

Divine Springtime



Louise Caswell Recalls
the Early Years of the
Bahá'í Faith in Central
America and Panama

By

Daniel Nelson Wegener

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INTRODUCTION

During the first National Convention of the Bahá'fs of Guatemala in 1961, Hand of the Cause William Sears suggested to Louise Caswell that she write a history of the Bahá'f Faith in Central America. As he explained in a letter four years later: "The important thing is that posterity will have a record of the history of that part of the world before much of the wonderful exciting information is lost, and the wonderful stories of the early days can no longer be recalled by those who lived through them." For several years Louise struggled in her efforts to be obedient to the Hand of the Cause by collecting her clippings and notes, writing friends and National Assemblies for contributions, and writing down her memories of the experiences she could recall from her many years as a pioneer. In spite of her efforts, progress was slow and help from others was meager.

While living in Guatemala as a pioneer in 1972, I agreed to take up where Louise had left off as the project was of great interest to me. During the period from January 1972 to January 1977, we have been corresponding about the many details and the final shape of the book. I have taken the liberty to add to Louise's original material to

round out the book and to tie the often sketchy information into one story. Unfortunately much of the historical details have already been lost. Hence, this book is not meant to be an exhaustive historical presentation of the establishment and growth of the Bahá'í Faith in Central America. It is instead, the story of one of the pioneers who was among the first to arrive and who has steadfastly remained. This is Louise's story as remembered by her, and those who loved her and worked with her. It is also a summary of the major historical developments in the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in Central America and Panama.

Perhaps of even more importance, this book offers the potential pioneer a close-up view of what pioneering is all about and especially what it meant to be a pioneer in the early years. Finally, this is a glimpse of the countless ways in which Shoghi Effendi, the Beloved Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, cherished, guided and sustained the Pioneers and the infant Bahá'í institutions throughout his thirty-six years of service.



Louise Caswell, 1948

OUR FIRST MEETING

The air was heavy and moist to the skin, the sky hazy and orange as the sun shot its last rays over the mountaintops. The airport was surprisingly modern, almost futuristic, with its plain lines, white marble, and high windows. We were forming our first impressions, my wife Pam and I, of the "Land of Eternal Spring" that evening, March 15, 1970. Ours was a challenging task because there were so many unknowns. We were on our way to be the directors of the Dorothy B. Baker Institute in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. We were greeted that evening by a pioneer from the States, Thelma Chapman, who had moved with her large family to Guatemala two years before. Her husband was an attorney who returned to the States periodically to keep his law firm prospering in order to support their endeavors in Guatemala. It was a great sacrifice. Thelma was accompanied by Mario Garcia, a radiant Guatemalan Bahá'í who exhibited all the finest qualities inherent in the Maya-Quiché Indians. After carefully loading our baggage in her small Japanese car, we suddenly found ourselves admiring the boulevards and fountains of Guatemala City. The streets narrowed as we approached the central zone and we were struck by the box-like buildings

that formed a wall from street corner to street corner and the square, iron-barred windows that lined the streets on both sides. The large buses left the faint smell of diesel smoke in the air, but the sky was still clear and the stars began to shine in the dark spaces between the tiled roofs of the one story buildings.

We soon found ourselves in front of the National Bahá'í Center, a small building on a corner near the downtown area. Thelma took us inside and introduced us to Louise Caswell, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly. She was rather short and slight of build which served to emphasize her graceful manner. Her hair was silvery gray and her sparkling brown eyes gave her face an added serenity and warmth, especially when she smiled directly at us. Her sweet and loving nature set us at ease instantly as she proceeded to ask us about our flight and our immediate plans. After getting acquainted we said some prayers together and we felt the power of the prayers as never before.

The next day Thelma picked us up at our "pension" which was very near the Bahá'í Center and then we went to pick up Louise. We all set off for a short sightseeing trip to nearby Antigua, the Colonial capital of Guatemala. We had the opportunity to ask both of them many questions about our new country, as we took turns looking through the Spanish-English dictionary, fired with zeal to master Spanish. Louise told us many things about Antigua and mentioned that she had lived there. She conversed very casually in perfect Spanish with some Indian women as we strolled through the main square admir-

ing the fountains and flowers. Her gentle voice and manner seemed to match the shyness of the Indians. Louise seemed to be attuned to the people and the pace of life in that enchanting place. Who was this gracious lady who seemed so out of place and yet so much a part of it? How had she come to adopt Guatemala as her home and how did she master the Spanish language? We discovered the answers to these questions and learned to appreciate and admire her many admirable qualities during the two years that followed.

BEFORE THE DAWN

Louise Caswell was born on March 18, 1896 in Portland, Oregon, where she spent an exciting and affluent childhood which included trips to Europe, dancing lessons, elocution lessons, coming-out parties, dancing in Junior League shows and amateur theatre acting. Her parents were rich, influential, and progressive. The first Garden Club in Portland was formed in a wisteria covered pagoda in her mother's garden. Her father was a philatelist who once said, "What the world needs is a world religion." The combination of their progressive ideas and the education they afforded Louise, gave her a wide background of experience and good preparation for working with people. Her education included one year at Miss Wheeler's School in Providence, Rhode Island, Portland Academy private school, two years at the University of California, and finally two years at Reed College, Portland, Oregon, where she graduated in 1916.

After finishing her formal schooling, Louise went to the Army nursing school in Camp Lewis, Washington, where she met and married a soldier, Dale Hinkle, on July 14, 1918. Her marriage

lasted only until 1922. As a divorcee she led a very frustrated and unhappy life for several years. Then in 1927, Louise met the Bahá'ís of Portland, Oregon, and she entered a new period in her life which eventually led her far from the United States and the life she had known. "The real love of the Bahá'ís and the supreme logic of the teachings quickly won me to the Faith and my full acceptance of it."

A NEW LIFE BEGINS

"My teachers in Portland and Geyersville Summer School included the Latimers, one of the earliest Bahá'í families there, Helen Pilkington, a Bahá'í scholar who wrote the introduction to the English edition of the Kitab-i-Iqán; Leroy Ioas who later served on the Inter-America Committee and eventually went to the Holy Land to work at the International Center, and later was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God; Ella Cooper and especially Louise and John Bosch, who so generously donated the property and buildings for the Geyersville Summer School. I also learned much from a loving association with many Bahá'ís in Portland. I had the unique distinction of attending all of Martha Root's lectures, in fact, I drove her in my car to many of them--I adored her. I also attended the lectures of Keith Ransom-Kehler."

Louise maintained a correspondence with the Holy Land from the very beginning of her Bahá'í life. The first letter postmarked "Haifa" was sent to her from Munfrih Khánum, the wife of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The letter began:

My dear Bahá'í daughter,
I thank you so much for your

letter and lovely gift. It conveys to me your sweet love and devotion. To hear from the Friends of the Beloved brings joy and solace to my heart always. It is not possible that I can meet you all in person, but I surely do in spirit and ever I earnestly supplicate for you all in my daily prayers, that you may be strengthened and blessed to carry on the work of the Beloved Cause in your land with untiring zeal...

(Signed,) Munfrih Khánum

Thus from the very beginning of her Bahá'í life, Louise was blessed with the love and prayers of the most eminent of Bahá'í women, for as Munfrih Khánum wrote later in the same letter:

May all the believers arise and give to the Beloved Cause the greatest gift that is in their power.

That is, the gift of themselves and their talents to the furtherance of the Revelation of the New Day.

I send to you the warm love and Bahá'í greetings from the Greatest Holy Leaf (Bahá'u'lláh's daughter) and myself....

Truly Louise did give herself, and all her talents to the Faith.

Louise launched herself into Bahá'í activities in the Portland area. In a letter from Haifa dated February 15, 1929, Louise's efforts were

acknowledged.

My dear Mrs. Caswell,

I am directed by the Guardian to thank you for your welcome letter of January 17th with enclosures.

The news of the friends' constant activities and services in Portland is specially gratifying to our Guardian, as we learned with pleasure from Ruhi, of their staunch faith, proper understanding of the Cause and of their eager desire to help in its progress and establishment. Not least your endeavors are looked to with very great hopes and expectations.

(Signed) Soheil Afán

My dear Co-worker,

I deeply appreciate the spirit of your unsparing devotion to the Cause, and will supplicate the Almighty to guide you, protect you, and sustain you in your labours.

Your true brother, (Signed) Shoghi

In the same letter, mention was made and thanks given for Louise's contribution. This was the first of a continuous stream of financial contributions to the world Center of the Faith. Her continued financial support to the Faith was not the least of the many ways in which she added to its growth. She gave unselfishly not only of herself, but of her material resources.

In a letter from Haifa dated January 26th, 1930, it was written: "He (the Guardian) was much touched by your assurance to devote your endeavors to the progress of His Faith, and in welcoming such spontaneous enthusiasm and sincerity, he wishes me to assure you of his ardent prayer that all your efforts may be successful and that you may render increasing services to the onward march of the Cause in America." (Signed) Soheil Afnan. These prayers were certainly answered as Louise rendered increasing services in teaching the Faith. Her teaching activities included working with youth, a local newspaper editor and local radio stations, and teaching a class in Esperanto. She also traveled to Saratoga, California to teach the Bahá'í Faith. In a letter from Haifa dated April 18, 1932, her work in this area was acknowledged. "But together with this method (radio) there should be intensive teaching whereby those interested are made to study thoroughly and fully embrace the Faith. The cause wants adherents who are willing to shoulder responsibility and when the occasion arises sacrifice their life and all in its path. Shoghi Effendi trusts that you are doing that as well, as he is fully familiar with the services you have been rendering along that line."

(Signed) Ruhf Afnán.

In October of 1933, Louise's mother died. Although Louise was naturally stricken with grief over her loss, she nevertheless found herself able to enter still wider fields of service to her beloved Faith. In a letter from Haifa dated December 15th, 1933 we find:

He (the Guardian) was deeply gra-

tified to learn of the increasing zeal with which you are extending the scope of your teaching activities. The short teaching trip which you, together with some of your young and active believers, have undertaken to Seattle, Monroe and Vancouver will, it is hoped, be abundant and enduring in its results. Such sincere, whole-hearted and united endeavors for the spread of the message cannot but lead eventually to the triumph of the Cause, and to its further penetration into regions and circles where the very name of the movement had for long remained unknown.

Shoghi Effendi wishes you, therefore, to attach the greatest importance to the cause of teaching, and and to endeavor, through every means to insure its development and progress in your locality. His prayers on your behalf will continue to be offered to Bahá'u'lláh that, through His grace and mercy, you may be increasingly imbued with the spirit of the Cause and be enabled to spread its light throughout the world.

(Signed) H. Rabbani

Through Bahá'u'lláh's mercy and her tireless efforts, Louise became more and more imbued with the spirit of the Cause as she continued to teach and to spread its light. In a letter from

Haifa dated September 14, 1935 it was written:
"In closing may I assure you of the Guardian's deep felt appreciation of your teaching activities in Spokane, Boise, and Vancouver, and of his prayers for the unhindered development and continued success of your work for the Cause."
(Signed) H. Rabbani. At that time Louise was considering a trip to Europe to teach the Faith, but the Guardian advised her to wait and do it en route to pilgrimage when her resources permitted. If possible she was to settle permanently in Europe. However, these plans were never realized, and instead Louise remained in Oregon and continued her teaching and other activities. Then in April of 1937, she received a suggestion from the National Spiritual Assembly that she undertake a teaching trip to Nashville, Tennessee.

HOME-FRONT PIONEERING-HER FIRST MOVE

In the Guardian's Convention Cable of April 21st, 1936, Shoghi Effendi sent out a call for pioneers to go to Latin America. After nine years of active Bahá'í life, Louise enthusiastically offered through the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada to spend the winter in Mexico. What a disappointment when her offer was refused ! It was almost a year later when the National Spiritual Assembly suggested that she go to Nashville to do some follow-up teaching with the people who had become interested in the Bahá'í Faith through the efforts of Marian Little. A letter from Haifa acknowledged and encouraged her new endeavor.

Beloved Bahá'í Sister,

The Guardian is in receipt of your letter of March 29th, and is delighted to hear that, at the National Spiritual Assembly's suggestion, you are planning to undertake a teaching trip to Nashville. He wishes me to assure you of his prayers at the Holy Shrines for the success of your visit, and to express the hope that through it you may receive a

fresh and full opportunity to assist in the spread of the teachings in new fields. The mission with which you have been entrusted is certainly difficult and delicate, but you should be confident that with the assistance of Bahá'u'lláh you will be made fully equal to your task. Have courage and whole-heartedly persevere in your splendid efforts. (Signed)H. Rabbani

This fresh opportunity to teach the Cause served to prepare Louise for the many difficult and delicate tasks she was later to tackle in her many years as a foreign pioneer. She was indeed made fully equal to that first difficult task and to many, many others in the years that followed.

Louise set to work immediately in Nashville, and her teaching trip turned into a new home as she remained to continue in the teaching work. In a letter dated May 15th, 1937 we find:

The Guardian also wishes me to express his gratification at the success of your teaching work in Nashville. He has read with keen interest the clippings you had enclosed, and is delighted to realize the wide response your talks and lectures have brought to the message. He is continually and fervently praying that your trip to this "Athens of the South" may result in attracting and confirming many souls of true spiritual insight and of intellectual capacity. Remain assured that the seeds you are now

so carefully sowing will in due time bear an abundant fruitage. There is no effort in His path that can be considered to have been spent in vain. Persevere, therefore, and be confident and happy, success will assuredly be yours. (Signed)H. Rabbani

In July of that same year, Louise went to the Geyserville Summer School in California, and was undecided about returning to Tennessee. But in a letter dated July 10th the Guardian advised her "...to return to Knoxville in order to follow the work that has been so splendidly started. Your first and foremost objective upon your return, he feels, should be to lay firm foundations for the establishment of a Local Assembly so that after your departure the work may be carried forward steadily and along specific Bahá'í administrative lines. " (Signed)H. Rabbani Just before going to the Summer School, Louise had extended her teaching activities to Knoxville, and in obedience to the Guardian she returned again to Tennessee.

In August of that same year, Louise sent a letter to the Guardian, and wrote of her hopes to form a local Spiritual Assembly in Knoxville that coming Ríḍván. In a letter of October 27th, 1938, the Guardian acknowledged with great happiness her teaching successes. The letter went on: "For the present however, the Guardian would advise that you remain in Knoxville and assist the friends in consolidating their work and in acquiring the teachings necessary to enable them to administer their affairs efficiently

and along sound administrative lines. (Signed) H. Rabbani

So Louise remained in Knoxville and continued in her efforts to consolidate the young Bahá'í community there. It must have been a great disappointment for her when it proved impossible to form the Assembly that Ridván. The Guardian advised her to return to Knoxville after the National Convention in 1938, and to continue her work there. Her disappointment was overcome by her desire to be obedient.

Louise remained for another full year in Tennessee, and on April 21st, 1939, her cherished goal was at last realized and the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Knoxville, Tennessee was duly elected and fully established. What a victory it was and a fitting reward for her many efforts there. Her thoughts turned once again to teaching in a foreign country and service as a pioneer for her beloved Faith.

THE GREAT STEP INTO THE FIELD OF PIONEERING

Shortly after the formation of the Knoxville Assembly, Louise received a letter from Leroy Ioas, secretary of the National Teaching Committee, asking her to consider going to settle in Panama, in response to the Advent of Divine Justice, that epoch making letter of the Guardian in which he asked for immediate settlement of pioneers in every country in Latin America. Louise had thought often about pioneering in a foreign land, but the letter was so unexpected, and she had never really considered Panama. Nevertheless she pondered the suggestion seriously.

Two days before receiving the letter she dreamed that she was traveling alone to Panama on a great ship sailing over southern waters, over a sea as smooth as glass. Events passed with amazing rapidity, and the spirit of the Guardian accompanied her. Also as she walked up and down many flights of stairs with the Greatest Holy Leaf, she learned from her how to heal the sick. The dream was the confirmation she needed. She answered the letter the very next day, offering to go to Panama in September when the lease on her apartment in Knoxville expired.

By September, Louise had sold a house in the mountain reserve in Oregon for less than one sixth of the cost to obtain funds for her travel expenses. The National Spiritual Assembly, having accepted her offer to go to Panama, sent additional help for the boat passage. In a letter from Haifa dated July 29th, 1939, the Guardian expressed his joy, and at the end of the letter he wrote these soul-stirring words which were like a loud trumpet call to action and echoed throughout her mind and soul:

Dear and prized Co-worker,

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

Your true and grateful brother,
(Signed) Shoghi

The night before her departure from California, Tony Seto arranged a delightful Chinese dinner in San Francisco's China Town with the Bahá'ís of that city. Louise met with the members of the Inter-America Committee, including Louie Mathews, Joy Allen, and Leroy Ioas.

This committee was in charge of planning teaching activities throughout Latin America. This was the beginning of a vital link maintained between Louise and the administrative bodies of the Faith in the United States.

On the morning of her departure, some of the Bahá'ís took Louise on a drive through Golden Gate Park to see the trees where 'Abdu'l-Bahá had walked and had told the believers that these same trees felt His presence. Later that day, September 25th, 1939, the Norfolk Steamer docked in Los Angeles and departed from that port bearing Louise Caswell on the first part of an adventurous endless journey that was to be her life--a pioneer. She was joined on the voyage by another pioneer, Johnny Eichenaur, a youth of only seventeen, who was on his way to El Salvador. He carried with him a letter from Mr. Cordell Hull which he later used to enter the country of El Salvador where he intended to finish his education.

The two new pioneers arrived in the Republic of Panama on October 4th, 1939. They discovered a small city which embraced the Bay of Panama. They admired the many wheat-colored people dressed in clean white clothes. The streets were narrow and followed no particular pattern--she learned later that not long before, they were merely cow-paths. They were so pre-occupied with all the many new sights, they did not realize at first that the air resounded with the lilting tones of many church bells. They quickly realized that it was very, very hot . . .

In obedience to Louie Mathews' instructions (she was secretary of the Inter-America Committee at that time) and before doing anything else, Louise went immediately to the United States Consul to register herself. Her first step was to hire an old-fashioned car with enough space for her trunk, hat-bag, and all the usual luggage of a female traveler in the 30's. Upon arrival at the Consulate, Louise discovered a great surprise and a wonderful inspiration in the form of two letters awaiting her, one from the beloved Guardian, and the other from Leroy Ioas welcoming her to her new pioneering post. What powerful words she found in these letters. The message from Shoghi Effendi read in part: "The spirit of complete self-sacrifice, of courage and audacity that have inspired you to take such a step in the face of so many difficulties and obstacles will surely lead you to success, and will, even as a magnet, draw upon you the confirmation and blessing of Bahá'u'lláh."

Such a rush of exultation poured over her as she read and re-read the letters, and recalled the stirring words of the Guardian's last letter to her in the States. She recalled those precious moments and described them years later in these words: "It was spring-time for the Faith in Panama. 'How wondrous was that spring-time and how heavenly was that gift,' and this broken-winged bird was truly soaring in the world of the spirit to raise the call of the Kingdom in these vast and spacious regions. These were the seed-sowing days in Panama, not the harvest time; the days when the unity of the breezes of springtime, the bountiful

showers of grace, the warmth of the Sun of Bahá combined to protect the pioneers. It must have been the same springtime in all the many countries where pioneers went as a part of the teaching plan. "

In her moments of exultation, Louise could not have known the full significance of the Guardians words--"...so weighty with responsibility, so arduous in nature...." He was perhaps warning her that tests and difficulties would come, and in fact, they did come continuously, for that is the essence of pioneering--not just the tests, but the spirit with which they are met and overcome, and the implicit and constant reliance that the pioneer must have on Bahá'u'lláh and the Supreme Concourse to overcome them.

Her first test 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. Every morning at dawn Louise invoked Bahá'u'lláh and looked out over the bay through the palm trees at the rising sun, preparing herself for the many challenges ahead.

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 Wantuck. 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.

Without assistance from any Committee, Mathew had arisen in April, six months before Louise's arrival, to go to Panama. He responded to the Guardian's call in the Advent of Divine Justice: "Let them not tarry until such time as their fellow-laborers will have passed the first stage in their campaigns of teaching..." (Advent of Divine Justice, page 50.) (The Guardian later wrote Louise and told her to use Advent of Divine Justice and Tablets of the Divine Plan as her principle teaching inspiration.)

It was with unexpressed regret that Mathew accepted instructions from the Inter - America Committee to transfer to Nicaragua, a post where he was so urgently needed. The small cattle boat, the Acajutla, dubbed as "not worth a German bomb" by Mathew, was waiting to take him on

the next part of his journey as a pioneer. As dusk fell, Louise and Cora came to say good-bye to him. As they stood on the floating dock, Mathew sang a heart-rending chant he had composed about the Dawn-Breakers. The three pioneers were surrounded by the spirit of God as they stood alone in that profound silence by the sea, as though they were the only people in the world at that moment. After giving them a kiss on the cheek, Mathew boarded his boat which slowly disappeared into the dark night, up the western coast to Nicaragua.

Mathew always served as an example to Louise and his memory was very dear to her. He was the pioneer who first gave the message to Alfred Osborne, now known throughout the Bahá'í World for his integrity, steadfastness and constancy. When he (Mathew) left for Nicaragua he turned this precious contact over to Louise and Cora. "Mathew once told me, 'I want to be imprisoned like my Lord. I am an Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh'. It is comforting to realize that Bahá'u'lláh has promised to those who are faithful, association with these holy souls in all the worlds of God. Mathew was concerned only with promoting the Faith. He was most obedient to the Inter-America Committee. Mrs. Louie Mathews had told him to always wear rubbers and carry an umbrella. 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 com-

plete obliviousness to the world, his readiness to serve without ostentation, rendered him unforgettable to those who met him. He was one of those of whom it has been written, '...and all that dwell in every land shall be illumined by their memory.' (Advent of Divine Justice, page 70.) He traveled with two suitcases, one filled with Bahá'í books and the other with his clothes."

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

Gayle Woolson, a pioneer to Costa Rica at the time, has written: "One day while I was in San José, someone brought me a letter sent to me by a believer in Nicaragua telling me that Mathew was in jail because his motives for being in Nicaragua were misunderstood and misinterpreted. It was suggested that I write to the United States Consulate in Managua to inquire as to the whereabouts of Mathew saying that I had not heard from him for a long time and was worried about him. This I did and it brought an investigation of his whereabouts and he was immediately released but his release was some months after he had been imprisoned. His health was broken as a result of his ordeal. He was sent back to the States and died shortly thereafter (January 13th 1913). His grave is in Brownsville, Texas. We

can truly say that he gave his life for Nicaragua."

Johnny Eichenauer was drafted and sent to Germany. He helped reorganize the persecuted German Bahá'í Community after the armistice. Cora and Louise carried on the teaching work in Panama. They were very happy to have each other as companions and were in accord with each other as regarded the teaching methods needed in Panama. It was difficult for them to find a place to live, so they asked at the United States Consulate, where it was suggested that they take a room with a "do-gooder, Episcopal lady." The house had a balcony on the Bay of Panama and was very interesting, but Louise did not want to stay there very long because the closet in her room was full of the dead husband's clothes. Her cousin who lived in army quarters found an apartment for them over a florist shop, but they were forbidden to have meetings there, and had to eat out. Finally they found a suitable apartment where they were more comfortable and were free to have meetings.

At first opportunities to teach the Faith were few. As Louise remembers those early days: "All doors seemed closed, until Cora and I went to the University, where I was to study Spanish. The rector said that we could have meetings in the University any time. We had several on Sunday mornings. Cora finally got work in the Canal Zone, and I spent my mornings visiting and looking for Bahá'ís. We tried to contact Mathew's friends who were interested in the Faith, principally students and teachers." In a letter from Cora and Louise to the Guardian dated November

26th, 1939, we find more details about those early days: "By attending all possible public functions, by making personal calls, by making friends with students at the University and by associating freely with people from all walks of life wherever we go, we are slowly but surely becoming known as Bahá'fs and whenever an occasion arises we give the message and distribute literature. Among acquaintances in the Republic are professional and business men, humanitarians, educators, and students."

On December 11th, of that same year, the Guardian answered their letter this way:

Dear and Valiant Co-Workers,

My heart overflows with joy at the news you give me. The spirit animating you both in your services to the Faith is truly exemplary, and will no doubt enable you to overcome and obstacles that may confront you. I am deeply thankful for having such staunch and devoted co-workers in the Divine Vineyard. Persevere, and be assured that I will continue to pray for both from the depths of my heart.

Your true brother,

(Signed) Shoghi

It was such letters from the beloved Guardian that kept them going and sustained their spirits. They tried to expand continually their efforts. As Louise explained in a letter to the Guardian dated March 30th, 1940: "I am spending one month or more in the town of Colon on the Atlan-

tic side of the Isthmus of Panama and my first few days have been very refreshing because I have met Europeans, people from the States, and Panamanians, and have spoken to them of the Bahá'í Religion. Under the roof of this pension, Bahá'í literature has been read in three languages and well received: Volume V of the Bahá'í World attracts those who wish to investigate. I can see the limitless possibilities here and have had occasion to speak in several languages. I shall try to practice my languages here and eventually perfect them.

"In the Canal Zone the white and negro sections are designated as 'silver' and 'gold' from early construction days when negroes were paid in silver and whites in gold. A class in 'Silver City' has been arranged by Mr. Osborne, superintendant of colored schools. He arranged the class in La Boca on the Pacific side of the Canal and the men in this class are outstanding in spiritual qualities.

"Now it seems that there will be two classes on the Atlantic side to be conducted simultaneously with those on the Pacific side. I shall go weekly to the Pacific side as Mrs. Oliver's work does not permit her to teach since the hours are very bad. We are praying for better working conditions for her."

Louise and Cora continued diligently in their efforts to widen the scope of their teaching activities as evidenced in this letter, written almost a year later to the Guardian, dated March 2, 1941: "During the last year Lorol Schopflocher,

Mrs. Adolphson of Honolulu, John Stearns, Gerrard Sluter, Eleanor Adler, Marcia Atwater, Mrs. True, Edna and Katherine, have favored us with visits. This month we expect Emeric and Rosemary Sala and Mrs. Mary Barton. Mrs. Stewart who is in Nicaragua will soon be here.

"The lack of cultural organizations and clubs in the Republic of Panama limits the contacts there. However, we are fortunate in having openings at La Universidad Nacional de Panamá and the Panamanian Women's College Club. Louise made new Panamanian friends through writing a paper in Spanish which she read to the Spanish Conversation Group of the Canal Zone College Women's Club. We have put forth a tremendous effort to get other pioneers to come, especially men to contact soldiers and men in Panama. To stimulate this interest in Panama, Louise visited all the summer schools in the States in 1940.

"Last summer Cora was the house guest of the wife of the Superintendent of Schools in the Canal Zone for six weeks and furthered her interest in the Faith. After nine months work in a Canal Zone Clubhouse, where she met hundreds of people, Cora got a permanent position at the Board of Health Laboratory, Gorgas Hospital, where she works in a congenial atmosphere and is making new contacts. She is going to Costa Rica for ten days this month and will be with the pioneers there."

Although in reading over the historic letters from Louise and Cora to the Guardian, one does not detect sadness or difficulty, the difficulties

were ever-present for the pioneers. Louise did not write, nor did she discuss the difficulties, and she never complained, but in a letter from Dorothy Baker, later appointed Hand of the Cause of God, dated March 18, 1942, we can get some idea of the tests and difficulties they suffered:

Louise dear,

Your note came in time to take with a prayer group that has been coming in at noon during the 19 day fast. Tomorrow we will pray again for you and for the Canal Zone. How I hope that it will pass quickly, whatever the difficulty. God's dear angels do have so much to suffer, at every door. In a letter to Roberta Christian, The Guardian recently said: "Life in this world holds many tragic and terrible hours for us all - even the beloved Manifestation of God Himself. Even He is not spared the sufferings that fall to Man's lot in this fleeting world." Later he writes in the same letter: "At such a time it is not unreasonable to expect your body and your spirit to be exhausted and depressed."

But Louise, you are so beautiful, that Canal Zone cannot fail to see it. It would seem to me that you would have only to be what you are, a rare, delicate instrument of beauty in the hands of the Beloved, to attract the whole panamanian world. And it will come, by the bounty of His Highness the Exalted One.

I think our greatest suffering comes in loving the Cause so much that impediments to its spread amount to actual heart break.

You are really in a position of spiritual command, as suggested in this portion of an unpublished Tablet of the Master, shared with us by George Latimer at a recent National Spiritual Assembly meeting. "Every soul who sacrifices his life (i. e. serves faithfully) in the services of the Cause of God, all existing beings will come under his command, and confirmations will pour upon him from every direction, so that he quickens the souls, tranquilizes the spirits, and bestows prosperity to the bodies."

Translated by M. A. Esphahani, 1908.

(Signed)Dorothy

Louise and Cora held regular public meetings and many Theosophists and Masons attended. One evening a leading Theosophist from Cuba attended along with several other Theosophists. When she left, she said that she hoped all the Theosophists would become Bahá'ís.

Later that same year, Louise directed a letter to the Guardian dated October 21, 1942, in which she conveyed the news about the teaching activities in Panama: "Philip Sprague spent two days teaching here on his way to Buenos Aires. Fourteen friends attended a meeting at which he spoke in the Bahá'í Center. Present were Panamanians, Jamaicans, United States citizens,

including representatives of both the Army and the Navy. All were attracted to Philip's presentation of the Faith as he teaches in a commanding manner. Cora and I are happy and grateful to have found someone who understands the importance of the teaching work here. He plans to return and conduct a series of classes as soon as possible.

"There are now five Bahá'í pioneers here: Norma and Claire Hamilton from Texas, both of whom show promise of developing into able teachers, and Bert Wernecker, a Bahá'í from Detroit who is serving in the Army but who asked for duty here. These five (Cora and I are the other two) and the new Bahá'ís of Panama and the Canal Zone meet in an informal group and practice Bahá'í procedure and have established a fund of substantial proportions."

So after three years of continuous and systematic efforts, Louise and Cora found themselves working with a group of Bahá'ís instead of alone. The next major step in the teaching efforts was the establishment of a Local Spiritual Assembly. In that same letter of October 21, Louise went on to explain many difficulties which were making the establishment of the Assembly unachievable. As always, patience and perseverance as well as many prayers brought results, and at last on April 21, 1945, the first Local Spiritual Assembly was established in Panama.

The happy news of the formation of the Assembly was received with joy in the Holy Land, and the response was full of praise as in this letter

from Haifa, dated July 5th, 1945:

The formation of this very important Assembly was a source of deep joy for him, and he feels that your persevering efforts, and those of Mrs. Oliver and all the other dear friends, have at last borne fruits in a worthy form; he hopes that the believers there will go forward, with the greatest love and unity, to the accomplishment of the many tasks that lie ahead, such as increasing the community's members, holding regular public meetings, teaching the Indians, etc.

He very greatly appreciates your own constant labours in this small but significant Republic, and assures you that he will continue to pray for you, that your efforts may be richly blessed and that you may be guided and strengthened in your devoted labours for the Faith.

(Signed) R. Rabbani

Dear and valued co-worker:

I am so glad to receive the splendid news conveyed by your letter, and I wish to assure you of my heartfelt and abiding appreciation of your constant, your devoted, and meritorious activities and services to our beloved Faith. Persevere in your noble task and rest assured that I will continually supplicate for you at the Holy Shrines.

Your true and grateful brother,

(Signed) Shoghi.

The realization of the goal of a Local Spiritual Assembly in Panama City allowed Louise to teach in other localities. She turned her attention to the Canal Zone and to nearby Colón, where she established her residence. Hascle Cornbleth also pioneered to Colón and helped build up the Local Spiritual Assembly there. During that time Louise opened the city of Santiago to the Faith.

In October of 1943, a year and a half before the formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly another pioneer had arrived in Panama to assist with the teaching. Miss Julie Regal was her name, and she became a dear and life-long friend of Louise. Miss Regal's memories of those pioneering days give us another perspective about Louise and also provide some details about the years that followed until her departure from Panama in 1948:

"Louise never cared about receiving credit for anything she did, and she hated limelight. Once she was asked by George Westerman, A Negro editor and leader in the Canal Zone black community, to be chairman of a large Sunday afternoon meeting which he had organized. The prospect of sitting on a platform before all those people distressed her, but she considered it a way to serve the Faith, so she went and took me with her. Not only were we the only Bahá'ís there, we were also the only white persons.

"The purpose of this meeting was to develop in the black man self-respect. Various speakers explained how Negroes were not an inferior race, neither biologically nor culturally, and elaborated on their achievements. And Louise, sitting before

them and presiding with a beautiful, beaming countenance and overflowing sweetness and graciousness, shone in the center of that gathering as a dazzling ornament.

"When early in 1945 it became apparent that an assembly could be formed in Panama City in April if I, who was then living in the Canal Zone, would move in, Louise helped me in this matter by inviting me to share her apartment. With much pain I left the apartment I had come to love and went to live with Louise. Not only to live with her, but to work closely with her.

"Apartments in the Zone cost far less than in Panama, and Louise, to encourage me to make the move, offered to let my rent stay at what it had been. However, I insisted on paying my share of all expenses. This was just the first instance of many, which revealed to me her great generosity.

"In her constant teaching of the Faith, she did much walking around Panama City, and often I went with her, and sometimes she sent me to call on people alone. Frequently we visited people in the fetid gloomy tenements.

Every Wednesday evening a fireside was held in our apartment. These firesides had been held weekly ever since Louise and Cora had first moved into that apartment (Cora later moved into her own), and after Louise moved to Colón, I continued to hold them until I left the Isthmus in February, 1948. These firesides drew people from all of Panama's diverse races and walks of life.

When the first assembly was formed, this apartment became the Bahá'í Center and remained so until my departure.

"Louise and Cora had become acquainted with a number of Panama's most distinguished leaders and intellectuals soon after they arrived on the Isthmus in 1939, and these men occasionally spoke at our firesides and conferences.

"The publisher of the newspaper, 'Star and Herald,' was our special friend. Being a mulatto who had been educated in the United States, he deeply appreciated the Bahá'í Teachings on racial equality, and especially the adherence to this principle which the Bahá'í pioneers unswervingly demonstrated. Articles which we submitted to his paper were seldom rejected. Other newspapers, also, often printed Bahá'í write-ups -- sometimes on the front page. Thus all the newspaper-reading inhabitants of Panama learned of the Bahá'í Faith and its principles in those days.

'Once Louise pondered deeply on the Guardian's desire that we enroll Indians in the Faith. How could she become acquainted with an Indian? Then she had an inspiration. She called on José Daniel Crespo, Minister of Education, whom she knew, and asked him for the name of a San Blas Indian. He obliged and furthermore, he sent word to this man, Manuel Corgas, that on a certain day a North American lady was going to call on him.

"Several times I have heard Manuel Corgas describe his wonderment when he received this message. What could it mean? Why would a

North American lady want to see him? When Louise came and explained the Bahá'í Faith to him, he was captivated by it, and so he became the first Indian believer in Panama. Señor Crespo's attention had been drawn to him by his diligent labors in activities to provide wholesome recreation for the youth of his race.

"Right after his conversion Manuel made several visits to our apartment for Bahá'í instruction. Louise taught him and she also had me give him lessons.

"Occasionally he invited us to large Indian gatherings, where we were the only whites present, and where we were asked to tell about the Faith.

"In January 1946, the first Bahá'í Congress to which Bahá'ís from all Latin American countries were invited was held in Panama City, and the following January a second congress, for Central America and the Caribbean Islands, was held there. The meetings took place in our apartment and in Mrs. Oliver's. Of both of these congresses I was secretary-treasurer.

"Before the second congress, the Panama Assembly established a fund to pay for the travel expenses of delegates from all the other countries. (Otherwise, few if indeed any, would have come, since all of these people were much too poor.) Louise, unbeknown to anyone else, offered to furnish me 100% of the money needed. This amount was not required of her because of the other donations, but it was another evidence of her immense generosity.

"As a crowning event at the close of the second congress, the Panama Assembly decided to hold a banquet. The Colombia Hotel, on Bolivar Square in the oldest quarter of the city, was selected as the site. Fifty-one persons were invited and came: they included the publisher of the 'Star and Herald,' who was also an ex-president of Panama, the Governor of the Province of Colón, an ex-ambassador, and university professors, as well as rich and slum-dwellers, black, white, Indian and Chinese, Panamanians, Zonians, and North Americans, Bahá'í and non-Bahá'ís, and delegates from all, or most, of the Central American and Caribbean countries, and Mexico. Probably Panama had never before seen a gathering of such diversity.

"No one paid, for although it was not divulged, the expense was shared by Louise and me. She and I decided the seating arrangement and chose the chairman and speakers. Herself she placed toward the end of the table - away from the center and notables. But she insisted that I should sit beside the publisher of the 'Star and Herald,' José Gabriel Duque, 'because,' she explained, 'you are young and he will like that.'

"Alfred Osborne was married in December, 1943, in Colón on the Atlantic side of the Isthmus, and nearly all the Bahá'ís (About six people) came from the Pacific side to attend. During the reception Louise conversed with Mrs. Iola Edwards about the Faith and received from her an invitation to hold a fireside in her home. So, very soon Louise returned to Colón on this mission, and thereafter I went, too, as she had arranged for me to speak to a group of teen age

girls, friends of Mrs. Edwards. At her suggestion I spoke about Tahirih. She also arranged for Cora Oliver to visit the Colón friends and speak at their meetings. Thus the Faith was established in Colón.

"Some years later a Spanish-speaking white couple, Señor and Señora Lalama, who belonged to the Panama City community, moved to Colón. Louise was much concerned, for the believers in Colón were all black and English-speaking, and she said to me, 'I wonder how the Lalamas will get along there? This will really be a test for them and the Colón Bahá'ís.' With this thought uppermost in my mind, I went to visit them. On entering their meeting room, immediately I saw the answer; everyone black and white, was smiling with great joy. The black Bahá'ís were exceedingly glad to have some white believers among them, and the whites were very happy because of the love and solicitude shown them by the blacks. The language problem was solved by a member who could translate and very attentively did so.

"Soon after Louise moved to the city of Colón (August or September of 1946). She called on the Governor of that province, Victor Navas, gave him the Bahá'í Message and obtained from him an invitation to hold Bahá'í Meetings in the Government Building whenever we might choose. Accordingly, several times we held Bahá'í public meetings there, and the Panama City and Canal Zone Bahá'ís would cross the Isthmus to attend them. Governor Navas himself honored us with his presence often.

"The Sunday before I left Panama a farewell picnic was held for me by all the Isthmian Bahá'ís on the outskirts of Colón. Among those who attended was Governor Navas."

THE FATEFUL FORTIES

During the decade of the forties, Louise had several interesting experiences outside her pioneering post. Back in 1941, a combination of events resulted in a tour of all five Central American Republics. She made a quick decision to tour all of Central America--a project that the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States had previously suggested to her. This is how she recalls her impressions of that trip:

"In Tegucigalpa, Honduras, I found a very dignified, organized Assembly, -- the work of Tony Roca. I met with them (all men) and they all stood up for the opening prayer. Then they opened the contribution box and counted the money and the lottery tickets. One of their members made his living by selling lottery tickets. Another published a small news sheet called, 'La Nueva Era--Organo de la Assamblea Bahá'í.' I gave him \$40.00 to publish it for four months, but he published only one issue. Years later, having resigned from the Faith, he met me on the street and I asked him for the rest of the money. He replied that he had spent it on something else. He had lost his love for the Faith.

"At that time, Mathew Kaszab was still in Managua, Nicaragua, and he met me at the airport. I met the Bahá'ís there through him. I loved the spirit of the people, something special was there. After making inquiries, I realized that this friendly loving spirit was inherited from the district of Andalusia, home of the troubadours and poets. Whatever suffering the people have gone through they could never disguise that spirit of poetry and song.

"I stayed in a first class hotel for \$2.00 a day including meals and a swimming pool. Between meetings and visits I sat in a rocker on the porch or went swimming -- No hardships. Girls talked to me in the park. I remember how friendly and impressive one of the Bahá'ís was, he was a banker and a Mason. There was also dear, faithful Blanca Mejía, a polio victim who was able to attend the 1944 Centenary in Wilmette, Illinois, with the tender companionship of Gayle Woolson.

"In Costa Rica I stayed with Gayle who was doing wonderful work. The first Local Spiritual Assembly of Central America was established in that country in 1941. Gayle was going to school to learn Spanish and she had many friends and admirers. We made many teaching visits to her interested friends and she taught the Faith with such understanding and patience. I appreciate the association I had with her. She also taught in Nicaragua and Guatemala for a time. She is a fine lecturer on the Faith and has talked to large audiences of Masons, and over the radio. Gayle was later sent to South America -- Venezuela, Colombia, etc. Costa Rica was never able to replace her.

"In El Salvador I had the delight of witnessing the fine activities and efforts of Clarence Iverson and Johnny Eichenauer, both of whom had gone there in the early part of the 7 Year Plan. They had established the Faith on a solid basis there.

"Guatemala had an active though immature Local Spiritual Assembly. It was the only one of the five Republics in which I saw the New History Society (Covenant Breakers) literature. On a visit to Chichicastenango, I fell in love with the Maya-Quiché race, a love which influenced greatly my Bahá'í life for many years. I did not know that I would be returning in 1953 with the blessing of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, after a pilgrimage in that same year.

"The Inter-America Committee had asked me to initiate a correspondence course about the Faith while I was in El Salvador. One night a member of the Committee for Central America was scheduled to give a radio talk on the psychology of the Indians. Time on the radio was arranged and paid for and I was merely going to meet her there. The radio hall was full of people. The lecturer did not show, time was passing and the hour of our program was at hand! I couldn't afford to lose paid-for radio time, so I jumped up onto the platform(it was too high to step up) and in my heavily-accented Spanish I read from a Bahá'í pamphlet which luckily was in my purse. When the Bahá'í time was up the musicians appeared and I realized that the full audience was there all the time and listening as they waited for the music. Even the people looking in at the windows heard the Bahá'í message.

On reporting of my trip to the Committee, all that I could recommend was that a pioneer settler (pioneer) was needed in each country to sustain the work of the teaching.

"I travelled by plane to all five countries. It is fantastic to think of two aspects of my travels: how I always had enough income to live modestly without having to work and how thrilled I was in every country to know the people and tell of Bahá'u'lláh. Deceptions, promises, indifference, disappointments -- all were followed by a joyous sunrise and a new set of deceptions. It amazes me but we all go through this and come up smiling even though it seems that there is no result. However, our prayers, are answered but not always as we expect. Every effort seems a failure and then we see in some remote part, an answer to prayer --but not of one's own doing.

"About 1945, I took a trip to Colombia -- a great industrial country, home of emeralds, and very definitely a Catholic stronghold. The people said that if the Pope ever left Europe he would settle in Colombia. Cali, Colombia was very receptive to the Faith and I had great confirmations there. All alone I read a paper to the Masonic Lodge.

"The Local Assembly of Bogotá was inactive. So, in the intense cold I prayed and ran to keep warm, and used the long healing prayer for the community. Finally, just before leaving, I was able to get all nine members together. I was unable to make any spiritual or intellectual contact with anybody.

"In Cali, Colombia, I dropped into the Tourist Bureau and started activity that resulted in a newspaper article, my picture in the next issue of a major newspaper, and a talk at the Masonic Hall. Best of all was the promise of an Assembly in Cali. I also gave a talk at the Theosophical Society in Bogotá before I left. Gayle Woolson later came and build up an Assembly and also did wonderful work in Bogotá.

"During the period in the forties, I remember having suffered so much from the heat of Panama that I asked the Interamerica Committee if they could suggest a place that needed visiting, and would give me relief from the oppressive heat. They wrote back that they would like me to visit Haiti. I literally jumped from the skillet into the fire -- Haiti was even hotter! Anyway, I was asked to work with the Local Assembly there and was called upon to clarify some very essential matters about Bahá'í administration so the trip proved to be fruitful, but certainly not a relief from the heat."

Still another dimension of Louise's service during those fruitful years in Panama was her ability to contact and win the support of government officials and other dignitaries. Her dignity, charm and wit enabled her to attract them to the Faith, or at the least to support her teaching efforts. Not long after she and Cora were settled in Panama, they went to seek an interview with the President of Panama. They were eventually successful in their efforts and presented a copy of Dr. Esselmonts' Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, to President Boyd. "Panama is a peace-loving

nation" were his words as he accepted the book in the Gold Room of the Presidential Palace. He assured them that the Bahá'í teachings would be warmly received by the people of his country. During her 1941 visit to Honduras she went with Johnny Eichenauer to visit the President, at which time President Carias received a Bahá'í book from her. Years later she and Helen Holst presented a book to Villeda Morales, the President of Honduras during the years of 1957 to 1963. He seemed pleased to receive the book and they had a wonderful talk with him.

Still another example of Louise's contacts with important personages, and perhaps the most interesting, is the relationship she established with the Consul of France in Panama. Through contact with Louise and the Bahá'ís of Panama, he developed a great respect and high regard for the Bahá'ís and the Bahá'í Faith. His duties took him elsewhere in 1948, but before he left, he directed this letter to Louise:

Highly esteemed Mrs. Caswell:

I desire, by this means, to express to you what I said to you the other night at the Bahá'í meeting, when I said good-by to all my friends.

Each time I attend a function of the Bahá'í group of Colón, I found reason for profound spiritual delight, as each time I had the impression that I was drinking from a pure, crystal-line fountain. In the Bahá'í teachings, I admire the sentiments of fraternity, of love for your fellow-man, and above all, of tolerance, comprehension, and

bounty. I will never forget these words of Bahá'u'lláh:

"We are all the leaves of one tree and the fruits of one garden."

I can speak without passion of the Bahá'í Faith, since I am not a Bahá'í (perhaps I am one without knowing it as you say). If this atmosphere of frankness, sincerity, and rectitude that I sense among the Bahá'ís dominated the world, I am convinced that the grave difficulties now ever-present, would be solved in a most satisfactory manner for everyone. Soon I will be leaving for France. You can be sure that in my country, as in whatever country my work may take me, I will have the pleasure of having relationships with the Bahá'ís and will tell them of my good thoughts of them.

I desire for you the most complete success in your sacred spiritual mission, and thus must leave you, my esteemed friend, with the expression of my purest and most respectful friendship. (Signed) Roberto Guillois

Years later the same French Consul, having been assigned to El Salvador, was in San Salvador during the 1950 Conference and attended Bahá'í dinners. He sent five dozen roses each to Dorothy Baker and Louise.

Everywhere in her many teaching trips and at all her pioneering posts, Louise attempted and

usually succeeded in acquainting the leaders of thought and government with the ideals and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, both through her own example and her words.

The first major period of Louise's life as pioneer came to an end with the end of the decade. She had spent ten long but eventful years in Panama and her efforts were rewarded with many victories and confirmations. The Bahá'ís of Panama and the accomplishment of the construction of the first Bahá'í House of Worship in Central America in Panama were made possible by the early pioneers, their many sacrifices, and their constant devotion to the Cause. Louise was not the first, nor was she the only pioneer in Panama, but with the exception of devoted Cora Oliver, she stayed the longest, and hopefully this account of her memorable years there provides some insight into the task of pioneering, as well as of the early history of the Bahá'í Faith in that small but very significant republic.

THE TRANSITION

In January of 1950, Louise arrived in Managua, Nicaragua where she worked with Sheila Rice - Wray, who was an international travel teacher . She was a painter and was wondering how to make her living there. Louise suggested that she offer to paint the president's portrait--typically Louise bold and audacious, but Sheila never made the offer. Sheila did paint many pictures of scenery in Central America. Louise gave exhibitions of her work in Tegucigalpa, Honduras and Sheila gave one in Nicaragua at Louise's suggestion. By exhibiting Sheila's art and giving explanations of their significance--often closely related to the Bahá'í teachings, they made many friends and were able to teach them about the Faith. Sheila later taught the Faith in Bolivia, Panama, Nicaragua and Mexico and is now in the Dominican Republic. Louise has said of her, "She is very loving and lovable and will always be one of my closest friends."

Sheila also regards Louise as one of her closest friends, as she wrote in a letter dated August 1950:

"In 1950, the only country in Latin America without an Assembly was

Paraguay, so the Area Teaching Committee sent me there in August--carrying books that could not get in to some countries--as the Beloved Guardian had given permission to form assemblies up to November 15th. The one in Paraguay was elected November 12th. As my plane from Nicaragua stopped in the airport in Costa Rica, Louise was in the airport to both welcome me and speed me on my way. As I left she said (slipping a beautiful ruby Bahá'í ring on my little finger) "As I can't go with you let this be a symbol of my love and that will accompany you."

In thinking back to that eventful year of 1950 , Louise recalled this amusing story: "I remember when I was visiting Sheila, the Interamerica Committee was meeting in her home that same weekend. I was not very well and Elizabeth Cheney, who was there for the meeting, diagnosed me as having gall-bladder trouble (probably because she had it) so she sent a doctor who gave me an injection. However, it affected me adversely and I could not attend the Bahá'í meeting that night as I had pains--like lightning. The next day both Sheila and Elizabeth sent me to find gold paint, although I still felt badly. I guess neither of them could walk for some reason! It was such a hot afternoon. I could surely walk and I did and almost melted in the sun. Many times I have quoted the Hidden Words to myself : 'Desireth thou to die upon thy couch or to shed thy blood on the dust.' But all I could do was

shed a little, or should I say a lot, of perspiration.

"I remember being introduced to a lady by some friends of Sheila as a 'señora.' The lady said 'but you don't look like a señora.'

'Why?', I asked.

'You look happy and you're not fat.'

"During that meeting of the Interamerica Committee I was asked to go to Costa Rica which I did. I lived there for a year and obtained residency without much difficulty as that country encouraged settlement by foreigners. I worked closely with the Local Spiritual Assembly there.

"In 1952, I moved to Honduras to help Marcia Steward with her project of the Karbilá property and school. Marcia had moved to Central America to lay the foundation for the future National Spiritual Assembly of Central America. She also visited the Presidents of the Central American Republics. She decided to live in Honduras and bought the Karbilá property near Tegucigalpa for our Beloved Guardian.¹ The first school session was held there in September of 1952. I gave a course on Muhammad at that first school.

¹"With the remnants of her means and the assistance of a friend or two, Marcia purchased a property in the mountains of Honduras, near Tegucigalpa. She named it 'Karbilá.' It was her dream that it eventually would become a hospice for pioneers and a summer school for nearby Bahá'í communities. She acquired it for her beloved, the Guardian, and she was alone there most of her remaining years. An aged horse was her only tie with the outside world during

Now, the temple site and the endowment for Honduras are part of the Karbilá property. I had the privilege of spending a few months there and had a small part in developing it. It is an ideal place to spend one's days, except that the teaching plans of that time (The Ten Year World Crusade) would not permit us to remain stationary-- maybe someday.

"I also lived for a year in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, where I took up residence and tried to teach the Faith. I at least was able to find a building suitable for meetings, but all in all, it resulted in no new believers. I lament to say that the only result of that year was personal as well as community house-cleaning. These bounties and tests prepared me for the greatest of all bounties--pilgrimage."

This short but very difficult period of transition between pioneering posts and her pilgrimage to Haifa resulted in few outward accomplishments. But her suffering and difficulties forced her to grow inwardly and her faithfulness and perseverance resulted in the bounty of pilgrimage. But before recounting the details of her pilgrimage and her meeting with the Guardian after corresponding with him all those years, it is necessary to step back and survey the history of the Bahá'í

¹...the part of each year when abundant rains washed out the bridges and roads. She went cold and hungry in order to maintain 'Karbilá'. During these lonely years Marcia's companionship was a coplas exchange of letters with Shoghi Effendi."

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Faith in Central America from a broader perspective. Much of the following was written by Louise and most of the information was gathered by her. Now that we have examined closely the daily life and struggles of a pioneer, we can better appreciate the significance of the sacrifices of the many other pioneers and traveling teachers who, like Louise, brought the plans of the Beloved Guardian out of the spiritual and mental realms into physical and historical reality.

THE TEACHING PLANS

The Tablets of the Divine Plan, revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during the first World War, were received after the Armistice in 1918. They were addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada and designated the Bahá'ís of North America as the Master's trustees in carrying out the provisions of the Tablets. "In His Plan he bound the peoples of the East and West together in one spirit, one brotherhood, one social order, finding in North America the necessary elements of freedom, initiative and unified executive capacity to sustain the greater responsibilities of a world mission." (Bahá'í World, Vol. XI. p. 38.)

One of the few notable responses to these Tablets was that of Martha Root. As early as 1919 she visited Panama and all the South American countries spreading the news of the Faith in newspapers and meeting people of capacity. In 1920, Leonora Holsapple also visited Panama. The visits of these two early Bahá'í teachers marked the inception of the history of the Bahá'í Faith in Central America.

It was not until 1936, however, when the Guardian considered that the administrative

structure of the Faith had been sufficiently established, that he urged the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada to participate in their first organized international effort. THE FIRST SEVEN YEAR PLAN, 1937-1944. Pioneers and resident teachers were sent out to fulfill the mandates of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan in all of Latin America. The Guardian's startling cable to the 1936 convention read: "Would to God every state within (the) American Republic and every Republic in (the) American continent might ere termination of this glorious century embrace (the) light, Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and establish structural basis of His World Order." The convention was electrified as the spirit of the Guardian called out to the souls of the future pioneers.

In his monumental letter, The Advent of Divine Justice, (December 25, 1938) The Guardian addressed the American believers and urged them to "arise as one man to conquer the forces of darkness, ignorance, confusion, superstition, in this, their first organized international enterprise." The first step was to send out dedicated pioneers to each of the twenty Latin American Republics. In Volume IX of the Bahá'i World, Garetta Busey beautifully summarized the significance of the first SEVEN YEAR PLAN in Latin America:

"The unity of men in the love of God, destined by Bahá'u'lláh to pervade the whole earth, has at last, during the closing years of the first Bahá'í century, been extended to all the Americas. At some point... in each republic of the south and central portions of the hemisphere, a few people

have sensed the nearness of God in his latest Manifestation, have dedicated their lives to His service, and have thus experienced such a feeling of brotherhood with one another and with all men everywhere as to promise deliverance from the suspicions which have long kept apart the American nations, from the class and racial cleavages which have riven them internally, and from the skepticisms which have paralysed their energies. The pattern of Bahá'í administration, instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, is being stamped upon every portion of the western world.

"To contemplate this event is to realize the inevitability of the Divine Plan for the spiritualization of the western world. Marking the various stages of its progress, one comes to understand that that each evolves in its own divinely appointed time and employs its own divinely prepared instruments." (Page 186)

In this regard, Panama was especially favored because of the importance attributed to it by both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. "The erection of another outpost of the Faith in its heart (Panama) will exercise a powerful yet intangible spiritual influence over the life and development of its people," wrote Shoghi Effendi in 1938 (Advent of Divine Justice, p. 59.)

Because of this spiritual significance, Panama was the first Central American Republic to receive a resident teacher in 1939 (Mathew Kaszab). Louise and Cora arrived in Panama shortly after Mathew and the teaching work was begun. Although the people of Panama were

receptive to the Bahá'í message. it was not until many years later in 1945 that the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Panama was formed. Many North American Bahá'ís assisted with the establishment of the Faith in Panama during the FIRST SEVEN YEAR PLAN. Among them were Norma and Claire Hamilton of Texas, who went to Panama during the war and worked with great zeal. War work brought Bahá'í employees of the government such as Engineer Benjamin Schreibman, Colonel Bert Werneken, Warrant Officer Philip Bartick, and Miss Merdie Joseph. Julie Regal spent several years working for the navy and teaching the Faith. Artemus Lamb, now on the Continental Board of Counsellors for Central America and the Antilles, also made several trips through Panama. All of them entered into the teaching campaign whole-heartedly during their time on the Isthmus. Traveling teachers and pioneers on their way to posts in South America shed their light for a few days as they passed through Panama. Eleanor Adler, Marcia Steward, John Stearns, Eve Nicklin, Virginia Orbison, Gwene Sholtis, and Louise Baker were just some of the first to settle on the great continent of South America. Their passing through Panama kept the Panamanian Bahá'ís aware of the fact that the Bahá'í Faith was a living, growing organism, a Faith that was thriving in a time of universal agony and great human need, and that the Faith was carrying the promise of Peace to the suffering millions. Friends from Australia with only a few hours on the Isthmus, those en route to England, soldiers, Bahá'ís in the Navy, all passed through the Canal, met the Bahá'ís and added their bit to the formation

of the new spiritual consciousness. Members of many different races and cultures were brought together in the Bahá'í meetings on Tivoli Avenue and there were high moments when people who did not even speak a common language were united in spirit, when rich and poor, high and low met together in a spirit of universal love.

The teaching work went much more rapidly in Costa Rica, and the Republic had the high distinction of forming the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Central America in 1941. Costa Rica also sent out the first native Latin American pioneer, Gerardo Vega, who helped lay the foundation for the Spiritual Assembly in Panama. The first Bahá'í teachers to arrive in Costa Rica were Mr. and Mrs. E. R. Mathews in 1936. Mrs. Gayle Woolson and Mrs. Amalia Ford were the first pioneers to reside in Costa Rica. They arrived on March 29th, 1940.

The valiant efforts of these two early pioneers were soon to be rewarded with great victories. In a letter from the Guardian to Mrs. Woolson on July 19th, 1941, the Guardian wrote in his own handwriting at the end of the letter written by his secretary:

Dear and valued co-workers,

Future generations will extol your labours, follow your footsteps, and derive inspiration from your pioneer activities. I will specially and constantly pray that your numbers may increase, and your Assembly flourish, and your hopes be fulfilled and your influence extend far and wide.

Persevere and be happy.

Your true and grateful brother,

(Signed) Shoghi

The first four believers in Costa Rica, came into the Faith simultaneously: Mr. Raúl Contreras, Mr. José Joaquin Ulloa, Mr. Guido Contreras, and Mr. Felipe Madrigal. Gayle recalled some of the highlights of those early days in an article published in the World Order Magazine of September, 1945:

"Things moved fast for us and within a month after our arrival, a weekly Bahá'í study class was established. The few attendants were from the Theosophical Society and other contacts that were made. At that time we were living in a pensión (boarding house) and the landlady gave us permission to use her dining room for our class. An amusing incident occurred after our first meeting when the landlady had a sudden change of heart, and as the friends began to arrive for the second meeting, she firmly informed us that under no condition could we have our meeting there. We felt we had the right to use our own bedroom, so we invited the friends in there but the landlady would not allow us to use any of her chairs. With the use of the edge of the beds, some of our luggage and the one lonely chair we had in the bedroom for seats, we happily carried on our meeting. Through the efforts of one of the friends, a small apartment was soon found for us where our meetings were conducted with freedom and regularity.

"Rapid progress was made with the marvelous cooperation of the contacts. One would bring a

relative, another a friend, and they would take an active part by speaking and presenting papers they had written on the teachings. They showed wonderful ability to express themselves both in speech and in writing. After the reading of passages from the Bahá'í Writings, interesting discussions would follow. Almost invariably, someone would bring, of his own volition, a commentary he was inspired to write on some principle or aspect of the Cause. We were fortunate in getting fine publicity early in the course of our work as one of the new believers was the owner and editor of the magazine 'Alma Tica.' (meaning Costa Rican Soul) , in which a section of each edition was devoted to the Bahá'í Teachings . The first four believers in Costa came into the Faith simultaneously : Mr. Raúl Contreras, Mr. José Joaquin Ulloa, Mr. Guido Contreras, and Mr. Felipe Madrigal.

"The group grew to the extent that the following year, 1941, when the time arrived for the formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly, there were twelve Costa Rican Bahá'ís to take part in the election. The members of that first Spiritual Assembly were : José Joaquin Ulloa Z. (deceased), Raúl Contreras Torres, Guido Contreras C., Felipe Madrigal Nieto (deceased), Esther Urena Mora de La Frank, Consuelo Miranda (now Mrs. Oscar Ayala), Mrs. Amalia Ford (now pioneering in Mexico), Mrs. Gayle Woolson, and Miss Anita Clachar. In a letter from Shoghi Effendi to the Spiritual Assembly of San José, written December 17, 1941, by the Guardian's secretary, he said:

Your Assembly will go down in history as the first Bahá'í Assembly in Central America, a great distinction and blessing, and the Guardian feels that if you continue to progress so rapidly you will soon be in a position to spread the Cause, through representatives of your Community, in other neighboring lands. This would be of great value to the work of teaching these divine laws and truths, as then the Latin Americans would be hearing it from the lips of their own people, in their own language, which, of course, would be very effective.

"The progress continued and in the following year, on April 21, 1942, a Spiritual Assembly was formed in Puntarenas, a seaport on the Pacific side of Costa Rica. (The first believer in Puntarenas was Genaro Miranda). In June of that same year, the legal registration (or incorporation) of the San José Spiritual Assembly with the Costa Rican Government was completed."

In the second letter from the beloved Guardian, through his secretary, to the Spiritual Assembly of San José, dated July 26, 1942, he said:

The progress which the Bahá'ís of Costa Rica have made during the past year is little short of astounding, and shows the deep receptivity the people of that country have to the New Message of God which Bahá'u'lláh has proclaim-

ed to the world. You must all indeed be both proud and grateful that you live in a land so tolerant of progress and which enables you to establish the blessed institutions ordained by our Faith.

The establishment of the new Spiritual Assembly of Puntarenas is a great step forward, and the legal registration of the Cause and approval of the government marks a milestone in the progress of the Cause not only in Costa Rica, but in Latin America.

The more the Guardian receives news from the Central and South American Republics, the more firmly he becomes convinced of the great capacity possessed by the peoples of Latin America. They are proving themselves to be both deeply spiritual and intellectual, and he cherishes great hopes for their future development and their contributions to this glorious Faith of ours.

How wonderful that in less than a hundred years the message that originated in the heart of Persia should have spread to the heart of Central America, and kindled such love and devotion and hope as now burns in the hearts of new believers in that distant continent!

The Guardian hopes that you will not only succeed in establishing further centers in your own native land, but

that the activities of the Costa Rican Bahá'ís will spread to neighboring countries and aid in the establishment of the Faith there.

As already mentioned, the Bahá'ís of Costa Rica did help other countries, the first of which was Panama.

In her account of the early years in Costa Rica, Gayle wrote of the importance of visits from other pioneers and teachers :

"Visits from other pioneers are always very effective and helpful in the development of a group. It is hard to express how a pioneer thirsts for visits from fellow-pioneers while in those virgin and distant lands, especially when the community is just a new one, and what a great joy, rare treat and fortification it is to see them, to derive the blessings of their association and assistance. If only more would come! Pioneers who visited us in Costa Rica during the First Seven Year Plan were Mathew Kaszab from Nicaragua, Cora Oliver and Louise Caswell from Panama, Johnny Eichenauer from Salvador, and Virginia Orbison on her way to pioneer in Chile. Each left his special contribution to the growth and strengthening of the Costa Rican Bahá'í Community."

The first Bahá'í teachers to arrive in Guatemala were Mr. and Mrs. E. R. Mathews in 1936. Gerrard Sluter was the first resident teacher in Guatemala from 1939 to 1940. Mrs. Lorol Schopflocher was a visiting teacher to Guatemala in 1940 and Johnny Eichenauer was in Guatemala

for a time in 1942. Mrs. Florence Keemer was the first resident teacher from 1943 to 1944. The first Spiritual Assembly was organized in Guatemala in 1943. Louise Caswell made her first visit to Guatemala in 1943 as a travelling teacher, and Gayle Woolson also visited Guatemala in 1944.

Mr. Antonio Roca was the first pioneer teacher in the Republic of Honduras. He remained there from 1939 to 1940 and laid a firm foundation for the first Bahá'í group. Mr. Gerrard Sluter was also a resident teacher in Honduras in 1940. Mrs. Lorol Schopflochler was a visiting teacher in Honduras in 1940. Johnny Eichenauer moved to Honduras in 1941 and remained there until 1942. The first Spiritual Assembly in Honduras was established in 1942. Louise Caswell visited the country that same year.

The first travelling teachers to Nicaragua were the Mathews in 1936. Nicaragua's first resident teacher was Mathew Kaszab who arrived in 1939. (See earlier chapter) Johnny Eichenauer was a resident teacher in 1942. It was not possible to establish an Assembly in Nicaragua before the end of the First Seven Year Plan in 1944.

¹The first Maya-Quiché Indian to arise and teach the Faith in Guatemala was Filomena Cajas. During the Nine Year Plan she travelled extensively and taught tirelessly, often in very remote areas. She was one of the representatives of Guatemala to the World Congress in London in 1963.

All the Central American Republics were asked to select delegates to the historic Centenary Celebration that was to be held in Wilmette in 1944. The difficulties that faced the Central American delegates in making such a long and expensive trip were overwhelming. Gayle Woolson recalls that event in these words:

"It was a jubilant occasion when the delegate of Costa Rica to the 1944 Centenary Celebration of the Declaration of the Báb was informed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States that he would be helped financially to go to the United States to attend that momentous event. He brought the letter to me to translate it for him and we could hardly believe it to be really true; we had not considered that such a great undertaking could be realized, making it possible for the Latin American delegates to attend that glorious celebration within the walls of our majestic Temple. As we read this wonderful news, we were so overtaken by emotion and excitement we did not know whether we were going to laugh or cry. Profound joy and gratitude filled our hearts. All the Latin American delegates must have felt that same emotion when they learned that an experience which occurs once in a lifetime was to be theirs. Only the power of Bahá'u'lláh could accomplish such a great achievement, to bring together in love and unity representatives of these various Latin American countries with all those who would be gathered in North America. Breaking down the barriers of distance, language and lack of means and demonstrating that spiritual brotherhood

which is the salvation of all nations. This undertaking had a great effect not only on the Bahá'ís of Latin America, but also on the other Latin Americans who learned of it, making them realize more deeply the scope and power of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh."

On August 19th, 1944, in response to a letter to the Guardian signed by all the Latin American believers and pioneers who attended a special conference arranged for the Central and South American representatives, July 9th to 16th he wrote:

It is the first time in Bahá'í history that so many duly appointed representatives of so many independent countries have gathered together, and it foreshadows the gatherings of the future when the believers from the four corners of the globe will gather to discuss plans for the beloved Cause and to exchange ideas and suggestions.

That momentous year, 1944, marked the Centenary of the Declaration of the Báb, and also the end of the first Seven Year Plan. The triple goals of the Plan were all achieved : completion of the Temple exterior; the establishment of centers in every state and province of the United States and Canada; and the establishment of Assemblies or groups in every republic of Central and South America. For the representatives from Central America, that was a year and an experience never to be forgotten. The delegates from Central America were: Señor Raúl Contreras from Costa Rica, Señor Eugenio Gines from Cuba, Edelberto Torres

from Guatemala, Mr. William Mitchell from Jamaica, Señor Carlos Vergara from Mexico, Señorita Blanca V. Mejía from Nicaragua, Mr. Alfred Osborne from Panamá, and Doctor Manuel Berges from the Dominican Republic.

The First Seven Year Plan was completed and was added as new pages to the glorious account of Bahá'í history. However, the first plan was only a beginning. Edna True, secretary of the Inter-America Committee, recorded the Guardian's instruction for the next phase in the teaching campaign for Central America: "formation assembly one remaining republic, Nicaragua; consolidation newly-fledged assemblies; multiplication groups; intensified efforts dissemination literature... paramount tasks present year (1945). Praying fervently removal obstacles dispatch pioneers fulfillment hopes necessary prelude launching second stage Divine Plan." The Guardian also asked for "more effective contact these communities with masses population all races and classes."

The Guardian expounded further in other messages the needs of the hour: "A mighty impetus should, at however great a sacrifice, be lent to the multiplication of the Bahá'í centers in Latin America... to the proclamation of the verities of the Faith to the masses, to the strengthening of the bonds binding the newly-fledged communities to each other, and to the deepening of the spiritual life of each other"(August, 1944). "The spirit that has inflamed the pioneers who have set the seal of triumph on the Seven Year Plan, must under the vigilant care of the national representatives of the American Bahá'í Community, be constantly

watched, kept alive and nourished... The healing message of Bahá'u'lláh... must be vividly, systematically brought to the attention of the masses, in their hour of grief, misery and confusion " (March 29, 1945) . "The spirit which has been enkindled must be continually nourished... every measure that will serve to reinforce the bonds uniting the newly-fledged communities in the Latin World... must be speedily undertaken." (Shoghi Effendi, June 1946, Bahá'í World, Vol. XI, p.183).

Perhaps the two most important events in Central America that united the new believers and raised their level of consciousness were the two Central American Congresses. The first was held in 1946, and the second in 1947--both in Panama. In November of 1945 the National Spiritual Assembly sent Gayle Woolson to Panama to collaborate with the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Panama City in making preparations for the first Latin American Congress which was being planned for January 1946.

The inner significance of this first Congress was the strengthening of the spiritual bonds between the North, South and Central American believers. For years the friends of the Bahá'ís had been watching the Bahá'ís with a mixture of pity and skepticism, but then with the accomplishment of the Congress, they realized that their message was not of words alone, but of deeds: unity of races; unity of nationalities; unity of thought in world undertakings.

"The entire city of Panama was saturated with news and announcements of the Congress by means

of unprecedented publicity in the newspapers, the radio, posters and personal invitations to such a degree that when some of the representatives entered the stores, they were recognized as Bahá'ís that had arrived to attend the Congress by employees who showed their interest in finding out about the Bahá'í Faith." (Noticias Bahá'ís Interamericanas, February, 1946). A very amusing letter to the editor was published in the "Star and Herald" on the last day of the Conference, which Louise fondly refers to as the "swoon letter" :

As an old reader of your newspaper I am wondering why you are giving so much space, even on your front page when more important news is printed inside, to this Bahá'í business.

Never have I seen so much space given to meetings of Methodists, Baptists, Catholics or other orders or sects. I think you were right in such cases and it is possible you have good reason for boosting Bahá'í until your readers, like myself are sick and tired of it.

They have been swooning for weeks over the opening of the Congress and now we get daily swoons. It may be that your policy is commercial and you are catering to your numerous Bahá'í readers and advertisers, although you must have quite a few who are Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians or Roman Catholics like the writer.

(Signed) Curious

Editor's Note: The last "swoon" will be tonight when the Bahá'ís close conference.

Among those who attended the First Congress was Amelia Collins bringing bounties from Haifa and representing the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States as well as the Inter-America Committee. Pioneers who attended included: Cora Oliver, Louise Caswell, Julie Regal, Elizabeth Cheney, Louise Baker, and Gayle Woolson. In addition to many Bahá'ís from Panama, the following countries were represented: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Chile.

The closing session of the Congress was held in "El Aula Máxima" of the National University of Panama. The rector of the University, Señor Octavio Mendez Pereira, had just returned from the San Francisco Conference and gave an excellent report of that historic meeting where the Charter of the United Nations was drafted. "'Abdu'l-Bahá had told us that California would play a great part in the hoisting of the banner of peace when he was in Sacramento, California in 1912," Louise recalled at that time. (Promulgation of Universal Peace, Vol. II, p. 371) . The Bahá'í speakers at the closing session were Elizabeth Cheney and Gayle Woolson, with Alfred E. Osborne, chairman. The two speakers discussed the Lesser Peace and the Greater Peace respectively. Over a hundred people were present and many races and nations were represented in the audience.

Louise was also directly involved in the Second Congress, held in January of the following year, 1947. She has described it thus:

"It seemed a double blessing that the Panama Spiritual Assembly should also be host to the Second Latin American Congress in 1947 which established an even stronger solidarity among the Latin believers and made them realize that this was their Cause just as much as the Cause of a few North Americans. Help was sent to this conference in the persons of two of our best South American pioneers, Marcia Steward and Artemus Lamb. The materials of the lectures and classes have been reported in detail in the Latin American bulletins.

"There was much more activity at this Second Congress than at the first since the Latin believers caught a glimpse of their great destiny in the Faith. Between sessions they met together in little social groups or visited people from their countries and invited them to the meetings. Thus our numbers increased. The belated arrival of William Mitchell, delegate from Jamaica, brought to our attention the importance of an international language, as he spoke only English. A special interpreter was appointed to help him but even that was not sufficient to give him an understanding of all that was going on. His patience and spiritual understanding gave us all a lesson.

"Our Spanish Bahá'í (from Panama), José Granada, presided at the closing session of the Second Congress which was held in the 'Aula Máxima' of 'La Universidad Nacional.' It was

a very large and impressive gathering. Manuel Corgas, who was soon to become a declared believer--the first Indian Bahá'í of Panamá, read the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá about the American Indians. The Minister from China, Dr. Tu Yuen-Tan gave a scholarly talk on the Philosophy of China. Other speakers were Professor Baltazar Calderón, Dean of 'La Universidad Nacional,' Mr. Harold Sosted, Superintendent of Education in the Canal Zone, Mr. Sydney A. Young, editor of the 'Panama Tribune,' and the travelling Bahá'í teacher, Gayle Woolson. Carlos Porrás, a Bahá'í from Costa Rica, who had been generous with his beautiful tenor voice ever since the first Congress, sang and brought his accompanist, Alcides M. Dávila, from the 'Conservatorio Nacional.'

"The Panama Spiritual Assembly, wishing to honor its many friends, invited them to a banquet at the Colombia Hotel after the Congress, to meet the traveling delegates. Fifty-one people were seated at a long table, decorated with flaming bouganvillia vines and three large cards with the Greatest Name placed at intervals in the center of the table. At the end of the room was placed a bust of 'Abdu'l-Bahá made for this Congress by Antonio del Villar who knew the Master and loved Him very much. He had flown from Caracas, Venezuela with the bust and we were all very much touched by his expression of devotion.

"Our distinguished non-Bahá'í guests spoke most favorably of the Faith. Governor Navas of the Province of Colón, said that he considered himself a Bahá'í, although not a member of the organization. Tomás Gabriel Duque, publisher

of 'La Estrella', and special friend of the Bahá'ís, said he was going to chide the members of his staff for having disdained the invitation to be present at such a splendid occasion. The delegate from Cuba read an original Bahá'í poem. Raquel Francois of the Panama Bahá'í Community presided at the banquet."

SECOND SEVEN YEAR PLAN

In 1946 the Guardian cabled to the National Convention of the United States: "The two year respite well earned after the expenditure of such a colossal effort, covering such a tremendous range, during so dark a period, is now ended . The prosecutors of the Plan who in the course of six war-ridden years achieved such prodigies of service in the Western Hemisphere from Alaska to the Straits of Magellan are now collectively summoned to assume in the course of the peaceful years ahead still weightier responsibilities for the opening decade of the Second Century. The time is ripe, events are pressing, Hosts on high are sounding the signal for inauguration of second Seven Year Plan designed to culminate first Centennial of the year Nine marking the mystic birth of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic mission in the Siyah-Chal at Tehrán. The first objective of the new Plan is consolidation of victories already won throughout the Americas, involving multiplication of Bahá'í centers, bolder proclamation of the Faith to the masses. . . The third objective is the formation of three National Assemblies, pillars of the Universal House of Justice, in the Dominion of Canada, Central, and South America . Upon the success of the second Seven Year Plan

depends the launching... of a yet more momentous third Plan, which when consummated through the structure of the administrative order in the remaining sovereign states and chief dependencies of the entire globe, must culminate in and be befittingly commemorated through world-wide celebrations marking the Centennial of the formal inception of the Bahá'í Revelation and signaling the termination of the initial epoch of the Plan whose mysterious, resistless processes must continue to shed ever-increasing lustre on successive generations of both the Formative and Golden Ages of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh."

Louise recalls that "Those few pioneers left working in Central America were not aware of any respite until the Guardian announced that it was over in his Convention Cable of 1946, announcing the second Seven Year Plan. Central America's principal objective was to establish a Regional Spiritual Assembly for eleven countries, the five republics of Central America -- Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, -- Mexico, Panamá, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. The Inter-america Committee asked Marcia Steward to leave here post in Chile and come to Central America to lay the administrative basis for the future National Spiritual Assembly and to interview the Presidents of these Republics. She worked with a Teaching Committee for Central America, travelled to different countries and spent years as a settler in both Costa Rica and Honduras. She directed a correspondence campaign in Costa Rica and in Honduras and in this way new assemblies were formed in these two

countries. The correspondence campaign was so successful that the Guardian asked for it to be repeated in all countries and it was put into effect in Panamá, El Salvador and Guatemala. Also, during this time a committee in El Salvador formed by Artemus Lamb and Tim and Jan Ferrand sent out regular messages to all the Central American countries, providing them with compilations of the writings for Holy Days and Anniversaries. This laid the foundation for firmness and faithfulness among the believers.

During the Second Seven Year Plan the teaching work was greatly assisted by the North American Bahá'í Community. Several travel-teachers passed through including Mr. and Mrs. Emeric Sala, Raff and Mildred Mottahedeh, and Mary and Ed Bode. A new wave of pioneers also gave impetus to the teaching efforts.

One of those North American Pioneers to arrive in Central America was Artemus Lamb. He had bravely offered to go to Punta Arenas, Chile during the great Centenary Anniversary celebration in May of 1944 in Wilmette. He and Esteban Canales, a Chilean Bahá'í, formed a Local Spiritual Assembly in Punta Arenas in 1945. Artemus returned for a time to Santiago where he assisted in the teaching work.

In 1951 he moved to Costa Rica and was soon after elected to the first Regional National Assembly and served on it during its ten years of existence. In 1953 he made his pilgrimage to Haifa and met the Guardian. In 1956 he moved to Santa Ana, El Salvador, where he established

an English Academy. He and his wife Dee were soon forced to leave the country as a result of political pressures created by some enemies of the Faith, so they moved to Guatemala. In 1963 he was named an Auxiliary Board member under Hand of the Cause Dhikrulláh Khádem and later served under Hand of the Cause Ugo Giachery. In 1964 he was asked to move to Yucatan, Mexico, to help with the teaching work there among the Mayas. In 1968 he was named a member of the Continental Board of Counselors for Central America and the Antilles. He and his wife Dee moved to Costa Rica in 1969 and returned again to El Salvador in 1974 . Throughout his life as a pioneer in Central America Artemus has made great contributions in both administration and teaching. He has written about pioneering:

There is really no other aspect of Bahá'í service that gives one such a feeling of being an integral and useful part of this Divine Process or of giving one a training in so many different kinds of service, as pioneering. The Faith and its welfare and progress become the foremost and really the only thought of the pioneer, and his entire life is built around and on this foundation. True there are tests, sometimes terrific tests, but one learns things through them that he never would have learned leading a "normal" life and we all know that we cannot progress and develop without tests. Furthermore, one learns to rely entirely upon the Protection and Guidance of God, which is probably the greatest blessing of all. Personally, my wife and I thank the Almighty every day of our lives for having had the Bounty of

being accepted and having been able to remain at our posts and perhaps suffer a little for Bahá'u'lláh. It is our hope and prayer that we may bury our bones in this service.

The series of institutes and congresses which as already discussed, began with the two Congresses in Panama were also of great assistance. The next Congress was in Mexico City in 1948. The following year one was held in Guatemala during which Dorothy Baker was a great and inspiring teacher to the Bahá'ís. (See Bahá'í World, Vol. XI, p. 776) A Congress was held in El Salvador in 1950. It was the last Regional Convention for the Central American Republics and the Greater Antilles. It took place just one year prior to the formation of the regional National Spiritual Assembly. Hand of the Cause of God William Sears and his wife Marguerite were in attendance at this convention. The correspondence campaigns and wider publicity expanded the base of the Central American believers and led up to the formation of the regional Assembly in 1951.

This Regional Assembly for Central America, Mexico, Panama and the Antilles was elected in Panama City, Panama just fourteen years after the beginning of the first Seven Year Plan. The first Bahá'í Convention for the election of the election of the Regional Assembly was held in the Hotel Central from April 22 through the 27th, 1951. The representatives from the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States were Dorothy Baker and Horace Holley. The Delegates to the first Convention were as follows: Costa Rica, Mrs. Jennie Taylor and Mr. Artemus Lamb;

Cuba-Mrs. Josefina Camacho and Mr. Máximo Sainz; Dominican Republic-Mrs. Elena Marsella and Mr. Ramón Casado Soler; Guatemala-Mr. Joaquin Rodas; Haiti-Mr. Estace N. Bailey and Mr. Pierre M. Morpeau; Honduras, Tegucigalpa-Mr. Salvador Flores Corleto and Mr. José S. Perez, San Pedro Sula-Mrs. Modesta David; Jamaica-Mr. Luis A. Aiken and Mr. James Foster; Mexico D. F.-Miss Zenayda Jurado C. and Mrs. Aurora Gutierrez, Puebla-Mr. Guadalupe Alarcón O.; Nicaragua-Mr. Armando Fonseca Duval; Panama-Miss Raquel Jean Francois and Mr. Alejandro Arze P., Colón-Mr. James V. Facey; Puerto Rico-Mr. Cruz Carlos Irizarry; El Salvador-Mr. Marco Antonio Martínez, Dr. David Escalante, and Mr. José René Gonzáles. Ruth Moffet was also present and showed slides of Haifa.

The members of that historic first Assembly were: Señorita Raquel J. Francois, Chairman; Mrs. Cora H. Oliver, Vice Chairman; Señorita Elena Marsella, Secretary; Señor James V. Facey, Treasurer; Señorita Zenayda Jurado C.; Mrs. Louise Caswell; Dr. David Escalante; and Señor Artemus Lamb.

With the formation of the National Spiritual Assemblies for Central America and the Antilles, and South America, the Faith had reached a new level of development! The "lightning-like rapidity" with which the Faith had grown in Latin America was the direct result of the constant guidance from the Guardian through the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and finally, through the untiring efforts of the many pioneers

and travel-teachers. To comprehend fully the importance of this development and to survey adequately the manifold tasks that confronted that nascent institution, it is necessary to study the two historic letters directed from the Guardian to that institution, the first dated July 12, 1951, written and signed by the Guardian himself, directed to both Regional Assemblies, and the second written on the Guardian's behalf by Rūḥíyyih Khánum, written only to the National Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Meso-America and the Antilles, and signed by her. The full texts of these documents follow and warrant considerable study.

In his pilgrim's notes, Artemus Lamb wrote:

"On at least three different occasions the Guardian quoted from his cables either to the Bahá'í world at large or to Central America, each time fixing me squarely in the eye, he would say: "you remember that, don't you?". Well, of course I usually did not remember. From then on whenever a cable arrived from the Guardian to the Bahá'ís at large or to our part of the world, I would spend hours studying and trying to absorb it. Of course, the principle operates now regarding messages from the Universal House of Justice. These Messages from the World Center give us infallible guidance and all our plans and actions, both individual and collective, should be built around this guidance if we want maximum success."

July 12, 1950

**"National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of
Meso-America and the Antilles and South America.**

Dearly Beloved Friends,

"The formation of the first National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Central and South America - an event hailed by the entire Bahá'í world - constitutes a landmark of the utmost significance not only in the history of the evolution of the Faith in Latin America, but in the annals of the Formative age of the Bahá'í Dispensation as well. It signifies the termination of the first Epoch in the rise and establishment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in Central and South America - an Epoch that was ushered in on the morrow of the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan through the pioneer services rendered by individual believers, among whom ranks as foremost that immortal and heroic soul, Martha Root, and which culminated with the successful prosecution of two successive historic campaigns initiated by the North American Bahá'í Community in pursuance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan.

"This second and momentous Epoch in the unfoldment of the Faith, now being entered upon, is signaled by the emergence of two newly established, independent, firmly-knit regional communities, embracing all the Republics of Central and South America, stretching from the borders of Mexico as far as the southern extremity of Chile, comprising no less than forty organized local assemblies, many of them already incorporated, every one of them animated by the spiritual verities of one common Faith, and all of them

functioning in accordance with the principles of a vigorously operating, divinely appointed Administrative Order.

"This new phase in the development of an irresistably advancing Faith presages, moreover, the formal association of these twin newly-emerged communities with their parent community in the North American continent in the prosecution of the Plan conceived by the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, among the Latin American races now awakening to the clarion call sounded by Him in His immortal Tablets. Though not enjoying the status and privileges conferred in that same Plan by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the North American Bahá'í Community, yet, in view of the mementous and stirring summons issued by the Author of the Revelation in His Most Holy Book, addressed to the Rulers of all the Republics of the Western Hemisphere, both of these communities may be said to have been invested with rights and duties which no community in any continent of the Eastern Hemisphere can claim to possess.

"This association, which will be formally inaugurated with the termination of the Second Seven Year Plan, and which is destined to reveal its potentialities in the course of the unfolding of the Formative Age of the Faith, and particularly as a consequence of the formation of separate National Spiritual Assemblies in each of the Republics of Latin America, is a distinction which every adherent of the Faith, whether a native believer or a North American pioneer labouring in Central or South America, must constantly bear in mind. Its importance cannot be overestimated, nor can

its full significance be assessed at the present hour.

"The consolidation of the existing assemblies, the multiplication of groups; the steady development of the process of Bahá'í incorporation; the expansion of the all-important task of translating, publishing and disseminating Bahá'í literature in Spanish and Portuguese; the consolidation of the recently inaugurated national and local funds; the strengthening of such institutions as Bahá'í National Committees, Summer Schools, Conventions and Regional Teaching Conferences; the acceleration of the highly meritorious work already commenced amongst the Indians in both Central and South America; the progressive proclamation of the verities of the Faith to all sections of the population of Latin America; above all, the triple task of constantly deepening the spiritual life of the individual believer, of enriching his understanding of the spiritual and administrative principles of his Faith, and of cementing the unity of each local community - these stand out as the foremost responsibilities to be assumed during these two concluding years of the Second Seven Year Plan by the two newly formed National Spiritual Assemblies of Central and South Smerica, in preparation of the launching of specially conceived, clearly defined plans, the initiation of which must mark the formal association of the Bahá'í communities of Latin America with the National Bahá'í communities in the United States and Canada, for the furtherance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's world-embracing Master Plan, now still in the embryonic stage of its development.

"Afire with the vision now unfolding itself before their eyes; conscious of the sacred responsibility which, as implied in the ringing words recorded in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, they must increasingly shoulder; fortified by the contemplation of the manner and rapidly with which their beloved Faith has struck its roots into the soil of their homelands; confident that the same mysterious and unconquerable Power that has watched over the operation, and ensured the consummation, of the specific Plan undertaken by various National Bahá'í Communities in recent years in both the East and the West, will, as they prepare to launch their own collective enterprises in the years immediately ahead, vouchsafe to them its sustaining grace and unfailing guidance; the members of these newly emerged communities and above all, their recently elected national representatives, must display, during this period of transition, a spirit of dedication, a tenacity of purpose, a willingness for self-sacrifice, that will surpass anything as yet exhibited in their past history, which will at once excite the envy and admiration of their older sister communities in all the continents of the globe, and enable them to acquire the spiritual potentialities that will assist them to take their honoured place in the ranks of those same communities which, in various regions of the world, are collectively and energetically carrying out their own national campaigns in the service and for the glory of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

"That they may prove themselves worthy of the missions with which they will soon be formally invested; that they may never allow anything to interfere with the successful conclusion of this

present preparatory phase of their historic task; that they may, through the quality of their devotion and the solidity of their achievements, rejoice the souls of the Concurrence on high and, above all, the Spirits of the Holy Báb, of Bahá'u'lláh, and of His beloved Son, 'Abdúl-Bahá, so that they may contribute their share, as independent pillars. In sustaining the House, whose erection must mark the culmination of the establishment of the Administrative Order of their Faith, is the dearest wish of my heart, my constant hope and my ardent prayer."

Your true brother,
(Signed) Shoghi

July 11, 1951

"National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of
Meso-America and the Antilles.

Dear Bahá'í Friends:

"Your letter of May 5, 1951, as well as the report of the convention and minutes of your first Assembly meeting, and the photographs you sent, have reached our beloved Guardian, and he has instructed me to answer you on his behalf.

"It gives him very great happiness to address this first letter to your Assembly, newly come into the field of international service to the Faith, and so ready and eager to embark upon its truly historic tasks.

"The believers of Central and South America are embarking upon their services at a most

important time, not only in the history of this great Cause, but also in the history of mankind. Never has the outlook in this physical world been darker - with the shadow of perhaps another devastating conflict lengthening on the horizon - never the spiritual promise greater, for we see the Message of Bahá'u'lláh at last spreading all over the globe and planting its banner in the most distant countries.

"The opportunities for this new National Assembly to distinguish itself are therefore unique and its privileges priceless. He feels sure that the Latin American believers are going to demonstrate their readiness and capacity in such a way as to rejoice their fellow-Bahá'ís and the heart of the beloved Master.

"Like the United States and Canada, Latin America is the New World; it has the freshness of youth, and far from such ancient civilizations as those of Europe and Asia, with their interminable problems and grievances, it can undertake service to Bahá'u'lláh under more auspicious circumstances.

"He feels that your Assembly must, now at the very beginning of its work, devote its energy primarily to laying a sound and abiding foundation for the future. What does this imply? First and foremost establishing harmony, love and understanding amongst the Bahá'ís under its jurisdiction. When the friends are united in the love of God all problems can be solved and all work carried out with success. Personal problems, differences

of race, nationality, origin, are dissolved in the crucible of Bahá'í brotherhood.

"Second, the teaching work: The local assemblies must be maintained and strengthened and the groups encouraged and protected, so that they may attain assembly status as soon as possible; extension teaching work must also be undertaken and news of the existence of this Faith broadcasted as much as possible.

"Third: The National Fund must be supported. The friends are for the most part, not well-to-do, but they must realize that to give to the Fund, even in a small way, is the important thing, for it is a visible sign of their unity, their devotion, their desire to support the institutions which now represent them and belong to them.

"Fourth: Your Assembly, in conjunction with that of South America, should devote particular attention to Bahá'í literature, as in the past the publication of really adequate translations and their dissemination have been often delayed and the books inferior in style. The Spanish-speaking Bahá'ís, becoming more numerous all the time, have a right to possess the literature of the Faith, so infinitely rich and inspiring, in their own tongue and well translated.

"The Guardian feels that during the coming few years, your Assembly should not hesitate to lean on and consult the American Assembly. This in no way implies any weakness or inadequacy on your part but is logical and organic. The American National Spiritual Assembly is one of the oldest

in the Bahá'í world, it has gone through a lot, and consequently acquired an experience which cannot be obtained over-night. It also looks upon with pride, affection, and concern this beautiful daughter, so to speak, that it has brought into being. So your tie is a deep and natural one.

"Shoghi Effendi is also most anxious for the Message to reach the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas. These people, for the most part down-trodden and ignorant, should receive from the Bahá'ís a special measure of love, and every effort be made to teach them. Their enrollment in the Faith will enrich them and us, and demonstrate our principle of the Oneness of Man far better than words or the wide conversion of the ruling races ever can."

With warm Bahá'í love,

(Signed) R. Rabbani

The new National Spiritual Assembly of Central America launched a Two year Teaching Plan whose termination coincided with the ending of the Second Seven Year Plan. The first two years were difficult ones as limitations posed by inexperience, great distances, transportation and the need for visiting many communities to fulfill the directives of the Guardian posed great challenges for the new institution. Louise recalls with astonishment the import of those two years and the formation of the institution itself:

"Little did the Latin American Bahá'ís dream that later in the year the two representatives who brought the love of the North American believers to them were to be named Hands of the Cause of

God. Dorothy Baker, who had already devoted so much time and love to the progress of the Faith in Latin America and Horace Holley, were among the first twelve to be appointed Hands by our beloved Guardian in December of 1951. All the National Assemblies in the world now attained a degree of security with the assurance that the time of the Hands of the Cause of God had been ushered in, the time when they would 'diffuse the Divine Fragrances, edify the souls of men, . . . promote learning, . . . improve the character of all men. . . and guide all the peoples of the world.' (Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, published in the British Isles, 1950, pp. 107-8.)

"Little did the Latin American Bahá'ís imagine that within two years of the formation of their National Spiritual Assembly they would attain maturity through their association with the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States in the goals of the Ten Year World Crusade revealed to them by our Guardian at the end of 1952. When the Guardian had told us that the Cause had advanced with 'lightning-like rapidity' in Latin America, we Bahá'ís were so absorbed with consolidating local assemblies, planning school sessions after each convention, observing the first school in the region held at Karbilá, Honduras, in correspondence campaigns in four of the Republics of the territory, in promoting congresses in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Panama that we did not dream that we were really working rapidly, for every effort was like lifting a huge stone."

In addition to the growing numbers of steadfast Bahá'ís from the region itself, others came to assist in the many complex tasks. Marcia Steward had been asked by the Inter-America Committee to interview the presidents of the republics and to help consolidate the Faith in Central America. She was chosen because of her successes in Chile. Esteban Canales had settled in Costa Rica, and Artemus Lamb had come from South America to help the struggling Central American republics. He rendered valuable contributions to the consolidation work in Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Mexico. An important part of the Two Year Plan was a constant flow of teachers to the already existing local assemblies to strengthen and consolidate them. Many of the National Assembly members helped with this important effort. Raquel Francois de Constante made a visit to the Central American countries and brought them great enthusiasm to continue teaching during that period. All the teachers tried to their utmost to establish the basis of love, unity and harmony as the Guardian had instructed them.

With the conclusion of the Second Seven Year Plan, and their two year history, the National Spiritual Assembly of Mexico, Central America and the Antilles passed through its brief period of youth, and emerged into the responsibilities of maturity. With the inception of the Ten-Year World Crusade it became the associate of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States.

When we left the account of Louise's experiences in Central America, she too was faced with a very difficult period. But just as the Regional Assembly quickly passed into a new period of its development, so too did Louise. Her brief period of transition, tests, and uncertainty soon passed, and she found herself making plans for one of the most significant and unforgettable experiences of her life--pilgrimage.



Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Mexico, Central America, Panama, and the Antilles, Ríoán, 1951. Seated, from left to right: Artemus Lamb, of Costa Rica; Dr. David Escalante, of El Salvador; Miss Raquel Francois, of Panama; Mrs. Natalia Chávez, of Honduras; Miss Elena Marsella, of the Dominican Republic. Standing, from left to right: Miss Natalia Chávez, of Mexico; Mrs. Cora Oliver, of the Canal Zone; Mrs. Louise Caswell, of Honduras; and James Facey, of Colón, Panama.

PILGRIMAGE AND A NEW DIRECTION

"In 1953, with the Guardian's cabled permission I travelled from Panama (after going from Honduras to a National Spiritual Assembly meeting) to Israel for my pilgrimage. I had a wonderful pilgrimage as the Guardian was living and Rúhíyyih Khánúm was acting as a charming hostess to all the pilgrims and the members of the International Council. We all ate at the same table. So I was present at meetings of the International Council without realizing it until later. What a privilege! Also, the beloved Guardian asked questions about Panama and Central America at every meal.

"During the nine days Shoghi Effendi dined often with the Western Pilgrims. These few hours were of the essence and passed all too quickly. With what eager steps the members of the household rushed to the dining room when it was announced that the Guardian had arrived. He then received each one of us, and often served us something at the meal with his own hands. One night he brought some Persian candy and handed a piece to each one of the pilgrims. He directed the conversation which sprang from his warm human interest in his guests and rose gradually to great heights.

In his presence, in his house, as well as in the Bahá'í Holy Places, I felt the constant push of an expanding creative power, since I was at the fountainhead that I had been talking about all my life. Now I was drinking at it and experiencing that it was so much greater than I had ever dreamed. It was an ominous power and I was frightened. I thought, it is too great. I cannot stand it. This surely is the great and terrible Day of the Lord. The frightening thing is the possibility that I may not conform to all that God has ordained, or may be unworthy in some way, for even a small thing can keep one from God. How can I possibly get myself organized into a properly functioning human instrument to serve like those exemplary members of the International Council? How can I sustain the great weight that every Bahá'í takes upon himself? I came to the conclusion that only by getting new believers to help our Guardian in his constantly expanding plans could I be of real service. 'The greatest of all things is teaching the Cause, of this how can we deprive ourselves?' And this is for each Bahá'í to do and we must teach if we are to satisfy Shoghi Effendi's requirements for our lifetime.

"Another bounty was that I had two private interviews with the Guardian, the day after I arrived and the day of my departure. Not all Bahá'í pilgrims received so much and I took it as a special gift for the Bahá'ís of Central America as he spoke with keen interest and love for the believers in Central America and said that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was watching over the work here and that our work would be richly blessed and there would be great confirmation in the future. He asked many

questions about us. 'How do the friends in Central America like my cables?' How did they like the one about the acquisition of land around the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh? How are the Feasts in Panama?' He said, 'You see how busy I am. I have no more time for personal letters, not even for letters to the National Spiritual Assemblies. I can only send cables.'

"One night, at the dinner table, I asked the beloved Guardian if he wished me to settle in some new goal country to fulfill a goal in the new Global Crusade, or if he wished me to go back to Central America and teach among the Indians. He answered in a delighted manner and smiled very brightly--he wanted me to teach the Indians of Central America. So I decided to move to Guatemala where slightly more than half the people are Indians. Since I had visited the Local Assembly in Chichicastenango, Guatemala some years before, I had that particular place in mind when I asked about returning to Central America. I had been very impressed with the lovely eyes of the remnants of the Maya-Quiché race.

"Just before leaving Haifa, the Guardian asked me to return to Central America by way of London and Dublin and to 'take the spirit of Haifa' with me. He also told me to take a message to the Hand of the Cause, Reverend George Townshend, who was living in Dublin. The message I was to give him was simply, 'concentrate on your writings.' When I met the beloved Hand, his wife and daughter, Una, I gave him the message from Shoghi Effendi. He was in delicate health and so weak that his wife and daughter had to dress him.

I thought to myself, he can write a little pamphlet but that's all. However, it was after my visit and message from the Guardian that he wrote that great book, Christ and Bahá'u'lláh. He took me and his family to the Zoological Gardens, for lunch--the most stylish place in Dublin, and we had a delightful time. I told them that the Guardian favored intermarriage. Years later, after his ascension, his daughter married a negro."

A brief but unforgettable experience was over, and Louise was once again on her way to a new pioneering post. Had she gone to a virgin territory in that auspicious year, she would have gained the illustrious title of a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. But as was the case throughout her pioneering, she went to the country where the needs and the challenges were great, but the immediate harvests and bounties were very few. Louise remained in Guatemala from 1953 until 1975. She served for many years on the National Spiritual Assembly of Guatemala which was first formed in 1961, when all the Central American republics formed their own National Assemblies. During her many long years of service in Guatemala, she lived in Chichicastenango for two years, in Quiché for a short time, and in Retalhuleu. She also lived for a time in Quetzaltenango, and Antigua with Edith McLaren, pioneer to Guatemala, where Edith was made Auxiliary Board Member. Edith remained in Guatemala until 1974 when she was asked to serve as the Auxiliary Board Member in Nicaragua. She is presently living in Matagalpa, Nicaragua and is rendering invaluable services in that capacity. She is well known throughout Central America and is known as an excellent teacher.

In February of 1975, after living alone for many years, she left her rented room in the Pension Rivera, near the National Bahá'í Center of Guatemala and moved to Mérida, Yucatán, where she is now sharing the home and the company of Teresa Mac Gregor.

Cora Oliver remained in Panama until 1953, when she moved to British Honduras, now known as Belize. She and Shirley A. Warde, who also moved to Belize as a pioneer, were consequently designated as Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, for having arisen to the Guardian's call for pioneers to virgin territories. They lost no time in opening Belize to the Faith and began teaching immediately.

On the first night of Shirley's arrival, they both attended a meeting of the Federation of Women by invitation of the wife of an acquaintance of Cora's. At that meeting, they met Mrs. Gwendolyn Lizzaraga who was soon to become the first adult registered believer there.

Both pioneers launched themselves into community services and made many friendships and teaching contacts for the Faith. The National Spiritual Assembly for Belize was finally formed during the Nine Year Plan in 1967 with the assistance of the National Spiritual Assembly of Guatemala. Shirley has remained at her post until the present and Cora remained until 1973. Both rendered invaluable services to the Cause and the Faith is now firmly established in Belize.

THE GROWTH OF THE FAITH AND THE INSTITUTIONS

Before going into the details and stories of the next years of Louise's experience as a pioneer, several letters from the Holy Land, from Shoghi Effendi, Rúhíyyih Khánum, and Leroy Ioas will be quoted. These rather lengthy quotes will serve to set the overall context of the conditions and changes in the Faith in Central America during the Ten Year World Crusade. The following is taken entirely from letters directed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Central America:

June 24, 1954

"He (the Guardian) was extremely pleased that your Assembly was able to purchase the site for the Bahá'í Temple in Panama before the expiration of the first year of the Ten-Year Crusade. He advises your Assembly while safeguarding and maintaining the property, and living up to the terms of the contract which you signed, to spend as little money on the site as possible. Your resources are too limited, and the needs in the teaching field are too urgent, for money other than for the purpose of the purchase and bare maintenance of the property to be spent on the Temple site, at the

present time. The important thing was to buy it, and this has been satisfactorily accomplished.

"He is very proud of the fact that Central America has filled all her pioneer goals with the exception of the Marshall Islands, to which Mrs. Steward is now en route.¹

"He has read with attention the consolidation plan prepared by the National Teaching Executive Committee, a copy of which you forwarded to him in your most recent letter; and, although he thinks that the general outline of activities is excellent, there are two points to which he would like to call your attention.

"The first is that he has not decided that there will be definitely no Regional National Assemblies prior to the establishment of independent National Assemblies for each Latin American country. As the work unfolds and the centers multiply, this matter will have to be carefully considered. At present it is premature to reach any conclusions.

"He also believes that, before any abolition of the present basis of electing delegates to the

¹ Several members of the new National Spiritual assembly resigned in order to fill Goals of the Ten Year Crusade as Knights of Bahá'u'lláh: Cora Oliver, to assume her duties in Belize; Elena Marsella Fernie, Secretary of the NSA to sail to the Gilbert and Ellis Islands. The other goal was filled by Jean Sevin of France who settled in Tuomatu Islands. Artemus Lamb met him in France and persuaded him to fill the goal. Thus all foreign goals were filled by the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America.

National Convention, (in other words, the delegates represent Assemblies, and not Groups and isolated believers as well) is made, the Cause must grow much stronger in each of the Central American republics.

"Perhaps your Assembly is not aware of the fact that with the exception of the United States and Persia, the two countries where the mass of the believers is the greatest in the Bahá'í world, all other National Assemblies are elected by delegates, who are elected in their turn by local Assemblies, and not by the body of the believers residing in any particular country.

"He considers the introduction of the latter system premature in Latin America. You must first have many more active Groups and isolated centers, before there is any point in electing the national delegates for the Central American Convention by the method used in the United States at present.

"This is one of the reasons why he is urging Bahá'ís everywhere to, above all, concentrate on increasing the number of Spiritual Assemblies and Groups, as well as isolated believers, educating them more deeply in the administrative and spiritual fundamentals and doctrines of the Faith, and increasing their awareness of their great responsibility as Bahá'ís in both the teaching and administrative work of the Faith. He always considers that the foundation is securely laid, there should be no attempt at elaborating the superstructure.

"He hopes that the Auxiliary Board, working in conjunction with the Hands of the Cause, will be able to carry a new impetus to the teaching work, and, in collaboration with the National Assemblies, help to strengthen and revitalize weak centers.

"Another matter to which he attaches the greatest importance is that of keeping the pioneers at their posts, and urging upon them the necessity of persevering at all costs, lest one of the so-hardly-won goals of the Ten-Year Crusade suffer even a momentary eclipse.

"Your Assembly must feel very proud of the fact that a number of its members have gone into the pioneer field. The National Assembly must always show forth signs of true Spiritual leadership; and he is very happy that your Body is so active, so devoted and so united.

"He hopes that, in the unfoldment of your work throughout the region, you will pay special attention to teaching the Indians and minority groups, and converting them to the Faith. He attaches the greatest importance to this work, and is always glad to receive news of the names of any new Indian tribes represented in the Cause of God, or contacted."

With Warmest Bahá'í greetings,
(signed) R. Rabbani.

The following is a letter directly from Guardian which bears the same date as the above letter from Rúhíyyih Khánúm:

June 24, 1954

Dear and Valued Co-workers:

"The Central American Bahá'í Community, occupying so pivotal a position in the heart of the Western Hemisphere, stands, at this hour, marking at once the termination of the opening phase of the Bahá'í World Spiritual Crusade and the commencement of the second period in its unfoldment, on the threshold of an epoch of glorious expansion, both within its homeland as well as in foreign fields.

"Its members can do no better than to recall at this juncture, with joyous gratitude, the series of historic events which have led, in the course of almost four decades to its gradual emergence, its rapid rise and steady consolidation. The epoch-making travels of some of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's disciples, headed by the incomparable Martha Root, during the concluding years of the Heroic, and the opening decade of the Formative Age of the Faith, in response to the call raised by the Centre of the Covenant in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, may be regarded as the prelude to the formal and definite introduction of the Faith in that vast and prominent region. The preliminary years of wide-spread and strenuous seed sowing paved the way, on the morrow of the establishment of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith in the Western Hemisphere, for the launching of the First Seven Year Plan formulated by the American Bahá'í Community which culminated in the laying of the Administrative foundations of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the Republics of Central America and the Antilles.

This initial stage in the rise and establishment of the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh in the heart of the Western Hemisphere was immediately followed by the initiation of yet another Plan which attained its climax, on the morrow of the centenary of the Báb's martyrdom, through the formation of the Central American Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly, - an auspicious event that was befittingly celebrated in the course of the festivities commemorating the centenary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's mission. This notable and unforgettable event in the annals of the Faith in the New World was destined to be succeeded by the launching of a small albeit carefully devised plan by the newly launched National Spiritual Assembly and which culminated in those same never to be forgotten festivities. The launching of this Plan was in itself a prelude to the initiation of a Ten-Year Plan, formulated to meet the immediate needs of the Central American Bahá'í Community, in conjunction with a Spiritual Crusade embarked upon by National Bahá'í Communities throughout the entire globe.

"The opening phase of this Ten-Year Plan, which may be said to have inaugurated the Mission of this same community beyond its homeland has now drawn to a close, a year that has witnessed the opening, with a single exception, of all the virgin territories assigned, in accordance with that same Plan, to this community.

"This great victory, in which the followers of the Faith in Central America have themselves played a notable part, and which has virtually set the seal of strength on the initial stage of this glorious crusade must, at this hour of the unfold-

ment of the second phase of this historic enterprise, prove in turn a forerunner of a period of unprecedented, rapid and systematic expansion and consolidation of the Faith in each of the Republics of Central America and the Antilles.

"Whilst every effort must be strenuously exerted to safeguard at any cost the prizes won in the six newly opened territories in the American and Asiatic Continents, attention must, in the course of the present year, be focused on the multiplication of Bahá'í Centers, and on the formation of local assemblies, in order to broaden the foundations on which future independent National Spiritual Assemblies must ultimately rest. A no less assiduous effort should be exerted to increase rapidly the number of the avowed supporters of the Faith, particularly among the Indians, whose spiritual potentialities 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeatedly emphasized. . . . Simultaneously measures should be speedily undertaken to assist the United States National Assembly in expediting the translation and publication of Bahá'í literature in the Indian languages specifically mentioned in the provisions of the Ten-Year Plan. No effort should moreover be spared in assisting the South American National Spiritual Assembly in the all-important work of translating, printing and disseminating Bahá'í literature in both the Spanish and Portuguese languages.

"Particular attention should likewise be devoted to the acceleration of the process of local Bahá'í incorporation, so vital to the further consolidation of the newly emerged administrative institutions of the Faith in Central America and the Antilles.

"As the process of internal expansion and consolidation gains momentum, the elected national representatives of this community must not fail to consecrate themselves to the no less fundamental task of enriching continually the spiritual life of its members, of deepening their understanding of the essential verities, tenets and principles underlying their Faith, of demanding a strict adherence to its laws and statutes, and of setting an example to their fellow-believers through a fuller reflection, in their personal lives and conduct, of the ennobling truths animating the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

"May this community which, in the course of over a decade, has demonstrated so conspicuously its devotion to the ideals of the Faith it has risen to champion, furnish, as the years roll by, further proofs of its staunchness, its courage, its fidelity, its watchfulness, its singlemindedness and unswerving determination to fulfill its high destiny through the attainment of every single objective of the Plan to which it stands committed.

Your true brother,
(Signed) Shoghi

The following are certain paragraphs from a letter dated July 15, 1955, directed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Central America from the Bahá'í World Center:

"As regards your question about giving the Faith publicity, in the places that pioneers have moved to in order to fill the goals of the Plan; It depends on the place. If there is absolutely

no danger of publicity stirring up antagonism, or leading to the expulsion of the Bahá'í, or his being deprived of his residence visa, then there is no objection to publicity. The general principle, however, is this - that the Bahá'ís should keep as quiet as possible, seek out and confirm the receptive souls, and build their future Assemblies on a solid foundation. To broadcast the news of their activities is not essential in these virgin areas at the present time, and can in most cases be dangerous, and hinder the spread of the Faith.

"He (the Guardian) urges your Assembly to bear in mind that shortly National Ḥaẓratu'l-Quds will be needed in each country, and that the friends should begin to look for suitable Centres that will under no circumstances be too expensive, nor too far out from the centre of the city.

"He was delighted to see that, following speedily upon the purchase of the Panama Temple site, the Ḥaẓratu'l-Quds of the Bahá'ís of Central America has also been acquired.

With warm Bahá'í greetings,
(Signed) R. Rabbani

P.S. - Since commencing the above letter, the beloved Guardian has received your other letters dated April 9 (2) , April 12, and May 14.

He was very happy to know that you have increased the holdings of the Temple property in Panama. Please thank Miss Sneider on his behalf for this generous act on her part, an act which will be

appreciated increasingly as time goes on and the Temple itself is erected."

July 15, 1955

Dear and Valued Co-Workers:

"The year which has just been concluded witnessed a succession of achievements on the part of the members of the Central American Bahá'f Communities and particularly of the elected body of their national representatives, worthy of the highest commendation. In both the teaching and administrative spheres of Bahá'f activity, these newly fledged communities have demonstrated their firm attachment to the Faith they have expounded, their loyalty to its fundamental verities and principles, and their inflexible resolve to extend the range, and reinforce the foundations of their collective and meritorious activities and achievements.

"They are now, by the virtue of the splendid services they have performed, the spirit they have so powerfully evinced, the noble example they have set, approaching a stage in the evolution of the Faith in that highly promising area of the globe, which bids fair to eclipse the magnificent efforts which have been exerted, and the noteworthy services which have been performed, since its inception in the Antilles and the Central American Republics. They will soon be entering a period which is destined to witness the emergence of Regional National Assemblies which are to be regarded as stepping stones paving the way for the ultimate establishment of independent National

Spiritual Assemblies, which are destined to act as pillars, and participate directly in the formation of the future International House of Justice, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh as the supreme Legislative Organ of His World Order.

"Now is the time for those communities to prepare themselves, in the course of the two fast-fleeting years separating them from the opening of the third phase of a world spiritual crusade, individually as well as collectively, to assume befittingly the staggering responsibilities so soon to be placed upon them.

"They have thus far, discharged their task with befitting courage, zeal and loyalty. The foundations they have securely laid must now be both enlarged and strengthened. The virgin areas of the globe, assigned to their elected representatives, under the Ten-Year Plan, have been triumphantly and speedily opened. The translation and publication of the literature of the Faith into both the Spanish and Portuguese tongues have been vigorously undertaken. The plot whereon the first Mashriqu'l-Adhár of Central America must needs be erected has been purchased in the Republic of Panama, the importance of which has been so clearly stressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The first two of the historic National Hazratu'l-Quds that are to be established in the capital cities of the Republics of Central America and the Islands of the Antilles have been acquired.¹ A beginning

¹ During the Ten Year World Crusade, Hand of the Cause, Amelia Collins contributed a large sum of money for the purchase of sites for National Hazratu'l-Quds, Temple sites, and...

has been made in the translation of Bahá'í literature into the American Indian languages spoken in those regions.

"The tasks, now confronting them in the course of this current year and of the next, demand a still greater exertion on their part, a more complete dedication to the aims, purposes and principles of their Faith, a firmer resolve to achieve the immediate goals of their Ten-Year Plan, and a still nobler self-sacrifice in the path of the Cause they have espoused to champion.

"The two crucial years, constituting the concluding year of the second and the opening year of the third phase of the Ten-Year Plan must be signalized, if they would prove themselves worthy of their stewardship to their Faith, by a series of achievements even more conspicuous than those that have distinguished the opening years in the annals of that Faith in Central America and the Antilles.

"The number of avowed adherents of the Faith must, throughout that area, be speedily and substantially increased. Simultaneously a notable multiplication of groups and assemblies must be ensured in order to enlarge and reinforce the foundations of the forthcoming Regional National Assemblies. The incorporation of firmly established local spiritual assemblies must like-wise be expedited. The prizes won in distant and vir-

l endowments in many Latin American countries thus fulfilling a most challenging and important goal of the Ten-Year Crusade.

gin fields must not only be preserved but continually enhanced. The translation of Bahá'í literature into the American Indian languages assigned under the Ten-Year Plan must also be energetically prosecuted. The establishment of national endowments throughout that area must be, moreover, diligently undertaken and rapidly carried out. Above all, the purchase of National Hazratu'l-Quds in the remaining Republics of Central America and the Antilles must, ere the conclusion of the second year of the second phase of the Ten-Year Plan be consummated.

"Then, and only then, can the Central America Bahá'í Communities, that have won such superb victories in the past, confidently assume the sacred burden of responsibility incumbent upon them in the course of the third phase of this world encircling crusade. Then, and only then, can they demonstrate to the Bahá'í World their capacity to carry out in its entirety their share in ensuring the triumphant conclusion of this worldwide enterprise launched by the valiant upholders of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

"The tribulations now experienced by their brethern in the land of its birth should, far from crushing their spirit or dampening the zeal which animates them, infuse into them fresh courage and a more determined resolve to arise and compensate for the loss which the Cause is now sustaining. Individually as well as collectively, in their capacity as teachers and administrators, they should prove by their conduct the world-redeeming capacity of their Faith, demonstrate its incorruptible spirit, proclaim the sublimity of its

teachings, and silence the criticism of its opponents.

"Theirs is a glorious opportunity which they must not, in these day of test and trial, neglect. Theirs is a sacred duty which they must befittingly discharge. May they arise as one man, and armed with the invincible power of Bahá'u'lláh, play their part in a manner that will bring everlasting consolation to the hearts of their persecuted brethern, and dishearten thoroughly those redoubtable adversaries who are so artfully and persistently labouring to undermine its foundations and extinguish its light."

Your true brother,
(Signed) Shoghi

The last major letter from the Guardian to the National Assembly of Central America was dated July 28th, 1957. Earlier that same year, two Regional National Assemblies were formed, one for Central America, Mexico and Panama, and another for the Antilles. Thus the last preparatory step for the ultimate establishment of independent National Assemblies for each nation was accomplished. This final letter is historically significant not only because it was the last, but also because it was so stirring in its challenges.

"The beloved Guardian has instructed me to answer on his behalf your letters dated May 30th, June 26th, and July 16th.

"He was delighted to hear that the Convention was such a success, and that the Hand of the Cause, Mr. Khádem, was able to visit so many centers throughout that region. He feels sure that the spirit he imparted to the friends, as well

as the stirring events of the Convention and the election of your Assembly, will all mark a turning point in the work in that area and give the forward march of the Faith a new impetus.

"Now that the New Regional Assemblies in Latin America have been formed, and that each one embraces a more limited area than the previous Central and South American assemblies, the work should be much easier to handle, and therefore go ahead much faster. He anticipates great things from your assembly and is eagerly awaiting news of fresh victories.

"The paramount task is, of course, the teaching work; at every session your assembly should give it close attention, considering everything else of secondary importance. Not only must many new assemblies be developed, as well as groups and isolated centers, but special attention must be focused on the work of converting the Indians to the Faith. The goal should be all-Indian assemblies, so that these much exploited and suppressed original inhabitants of the land may realize that they are equals and partners in the affairs of the Cause of God, and that Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of God for them.

"Another of the important tasks facing your body is that of purchasing sites for future Temples in the outskirts of the capital cities of all the Republics under your jurisdiction, with the exception of Panama, which has its Temple site already. The land need not be large, two or three acres being quite sufficient for your purposes at this time; it need not be in the city but anywhere within

a radius of fifteen kilometers, and economy should be borne in mind. If, when the time comes to build a House of Worship, the site is not suitable, it can be exchanged or sold and another one acquired.

"Wherever the laws permit, firmly established local assemblies should be incorporated, thus laying a foundation on which the future independent National Spiritual Assemblies can build when they come into being.

"Every step forward in the expansion of our glorious Faith releases new spiritual energies. The believers, as well as your assembly, must seize upon this opportunity they now have with both hands, and arise to new levels of self-sacrifice, service and dedication, confident that Bahá'u'lláh is only waiting for the instruments to be put in His hands in order to fulfill His Divine purpose.

"The Guardian assures you he will support you, one and all, with his prayers, and supplicate that you may be guided in carrying out your great work, strengthened and protected.

With warm Bahá'í greetings,
(Signed) R. Rabbani

Dear and Valued Co-workers:

"The formation of a Regional Spiritual Assembly representing the Bahá'í Communities of Central America and Mexico, with its seat fixed in the capital city of a Republic the future

of which the pen of the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant has extolled, is indeed, an auspicious event of far-reaching significance, to be acclaimed as the forerunner of no less than seven National Spiritual Assemblies, designed to support, each as a separate pillar, the noble and divinely conceived structure of the Universal House of Justice.

"There can be no doubt that the remarkable progress achieved, singly and collectively, in both the teaching and administrative fields, by the followers of the Most Great Name, labouring, in the course of two decades, so diligently, for the propagation of His Faith, throughout the length and breadth of an area linking the northern and southern continents of the Western Hemisphere, has been responsible for this great step forward that has been taken towards the consummation of so historic a task.

"The various and urgent enterprises, now challenging both their spirit and resources, demand a consecration as complete, a resolve as firm, and a zeal as ardent as any they have hitherto evinced.

"The Six-Year Plan formulated to enable them to meet the immediate requirements of their mission should be prosecuted with the utmost diligence. Attention, on the part of all the members of the seven Bahá'í Communities participating in this world crusade, as well as their elected representatives, should be continually focused on its objectives.

"A Systematic effort must be made by the rank and file of these communities to increase rapidly the number of avowed supporters of the Faith, of isolated centers, of groups and of local spiritual assemblies. Every firmly grounded assembly should, at the earliest opportunity, be incorporated for the purpose of reinforcing the foundations of the rising structure of a divinely conceived administrative order. Every avenue should moreover, be explored in order to obtain recognition from the civil authorities concerned, of the Bahá'í marriage certificate and of the Bahá'í Holy Days. Nor must the meritorious work, so zealously undertaken in the newly opened virgin territories be, under any circumstances, neglected. The translation of Bahá'í literature into the Spanish and American Indian languages, its publication and dissemination, should likewise, be carried out with efficiency and vigour. The all-important enterprise, aimed at winning the whole-hearted allegiance of the members of various tribes of the American Indians to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and of ensuring their active and sustained participation in the conduct of its administrative affairs, must likewise be seriously considered and strenuously pursued. And, last but not least, a site of modest dimensions should in the neighborhood of the capital cities of each of these seven Republics, with the exception of Panama, be chosen and promptly purchased, designed to pave the way for the ultimate erection of a Mother Temple in each of these Republics.

"Marvellous opportunities, which if not seized at once may not reoccur, have been vouchsafed, at this auspicious hour, to the prosecutors of this

historic and momentous Plan, on which the immediate destinies of these communities, now gathered under the shadow of Bahá'u'lláh, depend. Theirs is the privilege and sacred duty to exploit them to the full, ere it is too late, and to play their part, befitting the co-executors of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan and members of that band of crusaders now battling for the strength of His Father's Cause in building up the institutions, and in broadening and reinforcing the foundations, of the embryonic world order of His Faith in the heart of the Western Hemisphere.

"No matter how severe the tests and trials they may encounter, however arduous the task that confronts them, they must, one and all, pursue steadily the path they now tread, with undimmed vision, undeviating loyalty, unrestrained devotion and unyielding determination, until the Plan they are pledged to execute will have been carried out in its entirety, and the fondest expectations entertained for their success by their watchful brethren throughout the Western Hemisphere, and, indeed, in every continent of the globe, are triumphantly fulfilled.

"May the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh bountifully sustain them while discharging their manifold and pressing responsibilities, and may the Author of the Divine Plan, whose design they are painstakingly labouring to create, and whose mandate they have willingly arisen to obey, guide every step they take, remove every obstacle obstructing their path, fulfill every hope they cherish, and enable them, through a still greater measure of His abiding

grace, promised unequivocally to all those who will respond to His call, to write an unforgettable chapter in Latin American Bahá'í history, and contribute a share to its enrichment which posterity will never cease to extol.

(Signed) Shoghi

Although the Central American Bahá'í Community, as was all the Bahá'í World, was deprived of its beloved Guardian, they did indeed respond to his call, and accomplishments of historic significance were indeed realized. Just four years later, at Ridván, 1961, the long anticipated Independent National Spiritual Assemblies were established, thus allowing the Central American believers to play their role in the establishment of the Universal House of Justice in 1963. Also during the period from 1957 to 1963, the Hands of the Cause Dhikru'lláh Khádem and later Dr. Ugo Giachery took charge of the great task of guiding and inspiring the Bahá'ís of Central America and the Antilles. It was with great love and care that they visited, taught and inspired the Bahá'ís and guided their institutions.

The previous letters outline the steady growth and consolidation of the Faith in Central America during the first and second parts of the Ten-Year Plan, and accurately describe the sphere of administrative activities which were constantly before the Regional Assembly. It must be kept in mind, also, that simultaneously, an ever-increasing effort was being made in the teaching sphere. With new pioneers, visits from the Hands of the Cause, the aid of the Auxiliary Board, and the

continued efforts of native teachers, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh was being broadcast throughout the region. These valiant efforts in the teaching field were usually made in the face of great obstacles and involved much sacrifice on the part of the pioneers and teachers. Although a complete and worthy rendering of all those efforts and sacrifices on the part of so many of Bahá'u'lláh's devoted followers in Central America during those historic years is beyond the scope of this work, hopefully, the stories which follow will serve to stir within the reader an appreciation for their efforts.

A GLIMPSE OF THE TEACHING EFFORT

The following is a series of stories, recollections, quips, and fleeting memories, told by Louise and some of her friends and fellow-pioneers, of those many now almost indistinguishable years as a pioneer in Guatemala. During these years, after the formation of the National Spiritual Assemblies, the Faith grew rapidly throughout Central America, as it did throughout the world. Although the following is not an adequate rendering of the historical growth of these national Bahá'í communities, the work, the sacrifice and the great bounties of the teaching work, were surely similar everywhere. So it is hoped that the following vignettes will serve to recreate in part the painstaking growth of the Faith in these countries and evoke an appreciation for the efforts of the many pioneers, travel teachers, and Hands of the Cause.

Although Louise was primarily involved in teaching activities, on one occasion she was called upon to protect the Faith from a Covenant breaker. She was asked to travel to Costa Rica accompanied by Larry Kramer, who gave a course on the Divine Plan while they were there. They went to investigate reports of a Persian who was

visiting the local believers in his robes and making strange claims. When Louise arrived she sought him out and visited him at his hotel. When she referred to the passage of Bahá'u'lláh: "Whoso maketh a claim before a thousand years is a lying imposter" (Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 40), the man in robes replied: "Well then I am a lying imposter." Later after sending in her report, she received a letter from Horace Holley, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States which read: "The members of the National Spiritual Assembly wish to express to you their cordial thanks for your vigilant and effective action in protecting the Bahá'ís of Costa Rica from the negative influences of this man."

Another pioneer that Louise met in Costa Rica was Alan Pringle who said later that his contact with Louise encouraged him to teach the Indians. In the years that followed, Alan Pringle had great success teaching the Indians on the San Blas Island Islands of Panama. Louise continued to support the Indian teaching efforts not only with her encouragement, but with her financial assistance to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama as well. Louise later returned to Panama to visit the Pringles and help them teach at Indian institutes and at Villa Virginia. The fame of Alan and Ruth Pringle's teaching efforts in Panama has been widely broadcast.

Almost immediately after returning from her pilgrimage to Haifa, Louise had the great bounty of accompanying Hand of the Cause Dhikru'lláh Khádém on his tour of Central America. She has

written about some of the highlights of her trip:

"In Tegucigalpa the friends gave a warm and well organized reception to our visiting Hand. The first evening Don Gerardo Flores Corleto, Marfa Rivera, Leo Alfaro and Olimpia Varela greeted him in the Bahá'í Center which was attractively arranged with fresh flowers. They also sent flowers to his room. I went to San Salvador two days ahead of him, as no one knew he was coming. With difficulty and the same old footwork of the early days, I notified some of the friends. The Corpeños were very co-operative and the meetings were held in their home. The first night they were not prepared for a 'prince', but on Sunday afternoon, they recognized him and were well prepared.

"Guatemala was something special. Our beloved Guardian told Mírzá Khádem he would come here over 13 years ago. Twelve were present at the first meeting, the largest number I witnessed. The second night fewer Bahá'ís came but Señor Perez came as a newly declared Bahá'í and he brought his wife. She said nothing but her face indicated that she was inspired by the words of our Hand of the Cause. In Chichicastenango, Mírzá Khádem launched the Ten-Year Crusade for the Indians and he lifted all nine present to spiritual heights. He brought healing to Gustavo Rodas and each one present was made aware of the important part he could play in the Ten-Year Crusade. He told them the story of Leroy Ioas which stirred them all to hear of a man who was earning \$50,000.00 a year and nearing a pension--who left everything to serve our Beloved Guardian.

He went to live in two small rooms and said that he was living in paradise.

Louise recalled a particular incident during her travels with Mr. Khádem which serves to illustrate the many difficulties associated with traveling by bus in the Central American countries: "We went to two 'pensions' to find rooms without success. At one 'pension', I was permitted to use the telephone and found rooms for us at the Pension Asturias. We were then tired as it was midday, and we sat on the curb waiting for a taxi to take us to Pension Asturias. I can't recall why we found ourselves in a very poor hotel, but I guess it was because we were going to Chichicastenango on a bus that left at 6:00 A. M. the next morning. We asked the hotel to call each of us at 5:30 A. M. After sleeping in a room with ply-board walls, I heard a knock and was told it was time to get up. I rushed to dress and in the lobby or should I say, hall, I met Mr. Khádem. We greeted each other and sat in chairs in silence. Looking at my watch I noticed it was 3:00 instead of 5:30. This disturbed our night's sleep."

A few months after her trip with Mr. Khádem, Louise was settled in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. She recalled with fond memories the way she observed the birth of the Báb which apart from being the day of the birth of our beloved Báb, it was also a national holiday of Guatemala. Adriana Zúñiga, teacher of 'Instituto Cultural Bahá'í,' and I were invited to accompany the mayor and officials of the town in the parade to the grounds where speeches were made, and games were

played. During the ceremony, Adriana sat at the right hand of the judge, and I sat at the left hand of the mayor so that the two government officials were flanked by two Bahá'fs. As we sat under the tin canopy decorated with pine boughs, watching the ceremonies, I had to wipe an occasional tear from my eyes, as I thought of the Báb, of Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the spiritual assembly of Yazd, all of them in prison. I also kept thinking about Dhikru'lláh Khádem and his having visited this town in June and launching for us the Ten-Year Crusade. The sun came out and shone upon us and warmed us and I felt the glow of the coming victory for our Faith."

"Once Artemus Lamb and I were staying in the same 'pension' in Costa Rica. Americans were forbidden to go out on the streets as there was political upheaval of some kind. Nevertheless, we went to a park, just a block away from the 'pension'. But when the bullets started whizzing over our heads we rushed home."

"Once when I was still living there, Robert Gulick visited Costa Rica and I gave a tea for about sixty women, in the best hotel in San José. He gave a Bahá'f talk and then asked me how many were Bahá'fs. To his great surprise, I answered, 'none'."

"We paid little attention to the political problems of government except when they interfered with Bahá'f meetings. Once, however, during some changes of government in Guatemala, I

was on a bus going to a town in the southern part of the country. Suddenly a man got on the bus, and said to the passengers in a polite tone, 'Please get off the bus. We are going to set it on fire.' So, I got off and took the next bus."

"In 1955, I spent several weeks with Margaret Mills and Marjorie Stee in El Salvador. The two girls had rented a small house in Santa Ana and had weekly meetings there. I helped them arrange the furniture and gave a talk. The door was open to the street, and I remember so clearly that perspiration was pouring off my face, as I talked about Bahá'u'lláh. A woman looked in and I knew that she was going to become a Bahá'í, even though she did not come in and said nothing. This was Menscha, who worked for the Ferrands years later, and became a very loyal Bahá'í."

The following account as recalled by Alice Sinclair in a letter to Louise, depicts better than anything else could, what "the seed-sowing years" were like in Central America:

"Manolo and I had just returned from a teaching trip to Chinaca, about 16 kilometers from Huehuetenango, Guatemala. We had two nice experiences talking with people and on the way back I was so tired I had to rest so we found a tree and sat down to rest in the shade. Dozens of people passed by and of course we greeted them, but one man with beautiful eyes came over to us like a magnet. We asked him when we could come to his aldea to give the people a beautiful message

about the new Messenger God had sent. He said, 'Are you Bahá'ís?' I nearly fell dead, and said 'yes.' He said, 'I am a Bahá'í.' Tears came to his eyes. He put his arms around me and said, 'I've hunted all over for Louise Caswell to tell me more about the Bahá'í Faith. I went to Guatemala City, Retalhuleu, Masatenango, and other places hunting for her to tell me more.' Then the dear soul fumbled to the bottom of his sack and pulled out an old prayer book wrapped in pieces of cloth and said, 'She gave me this in 1953, I always pray to Bahá'u'lláh and to 'Abdu'l-Bahá to let me find this wonderful message. Now finally I have found it again. My children are the only ones that believe me that there is such a beautiful religion. Others laugh and say it isn't true. Please get me books. I'll be there Wednesday at 11:00 A. M. to pick them up with my friends. I have a little ranch to teach them in. My wife said this religion was false and destroyed the books Mrs. Caswell gave me -- all but the prayer book. She soon died so it proves it wasn't false.' When I told him we would have tortillas and coffee ready for them on Wednesday, he said, 'No, we want food for the spirit instead!'

"One afternoon I was returning from a visit to an Indian family near Retalhuleu, Guatemala, where we met in their thatch-covered hut with dirt floor in that scorchingly hot sea-level area amidst the lush growing ferns and palm trees. I was crossing a low bridge over a creek where the women were bathing. Suddenly a woman was walking towards me and as I smiled at her I soon found her in my arms sobbing and weeping, begging me to give her something to cure her habit of drinking liquor, a habit which she had acquired

after she had lost her husband who was killed instantly by a train. What comfort a Bahá'í can give was offered to her but in reality, all I could do was to listen patiently. This is only one of the incidents I experienced when all I could do was listen to the 'tale of the poor that lieth upon the dust', and 'suffer him to recount the tale of the woes with which God's inscrutable decree hath caused him to be afflicted.' (Gleanings, p. 315) . What a nearness I felt knowing that the Supreme Concurrence was looking down on us and blessing us as we listened to the tales of the poor. This is one of the greatest bounties of pioneering."

"I often remembered that 'Abdu'l-Bahá wanted to teach the 'nameless and traceless poor,' when my own patience was taxed. Such was the case when an 'ambulante' (Spanish for a wanderer, a rover, very poor and truly nameless) began to talk to me in a bus when I was going from Retalhuleu to San Sebastian. He was most helpful in explaining to me a few words in the Maya-Quiché dialect. My friendliness resulted in several visits by him to my hotel. He came to tell his sad stories, how he had been put in jail for fighting, how he had been dragged through the streets like a pig. Sometimes I wondered how long he would keep me standing in the hotel lobby listening to him. On one such occasion, Johnny Eichenauer came along just as I was about to become exasperated. Finally, Johnny said to him, 'So what are you going to do now?' This question started a new set of impulses in the 'ambulante's' head and off he went to his next activity. This remark of Johnny's should be useful for many in the future."

INTROSPECTION

Louise rarely complained about anything to anyone, and was always careful to keep her tests and suffering to herself. However, she once wrote a summary or introspection of her difficult years during the Ten-Year World Crusade that included some generalizations about her experience as a pioneer. Her thoughts are probably applicable to most, if not all, pioneers.

"It is true that the beloved Guardian has asked us to bring order into our lives and this I have been trying to do ever since his special instruction, but as for a particular teaching method, this is difficult for me to develop. Martha Root has been my example, since she taught in my home in Portland, Oregon, and I was able to observe her work. But in the small towns of Guatemala the work was principally with people of the soil and required a different approach. Roaming the hills dwelling on the life of Bahá'u'lláh, visiting the plazas of the Indian towns, communing with the Indian spirit, which, next to the memory of Bahá'u'lláh, was the most refreshing and healing elixir for the soul. The spontaneous smiles of the native Indians reminds us that there is a great spirit which they have carried down from

the past, a spirit which 'Abdu'l-Bahá knew would become rekindled and bring illumination to the world. If the town had a library or a museum I would visit it. The goal of winning souls to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh seemed so very difficult and slow in accomplishing that we could not understand at first, why the beloved Guardian had written that the work in Latin America had progressed with 'lightning-like rapidity'. I cannot feel that I converted anyone to the Faith in this time, but rather that I found believers, and we together have taught them--so very few, but without discouragement. We could never count the people that have shown enthusiasm and then disappeared into thin air, or how many have convinced us that they would become Bahá'ís, contribute to the fund and work for the Faith. We are the lambs of God. We believe; and disappointments cannot keep us from drawing with due renunciation from those life-giving waters to 'sprinkle therewith all created things.' (Gleanings, p. 279) . So we go right on, accompanied by the chosen angels, and communing intimately with the spirit. The daily prayer and daily effort of the pioneers, our constancy in giving the message to people in all walks of life, our obedience to all our beloved Guardian's instructions and suggestions, our winning of races and peoples to the glorious Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, all these are but stepping-stones to attaining acceptance of our Lord 'that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.' (Gleanings, p. 157)

"If our difficulties will help future pioneers, then we must recount them for their sakes."

Speaking for myself, I can say that the greatest difficulty has been the gradual revelation of the self to the self: this revelation admits of no timing and goes back as far as one can remember, until one finds oneself constantly saying: 'Why did I do this awful thing?' The best answer seems to be that 'I was not conscious of what I was doing' and that 'my point of view was purely selfish and did not include anyone else.' This is not pleasant. But there is a cure for falling into despondency caused by remorse, and this cure is the mention of Bahá'u'lláh. This is the healing of all our ills. Do we not enjoy 'that which draweth us nigh unto Thee... and every good thing sent down by Thee in Thy Books and Thy Scriptures'. (Long Obligatory Prayer) .

"As the self of the pioneer is developing from the centripetal ego to the universal service, there must pass moments of great loneliness, for has not Muhammad told us that 'every good thing comes to us from God and every evil thing comes to us from ourselves'? So the self analysis deepens and the pioneer must overcome this loneliness by referring to these words: 'Grieve not if thou doest it thyself alone. Commune intimately with His spirit and be of those who are thankful.' (Gleanings, p. 280)

"We have seen wonderful examples of real Bahá'ís who commune so very intimately with the spirit that they are never lonely. These are our shining examples. Many of them are living and do not even want their names mentioned, but we receive assistance from such as Martha Root, Keith Ransom-Kehler, May Maxwell, the Dunnes,

Louis Gregory, and many others from the Abhá Kingdom.

"I was present at the Convention in Panama in 1957 when two national assemblies were formed, one for Central America, Mexico, and Panama, and the other for the Greater Antilles. I also visited the Convention in El Salvador in 1961, and the Guatemalan Convention that same year, when twenty-one National Spiritual Assemblies were elected in the Western Hemisphere. Viewing the rapid formation of these twenty-one national assemblies in countries in which there were practically no native Bahá'ís at the beginning of the First Seven Year Plan, we can understand what our beloved Guardian meant by the 'lightning-like rapidity of the growth of the Faith in Latin America'."

CONCLUSIONS

The Faith did indeed grow rapidly in Central America from 1939, when Louise first arrived in Panama, and 1961, when the National Spiritual Assemblies were formed. But for each pioneer, the growth always seemed slow and painful. It requires great faith and perseverance to ignore the seemingly slow progress in the life of the individual pioneer, and to trust that all efforts bear fruit eventually. When the writer compares his experience as a pioneer in Guatemala from 1970 to 1972, and presently in Honduras in 1977, to the pioneering experience of Louise and her fellow-pioneers of those early years, the differences are many and profound. Now we find national assemblies, with many local assemblies, and many confirmed believers. How difficult it is to truly appreciate the sacrificial efforts of those early pioneers who are responsible for the present state of the Faith in these Central American countries .

It is beyond the scope of this work to depict adequately the history of each of the national Bahá'í communities after the formation of each national assembly in 1961. Each country has

separate histories from that point, and it must fall upon other writers to record for posterity the rich and fascinating history of each national community. Although the historical portrayal of this work ends in 1961, Louise's life of service as a pioneer has continued. She served for many years on the National Assembly of Guatemala. In addition, she has served as an inspiration for many pioneers, both in Guatemala, and throughout Central America. She has continued to contribute unselfishly both to her national community and to the World Center of the Faith. Just one example of her generosity was the financial support she provided for the construction of the local center in Livingston, Guatemala, in obedience to the suggestion of Hand of the Cause Dr. Muhajir. The day of the dedication of that center in February of 1972, will forever be remembered by all those present. Louise was like a queen, as she walked down the long road to the center, accompanied by many believers from Livingston and by others from all over the country. Her radiant smile enveloped the entire scene, as she sat next to the mayor of Livingston during the inauguration ceremony. As always, she didn't want the believers to know who had contributed the money. She was as a radiant sun in that gathering of brown and black faces!

Throughout the years from 1961 to 1975, Louise continued to travel throughout Central America helping with the teaching work as it gathered momentum. When she was on pilgrimage, the Guardian had told her that she would become an international teacher. Indeed she did, as she assisted in Chiapas and Yucatan, Mexico,

Haiti, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Belize, and elsewhere. She has many letters from these various National Assemblies thanking her for her work.

APPRECIATIONS

The following is a passage from a letter dated March 14, 1964, from the Western Hemisphere Teaching Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States:

As we stand at this point--before the Nine Year Plan is revealed and after the great victories of the beloved Guardian's Crusade climaxed in London, we think of you and your contribution. We wish we could adequately express the deep admiration and pride, the appreciation, love and gratitude we have for you! Words fail us. You have remained a pioneer in the face of all difficulties, far from your native land with your mind and heart determinedly set on expanding the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh-- a true pioneer! Through your efforts and sacrifice, your teaching and living our beloved Faith the Great Crusade came to a triumphant climax. And you remained! We love you for this! We love you for what you are! We are proud to be linked with you! You are an integral part of the life of your

adopted country and your National Spiritual Assembly. You may think of yourself as belonging only where you are. This is your vital life and you have put down roots. How precious you must be to Shoghi Effendi who so desired this devoted steadfastness of all pioneers! Though you have grown beautifully and flourished and accomplished vastly, we still feel the tug of the ties that bound us closely in the early days of your planning and pioneering. You have a special corner in our hearts. Happy Naw-Rúz! Happy days of victories and fulfillment ahead as we stride into the Nine Year Plan and joyfully accept the new challenge!

Warmest greetings to you from each committee member, and our

Abiding love,
WESTERN HEMISPHERE TEACHING COMMITTEE
(Signed) Maurine Kraus, secretary

The following paragraph is from a letter dated September 17, 1961, from Hand of the Cause Dhikru'lláh Khádem:

"Indeed you have always been, both during the lifetime of the beloved of all hearts, Shoghi Effendi, and after his passing, a true example of devotion and self sacrifice to all the Bahá'ís. We feel sure that you have always brought joy to the heart of our Beloved ever since

you left home and everything in response to his call in pioneering. What a great bounty! We have been giving your example of indefatigable services to the beloved friends."

Of course, Louise Caswell was not the first pioneer in Latin America, and she was not the only one who persevered in her services. Undoubtedly throughout the Bahá'í world, there were others who matched her services. But she is truly a shining example to all who would aspire to the high station of "a true pioneer." The days of heroic and historic services to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh such as the Louises of the world witnessed, are gone and will never reappear. We are building upon the solid foundations they have laid for us. If we reach higher, it will be because we stand upon their shoulders. Let us never forget what great sacrifices, and what devoted labors have been silently and lovingly offered for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and let us always be joyful and thankful for the comparatively smaller tests and challenges that face us in the years to come.

One final tribute to Louise must be included in this work; Ruth Pringle of Panama wrote a very loving letter to Louise on December 11, 1963. This is just one of the glowing paragraphs:

"You know, Louise, you have a very special place in your heart for Panama; but I wonder whether you realize what a special place the Panamanians both old and new have in their hearts for you. The glory of today really isn't ours but rather belongs to the Louises all over

the world who through blood, sweat, tears and grief toiled, tilling the soil with their love, depositing tiny seeds and later cultivating the tender little shoots. Our harvest belongs to you and through all the worlds of God we shall continue to sing your praises. "

"I swear by Him Who is the Truth! Ere long will God adorn the beginning of the Book of Existence with the mention of His loved ones who have suffered tribulation in His path, and journeyed through the countries in His name and for His praise. Whoso hath attained their presence will glory in their meeting, and all that dwell in every land will be illumined by their memory. "

--Bahá'u'lláh (quoted by Shoghi Effendi in Advent of Divine Justice, p. 70)



Bahá'í Group of Tegucigalpa,
Honduras, 1941. Johnny Eichenauer
and Louise Caswell, center rear.



Managua, Nicaragua Bahá'ís with
Catherine Cole, 1945.