

## Letters from a Nineteenth-Century Kansas Bahá'í

BY DUANE L. HERRMANN

ENTERPRISE, Kansas, has "the distinction of having had the second group of Bahá'ís in North America," the first having been formed in Chicago in 1894.<sup>1</sup> Two letters survive from the person responsible for the Bahá'í teachings coming to Kansas so early: Barbara Ehsam, a resident of Enterprise and a student of Ibrahim George Kheiralla, who introduced the Bahá'í Faith to North America. She invited Kheiralla to come to Enterprise during the summer of 1897. He and his family stayed seven weeks in her home, where he gave classes in her parlor. He left behind a small group of Bahá'ís. Although the Enterprise Bahá'ís corresponded for a time with a number of Bahá'ís in the United States, Kheiralla remained the only personal contact they had with the larger Bahá'í community. Twice in 1899—on 3 May and 14 November—Ehsam wrote to Maude Lamson, Kheiralla's secretary, seeking more contact with Bahá'ís and more information about the Bahá'í Faith. The inability of Bahá'ís in other parts of the country to visit Enterprise and the lack of responses from the few correspondents and most particularly from Kheiralla were not sufficient to sustain Ehsam's commitment to the Bahá'í Faith.

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1. Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins, 1892-1900, Volume 1* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985) 105.

2. Some of the other cities where Bahá'ís resided were Chicago, New York, and Kenosha, Wisconsin.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Enterprise, Kansas, was one of the few cities in the United States where the Bahá'í teachings had been systematically taught and a group of people had accepted them.<sup>2</sup> Though Enterprise had the second Bahá'í group, it was the smallest locality in the size of its general population and the number of its Bahá'ís, as well as the most remote.

Barbara Ehsam was one of the founders of the town of Enterprise and, by the turn of the century, its most prominent woman. She had been born Barbara Senn in Switzerland in 1843. Her parents brought the family to America in 1854 and settled in Grasshopper Falls, Kansas. In 1860, shortly before her seventeenth birthday, she married Joseph Hilty, a fellow Swiss immigrant. They produced two children, Leonhard and Josephine, before Joseph went to serve in the Civil War. He survived his brief enlistment only to be killed by a horse after returning home. This left Barbara alone with a small child, an infant, and a 160-acre farm.

Barbara's brother, Michael Senn, not yet married, joined her to help work the farm. Eventually the two decided to relocate from northeast Kansas to central Kansas where their sister, Elizabeth, and her Swiss immigrant husband, Christian Hoffman, were creating a new settlement on the open prairie. Nine years earlier the Hoffmans had moved west to settle near Loudon's Falls on the Smokey Hill River. On the falls Hoffman, a miller, built a mill that prospered, and plans for founding a town began to crystallize.

In 1869 Barbara rented her Grasshopper



BARBARA EHRSAM  
the first Bahá'í in Enterprise, Kansas

Falls farm and with her children, her brother, and four wagons of goods set out for Loudon's Falls. When she arrived, she and Michael, with the help of other settlers, built a two-story frame store and stocked it. In 1873 the town of Enterprise was platted around her store and Hoffman's mill.

In 1874 Barbara married Jacob Ehrsam, another Swiss immigrant and a machinist who had helped build the mill and who had become Hoffman's right-hand man. After the mill was finished, he had started his own machine company, which remained in operation until the summer of 1996. Barbara's and

Jacob's first baby was the first white child born at the site. Together they had five more before Barbara decided eight was the limit. By 1894, at the age of fifty-one, she was worn out in body and spirit. Jacob had built her the fanciest house in town, but it was no comfort in her search for spiritual satisfaction as well as physical health.<sup>3</sup>

Barbara Ehrsam's search for spiritual knowledge was wide ranging, including Christian Science; Doweism, a millennial group headquartered in Zion, Illinois; and the Bahá'í Faith. Her investigation of the Bahá'í Faith, which revolved around Kheiralla and his teachings, caused an uproar. The new teachings were maligned as being "fanatical," "Neo-Platonism," and a mix of "Arabic mysticism, German rationalism, mesmerism, etc."<sup>4</sup>

Ehrsam had learned about Kheiralla through her daughter, Josephine Hilty, who was studying music in Chicago.<sup>5</sup> The *Abilene Weekly Chronicle*, published in the county seat, reported that "Miss Josie Hilty, who knew the 'Doctor' in Chicago . . . is said to have embraced the doctrine he teaches."<sup>6</sup>

Ibrahim Kheiralla was of Syrian background and had converted to the Bahá'í Faith shortly before coming to the United States from Egypt in 1892, hoping to become wealthy. His financial ambitions were soon frustrated, but when he discovered the profitability of being a "doctor" and "healer" (his medical title came from a mail-order school), he turned to the healing professions. Noting the social obsession in the United States with secret and fraternal societies and "orders," he found that it was not a great step from claims of physical healing to spiritual healing. He used his scant knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith to create a partially secret society, which he unfolded in a series of public talks and twelve private lessons.<sup>7</sup>

Kheiralla's teaching effort in Enterprise appears to have followed the same pattern he later used in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and New York City. He gave public lectures partly based

3. Edward G. Nelson, *The Company and the Community* (Lawrence, Kansas: Bureau of Business Research, School of Business, University of Kansas, 1956) 312.

4. "Teaches Strange Things," *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* [Abilene, Kansas] 16 July 1897: 1.

5. Nelson, *Company and the Community* 292.

6. "Teaches Strange Things," *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* 16 July 1897: 1.

7. The Bahá'í Faith is a world religion, but Kheiralla sometimes gave the impression that it was a secret organization.

on his small pamphlet called *Za-ti-et-Al-lah: The Identity and the Personality of God*.<sup>8</sup> Newspaper articles often quoted or reworded some of the pamphlet's contents. Kheiralla's statement in the pamphlet that "the name of the Order is known only to those who have taken the teaching" is almost identical to the last line of the first newspaper article published in *Enterprise*: "the name of the order is only revealed to those who have taken all the teachings." The article went on to summarize aspects of the pamphlet, noting that Kheiralla "teaches the Oneness and Singleness of God; also whence we came, why we are here and where we are going. He gives to his private pupils the key to the sealed books of the Bible which he uses to verify his teachings. He believes the truth is in the Bible but that the Bible is not the truth."<sup>9</sup>

Kheiralla's private lessons were a mixture of his own ideas and the very little he knew about the Bahá'í teachings. He devised

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 believer might enter into a special relationship with the divine. Finally, for those who had taken all the



BARBARA EHRSAM'S HOUSE  
in Enterprise, Kansas, where Ibrahim George  
Kheiralla stayed for seven weeks in 1897,  
giving lessons on the Bahá'í Faith.

lectures and shown themselves worthy, Kheiralla delivered the "pith" of his message: that God had returned to earth in the person of Bahá'u'lláh [the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith], and that now his Son, Jesus Christ ['Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's son and appointed successor], was living in Akka. Those who believed were given the Greatest Name and told to write a letter or sign a form letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá confessing their belief.<sup>10</sup>

Kheiralla's public lectures and private lessons generated considerable newspaper coverage. "THE BIBLE IS NOT THE TRUTH" proclaimed a front-page story in the *Enterprise Journal* on 15 July 1897.<sup>11</sup> Additional articles appeared in the Abilene newspapers, and smaller notices continued in the *Enterprise* paper, which was owned by Christian Hoffman, Ehrsam's brother-in-law. Some of the articles were reprinted as far away as Topeka, Lawrence, Salina, Leavenworth, and Kansas City. These news articles may be the first extensive press coverage of the activities of the American Bahá'í community. Their content was not accurate according to currently available sources, but Kheiralla insisted on secrecy: "These teachings are private and you are not to mention them to any one, they

8. See Ibrahim, George Kheiralla, *Za-ti-et-Al-lah: The Identity and the Personality of God* (n.p., 1896), quoted in Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 48–53.

9. Kheiralla, *Za-ti-et-Al-lah*, quoted in Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 50; "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Enterprise Journal* [Enterprise, Kansas] 15 July 1897: 1.

10. Peter Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community, 1894–1917: A Preliminary Survey," in *Studies*, Vol. 188, 90.

11. "The Bible Is Not the Truth," *Enterprise Journal* [Enterprise, Kansas] 15 July 1897: 1.

are not secret, but private, and we trust to your honor. We do not ask you to take any obligation or oath. These teachings are private for many reasons."<sup>12</sup> Hence those who did not take the classes never really knew what was being taught (a fault on which the press remarked).

In his 1897 visit to Enterprise, Kheiralla did not complete the sequence of classes, as he had in Chicago, for he was in town only seven weeks. To give all of the lessons, which usually took three months, he had to double them up—giving two a week, as the *Enterprise Journal* reported. The newspaper reported that Kheiralla might return to continue his lectures, which suggests that he did not complete the lessons.

Nor did Kheiralla, as has been presumed, hold a private ceremony during which he bestowed upon the new believers the "Greatest Name," which is a form of the name of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, which means the Glory of God.<sup>13</sup> In May 1899 Ehrsam mentioned in her first letter to

Kheiralla's secretary that Kheiralla had "hoped that Mr. Chace [Thornton Chase, the first person in North America to become a Bahá'í] could of stop of [sic] and give us some more lessons or perhaps the *Greatest Name*," presumably shortly after Kheiralla's 1987 visit.<sup>14</sup> In the same letter Ehrsam wrote that "My daughter, . . . has given me the Greatest Name. . . ." Notations in the "Supplication Book of Students in Miscellaneous Cities, 1895" indicate that nine of the Enterprise Bahá'ís eventually received the Greatest Name, but these notations were made in September 1899 and probably reflect Josephine Hilty's efforts.<sup>15</sup>

When Kheiralla left Enterprise in 1897, the new Bahá'ís were alone without books, magazines, or sustained contact with other Bahá'ís. After two years of isolation their desperation grew until Ehrsam finally wrote on 3 May 1899 to Kheiralla's secretary, Maude Lamson: "This is the first time I started to write to you although I wished to have done so many times since I had these teachings." Why did she wait so long to write? She explains: "I have been very ill for nearly two years, but now have gained much strength the last three weeks that I have hopes of becoming well again." Her hope was not to be realized, for she was plagued with ill health during the latter part of her life.

Much of Ehrsam's May 1899 letter refers to her desire for contact with other Bahá'ís: "The Drs stay was so brief"; "I thought it might be possible that they [the Getsingers<sup>16</sup>] could stop on the way back [to California from Akka] with us for a few days"; "What has become of Mr. Chace?" These new Bahá'ís wanted to learn more, but "with no one to instruct" them, they were at a loss. Her plea for information about Kheiralla is wrenching: "please lett me know when you expect the Dr to come or inform me if he should already be in Chicago." Ehrsam's question about Kheiralla's return to Chicago was based on information she had received from Mrs.

12. "The Soul," from a Truth-knower Lessons manuscript, p. 1., Kenosha Papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill. See also Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 60-61.

13. *Enterprise Journal* [Enterprise, Kansas] 26 Aug. 1897: 1; Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America, Origins* 109; see also Peter Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community, 1894-1917: A Preliminary Survey," in *Studies in Bahá'í and Bahá'í History, Volume One*, ed. Moojan Momen (Los Angeles, Kalimát Press, 1982) 90.

14. Barbara Ehrsam to Maude Lamson, 13 May 1899, Maude Lamson Papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill. For the complete text of this letter and her letter dated 14 November 1899, which is also in the Maude Lamson Papers, see page 35.

15. "Supplication Book of Students in Miscellaneous Cities, 1894-1899," in Bahá'í Enrollment List, United States, Collection, 1894-1900, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.

16. Lua and Edward Getsinger, two prominent early American Bahá'ís, were among the first Americans to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Akka, Palestine.

Bell about Kheiralla's and the Getsingers' 1898–99 pilgrimage to Akka to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the possible dates of their return.

In her May 1899 letter Ehrsam mentioned Bahá'ís with whom she had contact. One was the enigmatic Mrs. Bell, about whom no other information has been found. Another was Ehrsam's daughter, Josephine Hilty Kimmel, who was married and living in St. Louis and who is mentioned in the "Supplication Book of Misc. Cities," which lists Bahá'ís in St. Louis. A third Bahá'í was "Mrs Hilty in Enterprise." This was Ehrsam's daughter-in-law, Rose Abbuehl Hilty, who had married Ehrsam's oldest son, Leonhard, in Grasshopper Falls, Kansas, on 1 January 1882.<sup>17</sup>

In the May letter Ehrsam also said that "one of the believers here" had written to Thornton Chase but that Chase had stopped writing. A search of Chase's correspondence discloses that this Bahá'í was John Abramson and that Chase and Abramson had corresponded in 1898. A modern history of Enterprise described Abramson as "a cousin's son from Switzerland" who had come to Enterprise to live with the Ehrsams "after a few years in Palestine with a missionary. Although but a boy of fifteen (in 1888), he spoke German, English and Arabic fluently and added much energy to the family life in Enterprise."<sup>18</sup> Stockman speculates that Abramson may be the first North American of Jewish descent to accept the Bahá'í Revelation.<sup>19</sup>

In her second letter, dated 14 November 1899, Ehrsam mentioned no additional Bahá'ís with whom she had had contact, but she gave more information about her relationship with

her daughter-in-law: "It is now impossible for Mrs Hilty to come to Chicago, for she had to have a very difficult operation performed. That was done in September but altho she is doing well, she will have to wait a longer time to gett strong and able to take a long journey. She will write you er long. We live close and see one another every day." A trip to Chicago at that time by one of the Bahá'ís would have provided a very valuable link, but there is no evidence that such a trip was ever made.

In her May letter Ehrsam referred once to all the new Bahá'ís, suggesting that they thought of themselves collectively as a group: "We are a little band of believers here. . . ." This is crucial in determining whether the individuals in Enterprise should be considered a Bahá'í community. Although the Enterprise Bahá'ís might not be recognized as such by 1990s standards—they did not elect a spiritual assembly or consultative body, or even choose officers—the fact that they considered themselves to have an identity separate from that of other religious groups legitimizes them as a Bahá'í community of the 1890s.<sup>20</sup>

In the May letter Ehrsam asked about the book Kheiralla had told her he was writing when he was in Enterprise: "We are very eager to gett the Drs book as soon as it is published. So please inform me when it is expected . . . in print. . . ." Her November letter repeated the request: "Is it done or if not finished when can we expect to have it." Such was her desperation that she offered to pay for the book ahead of time: "If it be desirably, I will send the money at once and wait for the book." The book Ehrsam was so eager to receive was *Behá 'U'lláh*, which was published in 1900. But whether Ehrsam ever purchased the book is uncertain because the accuracy of its contents immediately fell under a pall. In late 1899 Kheiralla began to question 'Abdu'l-Bahá's authority and rewrote his book to incorporate some of his uncertainty.

17. Nelson, *Company and the Community* 235.

18. Nelson, *Company and the Community* 293.

19. Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins* 110.

20. A spiritual assembly is a local Bahá'í governing council.



'Abdu'l-Bahá sent a Persian teacher to the United States to talk to Kheiralla and revive his faith, but the efforts were unsuccessful, and Kheiralla broke with the Bahá'í community in mid 1900. The majority of the Bahá'ís in the United States remained loyal to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but Kheiralla's disaffection was an enormous blow to their morale and made it even more difficult for them to assist the struggling community in the middle of the Kansas prairies.

In her November letter Ehrsam also expressed her longing for more of the Bahá'í Faith's spiritual truths: "We talk much about the blessed truth and long to hear and know more about 'Oh God give me Knowledge faith and love' [it] is the desire of my heart at all times." The quotation is from a prayer Kheiralla gave to his students, who believed it to be a Bahá'í prayer, but it was Kheiralla's own creation.

Despite Ehrsam's May and November 1899 letters, the Enterprise Bahá'ís remained deprived of further contact as well as more information about the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. In place of literature they could only hope for letters, the sharing of which was common during the first decades of the Bahá'í Faith in the United States, especially when a Bahá'í had seen 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Letters about such experiences were passed around and copied so that others could also learn from the experience. In her first letter in May 1899 Ehrsam chided Kheiralla's secretary: "You promised in the letter to my Daughter to send her, also Mrs Hilty in Enterprise a copie of Mrs Gezingers letter or perhaps some of the Drs, but we have not seen anything of the kind yett and it is nearly 5 weeks ago." At the

end she cried out: "Now please lett us have the letters we will gladly copie them and send them back without delay."

Since Ehrsam's May 1899 letter did not help to relieve the isolation of the Enterprise Bahá'ís, her November letter began abruptly: "Its been such a long time since I heard of you." One letter after two years of no contact was not sufficient. How could she and her fellow "band of believers" learn more about the Bahá'í Faith when no information or support was available from those who knew more than they?

Considering the lack of letters, literature, and visits from other Bahá'ís, it is surprising that any Enterprise Bahá'ís weathered the lack of news and remained faithful. One who did was Mrs. Mary M. E. Miller. In 1899 she was listed as a Bahá'í in Kansas City; later she moved to Enterprise, where she and her husband had lived decades earlier. They had known the Hoffmans since at least 1868.<sup>21</sup> The Millers had pioneered on the prairie and founded the Methodist church in Lyona. Mr. Miller was a Methodist minister and had conducted the first worship service in the Hoffmans' cabin before Enterprise was founded. Mrs. Miller continued her association with the Bahá'ís and until her death in 1911 contributed to the fund to build the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, a major undertaking of the U.S. Bahá'í community. Her obituary appeared in *Star of the West*, the first Bahá'í magazine published in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Another Bahá'í who remained firm in her faith was Ehrsam's daughter-in-law, Rose Hilty. One of Rose's daughters was the "little girl named Hilty," to whom the newspaper referred as being slightly cured of blindness by Kheiralla.<sup>23</sup> Rose and Mrs. Miller, together with more than four hundred American Bahá'ís, signed a petition to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which was sent to Him on 4 July 1905. In 1906 Rose moved with her family to Topeka, becoming the first Bahá'í in the capital city

21. Nelson, *Company and the Community* 145.

22. "News from the Occident: United States," *Star of the West* (28 April 1911): 9.

23. "Teacher Strange Things," *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* [Abilene, Kansas] 16 July 1897: 1.



'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

(front row, seated, third from right) at the 1 May 1912 ground-breaking ceremony for the Bahá'í House of Worship to be built in Wilmette, Illinois. Kansas Bahá'í Elsbeth Frey, wearing a wide-brim hat, is standing at the far left.

of Kansas.<sup>24</sup> She was the only Bahá'í there until about 1914 when Bertha Hyde became

24. Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "To the beloved of God in general in America (Upon them be Baha Ullah)," trans. Ali Kuli Khan, 3 January 1906, in Cambridge, Mass., Topeka Bahá'í Archives, Topeka, Kansas.

25. Duane L. Herrmann, "Bertha: An early American Bahá'í stalwart," in *Herald of the South* July-September 1991: 46-48.

26. Duane L. Herrmann, "Great Results Can Come from Small Actions: Rose Hilty and the Topeka Bahá'í Library," in *Forum* 2:2 (1993): 49-51. For additional information on the development of the Bahá'í Faith in Kansas, see also Duane L. Herrmann, "The Bahá'í Faith in Kansas, 1897-1947," in *Community Histories: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religion, Volume 6*, ed. Richard Hollinger (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1992) 80-108.

27. Bahai Temple Unity ledger books, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.

a Bahá'í through her mother, Ellen May Hyde, and sister, Mable Hyde Paine, in Urbana, Illinois. Hilty and Hyde worked together to build a Bahá'í community, but when Hyde moved in 1921, Hilty was alone again.<sup>25</sup> She subscribed to *Star of the West* from its first appearance in 1910 until her death in 1933 and also bought Bahá'í books as each new one was published. When she died, her library was given to the Topeka Bahá'í community and formed the basis of the current Topeka Bahá'í Library.<sup>26</sup> Hilty also contributed to the fund to build the Bahá'í House of Worship.<sup>27</sup>

In December 1911, shortly before 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited the United States and Canada to strengthen the Bahá'í community, a feature article on the Bahá'í Faith appeared in *Everybody's Magazine*, a general interest, na-

tionally circulated magazine.<sup>28</sup> Ehrsam wrote to Hilty, calling her attention to it and commenting that she had never thought Kheiralla's secrecy was right.<sup>29</sup> That correspondence, plus a contribution to the Temple fund, are all the evidence found to date of Ehrsam's commitment to the Bahá'í Faith after 1899.<sup>30</sup>

The Kansan who made the most evident and documented commitment to the Bahá'í Faith was Elizabeth Frey, the wife of Enterprise's postmaster. Not only did she maintain her commitment, but she taught the Faith to her daughter, Elsbeth, who had been too young to attend Kheiralla's classes. The two traveled to Chicago in 1912 to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Elsbeth appears in photographs of the 1 May ceremony during which 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid the cornerstone for the House of Worship to be built in Wilmette. Residents of Enterprise remember Mrs. Frey's holding "religious meetings" in her home.<sup>31</sup> Elsbeth became an active Bahá'í in St. Joseph, Missouri, where she taught school for many years and continued to be an active Bahá'í until her death in Denver, Colorado, in 1970. She came back to Kansas at least once for a conference in Wichita in 1955.<sup>32</sup>

28. Ethel Stefana Stevens, "Light in the Lantern," *Everybody's Magazine*, 25.6 (Dec. 1911): 775-86.

29. Barbara Ehrsam to Rose Hilty, 4 December 1912, 28 December 1912. Copies in possession of the author courtesy of Mrs. Constance Downs, granddaughter of Rose Hilty.

30. Bahai Temple Unity ledger books, National Bahá'í Archives.

31. Helen Erickson to Duane L. Herrmann, 23 October 1980.

32. The *Wichita Eagle* [Wichita, Kansas], September 1955, contains a conference photograph with names of attendees.

33. F. C. Havinghurst, "The Social Development of Enterprise, Kansas," M.A. thesis, Kansas State College, 1919, 39.

34. See Duane L. Herrmann, *The Bahá'í Faith in Kansas, since 1897* (Topeka, Kansas: Buffalo Press, 1994).

Considering the isolation and the lack of information and support available to the Enterprise Bahá'ís, it is not surprising that the group eventually ceased to exist. F. C. Havinghurst, in his 1919 Master's thesis, criticized the Hoffman-Ehrsam family for not interacting with the ordinary citizens. He noted, however, that their "idiosyncrasies were bound to destroy any influence for good which these leaders might have had among the average, church people of the town, and it served to deepen the wide chasm between the church and non-church groups in the town."<sup>33</sup>

The experience of Enterprise is unique in the early history of the Bahá'í Faith in North America. Barbara's two letters written in 1899 provide windows to the times and condition of the American Bahá'í community before the turn of the century. They provide a glimpse of the eagerness of isolated Bahá'ís for information about the Bahá'í teachings and the activities of their fellow believers, and they help illuminate the ignorance about the basic Bahá'í teachings that characterized those years. More than any other nineteenth-century American Bahá'í community, Enterprise was isolated from the rest of the community. It is amazing that any interest in the new religion survived. Yet the achievements of the Enterprise Bahá'ís are still felt today: the Enterprise Bahá'ís are still felt today: the Topeka Bahá'í community, its Spiritual Assembly and the Bahá'í library have direct roots in Enterprise.<sup>34</sup> From Topeka the Bahá'í Faith has spread to more than one hundred localities in Kansas. And Kansas Bahá'ís have settled in several dozen foreign countries to share their Faith. In spite of its isolated beginning in Enterprise, the Kansas Bahá'í community has been continuous and growing for a century.

— Here follows the complete text of the Barbara Ehrsam's letters to Kheiralla's secretary, printed without corrections of grammar, spelling, or context.



MRS. BARBARA EHRSAM TO MRS. MAUDE LAMSON, MAY 3, 1899

Enterprise May 3/99

Mrs Lamsen

Dear Madam:

This is the first time I started to write to you although I wished to have done so many times since I had these teachings which makes a bond of unity between us. My daughter Mrs Kimmel of St Louis formerly Miss Hilty has given me the Greatest Name (with your permission) while there on a visit. I have been verry ill for nearly twoo years but have now gained much strength the last 3 weeks that I have hopes of becoming well again. We are a little band of believers here but have no one to instruct us. The Drs stay was so brief and he hoped that Mr Chace could of stop of and give us some more lessons or perhaps the *Greatest Name*. I understood Mrs Bell to say that Mrs and Mr Gezinger would go back to California after there return from Acca and I thought it might be possible that they could stop on the way back with us at least for a few days. We are verry eager to get the Drs book as soon as it is published. So please inform me when it is expected to (be outh) in print and if the Getzingers intend to go to Oakland again. What has become of Mr Chace? He used to write to one of the believers here but no one has heard lately. And please lett me know when you expect the Dr to come or inform me if he should already be in Chicago. I have something to impart to him. You promissed in the letter to my Daughter to send her, also Mrs Hilty in Enterprise a copie of Mrs Gezingers letter or perhaps some of the Drs but we have not seen anithing of the kind yett and it is nearly 5 weeks ago. Now please lett us have the letters we will gladly copie them and send them back without delay.

Hoping I am not asking to much of you I remain yours truly

Mrs J. B. Ehrsam

Enterprise Kansas

MRS. BARBARA EHRSAM TO MRS. MAUDE LAMSON, NOVEMBER 14, 1899

Enterprise Nof 14/99

My dear Mrs Lamson.

Its been such a long time since I heard of you. Of course you know how it was, how sick and feeble I have been and therefore unable to write. But thank God I am much better and would now like to know about the Drs whereabouts, also about his book. Is it done or if not finished when can we expect to have it. If it be desirably I will send the money at once and wait for the book. Lett me know how the believers are prospering and how they grow in grace and knowledge at the headquarters. Has Mrs Khairalla arrived in Chicago. It is now impossible for Mrs Hilty to come to Chicago, for she had to have a very difficult operation performed. That was done in September but altho she is doing well, she will have to waith a longer time to gett strong and able to take a long journey. She will write to you er long. We live close and see one another every day.

We talk much about the blessed truth and long to hear and know more about "Oh God give me Knowledge faith and love" is the desier of my hearth at all times.

Hoping to hear from you soon I remain yours for the truth Mrs J. B. Ehrsam.