

NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES COMMITTEE
Bahá'í National Center, Wilmette, Illinois 60091

November 3, 1986

To the members of the Auxiliary Boards

Dear friends,

The attached packet of information has been prepared for you at the request of the Continental Board of Counsellors. It is designed to assist you in consulting with Local Spiritual Assemblies about the importance of maintaining and preserving their local community archives.

The Six-Year Plan calls for accelerated strengthening and consolidation of our national and local communities. National and local archives go hand in hand with that development. Archives foster a sense of purpose and identity. They also serve as an invaluable asset for present-day and future administrators of the Cause.

Because of the close working relationship you as Auxiliary Board Members have with the Local Spiritual Assemblies in your jurisdiction, the National Archives Committee is enlisting your aid to help us disseminate information about Bahá'í archives at the grassroots level and answer basic questions that these local Assemblies may have.

As stated in a recent letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies from the Archives Office at the World Centre, the Bahá'í Faith is presented with the unique "opportunity—perhaps even the duty—the preserve for future generations an accurate and detailed record of how a major religion entered the world of man and became established in human society." We hope that you will help us instill this sense of historical responsibility in local communities, especially our younger ones, so that they will take pride from the start in preserving their history and documenting the growth of the Faith in their areas. In more established communities, it may be relevant to remind the Assemblies that, just as we protect the Faith from external and internal attacks, so must we also protect our records from neglect.

The sheets in this packet are for your use. Please duplicate them at will and give them the widest possible distribution. We thank you in advance for your efforts. The archives staff at the National Bahá'í Center, Mr. Roger Dahl and Mr. Lewis Walker, are available if you have any questions or need further assistance.

With warm Bahá'í greetings,

Members:

Dr. Betty Fisher

Carolyn Henderer

Sarah Lee

Lois Walker, Chairperson

Roger Dahl, Secretary

National Bahá'í Archives committee

Roger Dahl, Secretary

GENERAL QUESTIONS

The Auxiliary Board Members and their assistants can perform a valuable service by impressing upon Local Spiritual Assemblies the importance of safeguarding their records. The following questions can help stimulate discussion about local archives when consulting with Local Spiritual Assemblies.

IS THE ASSEMBLY GENERATING THOROUGH MINUTES OF ITS MEETINGS THAT WILL DOCUMENT THE GROWTH OF THE FAITH IN ITS JURISDICTION?

Minutes should be typed on high-quality acid-free paper (available at office supply stores or stationers. If they must be handwritten, do not use water-soluble ink.

ARE ALL OF THE ASSEMBLY'S INACTIVE RECORDS IN ONE PLACE?

If not, they should be gathered together and stored in a secure, dry place, preferably where there is air conditioning. (Attics and basements are the worst places for archives.)

HAS THE ASSEMBLY CONDUCTED AN INVENTORY OF ITS ARCHIVES?

If not, a records inventory form is included in this packet. It should be completed and a copy sent to the National Bahá'í Archives.

HAS THE ASSEMBLY APPOINTED AN ARCHIVIST?

Each Assembly should appoint an interested person as caretaker of its local archives. This can be the Assembly secretary, another member of the Assembly, or a member of the community. Communities with sizable archives should recommend that this person receive some basic archival training from the National Bahá'í Archives Committee.

DOES THE ASSEMBLY MAINTAIN BIRTH, DEATH, MARRIAGE, AND ENROLLMENT REGISTERS?

This is a goal of the Six-Year Plan. The Assembly should attempt to re-create these registers from its records and minutes as far back as possible and then maintain them henceforth. Sample register pages are available from the National Bahá'í Archives.

DOES THE ASSEMBLY HAVE, OR KNOW PEOPLE WHO HAVE, ORIGINAL TABLES OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ OR LETTERS FROM SHOGHI EFFENDI?

If possible, the original Tablet(s) or letter(s) should be sent to the National Bahá'í Archives for safekeeping and a photocopy kept with the Assembly's or individual's papers. If the Assembly or individual wishes to retain the original, a high-quality photocopy on acid-free paper should be sent to the National Bahá'í Archives. In either case, a photocopy will then be sent to the Universal House of Justice.

HAS THE ASSEMBLY INHERITED THE PERSONAL PAPERS OF ANY INDIVIDUALS?

If so, the Assembly should notify the National Bahá'í Archives of the names of these individuals and at least a rough idea of the contents.

DOES THE ASSEMBLY HAVE A COPY OF *GUIDELINES FOR BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES*?

Order forms are included in this packet. Reproduce them as necessary.

QUOTATIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES

The importance of the institution of Bahá'í Archives is not due only to the many teaching facilities it procures, but is essentially to be found in the vast amount of historical data and information it offers both to the present-day administrators of the Cause, and to the Bahá'í historians of the future. The institution of Bahá'í Archives is indeed a most valuable storehouse of information regarding all aspects of the Faith, historical, administrative as well as doctrinal. Future generations of believers will be surely in a better position that we are to truly and adequately appreciate the many advantages and facilities which the institution of the Archives offers to individual believers and also the community at large.

Now that the Cause is rapidly passing through so many different phases of its evolution is the time for the friends to exert their utmost in order to preserve as much as they can of the sacred relics and various other precious objects that are associated with the lives of the Founders of the Faith, and particularly the Tablets They have revealed.

Every believer should realize that he has a definite responsibility to shoulder in this matter, and to help, to whatever extent he can, in rendering successful the valuable work which National and local Bahá'í Archives Committees are so devotedly accomplishing for the Faith in

Shoghi Effendi

Directives from the Guardian, pp. 4-5

The opening of a new epoch of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Faith, and the beginning of the Six Year Plan are milestones in the unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. As we look backward over goals accomplished, and forward to new challenges, our sense of history is stirred, and we recognize the momentousness of the age in which we live.

Beyond having the vital duty of preserving the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith and of the Guardian, the Bahá'í Faith is unique among world religions in the degree to which its historical processes have been documented and recorded. Unfortunately, many Bahá'í communities experience difficulty in caring for their historically significant records. Important pieces of our documentary heritage are at risk, or may already have disappeared. Care of archival resources—including the records of Bahá'í individuals and families, corporate bodies and institutions—is an indication of the state of our historical awareness. We too often fail to perceive the significance of what we do, and for this reason give scant attention to preserving the documents of our own, or earlier times.

Bahá'ís have the opportunity—perhaps even the duty—to preserve for future generations an accurate and detailed record of how a major religion entered the world of man and became established in human society. More immediately, history offers all of us a sense of inspiration from the past, as well as a revealing glimpse at our historical roots.

From a letter to National Spiritual Assemblies from the Department of Library and Archival Services, Bahá'í World Centre, 11 June 1986

LOCAL BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of Spiritual Assembly: _____

2. Date of formation of Spiritual Assembly: _____

If Spiritual Assembly has ever been lost please give date span.

Date(s) lost and reestablished:

3. How far back do your Spiritual Assembly records go?

Minutes _____

Correspondence _____

Treasurer's records _____

4. Do you have a local Bahá'í archives? Yes ____ No ____

5. Where is your archives housed: Private home(s) _____

Bahá'í Center _____

Other (please specify) _____

6. Who is in charge of the archives?

Archivist _____

Archives Committee _____

Spiritual Assembly Secretary _____

Librarian _____

Other (please specify) _____

7. What is the name of your archivist or archives committee secretary?

| | | | |
|--|-------|-------|---------------------|
| 8. Please indicate contents of archives: | Yes | No | |
| Relics of Bahá'u'lláh | _____ | _____ | |
| Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá | _____ | _____ | |
| Relics of 'Abdu'l-Bahá | _____ | _____ | |
| Letters from Shoghi Effendi | _____ | _____ | |
| Spiritual Assembly minutes | _____ | _____ | Approx. years: ____ |
| Spiritual Assembly correspondence | _____ | _____ | Approx. years: ____ |
| Treasurer's records | _____ | _____ | Approx. years: ____ |
| Personal papers of Bahá'ís | _____ | _____ | |
| Names: | | | |
| Photographs | _____ | _____ | |
| Books | _____ | _____ | |
| Newspaper clippings | _____ | _____ | |
| Publicity scrapbooks | _____ | _____ | |
| Tape recordings (not published tapes) | _____ | _____ | |
| Computer files | _____ | _____ | |
| Artifacts | _____ | _____ | |
| Describe: | | | |

9. Does your community contain any Bahá'ís who have experience as archivists or archival conservators (i.e., those who restore damaged manuscripts)?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please list names and specialties:

Please keep this form with your records and mail a copy to the National Bahá'í Archives.

NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES

□ Wilmette, Illinois 60091

INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS INQUIRING ABOUT THE NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í ARCHIVES

The National Bahá'í Archives is the archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. The Archives' holdings document the history of the American Bahá'í community and include records of the National Spiritual Assembly and its committees and agencies, personal papers, photographs, tape recordings and a reference library.

The National Bahá'í Archives is located in the lower level of the Bahá'í House of Worship, 100 Linden Avenue (corner of Linden Avenue and Sheridan Road), Wilmette, Illinois. It is open by appointment to qualified researchers Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with an hour closure for lunch. The Archives is closed on holidays and Bahá'í Holy Days.

Permission to examine manuscripts, photographs and printed matter held in the Archives will normally be granted to qualified researchers for specific purposes upon application to the Archivist and upon agreement to abide by the Archives reading room rules. Such permission is granted subject to whatever restrictions have been placed on specific holdings by their writers, donors or depositors or by the Archivist.

The records in the National Bahá'í Archives of the National Spiritual Assembly, its committees and agencies less than 50 years old, Local Spiritual Assemblies and members of the Continental Board of Counsellors and Auxiliary Boards, which have not already been made public, are restricted and require the permission of the National Spiritual Assembly secretary for access. Researchers desiring to see any of these records should contact the Archives staff about acquiring permission.

Before visiting the National Bahá'í Archives, the researcher should first write or call to make an appointment. The researcher should provide the Archives with the specific dates he would like to visit as the Archives may have unscheduled closings.

Only pencils are allowed to be used in the Archives - no pens. Hence researchers should bring a supply of pencils with them.

As the Archives staff is small we cannot do extensive research for researchers but instead recommend that they visit the Archives. We can do a limited amount of photocopying by mail if researchers have very specific requests for documents.

ORAL HISTORY GUIDELINES

1. A successful interview requires previous research on the life and activities of the interviewee. The interviewer should come to the interview with a list of prepared questions or topics to be covered.
2. The interviewer will often want to start the interview by getting some general background and family information from the interviewee. The interview can then proceed chronologically or by topic.
3. The interviewer should be flexible enough to be able to explore unexpected information or a new trail of inquiry not covered by the prepared questions if one should suddenly appear. This is why a good grasp of the subject being discussed is so valuable.
4. A basic purpose of oral history is to fill in gaps in manuscript or printed sources or to elaborate on them. Manuscript material is considered to be archival when it has permanent historical, administrative, or religious value and will be used by researchers in the future. The same criteria apply to oral history interviews.
5. Before the interview begins, the interviewer should discuss with the interviewee any restrictions the interviewee may want to place on the use of the tapes. Archives generally prefer not to have any restrictions, but are willing to accept reasonable restrictions on access or copyright if the restrictions have a definite time limit. A letter detailing any restrictions should be sent with the interview to the archives. Upon receipt of the tapes, the archives will send a Deed of Gift to the interviewee, if one hasn't been signed at the time of the interview.
6. The interviewer should be friendly and courteous.
7. The interviewer may want to do more than one interview if the subject warrants it and the interviewee is agreeable. Several shorter sessions (2 hours or so) are better than long sessions that tire both the interviewer and interviewee.
8. The interviewer should phrase questions carefully and keep them short so that the interviewee is free to express his or her own ideas and knowledge. The interviewer should avoid leading questions.
9. A letter of appreciation should be written afterwards.
10. The interviewer should keep careful records on who is interviewed, when, and where. Each tape should be labeled with the names of interviewer and interviewee, place, and date. Record a short introduction at the beginning of the tape, including this information, before the interview begins.
11. It is generally a good idea to avoid interviewing two or more people at a time. It is easier to keep subjects focused on the questions at hand, there are fewer interruptions and distractions, and this avoids people "walking" on each other by talking at the same time.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN RESEARCHING AND WRITING HISTORY OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

1. When was the Local Spiritual Assembly first formed, incorporated, and other important dates?
2. Names of original and early Assembly members
3. History of the individuals believers and groups that existed prior to the formation of the first Assembly
4. Contacts with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, the World Centre, the National Centre, regional teaching committees, etc. Early Pilgrimage stories.
5. Hands of the Cause, travel teachers, and other notable Bahá’ís who visited the community and how they affected its development
6. History of firesides, proclamation events, and teaching activities in the community
7. Social events (picnics, Holy Day celebrations, fund raisers, etc.) and traditions
8. Pioneers who went forth from the community, both homefront and international
9. Special ties with other communities and details of intercommunity activities
10. Participation of believers in regional, national, and international conferences
11. Growth and development of children and youth activities
12. Intangible aspects of the community’s history. For example, the special character of the community, including the history of the city of which it was a part, how the early believers’ understanding of their roles as Bahá’ís developed, how they perceived themselves in respect to the larger Bahá’í community, etc.
13. Contact and interview older believers in the community/area that may have valuable memories of the early years of the Faith. Discuss preservation of their personal papers.
14. Try to reconstruct birth, death, marriage, and enrollment registers for the early years.