

Climax week of celebration. . .

Bahai's observe 80th anniversary in U.S.

The 80th anniversary of the first mention of the Baha'i Faith in the United States will be celebrated by Baha'is in Chicago Sept. 23.

In what is today the Chicago Art Institute, on Sept. 23, 1893, the Rev. Henry H. Jessup, director of Presbyterian Missionary Operations in Syria, made the first reference in America to Baha'u'llah, the Inaugurator of the Baha'i Faith. He spoke at a session of the 17-day Congress of Religions, an adjunct to the grand Columbian Exposition, called to explore "the grounds of fraternal union" in language, literature, science, art, and in religion.

This observance will con-

clude "Baha'i Week in Chicago," proclaimed by Mayor Richard Daley in July, to honor this growing world religion.

The public events during Baha'i week will include a World Peace Day Tea, Sept. 16, 3-6 p.m., Chicago Baha'i Center, 116 S. Michigan ave. An Indian Art Exhibit at the Baha'i Center, Sept. 18, 8 p.m. An Iranian Night, 8 p.m. Sept. 20, at the Baha'i Center. Free Persian entertainment and food was featured. The presentation by a Baha'i Road Show of a one-act musical drama, "Journey of the Soul", 8:30 p.m., Friday, Sept. 21, 10th

floor auditorium, Fine Arts building, 410 S. Michigan.

The Baha'i Faith, an independent world religion, was launched in Baghdad in 1863, when Baha'u'llah, son of a government minister, announced his prophetic mission to bring unity to the world through the promulgation of new religious teachings.

The name Baha'u'llah means "Glory Of God". Among his teachings, expressed more than a century ago, are the need for equality between men and women, the need for a world system of government, the need for universal compulsory education, for harmony bet-

ween science and religion, for a common world language, and others. Like the great religious teachers before him, he stressed, in addition to his social teachings, that the purpose of life is to know and to love God.

Because of his religious activities, Baha'u'llah was imprisoned by the Persian government in 1852. He was ultimately banished to the penal colony of 'Akka' in 1863. He remained a prisoner of the Turkish government until his death in 1892.

More than 4000 people attended the Congress of Religions, one of the first truly ecumenical gatherings on record. Among the participants, according to a contemporary account, "were men of many tongues, of many lands, of many races; disciples of Christ, of Mohammed, of Buddha, of Brahma, of Confucius, in the name of the common God, for the glorification of the Father."

"The sight was most remarkable," that early account continued. "There were strange robes, turbans and tunics, crosses and crescents, flowing hair and tansured heads..the representatives marched down the center aisle, and..took their seats in triple rows upon the platform, beneath the waving flags of many nations."

The speeches on the thirteenth day of the Congress, September 23, dwelt upon the prospect for establishing a brotherhood of man upon the earth. Within this framework, Dr. Jessup, speaking on the "Religious Mission of the English Speaking Nations", quoted the following words of Baha'u'llah:

"That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease and differences of race annulled-what harm is there in this? Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the "Most Great Peace" shall come." "Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country," Jessup continued quoting Baha'u'llah, "let him rather glory in this, that he



Baha'i leader. . .

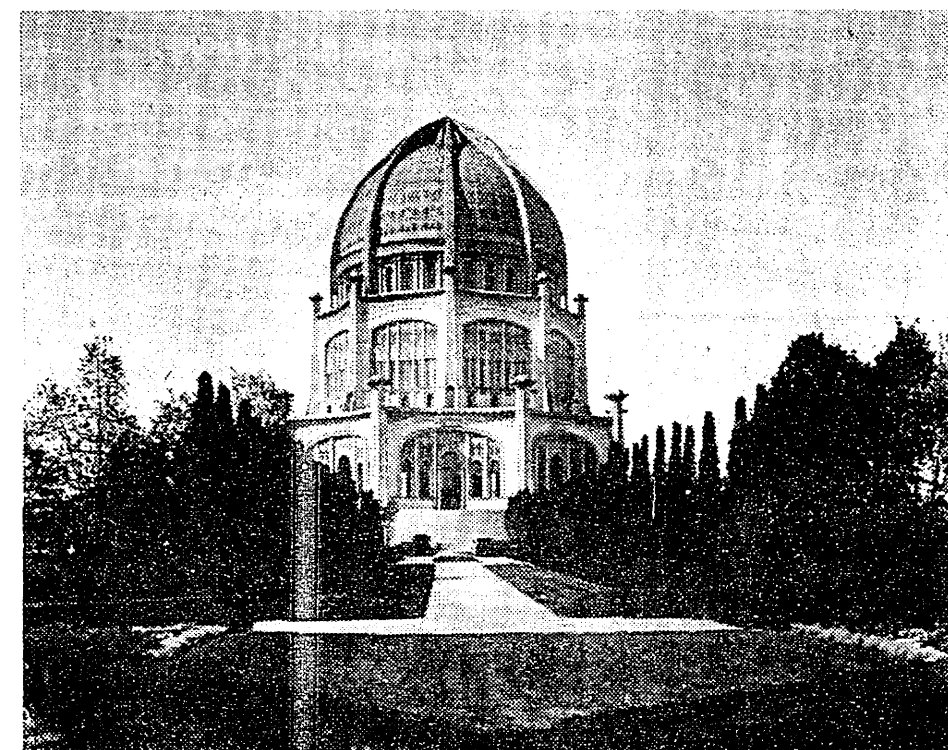
Abdu'l-Baha, (left) son of the prophet-founder, Baha 'u'llah, visited Chicago in 1912 to dedicate the grounds of the Baha'i Temple. On April 30, he addressed the fourth annual conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, at Handel Hall. "Can we apply the test of racial color and say that man of a certain hue - white, black, brown, yellow, red - is the true image of his Creator?" Abdu'l-Baha asked during his talk. "We must conclude that color is not the standard. . .for color is accidental in nature. The spirit and intelligence of man is the essential. . .Man is not man simply because of bodily attributes. The character and purity of the heart is all important."

A member of the local spiritual assembly, David W. Kellum (right) joined the worldwide religion - Baha'i Faith - during the 1950s. Kellum who is one of the leaders in the Chicago area, was a former city editor of the Chicago Defender.



Pioneers. . .

A group of Chicago Baha'is at the turn of the century. Thornton Chase, (standing second from right) a Chicago insurance broker, was the first Baha'i in the United States.



Baha'i Temple. . .

The land for the Baha'i Temple in Wilmette was purchased by the Baha'is of Chicago in 1908. Construction on the building began in 1921. The Temple was dedicated to public use in 1953.

loves his kind."

Shortly after the first eventful mention in 1894, the first Baha'i center in the Western world was established in Chicago. The first follower of the religion in the United States was Thornton Chase, an insurance broker for the Union Mutual Insurance Co., now located at 175 West Jackson Blvd.

Chicago has remained an important center for the Baha'i Faith ever since. A Local Spiritual Assembly, the basic administrative unit of the Baha'i Faith, elected by secret ballot whenever the membership in a locality exceeds nine persons, was formed in Chicago, before 1900. There are now more than 800 Local Assemblies in the United States, and more than 17,000 in the world.

The first Baha'i convention in the United States was held in Chicago in 1907, attracting a few score people to consult on the construction of a Baha'i Temple. The first plots of land for the now familiar Baha'i House of Worship, in Wilmette, were purchased by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Chicago in 1908. The Baha'i Temple was opened to public use in 1953.

In May, 1912 Abdu'l-Baha, son of the founder of the religion and the leader of the worldwide Baha'i community following the death of

Baha'u'llah, was in Chicago to attend the dedication of the Temple grounds. On the evening before the ceremony, in a gathering in downtown Chicago, he explained the significance of the majestic building that was soon to be constructed.

"The real temple is the very word of God," he said, "for to it all humanity must turn and it is the center of unity for all mankind...Temples are the symbols of the divine uniting force, so that when people gather there...they may recall the fact that the law has been revealed for them and that the law is to unite them..."

"For thousands of years the human race has been at war," he said. "It is enough...for thousands of years the nations have denied each other, considering each other as infidel and inferior. It is sufficient."

He closed with a prayer for America: "O Thou kind Lord!Confirm this revered nation to upraise the standard of the oneness of humanity, to promulgate the Most Great Peace, to become thereby most glorious and praiseworthy among all the nations of the world."

By 1939 the growth of the Baha'i community had become so substantial that the National Spiritual Assembly, elected annually to govern the affairs of the Baha'is throughout the country, moved

its permanent offices to 536 Sheridan Road, Wilmette.

At the time of the move there were only 72 Local Assemblies in the entire North American continent. Today there are more than 800 in the U.S. alone. In addition, there are Baha'is in more than 5000 communities around the country.

"In the United States the Baha'i community grew more than six-fold in nine years," according to recent statement of the National Spiritual Assembly. "Thousands of Blacks

joined the Cause, particularly in South Carolina which in 1972 had more Baha'is than there were in all of the United States in 1937."

"The influx of minorities changed the character of the Baha'i community," the statement continued, "making it even more diverse and dynamic. Simultaneously, the unprecedentedly large proportion of youth among the new converts, radically changed the age distribution and brought additional vigor to the community."