

WITH THE MIAMI BAHAI'IS - 1933 to 1983

BY

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Miami, Florida

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On April 21, 1983 the Baha'i Assembly of Miami, Florida noted that it was observing fifty years of continuous service. There is some reason to believe that there may have, for a very short time, been an assembly two or three years previously, but, if so, all local records of it have been lost and there was definitely no Assembly here in 1932 or early 1933. The election of April 21, 1983 marked the Fiftieth Year of continuous existence of the Miami Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is. Accordingly, this year we have named our Golden Anniversary Year and plans were made to have at least one public proclamation event per month for the whole year. The first was a barbecue and picnic in a public park the last week in April. Special Tee shirts of a golden yellow with dark green lettering were ordered and sold proclaiming "The Baha'i Faith. Unity in Diversity. The Miami Baha'is - 1933 to 1983. 50 Year Anniversary." Many were worn at the picnic, proved quite popular and caught the interest of the general public.

Since the Miami Assembly had been the first to do Extension Teaching work in Dade County, all our sister Assemblies were invited to celebrate with us. These included the Assemblies of Miami Beach, North Miami, North Dade County (which hosted the Barbecue), Central Dade County, and South Dade County. The Miami Assembly also arranged the first public Baha'i meeting ever held in Fort Lauderdale. This was about 1945, near the end of WW II. Dorothy Baker was our speaker. There were only about 15 present, including a carload from Miami - 30 miles away.. This meeting was held in a small auditorium owned by the Women's Club of Fort Lauderdale. When we noted the smallness of numbers Dorothy Baker said "Oh, I never let the smallness of numbers bother me. Abdul Baha has said this is the seed sowing time and has promised that no seed will be lost." (It may be noted that Miami is in Dade County, Florida which is one of the largest single counties in the U. S. having an area of about 50 square miles. Fort Lauderdale is in Broward County and is 30 miles north of Miami.)

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In the late 1940's and 1950's the Miami Assembly also did Extension teaching work in St. Augustine, Florida, which had an Assembly predating Miami's but needed help. It had been established by Dr. Walter B. Guy and his wife several years earlier but was in danger of being lost after his death, when his wife and son moved back to Boston. Several times teaching teams of 4 or 5 spent long week-ends in St. Augustine holding public meetings and putting news in the papers. A pioneer family from Miami moved to St. Augustine to save that Assembly. This was John and Mae Ver Haven and their three children. They succeeded for a time. However, there is no Assembly there today.

The Miami Community also sent teaching teams of two or three several times to Key West over a period of several years. Finally one of our number, Mrs. Mara Edmonstone, moved to Key West as a Home Front Pioneer and spent several years there.

The development of the Miami Assembly and Community happened this way. In 1932 a very attractive lecturer came to Miami who told us of the latest new religion, advertised in those days as a "World Peace Movement". This teacher was Mrs. Orcella Rexford who travelled widely ~~lecturing~~ lecturing on Health foods and exercises and conducting paid classes. After this she always gave three nights of free lectures about the Baha'i Faith.

In 1933 before our Assembly was formed there were just seven recognized Baha'is in Miami. They were: Mr. William Atwater and his wife, Mrs. Margaret Atwater, Mr. Chester M. Davison and his wife, Mrs. Romette Davison, Mrs. Olive Kretz, Mrs. Carolyn Harbin and Miss Corrinne D'Amour.

In January 1932 Mrs. Orcella Rexford and her husband, Dr. Gayne V. Gregory came to Miami on a lecture tour. Orcella Rexford (her professional name), was a very attractive lecturer and teacher. Both were Baha'is and contacted local Baha'is when they came to town. In 1933 Orcella already had a following. She was a dynamic speaker, a colorful and beautiful woman. As a young woman she had had several long illnesses and was expected to have a very short life.. She decided that she wanted to live and could help herself, so enrolled

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in a college course in diatetics, psychology and physical fitness. This was so successful she became radiantly healthy and beautiful and determined to help others.

Her method was to travel and give a series of free lectures on health building, followed by a study course. Then she gave a course in Numerology. However, within a few years the Numerology was discontinued on the advice of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, who told her it was only a pseudo-science. At all of the free lectures a hostess at each door recorded the names and addresses of all in the audience in a big guest book. Her lectures and courses were so interesting that everyone wanted to be on her mailing list. At the end of her commercial series Orcella sent post cards (at that time costing only two cents) to all on her mailing lists and also placed newspaper ads, announcing three free lectures on the subject of "The World of Tomorrow". These were lectures on the Baha'i Faith.

Orcella was always attractively dressed in long, colorful evening gowns with buckets of flowers on the stage and, usually, a musical prelude. At one meeting I remember Mrs. Romette Davison, who had a lovely coloratura soprano voice, sang, "Pale Hands" and "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life".

The average attendance at her lectures was over 500. At the end of the free lectures it was announced that the local Baha'is would hold further study groups for a month at a rented hall downtown. These were conducted by Mr. Chester M. Davison. Then, as the group settled in at about 15 in number, they were moved to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Atwater for a weekly study class. At first the only books we studied were "Baha'U'llah and the New Era" and the Prayer Book. A few pamphlets had been distributed at Orcella's meetings. At her last lecture I remember Orcella saying, "God wants everyone to hear His Message and to work for him. You who hear this are privileged, but those of you who accept and work for the Faith will feel as if God had placed His Finger on your forehead and said, "You are Mine.""

In 1933 after attending the local study class for several weeks there were a number who accepted the Faith and some older Baha'is who had moved to Miami. Twelve or thirteen new members accepted the Faith in the spring and summer of 1933. From then on we have always had a Local Spiritual Assembly of Miami.

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In the writer's possession is her copy of the original Baha'i Membership List for the election of April 21, 1936. The following names are listed:

Mr. William M. Atwater
 Mrs. Margaret Atwater
 Mrs. Emma Bethel
 Mr. William M. Bethel
 Mrs. Amelia W. Bodmer
 Mrs. Selma Bosley (now Mrs. Selma Witherill of California)
 Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi (who pioneered here in 1935)
 Mr. Chester M. Davison, Sr.
 Mrs. Romette Davison
 Miss Corrinne D'Amour
 Mrs. May Fisher
 Mr. James Graver
 Mrs. Emma Gilles
 Miss Alice Halverson (now Mrs. Alice Hendershot of California)
 Mrs. Lucile H. Hoke (now Mrs. Lucile H. Buffin of Miami)
 Mrs. Florence Hisey
 Mrs. Olive Kretz
 Mr. Claude Layman
 Mrs. Gladys Layman
 Miss Josephine Kruka
 Mrs. Jeanette Niles
 Mrs. Eugenia Meyer
 Mrs. Esther Skillman (now Mrs. Chester M. Davison, Jr.)

Also, there was a youth group consisting of Chester M. Davison, Jr. Robert Bruce Davison, Leslie Bosley and Jimmie Hoke.

For the first two years our Nineteen Day Feasts and study classes were all held at various members' homes. Then, occasionally, a public meeting would be held at some downtown hotel. Finally we acquired a vacant store room down town for the sum of \$5.00 per month. (There were many such during the Great Depression). We bought a table and a dozen folding chairs and had meetings there for a few months. There were occasional drop-ins from passers by on the street. Then we found a more desirable location for \$20.00 a month which we used for a couple of years. Then, about 1940 we found a still more desirable location down town on the ground floor of a small building owned by a good hotel next door. This rented for \$35.00 per month at first, but each year the rental seemed to increase until during World War II it rented for \$100.00 per month. Because space was scarce then we were able to sublet the room part time to a music teacher who paid half the rent. However, after the war, when rent controls were abolished, the rent was raised so much we were forced to give it up.

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So, in 1946 we found a small business building which had four storerooms on the ground floor, each with a small kitchen and utility room and washroom, with front and back entrances. This was on North West Second Avenue at 30th Street. The owner was a naturalized American of Italian descent and he sympathized with our aims and purposes when our committee presented them to him. He knew that we accepted members of all races and backgrounds. This location was near the dividing line of white and black residential parts of town though the dividing lines were not strictly drawn after World War II. The owner gave us a year's lease for \$75.00 per month. The room was large enough to accommodate about 75 people comfortably. We furnished it attractively and began meetings. One of the first meetings had a special out of town speaker and many Baha'is from nearby towns came. The room was filled to capacity with a mixed audience.

When the meeting was well underway we were disturbed by two car loads of men wearing white masks and sheets of the Ku Klux Klan, carrying shotguns which they shot into the air as they drove up and down the street in front of our building. Of course a crowd gathered and then the Klansmen called the police and reported that the Baha'is had caused a riot. When the police came and investigated and found everything peaceful they told the crowd that we were within our rights and that former laws prohibiting racially mixed meetings had been cancelled during the war years. However, a short time later, another meeting was again interrupted by the Klansmen and the police again called. When the Klansmen were again told that no laws were broken and all was peaceful, they went to the owner of the building and threatened to break all the windows in his four stores and set fire to the building if he allowed our meetings to continue. With tears in his eyes the owner asked us to cancel our lease, which we did.

Then one of our members, Miss Ida Solomon, offered her home for a Center. This was smaller, in a different location and on the second floor and we used it for a number of years. Finally, Miss Solomon, who had been our Secretary for a number of years, decided to go pioneering and so sold her building. Then another member, Mrs. Doris Loverin, offered to rent us the lower half of an apartment building which she owned and this became our home for nine years. During all this time

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larger public meetings were held from time to time in one of the downtown hotels and in school auditoriums.

It used to be said, "Join the Baha'is and see the world"

It was aptly said for Baha'is always seemed to be on the go. We were blessed with many fine visiting and travelling teachers. Miami is a crossroad. Shoghi Effendi recognized this and said in one letter he well realized the possibilities of Miami's location. Miss Alma Knoblock was one teacher who spent a winter with us. She lived near Washington, D. C. but had pioneered in Germany and in South Africa. Mrs. Elizabeth Greenleaf was another, originally from Chicago, who spent several winters in Miami. Her husband and two sons had all been Baha'is, but had passed away, leaving her with only a daughter-in-law for family. She was an excellent Baha'i teacher and much inspiration to our young believers. Her stories of early days of the Faith and her visits to Haifa were inspiring.

Dorothy Baker was another much loved and admired speaker and teacher who spent a month or more in Miami several times, often accompanied by her husband, Frank Baker. Frank loved to go fishing and sometimes Dorothy went with him. But often while he fished she was busy with Baha'i work, helping with meetings, newspaper interviews, and assisting the new Assembly with organizational work. Dorothy spoke at the first Baha'i meeting ever held on Miami Beach, which was in a large garden at the home of Mrs. Toby Emanuel.

Dorothy liked to tell the story of a young man who had been in one of her classes at Lou Helen School. He had been very eager and had seemed on the verge of making a declaration when one day he missed a class. Instead he sent her a note which read, "I am having spiritual indigestion. Have gone fishing."

Mrs. Toby Emanuel had become a Baha'i in September 1948 after meeting Solon Fieldman, who died in her nursing home that month, and Mrs. Billie Wilson, who became her teacher. Mrs. Emanuel immediately became very active in the Faith having many meetings at her home on Star Island, Miami Beach. Solon Fieldman is buried in Miami.

In 1938 several of the Miami Baha'is purchased their first copies of the Dawn Breakers, Nabil's Narrative. We were amazed one day in studying it to find this passage on page 586: - " Be thankful to God

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for having enabled you to recognize His Cause. Whoever has received this blessing must, prior ~~prior~~ to his acceptance, have performed some deed which, though he himself was unaware of its character, was ordained by God as a means whereby he has been guided to find and embrace the truth." When we were told this applies to all believers and not just those to whom the Bab was speaking at His declaration, we immediately all said, -"He cant mean us! What have we ever done?" None could think of anything so worthy.

Then there was dear Phillip Marangella with his family who spent several winters in Miami and at one time owned a home on Miami Beach. This small, hunch-backed, dark eyed, black haired man was an eloquent speaker and had a magnetic personality. His Baha'i services were tireless but often exhausting. He earned his living as an accountant but his prime purpose in life was teaching the Faith. One day we were discussing a passage from the Bible which read -"Take heed what ye set your heart upon for it shall surely be yours." He said that could apply to anyone but especially to Baha'is. We spoke of various things we might want. One wanted a new car. Another wanted riches. Another wanted good health. When Phil Marangella was asked what he wanted he said, "Just the love of the Baha'i friends and to serve the Faith." He had both in a superior degree.

One cannot speak of Phillip Marangella without thinking of Eddie Schlesinger. They had been close friends when both accepted the Faith in New England about the same time. Edward Schlesinger was also an inspired speaker and devoted servant of Baha'U'llah. He had a radiant personality and a quick laugh. He and his family lived in Miami several years and were tireless in Baha'i work. Eddie and Phil had lived in New York City at the same time. Phil often stayed at the Kinneys and there were many meetings. Both often spoke at Baha'i meetings and they told me they developed a system to spark interest in an audience. Whichever was speaking, the other would sit at the rear of the room and after the talk would feed "loaded" questions to the speaker, which they felt the uninformed in the audience should be asking. Once someone called Mr. Schlesinger "Edward" in a formal way. I remarked on it and he said, "All my friends who love me call me Eddie."

Phillip Marangella and his second wife, June, pioneered in Cuba for several years. He told me that when he first went to Cuba he spoke English and Italian but no Spanish. He immediately began studying Spanish. His method was to hire a private native teacher who knew English and then he would pay his teacher to translate Baha'i pamphlets from English into Spanish and help Phil write them out in Spanish. Several of his teachers became interested in the Faith as a result of this ploy and made their own declarations.

Later, when an urgent call for pioneers to go to Japan was issued, Phil decided to go. Phil always acted on his faith. At the time he first went to Japan he had no job there. Government regulations required ~~required~~ that anyone going to Japan have a certain sum of money and enough for a return ticket. Phil had a hard time getting this sum together. After he boarded his ship and was saying good-bye to some friends he was conscious of lacking one dollar of this required sum. As he was saying goodbye and shaking hands one lady left a dollar bill in his hand, saying, " I do wish it were more."

When he arrived in Japan he applied to the office of the U. S. Army Headquarters in Tokyo and obtained a good Civil Service position in accounting - his own line of work. This he held for a number of years and was able to make a trip around the world in 1963 and attend the Baha'i Congress in London, where I met him again and he told me these stories. He was able to make other trips back to the States later and travelled widely in the East, also going to Korea and Vietnam while serving with the Asian Teaching Committee. He died and is buried in Hong Kong while serving the Faith there.

For 14 years I served on the Regional Teaching Committee, when my territory covered Florida, Georgia and Alabama. This began during the Great Depression of the 1930s. I was a young widow with a 10 year old son and my average salary was \$18.00 a week for several years. There was no budget for the work of the R.T.C. Needless to say, most of my work was done by correspondence and getting out an occasional Bulletin. Of course, isolated believers then were few and scattered.

Dr. and Mrs. W. B. Guy in St. Augustine, the only other Assembly in the state of Florida at that time, were both from Boston. Dr. Guy

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purposely bought a house on a street which bordered the Negro section of town, since at that time city regulations required certain restrictions. On the dividing line he could treat both white and blacks. He soon interested people of both races and had the first integrated Baha'i community in Florida. In Miami we soon found receptive friends in Captain James E. Scott and his assistant, Miss Olive Alexander who managed a social service center in the Negro section of town. We have been fortunate then and since in finding Baha'i friends among a loyal and talented group of Negroes and now have more blacks than whites on our community membership list. Captain Scott also administrated a model housing project in Liberty City which was a pattern in its time. Unfortunately, he only lived a short time after we knew him and is buried here in Miami. He was the first Negro Officer to command a large force in the Army and served overseas during World War I. When he died he was succeeded by Miss Olive Alexander, who managed the James E. Scott Community Center for many years. She also served as Chairman of the Miami Local Spiritual Assembly for many years.

In 1935 I was elected delegate to the National Baha'i Convention in Wilmette, Ill. I travelled up by train and recall that as I was reading a copy of the Baha'i News, a lady passing in the aisle stopped, gasped said, "Are you a Baha'i?" When I assured her I was she introduced herself as Mrs. Walter B. Guy of St. Augustine. She was their delegate. One of our members, Mrs. Caroline Harbin, had attended Green Acre School the previous summer. She studied in the first class given there on Baha'i Administration. Shoghi Effendi had that year given guide lines for Administration and had said it was very important. It was hard for Mrs. Guy and some of the older members in Miami to accept Administration. They would not try to attend our study classes on it. So, on the train, on the way to the Convention, Mrs. Guy asked me who I intended to vote for for the National Spiritual Assembly. We discussed the principle of not electioneering for Assembly members in elections, but it was hard for them to understand how this could be practical.

One of our older members, when the subject of studying Administration was brought up said, loftily, - "Oh, no. I'm much too spiritual to be bothered by anything so mundane as Administration." That year

she had sent a friend around to tell everyone (except those of us who studying Administration) whom she wanted them to vote for on the local Spiritual Assembly. But her messenger, tho an older believer, was more open minded and came and told the rest of us what she had been ordered to do by the Chairman.

When we discussed this with one of the visiting teachers that spring she said, "These older believers have been likened by Shoghi Effendi to the foundation stones upon which a great building will be built. Those stones are often rough and unfinished. God will not allow them to harm the Cause if they are sincere".

Within a short time this elderly woman had a long illness and never recovered enough to be active again. A certain man whom she had been electioneering for as a Spiritual Assembly member and proposed for Chairman, because he was well to do and had said that "if he were elected Chairman again of the new Assembly," he would donate a lot on which to build a center, was not even elected to the Assembly again. So he decided to move to Miami Beach and try to form another Assembly. However, before he could make the move he was struck by a hit and run driver on Biscayne Boulevard and died within a few hours.

The year 1935 was in the height of the "Great Depression". With only two Assemblies in Florida I was elected the delegate from Miami. As a young widow with a 12 year old son to support I was thankful to have a steady job that paid \$15.00 a week, plus a light housekeeping room, clerking and bookkeeping for an electrical goods store. This hardly allowed money to be spent on travelling to Chicago to a convention. We had been told by one of our early teachers, I believe it was Mrs. Elizabeth Greenleaf, that there was great power in the prayer, "The Remover of Difficulties". She said for specific problems to use it nine times a day for nine days, in addition to our regular prayers. Then to just have faith. I immediately decided to try this.

At the end of the nine days I received a letter from some Baha'i friends in Maywood, Ill., a suburb of Chicago, where I had spent a summer working two years before. These friends, George and Gladys Amerson wrote inviting me to be a guest in their home if I should be coming to the Convention. And my host would be driving back and forth to the Convention part of the time. The rest of the time we were close to the Elevated Railroad, which took us to within 3 blocks of the Temple. The Temple was not

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completed at that time but the meetings were held in Foundation Hall.. As a Florida resident for 10 years I had no winter clothing and April in Chicago can be quite cold, even with the jonquils and hyacinths and lilacs blooming. The next day One of the friends, who had recently come from South .Dakota, offered me the use of her winter coat for the trip, "If you should go." Then, A Baha'i friend and I found a furnished apartment to share and she offered to supervise my son, Jimmie Hoke, for that week. Finally, a member of my family in another state, whom I had helped in earlier, more prosperous years, unexpectedly returned to me the sum of \$50.00. At that time the Grayhound Bus fare, round trip, to Chicago was only \$35.00. So I asked my employe~~r~~ if I could take my vacation early that year, received permission and made plans to go. I even had \$25.00 left for incidentals and that proved ample. So I had the honor of attending my first Baha'i Convention as a national delegate. And exactly 19 years later, in 1944, I was delegate for a second time. At a very momentous time, the dedication of the Temple. The first time I stayed over after the .Convention for 3 days to go a fireside at the home of Ruth Moffett and also to visit the Art Institute Museum and the Field Museum and other places of interest.

I have told many others about using the Remover of Difficulties for special problems. About 5 years ago a young couple in South Miami offered to go pioneering. Mr. Myers was a college professor and highly skilled technically in such work as computer programming. Donald Myers made up his resume of skills and experiences and sent copies to many different countries where he had been told Baha'i pioneers were needed. Working with the International Goals Committee he told me that over a perior of two years he had made so many applica-
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 tions that he had lost ~~but~~ with no results. In talking to Patricia, his wife, one day I told her of my experiences using the Remover of Difficulties nine times a day for nine days, for specific problems. She immediately said, "We'll try it. What can we lose?" On the tenth day Don received replies and offers of jobs from five different countries, and later more followed. He liked the offer from one in Alaska and went up for an interview. Patricia soon called me and said, "He took the Alaska job. We put our house up for sale and it sold in less than a week. We are moving to Alaska very soon."

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At the 1935 Convention the walls of Foundation Hall were lined with beautifully executed and framed Tablets of the Divine Plan, in beautiful Persian script. They called for pioneers to go forth. At that time there were a number of states in the U. S. no resident Bahas and many states, such as Florida, with only one or two small Baha'i communities. One of the first to answer the call for pioneers was Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi, who had been sent by Abdul Baha to Chicago very early in the 1900s when there were only 6 believers there. We invited Dr. Bagdadi to Miami and offered him help in getting settled. He immediately gave up his medical practice in Chicago and came to Miami shortly after the Convention in 1935. He was a wonderful addition to our group, an inspiration with his knowledge of the Holy Family, having lived with Baha'U'llah as a small child. We never tired of his stories of the Holy Land. He had grown up under the care of Abdul Baha and knew Shoghi Effendi well.

One day Dr. Bagdadi asked me if we had ever had a letter from Shoghi Effendi. We said, "No, we had not written him because we had heard that he was not well and should be spared any extra burdens." Dr. Bagdadi said, "Oh, if one wrote of small personal problems it would burden him, but if we wrote to tell of the progress of the Faith in Miami it would cheer him greatly.". Immediately a letter was drafted telling of the progress of the Faith in Miami with its new Assembly and of Dr. Bagdadi's presence and help. In due course a letter was received in reply from Shoghi Effendi to our great delight. It read as follows:

"To the Secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Miami, Florida.
Dear Baha'i Friend: I am directed by the Guardian to inform you of the receipt of your most kind and interesting letter of the 25th of January 1936 written on behalf of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahas of Miami, and to ask you to kindly convey to your fellow members in that body the expression of his sincere and most grateful thanks for their generous and self-sacrificing labors for the wider establishment of the Cause in that Center.

He is very happy to hear of the many important and helpful visits paid to your group by such able and devoted servants as Mrs. Greenleaf, Mrs. Dorothy Baker and Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi. He is

confident that through this contact the ties of fellowship and cooperation between your community and the northern centers will be further strengthened. He is especially appreciative of the teaching campaign which Dr. Bagdadi has just inaugurated and trusts that through his efforts the Message will receive a widespread publicity throughout Florida. It would be indeed splendid if he could prolong his stay in your midst, as his knowledge of the Teachings and his utter devotion to the Cause are such as to make him a most valuable pioneer in the field of Baha'i teachings.

"The Guardian is fervently praying that your group may increasingly receive the support and full cooperation of such devoted believers. He is fully aware what an important center the town of Miami is, and is quite conscious of the many teaching possibilities. It is his ardent hope and the object of his continued supplications at the Holy Shrines that your Center may daily gain in numbers, in unity and in strength.

With His best wishes and loving greetings to you all."
 Yours in His Service,
 /s/ H. Rabbani

(Post script in Shoghi Effendi's handwriting):

"In my hours of prayer and meditation at the Holy Shrines I will especially remember you and your pioneer co-workers in your Center that are labouring with such zeal, devotion and loyalty. Persevere in your high endeavors ~~an~~ and rest assured. Your true brother, Shoghi"

 A list of early teachers visiting in Miami for from one to six months and sometimes longer includes the following: Mrs. Elizabeth Greenleaf, Mrs. Dorothy Baker, Miss Alma Knoblock, Mr. Charles Mason Remy, Miss Marguerite Reimer, and later with her husband, William Sears, Mr. Charles Reimer, Mr. Philip Marangella, Mr. Edward Schlesinger, Mrs. Orcella Rexford Gregory, Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi, Miss Gwen Dorothy Sholtis, Mr. Solon Fieldman (who passed away here on September 4, 1948), Mrs. Ruth Moffett. And others of varying lengths of visits..

Some of the pioneers who have gone out from here are: Mrs. Alice Halvorson Hendershot and her sister, Mrs. Selma Bosley (Witherill) to California; Mr. Fred Babo and his sister, Mrs. Dorothy Logelin to New Orleans; Mrs. Eugenie Meyer to Switzerland, Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi to Augusta, Georgia, Mrs. Amelie W. Bodmer to California and Arizona; Charles and Mary Dayton to St. Amalie,

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the Virgin Islands for 15 years, their daughter and her husband, Dawn Dayton Belcher and Dr. Rodney Belcher to Virginia and Africa, William and Emily Bethel to North Miami, Fla. Miss Ida Solomon did extensive travel teaching in South America after having served as the Miami Assembly Secretary for about ten years.

It is interesting to note that after Mrs. Alice Hendershot moved to California she and her husband raised three sons who are now, in 1983, all pioneers, Jan and Jon Hendershot in Venezuela and Gene Hendershot in the Republic of Central Africa. (Gene was a bachelor until about the age of 35, then he met a Baha'i girl who was also pioneering in the Republic of Central Africa. She was from Raleigh, North Carolina. They came back to North Carolina to be married at her parents home and are now again in Africa, with their two young sons.)

Alice Halvorson (Hendershot) was the Secretary of the L.S.A. in Miami for several years, followed by Mrs. Gladys Layman for several years, then Miss Ida Solomon for about ten years, and Mrs. Lucile H. Buffin for 14 years, after serving 14 years as Secretary of the Area Teaching Committee. Mrs. Layman, Miss Solomon and Mrs. Buffin also doubled as Assembly Librarians at the same time.

BOOKS. In "Design For Victory", p. 6, it says, "Every Time we teach we should make a special effort to teach with a book." In Miami we have maintained a Baha'i Library for many years and also a lending library. Often, when one ~~one~~ of the older believers has passed away their families, especially if non-Baha'i, will donate the member's Baha'i books to our lending library. In this way we have been fortunate in acquiring many of the older publications, as well as the new and even some copies of the first Baha'i magazine, "The Star of the West."

In 1925, the University of Miami in Coral Gables, a nearby suburb, was established and after a slow start during the depression of the 1930s, has now become one of the largest in the South, with more than 20,000 students and a number of specialized schools. The Richter Library of the University of Miami has a large building all its own. During the 1940s the Baha'is of Miami began a campaign to get Baha'i books in all local libraries.

There is a large public library with several branches and we have at times placed Baha'i books in many of them. However, a few times our gifts of books have been refused. And, even when not refused the management was sometimes slow in putting them on the shelves. Also, we found that if some books were slow in circulating they were sometimes thrown away or destroyed after a year or so. Even though some of the Baha'is occasionally made a point of withdrawing books, often when the member owned his own copy of a book, still often books seem to disappear. The author personally twice withdrew an early Baha'i book called "The Oriental Rose" by Mary Hanford Ford from the main library, but when she went back six months later was told it had been burned. (We happen to know that at that time the head of the public library system in Dade County was a strong Catholic and that he had arbitrarily destroyed other non-Catholic religious books.)

Accordingly, when the University of Miami announced that they were seeking gifts of books to build up their library, our Assembly in 1945 decided to donate Baha'i books to them. A representative selection was purchased for this purpose, among them four copies of The Baha'i World, our book of Baha'i current history. From time to time various additions were made and gratefully received. Then, for several years, after the passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957, the Baha'i World books were suspended. Finally a new one came out and our librarian asked a Baha'i girl who was working in the Richter Library to find out if they would like some more. The answer was, "Yes, indeed! We would very much like to have a complete set!" The University librarian gave us a list of those on hand and our librarian got to work looking for the missing volumes. Her personal library yielded three of the needed and another member donated two. One more was found in our local lending library and donated. The Librarian has continued to donate a new volume of the Baha'i World to the University Library as soon as available. These are never loaned out but are kept in the Reference Section of the University Library and are well protected. We were assured, also, that upon request they would be available to any of the citizens of Miami as well as students and that special cards would be issued on request. The Library also maintains a complete collection of local newspapers on microfilm which carry many articles and advertisements about the Faith. Each year the Librarian donates not only Baha'i books but her surplus books on various subjects. Even paper backs and detective and suspense stories are welcome.

TEACHERS AND PIONEERS

Thru the years the Miami Community has been blessed with the help and inspiration of many visiting teachers who came to Miami for varying lengths of time. Some for just a few days, and some spending several whole winter seasons here. Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi came in 1935 and stayed more than a year and then went to Augusta, Georgia because he could not get a license to practise medicine in Florida. This was not because he was not qualified but because the state laws permitted only a certain number of new doctors to settle each year. So many wanted to come down and leave the cold North in the winter, they were required to live in the State for a year and then take the State Board. And then only a certain small number were admitted. He said that Baha-Ullah was guiding him to Georgia that way. Miss Alma Knoblock spent two winters with us. Of German descent she had pioneered to South Africa and to Germany and was very inspiring and practical.

The Baha'i World, Vol. II, 1926-1928, lists a Baha'i study class at the home of Mrs. Olive B. Kretz, 121 S. E. First St. Miami. In the same volume is a picture of an early teacher who died in Miami on December 26, 1926. This was Howard MacNutt, who had many difficulties because of the segregation laws of that time. I was told that he often dared to give soapbox lectures on down-town street corners and that he had been abused and viciously attacked because of it.

Mr. William Atwater and his wife, Margaret, came to Miami from Boston, Mass. in 1914. While living in Boston they had vacationed at Green Acre in 1913 and had accepted the Faith there. They were staunch workers for the Faith and many meetings were held in their home. One of their sons, Mr. William Atwater, Jr. accepted the Faith in Miami after the death of both his parents.

Mrs. Millie Collins, who later became a Hand of the Cause, was several times a visitor during the winter to Miami and often helped us, chiefly by explaining the mysteries of some of the teachings to us new believers.

Auntie Victoria Bedekian, was another of the older believers who had entertained Abdul Baha in her home in New Jersey in 1912. She for many years at her own expense wrote and mimeographed a news bulletin, always ornamented with her drawings in colored inks and circulated it widely across the U. S. with Shoghi Effendi's blessing. Her husband was an Armenian and not a Baha'i and believed that a woman's place was in the home. After his death it was her joy to

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travel and visit as many of the Baha'i friends as possible. Rather hard of hearing, she still had a sweet voice and appreciated all hospitality very much. She would often put on a second dress on top of the one she was wearing, pack a night dress and change of underwear in with her typewriter and with only that and her hand bag get on a bus and go to "visit her Baha'i family". Twice she appeared in Miami unannounced and called up from the bus station and said, "Here I am. I've come to visit you. Come and get me." Once she called the writer at 4 o'clock A.M. with just such a message. At the time my husband, who was not a Baha'i, and his son had already gotten up early and gone into the country to go duck-hunting. I was alone in the house and without a car. Fortunately Mr. and Mrs. Bill Bethel were at home and knew her and told her to sit tight until 6 o'clock A.M. and they would pick her up. She usually wanted to spend about two weeks on each visit. Eccentric, yes, but she was fun and such a devoted Baha'i we all loved her. She once sent me a piece of a rug, about 14 inches square, which she said was part of a rug that had been in her room when Abdul Baha stayed at her house. I still have the rug cutting.

Other teachers have been mentioned above. Miss Josephine Kruka spent several winters in Miami and while here taught a Baha'i class in Esperanto. Mr. William Bethel and Mrs. Emily Bethel moved to North Miami a number of years ago to help form an Assembly there. Mrs. Emily Bethel and her daughter, Mrs. Barbara George and her husband, Harry Jay George are all still members of the Assembly there. Miss Kruka left Miami to pioneer in Cuba and then later in Finland, her family's native land. She passed away several years ago. Miss Ida Solomon served as the Secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly for about 10 years and then did travel teaching in South America for varying periods afterwards. Mrs. Gladys Layman served as Secretary and Librarian for several years before Miss Solomon and then Lucile Buffin followed Ida for 14 years.

The first Negro believer who accepted the Faith in Miami was Captain James E. Scott, who after graduating from college

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enlisted in the Army during World War I. He served in Europe with the rank of Captain and was in command of a battalion consisting of both white and black soldiers. When he accepted the Faith in Miami he had retired from the Army and was the very capable Administrator of the first Model Housing Project in Miami. He passed away in Miami in 1948. A community service center run by the City of Miami still bears Captain Scott's name. His assistant at the Center, Miss Olive Alexander, also accepted the Faith and was in charge of the Center for many years after Captain Scott's death. Miss Alexander also served as Chairman of the Miami Assembly for a number of years. About 1937 the names of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Baumgartner, Mrs. Doris Loverin and Miss Betty Keogan were added to our membership list.

The Baumgartners moved their large family to North Dade County and had a Nursery Garden, a place of rare beauty, where we often had outdoor meetings and picnics. Their oldest son, Thomas Baumgartner, Jr. and his wife, Dorothy, and their six sons moved to Alaska to do pioneer work. The boys are now all grown and married and when I last talked to them there were 36 descendants of Tom and Dorothy Baumgartner living in Alaska and all were Baha'is.

High points in Baha'i history have been the large meetings down town when we hosted ceremonies for the embarking of the ship which carried all Baha'is to the Kingston, Jamaica Conference in May 1, 1971 and the meeting for all of south Florida Baha'is held in November 1982 at which Hand of the Cause William Sears spoke on behalf of the recent Baha'i martyrs and persecutions in Iran.

Inevitably there have been many problems and clashes of opinion, always agreeably settled after consultation. As Auntie Victoria Bedekian used to say, "There is no use trying to hide disagreements and hurt feelings and injustices. They can not just be swept under the rug in the hope that they will go away. They must be brought out and discussed. Then Baha'U'llah helps settle them".

Other members who made their special contributions to the Faith as I remember them were: Mrs. Alberta Johnson, who, left a widow with a large family, worked cheerfully and put most of them thru college. She was always cheery and smiling and put aside one afternoon a week out of her busy schedule to work for Baha'U'llah. With her stock of pamphlets and Baha'i books she would go from door to door, up one street and down another asking, "Have you heard of the Bahai Faith and Baha'U'llah? I can tell you about them." After she moved to north Dade County she helped to form an Assembly there which still exists. It still has members she attracted thru this method. Her daughter, Allene Guinyard brought in her husband, Harold Guinyard and both are on the Local Spiritual Assembly in North Dade County today.

Another is Miss Madeline Humbert who had been a pioneer to Belguim many years ago when the Baha'is there were very few. After returning and accepting a position as companion and housekeeper to a gentleman who frequently travelled to Europe, Madeline still keeps in touch with the Baha'is wherever she is and support activities. She is still active at the age on ninety-one.

Then there was Donald Newby, who was a member of the Miami Community for nearly two years. He has been pioneering in Caracas, Venezuela for well over ten years and has some interesting tales to tell when he comes visiting.

One of our outstanding recent Chairmen of the Miami Assembly for several years has been Mr. Leonard La Fata who was an inspiring Baha'i worker and with his knowledge of English, French, Spanish and Italian is invaluable here in Miami with our large foreign population. At a recent trace Convention here it was noted that twenty-one translators of foreign languages were necessary, some of them very exotic.

One of our most indefatigable workers, Mr. George Savitt, has doubled as Treasurer, Treasurers' Representative for the N.S.A. and Publicity man and willing committee worker. He has a unique way of teaching with original witty quips which go to a rather large mailing list. (The subscription price is a written request accompanied by a self addressed, stamped envelope.

Here are a few samples:

"Baha'U'llah said, "O, Son of Man! My calamity is my providence, Outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy." What He is telling us is that when we get into a man God jars us!"

In the early days of the Faith in America we had Jewish Baha'is Christian Baha'is and Muslim Baha'is. Today, Baha'is are no longer hyphenated. They are Haifa-nated!"

Baha'U'llah is God's physician who has come to heal the world's ills. He is also the spiritual plastic surgeon by whom the world will have its faith lifted."

"As Bahais, we must adhere to Unity or we will be stuck without it."

And Time marches on.

(More in ten years, we hope.)