

... description: 1900, Sarah Farmer  
author: Horace  
title: Biography of Sarah Farmer  
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## Biography of Sarah Farmer

### Bahíyyih

#### 1900, Sarah Farmer

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January 20, 1949. Mrs. H. E. Ford, Box 1003, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Dear Bahíyyih:

Renee Welsh sent your manuscript on Sarah J. Farmer to the Review-Committee and their remarks were considered at our recent meeting.

Receiving Committee, in a formal sense, would not need to come into the picture concerning this manuscript as it is not a Bahá'í manuscript, A, concerned with the Bahá'í teachings, etc.

The member of the Reviewing Committee felt that this manuscript did not come, under their function but "there is one point which the members nevertheless cannot refrain from commenting on. It is the feeling of the members, in varying degrees, that while the mss. conveys a wonderful story of a most inspiring life, the writing is uneven in quality and there are many sentences that need revision." (There are also \*polling mistakes).

As we cannot afford to print the manuscript until after the emergency years, we feel sure that you will want to re-write at least parts of this wonderful record.

We are writing Mr. and Mrs. Welch of this action and sending you the mss. herewith.

With every good wish to you both,

Sincerely,  
HORACE

Secretary

This book is dedicated to those who made the writing of it possible. Miss Farmer lives in the hearts of many and they have shared freely of their memories, letters, programs, pictures and momentos, that the record of her greatness might be told. We wish that tribute could be made by name, for each has given a link in the story, but that will have to wait for a longer biography. Someday the full story will be told about her parents, her childhood and youth, and much more about her womanhood and dream. Most of the source material has never been

published. When many have written the same episode, in which details vary, we have used to facts which the greater number agreed upon. We hope we have conveyed in this book something of what they intended.

Margaret Randall Ford

Little Falls, N. Y. May 30, 1947.

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### **Sarah Jane Farmer**

1847-1916

It was a hot June day in Boston, in the year 1892. Not a breath of air stirred in the crowded lecture hall. The speaker mopped his brow as he talked of the more abundant life. Half way down the room sat a gracious middle-aged woman. Her appearance belied the heat of the afternoon. She wore a soft flowing grey dress with a touch of lace at the neck. Her face bore a look of serenity and sympathy. With hands folded quietly in her lap she watched the audience strain to concentrate on the lecture. Suddenly her figure grew tense, her expressive brown eyes kindled with enthusiasm. She hastily drew a pencil and paper from her purse and quickly jotted down words: Green Acre – tent in riverbank – all races – religion – music – science – understanding – Peace.

As the lecture closed, Sarah Farmer arose and hastened from the hall. That had been an eventful afternoon for her and so many others. In a moment of clear insight, she had realized the significance of the hour in which she lived, that it was the dawn of a New Day of Unity and Peace for humanity. That the great need was for a place where this New Day could be discussed and lived, no matter on how small a scale. The Ideal must be put into practice and then it would spread throughout the earth as a pebble dropped into a pool sends its waves to the furthermore shore.

That evening, she told her father what had happened. “I was listening to a lecture by Coleville. The people were hungry for knowledge of themselves and sat patiently in spite of great heat and the noise of traffic that almost drowned the speaker’s voice. I thought of what a glorious thing it would be for poor, tired, struggling humanity to have some spot on earth where our bodies and souls might be refreshed at the same time. Suddenly, I saw the need and with it how to begin to help. I saw the picture of Green Acre with its acres of beautiful fields and pines and the river with the Inn high above its banks. But instead of a small summer resort it had become a great center of learning. Throngs of people were coming to it at boat, carriage, even walking. On the shore was a large tent with people comfortably seated listening to a series of Conferences on progressive subjects, free of charge so that all might come. There were all races and creeds there, and happy children and young people ready to learn how to make their lives of value. Peace was the aim of everyone’s efforts. It was a place to manifest in this world the wonderful power of God. And I saw

also that in the years ahead, the Conferences would grow into a school and the school into a University on Sunset Hill nearby, which would be dedicated to man's highest achievements in the arts, sciences, religion and philosophy. The spiritual principles of the New Day would find their complete expression in the life of Green Acre. This is what you and Mother and I have always been working towards, but we saw only parts of the plan and now I have seen it all."

The seventy-year old man did not smile. His weary body, almost helpless in a wheel chair, had never trapped his soul. He caught the picture too. And far into the summer night those two sat making the blueprint of an Ideal.

Three months later found the father and daughter leaving their home in Eliot, Maine, near Green Acre, for Chicago. It was against doctor's orders but when had they ever not striven far beyond their physical strength? And there was the great plan to work for now.

The Colombian Exposition of 1893 was soon to open its doors. Prof. Farmer had been invited to have an exhibit of his inventions, for he was one of America's great scientists. Is first little model of a trolley car, the mantelpiece with its incandescent bulbs on it that had illumined the parlor of their home in 1859, a model of his electric fire alarm system; all had been carefully packed and freighted.

The next few months in Chicago were busy ones. The exhibition was arranged, Sarah had even made some contacts for Green Acre, and plans to sell several of the inventions had taken shape.

On the evening of May 17, as Prof. Farmer sat in their small apartment waiting for Sarah to return from a meeting, his thoughts wandered back across the years. They had been long hard years of struggle, and sometimes poverty, because his earnings had gone it seemed once again that she would collapse, Miss Wilson took her away, this time for eleven months. It was called a sabbatical year and Mr. Keefe was left in charge. He was in truth her King Arthur of the Round Table.

January 3, 1900, found Miss Farmer and Miss Wilson at a New York City dock boarding the S. S. *Bismarck* for the Mediterranean, and to their joy they met Josephine Locke and Elizabeth Knudson who were also sailing. This was a happy surprise for the four had been friends for years. Before many days at sea, Miss Farmer suspected that the two friends had a secret, as sometimes when she approached them on the deck, they would hastily conceal a small book they had been reading. Her curiosity was fully aroused and finally won from them the confidence that it was the "Hidden Words" a book written by a Persian who called himself, "Bahá'u'lláh". They told her they were on their way to see his son, a religious prisoner of the Turks, in the ancient fortress of 'Akká, in Palestine. Instantly, Miss Farmer was filled with a desire to make this journey also. Miss Locke was not sure it could be arranged; for her brother had cautioned her to be most secretive about her trip, lest she incur the disfavour of

the officials in whose custody 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been placed; this did not daunt Miss Farmer, she and Miss Wilson cabled ahead, asking permission to come.

By the middle of January they were in Egypt meeting some of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh and his son. They became increasingly anxious to study this religion at its source. While awaiting permission from 'Akká they took a three-weeks' sail on the Nile. Miss Farmer felt the romance of this ancient land and explored Thebes and the pyramids with intense interest; she even took a moonlight ride across the desert on donkey-back. When they returned to Cairo, the trip to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been arranged. On March 21, the four friends boarded a steamer for the overnight journey to Haifa. Early on the morning of March 23, the carriage arrived to take them the nine miles around the bay of 'Akká. The high walls which surrounded it looked forbidding, and as they entered the gate, the stench and confusion of the narrow street were appalling. They rounded a corner or two and entered a small courtyard, the end of the journey; there they forgot all but the figure standing in a doorway at the top of a long flight of outside stairs – 'Abdu'l-Bahá! As Miss Farmer climbed the steps she gazed into a face of such nobility of character that she knew she was meeting, for the first time in her life, a man of true spiritual distinction. She was in a unique position to judge her fellow beings, she had known the great and the near great. In her diary that night she wrote this one sentence, "Heart too full for speech – received by our Lord."

The second day of the visit she decided to write down the many questions she said for 'Abdu'l-Bahá lest they be forgotten in the excitement of an interview. She thought them out carefully and laid the slip of paper in her Bible. The third morning at an early hour she was called, with a young interpreter, for her personal talk with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She forgot her paper in her haste but 'Abdu'l-Bahá's first words were, "Tell Miss Farmer that this is the answer to her first question." The young man hesitated for he had heard no question and 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued, "She will understand." One by one her questions were answered. He spoke with such wisdom and understanding that she was lifted into a state of exalted happiness. Some hearts are as a lamp filled with oil waiting for a spark to transform the wick into a light. Miss Farmer's heart was ready and the power of love of God that she now saw reflected in the life and person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá carried her to new heights of spiritual unfoldment. 'Abdu'l-Bahá told Miss Farmer that her dream of Green Acre had been real, that someday there would be a university and also a temple for the worship of God on her beloved Mt. Salvat, that her work had not been in vain, that it was to live and that she had been chosen through the mercy of God to found this center to herald the dawn of a New Day. But he cautioned her. He explained that the real religion was not composed of psychic experiences or manmade ritual and superstitions, that to encourage the study of these things would not lead to unity and peace, that not an electric Faith but rather a fresh outpouring of the knowledge of the Will of God was spoken though the pure channel of a Prophet was the only power that could transform human hearts. It had always been so down through the ages. Tolerance was not enough! And finally that a new

step must be taken at Green Acre. The spirit had been established there, the platform for the reception of universal ideas created, and now it must become a focal point for the message of God for the New Day!

Miss Farmer met 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wife and family. Their prison life was filled with happiness and grace. She loved them and they loved her. Always she was to remember their example of patience in the face of deprivation and suffering.

These 'Akká days were the climax of her life. They could only be four of them because of the restrictions placed upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá but they were enough. She found the answer to the spiritual longings of her heart and soul.

On the fourth day the carriage bore them out of the city gate and back along the sea to Haifa.

They had a few days in Cairo and then started on a trip through Europe. The first stop was Greece; one day in Athens as Miss Farmer was walking along the street a carriage stopped beside her; the Queen leaned out to inquire who the lady with the radiant face was; Miss Farmer was a striking figure in Athens, New York or Paris. Her dresses and bonnets were made in simple Quaker fashion of a gray material with a touch of lavender in it, making a perfect background for her marvellously expressive face.

Rome, Oberammergau, Munich, Strassburg, Geneva and finally Paris. There Miss Farmer and Miss Wilson were the house guests of Madame Jackson, a wealthy American woman they had met in Cairo and with whom they became great friends. It seemed as though everywhere Miss Farmer went, she made close friends. Those Paris days held her first Bahá'í meetings too, at Charles Mason Remey's studio where there were other Americans, among them May Bolles Maxwell.

When Miss Farmer returned to America in December she began to organize the program for the coming season and also to see the Bahá'ís in eastern cities. She spent part of that winter in Washington with Mrs. Phoebe Hurst and there she lectured about the new Faith/ she had been radiant before but now this new happiness gave her a luminous quality that made people say she looked like a saint. She was a power for good wherever she went.