

Uncle Bill

A Personal Memoir

R. Gregory Shaw



A FORTUITOUS ENCOUNTER

I was 17 in August of 1968, with one last year of high school darkening my Timonium, Maryland horizon. At school, I was an experienced malcontent, ever looking for new ways to amuse myself at the expense of the elders of education. Vietnam was widening the chasm between the “say you want a revolution” young and the reeling older generation that would soon vote for a Nixon-Agnew ticket of white-collar criminals to pilot the Silent Majority’s ship of state. Though agitated by the recent televised mess of Chicago’s political convention with accompanying riots, I agreed to accompany my girlfriend to the Maryland State Fair, where she had volunteered to stroll the crowd and hand out political literature. If I remember correctly, we were given classic straw boater hats to wear. I wish I had a picture - the idealistic, fresh-faced young woman and her scruffy boyfriend, still cultivating his first beard. In straw boater hats.

It was hot, and I was likely dragging my feet, looking for an excuse to cut out of the crowds. Among the food stands and horse barns, I saw a smaller booth with one attendant, an older gentleman. Dutifully, I offered him one of the pamphlets we carried. His response surprised me: “I’ll take one of yours, if you’ll take one of mine.” How could I have suspected, with those few words, the course of my life had just been altered?

Albert Edwin Dorrida, Jr. - “Uncle Bill” to his friends - was the first Bahá’í I met. Let me share my story of a quiet man, a select soul, whose many decades of stalwart service deserve a place of honor in the annals of the Bahá’í Faith in Baltimore.



The writer and Ms. C. Fremd, 1968



Maryland State Fair, 1968

FROM PUBLIC RECORDS

Bill was born May 15, 1901. He died March 11, 1972, and is buried in the Baltimore National Cemetery. His gravestone is carved with a nine-pointed star at the top, and it notes he was a trumpeter in the WWI U.S. Armed Forces. Buried with Bill is his wife, Martha Josephine Campbell Dorrida, who died in 1966.

He was the youngest child of Albert, Sr. (1868-1937) and Eusebia Day Dorrida (1871-1948). Bill had three sisters and a brother. His paternal grandparents were William (1827-1890) and Elizabeth Curfman Dorrida. Maternal grandparents were John Anthony Munnekhusen Day (1839-1908) and Mary Ellen Barnett (1845-1881). Most, if not all of these family members were born in Maryland, many in Harford County. In the 1910 census, Albert and Eusebia were living at 2548 West North Ave., Baltimore, Ward 15, now the site of Coppin State University.

At age 16, in March 1918, he enlisted in the Marines. After applying to learn trumpet and drum, he spent a few weeks ill in a Charleston SC hospital before completing his training and proceeding to join Fifty-Second Company, Third Provisional Regiment at Paris (now Parris) Island SC. His company was sent to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, departing Charleston on the USS Kittery. In September of 1919, Bill was honorably discharged from service. No background information could be found to explain a note on his record that he was one of 19 Americans to be decorated with the Serbian government's Order of St. Sava.¹

Bill shared an incident that occurred during his military service. Traveling by ship, one night he decided to sleep on deck. A great wave broke over the ship and Bill was swept towards the sea. At the last moment, a hand reached out to grab him and a tragic end was avoided. He later learned that on that very night his mother had dreamed that a wave had threatened his life.

In the 1920 census, Bill has returned to Baltimore, living with his parents, working as a clerk for Financial Services Co. In 1922, still with his parents, he is living on Frederick Rd, near North Bend. In 1926, he is listed as a "compto mech." Bill and Martha Josephine Campbell (1903-1966) were married in 1930 in Wheeling, WV. She was the daughter of John A. Campbell, a physician. (*An aside: I was pleased to learn that Dr. Campbell was a native of Fairmont, WV, my hometown.*) In 1932, with Martha, Bill is in Wheeling, a manager with Felt and Tarrant Mfg. on Oak Park Ave. A 1941 draft registration lists Bill and Martha living at 401 Chapel Gate Lane in west Baltimore. He is employed with the General Baking Company. He is noted as 5'5", 135 lbs., brown hair.

1. Decoration: Order of St. Sava (Serbian) - The Order of Saint Sava was established originally to recognize civilians for meritorious achievements to the Church, to arts and sciences, the royal house and the state. In 1914 a change was made permitting military personnel to receive the honor for military merit. 19 Americans were awarded by Serbia.

A directory found in the December 1944 *Bahá'í News* lists the officers of the Local Spiritual Assembly: "Albert E. Dorrida, Chairman, 3315 Woodland Ave., Baltimore 15; Annamarie Honnold, Secretary; Mrs. F. W. Hipsley (*Bill's sister, Marguerite*)." (See Appendices.)

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

On that August day at the state fair, Bill gave me a pamphlet with the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith, and my interest was immediately sparked. I asked questions, and his patient explanations were so "*far out*," as we would say in those days, so far out that I felt like I'd stumbled upon a secret fountain of truth. I could feel new vistas opening before me. Like many of my age, I had a vague notion that ending the Vietnam war would somehow right the troubled world. But Bill was talking of much broader solutions - the equality of men and women, a universal auxiliary language, the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, the harmony of science and religion. "*The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.*"

Could I really be hearing this from an old guy wearing a tie? My generation's mantra was: "*Don't trust anyone over 30!*"

As our conversation stretched out over the better part of an hour, from time to time Bill would hand me another pamphlet or booklet with more information. All of this, I took away with me to read and re-read over the next few weeks.

The Bahá'í Faith became all I wanted to talk about with friends. I carried one booklet with me at all times, and this proved the key to actually encountering the Bahá'í community. The school year had begun, and, as usual, I was lounging on the sidelines, ignoring my gym class. I spotted a fellow goof-off and strolled over to make his acquaintance. My opening line was: "Would you like to read something interesting?"

He asked to keep the booklet. A few weeks later, he told me that he'd written away to the published address, had received a reply and an invitation to a local introductory fireside. He insisted that I had to meet these "amazing" people, and he gave me the meeting information.

Over the next seven months, I came to admire and love these amazing Baltimore County Bahá'ís. My interest was so intense that I would attend every gathering I heard about, even in other cities. I brought many friends along and the firesides were often overflowing with barefoot teenagers sitting on the floor. I am eternally grateful to the small band of believers who nurtured my belief, especially Clarke and Betty Langrall, who were ever ready to help me overcome all hesitation until I openly declared myself a believer in Bahá'u'lláh.

In these years, 1968 to 1972, Bill Dorrida was a widower, with no surviving children, living in the home of Iraj and Mary K. Radpour. He suffered from lung disease and was hospitalized several times, but remained an active participant in the Bahá'í community. I enjoyed every opportunity to

visit and hear the stories he would relate of earlier days when the Faith was sparsely scattered across America, when a relative handful of awakened souls took up the task of spreading the Word to millions rooted in their hidebound beliefs.

Bill told me that he counted his days as a Bahá'í from an event in 1912. His mother, Eusebia, was one of the first few Bahá'ís in Baltimore, perhaps as early as 1902. Towards the end of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's historic trip across the United States and Canada, He visited Baltimore, giving an address at a Unitarian church, then gathering with the believers for a dinner in the home of Howard Struven. (See Appendices.) Young Bill Dorrida was at that dinner and met the Master. When I asked Bill about his memories of the event, 60 years had erased most of the details, but the spiritual impression could be seen on his face. He told me that 'Abdu'l-Bahá appeared radiantly happy - "He giggled" throughout the meal.

In those early days of the Faith in America, only a small fraction of the Writings had been translated into English, and the friends were greatly focused on what they knew of the Master's words and His living example. Bill joked, "We were 'Abdul-Bahá'ís!" He said every meeting included a serving of tea, "Because that was what 'Abdu'l-Bahá drank."

Also, he remembered a time when every meeting began with all attending each repeating the Greatest Name - "Allah'u'Abha" - 95 times before any other business was conducted.

One night, I sat with Bill in his room and he showed me a few photographs and some memorabilia he still possessed from past decades. One item that interested me was a tiny booklet, less than 2 inches square, with the number 9 on the cover, with relevant principles but no direct mention of Bahá'í inside. Bill said he and his mother used to carry these and "slip them into people's grocery bags when they weren't looking."

He also showed me an invaluable possession, a set of prayer beads that had belonged to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. These beads, as I recall, were of a light color, perhaps white, arranged in a group of 9 beads, with a separator, followed by 19 beads, a separator, then the remaining added to make a total of 95, tied to make a circle, with a tassel attached. Bill told me his wish was to donate this treasure to the Evergreen cabin on the Bahá'í property in Teaneck, New Jersey.

As noted earlier, Bill served on the Baltimore Local Spiritual Assembly. For many years, the Bahá'í Center on 5301 Gwynn Oak Avenue was the central meeting place for community activities. Bill recalled days when he would clean trash from the front lawn, dumped by unhappy neighbors to show their displeasure with racially integrated gatherings in the white neighborhood. By the late 1960s, he had seen the city change and "white flight" had brought diversity to the surrounding streets.

Bill told me of another dramatic change he had witnessed that involved Bahá'í property. He showed me a picture of himself as a young man, standing before the foundation construction of the future Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois. During the lean Depression years, the

completion of the beautiful architectural design was greatly delayed. Bill said the village was annoyed at the eyesore along the shoreline: "They said it looked like an oil tank." He lived to see the day when Wilmette came to adopt the finished Temple as the symbol of the city, a landmark attracting thousands of visitors in a week.

One night at a Bahá'í 19-day feast, my sister, Cilla, and I sang a musical arrangement of Bahá'u'llah's Tablet of the Holy Mariner. Afterwards, I noted Bill sitting alone, obviously distracted. I sat and asked him what was affecting him. With great emotion he said, "The Guardian wrote that one day there would be believers in cities all across America. We thought he meant in the Golden Age, centuries from now. I didn't expect it would happen in my lifetime."

There was another special opportunity to sing in a meeting, this time directly for Uncle Bill. The Bahá'ís were holding an areawide conference, with a number of well-known speakers, including Javidukht Khadem, an Auxiliary Board Member and wife of the Hand of the Cause. The organizers wished to honor Bill for his long and faithful service and asked Cilla and I to sing as a part of the tribute. We sang a Peter, Paul and Mary song, *Day Is Done*. Bill was touched and when we finished he sweetly said, "You guys are really something."

From an earlier generation, Bill wasn't a fan of the pop music of the 60s, though I remember there was an exception. He liked the Beatles' record, *Let It Be*. He said it sounded like religious music, and he liked hearing it come on the jukebox while he was at work at Double-T Diner. ²

When I knew him, Bill worked part-time as a bookkeeper for this diner on Baltimore National Pike. Having retired some years before, he had some funds for living expenses and now worked to earn money to contribute to the Bahá'í Fund. Remarkably, he gave all of his salary to the Bahá'ís! This attracted the attention of the tax authorities. As Bill wasn't well, the IRS sent a man to his home to interview him. Bill explained that he gave away 100% of the money he made. The tax man told him, "That may be true, but you're not allowed to do it." Bill had to pay a fiscal penalty for his generosity. An insight into his detachment from material matters can be seen in that he laughed as he told me this story.

2. In recent years, I've eaten a few times at the Double-T, remembering my friend. I recall him giving me insider information: "The pumpkin pies are really squash pies."

His generosity extended to me personally. While I was in South Carolina attending college, there was a dramatic surge in the growth of the Bahá'í community in the rural area where I lived. Though I had arrived as the only Bahá'í in my county, in a few months there were scores of new believers, most with only an introductory knowledge of Bahá'u'llah's Teachings. My only income was from 10 hours a week as a student library aide, but I was ordering as many booklets and materials as I could, trying to get information into the hands of new Bahá'ís. When word filtered back to friends in Maryland that I was leaving myself broke, I got a check in the mail with a short note: "For your personal expenses. Bill."

Bill's health was deteriorating, but the stays in the hospital opened a door to memorable moments for some of us. Dozens of high school kids had joined the Faith at the end of the 60s, and it had made an impact on the community. The small group of quiet professionals leading steady and focused lives was suddenly challenged to open their living rooms and embrace a gang of hyperactive, adventure-hungry, fad-following, ill-kempt, naive, and often lovesick young folks, who had yet to grasp the depth of commitment required to create the spiritual world they did indeed long to see. But, their footloose lives meant they were the ones with the free time to make hospital visits.

One of the older (over 30!) Bahá'ís shared with me that Bill had been anxious at the thought that the Faith for which he had dedicated his life might now be left in the hands of a happy-go-lucky generation unsuited to continue the work. Then, when faced with lonely days lying in a hospital bed, he found a daily stream of newly-blossoming Bahá'ís appearing at the door to cheer their Uncle Bill. Reassured, he now proudly announced, "These young kids are great!"

"O God, my God! Thou seest me... supplicating Thee in the dead of night and at the break of dawn, entreating and invoking Thee at morn and at eventide to graciously aid me to serve Thy Cause to spread abroad Thy Teachings to exalt Thy Word throughout the East and the West." - 'Abdu'l-Bahá

These bedside visits were important to me. As I drove into the city to the hospital, I would select a topic to discuss. On one occasion, I decided to ask about prayer. Having reached the point that I regularly said a daily prayer, and would even add one or two others from time to time, I was somewhat impressed with my spiritual development. So, I asked my friend to tell me about prayer.

Bill pointed to his bedside table and told me to hand him his prayer book. I noticed it was an older edition that I hadn't seen. This, I thought, is where the expression, "well-thumbed pages," was born. He looked through the book and gestured at various points. "Every day, I say all of the 'healing' prayers, and all of the 'forgiveness' prayers, and the 'teaching' prayers. I say the Tablet of Ahmad, And, of course, the obligatory prayer. Then, on special occasions, I say the others. I say them out loud; Bahá'u'llah says, to 'intone' the prayers."

Whew! I was learning that the spiritual path was a life-long endeavor. It was my great fortune to have known someone who had walked the long road.

I stepped into Bill's hospital room one day and greeted him, but he didn't answer. His eyes were open and focused on the wall. Thinking he might be near sleep, I sat down and waited and was startled when he suddenly turned and said hello. He explained that he had been looking at the wall of painted cinder blocks and repeating the Greatest Name for each block. Surely, the nurses must have learned that this was an unusual man in their care.

Sadly, the health struggles would have an end. Bill's condition deteriorated. I visited and found him very weak and struggling to breathe. I held his hand and told him that the community was planning a welcome party for some newly-enrolled members. Shaking, he pulled his oxygen mask aside and managed a single word: "Beautiful." Later that afternoon, at least two others came to visit, but he wasn't awake. That night, he passed away.

Some time earlier, Bill had joked with me, saying, "We Bahá'ís don't die; we ascend!"

AFTERWARDS

I attended the funeral, though the only detail clear in my mind is that I was asked to bring the community's flowers to the funeral home.

In the months after, I would often remember in prayer this friend who held a unique spot in my life's journey. Thinking of the restraints that poor health placed on his Bahá'í activity, I asked that I might be given the opportunity to carry out some task he'd been forced to forego. A year later, as I wearily endured another jolting all-night bus ride across the Andes, another leg in a 13 week trip through South America to play music carrying a Bahá'í message, I looked out at the unfamiliar landscape and thought, 'Uncle Bill, you must have harbored some big dreams.'

In 1980, I was on pilgrimage in the Holy Land. At the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, I met Ethel Revell, a distinguished Bahá'í of many years. In 1912, the Master had visited her family home in Philadelphia. The number of American believers was so small in those long-ago days that it was not surprising that she remembered Bill. "We always called him 'Split-peas Bill.' I don't remember why."

I plan to ask "Split-peas" about that when next we meet.

That pilgrimage brought another connection to Bill, a mystical experience to ponder. Well before that trip, I had a vivid dream in which I had passed into the next life. Here, I saw Bill Dorrida sitting on a bench. He waved for me to come and sit with him. When I did, he turned and looked me directly in the eyes and said, "That was quite a time, wasn't it?" As he said this, he smiled and patted me on the knee.

So, in 1980, I was on the slope of Mt. Carmel, in the heavenly atmosphere of the gardens surrounding the Shrine of the Bab. We visitors from around the world were gathering in the small building that served as a Pilgrim Center with the dear Hand of the Cause, Mr. Furutan. With devotion and great love, he addressed the friends, reminiscing about Shoghi Effendi and his own pilgrimage many years before. His audience was squeezed tightly into the padded benches - Persian mandars - along the walls of the room. When he finished speaking, the Hand of the Cause walked over to where I was sitting and, with a motion of his hands, indicated to make room, that he would sit by me. Without a word, he sat down and turned his aged face to look me directly in the eyes. He smiled and patted my knee.

Instantly, the dream of my other-worldly encounter with Uncle Bill Dorrida came back to my mind.

“Know thou that the souls of the people of Bahá, who have entered and been established within the Crimson Ark, shall associate and commune intimately one with another, and shall be so closely associated in their lives, their aspirations, their aims and strivings as to be even as one soul. They are indeed the ones who are well-informed, who are keen-sighted, and who are endued with understanding. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.” - Bahá'u'llah

APPENDIX I

'Abdu'l-Bahá in Baltimore by Allison Vaccaro and Edward E. Bartlett published in *Bahá'í News* 1982-02

The Bahá'í Faith was introduced in America at the Columbian Exposition in 1893, shortly after the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. The early pioneers to the U.S. were dispatched by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and it was under His guidance that the American Bahá'í community was nurtured.

Aware of the threat that Covenant-breakers posed to the fledgling American community, and acceding to the imploring requests that He visit the western hemisphere, 'Abdu'l-Bahá finally decided to make such a trip. At the time of His western sojourn in 1912, there were approximately 30 Local Spiritual Assemblies in North America. One of these was in Baltimore, Maryland.

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh was brought to Baltimore around the turn of the century. Its close proximity to Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia made Baltimore a logical target area for many early Bahá'í teachers.

According to the archives of the Baltimore Bahá'í community, Mrs. Isabel Brittingham had visited that city in 1900 in what may have been the first traveling teaching trip to Baltimore.¹

Letter to the Master

Later, Col. Nat Ward Fitz-Gerald of Washington, D.C., and Mirza 'Abu'l-Fadl, who was sent to the U.S. by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, spoke at a public meeting in Baltimore attended by about a hundred people in February 1902.² The number of Bahá'ís in the city grew, until in May 1909 the "Bahá'í Assembly of Baltimore" was formed. A constitution and by-laws were drafted and approved, and a letter was sent to 'Abdu'l-Bahá informing Him of the accomplishment.

There is little doubt that the Bahá'ís in Baltimore were ecstatic about the news of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's imminent arrival in their region. They were even more fortunate to have Him stop in their city; although He earlier had spent several weeks in nearby Washington, 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not visit Baltimore until near the end of His American sojourn.

The news of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to America prompted lengthy and generally accurate newspaper articles in the Baltimore newspapers. In a city noted for its quality

journalism, having spawned such outstanding talent as H.L. Mencken, the *Baltimore Sun* made only one major error in its reporting. That was with respect to the expected date of an address by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Baltimore.

On April 6, 1912, five days before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's steamship berthed in New York harbor, the *Sun* papers declared,

'Abdu'l-Bahá Coming. Son of Founder of Bahá'í Movement to Lecture Here — Seeks Unity of Religions — Persian Savant Also Maintains That There Should be Equality of the Sexes.³

The article stated that 'Abdu'l-Bahá would speak on Sunday, April 21, at the First Independent Christ's Church (Unitarian).

Six-month delay

In his book *239 Days*, Dr. Allan L. Ward suggests that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's itinerary was sometimes planned on a day-to-day basis and that no official schedule was given to the American friends prior to His arrival in New York on April 11, 1912. Since 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke in Washington, D.C., on April 21, it can only be assumed that the enthusiastic Bahá'ís in Baltimore had acted somewhat presumptuously in their advance planning and press releases.

From Washington, 'Abdu'l-Bahá departed for Chicago and points west, and was not destined to reach Baltimore until more than six months later. On November 12, 1912, the *Baltimore American* heralded the long-awaited arrival:

To Speak in Unitarian Church — Abdu'l-Bahá, the Persian peace advocate, who is making a tour of the United States after having been incarcerated in Acca, Syria, where he had been exiled by the Mullahs for antagonizing the religious beliefs of his country, will visit Baltimore tomorrow and deliver an address at noon at the Unitarian church Charles and Franklin Streets. Abdu'l is now in Washington after having completed a trip through the West and Southwest. He will leave Baltimore tomorrow night for New York.⁴

'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived by train in Baltimore's Camden Station at 11 a.m. on November 11. The entourage that accompanied Him included Dr. Ameen Fareed and Mirza Ahmad Sohrab (interpreters), Mirza Mahmud, Mirza 'Ali Akah, Mirza Valiollah Khan, Dr. Zia Bagdadi, and Saya Assadollah.⁵

Press interviews

They went at once to the Hotel Rennert at Saratoga, and Liberty Streets, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá granted press interviews. Mahmud recorded in his diary, "Among those who were honored with interviews was a press representative who heard a detailed discourse regarding universal peace and the capacity of the United States of America as a nation and government to enforce it, which was noted for publication."⁶ In all probability this interview was the basis for an article that appeared the following day in the *Baltimore American*.⁷

The chapel of the Unitarian church where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to speak was packed with Johns Hopkins University faculty members and many local professional men. 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived promptly at noon and began His address in Persian without any introduction. His translator was Dr. Fareed, who had studied previously at Johns Hopkins. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke on the unity of religions and the oneness of God:

We declare the foundations of the divine religions to be one; and if we forsake these accidental imitations — by imitations we mean the teachings that have crept in, dogmas which have crept into religion, and which have nothing to do with the foundation — then we have a basis for unity amongst the religions, then we have a cause or source of illumination of all humanity.⁸

Undaunted in his enthusiasm, a *Sun-papers* artist captured the animated delivery of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk in five unique sketches that appeared in the paper the next morning.⁹ Among several poses, they showed 'Abdu'l-Bahá with upraised palms, stroking His beard in meditative thought, and forcefully expounding a truth with a sculpted left hand. The accompanying article observed:

In appearance the Persian teacher is a striking-looking man of about 70 years. He is of the average height, with a strong rugged face covered with a short white beard. His cheekbones are high, his eyes bright and flashing.

At the lectures he wore a robe of black with a triangular insert of light tan in front reaching from the hem to the neck. The long sleeves of the garment were turned back from the strong hands. Distinguishing him from his escort was a white turban which he wore, from beneath which gleamed locks of iron gray. Members of his escort wore black turbans.

As frequently happens, this event was accompanied by an anecdote, completely unsubstantiated, that has nevertheless been passed down through the oral tradition of long-standing Bahá'ís. According to the story, two Catholic priests arrived late and took a position behind the speaker's platform to listen to the speech through a half-opened door. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is said to have noticed them and closed the door!¹⁰

Mahmud wrote of the address:

The Beloved delivered at the Unitarian Church of Baltimore an address regarding the oneness of the world of man, the immutability of the principles of the divine religions and the changing of the social laws according to the demands of the time.¹¹

At the conclusion of the address, women kissed His hand and others tearfully greeted Him at the door of the chapel. Pressed by a busy schedule, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His traveling companions hurried by car to the home of Howard Struven at 1800 N. Bentalou Street for a mid-afternoon meal.

Globe-circling trip

Present among the Baltimore believers at the luncheon were Mr. and Mrs. Struven and Mrs. Maude Thompson Amendt. Mr. Struven is credited in *God Passes By* with circling, "for the first time in Bahá'í history, the globe visiting on his way the Hawaiian Islands, Japan, China, India, and Burma" with Charles Mason Remey.¹² In an interview given in 1966, Mr. Struven related that the trip took place in 1902 and was financed by money that had been set aside for his college education. He did not attend college, but later became a successful businessman.¹³

Mrs. Amendt had spent the morning walking out to a farm east of Baltimore to get fresh chicken for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and thus had missed His talk at the Unitarian church. Mrs. Amendt was described as a stout, corseted woman. After the meal, 'Abdu'l-Bahá motioned her out of the kitchen and invited her to sit by Him on the floor in the tiny living room. One can only surmise that there was a twinkle in His eye as He extended the loving invitation to Mrs. Amendt who declined to attempt such an improbable feat of agility.¹⁴

Ursula Shuman Moore was living at the Struven home at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit, and it was she who provided the most extensive account of that interlude spent in the Struven home:

Yesterday, the 11th, he came over to our house in Baltimore and had dinner with us at our table! Did you ever dream that this would come to pass. He came to Baltimore about twelve o'clock and spoke at the Unitarian Church, and then they came out to our house and we had dinner for him. Many of the Washington believers came over too and many of the Baltimore believers came up. We had about 55 or 54 to feed. Had a grand chicken dinner, with rice and celery, peas, ice cream and cake, and vegetable soup. He said we had given him a *good* dinner, a *fine* dinner, and that he ate much. When I brought in the big platter of chicken and set it before Him at the table he said, "Oh, chicken!" and seemed to be much pleased with it. He said everything was cooked well. We had him and the Persians in his party sit

down first, 12 at the table, and served them, and then we had four relays and every body had something. They all seemed so glad to be there and enjoyed themselves so much. I was so glad for Mother could be near him and see him. I introduced Mother to him, and he took her hand and said "Oh, your Mother!" and looked at her very kindly. I told him she had been and was sick, and that we asked that she might be well. He said "In Shalah" ["if God be willing"]. So I hope she will get well soon now. They did not stay very long, as they left on the (3 o'clock) train. It surely was a great privilege to have him in our house, and something that we will always remember.¹⁵

It was reported by another observer that after the dinner, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had a brief nap upstairs at the Struven house before the public meeting.¹⁶ Mahmud penned the Master's comments during that post-prandial discussion:

"Praise be to God! I see that you may become more enlightened and spiritual. When I reach the Holy Land I shall lay My head on the Threshold of the Blessed Tomb and with tears in my eyes I shall supplicate heavenly favors, eternal honor and everlasting happiness for you."

He then left for the station. On the way to the station the Beloved embraced Mr. Struven as a kind father embraces a son and with utmost kindness He mentioned his services to the Cause of God.¹⁷

'Abdu'l-Bahá departed from the Camden Station on the 3 o'clock train for New York City, having spent four hours in Baltimore. During that brief interlude He gave interviews to the press, delivered a public address, and shared a luncheon with the friends in the Baltimore area. For a man of 68 years, His energies seemed endless, and His dedication to teaching the Bahá'í Cause was absolute. So much could be gained for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh if each of us were to teach tirelessly after the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

REFERENCES

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3. *The Sun*, Baltimore, April 6, 1912.
4. *Baltimore American*, November 10, 1912.
5. *Baltimore American*, November 12, 1912, p. 13.
6. Mahmud-i-Zarqani, *The Wondrous Annals*. Entry dated November 11, 1912.

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8. Address by 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered November 11, 1912, in Baltimore, Maryland. Recorded by Jack Salomon, stenographer for the *Baltimore Sun*.
9. *The Sun*, Baltimore, November 12, 1912, p. 9.
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11. *The Wondrous Annals*. Entry dated November 11, 1912.
12. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 261.
13. Interview with Mrs. Nancy Lee of Owings Mills, Maryland, December 1980.
14. Interview with Mr. Albert James, June 1980.
15. Letter of November 12, 1912, from Ursula Shuman Moore to Louise Shuman Irani, available in the Baltimore Bahá'í archives.
16. Recollections of Mr. Howard Struven, audio tape recorded August 14, 1966, available in the Baltimore Bahá'í archives.
17. *The Wondrous Annals*. Entry dated November 11, 1912.

APPENDIX II

Nov. 12, 1944, Charleston Gazette:

Regional representatives of the Bahá'ís of Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia will meet In Charleston this weekend at the Bahá'í center In Quarrier St. Attending the meeting will be Mrs. Annamaria Honnold. (?) Md., Miss Hannah Lohse, Chevy Chase, Md., Mrs. J. E. Rice, Arlington, Va., **Mrs. Martha Dorrida** and Mrs. Hazel C. Langrall, Baltimore, Md., Miss Mildred Elmer, Charleston, and Paul Haney, Alexandrla, Va. Haney will lecture at 3 p.m. today at the Bahá'í center.. The (?) also will celebrate the 127th anniversary of the birth of the founder of the faith. The celebration will close with a dinner this evening at the Village Grill.

March 1947 Bahá'í News, Public Meeting at Baltimore

The Baltimore Public Meeting was held in the Rainbow Room of the Pythian Hall. on January 21st at 8 pm. In spite of it being one of the coldest nights of the winter, the Baltimore friends report an attendance of 325.

The hall was beautifully decorated with flowers. Attractive displays were arranged with Temple pictures and literature. The speaker's fine compliment—"You are to be congratulated on the perfect coordination. the smooth production. and the perfect taste and surroundings in which it was held" express the result of the efforts of the Baltimore friends in a few words.

A four week radio program was used. on Sundays at 4:15 p.m., prior to the meeting. The transcriptions used were. "A New Interpretation of History." "Meet Mr. Justice." "Mr. Justice Returns," and "This is My Faith," over station WFBR. Spot announcements were also used.

Music was furnished by the Baltimore Fellowship Choir. an interracial group of soloists. singing the "Song of Peace" by Sibelius with solo numbers by two of its members. Further demonstrating "beauty in diversity" composed of an the ushers were interracial group of youths. and this important phase of activity was executed perfectly under the capable direction of Mary Jane Langrall.

Publicity was a bit disappointing to the friends, but the advertisements in the three local papers were excellent. A large Temple picture was on display the week before the meeting in an art dealer's window.

Summing up, the report states: "The success of the meeting can be attributed to our excellent speaker. William Sears. charming chairman. Annamarie Honnold. and fine Field Representative. Marguerite Sears. The individual cooperation of the entire community, the fine teamwork of the committees. and the sincere devotion of the prayer squads was a shining example of the true

Bahá'í spirit and loving unity." The National Public Meetings committee would be much amiss if they did not add to this, the efficient manner in which the secretary of the Baltimore Public Meeting Committee. **Albert E. Dorrida** handled his part of the work.

