

# EARLY BAHÁ'ÍS OF ENTERPRISE, KANSAS: 1897

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Note: Originally published to commemorate the centennial of the Bahá'í community of Enterprise, Kansas, the second in the western hemisphere.

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ISBN 1-879448-11-4

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Introduction

The process of writing history is much like standing at the top of a deep well and trying to describe the activity at the bottom. There is no light and the water is murky. The only tool available to retrieve a fact is a hook on the end of a string. With luck the hook will catch on a fragment of information from that earlier time, but will the assembled fragments make much sense?

This little booklet is the result of assembling such fragments and trying to create a coherent picture. Undoubtedly there are sources of information unknown to the present writer. It is impossible to provide complete biographies of all the individuals involved in Bahá'í activities in Enterprise a century ago. The aim here is to briefly summarize the information found to date.

In some cases the contact these individuals had with the Bahá'í Faith may be a surprise to present members of their families, for that we apologize. In many cases the contact was minimal and forgotten about. In other cases, the contact may be well-known.

One hundred years ago when the Bahá'í Faith reached Kansas, it looked different than it does today. A century ago it was still in the first period of its development. The Bahá'í Faith traces its beginnings to the night of 23 May 1844 in Persia (now Iran) when a merchant in the city of Shiraz announced that He was the one through whom a greater Messenger of God would appear. The movement that arose was suppressed by the military and religious authorities of the country.

In 1852, a Persian nobleman, and follower of the Báb, was imprisoned for the new beliefs and consigned to an underground pit, in stocks with a 100-pound chain around His neck. During this experience, after which He was known as Bahá'u'lláh, He became aware of God's mission for his Life.

Bahá'u'lláh taught that the Creator of the universe is a non-physical, spiritual being without physical limitations, an unknowable essence. Humans are created spiritual beings, in the image of God as we can recognize and pay homage to our Creator. We have physical bodies to live in a physical world which in many ways reflects the spiritual world and here we learn and practice our spiritual attributes. How we exercise choice is an indication of the level of spiritual development which has been attained by individuals and the human species as a whole.

Bahá'u'lláh explained that the Creator, to help humans learn about our spiritual nature, sent Messengers to teach the human race. These unique beings, who are perfect mirrors of the Divinity, include, among others: Adam, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad and now, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh affirms that each adult is now responsible for seeking truth and not blindly following the opinion of others, priests or other intermediaries are no longer necessary, and each person is responsible of the result of his or her own actions. All the Messengers of God have taught the need for the same basic qualities: charity, mercy, understanding, forgiveness, etc. Outward expression of these has changed from age to age, but the inner meaning has not.

Bahá'ís are taught to pray and study the Word of God daily, fast once each year, observe monogamy and chastity, raise children in the teachings of God and social amenities, and strive to be ever more spiritual beings. The human soul endures forever in its journey toward the Creator and our daily actions reflect progress on that course.

Human society now is in a period of transition. The Bahá'í teachings propose that a global civilization is the next stage in human development, some of the outlines can already be seen: women are more and more taking their rightful place alongside men, nations can no longer afford to be aggressive, one language has become more and more useful in international communication, and multinational treaties, covering a wide variety of concerns, are increasing the ability of nations to function together harmoniously. Most nations share one system of weights and measures which facilitates commerce and economic prosperity, and democracy has been adopted by more and more nations during the past few decades. Bahá'ís believe these trends will increase as their benefits are more widely felt.<sup>1</sup>

The news of this message first personally reached Kansas through the actions of Barbara Senn Hilty Ehrsam. Barbara's oldest daughter, Josephine, had gone to Chicago for further musical training (she eventually sang on the stage in Europe). There, Josephine heard of Ibrahim Kheiralla, a religious teacher and "healer."

The date of Barbara's invitation to Kheiralla, or when it was accepted remains unknown. It is known that he did not come alone. Two news articles make passing mention of "his family," and another specifically mentions his son, George. Kheiralla later stated that he was accompanied to Enterprise by his wife and teenage son.<sup>2</sup> The memory of one of his Enterprise students independently confirms it.<sup>3</sup>

Kheiralla (1842-1929), of Syrian Christian background, had learned of the Bahá'í Faith in 1883, eventually decided to study it and converted in 1889 in Egypt. He later came to the U.S. to make his fortune. After several failed attempts, he learned he could tap the market for "healers" (some were already doing a thriving business even in Kansas). He bought a mail-order medical degree and soon combined "healing" with teaching his understanding of the Bahá'í Faith. It was reported that in the first few years, Kheiralla had attracted over a thousand followers.<sup>4</sup>

In Chicago, Kheiralla developed a system of classes for teaching the Bahá'í Faith. "This was a series of graduated lectures, the earliest dealing with such general issues as the immortality of the soul, the nature of the mind, and the need to believe in God. Later lectures dealt increasingly with biblical prophecy concerning the second advent and the existence of a 'Greatest Name' of God by which the believers might enter into a special relationship with the Divine."<sup>5</sup>

A summary of the beliefs of the American Bahá'í community before the turn of the century concluded that, "Ibrahim Kheiralla had taught the North Americans that Bahá'u'lláh was the return of the Father and that in His religion all biblical prophecies had been fulfilled."<sup>6</sup>

This was the time of the beginnings of the American Bahá'í community. In contrast, recent statistics from the Bahá'í World Center, in Haifa, Israel, indicate that the Bahá'í Faith has a world population numbering "more than five million," whose members live in 235 countries and dependent territories Bahá'ís reside in 121,058 localities around the planet and represent 2,112 races, tribes and ethnic groups. Local administrative councils have been established in 17,148 localities under the guidance of 175 national or regional administrative councils.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of Kheiralla's visit to Enterprise in 1897, only one piece of Bahá'í literature existed in English, and that written by Kheiralla. His pamphlet, entitled: "The Identity and

Personality of God,” is evidence of Kheiralla’s lack of knowledge of the Bahá’í Revelation. He lists seventeen “general principles,” and eight “great points.” Among these only one, “the oneness or singleness of God,” is recognizable as one of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Only the last of Kheiralla’s “great points” is sufficiently clear to indicate a correlation with the Bahá’í Faith and that is a reference to the “Greatest Name,” the name of Bahá’u’lláh. Of these twenty-six items listed in the pamphlet, the text discusses only one. Twenty-eight pages of the pamphlet are devoted to Kheiralla’s ideas about the “proof” of the “individuality of God.”<sup>8</sup>

It appears that Kheiralla brought this pamphlet with him to Enterprise. Some statements from it are reproduced in the larger newspaper articles, such as, “the teacher can not accept any remuneration...”<sup>9</sup>.

Within a few days of his arrival in Enterprise, in the middle of July 1897, Kheiralla began his lectures. Because of the attendance of prominent individuals, including Michael Senn, Barbar’s Ehram’s brother (and former State Senator) and particularly C.B. Hoffman, her nephew (then at the center of political controversy), the classes attracted the attention of the press. Kansas newspapers from Hays and Hutchinson and Salina to Kansas City and Atchison made reference to the classes that July and August. Two major articles and one smaller one were used, copied more or less word for word, or as the basis of new articles or references. Newspapers outside Enterprise often added their own editorial comments. Some statements in the news articles can be confirmed by notes taken by his students in Chicago.

Once a person had completed the classes, Kheiralla invited their participation in a private ceremony which he had devised. During this ceremony he informed the student of the name of the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, Bahá’u’lláh. This was referred to as, “receiving the Greatest Name.” The ceremony signaled complete membership into the American Bahá’í community at that time.

As the number of members increased, Kheiralla found himself unable to continue the degree of control that he wanted. This became completely impossible when believers began to arise in several different cities simultaneously. Distance, especially in the case of Enterprise, became an inhibiting factor. The believers in Kansas wanted the initiation and felt deprived without it. Gradually Kheiralla was impelled to allow other believers to give out the Greatest Name. Barbara Ehram relates this as the manner in which she received it.<sup>10</sup>

Kheiralla’s secrecy and special initiation was kindred to the secret societies that were predominate at the time. In 1896, with a population of only 36,000, according to the city directory, there were seventy-five “Secret and Benevolent Societies” in Topeka, and nearly as many other clubs and organizations, not counting churches.”<sup>11</sup>.

By 1897 the American Bahá’í community had not yet developed a sufficient infrastructure of effective administration, nor a systemic method of communication among its members. Many of the “little band of believers,” as Barbara Ehram described them, gradually drifted to other interests. Those who maintained their interest saw these problems resolved and provided a connection to those original events. Through then, the Kansas Bahá’í community has been continuous for a century.<sup>12</sup>

Different amounts of information have been found regarding the various individuals involved, so the following profiles are uneven in coverage and substance.

#### John J. Abramson

John Abramson was born in Syria in 1871 of parents who were born in Russian and Switzerland. This does not preclude a German background, indicated in personal correspondence, by him being addressed as, “Hans,” the diminutive of “Johan,” the German form of “John.” There is also local reference to him having a Jewish background.

Described in the 1900 census as a “nephew” of Jacob Ehramson, he had lived with the family since his arrival in the U.S. in 1888 at the age of 15. By that time he was fluent in German, Arabic, and English, adding a dynamic element to family life.

He is listed as attending Kheiralla’s class, but he did not satisfy himself with what he heard there. To learn more he wrote to his brother who lived in Jerusalem. Letters from his brother were shared with Bahá’ís and some were saved by Thornton Chase, a Bahá’í at the time in Chicago. The information his brother found is consistent with Bahá’í histories available today.

In one of those letters he mentioned planning to go to the Holy Land at the end of 1898, but no evidence has been found that such a trip occurred.

Though Barbara Ehramson indirectly confirms his role as, “one of the believers here,” no other evidence has been found of involvement with the Bahá’í community other than attendance in the class and the surviving letters.

In 1903 he moved to California where he lived the rest of his life and died there in 1932. He married Josephine Hilty and they had one child, a son, Hilty Abramson.

#### Arnold J. Ehramson

Arnold Ehramson was the third son of Jacob and Barbara Ehramson and given, for a middle name, the name of the Swiss hero, Winkler. After attending the Enterprise schools, he went to Baker University and devoted himself to the new sport of “football.” He became the first football coach at K-State.

After his college career, he entered the family business and held various responsibilities until his death in 1941. In 1901 he married Viola Hare and had three children. She far outlived him by reaching her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1978, a month and a half before she died.

The only evidence of Arnold’s connection with the Bahá’í community was his attendance at Kheiralla’s class.

#### Barbara Senn Hilty Ehramson

Barbara Ehram was born in Switzerland on 14 May 1843. Her father brought the family to America in 1854 and she grew up near Grasshopper Falls, KS. In May 1860 she married a neighbor, Joseph Hilty. Together they had two children, Leonhard and Josephine. Her husband died in 1868 after returning home from service in the Civil War. They owned two sections of land which the young widow could not manage, in addition to the two babies, so her brother, Michael, came to help her.

The next year she rented out her farm and both of them, with their families, joined their sister and her husband in building a new town on the central Kansas prairie. This became the city of Enterprise. Barbara and Michael built and managed the first store at the town site.

In 1870 Barbara married Jacob Ehram, the mechanic who had helped her brother-in-law build the mill on the Smokey Hill River. Together they had six children, giving Barbara a total of eight. Twenty years later she was searching for more meaning in life and turned to various philosophies.

While her daughter, Josephine, was in Chicago, she heard of another spiritual teacher, Ibrahim Kheiralla, and he was invited to Enterprise. In the summer of 1897 he arrived and held his classes. He did not complete them and thought he might return, but did not. For several years his students sought the Greatest Name to complete their experience, and some found it, Barbara from her daughter, Josephine.

Two letters of 1899 survive from Barbara to Kheiralla's secretary asking for more information. None was available so Barbara went on to other interests.

In 1911 she did encounter more information on the Bahá'í Faith in an article in *Everybody's*, a general interest magazine. She wrote of this in two letters to her daughter-in-law, Rose Hilty. In one letter she states she never agreed with Kheiralla's insistence on secrecy, one of his ideas that clouded his efforts.

The next year, in letters to Rose, she mentions the visit to her of another Enterprise believers, Elkizabeth Frey, who had been to Chicago to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, then Head of the Bahá'í Faith, who was traveling in America at the time. Barbara related the tragedies in the life of one believers, and how 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that it is through such difficulties that people's souls are tested and strengthened.

One more indication of interest was found in the financial ledger books of the Bahai Temple Unity, the executive body formed to build the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, IL, near Chicago. In 1917 she sent a contribution to help with construction.

## E. Ehram

No first name for this person is given in Kheiralla's list. According to both the 1895 and 1900 census there were four individuals in Enterprise who could be referred to as, "E. Ehram." Three were named "Elizabeth," and a fourth was "Elsbeth." Two were born in Switzerland in the early

1830s, and one of these was a sister-in-law of Barbara Ehram. The third was in her early 20s in 1897, and the fourth was only nine, the daughter of Barbara and Jacob Ehram. With no other information, speculation as to actual identity is futile.

#### Julia Ehram

Born in Enterprise on 11 January 1879, she was the fourth child of Jacob and Barbara Ehram. In 1897 she graduated from Enterprise High School at the age of 18. Kheiralla's list indicated that she attended the class and received the Greatest Name, probably from her mother or step-sister. No other evidence of her involvement with the Bahá'í community has been found.

In 1906 she taught Kindergarten in Enterprise after traveling to St. Louis for instruction. She later married Edward H. Kuster. For thirty-five years he was the secretary, and a director, of the Ehram company. He also became vice President, and a director, of the Dickinson County Bank, Mayor of Enterprise from 1941-1947, and member of the city council for twenty-five years. He died in 1955.

After her husband's death, Julia moved to Wamego to be near her only child and joined St Luke's Episcopal Church. The last year of her life she lived in a nursing home in Topeka and died there in 1967. Both she and her husband are buried in Enterprise.

#### William J. Ehram

William was the first child of Jacob and Barbara Ehram, and the first child born in the town of Enterprise. At age 14 he attended the Kansas State Agricultural College for three years, then Rose Polytechnic Institute in Terra Haute, IN.

After graduation he returned to Enterprise and joined the family business. In 1924 he became president of the company after the death of his father. He remained in that position until ill-health forced him to retire in 1942. Under his direction the company grew from a small machine shop into an internationally famous manufacturer of milling equipment. As testimony to his accomplishment, he was invited to England, in 1936, as a consulting engineer.

In 1903 he married Vergiline Mulvane, daughter of the President of Washburn College of Topeka. They had five children. For his family he bought the house that is now operated as "Ehram House Bed and Breakfast."

His name on Kheiralla's list is the only indication of his involvement with the Bahá'í community.

#### Louise Forrester

“L. Forrester,” is the only one listed in the 1895 Kansas census that could be Louisa Forrester. She is listed as being a “housekeeper,” in the home of Robert Forrester, a stonemason, with five other Forresters, whose ages indicate they are the children of the household. Five years later, in the 1900 federal census, Louisa is not living there, but Robert’s wife, Moriah was. Louisa and Moriah are not the same person as they have different ages and birth places. Five of Moriah’s eight children were living, with accounts for the five children of the household. It is quite possible that Louisa and Robert were brother and sister, and she came to help him during the time his wife was away from home.

After Kheiralla’s class, Louisa either married, moved out of Kansas, or died some place other than Enterprise. Her name does not appear in further connection with Enterprise or the Bahá’í community.

Kheiralla’s list does not indicate that Louisa received the Greatest Name. it is likely that she left Enterprise before the others there received it. No other indication has been to suggest that she maintained contact with the Bahá’í community.

## Elizabeth Frey

Born Elizabeth Killius in Havana, IL, in 1858, she had at least four siblings, two of whom outlived her. When she was about seventeen she traveled to Kansas where she lived near Detroit with a sister and taught school, in 1882 she married James Frey.

When, in the summer of 1897, James was appointed Postmaster of Enterprise, she then became the Assistant Postmaster. Their oldest son was hired as a clerk. Also, that summer, Elizabeth attended Kheiralla’s classes and later received the Greatest Name, She did not stop with that, but other events in her life took her attention.

As 1901 began, she traveled to Highland, IL., to get the three orphaned children of her brother. Both he and his wife had suddenly died. The children’s ages ranged from eight months to nine years, her own youngest was then fourteen. She spent her life giving to others in need.

A highlight of her life occurred when she was fifty-four; a trip to Chicago. This was not an ordinary vacation trip. She and her daughter, Elsbeth Renwanz, went there to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who was traveling in this country. While in Chicago, He laid the cornerstone for the Bahá’í House of Worship to be build in Wilmette, IL. Elsbeth is in a group photograph of the event, and her name is on the list of those who attended. Elizabeth Frey had stayed in her hotel on the actual day of dedication since the weather was cold, wet and windy.

As soon as she returned home, she went to see Barbara Ehrsam and told her of the trip. She shared with her the trials suffered by Corinne True who was instrumental in encouraging the project of building the House of Worship. Barbara’s account of these events can be accurately compared with True’s biography.



In 1928 she became ill with what her obituary called, “a deadly malady,” and died in April of the next year. The full obituary extolled her religious nature and the active role of prayer in her life.

#### Ed A. Hafner

Ed Hafner may not have lived in Enterprise for a very long time. Neither he, nor any family with his name, appears on either the 1895 or 1900 census. His name is on the class list, but not as having received the Greatest Name,

One other interesting place where his name does appear is in a brief item in the *Enterprise Journal*. On Thursday, 12 August 1897, the *Journal* stated: “Ed Hafner, Emmitt Hoffman and George Kheiralla are with a camping party on Lyons creek, near Woodbine, and will fight chiggers and mosquitoes for a week.” George Kheiralla was the teenage son of Ibrahim Kheiralla who taught the class.

Nothing more was found about him.

#### C.B & Addie Harding

Chauneg Harding was the Station Agent for the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad in Enterprise. He and his wife, Addie, attended the Bahá’í class and, afterwards, both received the Greatest Name.

He was from New York (both he and his parents were born in that state) and she was born in Iowa (also of American-born parents). His thirty-fourth birthday occurred the August that Kheiralla was in Enterprise. She was a few months older. Their two children were aged eleven and six.

By 1900 they owned their home, free of any mortgage, and had a servant living with them. Their home was also large enough for a boarder, and in the summer of 1900, a man named, John E. Pontius, boarded with them.

Aside from their names on the class list, no other evidence has been found of any further involvement by either of them with the Bahá’í community.

#### Rose Hilty

Rosa Abbuehl of Grasshopper Falls married Leonhard Hilty, son of Barbara Hilty Ehram, in 1860. Later, during their lives, they Americanized their names to “Leonard,” and “Rose.” Together they had three daughters, the middle one, dying in infancy. The youngest, Lovelia, was born blind and, when Kheiralla arrived in Enterprise, one of the newspapers mentioned him

“healing” her blindness to the extent that she could distinguish light from dark and see some colors. She later gave music professionally.

Both Leonard and Rose attended Kheiralla’s class, but only Rose received the Greatest Name. She is one of the few who maintained her connection with the Bahá’í community her entire life. to gain more information, she planned a trip to Chicago in 1899, but the need for surgery cancelled it.

In 1905, Rose and Mrs. Mary Miller, also of Enterprise signed a petition to ‘Abdul- Bahá (such petitions were frequently circulated through the American Bahá’í community in the early years of the twentieth century). The reply was printed as a booklet with the names of all 422 other believers who signed. A copy is in the Topeka Bahá’í Archives.

The next year, the Hilty’s moved to Topeka so that Lovelia could attend high school there. This move resulted in Rose becoming the first Bahá’í to live in the capital city and the beginning of the Topeka Bahá’í community. While there, Rose and her mother-in-law would write weekly letters to each other. In December 1911, she informed Rose of the article in that month’s edition of Everybody’s and the next year she wrote about Elizabeth Frey’s trip to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Chicago.

By 1916 the family had moved back to Enterprise, but Lovelia remained in Topeka. Rose brought with her news of contact with the larger Bahá’í community outside Kansas. There was now a small group of believers in Topeka, and one of them, Bertha Hyde, had other family members in Urbana, IL, who were also Bahá’ís.

In 1920, a Bahá’í sent by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to travel through America, came to Topeka. Rose came back to Topeka to help in preparation for his visit, and stayed. Sites for lectures were arranged, news releases prepared, etc., a flurry of activity for the small group of Bahá’ís in Topeka. The next year the Topeka city directory indicates the Hiltys had moved back to town. A few years later, Leonard died.

Rose was visited in 1934 by two new members of the Topeka Bahá’í community wanting to learn about the early days of the Kansas Bahá’í community. Their notes of Rose’s reminiscences became the only local history the Bahá’ís of Kansas would have for many decades to come. Later that year, Rose died and was buried next to her husband in the Topeka Cemetery.

Over the year, as Bahá’í books had become available, Rose had bought each one. She also subscribed to the Bahá’í magazine. After her mother died, Lovelia gave all these to the Bahá’ís of Topeka. They formed the basis of the Topeka Bahá’í Library, a legacy of her mother’s faith.

## C.B. Hoffman

Christian Balzac Hoffman was born in Switzerland in 1851, the son of Christian and Elsbeth Senn Hoffman. When he completed his education, he hoined his father’s milling business and gradually his interests branched out from there, eventually to politics.

The Hoffman mill sent samples of its flour to be exhibited at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 and the Hoffman family attended. C.B.'s wife, Catherine, wrote of her impressions of one event she attended there: the Parliament of Religions. She called it, "the greatest demonstration of the spiritual evolution of man that has ever occurred."

She closed her account saying, "This Parliament broadened human thought, created a deeper feeling of charity, and good will and served to unite the races into stronger bonds of brotherhood, that brotherhood taught by Jesus wherein creed and baptism are secondary and the spirit of love is paramount." It was at this event that the name Bahá'u'lláh, and His teachings, were first mentioned in America.

In the summer of 1897 Hoffman was a controversial figure on the Kansas political scene. For several years he had championed the Populist cause and had been appointed to the Board of Regents of the Kansas State Agricultural College. His proposals attracted considerable excitement. When he attended Khairalla's classes in Enterprise, newspapers across Kansas (from Hays, Hutchinson and Salina to Atchison and Kansas City) took note.

Hoffman wanted to know more than Kheiralla was able to teach (because he himself knew little about the Bahá'í Revelation) and, in his effort to maintain control, Kheiralla eventually expelled Hoffman from the class. This also generated publicity.

Though his contact with the Bahá'í community ended, some of Hoffman's thoughts, later in life, touched on a few points in agreement with Bahá'í teachings. These are expressed in an unpublished essay he titled, "Emotional Religion," his over-riding belief though, was in socialism.

#### John H. Johnk

John Johnk was the only one of his family on Kheiralla's list. He and his wife, Margaret, had six children by that summer of 1897, and they may have been the reason she did not come. Two more were born later to complete the family. John was a native of Germany, the fourth generation of his family to be a miller. He had moved his family several times before the turn of the century, movement that is reflected in the birthplaces of his children: Nebraska, Kansas, two in Colorado and three in Enterprise. All the children survived their infancy, a remarkable fact for those times.

Johnk was just a few days short of his forty-second birthday when he attended the class. How deep his interest went is unknown, he did not receive the Greatest Name.

About 1907 the family moved to Neosho Falls where he managed a mill of his own. He died there in 1912.

#### Josephine Hilty Kimmer

“Josie” was the first child of Barbara Ehram, born near Grasshopper Falls, KS. Her father died after returning home from service in the Civil War. She grew up in Enterprise, then traveled to Chicago for more education.

One of the first newspaper articles about the Bahá’í class in Enterprise reported, “Miss Josie Hilty, who knew the ‘Doctor’ in Chicago and through whose influence he was induced to visit Enterprise, is said to have embraced the doctrine he teaches.”

She is on the membership, with the name of “Kimmel,” as a resident of St. Louis, being the first Bahá’í there. For a time, a civil war veteran, J.H. Kimmel, lived in Enterprise and may be the connection to her first married name.

According to one of her mother’s letter, Josephine gave the Greatest Name to believers in Enterprise. She wrote, “My daughter, Mrs. Kimmel of St Louis, formerly Miss Hilty, has given me the Greatest Name (with your permission) while here on a visit.” No other evidence of her membership has been found.

She married John J. Abramson and, with their son, Hilty, lived most of her life in California. She died in Los Angeles a couple of years after her husband.

## Maud Kirkpatrick

Maud Winifred Parker was born in 1861 in Illinois of parents who had been born in New York and Pennsylvania. That Kansas was the birthplace of her children demonstrates her family’s part in the westward migration of the American population. Her family moved to Detroit, KS in 1869 and to Enterprise a year later.

On her seventeenth birthday she married Rufus Kirkpatrick, an Irishman, who, with his two brothers owned and operated the Enterprise livery barn, located beside the Ehram machine shop on First Street. They had come to Enterprise in 1872 and built the business in on the empty prairie. It was one of the earliest businesses in town. By the time they sold the business in 1899, it included eighteen driving and saddle horses, one dray team, eight buggies, four carriages, two hacks, a bus and a hearse. The loft above the stables was large enough to hold twelve tons of hay. It was a thriving business.

Before the automobile, the liveryman was one of the most essential people in town. He would meet each train to taxi passengers to their final destination, he delivered mail and supplies from the train as well as made local deliveries, took the doctor on sick calls and his was the only hearse in town. The family prospered.

Maud and Rufus had two children, Theron and Maud. Their daughter died before she reached three years of age. Theron graduated from Enterprise High School in 1898 and became a telegraph operator, a promising career in those days.

Maud attended Kheiralla’s classes, but the record does not indicate that she received the Greatest Name, No other evidence has been found to suggest she continued to regard herself as a believer, but she may have. Her obituary did not mention, as was often the case, any church

affiliation. It stated that she did not hesitate to help others, “in time of sickness or need, and she was an active member of the aid societies in town.” In this, she was practicing the life of a Bahá’í.

The family moved to Topeka in 1907, but after a few years returned to Enterprise. Maud died in 1911.

### Carrie Lamb

Carrie Lamb was the wife of “H.W. Lamb” and lived in Solomon, KS. Eventually she and her family moved to Los Angeles where she died in 1955. But, in the summer of 1897 she was in Enterprise.

That year did not begin well for the family. In January her mother, in Enterprise, after being unwell for two years, died unexpectedly. Her death was so sudden that she was buried in the yard beside the house until the family could decide where to bury her permanently. It is likely that Carrie returned to the family home to help care for her younger brothers and sisters, and she was there when Kheiralla came to give his class.

Later, in 1907, her father moved to Wichita and when he died, was buried in Wilsey, KS, where they had eventually decided to bury his wife. The family had lived in Wilsey in 1880 before coming to Enterprise and the youngest child was born there.

Carrie’s name is not checked on the Bahá’í list as having received the Greatest Name, and she is not found living in Kansas in the 1900 census, so she may not have stayed in Enterprise long enough for that to happen. No other connection has been found.

### Mary M.F. Miller

She was born in 1844, the daughter of a German minister. In 1860 she married another, John P. Miller. The next year he was assigned the mission district of Dickinson Co., and was stationed in Lyons until 1870. Soon after his arrival, Christian Hoffman invited him to preach in his cabin at Loudens Falls, and the Methodist Church of Enterprise made its beginnings. During his career, Rev. Miller was assigned to various churches in Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Iowa. He was retired early due to failing health and turned to homeopathy which he then became qualified to practice.

In 1898 the Millers were living in Kansas City, KS. That year, Mary Miller is listed as a member of the Bahá’í community. She was the first Bahá’í in Kansas City. Shortly after the turn of the century, they moved back to Enterprise.

Mary Miller was one of the two believers in Enterprise who, in 1905, signed a petition to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This was not an uncommon practice of the times. His reply was printed as a booklet with the names of all 422 believers who signed it.

Except for contributions to help build the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, little other evidence of her membership has been found. She died in 1911 and notice appeared in the Bahá'í magazine, "Word comes to us announcing the death of Mrs. Mary M.F. Miller, Enterprise, Kansas, after a stroke of paralysis." She was a believer to the end.

### Elsbeth Frey Renwanz

The childhood of Elsbeth Frey was changed by two events which occurred the summer of 1897, when she was ten years old. Her father was appointed Post Master for the city of Enterprise and her mother attended the Bahá'í class. Her mother received the Greatest Name and remained a firm believer the rest of her life.

In 1911 Elsbeth married Herman Rennwanz (the name was later shortened). A native German, he had come to Enterprise from Seattle six years earlier and was a draftsman for the Ehram Manufacturing Company.

The next year she and her mother made a trip that caused a lasting impression on their lives, meeting 'Abdul-Bahá. They were the only Bahá'ís from Kansas to do so. Elsbeth is pictured in a photograph of a group of believers with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In her later years she related, "'Abdu'l-Bahá, turning to mother, patted her on the shoulder, then looking at me, tears rolling down my cheeks, bade me not to cry, not to cry, to be happy, to be happy. Then, as I recall, He said, 'both shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven,' – a delightful memory indeed.

"Suddenly something more had penetrated me through and through. I was overwhelmed with joy. It was an inexplainable, forcible reality that cannot be denied, radiating from that fountain of Love, the Mystery of God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá."

A year after the trip, Elsbeth and her husband moved to Grand Rapids, MI. There, their son was born and she was actively involved in the Bahá'í community. And there, disaster struck the little family in 1919.

In March that year, Herman contracted influenza and died five days later. He was not yet forty years old when he became one of the 29 million to die in that global epidemic. Later that year, Elsbeth received a brief letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in answer to questions she had asked earlier.

She returned to Enterprise and began teaching school. Eventually she moved to St. Joseph, MO, teaching there until she retired, then moved to Denver. She died there in 1970, but not before returning to Kansas one last time. This was for a Bahá'í conference in Wichita in 1955. A photograph of the conference was published and she is identified in it.

After she died, her body was brought back to Enterprise and she was buried beside her husband and parents in Mt. Hoep Cemetery. A nine-pointed star adorns her gravestone.

### Elizabeth Rychner

According to the 1985 Kansas census, Elizabeth was thirty-three years old, a teacher and the mother of a year old daughter. It is doubtful that she actually taught that year given the social strictures that women did not teach school after they were married. Her husband, "J.S." was a "clerk," and both had been born in Iowa.

Only Elisabeth's name is on the Bahá'í list, and it is marked as her having received the Greatest Name. A letter from her survives which she wrote in October 1898, before receiving the Greatest Name, asking how she could receive it. She mentions the possibility of her going to Chicago on an excursion train, but wanted to be sure there would be some Bahá'í meetings she could attend while she was there. It is not known whether this trip was accomplished or not.

It is likely that she did not write the letter from Enterprise. After her signature appears an illegible word, followed by a capital O. It is known that she lived somewhere in Ohio after the class in Enterprise, so she may have been there by late 1898. She did keep in touch with others who had attended Kheiralla's class, but no other information has been found about her connection with the Bahá'í community.

#### Iona L. Senn

She was a daughter of Michael and Josephine Senn, and a niece of Barbara Ehram in whose home Kheiralla held his classes. During her childhood the family moved to Riley Co. where her father founded the settlement of Lasita. She later married Clarence W Moulton and moved to California where she lived most of her adult life. After her husband's death she returned to Kansas in 1965 and settled in Abilene to be near her family. She died two years later.

Her name on the membership list is the only evidence of her connection with the Bahá'í community that has so far been found.

#### Marie Senn

Marie Senn was also a daughter of Michael and Josephine Senn and the first girl to be born in Enterprise, in 1871, shortly after the founding of the town. She taught schools in Pearl and Enterprise and attended Kansas State College. In 1894 she became the head of the department of domestic science at North Dakota State University and continued there until she married. During the summer of 1897, she was home in Enterprise and attended Kheiralla's class.

In 1903, she married Thomas H. Heath, a Canadian living in Seattle. They lived in Seattle eleven years and began their family of three children. About ten years later they moved to Enterprise when he was hired by the Ehram company. He worked there the remainder of his career. During their life in Enterprise the family played a prominent role in activities of the city

when Thomas served on the city council four years and was mayor for sixteen years. Marie died in 1962 just a few days short of their sixtieth wedding anniversary.

The only evidence of her connection with the Bahá'í community is her attendance in Kheiralla's class.

#### Micheal & Josephine Senn

Micheal Senn and Josephine Meyer were married near Grasshopper Falls, KS, in 1868 after he returned from service in the Civil War. It was not an untypical union of the times: he a Swiss native who had fought in the bloodiest war in this country and she from a naturalized family. He helped his sister, Barbara Hilty, after her husband died and together they moved their families to the settlement on the Smokey Hill River which became the city of Enterprise. Their sister, Elizabeth Hoffman, and her husband, Christian, lived there and encouraged them to come. With Barbara, he built and operated the first store in the town and, with the Post Office in the store, became the first Post Master of Enterprise. As the town grew, his interests branched out. He, like Hoffman, utilized the water power of the river to operate a mill, his a woolen textile mill. Eventually he went into politics.

Later, he moved his family to Riley Co. and founded the settlement of Lasita, where he lived the last sixty years of his life. he earned a reputation as a "poet philosopher," and gained such a reputation for honesty and integrity that he was elected to both the Kansas House of Representatives and, later, the state Senate.

No matter where the family lived, his wife, Josephine, gained a reputation as one who could be called on in times of need, especially when doctors were few and women assisted each other in childbirth and caring for their infants.

Both attended Kheiralla's class in Michael's sister's home. Michael made news after asking questions that Kheiralla could not answer (Kheiralla said they made no sense) which resulted in him being expelled from the class. Only Josephine's name is marked on the membership list, but not marked as having received the Greatest Name, = No other evidence of involvement for either of them has been found.

#### Charles V. & Minnie Topping

Both Charles and Minnie Topping attended Kheiralla's class, but neither received the Greatest Name. They were counted in Enterprise in both the 1895 and 1900 census, so they should have had as much opportunity as the other members of the class. He was a bookkeeper in the flour mill and eventually became the Secretary of the Southwestern Millers League. As such, he became an expert on freight rates and shipping regulations. Part of his responsibility for



the millers association was to testify before congressional hearings. After one particularly intense and grueling hearing, he suffered a nervous breakdown and died four months later.

When he died, in 1928, the family was living in Kansas City. He was buried in Baldwin, KS, where he and Minnie Ocott had been married. They had come to Enterprise in the early 1880s. he had been born in Wisconsin, his parents in New York, and his children in Kansas. This was typical of the westward migration of the American population. Minnie's parents were born in Indiana and she, in Kansas, the same pattern, only at a later time in the family's progress.

By the 1900 census, they had been married sixteen years and owned their home on Bridge Street, free of any mortgage. Three children were born to them, one died an infant and is buried in Enterprise, but there is no marker for her grave.

Charles Topping was described as, "a pleasant spoken, unassuming gentleman, his mind stored with an enormous found of information which he calmly presented in a manner carrying unquestioned weight." He was sixty-four when he died. Her death, later, was not noted in the Enterprise or Abilene papers.

#### Notes:

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2. Dr. Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins, 1892-1900, vol.1* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), p.108.
3. Reminiscences of Rose Hilty found in, "History of the Membership in the Topeka Bahá'í Community," compiled by May Brown [n.d.], p.1, Topeka Bahá'í Archives.
4. About the life of I.G. Kheiralla see: Richard Hollinger, "Ibrahim George Kheiralla and the Bahá'í Faith in America," *From Iran East and West: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, vol. 2* (Los Angeles, Kalimat Press, 1984), pp.95-122.
5. Dr. Peter Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community, 1894-1917: A Preliminary Survey," *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, vol.1* (Los Angeles, Kalimat Press, 1982), p.90.
6. Dr. Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900-1912, vol.2* (Oxford, George Ronald Publisher, 1995), pp.383-384.
7. World Center Publications, *The Bahá'í World: 1995-1996* (Haifa, Bahá'í World Center, 1996), p.317. Statistics as of May 1995. National/regional assemblies as of April 1997.
8. I.G. Kheiralla, "Za-ti-et Al-lah, the Identity and the Personality of God," [no data, 1896], National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, IL.
9. *ibid.*, pp.3 & 5.
10. Duane L. Herrmann, "Letters from a Nineteenth Century Kansas Bahá'í," *World Order*, Winter 1996-97, pp.27-35.
11. *Radges 1896-1897 Directory of Topeka and Shawnee County*, pp.99-104.

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- Bruce Whitmore, *The Dawning Place*, (Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984).
- C.B. Hoffman Papers, Spencer Museum, University of Kansas.
- Elsbeth Frey Memoirs, National Bahá'í Archives.
- Elsbeth Frey Papers, Denver Bahá'í Archives.
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- Kansas State Census, 1895, Kansas State Historical Society.
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- Topeka Bahá'í Archives.
- United States Federal Census, 1900, Kansas State Historical Society.