions are difficult as the people are backward and also I can not 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 U.S. 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.

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 books that the Publishing Committee sent me came in very handy and it 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 a number of Chinese here.

The picture of the temple and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that the *News Service* sent could not be used in the local newspapers as they lack space but I showed it to a 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.<sup>34</sup>

I just received a letter from the library Committee. I placed an Esslemont<sup>35</sup> and a *Wisdom of Abdu'l-Bahá* in the library. Outside of that they have no modern Bahá'í book in there. Some of Mason Remey's books and pamphlets were placed in there in 1926.<sup>36</sup>

[following is handwritten]:

I sent you a copy of the *Tribune* with a write up of a speech I made in La Boca, a negro community.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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July 22, 1939

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
98 Calle del Estudiante  
Panama City, R.P.

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.

Mrs. Oliver of Washington, D.C. has been offered a position in Panama as a teacher. She can stay in Panama without any additional expense, and the N.S.A. prefer her to go. It might be that later you could return which would be fine and which I would help you to do.

Please let me know how you feel about this.

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<sup>34</sup> This could have been *The Bahá'í World* Vol. V April 1932-1934 or *The Bahá'í World* Vol. VI 1934-36 either of which Mathew might have had in his possession, or possibly a *Bahá'í News* periodical.

<sup>35</sup> Mathew gave away copies of *Bahá'u'llah and the New Era* by John Esslemont, first published in 1923 and still in wide circulation today.

<sup>36</sup> It is not known by this compiler who placed books in the library and when.

[Loulie Mathews]

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14<sup>th</sup> Kalimat, year 96  
[July 26, 1939]

Dear Loulie,

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 a 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 drier 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 cédula<sup>37</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 month's 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 deposit is available either if I get a job or if I leave the country.

Getting a job in the 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. Getting a job in Panama is also difficult on account of the restrictions on foreigners and a person requires a cédula.

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 cédula permitting him to stay here. He needs seeds and equipment and in some places fertilizer. Also he has to build himself a shack and he has to have some 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.

Food and lodging is comparatively cheap but some other things that have to be imported are more expensive. They charge one dollar to have shoes half soled. For one who would have a large amount of capital to invest there are all sorts of industries that could be started here and carried on profitably with hardly any competition. Hardly any of the industries and potentialities of the country are properly exploited. That is why a person without capital is at a disadvantage here. There are not enough industries for him to be employed in.

In Nicaragua conditions may not be quite so stringent, at any rate I would like to find out while I am finding out what happened to my plantation. I am also curious as to how people there would react to the Bahá'í Faith but 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. Here the West Indian Negroes are addicted to sectarian dogmatism. Others are too materialistic or are too busy concerning themselves with those things that crumble or are difficult to contact. So I have succeeded in inducing only a dozen people to investigate the Cause seriously. There is good

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<sup>37</sup> Official ID card

material among these for a Bahá'í group. There are others who are slightly interested. I think that I have done a fairly good job considering a lack of resources and the uncertainties that I had to contend with. The Esslemont books that you had sent to me are a tremendous advantage and saved the day. 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 exploited because it seems that each year there are new restrictions and more stringent laws passed to try to prevent people from entering countries and to hamper their activities and people are getting to be more suspicious 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.

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....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. The more countries in which the cry of Ya Bahá-ul-Abhá can be 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 Bahá'ís in the future; those who are refugees from Europe on account of racial persecutions. Not that anything will be safe in the day of cataclysm but we must try to do the best with what we have and not let things slide as we do not know what might be useful or how things will turn out in the future.

How is Green Acre getting along? Are the young people studying Spanish?

Alláh-u-Abhá.

(signed) Mathew Kaszab

98 Calle del Estudiante, Panamá City. R.P.

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[typewritten] 14<sup>th</sup> Kalimat year 96 [July 26, 1939]

Dear Loulie,

I just received your airmail letter this morning. 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. My mother also had a small plantation 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 Bahá'í activities in Bluefields and in Managua where the state records are kept...

Mrs. Oliver will not get here until September, probably, when school starts...

(signed) Mathew Kaszab  
98 Calle del Estudiante  
Panama City, R.P.  
[handwritten, below]

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

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14<sup>th</sup> Kamal, Year 96 [August 14, 1939] Mathew wrote of his broadcasting successes and more newspaper articles. He says “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 Channels of Panama.”

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By mid-August 1939 Mathew had been in Panama for almost four months, and the first Panamanian resident had enrolled in the Faith.<sup>38</sup> He was not a native of the country, but Joseph Wantuk had made Panama his home. Mathew describes him and the event of his declaration in a letter to Virgie Preston dated 15<sup>th</sup> Kamal year 96 [August 15, 1939].

*“Today Mr. Joseph Wantuk has declared himself as an inhabitant of the New World Order and I have accepted him as my coworker in the Divine Vineyards. He wrote to Mrs. Loulie Mathews to be put on the list of the Inter-America Committee., as the Committee wants to list all new members. I mailed his letter this morning with a special anniversary airmail stamp and included a note to Loulie to the effect that I had accepted him so now you have a brand new Spiritual brother in El-Abha, the first one to declare himself in Panama. While the National Assembly meditates as to what should be done, I go out and do it with only the help of two faithful friends and the Lord of Might. This morning I have just finished broadcasting the most beautiful speech you ever could have heard...so even if I should now go to Nicaragua, the foundation which countless centuries will not undermine has already been laid. Joseph Wantuk is 42 years old, is a U.S. citizen but has been in Panama for eight years and speaks Spanish fluently. He has a photo shop in Fort Amador. He is married and has two children. The other disciples are not proceeding so rapidly but we will locate some more worthwhile prospects to bring into the Cause.”*

On 10<sup>th</sup> Asmá, year 96 [August 30, 1939] Mathew wrote another letter to Virgie which expressed the ferocious urgency with which he feels the Bahá’í Cause must be shared with humanity. Apparently he had sent a speech to Virgie to review, on which she commented, and he vehemently defends what was probably very strong language. The handwritten letter is six pages long, written clearly and precisely, even boldly. One must remember that Mathew is said to have spoken English “haltingly” in a letter from Mrs. Frances B. Stewart, and with a quiet, almost inaudible voice by a later contact in Nicaragua, Professor Edelberto Torres; not so his writing in this letter. First he expresses some frustration about all the work he has been doing and the relative lack of interest in the Faith by the people of Panama, who

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<sup>38</sup> The first native Panamanian to enroll, also a contact of Mathew’s, was Mr. Alfred Osborne, who became a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas.

show "passive resistance and a negligent disregard for the Teachings." His command of the written word in English is significant. Excerpts from his letter follow.

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I received your letter with the duplicate of the one you wrote to Wantuk...[also] today I received the manuscript with the corrected copy. Your version is much more gentle and nice and respectable..sometimes believers have to act on the spur of the moment and there is no time for the niceties and the finesse. When that which will make the limbs of mankind quake will suddenly happen you will not have time to be nice and delicate...the people of error do not like the truth...I know that nothing that I can say would be acceptable or pleasing to them so I may as well speak quite openly and let them know where they get off and what is awaiting them...I have not been openly attacked so far...I knew the type of audience I was appealing to and I tried to figure and gauge how much I could get away with...I admit that your revision is a nicer edition and better oriented towards the type of people you are used to contacting also I admit that I did put it on a bit heavy but this was calculated and necessary for me ...in certain ways I am quite audacious. I am mature spiritually, I am somewhat an authority on the Teachings after seven years of study and am experienced in giving the message...Some of the changes that you made I see the reasons for. I am not insulted because I see that your way is the proper way to give it in Washington. On the other hand you must give me credit for intelligence, wisdom and guidance. Knowing this territory better than any other believer and knowing my capacity and weakness, would it be preposterous to believe that I know what I am doing? I have two more people interested in the Cause. Loulie wrote me a very enthusiastic letter to the effect that our disciple is the first Bahá'í in Central America. We do not stress peace here, in fact we soft pedal it considerably.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew

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On the same day Louise Caswell left for Panama with Johnny Eichenauer, the following letter was written to Mathew from the Inter-America Committee. With the confirmation of another pioneer arriving, it was decided that Mathew should go to Nicaragua. He accepted this decision with characteristic acquiescence, even while acknowledging the difficulties.

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September 29, 1939

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
98 Calle del Estudiante  
Panama City, R.P.

Dear Mathew:

At the recent meeting of the N.S.A. they appropriated \$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 [Wilhelm], asking him to forward me a check for \$150.00 with which I can send you a draft.

It is important, however that you remember in Panama to greet Louise Caswell who arrives on the City of Norfolk either the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> of October...but you will be able to ascertain that in Panama.

Mrs. Cora Oliver is also leaving via New York. Let me know the date of your leaving and send a receipt for the money to Roy Wilhelm, 104 Wall Street, when you get it.

Feel your appointment important and thrilling,

Lovingly,  
Loulie

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On Oct. 1, 1939 Mathew wrote from Panama that Joseph [Wantuk] is there but "too busy." Cora Oliver is not there yet.

5<sup>th</sup> day of Will, year 96 [October 1, 1939]

Dear Loulie,

It seems that now I will be able to get by until January when there will be plenty of jobs around her 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 for changing the status quo.

Although this is a strategic point on the Bahá'í 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.

I talked with Mr. Monte, the representative of the United Press and he said that all the press men are kept out of the secret sessions. They can only attend the general sessions and as for the rest they just get the second hand 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. 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 *Bahá'í News* we should not be messed up with politics and my efforts in that direction may be misconstrued by some as political activities.<sup>39</sup> I can not speak Spanish fluently enough and have no

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<sup>39</sup> Mathew is clearly cognizant of the directives from the Guardian which tell us to "shun politics like the plague, and be obedient to the Government in power in the place where we reside" [quote published in *Directives from the Guardian*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, India 1973 p. 58]. He emphasizes that he does not want his actions to be misconstrued.

adequate literature in Spanish. I have no one to help me or to consult with me. I can not put up the proper front and prestige counts a lot in this situation. Joseph [Wantuk] is too busy to help and I do not get a chance to see him because Fort Amador where he has his shop is on a war basis and no one is allowed except on official business.

I do not know when Mrs. Oliver is coming or what boat she will be on if she has decided to come. If Pedro Espinosa<sup>40</sup> was down here now maybe we could plan something big for the conference but it will break up by Thursday.

There is not much information in the *Bahá'í News* about activities in Central America. How many more Republics are as yet to be pioneered? Why is everything going so painfully slow? Is it a lack of funds or is Temple construction 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-ul-Abha would not as yet have been raised in this important region although the Guardian has repeatedly stressed the importance of Panama. Are many believers studying Spanish? It is estimated that there are more than 80,000,000 people in South America.

Alláh-u-Abhá

(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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Oct. 5, 1939 in a letter handwritten from Panama Mathew wrote that Louise Caswell "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 work and to see the scenery....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...I do not know how long Mrs. Caswell will stay in Cristobal and when Mrs. Oliver gets here the Bahá'í Community will be augmented to four people...I received a letter from the Guardian."

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Loulie Mathews states<sup>41</sup> that after Mathew's acceptance of the new post, he was made radiantly happy by the letter he received from the Guardian who wrote in his own hand the following:

*Dear and precious co-worker,*

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<sup>40</sup> Pedro Espinosa was one of the early Bahá'ís of Mexico and a member of the first Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Mexico City in 1938, the first Spiritual Assembly to be formed in Latin America.

<sup>41</sup> Matthews, Loulie, *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record* Vol. IX April 1940-1944 Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, p. 615. Mathew mentions receiving a letter from the Guardian on at least two different occasions, but the one published in *The Bahá'í World* is the one that has been accessed at this writing. He states in a letter dated September 6, 1941 to Mrs. Nellie French that he received the above letter while in the mines in Siuna.

*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 are setting. May the Beloved achieve your heart's dearest wish. Persevere and rest assured.*

*Your true and grateful brother,*

*Shoghi*

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[October 6, 1939]

Dear Loulie,

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 hardship I do not mind going on deck. John and I will probably leave by the 16<sup>th</sup> of this month (Oct.) on the Acajutla which is a small vessel belonging to the Pacific Steam Navigation. Probably English, but it is on the Pacific coast and I doubt if there are any submarines around especially within the security. If we do get blown up send two other pioneers to replace us immediately.

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 minutes. That is why there were only three of us at the meeting. I was surprised about the women coming after you wrote that only men would come but 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. Panama is no longer virgin territory, considering that there are already five believers around and the fact that the cry of Ya-Baha-ul-Abhá has been vociferously raised in these regions for already five months by a big, bold Bahá'í pioneer!

Next January when the \$277,000,000 appropriation will go through for the building of the third set of locks there will be all sorts of positions open in the zone for those with a profession or for skilled or semiskilled labor so there could be quite an influx of Bahá'ís. Maybe you should inform those who are contemplating coming down here. The higher positions are all civil service. It is not necessary to speak Spanish in the zone as hardly anyone speaks it. The most important consideration is that the person be a white citizen of the U.S. Many of the people are Southerners and have racial prejudice so it is even more

difficult for a negro to get a job in the zone as it is down South in the U.S.<sup>42</sup> Also there is practically no chance of getting a job if the person is not a citizen of the United States.

John was telling me about the new summer school for pioneers<sup>43</sup> and in that connection I have an idea. There is a shortage of food in the Republic which has to be imported from Costa Rica and even from the U.S. and so the government is encouraging agriculture. Vast tracts of land can be rented from the government for 50 cents a hectare per year and eventually bought outright very reasonably and all the products will find a ready market. Not like in the U.S. where part of the produce has to be plowed<sup>44</sup> under. So if some of the believers could be induced to invest a few thousand dollars a Bahá'í colony could be started. Would you talk with some of the Bahá'ís, especially those who have done some farming to see if there is a sentiment in favor of such a project? Details would be available from the Department of Agriculture here. This would serve as a self-supporting nucleus for further pioneering in South American countries.

I will write more in the regular mail. I feel that in going to Nicaragua I will be saving some money for the Bahá'í Fund as it would cost \$165 for transportation from the U.S. to Nicaragua if you were to send a pioneer from there while from here it will cost me only \$25 plus \$10 for passport which everyone must have. John found out that it would have been somewhat cheaper for him to have flown to Salvador from Texas.

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: That woman has a very nice face, she must be a Bahá'í 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 Hotel Tivoli until she finds a suitable place.

I suppose you were holding the check until you get this letter and now that the group has decided in Bahá'í consultation that it would be best for me to go soon [to Nicaragua] you could send me a draft at the nearest convenient time. The sooner the quicker [sic].

I just received a letter from San Francisco for Mrs. Caswell so I am going over to the Tivoli to deliver it to her.

Alláh-u-Abhá.

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<sup>42</sup> It is a sign of the times that Mathew would have recommended that white U.S. citizens be sent to the Canal Zone. He is stressing the similarities regarding racial relations in the U.S. and in Panama. His experience in Panama so far is largely with the non-indigenous population, as he does not speak Spanish, even though in several of his letters he inquires if the believers in the U.S. are undertaking the study of Spanish.

<sup>43</sup> "Temerity" training institute established by Loulie Mathews in Pine Valley, Colorado

<sup>44</sup> Mathew may be referring to the practice during the U.S. Great Depression of plowing under surplus crops in order to keep prices up. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace called this activity a "shocking commentary on our civilization."

(signed) Mathew Kaszab  
98 Calle del Estudiante  
Panamá City, R.P.

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Louise Caswell's first contact with Mathew Kaszab in his above letter is also described, from her point of view, in *Divine Springtime* by Daniel Wegener.

*Her first test [upon arrival in Panama] came very quickly. When she arrived at the "pension" where she had made reservations from San Francisco before departing, she discovered to her dismay that there was no room for her. A sudden realization followed – she didn't know nearly as much Spanish as she thought: "What did the lady say? Does she understand...?" As with so many daily tasks, what was simple at home had become difficult in a foreign land. Suddenly, a voice from behind her said very clearly, "Are you Louise Caswell?" It was Mathew Kaszab, a Bahá'í pioneer who had been living in Panama City. What a terrific relief it was; not only the sound of English, but another Bahá'í. This time the test was resolved quickly and easily, but it serves as an example of the numberless problems and frustrations that occurred almost daily.*

*Mathew took Louise and Johnny to the Tivoli Hotel in the Canal Zone where they passed some very pleasant days...Mrs. Cora Oliver soon arrived as a pioneer from New York and together they visited the seekers Mathew had found and also the first believer in Panama, Joseph Wantuk. In the evenings the four of them gathered in the writing room of the Tivoli Hotel and said prayers. Louise wrote, "If these days could have been prolonged, paradise would have been delayed there." Such was the spirit that surrounded those valiant pioneers.<sup>45</sup>*

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<sup>45</sup> Wegener, Daniel pp. 20-21.

Hotel Tivoli  
Ancon, C. Z.  
October 9, 1939  
Will 14, 96  
of the Bahá'í Era



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

Dear Mrs. Mathews;

Greetings from the Bahá'ís in Panama.

Mathew Kaszab, who has been here about five months pioneering and making numerous radio and newspaper contacts; Joseph Wantuk, first Bahá'í of Panama who has been a student of religion and philosophy for some time; Mrs. Caswell, who recently came to Panama to teach the Bahá'í 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 a lecheria, 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 were contacted by Mr. Kaszab.

Sinceramente, siempre listo para servir la Causa de Dios.

*Mathew Kaszab*  
Mr. Mathew Kaszab

*Louise Caswell*  
Mrs. Caswell

*Joseph Wantuk*  
Mr. Joseph Wantuk

*John Eichenauer*  
Mr. John Eichenauer, Jr.

*Cora H. Oliver*  
Cora H. Oliver

JCE

(over)

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

*This afternoon, October 10, Mathew and Johnny learned of Cora Oliver's presence in Panama City, and at 5:00 p.m. 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 together at the "Rendezvous." This morning Mathew and Johnny broadcast a Bahá'í program in English and Spanish over the "Star and Herald" station. Enclosed find picture.<sup>46</sup>*

<sup>46</sup> Caswell, Louise in a letter dated October 10, 1939 to the Inter-America committee. Courtesy of the U.S. Bahá'í national archives.



Picture taken October 10, 1939, Panama City, Republic of 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

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3<sup>rd</sup> of Knowledge, year 96 [October 18, 1939]

Dear Loulie,

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. John Eichenauer went last night on the Acajutla and I wanted to go with him as far as Corinto. 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 Bahá'í class in the Universidad Libre again for Mrs. Caswell and there we met a man who can find me some good contacts in Nicaragua as his father lives there. We have been making some important contacts the last two weeks.

I will send a receipt to Roy Wilhelm by regular mail. It will get there a few days later but apparently the National Spiritual Assembly is in no hurry anyway. I did not expect to get the check before 1944, the hundredth anniversary so I was quite surprised when I saw it this morning. I will send the receipt for \$100 as the other \$50 is through your generosity.

I received a letter from Phillip Marangella. I do not know the address of Gerald Sluter or of Tony Roca and Phil wants to write to them. Philip's address is Hotel Andino, San Lazaro 1218 Havana, Cuba. Will you send him and also me the addresses...

Alláh-u-Abhá

(signed) Mathew Kaszab



Postcard from Mathew dated November 1, 1939 and photo taken sometime in the fall in Panama with Louise Caswell, Johnny Eichenauer, Joseph Wantuk, and Joseph's daughter Edna

## NICARAGUA

Mathew sailed from Panama City to Nicaragua on November 1, 1939 on the Acajutla, leaving in the middle of the night for what would be the last three years of his life. He would earn the title of "martyr" in the eyes of some of his Bahá'í colleagues, with whom he kept in contact for as long as he could. In the series of letters that follow there is a gap between September 1941 and February 1942 during which his correspondence ceased. After September 26, 1942 correspondence from Nicaragua stopped altogether and his poignant story is pieced together by others.



Simplified map of Nicaragua, Central America

Shown are cities of Managua, Granada, Bluefields and the mining town of Siuna where Mathew labored to earn a living and found the direst conditions of poverty (taken from *The Bahá'í World* Vol. VIII p. 1037).

*Note:* Mathew's letters from Nicaragua are largely hand-written but on occasion he gains access to typewriters. He is a writer at heart, and typing increases his ability to express himself.

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2<sup>nd</sup> of 13<sup>th</sup> month, year 96 [November 5, 1939]

Dear Virgie,

I am held up by red tape here in Corinto which is the port for Managua. Corinto is an oxcart town and the streets are not paved. They have the cutest little toy locomotives capable of drawing 2 or 3 freight cars. A larger locomotive takes the train to Managua, there is about 150 miles of single track railway in the whole country. In Corinto there are two small schools and a church and a railroad station. A few very primitive hotels, no automobiles or carriages, only ox carts. Very few people speak English but I manage to get around after a fashion. The food on board ship was very poor, mostly beans and rice, it took me over four days as the ship was small, only 1/8 as large as the one I came from N.Y. on and it stopped over in Puntarenas and in San Juan from where I wrote you by ordinary mail. I better send this by airmail otherwise it will take six weeks to two months to get to the U.S. I have over \$100 dollars for which I can get 540 córdobas so things are quite cheap. It costs me 7 córdobas a day at this hotel (for one day with three meals). I can get 5.40 córdobas for one dollar so figure it out for yourself.

Loulie must have had great confidence in me because she sent me to the largest and most backward republic in Central America. A greater percentage of the people are illiterate than in any other republic and there is nothing but the Catholic Church. The currency is depreciated and there is a virtual

dictatorship.<sup>47</sup> So you see I will have quite a job putting Nicaragua on its feet again. (Especially when we take into consideration the fact that they are all barefooted!)

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew

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[undated – must be 6 Nov. 1939]

Dear Loulie,

Here I am in Corinto for the second day. 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 one who was born there. So 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 U.S. citizens.

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 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.

### **Managua**

The port captain telephoned to the Minister and 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 propoganda.<sup>48</sup> So the Minister told the captain to consult him after this and that is why I had to wait.

In Nicaragua the people are very poor and backward and illiterate. There are more barefooted peopled and naked children than in 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

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<sup>47</sup> Anastasio Somoza Garcia 1939-1947

<sup>48</sup> It is the opinion of this compiler that the port captain's comment foreshadowed troubles to come. Being the time of WWII and Mathew being Hungarian, he could have been taken for Russian or German as fear of communism began to lodge itself in Nicaragua.

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<sup>49</sup> but anyway it served as a good excuse.

My delay in Corinto was providential because I contacted Mr. 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. I know more Spanish than I thought I did so get around after a fashion.

You could write me in care of the U.S. consulate, Managua, Nicaragua.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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November 14, 1939

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o U.S. Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew,

My sympathies for you are as large as the country and the only way to stay there is to remember that when you cannot bear it any longer we will send you somewhere else. Do please be careful of the drinking water. It is not of the healthiest I understand. It may be that you can get a group together there and be able to leave. I think it is the most sacrificial post that there is outside of Haiti which is just a little bit worse.

I am doing a Spanish pamphlet of the Temple and will send it to you as soon as I have it and under separate cover, am sending you ten registration cards. Looking at them will help you to form the Assembly so you can leave.

Clarence Iverson has now decided to go to San Salvador. I wish you would write to John Eichenauer, Jr. c/o U.S. Consul, San Salvador, El Salvador and Gerard Sluter 7 A Avenue S 63 Guatemala City, and Antonio Roca c/o U.S. Consult Tegucigalpa Honduras. You might also write to: Mrs. Louise Caswell and Mrs. Cora Hitt Oliver P.O. Box 1296 Ancon, Canal Zone, Panama.

Very seriously, Mathew, that is a big sacrifice on your part and I hope you will be able to see your way to staying at least a few months. If you need anything, let me know and I will send it. I shall be here in New York until the 4<sup>th</sup> of December and after that for one month in Tucson, Arizona, at the Desert Inn.

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<sup>49</sup> The Nicaragua magnitude 6.1 earthquake in 1931 devastated Managua. Records of the banana plantation may have been forever lost in that earthquake. Mathew later found that the plantation itself was destroyed by a plant disease. It is not known what happened to the deed he showed the port captain.

Much love,

[from Loulie Mathews]

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Power, year 96 [November 1939]

Dear Victoria,

I have just arrived at San Carlos on the other side of Lake Nicaragua, I came from Granada on a small boat by the name of Victoria which reminded me that I should write to you. I got a first class ticket but even for first class there were no accommodations. They opened a cot on the deck and I slept on it without a pillow or anything else, that is, I slept spasmodically and had a pain in the neck by morning. The food was terrible. The river boat that goes down the San Juan River is even worse. It is somewhat larger than a row boat! I wrote Loulie Mathews that a pioneer is one who eats unpalatable and unsanitary food and sleeps without a mattress! I had the opportunity of giving the Message to a number of people who spoke English and two are seriously interested in the Faith. I also handed out some pamphlets in Spanish. It has been raining so the weather is comfortably cool. This village has about 500 people.

You asked me if you could help. You could send me a few postal cards of the Temple by ordinary mail. If you want to help financially, send me a few dollars in an envelope, I doubt whether I could cash any money orders. I have enough money to get by on for several months but when I get to Bluefields and start spreading the Message in a big way I will be able to use advantageously whatever I get hold of especially when we take into consideration the fact that I can exchange a dollar for 5.60 córdobas. The local currency being devaluated a U.S. dollar will go quite far.

In Bluefields the people speak English which is quite an advantage for me as I can speak it much better than Spanish and Bahá'í literature in English is more adequate than the few Spanish translations now available. The people here are backward and uncivilized but I am bound to meet some intelligent people especially in Bluefields where they are supposed to be more broadminded. After having had a little success I feel more encouraged. How are things going with you? I get little news and am out of touch with what is happening in the rest of the Bahá'í world.

Alláh-u-Abhá

(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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18<sup>th</sup> Power, Year 96 [November 21, 1939]

Dear Loulie,

Here I am in Granada which seems to be a more fertile field for the Message. I interested a Señor Alberto Selva in the Faith. He was born here but lived in the U.S., he has a wife and daughter in California who may come down here. Could you have some Spanish literature and pamphlets sent to him? Señor Alberto Selva, Casa Isabel Espinosa, Granada, Nicaragua.

Also some Spanish books and pamphlets to Mr. Frank Miller, c/o J. Vassali & Co., Managua, Nicaragua. About 10 pamphlets each would be enough as they want to give some to their friends and one or two books each. What they can't use I will give to other interested people.

I am going to Bluefields for a while. The transportation costs only five dollars each way in U.S. currency. There are a few intelligent people in Nicaragua...Don't you think that you picked out quite a job for me? A pioneer is one who eats unpalatable and unsanitary food and sleeps without a mattress!<sup>50</sup>

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew

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[undated – sometime between November 22 and December 25, 1939]

Dear Loulie,

The airmail letter you wrote Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> has been forwarded to me by the U.S. consulate. I received it the day before yesterday with 8 other letters, I was wondering what was happening and then all at once I get news from nine people: John Eichenauer, Louise Caswell, Cora Oliver, Phillip & June Marangella were among those who wrote me in English and Antonio Roca in Spanish. I could read the Spanish all right but I will have to answer in English. The other mail was from the U.S.

When I go somewhere where the water looks doubtful I buy coconuts and drink the water out of them. Many places the food looks too disgusting to eat so I just buy bananas or go hungry...

There is one hotel in Bluefields serving good food but they charge 5.50 córdobas a day while other places charge 1 to 2 córdobas. If Haiti is worse than Nicaragua I am sorry for the pioneer who will have to go there. Here it is at least cool during the rainy season, it rains so much on the coast that my rubbers and umbrella are my most valuable possessions. In the interior it is drier and warmer.

I found out that my grandmother's plantation of 239 hectares has been sold by a crook who claimed that my grandmother owed him money. My mother's small 40 hectare plantation could be reclaimed without much litigation but both plantations are practically useless as there is a banana disease on the Rio Grande so instead of wasting time with them I will go to the mines to look for a job. I still have a few hundred córdobas left which will last me for a couple of months.

Here in Bluefields there is no job. Since the last time I was here 24 years ago everything has gone down economically, morally and in every other way. The people are stupid, dishonest and corrupted. Although you are sending me registration cards I would hate to take the responsibility of signing up the people whom I have contacted (with very few exceptions) in Nicaragua.

There is one negro who said he would like to join but he enjoys a very bad reputation. I found out why he feigned interest and wanted to be friendly. He wanted to get money out of me. Most of that type just want to beg money to buy liquor with. However I explained the Bahá'í attitude on begging and liquor. I

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<sup>50</sup> In this letter and some of the ones that follow, one senses that Mathew is-probably under considerable emotional and physical stress.

try to encourage them to lead an honest and upright life but these unreliable and spiritually undisciplined people do not make good material out of which to build the new civilization. It is detrimental to the Cause to accept those who do not have a Bahá'í character and do not intend to live the life. Most of these people are under the false impression that all white Americans have plenty of money and they want to get it from them by any means. On the other hand I found a few reliable people who may make good material for a firm nucleus and I may find some more as I go around the mines. So I would like to have some literature. In Spanish I would like to have a few items of whatever is translated and available. English is spoken quite extensively here on the east coast so I would like to have [literature] in English... If available a few pamphlets in Chinese and in Arabic. There is a Syrian here who speaks Arabic and is interested in reading Bahá'í literature in the original, he speaks very little English...

The only address necessary is: Mrs. Anna Crowdell, Bluefields, Nicaragua.<sup>51</sup> Mrs. Crowdell was a friend of my mother's so I will make my headquarters here. Mrs. Crowdell is interested in the Faith and is reliable. Most Nicaraguans are not reliable but then, Mrs. Crowdell is from English parentage so she is different...there are hardly two or three people worth talking to in each town. There are no English newspapers and no radio station, no libraries, clubs or cultural activities of any kind...

If I could get hold of a typewriter I could condense my letters but they are not so plentiful here as in Panama. If I had one of my own I could not carry it around anyway, on account of the crude transportation...

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab

Send mail in care of Mrs. Crowdell and she will forward it to me wherever I am.

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1068 Park Avenue  
New York, N.Y.

November 28, 1939

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o U.S. Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

c/o Sr. Alberto Selva  
Casa Isabel Espinosa  
Granada, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew,  
Have you got money enough to make a visit to John in San Salvador, Antonio Roca in Honduras or Sluter in Guatemala? I could send you \$50 to one of those places to be cashed when you get there as I dare not send it to you to such a dreadful place as Granada [sic] sounds.

I will bring up at the N.S.A. meeting that I have advised you to do this. In that way, you could return to Nicaragua, stay a few days, and then go down to Panama.

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<sup>51</sup> Anna Crowdell was a creole activist and owner of one of the oldest landmarks in Bluefields, the three-story Crowdell Hotel, which was destroyed by Hurricane Joan in 1988.

Is the lake beautiful? Are any plans for the American Canal going forward? Won't it be nice to start a hotel if there are any prospects? Think what land would become when the U.S. moves from Panama to Granada. Look this over and let me know what you think. Write me at the Desert Inn, Tucson, Arizona.

In a letter from the Guardian, the Secretary says while the Guardian feels absolutely the necessity of maintaining a pioneer in each of the Central American states, he likewise feels the advisability that as many visitors as possible be encouraged to visit these settlements with a view to extending to them any special assistance they may need and thus reinforce their labors.

Faithfully,  
[unsigned copy]

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7<sup>th</sup> Questions, 96 [December 18, 1939]

Mathew Kaszab, c/o Anna Crowdell  
Bluefields, Nicaragua

Dear Victoria,

The second installment of your art was forwarded from Panama to Managua and from there to here so it finally caught up with me. Also Philip Marangella sent me one shot which you sent him to forward me.

I wrote you from the interior after I was sailing on the ship Victoria on Lake Nicaragua. I hope you received that letter already.

Thank you for all the encouragement. Nicaragua is much more backward and uncivilized than Panama so I hardly expect to get the same results. I have contacted a few reliable people who were interested in the Cause so I hope something will happen.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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Ironically the next letter to Mathew Kaszab is addressed from the Beverly Hills Hotel in Beverly Hills, California dated January 30, 1940. By this time, Mathew had found employment with the La Luz Mining Company in Siuna, Nicaragua where he was located for nine months. Further irony is a suggestion to contact Theosophists in Guatemala City. Mathew was so far from normal communications at this point that it is remarkable he was able to have any international contact at all.

ORIGINAL  
Al pasajero o acompaña al envío.

Nº 267

## GUIA

DE PASAJEROS Y CARGA ENTRANDO Y SALIENDO  
DE BONANZA LANDING FIELD

14-10-38. Fecha *Dic 26/39*

Nombre del Pasajero	Boleto TACA No.	Cuota	TOTAL
<i>Matthew Kasit</i>	<i>13888</i>	—	<i>1.00</i>
Total por pasajeros			

Bultos	Derechos pagados por	Guia TACA No.	Peso Lbs.	Cuota	TOTAL
Total exceso equipaje y carga					

Total recibido por cuenta de Neptune Gold Mining Co.

Pasajeros C\$ .....

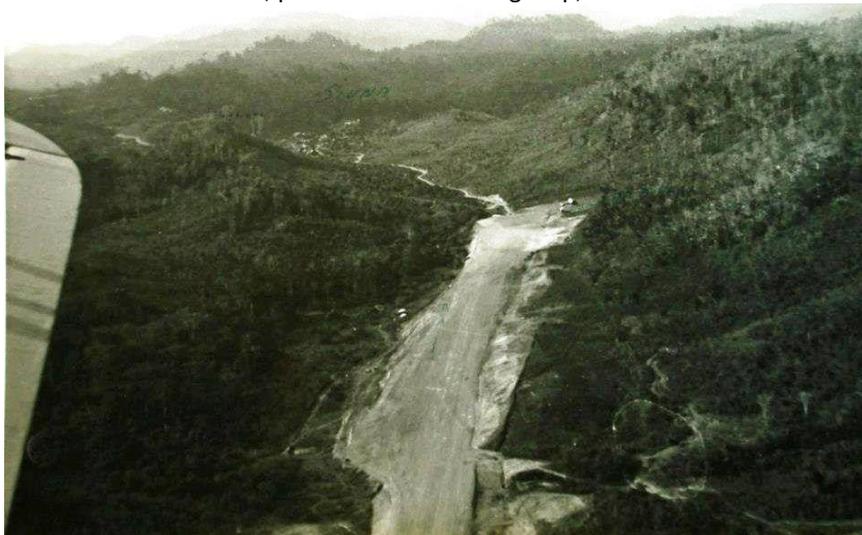
Carga *\$ 1.00*

TOTAL *\$ 1.00*

NOTA:— Pasajero tiene derecho a 30 lbs. equipaje franco.

Agente TACA *Salgado*

Above, landing field document of December 26, 1939  
Below, photo of Siuna landing strip, 1930's<sup>52</sup>



Beverly Hills Hotel  
Beverly Hills, California  
January 30, 1940

Dear Mathew:

<sup>52</sup> Airport photo courtesy of “Nicaragua en la Historia” social media page at Facebook:  
<https://www.facebook.com/Nicaragua-En-La-Historia-123079084521688/>

The enclosed names and addresses are subscribers to the Liberal Theosophical Magazine, "Simiente." They have been recommended to us by the Theosophical friends of Mrs. Gerard Sluter in Guatemala City. We would suggest that you write a note and send a leaflet to each of these persons, and ask if they would like to know more about Bahá'í Principles of World order.

With my constant good wishes to you,

[unsigned copy]

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March 4, 1940

[typewritten letter – Mathew has access to a typewriter once more]

### **THERE'S A GOLD MINE IN THE SKY, FAR AWAY**

Name: La Luz Mining Co. Siuna, Nicaragua (via Puerto Cabezas)

"The streets are paved with gold." – however to get hold of the gold the ore has to go through a complicated cyanide process. The gold is not visible in the rocks, the only way to find out if there is any is through a chemical process.

I got a job and am here working at this company checking up on the trucks, and equipment, to see to it that they keep running throughout the night. Siuna and La Luz are not very high up in the sky, only about 300 feet elevation but it gets quite cool at night during the rainy season. The two towns are very small only about 150 houses each. There is a shortage of lumber because the company's sawmill is a small one and they have not caught up with the demand. There is a shortage of houses and all kinds of accommodations and it will take about two years to catch up so the required quarters will be available. Some of the people sleep in tents. Everything is two or three times as expensive here as it is in Bluefields or in the interior. Whatever comes here is bought by plane as there is no other transport available. Most of the good and even some of the food comes from the U.S. by boat from New Orleans to Puerto Cabezas and from there by plane and then a duty has to be paid.

Taking into consideration that the córdoba has depreciated to one fifth of its former value and we have to pay five and even up to 5.65 córdobas for a dollar this makes everything cost out of proportion. The workman earns only three córdobas a day and he does not eat anything but rice and beans three times a day. On account of this everybody has bad teeth. I earn 8 córdobas a night but it costs me more to live than it does the Indians. I can not stomach the rice and beans day in and day out, so I buy some of the imported food. So even though I do not indulge in drinking liquor and gambling and other strictly non-Bahá'í activities I still do not come out much ahead of the natives.

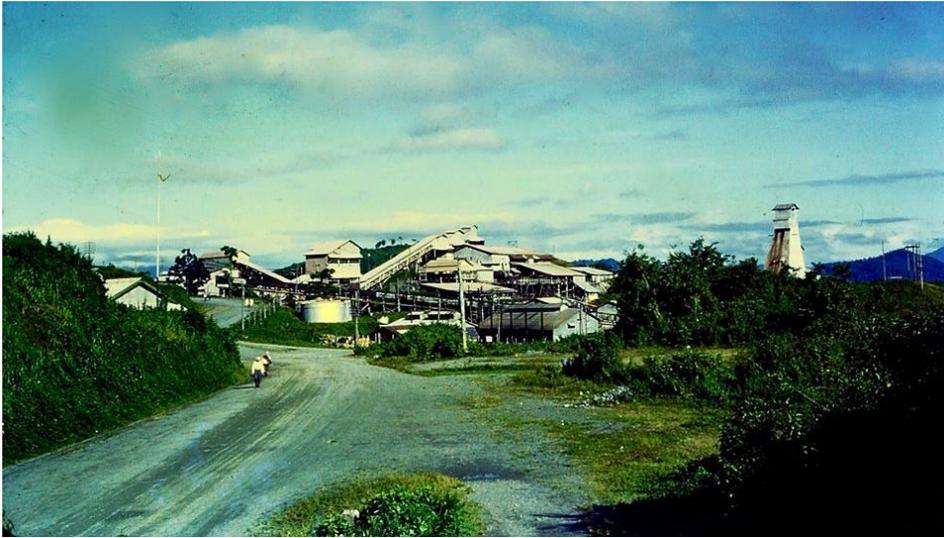
Many of the people talk three languages, Spanish, English and the Mosquito language.

I have interested many of the people in the Cause but as yet have no meeting place and the literature I asked for has not as yet arrived, as it takes a long time to get mail in Nicaragua.

In such a small place possibilities are necessarily limited but it is important for a pioneer to become economically stable so it is better to be here with a job than in Managua without one.

A pioneer gets into strange places.

Mathew Kaszab  
c/o La Luz Mining Co.  
Siuna, Nicaragua



Above, La Luz Mines, Siuna, Nicaragua. Photo from the 1950's about one decade after Mathew Kaszab worked there. Below, the town of Siuna, 1950's.<sup>53</sup>



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<sup>53</sup> ibid.

13th day of the fast 96  
[March 14, 1940]

Dear Loulie,

The letter you mailed me on March 1<sup>st</sup> took 12 days to reach me. When you send airmail do not write Via Puerto Cabezas on it. That is only for ordinary mail and packages.

I have been working here since last December as a foreman. I did not as yet get the \$25 which you sent in care of Mrs. Anna Crowdell but if you sent it as a check I will get it eventually as Mrs. Crowdell is sending my things with an agent of this company but it will take some time. Transportation is very slow and uncertain. If you send currency I probably will not get it as I hear that the local post office employees are dishonest.

You were worried because I don't have money or food but not much can be done about this! I can't get hold of any real money because they pay me in córdobas which is the Nicaraguan depreciated currency. I could get córdobas for one dollar at present although the córdoba was on par with the dollar in 1937. As for food I can't get anything worthwhile to eat as they hardly have anything besides rice and beans and meat that is as tough as leather. I do buy some canned goods imported from the U.S. but that has to be shipped here by plane from Puerto Cabezas and considering the depreciated exchange I have to pay \$1.10 in córdobas what would cost ten cents in the U.S.

As for where I would like to go, if I do not get an extension on my passport I would like to go back to Panama as I heard that jobs are plentiful and I had some good contacts for the Cause. I wrote to the U.S. Consul in Managua in January to have my passport extended for the full two years as it was a four month passport good til Feb. 11 and he replied that they wrote to the State Dept. and he will let me know as soon as he hears from them. That was two months ago but these official matters take a long time.

I think I will get the extension as I do not see any reason why I shouldn't but keep \$50 in reserve for me just in case. It is difficult to locate any U.S. currency around here and I would have to pay 6 córdobas or more for each dollar so you see I wouldn't get much.

On that terrible sea trip I was going from Granada to San Carlos and down the San Juan River to Colorado Bar, Costa Rica and from Costa Rica to Bluefields on the Caribbean is where I encountered the storm as I went in the stormy season...if you have pamphlets in Chinese I could make use of it as there are many Chinese merchants in Nicaragua.

I came here by airplane so I left most of my things in Bluefields including my files with the addresses so I haven't your N.Y. address and besides you move around, so I did not know where to send a letter to you...I have been teaching some children English and arithmetic in this primitive house in the evenings but the light is no good and the children did not show up regularly so now I am waiting for the regular school house to be built up so we can have class without interruption. I will have to alternate my adult class with the children as a number of men want to learn English.

There are few people in this village and they do not seem to be good material for the New World order. This is about the only place in Nicaragua where jobs are available.

Alláh-u-Abhá

(signed) Mathew Kaszab  
La Luz Mines Ltd.  
Siuna, Nicaragua

I received a letter from Shoghi<sup>54</sup> & Pedro Espinosa today.

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Pine Valley, Colo.  
May 21, 1940

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
Siuna, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

There appears to be a possibility for work in Panama. Have you enough money to get there, or do you want to go? I am rushing this off to you.

Haven't heard from you in ages, and am worried. For goodness sakes, write.

Affectionately,  
[Loulie Mathews]

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June 3, 1940

Dear Loulie,

I received the letter that was postmarked May 21 in Colorado Springs. I got hold of it on June 2d, last night. They must have forgotten about it in the office. Mail is uncertain here. I wrote you a letter in answer to your previous letter and also one addressed in care of the .S.A. which I hoped would reach you in time for the convention. I did not have time to mail the letters because I have to work 12 hours a day seven days a week so I sent a boy to mail it for me and I have no way of checking up whether the letters were actually mailed...I wrote a long letter to Mrs. Helen Bishop to correct some errors in the report and asked Virgie Vail to relay it to her.

I had been in the hospital for a week with dysentery which left me somewhat devitalized but I started to work again last Thursday. While in the hospital I wrote seven letters including one to you which you should be getting about now. I would like to be getting away from this place as it is unhealthy and I had enough money saved up for the trip but yesterday someone sneaked in and stole all my money. I had 360 córdobas and \$10 in U.S. currency. I did not as yet get hold of the \$25 check that you sent me but it may be in Alamikamba with the rest of my baggage for which I have been waiting for several months. I will get hold of it eventually.

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<sup>54</sup> This is must be the letter received from the Guardian as quoted in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record* Vol. IX April 1940-1944 as Mathew wrote on September 6, 1941 that he received a letter from Shoghi Effendi "while I was in the mine" that "confirmations would come."

I wrote two letters to acquaintances in Panama to see what the possibilities would be of getting a job there. It being a military base, they are very strict as to who goes there and what his business is and I haven't got my passport extended yet. Before the war I went to Panama without a passport. All I needed was \$100 deposit. Then when I came to Nicaragua I got an emergency passport from the U.S. Consul in Panama that was good for four months but could be extended, on application, for two years. That was valid until Feb. 11 so I wrote the Consul on Jan. 12 to have it extended. The Consul replied that he would notify me as soon as they got news from the state department. With the conditions being what they are the passport dept. must be overwhelmed and it seems that it will be a long time before I get my passport. I do not know if I could get out of this country without a passport. So I may have to stick around for a few months yet. Please send me some pamphlets in Spanish and in Chinese.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab  
La Luz Mines Ltd.  
Siuna, Nicaragua

Is there a Bahá'í pioneer in Panama now?

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Sometime between January and May 1940 in Siuna, Mathew had time to sit and write of his experience crossing the seas from Managua to Bluefields via Costa Rica in November 1939. Accessibility to a typewriter seems to bring out the Hemingway in him.

### **Sura of the Black Pig** by Mathew Kaszab

I was in Colorado, Costa Rica waiting to take a small gasoline boat to Bluefields. The captain said that he was watching the weather and might attempt to sail. About 5 o'clock Saturday we started out but when we were out for about ten minutes the small boat started to pitch and fall too much so we turned around and set back to port. I thought that was a very good idea because nobody could sleep with the weather being as rough as it was. In the daytime a person is not sleepy and can stand it better.

On board the ship *Esfuerzo* was a small black sea-going pig. She was a pet and was allowed to roam all over the deck.

I went back to what served as a hotel. Just a large crude warehouse part of which was boarded off for sleeping rooms with scant and primitive accommodations. The whole town consists of about fifty people. It has a few electric lights, the power for which is supplied by a small gasoline motor, but in the room which I occupied there was only a small kerosene lamp made in Germany which I lit with Swedish matches. The rates for room and board were higher than what I had paid in Managua at a regular hotel but then, in Colorado a person had no choice. There were no other accommodations to be had.

Sunday morning about eight o'clock we started again to brave the rough sea. I do not get seasick easily so I stood it all right for a while but the sea was getting rougher. After a while it was raining and the wind was blowing up some very big waves. The ship was making such terrible antics that even the sea-going pig got seasick! By eleven o'clock I was still going strong but I felt that the storm was gradually wearing me down. I was wondering how long I could hold out and how long the storm would last. I was getting dizzy little by little and finally the storm struck with full vigor. With one lurch the passengers reclining on the deck over the motor-room were sent reeling headlong to the sidewalk a couple of feet below the engine room covering. Luckily no one was seriously hurt and the crew rushed to restore the passengers. I was standing in the back holding on to a post and the water was washing all the way back. I had rubbers on but the water came up half way to my knees so I got my feet wet anyway. I looked around and the black pig was still there. I was glad that it did not get washed overboard. It was all wet, but then, pigs like water anyway. After this climax I got terribly seasick and I hardly cared what happened. Later on the storm was abating just a little bit and I tried to say the healing prayer. I felt so distracted and dizzy and wretched that I forgot half the words. But God being omniscient must have known what I was trying to say! I kept on repeating the Greatest Name. Even the captain and the crew appeared to be uncomfortable. However, they were used to it so they could stand it. The passengers were having a terrible time.

By three o'clock I was starting to get used to it but still feeling very miserable and worn out. I figured that in times of emergency and extreme stress the human organism and consciousness always had a reserve of energy and could even rally supernormal forces and invoke the assistance of the Supreme Concourse. I recalled the incident of the long and probably equally unpleasant voyage the Bab had to make under even more primitive circumstance.

The Manifestation of God may be able to still the ocean but for some mysterious reason they have to suffer also. Although God is all powerful, still it would be unreasonable to expect to have the waves stilled just for me, even though I am the most important person in Nicaragua and the establishment of the new civilization in this region depends on me at present.

Well, I shall survive somehow but it is terribly distressing to be in such big waves in such a little boat. The *Esfuerzo* is only a 75-ton motor ship. I was praying for strength to stand this without so much discomfort and for the alleviation of the suffering of the other passengers. So I was gradually getting used to it.

By ten o'clock Sunday night we were still about thirty miles away from Bluefields. So we went in behind a promontory called Monkey Point to spend the night. The ship was well protected from the storm in this shelter and I felt immensely relieved. The black pig seemed much happier too, and was eating bananas. During the storm it rushed to me for protection and was leaning against my leg and grunting in misery. It followed me around when I went from one side to the other. I told the Captain that the pig ought to be sold in Bluefields as carrying it along in these storms was cruelty, but he said that the pig had been living on the ship ever since it was very small and the storm does not usually get as bad as on this trip.

I took off my shoes and rubbers trying to dry them out. I had no chance to do anything since the ship left that morning. I did not have food or water since breakfast. The drinking water aboard was not very clean so I opened a coconut and drank the water out of it and ate two bananas. I had no appetite for more after such a shaking up.

A small sailboat was coming into the ravine and one of the men was talking to the captain. The captain was a big negro who had lost his right thumb. I told the captain my mission in Nicaragua, but we were in no mood to go into detail!

There was no place to sleep but on the hard deck covering the engine room so trying to make the best of these pioneering circumstances I borrowed a pillow and was trying to sleep. I lay around in a semi-conscious state on the uncomfortable deck and heard the captain talking very earnestly with the man from the sailboat. I did not know what they were talking about although they talked loudly – nor did I care. Then the motor started and we were going again. I tried to sleep but the waves were getting rougher so I got up and put on my shoes that were halfway dry already. We were heading out to sea again towing the sailboat. I looked at the clock and it was two o'clock in the morning already. I had been in a coma for four hours and lost track of the time.

I thought that we may be going to a nearby point as we did not have much respite from the storm. I asked the captain how far we were going and he said however far we go, the man in the little boat we were towing would be bounced around much worse than we would be. I asked if we were going straight to Bluefields and he said yes. I thought that it would take a long time to get to Bluefields towing another boat against that storm and had only four hours rest. I felt very hopeless. Well if the others could stand it, I would survive. Besides I was already getting used to it. If I had sufficient rest I would not even mind it much – if I were not so tired and sleepy.

We slowly passed out from behind the promontory and were leaving a small key behind. The sea was getting as rough as it had been during the day. It looked dangerous for those on the small sailing craft. I told the captain that they ought to come aboard but he said that someone had to stay on the sailboat to steer it and that the men were used to it. They certainly must have been tough hombres to stand that.

As long as I stood up I did not get so dizzy, but sitting down or lying down made me feel worse. So I stood up and watched the waves and the ship smash into them. I looked behind to see the sailboat tossing about. It was built sturdily to withstand such waves. Small boats seem to be almost as well off as the larger ones in such rough weather. This storm would be hard on even 10,000 ton steamships. The waves would batter against them with greater force.

As we continued, I was getting inured to the conditions and was probably drawing strength from unseen sources. At 5 a.m. it was getting a little lighter. I repeated what I could remember of the dawn prayer. It did not get very light on account of the clouds. We were passing several keys and by 7 a.m. one of the crew showed me the bluff for which we were heading.

It was after 8 o'clock before we arrived and I went up on the bluff and had breakfast. I drank the water from a large coconut as I was very thirsty. Then I took a launch across the bay and we stopped to try to haul the same sailboat that the *Esfuerzo* had hauled up the coast for 30 miles. However, the motor in the launch was not powerful enough to tug the sailboat so we had to leave the sailboat anchored in the bay.

Finally about one o'clock in the afternoon I set foot on the home town. The town of Bluefields, Nicaragua which I had left as a boy 24 years ago. Time marches on!

MATHEW KASZAB  
La Luz Mines, Ltd.  
Siuna Nicaragua

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May 1940 [handwritten]

Dear Loulie,

I have been working for 12 hours a day every day in the week so I did not have much of a chance to write letters, however, now I am in the company hospital so I have the time.<sup>55</sup> I was wondering how I was going to get off on the anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab [May 23] but I got sick and have been in the hospital for two days so I have to celebrate the Declaration today alone. I was going to have a big feast inviting about 10 people but now it is out.

I still have not heard from the U.S. Consul.<sup>56</sup>

I was thinking of moving to a more healthful section of Nicaragua like Matagalpa or Puerto Cabezas but I would be losing a fairly good job if I left. I have been drinking tea, I generally take a quart with me to work and when I go to eat I get water that has been boiled and filtered but the germs sneak up on a person from unknown sources no matter how careful he is.

If you send any additional pioneers to Nicaragua they should have special training. Make the applicants sleep on a board without mattress and feed them rice and beans three times a day also coffee and shoe-leather steak. Give them the worst coffee they ever tasted and pick out the toughest meat in the butcher shop. They may not be able to cut it with a knife but they can use their fingers and tear it apart with their teeth. The natives seem to relish the food even more if it is sprinkled with ants and cockroaches.

If they go through with the sleepless nights and do not lose their appetites, and after being knocked dizzy by doses of quinine, if after these tests they are still enthusiastic about pioneering here they probably will make good pioneers if they possess all the other requirements of a Bahá'í pioneer. Another drawback in the jungles is the presence of ticks and other parasites that get under the skin and make it itch for days and there seems to be no effective remedy. I rubbed alcohol on my ankles (I presume Bahá'ís may use alcohol externally) but it was of doubtful value.

I could continue this recitation but this is enough to start with...

Virgie Vail sent me the Annual Report having some inaccuracies in it.

I was born in Budapest, Hungary and came to Nicaragua when I was five years old<sup>57</sup> and stayed in this Republic until I was 10 when I went to the U.S. My plantation was not destroyed by earthquake but by the banana disease so it is unfit for raising bananas. Other things would grow but there is no market for it.

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<sup>55</sup> A further letter written from Managua on December 14, 1940 states he was in the hospital for a total of 8 days.

<sup>56</sup> At this point Mathew has been waiting five months for word on his request for extension of his passport.

<sup>57</sup> Mathew's father related to the press in 1921 that the family had left Europe in 1912 which would have made Mathew six at the time. There is therefore some discrepancy about his exact age upon arrival to Bluefields as a young child.

I wish you would send me some pamphlets and whatever literature is available in Spanish and in Chinese. There are many Chinese in Nicaragua; they control the retail trade on this coast. Somebody ought to be broadcasting the Message from Panama three times a week both in English and in Spanish. Many people listen in on the Panama stations. Many people understand English here and in Honduras, British Honduras, and the West Indies. I used to give 3 five-minute broadcasts a week when I was in Panama and it cost only \$10.00 a month for these broadcasts.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab  
La Luz Mines Ltd.  
Siuna, Nicaragua

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Pine Valley, Colo. Springs  
Colorado  
June 10, 1940

Dear Mathew:

We are terribly distressed that you have fallen ill and in such a place. I long to have you go to Havana, but as you did not say in your letters whether or not you received the \$25 we sent you, I did not dare to send you any money until I had a definite accounting.

I could not know, old dear, that you were born in Budapest unless you told us and in the next report goes in I will state the facts. Having no crystal ball, we thought you were from Nicaragua! The fact is that you were there when a child, that you have a banana plantation – the causes of its destruction will be stated in the next report also.

We are beginning our Latin-American Session to which 19 people are coming. I do so wish you were one of them. If you move, be sure and let me know at once so I can send you a little money. You have done so wonderfully in earning your living in the mines under such dreadful circumstances. I do not know how we can get anything decent to eat to you and I am wondering if you could not combine working in Panama and Bluefields.

You do not speak as if you got any of my letters which I am constantly writing you. I haven't any literature in Chinese but I guess we have it, and I have asked Clara Wood to send you some. The dreadful delay in the Spanish Esslemont and "Some Answered Questions" is a cross for all, especially the pioneers.

Enclosed are the programs for the Session and we will have daily consultation and prayer. I do so wish you were here as it makes me very sad that you have suffered so much.

Affectionately,

[Loulie Mathews]

By August 1940 the membership of the Inter-America Committee had changed, and the main correspondent between Mathew and the Committee was Mrs. S.W. French – Nellie – as Chairman.

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August 21, 1940  
786 Chester Ave., San Marino, California

Dear Mathew,

I hope by this time you will have received all the bulletins and letters which we have sent to you and so you will know that the new committee took over the work of the I.A. [Inter-America] on July first and we have been making very great effort to get acquainted with the past records and the present situation as it touches all the conditions under which the beloved pioneers are working.

It is because I have just received and been going over within the last three days the files which Mrs. [Loulie] Mathews had, that I have been able to know you and to be so deeply impressed with your work. Yesterday I read the "Saga [Sura] of the Black Pig" and found it worthy of use in *Bahá'í World* of which I still am chairman. I shall not emphasize the personality as I know you would not like to have me do so, but I shall submit the story with the materials which I always send to the Guardian for his selection when a book is in preparation.

And now let me tell you how I appreciate your attitude. We have believers and believers, and pioneers and pioneers, if you know what I mean, and while there is undoubtedly a great element of self-sacrifice in all that they do, there is still in some cases a lurking self-satisfaction in being a pioneer and in making the sacrifice. This idea does not in the least color your letters. From the bottom of my heart I see that you are completely dedicated to your service, and I hope that you will, as soon as you feel that you have accomplished what Bahá'u'lláh wants you to do in that spot, pray for guidance that you may take up the work in some other place. It seems to me there is very little scope for the Message where you are and Nicaragua is a large place. I am sure that you could receive some assistance if you do decide to change location when you feel guided to do so.

Please let us know how you are and if you are getting the letters and if there is anything we can do for you.

With loving greetings from us all in His Name - (signed) Nellie

Mrs. S.W. French Chairman I.A. Committee

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9<sup>th</sup> of Month, year 97  
[September 16, 1940]

Dear Mrs. French,

I received the first circular letter also the letter dated August 21. This is the second letter I am writing you.

I would like to have some small pamphlets in Chinese. The Chinese Esslemont which I received from the Publishing Committee has been loaned to several of the local Chinese merchants. Pioneers should have small and light books & pamphlets. In many sections of Central America the only convenient way to travel is by aircraft. 30 lbs. of baggage are allowed each passenger.

I have been getting my newsletters 2 or 3 months behind time. The last *Bahá'í News* I received was the July issue. If it would be sent direct to me here, I would get it sooner.

I will let you know as soon as I leave here but I would like to get hold of some Spanish pamphlets before I do. What should I do about conscription, has the NSA taken any steps? Send me some Temple pamphlets in English.

Alláh-u-Abhá (signed) Mathew Kaszab  
La Luz Mines Ltd.  
Siuna, Nicaragua

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8<sup>th</sup> of Knowledge Year 97  
[October 23, 1940]

[written from Managua, Nicaragua]

Dear Mrs. French,

I flew here from the mine and had a nice trip of about an hour's duration. While in La Luz, I received Spanish *Wisdom of 'Abdu'l-Bahá & Some Answered Questions* and Spanish pamphlets & prayers. Also the two letters about the draft. I talked with the U.S. Consul who said that those in foreign countries need not register and besides, I was 35 years old in September which lets me out. I had my passport extended locally until November 18 and expect to hear from the State Dept. within a few weeks. If they do not extend my passport then I will have to go to some U.S. territory, like the Canal Zone or Puerto Rico or back to the States in which case I will need some good U.S. currency, about \$100 or more. I have no U.S. money and the exchange rates are bad. Have you an emergency fund just in case a pioneer would need money in a hurry?

It is very hot in Managua so this afternoon I got all ready to go to Matagalpa by automobile. It was supposed to get me at 2 p.m. At 2:30 I happened to see the lady whom I met on the boat and she told me that she and her daughter were living in Matagalpa so I told her I was waiting for the car. She told me that Nicaraguans were not prompt and that the car may show up an hour late. At 3 o'clock I inquired and found out that the driver could not get enough passengers as three of them failed to show up so he was not going. He did not take the trouble to inform us. The two of us who were going went down to a trucking firm and bought tickets to ride on a truck at 4 p.m. The truck was to leave at 5. We told them where to get us. At 9:30 p.m. I came back to this hotel and the manager said I could sleep in the same room I was occupying before my unsuccessful attempt. I may get to Matagalpa mañana! Quién sabe?? Somebody at the mine suggested that the quickest way to civilize Nicaragua was to kill off all the natives and import North Americans. A drastic method, but maybe he was right!

After spending a few days in Matagalpa I intend to visit the pioneers in Costa Rica. I will have to go by train and gasoline launch as by airplane they want U.S. currency \$34.00. Costa Rican money is on par with Nicaraguan so I will not lose anything. Then if I am allowed to stay in Nicaragua I may I may work for the Pan-American highway although I would be earning 1/3 of what I got in the mine. I do not want to go back to the mine as there are practically no opportunities of spreading the Cause and the place is very unhealthful.

I will write in a few days & tell you about the latest developments. I did not receive the books that Mrs. [Frances] Stewart sent or the magazine.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, California  
October 30, 1940

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o American Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua C.A.

Dear Mathew:

We note that you are now in a better location for the spread of our message of peace, and we hope that you will be able to obtain employment which will make you comfortable and enable you to remain in Nicaragua.

You asked in your letter recently received if we have an emergency fund in case you need it, you can wire me, "French, San Marino" and I will immediately transmit money to you by registered air mail. We find that thievery is very rampant in certain parts of Mexico and South America and so if I send currency, I would have to send it by registered air mail.

It will be fine if you can visit the friends in Costa Rica. Mrs. Stewart will probably be visiting and also she is now in Guatemala City and can be reached in care of Mr. Francisco Acker whose address is 15 Calle Poniente No. 24, Guatemala City. I hope she will be able to help you in Nicaragua. Apparently the people there are in dire need of spiritual awakening. Phillip Marangella has left Cuba and is to be supplemented by Mrs. Imogene Hoagg.

In case your visa does not permit you to remain in Nicaragua, I am sure you can find employment in the Canal Zone as the girls write that there is a boom there and much doing. Regarding your story for the *Bahá'í World*, you can take your time because we have several months before it will be needed, but in these critical days, I am always relieved when I see such a thing completed. May I ask you in writing us to date your letters in the current usage as we have not yet stepped into the era when the Bahá'í calendar is in use so that all may know.

We hope everything will go well for you and while I know you would like to leave Nicaragua, we have too much confidence in the need for your work there to want to encourage you to leave. I wish we could

tell you how much the friends appreciate your sacrifice and your services. Please remember that we are with you I spirit always, and are here to help in any way that we can toward your happiness and success.

Faithfully,  
[Mrs. Nellie French]  
Chairman of the Inter-American Committee

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Mrs. Nellie French (1868-1954) served as Chairman of the Inter-America Committee during the period Mathew was in Nicaragua. She maintained regular correspondence with him. She also contributed to the literature of the Faith as Chairman of the *Bahá'í World* Editorial Committee during which time she assembled material for volumes IV-X, including the volumes in which Mathew's situation came to light to the national community. She traveled to Europe, Scandinavia, Australia, and South America, met the Guardian in 1952 and passed away at her pioneering post in Monaco.<sup>58</sup> She is a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

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Sometime between October 30 and December 7 of 1940 Mathew did visit Costa Rica, as reflected in his letter dated December 7, below, and information published in *Bahá'í News*. The respite from the heat of Managua must have energized and relieved him tremendously as well as camaraderie with friends and fellow pioneers. In his letter of December 14, below, he calls San José, Costa Rica "quite civilized."

From *Bahá'í News* No. 141 January 1941 p. 5:

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<sup>58</sup> *The Bahá'í World* Vol. XII, pp. 699-701

## **Costa Rica**

Word from our two pioneers, Mrs. [Gayle] Woolson and Mrs. [Amalia] Ford, brings us the intelligence that Mathew Kaszab has been visiting them. He spoke at a meeting of the group in Costa Rica and was very well received. They mention the establishment of a Bahá'í library and from the encouraging reports which they send, we have every reason to believe that a firm foundation is being laid in Costa Rica.

## **Nicaragua**

Mr. Mathew Kaszab writes that he has discussed with the friends in Costa Rica a very tentative plan for a radio hook-up of Panama, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, giving weekly talks on the Cause alternately in Spanish and English. Mr. Kaszab, whose plans are somewhat uncertain is now in Managua, Nicaragua. His address is in care of the American Consul.

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Dec. 7, 1940  
Qawl – 97

Dear Mrs. French,

Did you receive the large envelope containing my Nicaraguan experiences that I sent you from Costa Rica? I wrote you another letter from here.

I have not yet received the books that Mrs. Stewart sent me, maybe they are in the mine or in Bluefields. Nor have I heard from the publishing committee. I suppose they moved to Wilmette and they are all upset.

My talk at the Theosophical Society was very successful so I have been invited to talk at the Masonic Lodge as the enclosed notices indicate. I have found several people who are interested. Please send a couple of clippings to the publicity scrapbook of the *News Service* Committee or wherever they are supposed to be sent.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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December 11, 1940

Dear Mrs. French,

My lecture at the Masonic Temple was successful. 31 people attended in spite of an important wedding, Purísima,<sup>59</sup> etc.

If Mrs. Stewart comes she will be quite useful as the Masons said that a much larger crowd could be gotten together at the International Club. Several people are reading the Bahá'í books. A few are interested which seems unusual for Nicaragua.

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<sup>59</sup> Purísima is a Catholic holiday celebrating the Virgin Mary.

I received the mats of the Temple and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá etc. mailed Oct. 30 & letter mailed Nov. 14. It took a long time getting here. The 20 Esslemonts did not get here yet. U.S. citizenship is quite important and to maintain my citizenship I will have to go back to the U.S. every four years or so. I may have a good proposition in N.Y. in which case I may be tempted to go back for a year or so to get over the fever.<sup>60</sup> I am having a recurrence of the fever and have been taking quinine etc. for the past two weeks. A change of climate would eliminate this. Wages in Managua are very poor and I hear that a revolution is in the offing.

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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?? – 97  
Dec. 14, 1940

Dear Mrs. French,  
Today I received the checks totaling \$50.00 U.S.C. Thank you very much.

It was stamped Dec. 4 on the back of the envelope when it left Pasadena. Dec. 6 Brownsville, Texas, Dec. 7 Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and Dec. 10 oficina de certificados, Managua and I finally got it today. Airmail usually takes three days.

When I was in Panama over a year ago I received a letter from the Guardian<sup>61</sup> to the effect that it was important for the pioneers to find employment so when I got to Nicaragua I concentrated my energies on finding a job. I worked in the mine for 10 months every day except 8 days which I spent in the hospital. I complied with that requirement even to the detriment of my health. But to me it was quite apparent that I was not of much value to the Cause out in the jungles. That is why I wanted to get somewhere, where I could meet at least a few civilized or semi-civilized people. If I would have stayed there you would have to send somebody else to the west coast. So here I am where I can be of most value to the Cause in Nicaragua. Here it is difficult to get a job but if I stay around a few months I may land one. So I did not hesitate much in asking you for the money which you sent because if I did go back to the mine you would have to send somebody else which would cost the committee several hundred dollars. Also in the same letter I referred to, of which I am sending you a reproduction of the last page it was stated: - "Any assistance you may still require in connection with your teaching work in Panama, or in any other Central American State where you may be directed to teach will be readily extended to you & to this end you should continue to communicate with the N.S.A. & the Inter-America Committee."<sup>62</sup>

Several times I felt so disgusted with the conditions that I wanted to leave and to recommend to the committee not to waste any time and effort on a republic so backward as Nicaragua. I felt that the effort should be concentrated elsewhere and that it would be better to leave Nicaragua off the Bahá'í map. But this we may not do because "Abdu'l-Bahá included Nicaragua in the Divine Plan. So I am afraid that even more Bahá'í funds and effort will have to be spent here than in the more advanced republics.

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<sup>60</sup> Mathew is still ill from his time in Siuna, and never quite recovers.

<sup>61</sup> This is the second mention of a letter from the Guardian to Mathew.

<sup>62</sup> This quote appears to be from the Guardian to Mathew, but is not verified, this compiler not having access to the actual letter mentioned by Mathew.

While in San José (which is quite civilized) Mrs. [Gayle] Woolson told me that I should ask you to send me somebody to help me out with the teaching activities here. So I hope that Frances Stewart will come and stay as long as needed to accomplish something.<sup>63</sup> I have a big meeting lined up for her. I happened to meet several Nicaraguans who have been in the U.S. for 5 or 10 years and who speak good English and through them I have made some valuable contacts. My talk at the Theosophical Society and at the Masonic Temple was successful although I had an interpreter. I will start a small class tomorrow for those who speak English and later on I can get together a group of Spanish-speaking people but I wish Mrs. Stewart would help me out with that. One month would be sufficient time to get things going. In Oct. I asked Katherine Disdier to come over here as she speaks Spanish very well but she wrote that she was teaching in a high school in a small town in Puerto Rico and she could not leave her classes in the middle of the term. She got some good publicity in the newspapers...

The papers you received just goes to show how much red tape a poor little bottle of medicine had to go through before it could get to me. The medicine cost originally 50 cents. Aren't Nicaraguans foolish? I thought the committee would have some fun looking at the document and it would be good to put in the archives as it is significant of the way things are being done around here. Future historians would get a big laugh out of it. It would explain to them one reason why Nicaragua is not making any progress and is the most backward republic...

Send [mail] to Sr. Henry Wheelock, Banco Nacional, Managua, Nicaragua. This is a good address to send literature to because Mr. Wheelock<sup>64</sup> will keep the books for me or distribute it to interested persons. He will act as my librarian...

Alláh-u-Abhá  
(signed) Mathew Kaszab

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786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, California  
January 16, 1941

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
Care of the American Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:  
When I put a postscript on your Bulletin the other day, I did not mention your inclination to leave Nicaragua and possibly come to New York for a change of climate. As much as we would regret having

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<sup>63</sup> Mrs. Frances Benedict Stewart began travel through Central America in the fall of 1940 and by March of 1941 arrived in Nicaragua to assist Mathew. She remained until approximately the end of April 1941. She was a U.S. citizen born in Chile and spoke fluent Spanish. Her time in Nicaragua, indeed in all of Latin American, was fraught with difficulty in part because of her own perceived actions, in part because of WWII suspicions about foreigners in Latin America.

<sup>64</sup> Mr. Henry Wheelock, an important businessman and banker, was the second person to enroll in the Faith in Nicaragua, in the spring of 1941.

that post unoccupied for the time being, I do feel to jeopardize your health is not required of you. I am only writing this to ask you to keep us fully informed so that whatever you do decide to do, we may try to make some plans to keep in touch with the people whom you have interested.

Your manuscripts and the photographs have come and we are very grateful. Also, if you have any suggestions regarding follow up work in Nicaragua, be sure to hand them on to the Committee.

With loving greetings,  
Faithfully in His service,

[Nellie French]  
Chairman, Inter-America Committee

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January 20, 1941 2d Sovereignty 97

Dear Mrs. French,  
I received the sixth bulletin. I am glad that Mrs. Stewart has been asked to come here. She may still be in Salvador and she will stop over in Honduras before she gets here. I wrote her a postal card when she was in Guatemala but did not receive a reply.

If the fund is not too depleted, I would like you to send a few hundred dollars by the time Mrs. Stewart gets here. That may be the end of this month or in February because I do not know how long she will stay in Honduras. I have big plans for her. We will not have many such opportunities in the near future. I do not have to be cautious because the government does not care and will not hamper religious propaganda.

If the fund cannot stand the strain we will see what can be done, but I have not gotten a job yet although there are plenty of rumors about the big things that will be done around here.

I located the books in Siuna and sent after them. I will write more by regular mail. I have four in my class and we meet regularly. (signed) Mathew Kaszab

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786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, California  
January 23, 1941

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
Care of the U.S. Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:  
Your letter of the twentieth reached me on the twenty-second – now that is wonderful work and I am replying immediately to assure you that we would like to help you in your entertainment of Mrs.

Stewart. Remember that Mrs. Stewart is supplied with funds for her own expenses, so you have no obligation there and I am sending you \$50.00 for your own use. I could not send you more, except in a great emergency, without having the approval of the National Assembly which does not meet until the weekend of February eighth. If this \$50.00 is not sufficient for you I what you are planning and until you have decided upon your future moves, do let me know before that time so that we can make a recommendation to the National Assembly. Of course, if you were leaving Nicaragua and coming to New York you would require money for your travel in which case please bear in mind that our Emergency Fund is not a large one and would not be sufficient to cover your requirements so that your expenses would have to be voted at a meeting of the National Assembly...I am so glad that you have located the books and I hope you will have received them by the time Frances reaches you. The Committee is deeply interested in all that you say and we are looking forward to hearing from you soon again.

Faithfully, as ever,  
[Nellie French]  
Chairman, Inter-America Committee

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January 21, 1941

Mr. Thomas A. Jones  
Carretera Panamericana

Dear Mr. Jones,  
In connection with the Pan American Highway, the following experience would be of value.

I have been in Nicaragua since Nov. 7, 1939.  
I worked in the La Luz Mines for ten months where I was in charge of ore haulage. I had to supervise 4 trucks, 1 electric shovel, 1 gasoline shovel and their crews to keep the crusher supplied with ore. Beside that I had to build and maintain several roads from the mine to the crusher. I had up to 25 workmen to supervise on road building and maintenance.

I kept the wheels rolling without interruption in spite of the unreliable and tricky help which required close supervision. In the U.S. I worked a telephone cable inspection, radio factory, sheetmetal and other jobs of a clerical nature which may not be of much value in this job.

I can speak some Spanish. I had two years of Mechanical Engineering in Newark Technical School. I am a U.S. citizen. I am reliable and trustworthy and maintain the highest standard of behavior.

Sincerely (signed) Mathew Kaszab  
Sobre La Barata Cuarto No. 2 or c/o U.S. Consul Managua

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2nd Mulk 97 Feb. 8, 1941

Dear Mrs. French,

Being low in funds and morale and uncertain as to what I should do I went up to the Consulate to see if there was mail for me, now having anything better to do. There I found the registered letter from you with \$50.00 in checks enclosed. So both my funds and morale taking a high zoom I thought I ought to celebrate by drinking a fresco so going to the soda fountain, whom should I meet but the boss of the tractors on the Panamerican Highway. I had a talk with him and he said that there may be a job for me and that I should to go his office in the afternoon and talk to his assistant. I got there at two o'clock and was hired. I wrote you a memorandum that I received the \$50 etc., which you must have gotten by now as I wrote it the same day.

The envelope of your letter has some nice stamps, pictures of Daniel Chester French and Cyrus Hall McCormick. Some people here collect U.S. stamps. The job I have is easy and I have Saturday afternoon and Sunday off. All foreigners who intend to stay in Nicaragua have to register their passports, etc. with the Nicaraguan government, which I did. I had to pay 10 córdobas for that.

The U.S. consul said that if I am to stay here I should get some sort of statement letter from you to the effect that I am a representative of the Bahá'í Faith<sup>65</sup> which he will send to the State Department. This is necessary because I left the U.S. only two years after I became a citizen. However if I am sent here by a U.S. institution then I have a good reason for being here. When I was in the Canal Zone I was still on U.S. territory but the Inter-America Committee sent me to Nicaragua. The statement could be worded something like this: To whom it may concern: this is to testify that Mr. Mathew Kaszab had been sent to Nicaragua by the Inter-America Committee functioning under the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the U.S. and Canada and that he is the present representative of the Bahá'í Faith in Nicaragua.

If I comply with this requirement then I would be free from the presumption of having discarded my U.S. citizenship and may stay here for three more years.

Today I received the bulletin and also a magazine from the "New Hysterics<sup>66</sup> Society." They seem to be in the ridiculous position of being an organization against organization. The names and addresses of the Latin-American believers should be kept a secret otherwise a lot of confusion may be caused in the minds of those who are not well-grounded in Bahá'í Administration (by subversive propaganda).

Another set of people who are in an untenable position are the Seventh Day Adventists who were organized for the purpose of preparing themselves for the coming of their Lord and then when He appeared they rejected Him.

I received in Spanish 2 copies of *Kitab-i-Iqan*, 5 *Contestacion a Unas Preguntas* and 19 Temple pamphlets. My package from the mines did not get here although I wrote for it twice. I received a letter from John Eichenauer who wrote that Mrs. Stewart had left Salvador and is in Honduras. Also a letter from Katherine Disdier who is quite successful, and a card from Priscilla Rhoads.

Allah'u'Abha (signed) Mathew Kaszab

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<sup>65</sup> See section on Panama, above, on the question of the term "representative" as used in early correspondence.

<sup>66</sup> A play on words referring to the "New History Society" made of a few individuals who called themselves Bahá'ís but who had not accepted Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian, operating in New York from 1929. The NHS disintegrated in 1958 upon the death of its founder, Ahmad Sohrab. The latter worked actively against the efforts of the Guardian and was declared a Covenant-breaker. For more on Covenant-breakers, see section on Frances Benedict Stewart, below.



**Bahá'í Group of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, during visit of Mrs. Francis Benedict Stewart,  
January 21 to February 25, 1941.**

786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, California  
February 13, 1941

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
Care of the U.S. American Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

Your letter of February eighth reached me on the eleventh which made me feel very close to you. I am delighted that our check reached you in time and particularly am I delighted that you have located a job. You have been a Trojan about this matter and we all appreciate so much your patience and your energy.

Now, you ask for a letter of introduction and I will send it to you with this, copying your words. Mrs. Stewart is at present in Honduras [address]. I think she plans to go to you from Honduras, but I believe she is finding a difficult situation there.

Hoping the books which were sent to your former address will have reached you safely by this time and that you will let me know if you need any small pamphlets, I remain, with best wishes,

Faithfully in His Service [Nellie French] Chairman, Inter-America Committee

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April 1941

Dear Virgie,

If you get to see or write to Juliet Thompson tell her that I liked her book very much.<sup>67</sup> Thank you for sending it to me. The French Esslemont I made good use of by letting the postal inspector borrow it. He speaks four languages and knows French well. After he finishes with it I will lend it out to others. I also got the *World Order* magazines and the pamphlet written against the Cause by the minister. I think that it is quite good, taking into consideration that it was written by an enemy of the Cause. Maybe it will set people to investigating and will do more good than harm. I am not afraid of the open enemies.

I still am out of a job and will not know what to do until I hear from the Committee. I got an extra package of world religion pamphlets in Spanish which I believe must be the ones that you sent me although there was no return address on the small package. The committee sent me several previously. I had a nice time up in Jinotega where it is cool as it is up in the mountains. I met several people there with whom I left pamphlets and I sent a book to them after I got back to Managua. I have more time now to see people. I wrote to the committee that if I should be invited back to the United States I would prefer to go by land to enjoy the scenery and visit some of the friends.

I hope something will develop within a week but here in Nicaragua everything is very slow so I can't expect immediate action. Last week I went to Masaya to talk with several individuals there.

Allah'u'abha (signed) Mathew

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Junio 8, 1941

Dear Mrs. French,

Maybe you have been wondering what has been happening but I think that Paquita (Mrs. Stewart) has sent in her report about her activities so I did not think it necessary to reduplicate it.

I have sent you the card of Mr. Enrique Wheelock whom I met last November and have been teaching him ever since. He has been in the U.S. so he speaks English almost as well as he speaks Spanish. He has a Danish wife who is also studying the teachings. Paquita signed up a Señorita Blanca Mejía<sup>68</sup> who is fervent and brings around her two sisters to the meetings so we have two enrolled believers and five more who are interested and attend the meetings and there are a few more who are reading the books. I have never been able to locate the books there were sent from Mexico.

I received the bulletin saying that we should not have any publicity. That is a good idea and I have given up even the radio broadcasting idea as that is the best way of keeping out of trouble. There are a few contemptible people here who try to make trouble for the foreigners and they are in with the yellow journals circulating through the central American Republics and they invent all sorts of lies just for sensational publicity. That is how they make a living instead of earning an honest one.

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<sup>67</sup> Juliet Thompson's book *I, Mary Magdalen* was published in 1940.

<sup>68</sup> Blanca Victoria Mejía Arauz (1897-1975), a poet and a teacher, was the first Nicaraguan Bahá'í and remained devoted to the end of her life. Her story has been told in Sadeghpour, *El Cuarto Acto* and in *Bahá'í World: An International Record* Volume XVI 1973-1976, pp. 550-551 and in *Bahá'í World* Vol. XVI 1973-1976 pp. 550-551

I have been teaching quietly, picking out the worthwhile ones. I have dropped four of the people who have been coming around as they are not worth bothering with at this time when I want to build a strong nucleus and I have moved to a different section of town where I am closer to work and do not meet the mischief-makers.

The explanation you sent me about the incorporation papers in the *Bahá'í World* does not explain much but my theory is that it is put in there to show that the Faith is authorized by the U.S. Government as a religious organization and recognized as such and that it is not one of these fly-by-night subversive organizations but has recognized standing. This will help in Latin American pioneering as the U.S. has prestige in these republics. Also it is a sample for those groups who want to incorporate. It may be useful in this troubled world whenever we are called by any authorities to show whether we really represent an organization of recognized standing or merely an ambiguous movement.

I do not yet know whether I will get permission from the State Department to stay here after October. I may have to go back to the U.S. It would be good for my health to change climate as the fever recurs every once in a while and in a cold climate it would disappear.

Alláh-u-abhá (signed) Mathew Kaszab

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### **Mrs. Frances Benedict Stewart**

*In trying to arrive at a definition of Covenant-breaking, a number of points need to be born in mind... those who leave the Bahá'í Faith because they have lost faith are similarly not considered Covenant-breakers; and those who commit minor infractions of Bahá'í law may lose their administrative rights...but are not considered Covenant-breakers. It is those who remain within the Bahá'í community, professing loyalty to the Bahá'í Cause and yet oppose the authorized leadership of the Bahá'í Faith or actively try to split the Bahá'í community by setting up an alternative center of leadership who are considered Covenant-breakers.... From this it would appear that a definition of Covenant-breaking would be: "willful opposition to the authorized center of the Bahá'í Faith (or any other religion), despite a conscious knowledge and understanding of the spiritual station of that center."<sup>69</sup>*

By the end of February 1941 Mrs. Frances B. Stewart arrived in Nicaragua after having traveled to El Salvador and Honduras, to assist Mathew. She remained until approximately April 22, 1941, less than two months. She had many personal troubles of her own, not the least of which was obtaining travel documentation for her many travels during a difficult time. Because both publicity for the Faith and drama surrounding Mathew's stay in Managua were directly affected by her visit, it is important to know something about her and to examine brief excerpts of letters written to and from her during this period. She knew Mathew only for a short time and under strenuous circumstances for both of them.

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<sup>69</sup> From Momen, Moojan. *The Covenant and Covenant-breaker*. Article written in 1995 for possible inclusion in the *Bahá'í Encyclopedia*, a project of the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly. It had not been edited at the time of its posting on bahai-library.com in 1999.

Mrs. Stewart was an American citizen who spent her childhood in Concepción, Chile with her parents and therefore spoke Spanish fluently. She was a friend and inspiration to May Maxwell, who stated that South America had grown real to her in 1928 through Mrs. Stewart.<sup>70</sup> Mrs. Maxwell pioneered to Argentina and passed away there on March 1, 1940. Former Continental Counselor and pioneer to Latin America Mr. Artemus Lamb called Mrs. Stewart a “dynamic teacher.”<sup>71</sup> One account states that “our beloved teacher, Mrs. Frances Benedict Stewart, was entrusted the important and difficult task of opening the doors of South America...whether on sea or land she gave messages to all with whom she came in contact.”<sup>72</sup> She was a powerful force throughout the Americas, somewhat of a feminist, outspoken, comfortable in front of large groups, and gave the Message tirelessly. She also served as an officer on the Inter-America Committee. Blanca Victoria Mejía, the first Nicaraguan Bahá’í, paid tribute to the then-inimitable Frances Stewart: “Beginning in 1941, the first one was the unforgettable and sweet Mrs. Frances Benedict Stewart. She, with her words filled with eloquence, is like a torch that lights our souls; but as in these times certain things are misunderstood that develop during this period, she was also misunderstood here, although not by all, for some of us were captivated by her elevated ideas and advice. Full of wisdom the seeds are that today little by little are growing in Nicaragua.”<sup>73</sup>

In a letter dated September 7, 1940 from Nellie French, Chairman of the Inter-America Committee written to Mrs. Stewart as the latter travels through Mexico and Central America, Mrs. French says “I suppose you will not see Mathew Kaszab because he is out at the mines at Siuna, but my heart aches for him. He is surely a grand person and I hope can soon find someplace where he can serve more actively in spreading the Cause than where he is now.” A letter dated September 4, 1940 from Mrs. Stewart written from Guatemala states that a Bahá’í, Mr. Gerrard Sluter, seemed to arouse suspicion “because he is a German and associated with Germans while here. This is an increasingly serious problem that your committee must consider. All these nations are increasingly suspicious of all things German and especially of any German who is traveling with no apparent means of living, for ‘fifth column’ activities are the fear of the moment. Then for a German to be introducing new teachings at this hour is immediately suspect and doors are shut in his path.” Again, this is some foreshadowing of troubles Mathew Kaszab was to encounter in Nicaragua, during wartime heightened sensitivity towards foreigners of eastern Europe descent and, in the year to come, possibly through Mathew’s association with Mrs. Stewart herself.

A letter of February 27, 1941 from Nellie French asks for news of Mrs. Stewart’s progress in Nicaragua and what her future plans will be. On March 11, 1941 Mrs. French writes—in another letter to Mrs. Stewart that “I do not know [Mathew] personally, but he has the reputation of being a first rate Bahá’í and certainly sacrifice is his middle name. However, he must learn the courtesies which are needed in Latin America...”

In a letter dated March 18, 1941 and sent to Mrs. Nellie French from Managua, Frances Stewart writes:

I have been very busy here, speaking about every night and p.m. to all kinds of groups and seeing people constantly that I am about tired out, for the heat here is tremendous. However I have been happy and the response from these dear so-long-oppressed people is so sincere. No

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<sup>70</sup> *A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá’í World I-XII, 1925-1954*; compiled by the Universal House of Justice, pp. 516-28

<sup>71</sup> Lamb, Artemus.

<sup>72</sup> *Bahá’í World* Vol. VIII 1938-1940, “Inter-America Teaching 1938-1939” pp. 29-30

<sup>73</sup> Mejía Arauz, Blanca Victoria quoted in *Bahá’í World* Vol. IX 1940-1944, p. 85

American has ever come here and met with so many different types of people and spoken their own language to them and they are so appreciative and cordial. I love them and feel so deeply all their burden of injustice in every way...I have already spoken before 8 huge audiences and the papers have given me much space. Will visit the President and his family before I leave...I have proven to Kaszab that this nation has some fine people in it, searching for Truth – but calling them [names] will never attract anyone to this Cause. I think he realizes his method was not the method the Master used to reach the hearts and minds. These people are intelligent and sensitive and quick to feel any superiority complex. So much have they suffered that they utterly ignore anyone that attempts to “look down” on them. But love and sympathy and understanding opens all their weary hearts and their response is instantaneous. The large amount of publicity attracted its reaction and because I never mentioned in my talks politics or political personages, a newspaper man of very shady history and suspected by all tried to get me to make a statement on politics and the world horror. This I refused to do and he wrote up a statement saying I must be a “fifth columnist” for I would say nothing on my political stand...well, for some hours it caused quite a flare-up in the city but everyone rushed to me to assure me no one paid any attention to this “yellow journal” and that the man responsible is completely discredited...I have no doubt of Mathew’s sincerity, even to the point of a type of fanaticism, that is up-and-down dogmatic. However, these people in these nations have had centuries of dogmatic teaching that did very little to solve their desperate state of ignorance and poverty and injustice... I asked Mathew to please try and change his vocabulary .... No one can effectively teach this Cause without LOVE for the people one is teaching...He is a good boy and I believe him sincere. I know he loves this Cause and I want him to achieve the success he hopes to achieve, but ALL the obstacles are not with these people. His life is an example of personal conduct – and that is much for this nation, so if he only will try to LOVE these people I feel he will be guided to give them LIGHT. Naturally, I am very careful when I talk to him, not to offend him. He has been surprised to see the many, many people that I have met and who listen and in this way I have been able to tell him that I love these people, understand the long road of oppressions and superstitions that have kept them in darkness but that I know Bahá’u’lláh can make them bearers of His light also...I found things so very dead here that it seemed far wiser to remain here and help get things started than to spend time in Costa Rica where there are two pioneers doing such fine work. Mathew does not speak Spanish and his English is very halting. He promises to study Spanish and says he has studied it some. Of course, working on the Pan-American Road he has not much time save on Sunday...I hope the N.S.A. decides what they want to do with me soon! My letter from the Guardian I was very happy to get...

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In subsequent letters throughout March and April, Mrs. Stewart speaks of trying to put a fire under Mathew to get books that were stuck in Siuna, and to not be so concerned about getting materials in Chinese and Arabic; that Spanish should be the language of choice. She also emphasizes the acute war situation and that certain groups are under suspicion if one does not talk of their political views and how careful the Bahá’ís must be not to be misinterpreted, especially as regards bad translations of the materials of the Faith. She mentions Dr. Edelberto Torres, who is quoted below. He is a high official in public education. Also Blanca Mejía, who had polio as a child and whose leg and arm are both affected, who “has followed me about constantly and who is overjoyed with the Bahá’í Message.”

As regards her arrival to Managua, Nicaragua, Dr. Edelberto Torres Espinoza, a dignified and well-known Nicaraguan educator and administrator who first learned of the Bahá’í Faith in Guatemala but had

returned to work in his native Nicaragua at the time Mathew Kaszab and Frances Stewart began hosting meetings, said

*For some months I did not hear more about the Bahá'í doctrine, but one day I was invited to hear a conference that someone would present at the Masonic Lodge of Managua. The lecturer was a gentleman with a slender build, modest appearance, who spoke with barely perceptible voice. An interpreter conveyed to the audience the ideas expressed by the presenter. That man was Mr. Mathew Kaszab. He spoke of the heavens of civilization and divine dispensations, with assurance that the last of these were the Bahá'í dispensation. For the first time in Nicaragua the names of The Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were mentioned in public and therefore it was the first time Nicaraguan ears had heard these sacred names.<sup>74</sup> Mr. Kaszab [later] gave another talk in the same place and on the same material. About a month later, according to my memories, in April 1941 Mrs. [Frances B.] Stewart arrived in Managua, whom I consider to be the true introducer of Bahá'ísmo [sic] in Nicaragua. She gave a series of lectures on religious and social issues in Managua, all Bahá'í-inspired, and received the applause of a large number of people from all walks of life and professions. The workers in the "Casa de Obreros," the intellectuals, the "University Club" and other people in different places all heard her speak.<sup>75</sup>*

As of April 16 Mrs. Stewart was still in Managua and speaks of spies and slander, trouble with yellow journalism, being accused of communism, hostility from government officials, and consideration that she be asked to leave Nicaragua. There is considerable correspondence from Mrs. Stewart about trying to clear her reputation, even appealing to the President of Nicaragua and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, securing letters and signed statements denying charges of communism that have been made against her. On April 22, 1941 Mrs. Stewart wrote to Mrs. French that in spite of all these troubles

*Srta. Blanca V. Mejía, a lovely young teacher who has followed every single Bahá'í class and who is so filled with the Bahá'í Spirit that all her friends are astonished at her enthusiasm and her constant teaching of the Message that they are all asking for the Message themselves...wanted to sign her card and enter the Bahá'í community and she wanted me to send her card in to the Committee. So here I enclose it, the first Bahá'í of Nicaragua. A lovely personality. In girlhood she had infantile paralysis and her people being people of means, took her everywhere for healing but she is still crippled although can go and come with ease...she has relatives among prominent people in many cities of the Nation and I feel she will be the means of attracting many. Sunday I went over the Will and Testament [of 'Abdu'l-Bahá] with her and she was so deeply impressed that she asked to take the pamphlet home to read it to her sisters.*

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<sup>74</sup> Professor Torres did not realize that Mathew had already spoken to groups in Managua before the arrival of Mrs. Stewart, and that he had been speaking these sacred Names all over the country for an entire sixteen months. See Mathew's letters dated Dec. 7 and 11, 1940: "My talk at the Theosophical Society was very successful so I have been invited to talk at the Masonic Lodge as the enclosed notices indicate."

<sup>75</sup> Torres Espinoza, Edelberto, "La Fe Bahá'í en Guatemala" *Bahá'í World* Vol. IX, 1940-1944 p. 922 [translation of the original written and published in Spanish]. Dr. Torres attended the 1944 Centenary in Wilmette, Illinois representing Guatemala, along with Miss Blanca Mejía, the first Nicaraguan Bahá'í. He later got involved in politics and defined himself as a Marxist by choice. His complete story, including his involvement in the Bahá'í Faith, can be found in *La Dramática Vida de Edelberto Torres (1898-1994): Autobiografía*, EEUU 2014. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition corrected and edited by Flavio Rivera Montealegre.

*Mr. Kaszab brought the new Bahá'í News for me to see...Now I am waiting here in this stifling heat for another week...This has been a strange experience!*

By May Mrs. Stewart is in the Canal Zone and according to several letters to Bahá'í institutions maintains that probably all of her letters have been intercepted. She defends herself against what she says "is all libel and traces right back to the U.S. legation in Managua" stating "...I believe I can profitably remain here a while, that it is imperative the slander against me be cleared up in Washington before I attempt to start out to another foreign country, so I await orders, In His Name and in His Service."

A May 3, 1941 letter to Nellie French from Balboa, Panama, c/o Cora Oliver, states she has been in the Canal Zone "since the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April" and she cautions that pioneers "MUST be careful of their letters..." A letter dated May 11, 1941 written from Panama states that her passport has been taken from her by the authorities, and that she now knows that much of her mail was interfered with in Nicaragua. It is possible that both Mathew's letters and Bahá'í materials being sent him were likewise intercepted, which could be part of the reason for his upcoming persecution.

**Note:** The obligation to admonish a believer because of his or her actions does not come easily to Bahá'í Institutions. In November 1957 the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, suddenly passed away and the international affairs of the Cause were temporarily under the direction of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land. By 1958 seventeen years had passed since the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States had begun to patiently counsel Mrs. Frances Stewart as regards the impression she was giving and her failure to steer clear of any mention of politics. In September 1958 the National Assembly announced in *Bahá'í News* that the voting rights of Mrs. Stewart had been removed by the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. Within the next three years, Mrs. Stewart apparently forcefully voiced her further discontent with the administration of the Cause and perhaps with individual believers, and the August 1961 *Bahá'í News* carried the caution "Hands Warn of Covenant Breakers in Latin America" and stated "Mrs. Frances Stewart'[s]... current activities leave no doubt as to [her] intentions to sow the seeds of disunity wherever [she] go[es]" and that "because of [her] continued activities in opposition to the Covenant" she had been expelled.

Being declared a Covenant-breaker is serious and rare, and it can be seen that whereas before 1941 Mrs. Stewart was a respected and dynamic teacher with many friends and showing a great love for the Cause and for teaching, over a 20-year period had entered the arena of "willful opposition" to the Institutions of the Bahá'í Faith.

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786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, Calif.  
August 28, 1941

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o U.S. Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

We have been given the name of Professor Edelberto Torres of Nicaragua, who has been attending some of the educational conferences in this country and we find that he has met a number of the friends and that he claims to be the first Bahá'í in Nicaragua.

We would like your assurance of this and also to know of his address so that you and we can keep close touch with him.

Hoping the bulletins are reaching you safely, and with loving greetings to all the friends there,

Faithfully in His service,  
[Nellie French] Corresponding Secretary

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September 6, 1941

Dear Mrs. French,

I received your letter with the clipping about Señor Torres. Blanca Mejía was the first one in Nicaragua to sign the dotted line. Mrs. Stewart signed her up. My disciple Mr. Wheelock was the second to sign up although he has been studying the Cause the longest here as I started class last November. He knows more than the others because he speaks English and has access to Bahá'í literature in English which is quite an advantage. Señor Torres was reading *Some Answered Questions* before he left Nicaragua but he did not ask me for a membership card. However if he openly declared himself loyal to the Cause it should not be necessary to go through the formality of signing a card. When he gets back we will carry on the meetings with him as usual without saying anything.

As for giving out addresses I do not approve of that. The addresses that the Committee has should not be given out too freely. Some member of the "New Hysterics" Society may get hold of them and send the believers their literature and confusion may result. Also, we do not know what enemies we may have in the future.

I have not been bothered by any subversive forces as yet nor do I mind an open attack. I can take measures to block known enemies of the Faith but the opposing forces work under cover at times, and why be so foolish as to leave ourselves open to them? I am getting the bulletins and Blanca Mejía and Mr. Wheelock received the pictures of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which you sent. Mr. Wheelock will write you. Blanca would have to write in Spanish as I am just starting to teach her English. We have a class for children and a few adults who want to learn English. For memorizing I am giving them the poem written by Angela Morgan.

I was surprised all of a sudden that there was a new Nicaraguan believer though I knew that he was interested.

Alláh-u-abhá (signed Mathew Kaszab)

[handwritten postscript]: While I was in the mine Shoghi wrote me that confirmations would come.

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On June 8, 1941, Mr. Enrique (Henry) Wheelock wrote a beautifully scripted hand-written letter to Mrs. Nellie French as corresponding secretary of the Inter-America Committee.

*Dear Mrs. French:*

*I heard from Mrs. Stewart that someone informed that Center about her political activities in this country; nothing more absurd. I am moved to write you with the sole interest of establishing the truth on this subject.*

*Mrs. Stewart spoke about eleven times in public and only once she made an [illegible] reference to the Good Neighbor Policy, so it is perfectly fantastic to find in that incident enough grounds for such accusation. She taught the Message in a series of classes and before she left she organized a group to carry on the studies along the future, of that group I am the secretary and must declare that Mrs. Stewart exerted such influence that I decided to embrace the Cause and that is something I never dreamed of; but at the same time I have to say that Mr. Kaszab has changed a great deal after her visit, although he is of hardly any use on account that he does not possess the language. I attribute all that embroilment to religious intolerance and to some xenophobia. We are meeting every week, generally on Saturdays.*

*Faithfully in His service,  
(signed) Henry Wheelock*

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786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, Calif.  
June 17, 1941

Mr. Henry Wheelock  
Banco Nacional  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mr. Wheelock:

It was delightful to receive your letter which gives us the assurance of your acceptance of the Faith and also the information regarding the false reports about Mrs. Stewart's work. We have every confidence in Mrs. Stewart and regret exceedingly that any such misapprehension of her motives and teaching could have been publicized in Central America.

We note from a letter from San Salvador that John Eichenauer is now in your midst and we feel sure that you three will be able to keep the group together and see that it will grow in the consciousness of the beauty of the Bahá'í Faith.

Faithfully in His service,  
[Nellie French] Chairman Inter-America Committee

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Sometime between June and November 1941 Mrs. Louise Caswell and Mr. John Eichenauer visited Nicaragua. John stayed several weeks. Mathew mentions both of them in an undated letter referencing the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh (November 12) so it must have been around that time. Then, there is no more correspondence available from Mathew until early 1942. The reason for the lapse in correspondence is not clear, perhaps those records exist somewhere. *Bahá'í News* No. 144 of June 1941, page 10 states that John Eichenauer is in El Salvador and that he "has become interested in the study of Naturopathy and hopes to make this his profession. He plans to visit Nicaragua very soon and may possibly make that his headquarters. He assures us that the main object of his life is to teach the Cause and he will assist Mathew Kaszab."

Below is from Mathew, copy undated. The letter's content indicates it might be January 1942.

Mrs. Caswell and John stayed here a few days on their way north. John stayed a few weeks while Mrs. Caswell went the rounds of the republics and then he went to Honduras to prepare for her return. On her way back to Panama she stopped here on the anniversary of the Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh and we had a very nice reunion. Things were going well and she thought that there was a nice spirit evident but later some of those who attended the meeting got sick and did not show up and the enthusiasm seemed to vanish. That was several months later. If Mrs. Caswell could have stayed it would have been much better but she stayed only for the anniversary as she was bound for Panama. It also appears that the interest lags in some other places on account of the war or something. When things come to a standstill it has been my policy to start activities some other place so in December, when it started to get a little cooler I took advantage of the cool weather and went to Masaya where there are more people interested in the Cause and took the list of names that John Eichenauer left me and saw the people. I asked one of the people to call a meeting for Sunday and he said that he would attend to it. He got a young fellow to organize the meeting. However the young fellow died a few days before the meeting was supposed to take place so it didn't. I won't get very far if my prospective disciples die off! Anyhow he tried and Bahá'u'lláh will give him credit for the effort.

My friend sent me some books in Spanish and some pamphlets which came in handy in this campaign. I went around and saw the people one by one and left books and pamphlets and one lady gave me some valuable contacts here in Managua which I followed up.  
[from Mathew Kaszab]

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Feb. 23, 1942

Dear Mrs. French,

I started to make an outline of the conditions, economic possibilities etc. of this republic<sup>76</sup> but now conditions are changing so rapidly and are so uncertain that it would hardly be worthwhile. I was told that this was the best country to start a business for the small business man without much capital as there is no competition from large companies. If a person knows his line well he is at an advantage as there are so few who do have a knowledge as to how to do a thing right but at the same time a person should know the psychology of the people and the conditions that he will have to put up with or he can lose out easily. I talked to an importer from Panama who has a branch store here and one in Panama and he told me that conditions are very uncertain here as everywhere else on account of the war.

Sr. [Edelberto] Torres had to go to Guatemala and I have not heard from him. He told me that a first class school could be built in Nicaragua for \$30,000.00. After the Temple [in Wilmette, Illinois] will have been built we can start thinking about it.

I may have to return to the U.S. in one year unless I can get an extension. I have been in the field for three years already. Is a pioneer expected to settle very permanently?

I have been going to Masaya Sundays but it is difficult to get people together. I will have to work along with a small group as the others go out of town Sundays or have other reasons for not coming. I have not been to other cities recently because transportation is limited. The trains are very slow and do not run often.

Alláh-u-abhá [signed] Mathew Kaszab

Whenever any new pamphlets are printed, please send me some.

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786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, Calif.  
March 2, 1942

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o U.S. Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

Your letter of February 23<sup>rd</sup> has just come and we are very interested in all that you report.

I will send you under separate cover some new translation of the "World Religion" and this will also inform you that the "Dispensation" is about to be printed and we do not know whether any copies will be allocated for the pioneers, but if you have to purchase them you should write directly to the

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<sup>76</sup> A questionnaire about conditions such as weather, jobs available, and economics in Nicaragua had apparently been sent to Mathew by the Inter-America Committee. This questionnaire factors into Mathew's being arrested on March 5, 1942.

Publishing Committee. Also we will send very soon copies of the Spanish translation of the long Obligatory prayer and a Spanish translation of the "Basis of Bahá'í Community" which refutes the arguments of the New History Society.<sup>77</sup>

Regarding your question as to whether pioneers are supposed to remain permanently, you know perfectly well that this is the desire of the Guardian, but we wish very much that it might be possible for you to make a visit home so that you could recuperate a little and get in touch with the progress of the Cause which is so remarkable in this country, and then return to Managua. Of course, it would not be safe for you to leave there unless you had a permit to return and if you came back it could be necessary for you to register at once for military service. Otherwise, you might be detained as a delinquent or something.

I wish your letter had conveyed to me a little more information regarding the number of people who are studying with you and please be assured that the Committee is with you in every way and sends their loving greetings.

Faithfully in His service,  
[Nellie French] Corresponding secretary

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[undated – sometime after April 25, 1942 – typewritten]  
To Mrs. Nellie French  
786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, California

**I spent the Naw Ruz of the year 99 like the early believers who were with Bahá'u'lláh – in prison.<sup>78</sup>**

The Sunday before the fast which was the first of March, I went to Miraflores, a bathing place near Managua on the lake. In the afternoon I saw smoke all the way from Managua and thought that it must be a large fire. It was; for when I got back to Managua I heard that it was the plant where I work so I went to see about 10 o'clock at night but the gateman said that no one may enter. Next morning I went to work helping to reconstruct the place, also I was in charge of a small truck shop in the patio that had not burned down. The fire started next to our warehouse but since the buildings were contiguous and a strong wind was blowing toward our place the fire penetrated our warehouse and destroyed all our replacements and tractor equipment, burnt our office and part of our shop. The government said that it was sabotage but the tires, greases, oils and other valuable equipment were untouched. My theory is that it was carelessness. Now as they are rebuilding they are putting in concrete partitions between

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<sup>77</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, "The Basis of the Bahá'í Community: A Statement Concerning the New History Society" November 1941.

<sup>78</sup> March 5 until March 27, 1942 (23 days) was Mathew's first imprisonment, brought about, in part, through communications from the Inter-America Committee that were suspect to a government on edge during the war, as well as for suspicions about Mathew personally, possibly because of his Eastern European background and wariness about his presence in Nicaragua. He is questioned about John Eichenauer being German.

each section so a fire could not travel far. If that would have been done first it would have saved the government \$200,000 which is about a million córdobas.

I continued to work until Thursday morning March 5<sup>th</sup> when some officials of the Guardia Nacional came to the plant and told me to report to the second section of the police. I thought that they would ask me a few questions and let me go. They asked me more than a few questions! I had to wait until the afternoon until my turn came. I did not mind missing a meal as I was fasting. In the afternoon two officials of the Guardia Nacional and one who was evidently an American asked me all kinds of questions and wanted to know why I was in Nicaragua so I told them that I was a pioneer for the Bahá'í Faith. They wanted all my papers so we went to my room and they took all my Bahá'í books, letters, passport etc. and wanted to find out about the pioneers who had written me and said that John Eichenauer's name was German. Also they got hold of the bulletin with the questionnaire concerning climate, health, business and general conditions in the country which made them very suspicious!<sup>79</sup> I told them that was not extraordinary as the committee wants to send more pioneers into the Latin American countries. They asked me if I heard any rumors. I answered that I had not and that if I would have I would have reported it as I have a special interest in the highways; when the Inter-America Highway will be completed more Bahá'ís will be coming down for visits and Bahá'í activities will be increased and when the highway to the Atlantic coast will be completed maybe my plantation will augment in value. I thought that after the interrogation they would let me go but they unceremoniously dumped me into a cell where some black gunpowder was stored and there was only a bench to sleep on. I was held incommunicado although I had a chance to talk to anybody for five days after the fire! Just some Nicaraguan stupidity. I could not communicate even with the U.S. Consulate. Why did you write us to keep in close touch with the consulate? Did they lift a finger to help me or the other Americans who were unjustly imprisoned? Bahá'u'lláh stated "There is no escape and there is no refuge..." The U.S. foreign policy with these filthy republics is to give the oppressor a free hand.

I tried to sleep on the hard bench but I did not succeed much that night. Friday the two officials of the Guardia Nacional returned and asked me where I spent all my life and wanted to know every place to which I had been the two years that I had been in Nicaragua. They asked about the Bahá'í attitude in wartime and they wanted to know the names of the believers in Nicaragua. I told them that we do not give out the membership list to non-believers but they said that they have to have it so I gave the names of Mr. Wheelock and of Blanca,<sup>80</sup> the only two who have signed membership cards. In case of emergency I can suspend them from the Cause until after the war but there seems to be no danger.

A young teniente [lieutenant] who spoke English wrote down my declarations and then asked me to sign it. It was in Spanish but I understood all of it so I signed the papers. I told them that I was out of town and how they could verify my whereabouts on the Sunday when the fire occurred. The same teniente bought me some oranges which one of the guards peeled as I was not allowed to have a knife or anything in the cell so I ate the oranges after sundown. The next day I ate only oranges after sundown

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Enrique (Henry) Wheelock and Blanca Victoria Mejía Arauz were the first two declared Nicaraguan believers, Blanca enrolling first, on April 21, 1941 according to records, and Mr. Wheelock shortly thereafter.

and after that I was going on a complete fast drinking only water after sundown but the guards got perturbed so I consented to eat. I broke the fast on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March but the conditions under which I had to take the fast will be taken into consideration.<sup>81</sup>

After being in the cell five days I prevailed upon a guard to go to the house where I lived and bring me a pillow and sheet and a clean shirt. I slept a little better after that and physically I was feeling well on account of having fasted but mentally I was bored and uncertain. I was allowed out three times a day and went to the kitchen for food as I could not make arrangements to have food bought to me, being incommunicado. The food consisted of coffee and bread in the morning and rice and beans, tough meat, and tortillas for noon and night. It was invariable. Some of the men whom I knew in the plant were taken to jail over the weekend for drunkenness and were thrown into the cell next to where I was so I told them that when they get out to tell the boys in the office to come back of the jail as I wanted to see them to arrange for food etc. but nobody came to see me as they were afraid except one fellow who talked to the guards and they wanted to lock him up too! He could have talked to me when the guards were not around as they are negligent and do not take the trouble to find out what is going on. After a while I got tired of the food and was thinking of going on a complete fast until they let me out but I did not know how long they were going to hold me so it might have been suicidal and may not be in line with the best interests of the Cause. The reason for thinking of desperate measures was that I had nothing to read and was in solitary confinement and did not know what was going to happen and I was very angry at the injustice towards one who had come for the betterment of this country. As Bahá'u'lláh said "We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations, yet they think us worthy of bondage..." After Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá spent all that time in prison and exile why would it be necessary for one of their agents to go through all that again? On the other hand seeing that I was Their follower and They spent 40 years in exile and in prison I figured that I should show more patience. I had been in "exile" only two years and they could not hold me in jail indefinitely. I repeated all the invocations and prayers I could remember. I took a nail and scratched the Greatest Name on the walls and made inscriptions one of which was "Let the Oppressor desist!"<sup>82</sup> Another "There is no escape and there is no refuge." Also I composed what sounds something like poetry. One of the guards lent me a Spanish grammar so I tried to study it.

Some boys were playing ball on the street so I tore some slats out of the window so I could see outside and asked one of the boys to go to the house and ask the lady to send me some fruit so after that she sent her son around every day with a variety of fruit and I got my vitamins. I was starting to get inured to the jail when on March 27 a police official came around and told me that although they had got to no conclusion and the case was still in the air I was free on parole so to speak, as the General had decided not to keep us in prison any longer. Everybody who had been in for the investigation was freed. In my case they could have sent a guard out to Miraflores to find out if I actually was out of town when the fire

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<sup>81</sup> The Bahá'í Nineteen Day Fast is the period between March 2-20. It is testimony to Mathew's devotion that his main concern was not breaking the Fast, even though his food and water supply was so limited and he was imprisoned under strenuous and unsympathetic conditions.

<sup>82</sup> Probably not the wisest thing for Mathew to have written on a prison wall under the surveillance of a military dictatorship.

occurred and then set me free within a couple of days but they do funny things in Nicaragua 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).

Next day I went to the plant and found out that my salary had continued while I was in jail and my job is still intact unless the Nicaraguan Government decides that I should not work there, but I think that everything will be alright.

*Freely wheel the buzzards in the Nicaraguan sky  
While a prisoner is grieving: freedom passed him by.  
While the prisoner is waiting (what else could he do?)  
In his cell he's meditating of the Great One Who  
Languished in the Most Great Prison many miles away,  
Telling of a better world where buzzards held no sway!*

*Buzzards strut in freedom underneath the palm tree's shade  
Where mañana is the word and justice is delayed.  
Lizards crawl into the cell and peer with mournful eye,  
At the prisoner inside whom justice had passed bye.*

*How long will injustice reign in this forsaken land?  
How long will stupidity maintain its perverse stand?  
Fate will have (the mighty ones will find when they awake)  
Struck the hour appointed in which ever limb shall quake!  
Gloomy dusts arise from every section of the town.  
Falls the night of error that precedes the radiant dawn.  
Buzzards fly in freedom over Lake Managua's shore –  
Prisoner awaits the day when buzzards fly no more.*

Saturday I went back to the plant to work and got my checks and the next week being Semana Santa everybody was given a week's vacation so I started for Jinotega. I got there next morning and went to see Blanca who introduced me to her cousins and other people who were interested in the Cause and we talked to about five who seemed to be intelligent people. We left pamphlets and I promised to send her cousin a book which I did after I got back to Managua. I stayed there in Jinotega for three days and enjoyed the cool climate and the nice scenery and quiet surroundings. I rode around on the motorcycle loaned me by one of the boys. Wednesday morning I got back to Managua, and then at night I proceeded to Masachapa where I stayed until Saturday [April 4, 1942]. The food was terrible and prices boosted way up as the resort is open only one week out of the year and is not properly organized. I went swimming and got sunburned although I tried to be careful. I went to the gate of the President's mansion where there were all sorts of fruit trees growing and we were given a drink of grapefruit by the mother of one of my acquaintances. She was the cook there and she tried to get me an audience with the President but he was out for a swim so it could not be arranged.

Getting back to Managua I started in to work again at the plant next Monday and was working there as per usual until Wednesday when the boss told me that he had bad news. A letter came from the guard to fire everybody who was in for investigation which included me. The others who were questioned did not even get back to work after the fire. So here I am in Nicaragua without a job. They have my books

and passport etc. and I do not yet know what the next move is. The same woman whom I met in Montelimar said that she would take a letter to the President for me so I could talk to him and see if I could get my job back and she said that she delivered the letter but he had been out of town on several occasions inspecting the road. So far I did not get a chance to see him. Meanwhile I went to Masaya to see the people and talked to several of them. The Cause seems to be advancing in Masaya even though slowly. Having plenty of time I went to see several people here in Managua about the Cause following up all my leads. I got some literature in English and also a book in French and pamphlets in Spanish which came in handy as all my other books are still held by the guard.

April 25 I received a letter from Margaret Jamer which got to Managua on the 20th. She was supposed to have gotten here on the 21<sup>st</sup> to stay one day so I missed her.

[Mathew Kaszab]



..." 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.

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April 9, 1942

General Anastasio Somoza  
President of Nicaragua

Dear Mr. President,  
On Saturday April 4<sup>th</sup> I wanted to visit you in Montelimar but I had just missed seeing you so I am writing to obtain an interview with you.

I am a member of the Bahá'í Faith and to obviate any suspicion concerning my activities in these days when everything is under a suspicion I would like to present you a book explaining the tenets of the Faith so you could judge for yourself what my purpose is.

Secondly, up to date I have been working at the Tractor plan of the Inter-America Highway but now all those who had been under questioning after the fire, have been dismissed from work, including myself.

I had organized the truck repair in our shop so the work is speeded up considerably. I am the only one in our plant who is a draftsman and many times we need drawings to explain to the mechanics the operation and repair of our equipment. My knowledge of English comes in handy as the catalogues,

instructions, etc. are mostly printed in English. I am a U.S. citizen and have been in Nicaragua for two and a half years.

I have been working in the office of the "Bodega Caterpillar" the Inter-America Highway for one year and two months already and I could continue to be of valuable help in the organization in expediting the work if I could get permission from you to continue working at my post. At any rate I would like to see you so you may know what type of individual I am and I want to place myself [at your service].

[From Mathew Kaszab. Copy of this letter ends here].

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April 16, 1942

Dear Mrs. French,

I not only was held for questioning about the fire where I worked but also I lost my job last Wednesday and got caught in an earthquake. The loss of a job caused a greater disturbance than the earthquake as the earthquake was slight and no harm was done to property. You wrote about emergency evacuations from Panama but maybe from Nicaragua it would be more immediate if the necessity should arise. I may wire you or write by airmail and I would feel better if I had 50 good U.S. dollars in my pocket in checks of small denominations. If I have to go I would rather travel by land. It would be cheaper etc.

If you got the three page materials with the poetry which could be entitled the black buzzard please just state that you received the poem entitled the black buzzard. It need not be published in the *Bahá'í World*.

I got two envelopes full of pamphlets. I went to Jinotega where it is quite cool. It is a very nice place though small, about 5,000 inhabitants, and Blanca [Mejía] was up there and introduced me to several people who were interested in the Faith so I had a nice talk with them and left them pamphlets. Two of the men whom John [Eichenauer] had contacted are also studying after several visits from me.

I have not visited my friends in Masaya for several months and now being out of a job I will not have much money for transportation. I got the last bulletin in which you state that the pioneers could be frank, but how can they be with the letters being censored? Blanca's sister indicated her willingness to sign the dotted line so if I can get back the formal printed statements to be signed I will let her sign before I leave or if I can not get back my stuff then I will let her write a declaration of her own. She is not afraid. What the police got suspicious over was the bulletin in which you asked about the climate, altitude, business conditions, health, etc.

Now conditions are up in the air and I do not know what I will do but things are liable to develop in the next few days and then I can write more definitely about some things.

Allah'u'Abha

[signed] Mathew Kaszab

Just after Mathew's first imprisonment and release, all over the world Spiritual Assemblies in places where the Bahá'í Faith had taken sufficient foothold, were being elected, on the first day of the Ridvan Festival on April 21 as indicated by the guidelines of the Faith. Johnny Eichenauer, who arrived in Panama and worked briefly with Mathew there, was not yet 21 years old. Officially a pioneer to El Salvador, he traveled in every Central American country and lived not only in El Salvador but in Guatemala where he found work. His enthusiasm and charm were met with delight by all who came in contact with him. Mr. John Carl Eichenauer III deserves a biography of his own, and it is probable that sooner than later someone will take on this project. In April of 1942 he was in Honduras.



**Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tegucigalpa, Honduras,  
newly established April 21, 1942.**

Seated center is John Eichenauer, visitor to Honduras during the time the accompanying nine members were elected to the first Spiritual Assembly of that Country. Photo from *Bahá'í News* No. 157 November 1942

May 4, 1942

Dear Virgie,

I received your letter with the page from *Bahá'í News* concerning Panama. I can not leave yet because they still have my passport and I can not get a job here, I am still in danger. If you want to do something noble for the Cause send me a Spanish Esslemont by airmail as I do not know how much longer I am going to stay here and I have several new disciples who read only Spanish. The police had confiscated all my books and I did not get them back yet. That's why I need another one in a hurry before I should leave. The English Esslemont that you sent me got here all right. I will find someone to give it to. Also I received the World Order Magazines and the pamphlets in English and had distributed a few already. By now you must have received my other letter thanking you for Juliet Thompson's book and to tell her that I enjoyed reading it, I did not know that she was such a good writer.

Maybe some of my letters are being held up as I did not receive any recently. How is the husband? Say hello to him for me.

Alláh-u-abhá  
[signed] Mathew Kaszab

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May 4<sup>th</sup> 1942

Dear Mrs. French,

I wrote you a letter a while ago but I have not received one from you for a long time. Only the bulletin with the addresses and some pamphlets. I also received the last volume of *Bahá'í World* No. 8. The write up about Nicaragua was erroneous and terrible. I wrote a letter to Mrs. [Loulie] Mathews correcting the error but it seems that it was not corrected. It must have been written by someone with a vivid imagination. Also it is written in direct opposition to what had been recommended in one of your recent bulletins.

I had been in Panama exactly six months, the limit of my permit to stay there, if I had stayed another day I would have overstayed my limit. In the back of the book it is stated that I stayed five months. Now I am thinking of returning there if possible.

My case here is still in the air. I have no job and I am down to my last ten córdobas. If you have any emergency funds send me fifty dollars in small checks on a bank in the U.S. not a Nicaraguan bank.

The police still has my passport and I am still in danger although the legation said that they may be able to get it for me if I want to return to the U.S. If you get this letter please answer soon. Maybe the letters are being held up.

Alláh-u-abhá  
[signed] Mathew Kaszab

*[Handwritten postscript]: The police confiscated my books. It would be very helpful if you sent a half a dozen Spanish Esslemont books to Blanca Mejía 505-4a Calle Noreste, Managua, Nicaragua as we do not have enough to go around.*

---

786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, Calif.  
June 8, 1942

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o U.S. Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

...The [Inter-America] Committee being disbanded and a quorum being impossible before the meeting of the NSA, your letter has been sent directly to them for action.

We note that you are asking for a sum of money to come back to the States and we certainly feel that you should have a vacation. But also we must remind you that you would be eligible at once for military service and we would grieve to feel that Nicaragua was left without a pioneer. However, the whole matter is in the hands of the NSA and we have asked them to communicate their action to us at once so that we may notify you of their wish.

We are so happy to know that you have a potential Spiritual Assembly and we hope that it will soon develop into a larger number who will carry on in case you leave.

With loving greetings, Faithfully in His service,

[Nellie S. French] Corresponding Secretary

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June 19, 1942

The checks to the amount of \$50.00 were received without any trouble but the one that was mailed the 5<sup>th</sup> of May got here in June. Meanwhile it has started to rain very heavily and I can not get to Jinotega because the trucks get stuck in the mud and there is no way of getting there except by horseback or airplane which is expensive. So that trip will have to be postponed although there are five prospective Bahá'ís there who will form a firm nucleus. They already have some books but need some more. Blanca received the half dozen Spanish Esslemont books. I presume that they are the ones I asked to be sent to her.

An Inter-American Library is being formed here with the cooperation of the two governments to which Bahá'í books could be sent. The Organizer is Dr. Rodolfo Rivera in care of the U.S. Legation where he has his office. I had a talk with him and he said that he would be glad to accept books. He talks English, having a degree from an American University. The *Bahá'í World* No. VIII is not a good book to send considering the local write up by somebody with a vivid imagination and slight regard for accuracy! It would be better to send a selection of books in Spanish and a few in English. Before the *Bahá'í World* No. IX is published<sup>83</sup> please let me review the material on Nicaragua and please do not publish the ugly picture that was in one of the Bahá'í News. I could send you another one if necessary.

As for my situation, I had permission from the U.S. State department before the war, to stay here until February 11, 1943. But happenings since then indicate that I should be returning to the U.S. However, it would take several months to make arrangements and meanwhile I have an excellent plan.

I have been introduced to someone who would be just the one to carry on the teaching here and extend it. He is a philosopher, writer, an organizer in the cooperative movement, has written books that are in alignment with Bahá'í principles and is quite enthusiastic about the Faith and has indicated his willingness to take over and to publish a few pamphlets. His small lumber business will be tied up for several months during which time he will dedicate his activities to the Faith. He has many worthwhile friends in six of the principle cities.

I can not get a job here in the city, about the only place I could work would be in the mines back in the jungles where I would be isolated from civilization and subjected again to malaria and dysentery and my time would be wasted like it was the nine months that I worked in Siuna. It took me one year to get over

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<sup>83</sup> Poignantly, Mathew appeared in the "in Memoriam" section of the very next *Bahá'í World* Vol. IX.

the malaria. If the teaching budget would allow it this would be the ideal time to go around to the other six cities where my friend has contacts besides Jinotega and Masaya where I have nuclei of five people each already active.

In looking over the annual report I find that only \$15,000 has been spent in teaching and \$79,000 for Temple construction and if the Temple will be finished to the required state this year then that much will be released for teaching next year. The very minimum budget for Latin-American Teaching program would be \$19,000 in 1943 or a thousand dollars per republic. I would like to get hold of half of Nicaragua's share immediately! With \$500.00 the two of us could go around and accomplish more than could be done with several times that amount later on when I will no longer be here and my friend will be busy again. This is the first time in my three years of pioneering that such an opportunity presented itself and already I speak Spanish fluently enough to take advantage of it. So if you think that this is feasible please present this plan to the National Spiritual Assembly and ask for \$500.00 for the Nicaragua Bahá'í fund besides the \$200 for my fare back. About \$50.00 could be left with the publishing committee for books because we do not know what will happen in the future. Also if the lessons for children could be translated into Spanish Blanca would like to get hold of some for children up to 10 years of age. If what I ask is too much I could modify the plan but my impression is that now results count for more than economy and that no expense should be spared.

Sincerely, [signed] Mathew Kaszab

---

786 Chester Ave. San Marino Calif.  
June 24, 1942

Dear Mathew,

Your letter of June 19 has just come and I hasten to reply. The suggestions which you make about traveling with your friend throughout Nicaragua is very good, but things don't happen in that way. If your letter had arrived before the NSA meeting which occurred last weekend, I would have presented it, but now it will be over six weeks until there is another meeting and we can not do anything about this until it would be too late. In the meantime the NSA has voted you money to return (they assume you will go to New York) and this I am sure will reach you soon. As things now stand they have probably voted all the money they have on hand for the pioneers who are going out into the field.

Regarding *Bahá'í World* Vol. VIII I note that a copy has been sent to Managua and I can only hope that it will not make the bad impression which you mention. I do not know who wrote the report, it was not my business to judge what I received for the book but to use it as it was sanctioned by the then chairman of the Inter-America Committee. Now the material for Vol. IX has gone to the NSA to be held for the Guardian whenever we can forward it to him, but I know that your report was not used as you sent it because it was scarcely fitted for such a book.

I hope you will not be delayed in getting back as the money has been specifically sent for that purpose.

Let us hear from you when you do come,  
Faithfully in His service  
[signed] Nellie, Corresponding Secretary

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June 25, 1942

Dear Mathew,

I wrote you yesterday but today I am informed that your record has been cleared with the State Dept. and that you are now free to return to the States. We are therefore requested to work out with you the details of your return to the U.S. and so I am writing to ask you if there is anything you need in the way of papers which we can furnish to get you back.

I understand that the money has been vote[d for] but whether sent I do not know. You have had the \$50 on two installments but you have also been voted \$225 to enable you to return. Whether this has been sent or only voted and awaits our word from you as to your plans I can only guess. I believe you're to let us know at once when you will require this amount to come home with. The Nicaraguan Gov't did not explain to the State Dept. why you had been detained so that must have been cleared up and all is well. Let us know at once your plans.

In haste, [Nellie French] Corresponding Secretary

---

July 2, 1942

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o American Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

We regret very much your feeling obliged to return, but realize that you would prefer to remain if possible until you had an Assembly. When you come home, be sure to let us have all information possible about your years of ardent service to the Cause as a pioneer teacher. You can give information and advice which will be invaluable to us and to the Inter-America Committee.

Miss Edna True is sending you your transportation back to New York. With this letter I enclose draft for \$75.00. If there is delay in getting your reservation you may need more, in which case let me know as soon as you can. We are anxious to do everything possible to arrange for your return journey in accordance with your request.

All the members join me in expressing admiration of your heroic work for the Cause, and hopes that the time will come when you can re-enter the pioneer field.

With every good wish,  
Faithfully yours,  
[Nellie French] Secretary

---

5<sup>th</sup> of July, 1942

Dear Mrs. French,

I received your two letters, the last one mailed June 27<sup>th</sup>. I think that the passport and papers can be arranged from here.

My plan is to go with a group organized by the Tourist Bureau, over land. The tentative date set for starting will be August 30 though it may be delayed if some are not ready by that time. The itinerary is through El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. If this is not feasible then I could fly to Brownsville, Texas.

If the money has not already been sent then it could be sent in one \$25 and two \$100. Checks or bank drafts (like before). As for the publishing of pamphlets, that will have to be done by the publishing committee. Sr. Edelberto Torres told me that he would write some pamphlets for the Faith. Also I am acquainted with two Arabians who speak very good Spanish, one is an orator and I could get them to do some translations into Spanish from the original Arabic if some printed books in Arabic or Photostatic copies of Bahá'u'lláh's original manuscripts could be available.

The books that have been received by Blanca have already been lent out and some are already asking for other books to read. I wish that you would have the committee send a half dozen of *Some Answered Questions*, Esslemonts and whatever other books that have been translated since, to Sr. J. Antonio Bonilla, 3a Calle Noreste No. 711 (in Spanish of course). Sr. Bonilla has written a few pages of material that could be included in the *Bahá'í World IX* if it is not too late already. It will not be published until next year, will it?

I had quite a setback here when Sr. Torres went to Guatemala but he can be a help to the Faith there. We have some friends among the Masons, they published some discourses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Masonic newspapers of Masaya. (Masaya is the nearest town to Managua and I have been there a number of times contacting people).

Yesterday being the fourth of July the Americans were all invited to the U.S. Legation. The building has just recently been completed and has a magnificent view of the lake. We were all introduced to the new ambassador and his wife. They are nice people.

I will write you several times before I leave.

Sincerely,

[signed] Mathew Kaszab

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786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, Calif.  
July 12, 1942

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o U.S. Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

We are in receipt of your letter of July 5<sup>th</sup> and hasten to reply in as much as we feel that you should be straightened out a little in this matter of literature.

We have mentioned to the National Spiritual Assembly that you would like a number of the "Answered Questions" "Esslemont" and other translations sent to Sr. Bonilla, but we are informed by the NSA that there is no more literature for free distribution except the pamphlets. Hence, we cannot say whether your order will be forthcoming or not.

Regarding the translation which you say can be made by your Arab friends and also Sr. Torres, all literature translated must be sent to this country for review before publication. This has been mentioned frequently in our Bulletin and as far as the original texts in photostatic copies of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, those could in no wise be confided into the hands of anyone without the Guardian's express permission.

We note that you are planning to return with a group over land some time about the end of August. We do not know what provision the NSA may have made for your return. It has been the policy of the NSA to prepay transportation at this end where pioneers are returning home, but we have just written to them stating that you would like your money sent in the form of three drafts and that you, yourself, are proposing to finance your return with this money. If the NSA informs us that they have arranged for your transportation, then what arrangements you have made there will have to be abandoned. It might be well for you to write immediately to the NSA in case you have omitted yourself for some such arrangement, because time is lost by writing to us and then waiting for the action of the Committee and then writing to the National. In the National's statement to us they say this: "The NSA has voted to appropriate up to \$235.00 to make it possible for Mathew Kaszab to return from Nicaragua. We understand that he would go back to New York, as that is his original residence." We are therefore, at a loss to know exactly what has been arranged by you.

Hoping that we may soon be able to send another pioneer to Nicaragua to resume the work which you are leaving, I remain,

Faithfully in His service  
[Nellie French] Secretary

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July 14, 1942

Secretary  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada  
536 Sheridan Road, Wilmette, Illinois E.E.U.U.

Dear Horace,

I received the draft for \$75. My intention is to go over land through El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico to the U.S. There is a group going on August 30 and if my papers are all ready by that time I may be able to go with them but the date is only a tentative one and may be postponed. If I arrive in the U.S. in winter it may be better for me to stay in the South as I have been in the tropics over three years. I hear that there are plenty of jobs all over the U.S. so it would not matter where I went.

Before I go I would like to visit at least a few of the towns where I have contacted people and talk with them. At any rate I could well use an additional \$75 to wind up my work with, also some more books and pamphlets, in Spanish. Please have the committee send me some pamphlets by airmail as I will be needing some soon.

I will continue writing to Mrs. French so the Inter-America committee will know what is happening.

Sincerely

[signed] Mathew Kaszab

[handwritten postscript] Thanks for the interest taken in my work and in behalf of my welfare.

---

August 2, 1942

[handwritten]

I received the railroad ticket and also the Panamerican Airways ticket is in the office waiting for me but my passport has not been found yet so there may be a delay for another month or so. Meanwhile I have been employing the time very successfully. There are nine people just about ready to form a Spiritual Assembly here and about five more prospects. Also a good number of my sympathizers. In Masaya, the nearest town to Managua we have nine enthusiastic students some of whom are already well-versed in the Teachings and we will see if we can form another Spiritual Assembly there.

I have good contacts in other cities so we will form small groups there also if I have the time and the financial backing. Several things contributed to this sudden upsurge.

[copy of second page of this letter is missing]

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The August 1942 issue 155 of *Bahá'í News* carried the following:

### **Nicaragua**

Mathew Kaszab has been given permission to return home for rest and change. His future plans are uncertain. But he has had a strenuous time in Nicaragua where he has served faithfully and well.

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August 18, 1942

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o American Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

This will answer your letter of August second.

The treasurer's office has made the necessary arrangements to send you three checks in the amount of \$25.00 each to take care of your living expenses while you are getting your passport in shape for returning.

Your letter did not explain whether you lost the passport or whether it was mislaid in some office or bureau where it might have been on file. Anyhow, as your passport must have been registered in the Consul's office, I am sure you can get a duplicate or whatever document you need for returning without much delay.

It is very nice to learn that the teaching work is going along so well. We will send some books for your use in care of your friend Mr. Bonilla.

The orders for transportation are dated and therefore you must either make use of them or return them to us before the expiration date as otherwise this whole investment would be lost. Please therefore as soon as you can, complete your arrangements for returning or else inform the National Assembly that you wish to remain in which case the transportation should be sent back to us as soon as possible.

With kind regards,  
Faithfully yours,  
[Nellie French] Secretary

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September 8, 1942

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of U.S. & Canada

Dear Horace,  
I received the three checks \$75 in all.

The local bureau of investigation lost my passport<sup>84</sup> but at the U.S. Consulate they said that they could issue me an emergency passport which would be good for a month. The clerk in charge of the passports went away somewhere so I will have to wait a few days. After I get my passport I will have to wait my turn to get a seat in the airplane. Not having a priority I may have to wait a while unless I strike it lucky. If after the middle of this month I find that I will not be able to get away in time to use my railroad ticket I will send it so you could exchange it or get the money back. The railroad ticket is good until Sept. 30. The airplane ticket is good until next July so we do not have to worry about that. I would prefer to go through Chicago and get a chance to talk with members of the committee. However if I get to the U.S. before Sept. 30 I will use the railroad ticket as it is so as to save the trouble of having to exchange it.

The books that were sent did not get here yet. We are waiting for them because several more people have become interested in the Cause and we have all the others loaned out.

Sincerely,  
[signed] Mathew Kaszab

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<sup>84</sup> It might be safe to deduce that Mathew's passport, taken from him during his first imprisonment in March, rather than being "lost" was being withheld.

September 15, 1942

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o U.S. Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

We are very happy to have your recent letter and note that your plans are still a little uncertain on account of your need to secure an airplane reservation to return.

We have just received a very urgent letter from the Guardian in which he calls upon the pioneers to retain their posts at all costs and to face the obstacles in their path with courage, faith and confidence in the future outcome of their work.

As soon as we read this appeal the National Assembly acted to request you to remain as a teacher in Nicaragua if it is possible for you to do so. We can offer you a monthly budget for living expenses over a period of three months, and then make another arrangement with you depending on whether you have a job by the date of our November meeting.

The main thing is to help you carry on your teaching work, and this the National Assembly will certainly do in accordance with the Guardian's appeal.

I hope this letter gets to you before you have started on your return journey. Please let me know as soon as possible whether you can stay in the country, so that we can send you the first monthly budget and also some more teaching literature.

With best wishes,  
Faithfully yours,  
[Nellie French] Secretary

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September 19, 1912

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís

Dear Horace,

I have a reservation on the airplane of the Panamerican Airways on October 8, 1942 and the consul told me that he has permission from the state department to issue me a passport and I will get my passport before that date. It will be too late for me to use my railroad ticket which expires September 30 so am enclosing it in this letter. I do not want to go to New York anyway because it would be very cold in the winter after getting used to live in the tropics for three and a half years. So please sell the ticket and send me the money in two checks as I will need some money on my stopover in Guatemala and then from Brownsville to whatever place I decide to go. Please send it in care of the office of Panamerican Airways, Managua, Nicaragua so in case it would get here late they could relay it to me.

The books did not get here yet. Did you get my postcard with the picture of the friends on it?  
Sincerely,

[signed] Mathew Kaszab

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Excerpts from letter from the Guardian written through his secretary dated August 15, 1942 and referred to by the Inter-America Committee in its letter to Mathew on September 15, 1942 follow:

*"Every effort should be made to increase the number of such pioneers, to facilitate their departure, to insure their settlement in virgin territories, to keep in close and constant touch with them, and to reinforce their activities through visiting teachers, adequate financial assistance, and constant moral encouragement. The Guardian wishes to urge them and those who have preceded them, to retain their posts at all cost, to face the obstacles in their path with courage, faith and confidence in the future outcome of their work. The National Assembly, on the other hand, must do everything in its power to enable these self-sacrificing workers to continue their 51 pioneer services, and to discourage their return until the results of their labours are so substantial as to insure the continuity of the Bahá'í Community after their departure.*

*"He considers that at present pioneer activity is of the utmost importance and that the NSA should do everything in their power to insure that those who have gone to Central and South America, as well as those who are going there, remain there and consolidate their work – otherwise all the efforts and all the money, sacrificed by the believers for this effort, will have been spent practically in vain."*

- published in *American Bahá'í News* No. 156 October 1942 pp. 1-2

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**"I will be celebrating my 37<sup>th</sup> birthday up in the clouds"**

September 26, 1942

Dear Horace,

I have reservations on the plane leaving September 28<sup>th</sup>. If you have not already sent me the check, the money from selling the railroad ticket please send it to me in care of the Panamerican Airways to their office in Brownsville Texas. Tell them that I have reservations from Nicaragua on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September so they will have no trouble locating me. I have my passport and am all set to go.

My reservations were pushed up ten days ahead but I did not want to write you until I had my passport ready and was pretty sure of going. I will write you a postcard from Brownsville.

I will be celebrating my 37<sup>th</sup> birthday up in the clouds.

[signed] Mathew Kaszab

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National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada  
*Office of the Secretary*  
536 Sheridan Road, Wilmette, Illinois

September 28, 1942

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o American Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

Your letter of September 19<sup>th</sup> has just been received and I acknowledge the return of the order for railroad transportation from Brownsville to New York. This will be turned over for cancellation.

Just a day or two ago I wrote you the request of the National Assembly that you stay in Managua if possible, and yesterday the treasurer's office sent you drafts amount to \$75.00.

Now if you are obliged to return you can use that money for transportation but I hope that you can carry out the Guardian's appeal and continue your teaching work.

Please let me know as soon as possible just what you plan to do.

With every good wish,  
Faithfully yours,

[signed] Horace Holley, Secretary

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The November 1942 issue of *Bahá'í News*, No. 157 on page 6 carries news of John Eichenauer and his brother Marshall working in Guatemala and glowing reports of other communities in Latin America, including Panama, to which Mathew would have loved to have returned instead of remaining in Nicaragua. By November Mathew, unbeknownst to many of those awaiting news from him, was irreparably ill in a prison hospital. Under "Nicaragua" the *News* states: "At last reports Mathew Kaszab was about to return home for a visit but he has been requested to remain if possible in view of the Guardian's urgent appeal. Mr. Kaszab's teaching work has been extending rapidly in recent months."

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November 23, 1942  
Inter-America Committee

Mr. Mathew Kaszab  
c/o American Consul  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mathew:

Please let us know at once whether you received the letters we wrote you in September asking you to remain in Nicaragua and promising a monthly budget of \$75.00 until you get some kind of work. No letter has been received from you since your brief note of September 26<sup>th</sup>. We do not know whether you are still in Nicaragua or have returned to the U.S.A.

With kind regards,  
Faithfully yours,  
[Nellie French] Secretary

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[from Gayle Woolson]  
Box 2061  
San José, Costa Rica  
December 10, 1942

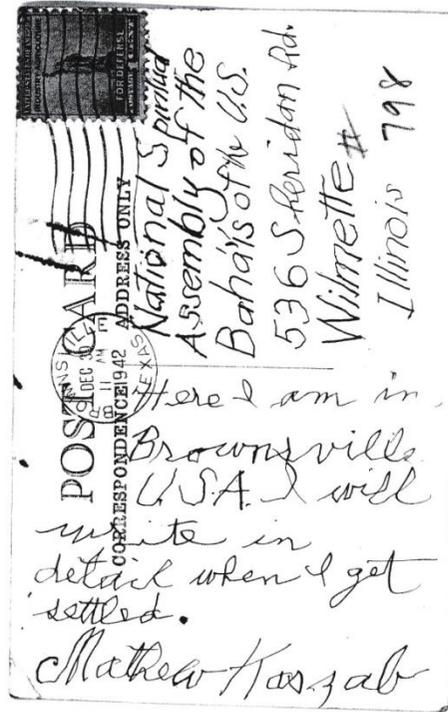
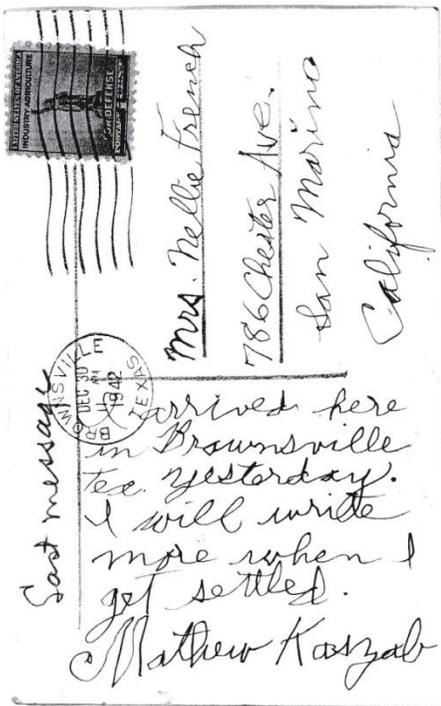
[excerpt]

Dear Mrs. French,

In regard to Mathew, one recalls the second Nightingale in the Tablet of Ahmad.<sup>85</sup> Our Assembly has written to the U.S. Consul at Managua, informing him that we have not had any communication from Mathew for some time, asking him to notify us as to where he is and to where we can write him. As soon as we receive an answer, we will let you know.

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<sup>85</sup> "Thus doth the Nightingale utter His call unto you from this prison." – Baha' u'llah



December 30, 1942 from Brownsville, Texas.

Last known correspondence from Mathew Kaszab, the only one since his letter of September 26, 1942. His handwriting shows visible signs of illness.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)			
SERIAL NUMBER	1. NAME (Print)		ORDER NUMBER
T 3671	Mathew, Telkes, Kaszab		T 135A
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) Plaza Hotel, Box 37, Cameron Co. Texas (Number and street) (Town, township, village or city) (County) (State)			
3. MAILING ADDRESS General Del. P. O. Box, Cam Co. Texas (Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If the insert word same)			
4. TELEPHONE		5. AGE IN YEARS 37	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Budapest
		DATE OF BIRTH Sept. 28, 1905	Hungary
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mrs. Nellie French			
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS 786 - Chester Ave. San Marino, California			
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Housekeeper			
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.			
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 1-1-42)		Mathew Telkes Kaszab (Registrant's signature)	

Above, registration card<sup>86</sup> for armed services required upon Mathew's arrival to the U.S.

<sup>86</sup> The National Archives (<http://www.archives.gov>) ; Selective Service Registration Cards, World War II. Texas, 10/16/1940 – 03/31/1947. Courtesy of Gyorgy Nemeth, electronic correspondence of June 28, 2019.

dated December 30, 1942, the same day as Mathew's last postcard. It is obvious that someone assisted him in filling out the card; the handwriting is distinctively not his.

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[handwritten draft of a telegram from the secretary of the N.S.A. of the U.S. and Canada]

January 14, 1943

Philip Sprague  
24 West 55<sup>th</sup> St., New York

Mathew Kaszab died last night in Brownsville, Texas after returning from Nicaragua. Kindly inform family and ask prayers friends. Have made funeral arrangements including local cemetery. No further information yet available. Deeply distressed.

[signed] Horace Holley

---

786 Chester Avenue  
San Marino, Calif.  
January 17, 1943

Mrs. Gayle Woolson  
Box 2061  
San Jose, Costa Rica

Dear Mrs. Woolson:

There are several items of news which I have to convey to you, but the first one will be a shock since I have to relate the passing of Mathew Kaszab in Brownsville, Texas. We have absolutely no details and we did not know where Mathew was since he left Nicaragua, nor even when he left there. The first news we had from him was a very faintly written post card which we received last week saying he was in Brownsville and would write later, but evidently the poor soul was never able to write as he passed away shortly after. We discovered this only by someone going through his effects, locating a letter from Mr. Holley, and then notifying the National Spiritual Assembly of his burial.

We are writing Sr. Wheelock to know if he knew anything about Mathew's travels and we are going to send the circular literature to Miss Mejía, believing that she will be conscientious about distributing it.

[signed] Nellie French

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<p><b>CLASS OF SERVICE</b></p> <p>This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.</p>	<h1 style="margin: 0;">WESTERN UNION</h1> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">A. N. WILLIAMS      NEWCOMB CARLTON      J. C. WILLEVER PRESIDENT      CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD      FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT</p>	<p><b>1201</b></p> <p><b>SYMBOLS</b></p> <p>DL = Day Letter</p> <p>NT = Overnight Telegram</p> <p>LC = Deferred Cable</p> <p>NLT = Cable Night Letter</p> <p>Ship Radiogram</p>
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The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

C10 24 NL=NEWYORK NY 14      1943 JAN 15 AM 7 59

HORACE HOLLEY=  
536 SHERIDAN RD

FAMILY MATHEW KASAB RESIDES PANAMA DONT KNOW ADDRESS NO  
KNOWN RELATIVES HERE SUGGEST YOU CABLE GUARDIAN IF  
YOU HAVE NOT COMMUNITY PRAYERS NEXT FEAST=  
NEWYORK SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY.

Telegram sent January 15, 1943 from Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New York to the National Spiritual Assembly secretary. Mathew's father Miklós (Nicholas) Kaszab was living in New York at the time but apparently knew nothing of his son's whereabouts. Mathew's mother Ilona Telkes Kaszab had passed away in 1931 in California. Mathew had several aunts and other extended family members in the U.S. There is no evidence available that any of them knew what had become of him.

During the month of January 1943 the National Spiritual Assembly with the assistance of friends, shocked and distressed at the news of Mathew's death, helped make arrangements for his burial and the distribution of his personal effects. There were also provisions made for the design and implementation of a headstone, a task taken on by Mrs. Loulie Mathews. Shortly thereafter attempts were made to unravel the mystery of his imprisonment and departure from Nicaragua.

January 15, 1943

Judge Oscar C. Dancy, County Judge, Brownsville, Texas

My dear Judge Dancy:  
Through the kindness of the president of the Wilmette State Bank, I was advised late yesterday afternoon of the telegram he had received from you reporting the death of Mathew Kaszab. Will greatly appreciate your kind cooperation in notifying a local mortician that friends of Mathew Kaszab will pay \$175.00 for funeral and a lot in non-sectarian local cemetery.

Mr. Kaszab was a member of our religious faith and arrived in Brownsville on his way from Nicaragua where he has been located for several years. We have been trying to get in touch with him since September through letters addressed in care of the American Consul at Managua, but without success.

We would appreciate very much a letter from the Police Department giving us all possible information about his general condition and the cause of his death.

Mr. Kaszab originally came from New York City although the family as I understand it had property holdings in Nicaragua which they have not been able to develop in recent years. A telegram from friends in New York states that his family is residing in Panama but the address is not known.

We wish to thank you very much for the kindness you have shown in this matter as well as members of the Police Department.

Very truly yours,  
[Horace Holley]  
Secretary

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From: Oscar C. Dancy, County Judge, Brownsville, Texas  
January 15, 1943

Wilmette State Bank, Wilmette, Illinois

Gentlemen:

Last night your telegram was telephoned to me as follows: "Answering wire Mathew Kaszab known to Mr. Doyle of Bahá'í Temple here. He will wire guarantee 175 dollars for burial purposes. Return New York draft to Bank for delivery to purchaser. We guarantee payment of Bahá'í Temple."

A few minutes thereafter Mr. Horace Holley wired me as follows: "Will greatly appreciate your kind cooperation in notifying a local mortician that friends of Mathew Kaszab will pay 175 dollars for funeral and a lot in nonsectarian local cemetery. Please return unendorsed draft to Bank."<sup>87</sup>

Both of these telegrams were turned over to Mr. Henry Gordon, Chief of Police. This morning I find that the unembalmed body of Mr. Kaszab was buried about 4:30 yesterday afternoon upon orders from the City Health Officer. Mr. Kaszab came from the tropics, and there was some fear of tropical disease. He was buried in City nonsectarian cemetery, and was given a \$50 funeral. Mr. Gordon, the City Marshal, whom I have known for many years as a just and honorable man, tells me that there was a full \$50 worth of expenses. He was buried by the Delta Funeral Home, morticians for the city. I am sure that full \$50 expenses were honestly incurred.

Under Texas laws the body cannot be exhumed without an order from the Grand Jury which will meet next month. I doubt if the health officers, both County and City, would agree to this, but his friends can rest assured that he did not receive a pauper's burial.

There was \$6 found on Mr. Kaszab's person, which has been turned over to the undertaker. I am enclosing the check for \$25 and will ask that the relatives or friends send check of \$44 to the Delta Funeral Home in this city, upon which the Chief of Police, Mr. Gordon, will forward to Mr. Holley or to anyone you suggest, the two suitcases with their contents.

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<sup>87</sup> An unused bank draft was found among Mathew's belongings, travel money that had been sent to him by the N.S.A. for his transportation from Brownsville to New York.

Yours very truly,  
Oscar C. Dancy, County Judge

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City of Brownsville, Texas

January 19, 1943

Mr. Horace Holley  
Wilmette, Illinois

Dear Sirs:

Judge Oscar C. Dancy of our local County (Cameron) has turned your letter of January 15 to me, with request that I give you information requested and I am glad to give you all information known to me regarding Mathew Kaszab.

On January 12, Mr. Charles Thielen, manager of the Plaza Hotel, reported to the Police Station that he had broken a door down to a room on the hotel in which a man lay very sick, that this sick man had not left his room for two days and did not answer knocks on his door. This party was then unconscious and Mr. Thielen was of the opinion that he had tuberculosis.

Our department immediately notified Dr. Cole, the City Physician and he in company of one of the City Nurses, Mrs. Sara Havre attended the patient, whom the doctor pronounced to be in a dying condition, his pulse being very weak and he being in a generally run down condition, being unable to partake of any nourishment, other than a few drops of water, as he was then unconscious and the Police Department provided an attendant to stay day and night with the patient.

This party had a leather suitcase and a small, square-cornered cheap quality hand case, containing papers and news clippings and among other things, a draft of twenty five dollars of the Wilmette State Bank payable to Mathew Kaszab, these suitcases, with contents are now here at the Police Station.

Dr. Cole investigated and found out that Mr. Kaszab, upon his arrival in Brownsville, on Dec. 30, 1942 had gone to the Mercy Hospital and informed the hospital authorities that he was suffering from malaria, but stayed there only a short while, and evidently took no treatment for his malaria. He then came to the Plaza Hotel and registered for a room, which he occupied.

Mr. Kaszab expired early on the evening of January 13 about 7:50 p.m. and his body was turned over to the Delta Funeral Home, where it was prepared for burial and he was buried the following afternoon in the Brownsville City Cemetery. The Delta Funeral Home has advised me that the complete fee for burial, including all services is fifty dollars.

The above information is about all that there is in this case and I believe, covers all the essential matters, concerned therewith, but should you desire any further information regarding some detail that may occur to you do not hesitate to call upon me, as I am at all times ready to serve you.

Yours truly,

[signed] Henry Gordon, Chief of Police  
Brownsville, Texas

It was during this time that the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, cabled the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada.

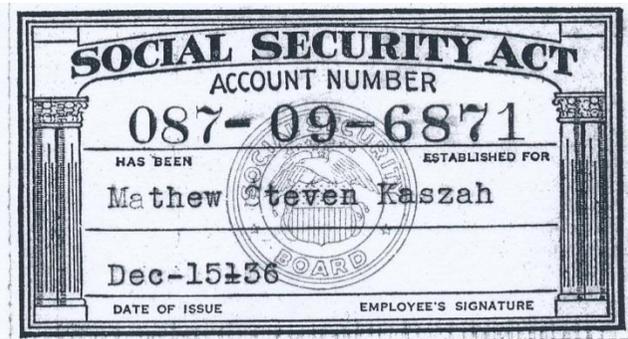
**Assure relatives of Mathew Kaszab of my heartfelt condolences and profound sympathy for the loss of this heroic pioneer. His services are unforgettable and abundantly rewarded. Loving prayers.**

NOTE THE INFORMATION CALLED FOR ON THE REVERSE SIDE

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS		MEDICAL PARTICULARS	
1. PLACE OF DEATH STATE OF TEXAS COUNTY OF <u>Cameron</u> CITY OR PRECINCT NO. <u>Brownsville</u>		TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH <span style="float: right;">816</span>	
2. FULL NAME OF DECEASED <u>Mathew Kaszab</u>		GIVE STREET AND NUMBER OR NAME OF INSTITUTION <u>Plaza Hotel, Market Square</u>	
LENGTH OF RESIDENCE WHERE DEATH OCCURRED YEARS _____ MONTHS _____ DAYS <u>15</u> (SOCIAL SECURITY NO. <u>087-09-6821</u> )		17. DATE OF DEATH <u>January 13</u> 194 <u>3</u>	
RESIDENCE OF (STREET AND NO. AND CITY) <u>Brownsville</u> COUNTY <u>Cameron</u> STATE <u>Texas</u>		18. I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I ATTENDED THE DECEASED FROM <u>Jan 12</u> 194 <u>3</u> TO <u>Jan 13</u> 194 <u>3</u> I LAST SAW HIM ALIVE ON <u>Jan 13</u> 194 <u>3</u> THE DEATH OCCURRED ON THE DATE STATED ABOVE AT <u>8</u> P.M.	
3. SEX <u>male</u>	4. COLOR OR RACE <u>white</u>	THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF DEATH WAS: <u>Exhaustion</u>	
5. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED (WRITE THE WORD)		DURATION	
6. DATE OF BIRTH <u>Sept 28 1905</u>			
7. AGE YEARS <u>37</u> MONTHS _____ DAYS _____ IF LESS THAN 1 DAY HOURS _____ MIN _____	8A. TRADE, PROFESSION OR KIND OF WORK DONE <u>none</u>	CONTRIBUTORY CAUSES WERE <u>Chronic malaria acquired in Managua</u>	
8B. INDUSTRY OR BUSINESS IN WHICH ENGAGED	9. BIRTHPLACE (STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Europe</u>		
10. NAME <u>Unknown</u>	11. BIRTHPLACE (STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Unknown</u>	IF NOT DUE TO DISEASE, SPECIFY WHETHER: ACCIDENT, SUICIDE, OR HOMICIDE	
12. MAIDEN NAME <u>Unknown</u>	13. BIRTHPLACE (STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Unknown</u>		
14. SIGNATURE <u>Police Dept.</u>	15. PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL <u>City Cem.</u> TEXAS	DATE OF OCCURRENCE <u>Jan 14 1943</u>	
16. SIGNATURE <u>DeLa Funeral Home</u>	17. SIGNATURE <u>B. L. Cole</u>	MANNER OR MEANS IF RELATED TO OCCUPATION OF DECEASED, SPECIFY	
ADDRESS <u>Brownsville</u> TEXAS	ADDRESS <u>Brownsville</u> TEXAS	M.D. COR. TEXAS	
20. FILE NUMBER <u>43-41</u>	FILE DATE <u>1-15-1943</u>	SIGNATURE OF LOCAL REGISTRAR <u>E. Williams</u>	POSTOFFICE ADDRESS <u>Brownsville TEXAS</u>

Mathew Kaszab certificate of death  
January 13, 1943

Further correspondence between the N.S.A. secretary and institutions in Brownsville concern payment of burial expenses for Mathew and expenses due the Plaza Hotel in the amount of \$25.01 for care of Mathew Kaszab during his sickness and subsequent death. Mathew's suitcases are received by Horace Holley on March 3, 1943. The N.S.A. sends all known information to the New York Spiritual Assembly for their archives as he was a member of their community, with authorization given the secretary to "dispose of the papers he finds in Mathew Kaszab's suitcase to the proper sources." One item, copied here, was Mathew's social security card. It can be surmised that the newspaper clippings and papers might have included articles that Mathew was allowed to keep when in Nicaragua, most of his possessions having been confiscated and his passport never returned to him by the Nicaraguan government.



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**Mrs. Louie Mathews**

*Gasparilla Inn  
Boca Grande, Florida  
January 22, 1943*

*Dear Horace [Holley],*

*I am horrified at Mathew's death. If ever there was a martyr it was this boy. He encountered every kind of obstacle when he worked in the gold mines at night and tried to teach the children in the daytime, amid the crudest of people, with improper food. It was here that he got malaria. This was the beginning of the tropical diseases he acquired that caused his death.*

*I am writing Nellie [French] and asking if the Inter-American Committee could not either get out a little tribute to Mathew or have a headstone placed in Brownsville, Texas. I would like to pay for this.*

*Perhaps I know him better than anyone since he went out to work in Nicaragua while I was chairman of the Inter-American.*

*Yours sincerely,  
Loulie*



Mrs. Loulie Albee Mathews was an intrepid travel teacher in her own right, devoted to the Cause, unafraid of physical challenges of which she had many, and cognizant of her own need for spiritual development and to understand the meaning of true sacrifice. It is perhaps her personal struggle to become what she considered a true Bahá'í that caused her to love and appreciate Mathew, as well as sharing his desire to serve in Latin America. Her story has been told in *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, which she dedicated "to the Latin American Pioneers and the Latin American Bahá'ís." Although by one account she and her husband visited Nicaragua during their 1936-37 travels to South America, Central America, and Mexico, she herself makes no mention of such a visit in her autobiography *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*<sup>88</sup> nor has evidence been found in the various Inter-America reports or in her letters that she did so, making Mathew the first known person to have either traveled or lived in Nicaragua for the Bahá'í Cause. Like Martha Root in 1919, she visited Panama, and was unable even to visit the capital city of Costa Rica stating that "when we reached the harbor of Costa Rica with its beautiful panorama of islands, time was too short for the train ride to San Jose....in the same abbreviated manner we reached three Islands – Trinidad, Jamaica and Cuba...when the journeys ended we settled down to the business of how best to send out pioneers to Latin America" and thus began her work with the Inter-America Committee with just that objective in mind. Loulie served as its Chairman. One of the first cables to be sent to the Guardian, and his reply:

*Ask prayers Inter-America work  
Spanish translations delayed  
Panama and Nicaragua posts filled*

To which the Guardian replied:

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<sup>88</sup> Mathews, Loulie Albee, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, Naturegraph Publishers Inc. 1986

*Delighted. Praying that remaining  
obstacles will be removed. Loving gratitude  
(signed) Shoghi*

In that early cable, the mention of Panama and Nicaragua meant Mathew; later Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver.

Loulie Mathews arranged and paid for Mathew Kaszab's headstone, and wrote the article about him that appeared in Vol. IX of *Bahá'í World*, the very volume Mathew had asked to be able to review before any more articles were published about him or activities in Nicaragua. On February 18, 1943 Loulie reported to Horace Holley that "The marble works of Brownsville, Texas take no orders beyond March 15<sup>th</sup>. Their two marble cutters will then be inducted into the army. After that all headstones must be done in San Antonio and wait their turn. The price then will be several hundred dollars in excess of the present plan. They assure me that the stone can be cut, placed and photographed in May, in time for the Convention." In consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly through its secretary, wording for the headstone was decided. At that time, it was common to place the Greatest Name, a special and sacred insignia, on headstones. Later, the Guardian instructed the Bahá'ís not to use the Greatest Name for that purpose.<sup>89</sup> Bahá'í headstones sometimes carry the nine-pointed star as a symbol of the Bahá'í Faith, although that is not required. The creation of the headstone as directed and paid for by Mrs. Loulie Mathews was done by Charles Lucas at East Commerce St., San Antonio after considerable correspondence, as "this firm alone capable of engraving our insignia." Mr. Lucas had agents in Brownsville and the stone was completed. *Bahá'í News* No. 165 of September 1943 carried a photograph of the headstone noting that it was erected "through the generous action of Mrs. E.R. Mathews."

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<sup>89</sup> Shoghi Effendi (on behalf of), *Directives from the Guardian*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, India 1973 p.79: "In regard to your question regarding the use of the Greatest Name on tombstones of Bahá'ís, the Guardian considers this too sacred to be placed in such a position in general use, and the friends should not use it on their tombstones. They can use quotations from the Teachings, if they wish to, but not the Greatest Name. Naturally, if anyone has already used it, it does not matter."



Loulie later reported in “Teaching in Latin America”<sup>90</sup> that “Mathew arrived [to Nicaragua] in 1939 and taught in the cities of Managua, Corinto, Granada, and in the mines, [and] Bluefields. His untimely death in 1943 was due to the hardships he had endured.”

From *Bahá'í News* No. 160, February 1943:

#### Inter-America News

The members of the Inter-America Committee are deeply grieved to announce the passing of Mathew Kaszab, that faithful and energetic pioneer in the service of Bahá'u'lláh. No details have as yet reached us beyond the fact that Mathew was enroute home and reached the end of his earthly journey in Brownsville, Texas. Mathew's service was fraught with many trials and much

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<sup>90</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, *The Bahá'í Centenary 1844-1944: A record of America's Response to Bahá'u'lláh's Call to the Realization of the Oneness of Mankind: To Commemorate the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of the Bahá'í Faith*. Compiled by the Bahá'í Publishing Committee, Wilmette Illinois 1944 p. 196

suffering and the welcome which must have been his as he ascended to the Abhá Kingdom must have been such as is accorded to a martyr in the Faith! Nicaragua will have been quickened by his presence and the believers whom he has left there will ever keep his memory alive.

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786 Chester Ave., San Marino, California  
Jan. 17, 1943

Sr. Henry Wheelock  
Banco Nacional  
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Sr. Wheelock,  
Some time ago Mathew Kaszab gave us your name in connection with his work in Managua and I am now writing you to seek information about Mathew and the time he left Nicaragua if it is in your power to give it to me.

I had not heard from Mathew for some months until last week we had a very brief message written on a postcard which announced his arrival in Brownsville, Texas and saying he would write later. Now we learn through sources in Brownsville that poor Mathew passed away there. We have no details whatever and only were able to learn of this because in going over his effects someone found a letter from the National Spiritual Assembly to him and a check on the Wilmette Bank which had not been cashed.

The President of the bank in Brownsville wired our national secretary to ask if the check could be cashed to pay for the internment of the body and this permission was given. But it is doubtful if we can get any information from that end and I am now writing you to ask what you may know of Mathew. Was he ill before he left and when did he leave? Also did he leave by rail or how was he travelling? Also we would very much appreciate a list of the people who had declared their faith in the Bahá'í Revelation. In fact anything which you can write us will be very gratefully received. We know how many difficulties Mathew underwent and we look upon his devoted services to the Bahá'í Faith as among those whose life was truly one of martyr.

Assuring you of our very great appreciation of any information which you can send us.

I remain – with sincere gratitude  
[Nellie French] Sec'y Inter-American Committee

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Managua, Nic. Jan. 25 1943

[Below is the original handwritten letter in English, from Mr. Wheelock, cryptically composed. Not only is Mr. Wheelock being very careful about what he expresses in writing; his English is directly and literally translated from his native Spanish.]

Dear Mrs. French:

Answering your letter of Jan. 17, I inform you that defunct Mr. Kaszab came to my cognition through Dr. Juan G. Aburto who brought him over my place and introduced him.

As Theosophist I took great interest in the new literature he offered, which I qualify of Belles-Letters because it emphasizes the aesthetic aspect of the future and considered it valuable to the extent that signed together with Blanca Mejía, specially for the Most Great Peace and federation of nations (of America) that it contemplates as sure prophecy for the immediate hereafter.

Some cogitated his work sensate others found him a rare specimen of humanity and those connected with creeds thought him ominous and inauspicious. It can not be described the impression your notice produced in me, so unexpected.

In this emergency, please seek counsel with legal authority which usually presupposes knowledge and weightier [illegible], as I don't know about his health or date of departure, whether he suffered an organic malady or not.

Respectfully yours,

[signed] Henry Wheelock

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January 23, 1943

Mr. Henry Gordon  
Chief of Police  
Brownsville, Texas

We are very much obliged to you for your kindness in giving us the information about Mathew Kaszab written in your letter of January 19<sup>th</sup>. I can only express deep regret that we were unable to act soon enough to give Mr. Kaszab a better funeral service although we do appreciate what was done by the Delta Funeral Home.

It is also regrettable that Mr. Kaszab did not remain in the Mercy Hospital long enough for a complete check up which would have disclosed the real condition and perhaps led to some treatment with a promise of recovery.

It is evident to us that your Department went out of its way to show every consideration and extend all possible help and I wish to express the gratitude of Mr. Kaszab's friends for your kind services.

The personal effects in the way of books, papers and other documents can be sent here, but his immediate family not being available, there is no need to send any clothing or other possessions of that type.

Very truly yours,

[Mr. Horace Holley] Secretary

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Below is English translation of letter written in Spanish by Blanca Victoria Mejía Arauz, the first Nicaraguan Bahá'í and devoted friend and admirer of Mathew Kaszab. The letter was most likely translated by Mr. Octavio Illescas, Spanish-speaking member of the Inter-America Committee, who resided in Los Angeles but was Peruvian. He and his wife enrolled in the Faith in 1940. Because of known interception of mail by the Nicaraguan government, the following letter was evidently given by hand to Maria T. de Argüello, who sent it from Mexico, as a note accompanies the original letter in Spanish written on *July 10, 1943* saying that Mrs. Argüello's trip had been delayed and therefore the sending of this letter that Blanquita [Blanca Mejía] had given her had been delayed as well, and begging that the letter be answered as soon as possible. Some of the original translation has been slightly changed by this compiler for further clarification and directly from the original in Spanish.

Managua, Nicaragua, Jan. 31, 1943  
[letter was delayed and not delivered until July 1943]

[to Mrs. Nellie French]  
786 Chester Ave.  
San Marino, California

Very distinguished Madam,

It is impossible for me to describe and explain the immense grief which the death of Mathew Kaszab has caused us, and our sorrow is even greater as we consider all the circumstances which surrounded his death. But only God knows how we struggled to save him and how we tried to communicate with you and with the president [sic] of the Bahá'ís or with Mrs. [Frances B.] Stewart, but all was impossible as they did not permit our letters to get through.

I wrote particularly to the Spiritual Assembly of Costa Rica so that they might inform you, but perhaps they, too, could not reach you.

As I said in one letter, which I could not send, Mr. Kaszab was to travel to the U.S. on September 28. He was very well but he did not wish us to see him off because of certain conditions. So it was in the belief that he had gone that we wrote to Mrs. Stewart. But 18 days later [approximately October 16, 1942] we learned that he was still here and that he was being held in prison in solitary confinement. You can imagine how great was our sorrow...we went to the American Minister but nothing was done for [Mathew]. We spoke to several influential persons and only one dared to talk with the President and he found him very ill disposed, so everything continued. When we learned that he was seriously ill, and we went to the Military Hospital, the impact was terrible, to see him almost dead and so thin as if he were a Christ. There [in the hospital] they gave him some remedies which helped him but before he was completely healthy, they took him again to the prison.

We took to him what we could, money and fruit, but since he was held in solitary confinement we could not see him.

So that was all...until the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, almost in a state of agony, they shipped him by plane to the United States, and this through the efforts of a friend, and all of this just now became known. They told us he had been moved to another jail and this was a lie. They say that he left me a note saying goodbye to all of us but they did not give it to me.

These are the crimes that remain hidden.

Mr. Kaszab suffered greatly in prison! It is a frightening place and the food is very bad. He was an innocent martyr and his only crime, they say, was certain misinformation that he gave concerning Nicaragua and which was published in *The Bahá'í World*.<sup>91</sup>

This is the painful story.

I am sending you some prose that I wrote in his memory which they did not wish to publish here because the press might be suspended.

Without more to say, and begging you to convey this to Mrs. T. and Mrs. Stewart,

Sincere greetings,  
Affectionate friend,  
[signed] Blanca Mejía

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Below is translation of a letter written in Spanish to Blanca Mejía from Octavio Illescas dated February 9, 1943 on behalf of the Inter-America Committee asking for information regarding Mathew's last days in Nicaragua.

Miss Blanca Mejía  
Managua, Nicaragua

Distinguished Miss [Mejía],

On behalf of Mrs. Nellie French it gives me pleasure to return the kind greetings from you and your children's class, sending you at the same time many congratulations and hoping that progress goes quickly forward in the study of our glorious Faith.

How blessed is the work to which you have dedicated yourself, to guide these tender minds to the Light which will illuminate the world! The Inter-America Committee to which I belong has admired the photograph of this intelligent children's class.

This Committee has received with sorrow the news of the death of our faithful and enthusiastic pioneer Mathew Kaszab, just a few days after his return to this country. We are trying to obtain all of the data

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<sup>91</sup> It was an uncomplimentary article in *Bahá'í World* Vol. VIII about which Mathew had complained, saying it was inaccurate and which apparently fell into the hands of a suspicious authority.

possible regarding his last days and we would very much appreciate that you send us an account of the days that he was with the Bahá'ís of Nicaragua, before starting back to the United States.

Because of your good work we will send the Nicaraguan Bahá'í group books and literature that we have available and we hope through letters to have the pleasure of strengthening further the ties that bind us.

The Inter-America Committee sends you its fraternal greetings.

On behalf of the corresponding secretary Mrs. Nellie French,

[initialed] O.J.

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Below is translation of letter written from Managua, dated March 11, 1943 from Blanca Mejía answering Mr. Illesca's query. Like Mr. Wheelock's answer to the Inter-America Committee, above, her words are cryptic, as she is obviously aware of the probability that her letters are intercepted by the Nicaraguan government. She does not use Mathew's name and instead of saying "prisoner" she uses the term "professor." She refers to the prison in Managua simply as "there" and the dots in her letter signify what she was not free to write. She does not use the word "Bahá'í" but rather "Ahmad."

Mr. Octavio Illescas  
San Marino California

Dear friend;

As I promised in my last letter today I will tell you what you want to know.

He was there as professor de Ahmad for three months. There he became sick; that is the illness he acquired in that place, became very grave [serious]. They gave him some medical care and then he continued in the same place. One of his hands was paralyzed.

Our suffering for all this was very great and although we did all we could to help him it was impossible.....

During only very few days we could see him, my sister, two friends, and I because the others had to.....

I was the one that saw him most, because I am that way, nothing can stop me. When I want to do something in favor of humanity (nothing can stop me). I fear nobody.

Please tell Mrs. Nelly F. that her letter is very nice and that I am very grateful for what she tells me.....and that she should not send yet. There are always wolves and lambs.

With regards for your wife and family I greet you very attentively,

With fraternal love,

***Bitterness***

In memory of Mathew Kaszab – a new saint

He had the gaze of a child. At times as I contemplated his blue eyes so full of innocent melancholy, my sense that human passions did not reach him was confirmed. I was convinced that visions such as snakes writhing at his feet never dared to sully that pure soul, that trusting heart, so full of humility and kindness for all beings...And paradoxically, that pure man, that saintly man, who like another Jesus Christ suffers martyrdom...and the terrible beast, perhaps called a monster from the underworld, smiles at the agony of the martyr...later, too late now, pious hands manage to rescue him, and by saving him lift his feeble body into the skies that ironically, will fall to the land of freedom ... to die among those who are free, he who was the victim of oppression.

\*\*\*\*\*

***Amargor***

A la memoria de Mathew Kaszab – un nuevo santo

Tenía el mirar como el de un niño. A veces cuando contemplaba sus ojos azules tan llenos de melancólica inocencia se afirmaba mi presentimiento de que las pasiones humanas no llegaban hasta el...Convencíame de que las visiones como serpientes se retorcían a sus pies sin atreverse jamás a mancillar aquella alma tan pura, aquel corazón ingenuo, tan lleno de mansedumbre y de bondad para todos los seres...Y como una paradoja, aquel hombre puro, aquel hombre santo, cual otro Jesucristo es entregado al martirio...y la terrible fiera que diríase monstruo del averno sonrío ante la agonía del mártir...luego, muy tarde ya...manos piadosas por fin logran rescatarlo, y por salvarlo definitivamente levantan por los aires aquel cuerpo exangüe que como una ironía va a caer a tierra de libertad...a morir entre libres el que fuera víctima de la opresión.

Blanca Victoria Mejía  
Managua, Nicaragua 31 de enero 1943

786 Chester Ave. San Marino, California  
August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943

Srta. Blanca Victoria Mejía  
4a Calle N.E. No. 505  
Managua, Nicaragua

Our very precious friend,

Your letter of the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 1943 has finally come to our hands and we wish to express our heartfelt appreciation of your efforts to assist us and that dear one<sup>92</sup> who has passed on during this time of sorrow.

Much that was not understood before has now come to light and we can only find comfort in the thought that the life of such a devoted soul must find its due reward in the promised Nearness to God.

Some months ago we received a photograph of a group in which we know you and your sister form part, but we would like to know the names of the others and also if they are members of the family or just acquaintances. We would be very grateful to know this as the photograph is very fine and we are very proud of it.

The beautiful tribute which you have written especially in memory of our dear one will be translated and sent to the friends in this country and abroad.

We have just had a visit from Mrs. Caswell and we hope that she may see you on her return to Panama in the very near future. I cannot give you the date as this is not allowed but she will see you if it at all possible. That will depend on the length of the stay her plane makes.

We are always keeping you and your sister [Evangelina] very close in our hearts and we hope that someday soon we shall be able to see you or know more about your work and your school.

With loving greetings from all the members of the Committee,

Faithfully,  
[Nellie French]

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<sup>92</sup> Observing caution, having taken the lead from Blanca Mejía, Mathew's name is not mentioned in this letter.



**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.

Translation of letter dated September 9, 1943 from Blanca Mejia, answering Nellie French's letter of August 1, 1943. She keeps her writing obscure, underlining he when speaking of Mathew:

My dear and sweet friend:

It has been a great pleasure for me to receive your affection and beautiful letter. How much I appreciate all your phrases so full of kindness and sweetness; they are a reflection of your beautiful soul. And for which, both my sisters and I, we feel great sympathy and true affection for you, my noble little absent sister.

Hopefully the day we have the happiness of knowing each other is not far away. For us it would be a great pleasure to receive you and from now on we place ourselves at your esteemed orders, as well as our humble little house.

I also have an immense desire to go to that beautiful and admired country. And no time would be better than for the great celebration of the Centenary. What happiness it would be for me to be able to go then. May God and our glorious Bahá'u'lláh help me fulfill this GREAT YEARNING!

I had the gratifying joy of seeing Mrs. Caswell because her card came just before the plane passed by, and I barely had time to go to the airport, as it went, I was unable to tell anyone, due to lack of time. We talked about 10 minutes. Everything was hurried.

The picture that you are asking about was more or less 10 days before he made his frustrated trip; it was taken at the home of a very good family and they loved him very much, and they even gave him a farewell lunch. The man who appears there is Don Toño Bonilla, his son and his two daughters. They are Marta and Aurita Bonilla and young Toño, like his father. The white-haired lady is a friend of ours and also of his.

As for the rest, nobody was to blame; he had the BOOK<sup>93</sup> in his hand to serve as a safe passage to enter the United States. Well-recognized is the honor of all in that. So it is only because of his LAST NAME, that's the first thing, and then ... they made a mountain out of a molehill. Thus the innocent perish ...

I have received a letter from Costa Rica, and likewise from John E. [Eichenauer] from the army, and so we are all always united.

With regards from all the friends and my family,  
A fraternal embrace,

Blanca Mejía

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March 15, 1943

Note to the Bahá'í Inter-America Committee:

You will notice in the attached letter of May 4, 1942 that Mathew asked me for another Spanish Esslemont, but inasmuch as he also said his books had been confiscated, I was at a loss to know the reason for this, so did not send him the book, knowing that all mail is examined and if this book were confiscated, another one would also be lost – yet I wondered why he asked for it. Here, I made a mistake as I should have had enough confidence in him to know he would not ask for it unless urgently needed. I thought he was about ready to leave Nicaragua, from the tone of his letter, and I figured he could mail an Esslemont to his friends himself after his return to the U.S. But as it later developed, he did not leave for several months later, and now I am sorry I disappointed him by not sending the book.

I know he had his tickets for transportation home several months ago, which your Committee sent him. He remained there much longer than I expected he would, showing how heroic and self-sacrificing he was, and I feel sure that much was accomplished during the last few months of his stay on account of his faithfulness up to the last minute. He started out to make “bigger and better landmarks,” and left his shrine in Brownsville, Texas – the biggest landmark of all – in the biggest State also.

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<sup>93</sup> This could have been the Bible, it could have been a Bahá'í book. Mathew had apparently tried to make himself look as unobtrusive as possible in order to leave the country without incident. Blanca makes reference here to the trouble with his suspicious-sounding Eastern-European last name, probably taken to be German.

The trouble with me is that I do not compliment people while they are alive, and our choicest people are never fully appreciated until after they are gone, although we see and know of their good qualities all the time. I now wish I had written more letters to him, and made them more complimentary. I did write him in January via air mail telling him to be sure and visit us a while on his way to New York and expected at that time to express appreciation for his pioneering successes, hardships and disappointments.

In sincere sorrow,  
[signed] Virgie Preston

P.S. Will you please deliver the message to Miss Juliet Thompson, as requested in the two letters attached?<sup>94</sup> I know that Mathew will thank you from the 'Abha Kingdom if you will. I neglected to do this thinking Mathew would soon be home and could do it for himself. V.P.

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Mrs. Virgie Preston of Washington, D.C. had been a faithful correspondent to Mathew during the early days of his sojourn to Central America. Like the other women in his life, Nellie French, Loulie Mathews, Blanca Mejía, and even to some degree Frances B. Stewart, she felt a tender affection for Mathew in spite of his shortcomings, and agonized over his sufferings and his death. On March 16, 1943 she sent to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada copies of "a number of very interesting letters from our heroic pioneer, the late Mathew Kaszab, while he was in Panama and Nicaragua." It is largely due to her having kept those letters, as well as through the letters of the Inter-America Committee, that we have been able to glimpse Mathew's thought process and to appreciate his fierce commitment to carry out the wishes of Shoghi Effendi, staying firm even in the most dire of circumstances, as we have witnessed through those letters. Mrs. Preston also sent a large envelope full of newspaper clippings describing his many activities in Panama in August, 1939 to Mrs. Sara Kinney at Hotel Sir Francis Drake, San Francisco, Calif. Some of those clippings were also obtained through records of the Inter-America Committee at the U.S. Bahá'í national archives. Mrs. Preston reiterates in her letter of March 16 that "I am deeply grieved to think that Mathew's services in Bahá'í work in this world are at an end, but take consolation in the promise that souls in the invisible realm have greater capacity to help for they are the "real life" of this world." She also has the foresight to say that "I hope an Assembly will soon be formed in Brownsville, Texas in Mathew's memory" and asks if there is a Bahá'í pioneer there. She presumes he died of malaria, as he wrote several times that he was in the hospital with it. "I have heard through others that he had been in prison as a suspect of a fire that happened in a building where he was employed. He, himself did not write me a thing about this, and I just heard it a few days ago. If he did write me about it, the letter was intercepted by the censors."

She says, lamenting that she didn't write to him more often because of being "absorbed in my own affairs" that

*Mathew was always patient, poised and radiantly acquiescent, even when sick or hungry, and all Bahá'ís should become 100% better from his memory, and it teaches me in particular to have more love and more concern for the welfare of the pioneers.*

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<sup>94</sup> Letters referenced by Mrs. Preston are dated April 1941 and May 4, 1942 and are found chronologically, above.

*Bahá'í News* No. 166 of November 1943 carries the note that “on her return to Panama, Louise Caswell wrote at length, and touchingly, of her visit to Mathew Kaszab’s grave in Brownsville, Texas. ‘An imposing Bahá’í stone’ distinguished Mathew’s resting place from the many other graves marked ‘only by wooden crosses or just a stick.’ (p. 6). In Managua the word of arrival had been delivered in time for a beloved little Nicaraguan believer<sup>95</sup> to meet the plane and have every precious moment for a mutually inspiring visit. This valiant Bahá’í has ‘a quenchless enthusiasm for the Cause, and is fanning the immortal flame which has been lit in Nicaragua.’”

### **What makes a martyr?**

***O Son of Being! Seek a martyr’s death in My path, content with My pleasure and thankful for that which I ordain, that thou mayest repose with Me beneath the canopy of majesty behind the tabernacle of glory. – Bahá’u’lláh, from The Hidden Words***

It might be said that for someone to be called a martyr in the Bahá’í Cause, it is dependent as much on how the individual lived as on the circumstances surrounding his or her death. There were two people designated as American martyrs by the Guardian, both women, and both dying in foreign lands. The “first and distinguished” is Keith Ransom-Kehler (1876-1933) who traveled tirelessly for the Faith and who died of smallpox in Esfahan, Iran, where she stayed at the behest of Shoghi Effendi; among the few American women who served in the cradle of the Faith. Another is May Maxwell (1870-1940), who passed away just days after arriving in Argentina; an invalid, already advanced in age, and in poor bodily health. This heroic act culminated a lifetime of self-abnegation and service to the Cause, under the guidance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian, and in strict obedience to them. A third woman, although not known to have been designated by the Guardian as a “martyr” is the “incomparable” Martha Root (1872-1939), named posthumously a Hand of the Cause of God, who died in Hawaii of a debilitating illness after twenty solid years of nonstop travel all over the globe for the Faith, putting herself at risk in unknown situations, and sacrificing any kind of material comfort.

*To Keith Ransom-Kehler, whose dust sleeps in far-off Isfáhán; to Martha Root, fallen in her tracks on an island in the midmost heart of the ocean; to May Maxwell, lying in solitary glory in the southern outpost of the Western Hemisphere—to these three heroines of the Formative Age of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, they who now labor so assiduously for its expansion and establishment, owe a debt of gratitude which future generations will not fail to adequately recognize.*

(Cable from the Guardian dated April 15, 1940 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada cited in *Messages to America*)

In a cablegram dated October 30, 1933 and likewise published in *Messages to America* referring to Keith Ransom-Kehler, Shoghi Effendi wrote:

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<sup>95</sup> Blanca Mejia, the first Nicaraguan Bahá’í

*Keith's precious life offered up in sacrifice to beloved Cause in Bahá'u'lláh's native land. On Persian soil, for Persia's sake, she encountered, challenged and fought the forces of darkness with high distinction, indomitable will, unswerving, exemplary loyalty. The mass of her helpless Persian brethren mourns the sudden loss of their valiant emancipator. American believers grateful and proud of the memory of their first and distinguished martyr.*<sup>96</sup>

Similarly, in a cablegram dated March 3, 1940 upon the passing of May Maxwell, the Guardian conveyed to the Bahá'í community "To sacred tie her signal services had forged, (the) priceless honor (of a) martyr's death (is) now added."<sup>97</sup>

It is not within the scope of this piece to compare the martyrdom of the Persian Bahá'ís who have given their lives as a direct consequence of their beliefs in their own homeland, with the heroism of the early pioneers and travel-teachers serving throughout the world. Consider the Persian mother who when confronted with the severed head of her murdered husband, said "What I have given to God I will not take back"<sup>98</sup> or a twelve-year old Rouhu'lláh who accepted to be slain after witnessing the murder of his beloved father Varqá. Countless Persian Bahá'ís have suffered agonizing humiliation, terrorization, torture and death in the 175 years of the history of the Bahá'í Faith in the land of its birth, and the persecution and oppression of the Bahá'í community continues to this day. Though many of the early American pioneers suffered greatly, and probably would have given their lives for the Cause of Baha'u'llah had they been asked to, it was only on occasion a direct result of the religion they professed that they endured hardships, sickness, and even death. Surely they must have suffered from a lack of understanding as to their mission, and, in the case of some of them, from afflictions that beset them as a result of inhospitable and even hazardous climates, substandard nutrition, and lack of access to proper medical care. Mathew suffered in Nicaragua because of all the aforementioned reasons. Had he remained in Panama, among friends and with relatively regular communication with people interested in his welfare, as well as access to more sophisticated resources, he probably would have lived, even flourished. With absolute confidence in the Institutions of the Faith, he obediently if not joyously, went to serve in Nicaragua. From the moment he arrived, he was assailed by misfortune.

The Guardian conveyed to the North American Bahá'í community in 1938, in his timeless letter known as *The Advent of Divine Justice*, to which Mathew had access, that it was through their "living sacrifice" rather than through their death that the American believers must usher in the "promised World Order."

*The community of the organized promoters of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the American continent—the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of an heroic Age, who by their death proclaimed the birth of that Faith—must, in turn, usher in, not by their death but through living sacrifice, that promised World Order, the shell ordained to enshrine that priceless jewel, the world civilization, of which the Faith itself is the sole begetter. While its sister communities are bending beneath the tempestuous winds that beat upon them from every side, this community, preserved by the immutable decrees of the omnipotent Ordainer and deriving continual sustenance from the mandate with which the Tablets of the Divine Plan have invested it, is now*

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<sup>96</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* – selected Letters and Cablegrams addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America 1932-1946, U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1947 ed.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Honnold, Annamarie, Ed., *Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, George Ronald, Oxford, 1991 p. 93

*busily engaged in laying the foundations and in fostering the growth of those institutions which are to herald the approach of the Age destined to witness the birth and rise of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.*<sup>99</sup>

Can one say that Mathew was a martyr? Unofficially, conceivably he was. Officially, as recognized by the Guardian, perhaps he was not. Nor was the “dauntless” Lydia Zamenhoff, who gave willingly and profusely of her energies for the good of the Cause, a Cause she espoused after meeting Martha Root. During World War II, a time of struggle the world over, in spite of the efforts of the American Bahá'í community to keep Lydia in the United States, her visa was not renewed and she was sent back to Poland, and thereafter to the gas chambers with thousands of her Jewish compatriots because she was assumed to be Jewish. There have been many more in several countries and in the history of service to the Cause, who have sacrificed and essentially lived a shortened life while serving the interests of their beloved Faith. If the following words are to be taken literally, Mathew was indeed a martyr. He not only barely crossed the border between two countries before death overtook him, but was imprisoned for a prolonged period while innocently struggling to survive in Nicaragua.

*Bahá'u'lláh himself testifies: “They that have forsaken their country in the path of God and subsequently ascended unto his presence, such souls shall be blessed by the concourse on High and their names recorded by the pen of Glory among such as have laid down their lives as martyrs in the path of God, the help in peril, the self-subsistent.”* (from a September 19, 1972 message to the Bahá'ís of the World from the Universal House of Justice regarding the deaths of three Iranian pioneers in The Philippines).

*Mathew's service was fraught with many trials and much suffering and the welcome which must have been his as he ascended to the Abhá Kingdom must have been such as is accorded to a martyr in the Faith! Nicaragua will have been quickened by his presence and the believers whom he has left there will ever keep his memory alive. - Bahá'í News No. 160, February 1943*

In *The Bahá'í World* Vol. IX Mathew's death was addressed as follows:

*The martyrdom of Mrs. May Maxwell in Buenos Aires, and that of Mathew Kaszab, who died in Texas of the effects of hardship and suffering sustained in Nicaragua, are the pledge that the trusteeship conferred by 'Abdu'l-Bahá will be fulfilled throughout the Americas, forming an inter-continental basis from which in future will be launched the spiritual crusade to achieve the oneness of mankind and the triumph of the Bahá'í teachings throughout the world. (p. 88)*

Mathew Kaszab identified strongly with the earliest figures in the Bahá'í Faith, and felt deeply the sacrifice of the Bab Himself, martyred at the young age of not quite 31 in Tabriz, Persia. He was inspired by the stories of the Dawnbreakers; of Quddus, Mulla Husayn, and all of the very earliest of the followers of The Bab. According to Loulie Mathews, who wrote the “In Memoriam” found in Vol. IX of *The Bahá'í World*, full text of which follows, “The heroic age of the Bab and the martyrs absorbed his mind and *The Dawnbreakers* became his constant companion...His short life, filled with suffering and pain, was offered to Bahá'u'lláh.”

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<sup>99</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL 1990 p. 7

The grief of those that had been corresponding with and who knew Mathew, was evident. Some of them, in spite of their personal distress at his loss, pulled up their bootstraps and got down to the business of finding someone to take his place as a resident pioneer in Nicaragua.

### **The aftermath**

By February 1943 the Inter-America Committee, with the assistance of Gayle Woolson who was pioneering in Costa Rica, was actively trying to replace the great void left by Mathew, by sending another pioneer to Nicaragua. The cost of living in Nicaragua was estimated to be about \$50-\$60 a month. Two Costa Rican Bahá'ís offered to fulfill this role, but it was determined after some consideration that it was not a good idea to send another pioneer to Nicaragua "at this time." Correspondence dated September 9, 1943 from the Inter-America Committee secretary Mrs. Nellie French to Ms. Woolson states that "the place we feel most anxious about is naturally Nicaragua where Srta. Mejía says a cautious teacher would be of assistance, but you know conditions there and we do not wish to urge you as we are not sure if you would care to go there." Louise Caswell was able to make a trip to visit Blanca Mejía in Managua, but no resident pioneer was able or willing to go there until November of 1944 when Dr. Malcolm King arrived for a bare nine months, departing in August 1945. He was a Jamaican citizen and traveled to Nicaragua on a British passport.<sup>100</sup> In the late '40's and into the '50's there were increased activities, and enrollments among the Nicaraguan population. Dr. Edris Rice-Wray apparently traveled to Nicaragua around 1950 because there is record of Louise Caswell visiting her there in January.<sup>101</sup> However, it wasn't until approximately 1954 that U.S. citizens Mr. Donald and Mrs. Mignon Witzel settled in Managua and later in Masaya. Ruth Yancey (later Pringle) also worked in Nicaragua and stayed first in the Managua area and then on the Atlantic Coast. In 1960 the Witzels moved to Panama and then to Venezuela, where Mr. Witzel served as a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas. In 1958 Mr. Hooper Dunbar arrived likewise from Los Angeles, settled on the Atlantic Coast, served on the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Nicaragua, and represented Nicaragua at the first International Convention and election of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa in 1963. Mr. Dunbar continued to live and travel in Nicaragua and Latin America as an Auxiliary Board member, then a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas, and in 1988 was elected to the Universal House of Justice. Mr. Robert Wilson arrived to the Atlantic Coast in 1968 with his wife Kristy and young son Rainn, where he lived until 1971. Pioneers to Nicaragua also arrived by 1960 from Cuba, Panama, and Costa Rica.

In 1946 the first local Spiritual Assembly was elected in Managua, the last among the Central American communities to achieve this goal. Blanca Mejía, about whom the Inter-America Committee felt most concerned because she was a faithful believer and taught the Faith wherever she lived, was encouraged by Mr. Ed Wharton, the husband of her niece Mireya Armijo, to attend the Centennial of the Bahá'í Faith in May of 1944 in Wilmette, a trip he helped finance.<sup>102</sup> Gayle Woolson accompanied her as translator and friend. This was the highlight of Blanca's Bahá'í life. She remained a devoted believer until her passing in 1975.

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<sup>100</sup> *Bahá'í News* No. 172 of December 1944 states: "[Mr. King] is being greatly assisted by Srta. Blanca V. Mejía, who represented Nicaragua at the Centenary. Through her Dr. King has met many people of influence and intellectual capacity (p. 6)."

<sup>101</sup> Wegener, p. 47

<sup>102</sup> Armijo de Wharton, Mireya, as told to the compiler during an interview in Los Angeles, California, June 2014



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.



Last known picture of Blanca Victoria Mejía Arauz, first Nicaraguan Bahá'í.

Taken in April, just one month before her passing on May 23, 1975 in Leon, Nicaragua.



First national Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Nicaragua, elected April 1961, twenty years after Mathew Kaszab's teaching efforts had started to bloom in Managua. Sitting l to r: Pablo Pérez Toledo (pioneer from Cuba) Leticia de Escalante (pioneer from Costa Rica), Armando Fonseca Duval, Ruth E. Yancey [Pringle], Oscar Lizano Solano.

Standing l to r: Salomon Escalante Elizondo (pioneer from Costa Rica), Jorge Valentín Harper (pioneer from Panama), Hooper Dunbar, Donald R. Newby (pioneer from the U.S.). The Spiritual Assembly was elected by delegates from three communities: Managua, Nandaime, and Bluefields.

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**In Memoriam**

**Mathew Kaszab**  
***Pioneer Teacher in Nicaragua***  
**by**  
***Louie Mathews***

From *The Bahá'í World* Vol. IX 1940-1944

While Mathew was a student at the University of New York, he met Mrs. Louise Talbott, who gave him the Bahá'í Message. From that moment, Mathew's real life began. The heroic age of the Bab and the martyrs absorbed his mind and *The Dawnbreakers* became his constant companion. He never spoke of his childhood or youth 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 Bahá'í 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 Bahá'í.

When Shoghi Effendi's *Advent of Divine Justice* was published in February, 1939, it contained words that lighted a flame in his heart:

"Let some, at this very moment, gird up the loins of endeavor, flee their native towns, cities and states, forsake their country, 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 unsundered cities, and bend their energies to capture the citadels of men's hearts." (page 52)

These dynamic utterances carried Mathew away, and without delay he set out for Panama. 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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. 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 true and grateful brother,  
Shoghi."

While in Panama, Mathew wrote articles for all the leading journals: *The Panama-American*, *The Star and Herald*, and *The Tribune*. He gave Bahá'í talks on the radio and brought into the Faith our first Panamanian believer.

We wanted him to take a cabin steamer on his journey to Nicaragua but he wrote that this was an unnecessary expense. He embarked on a small cattle ship, *The Alajuela*. He wrote of this journey that he lay on the floor of the deck at night looking up at the sky and reviewing in his mind the stormy journey of the Bab and Quddus, during which they continued writing and praying as though in the atmosphere of complete calm.

From the very 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. He went to work in the gold mines of Bluefields [sic – it was Siuna]. He described the deplorable conditions of poverty and vice and was so appalled by the ignorance of the miners' children, that he took a night shift and taught school in the day time. 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! All his efforts at betterment in Bluefields [Siuna] having failed, he returned to Managua. Suddenly, while walking on the street, he was arrested. The reason given was that he uttered words in criticism of the Nicaraguan government. This may have been the reason or not, - the cause is very obscure. He remained in prison from March 1<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>. As suddenly as he was interned, he was liberated. He determined to leave Nicaragua, sensing danger, and began to make preparations for his departure. When they were complete, he came to say goodbye to our first native believer [Blanca Mejía] who was teaching school nearby. He was loved by the children of the school, who gathered around him and sang their songs for him. The group of students that had studied with Mathew came to say goodbye and

wish him Godspeed, they would have accompanied him to the airport but, as it was far from the town, Mathew would not let them. When he reached the airport, an officer stepped forward and presented a warrant for his arrest. The day was September 28<sup>th</sup> of 1942. It was some time before his friends learned the sad news. On November first Mathew was attacked by an illness the nature of which was never learned, his condition was so grave that he was moved from the dungeon to the Guard's hospital. His friends were allowed to visit the hospital but he did not recognize anyone. At that time death seemed imminent but his strength slowly returned and he was sent back to the prison. On December 28 the authorities announced that he was free, but must leave the country. Silently and alone, he took a plane to Mexico City and there reembarked for Brownsville, Texas, where he died January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1943.

It is due to Mrs. Louise Caswell that we know the details of his death. She visited Brownsville in the summer of 1943 and placed flowers on Mathew's grave and interviewed the proprietor of the small hotel where Mathew died.

On his arrival, Mathew went to the Brownsville hospital, but he did not remain there; though his left side was completely paralyzed, he rented a small room in a modest hotel. He locked himself in and went to bed. As no sound came from his room after repeated knocking, the manager had the room broken into at the beginning of the fourth day of Mathew's silence. He was unconscious, though still breathing, and died before a doctor could reach him. He was buried in the city graveyard of Brownsville. On his tombstone are engraved the words cabled by our guardian Shoghi Effendi when he received the news of Mathew's death:

*"His services are unforgettable."*

His short life, filled with suffering and pain, was offered to Bahá'u'lláh. Down all the ages, he will be remembered and remain a beacon light to the Bahá'í 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.

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### **Tributes to Mathew Kaszab**

"You might say Mathew was a Knight [of Bahá'u'lláh] before there were Knights, because the title was only conferred on people who filled specific goals of the Ten Year Crusade... All the people who opened South America during the first two Seven Year Plans were pioneers to very difficult places, often in the midst of a world war." – Robert Stockman, author and historian

From *Bahá'í World* Vol. IX 1940-1944 under "Current Bahá'í Activities":

"The first native Bahá'í of Nicaragua, Sra. Blanca Victoria Mejía, pays tribute to the teachers who brought the message of Bahá'u'lláh to her people:-

“...there was among us Mr. Mathew Kaszab, an ingenious<sup>103</sup> 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.

“Also, a Mr. John Eichenauer honored us with his presence, an irreproachable youth, dynamic and with a clear intelligence, who presided at various gatherings of enthusiasts of the new Faith; but as a migratory bird he only remained two days in our capital. Then Mrs. Louise Caswell favored us gently with her talks full of sweetness and delicacy.

“Today, the Bahá’í Faith in Nicaragua is limited to a few seedlings recognized by souls following the light, but we try to sow them in many hearts. We are not dismayed, convinced by our eyes that the bigger and more important things have a small, almost imperceptible origin” (p. 85).

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In *Bahá’í World* Vol. IX Mathew’s name is also associated with Hands of the Cause of God and designated martyrs of the Cause named by the Guardian:

“In deep reverence also the Bahá’ís of America acclaim the Memorial raised in honor of the late Hyde Dunn in Australia, that built in Tehran commemorating the late Dr. Moody and the stone marking the tragic yet heroic grave of Mathew Kaszab in Brownsville, Texas, provided by the first chairman of the Inter-America Committee, Louie A. Mathews. In his cablegram of February 21, 1941, Shoghi Effendi linked together the names of Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler, Miss Martha L. Root, Mrs. May Maxwell and Mr. Hyde Dunn as evidences of the historic world mission conferred by 'Abdu'l-Bahá upon the American Bahá’í community” (page 90).

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From Mrs. Ruth Pringle (née Yancey), pioneer to Central America, member of the first national Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Nicaragua in 1961, and member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas:

Of the many assembled friends, again one soul heard the call for Panama and arose at once. Thus, Mathew Kaszab won the enviable distinction of being the first (though temporary) pioneer teacher to Panama. He plunged into the arena with a fever of activity and dedication typical of his "unforgettable" service to the Cause during the few remaining years of his gloriously tragic life.

Immediately upon his arrival in Panama (May 18, 1939) Mathew launched a vigorous proclamation campaign through the press, radio and public talks. Interested souls were attracted and by October the first permanent pioneers, Louise Caswell and Cora Oliver, arrived

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<sup>103</sup> This compiler believes “ingenious” to be a mistranslation. The word in Spanish was probably “ingenuo” rather than “ingenioso” which Blanca used to describe Mathew elsewhere. “Ingenuo” would translate as “ingenuous” meaning unaffected, trusting, innocent, idealistic, unpretentious, or child-like.

along with John Eichenauer (enroute to El Salvador). The first Bahá'í in Panama had been found and the story which future history will record had begun to unfold.

The first two weeks of October, 1939 were a feast of "joyous spiritual association of five Bahá'ís" in Panama. John Eichenauer continued to his proposed destination, and Mathew Kaszab departed for Nicaragua, the final phase of his pioneer service and life of selfless dedication to Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>104</sup>

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From Mr. Robert Wilson, former pioneer to Nicaragua 1968-1971 who lived in Bluefields with his wife Kristy and young son Rainn:

When I first arrived in Bluefields I took up residence in a rickety hotel left over from the glory days of the United Fruit Company. The hotel was located in Old Bank, not far from the lagoon. It was a three story structure, white with green shutters and open balustrades. It had an outdoor privy and a bank of outdoor concrete shower rooms. A shower consisted of a pipe coming out of the concrete ceiling and washing you with cold rain water that had collected in an overhead rain barrel. Plastic curtains gave one the illusion of privacy.

The hotel owner, an elderly woman, told me that she knew "your Mathew Kaszab." In fact, she said he stayed at her hotel. She told me he was tall and spoke often about Jesus. She said the children in the town often mocked him when he walked down the street, even calling him "Jesus." She said she worried about him because his health was not too good.

She said he had a "holiness" about him. He was calm and gentle. He was "Christ-like." But she admitted she didn't understand what he talked about, only that he was a Bahá'í. The intensity of the hotel owner when she talked about him gave me the feeling that she respected him and that he had made a profound impression on her.

The elderly hotel owner that spoke with Mr. Wilson was Mrs. Anna Crowdell, in whose name Mathew had his mail sent for a time while he was on the Atlantic Coast. She was a creole activist. Hotel Crowdell was destroyed during Hurricane Joan in 1988, along with many other landmarks in the old city of Bluefields.

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Garreta Busey, Chairman of the *Bahá'í World* Editorial Committee for Vol. IX wrote in depth about Latin America in her insightful essay "Uniting the Americas" (*Bahá'í World* Vol. IX pp. 186-199). Miss Busey lived in Illinois most of her life and was a well-known writer and teacher who once served on the editorial staffs of *World Order* magazine, *Bahá'í News*, and *The Bahá'í World*. She passed away in 1976. She had this to say in her above-mentioned essay:

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<sup>104</sup> Pringle, Ruth.

There were martyrdoms – of the spirit and of the flesh. Some of these bearers of the Word of God – Elizabeth Cheney, Mathew Kaszab, Gwen Sholtis, and John Stearns became very ill. Mathew Kaszab suffered imprisonment because his mission was tragically misunderstood. Ill and alone he journeyed back to Texas and there died. In Brownsville a burial stone erected by Mrs. Mathews marks his grave. It bears a design of the Greatest Name and a quotation from the Guardian’s cable.

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Louise Caswell in correspondence with Daniel Nelson Wegener, author of *Divine Springtime* and through her own notes stated that Mathew always served as an example and his memory was very dear to her. He was the pioneer who first gave the message to Alfred Osborne, an educator and administrator known for his integrity, steadfastness and constancy. Alfred was the first native Panamanian Bahá’í (born in the West Indies) and later was a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas, assigned to Nicaragua. Louise remembered that Mathew once told her, “I want to be imprisoned like my Lord. I am an Apostle of Bahá’u’lláh.” She said he was most obedient to the Inter-America Committee. He dressed in immaculate white and always wore black, shiny rubbers 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 traveled with two suitcases, one filled with Bahá’í books and the other with his clothes.<sup>105</sup>

Gayle Woolson, pioneer to Costa Rica beginning in March, 1940 and who was intimately involved with affairs in several of the Central American countries, states that she was notified when Mathew was imprisoned and that she made inquiries to the United States Consulate in Managua trying to arrange for his safety and release, without success. By the time he was sent off on an airplane to Mexico City and finally to Brownsville, his health was broken.

“We can truly say that he gave his life for Nicaragua.”<sup>106</sup>

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*...And when addressing him she [Ashraf’s mother, whose son laid down his life in the Land of Zá (Zanján)] said: “My son, mine own son! Fail not to offer up thyself in the path of thy Lord. Beware that thou betray not thy faith in Him before Whose face have bowed down in adoration all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth. Go thou straight on, O my son, and persevere in the path of the Lord, thy God. Haste thee to attain the presence of Him Who is the Well-Beloved of all worlds.”*

*On her be My blessings, and My mercy, and My praise, and My glory. I Myself shall atone for the loss of her son—a son who now dwelleth within the tabernacle of My majesty and glory, and whose face beameth with a light that envelopeth with its radiance the Maids of Heaven in their celestial chambers, and beyond them the*

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<sup>105</sup> Wegener, Daniel, p. 22

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23-24

*inmates of My Paradise, and the denizens of the Cities of Holiness. Were any eye to gaze on his face, he would exclaim: "Lo, this is no other than a noble angel!"*

*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*

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### Afterward

"He's alive??!"

In the process of researching the moving story of Mathew Kaszab I had assumed that anyone who had known Mathew could not possibly be alive, except, perhaps, children who had briefly encountered him in Central America. To my great surprise and joy, I learned that Johnny Eichenauer, whose story is interspersed throughout this work, was alive and well in Phoenix, Arizona.

Without hesitation, time being of the essence, I drove to Phoenix, having made arrangements through the Spiritual Assembly of that city to meet with John Carl Eichenauer III.

At almost 97 years old at the time of my interview with him, John was alert, healthy, and engaging. He brought to the interview a two-page letter hand-written to him in 1936 on behalf of the Guardian with a note from Shoghi Effendi himself. He received more than one letter from the Guardian and met him on pilgrimage in 1953. He also showed me his honorable discharge papers from the army dated August 20, 1946 of which he is very proud, although he says he doesn't know why, since he is simply "average."

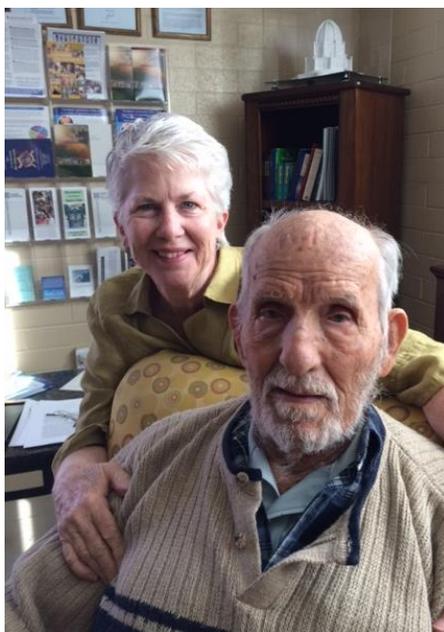
During this unexpected and gratifying interview on February 1, 2018, John spoke of his time in Central America which he considered "exciting," and his memories of Mathew. His words used to describe the latter were "determined, rugged, fearless." John recalled that in January 1943, when he heard of Mathew's mystifying death in Brownsville, he was in the process of meeting with the U.S. ambassador in Guatemala about his passport. That same year John was "escorted out of Central America," drafted, and sent to Germany, where he worked behind the lines until the end of WWII. John, at 17, was the youngest pioneer to arise during the Seven Year Plan, and in 1939 opened El Salvador to the Bahá'í Faith.

Through the process of finding and meeting John, several important concepts of writing a biography became glaringly evident. Never assume anything. Double-check resources. Dig deeper. Confirm accuracy and ask yourself, "can you prove it?"

I am grateful to John for spending time with me.

Gratitude also is expressed to the U.S. Bahá'í national archives for providing the letters on which this biography is based. To the Los Angeles Bahá'í archives through which I was provided copies of *Bahá'í News* in which historical glimpses of activities in Central America are forever available, I am likewise very grateful. Volumes of *The Bahá'í World*, which reflect not only world-wide activities of the Faith throughout the world, but which hold priceless sketches of individuals in the 'In Memoriam' section, provide another resource of inestimable value to all.

Anne King Sadeghpour  
Compiler  
Santa Monica 2019



Compiler Anne Sadeghpour with John Carl Eichenauer III  
Phoenix, Arizona - February 1, 2018

John worked alongside Mathew Kaszab in Panama in 1939 and in Nicaragua in 1941. He traveled to each of the Central American countries, helped reunite the Bahá'ís of Stuttgart, Germany after WWII, and pioneered to Monterrey, Mexico in 1954 at the behest of the Guardian. His story is one of ceaseless service, enthusiasm, and cheerful engagement from the age of 13 years.

On November 12, 1972 the Mathew Kaszab Bahá'í Institute was inaugurated by the Bahá'í community in Anchorage, Alaska. The property was donated to the National Spiritual Assembly by Jenabe and Elaine Caldwell.

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# The Gloriously Tragic Life of Mathew Kaszab Letters from a Pioneer 1939-1942

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**Letters to and from Mathew Kaszab courtesy and generosity of the U.S. Bahá'í national archives.**

*Please note:* Major references for this biographical compilation are *The Bahá'í World* Volumes, especially Volumes VIII (1938-1940) and IX (1940-1944), Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, as well as *Bahá'í News* published in Wilmette, Illinois, particularly issues published between 1938-1943. Each volume or issue used has been cited within the body of the work and most were accessed through the generous assistance of the Los Angeles Bahá'í Archives

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